

NEWBORN!



Into Life with Christ

ANDREW W. P. GAGE



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PREFACE

Welcome to *Newborn! Into Life in Christ*. It is my hope that this book will serve as a guide to those who like me were born-again into life with Christ. Living in the Spirit is both easy and difficult at the same time. It is as simple as loving God with all your heart and mind and as difficult as any relationship we enter into here on Earth. We are not born-again as an adult with all our spiritual faculties ready for action but rather as a crying baby just brought forth from the womb of God. We are to learn and develop our spiritual life in the same manner as we grow and learn in our physical life. Each day a new lesson, each day we learn more.

True newborns are always in a rush to know all they can about God instantly; we just cannot seem to get enough. We also tend to think we “made it” and we are ready to serve God in anything. Neither of these first impressions is true. I do not think we will ever know all there is to know about God nor ever truly be able to let our guard down and say, “We made it.” We are rather like newborns who seeing the new world for the first time are amazed and dazzled by the strange spiritual kingdom in which we now live. We no longer should live like the secular people in the world, but we should be different. We need to be the light in the darkness.

I have written this book at the urging of the Spirit. I am not a writer, and this is my first work. I felt the need to offer what I have learned by the grace of God and to help others who may have a need for the truths within these pages. I believe these “messages” to be inspired by the Holy Spirit for my sake and so others may also benefit. Do not just take my word for it but seek the Holy Spirit to guide your mind and open up the truths to you. Confirm them in the Bible and against your faith. I will let the Holy Spirit teach you through

this message to inspire you with its holy guidance. If it does inspire you, and the Spirit teaches you through this work, you are welcome to witness how the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart. My address will be in the back of this book.

I offer the rights to this book freely to all who wish to copy or have copies made. What was given to me I freely give to you. While I do not have the means to provide unlimited free books, I can allow others to have them made at cost. All you need to do is get in touch with me, and I will provide the information of where to order them. I also plan on providing a CDROM version and a free version downloadable on the Internet.

This book is meant to be multi-denominational; I believe that God looks at the heart of the individual, and this is a book on faith in Jesus. I attempt to stay away from too many statements that cause discourse and try to remain centered on Jesus, the working of the Holy Spirit, and the meaning of life in the family of God. I have always believed that Christ never wanted us to fight amongst each other over our methods of worship, but rather we are to work together to promote the truth. Anyone who seeks to keep separate the Christian churches are inadvertently serving Satan rather than God. It has been an embarrassment to the faith and causes others to think we do not know what truth is because we do not live what we preach, and we put each other down.

This book is not to be read like a novel but rather as a series of ideas and revelations about our relationship to God. Seek deeper meanings within the text. Pray for guidance by the Holy Spirit, so that he can reveal to you what is meant by what you read—to reveal what you need to know from it.

When I was younger, and I had a problem in my life, the Holy Spirit had revealed to me from the Bible a parable that would answer my need. Later, I would experience a different kind of problem, and when seeking the answer to “this” problem, I would look at the same parable that answered my other problem and find the answer to this problem too. How could one parable answer both problems? By the power of the Spirit, the Spirit stresses the answers that you need when

you need it. I have found no less than fifteen lessons from the parable of the lost son alone!

I doubt that anything truly new theologically speaking has been revealed here in this book. Rather it is a newer interpretation of what is already there in Scripture. That is why I challenge you to read what is written here against the Bible—to seek out the truth with *new-born hope* and *fervor*. Never take anything for granted that it’s true but prove it to yourself. Each man who speaks revealed truths by the Spirit must be checked against Scripture. The Holy Spirit is good and perfect, but our ability to speak for God is fallible.

If several people watch an event, each will have a different interpretation of what they saw. Some would stress what was important to them, while other people would stress that other events were important too. When interpreting our relationship with God, each person will understand what he or she *needs to see* in order to understand. They will focus on their best interpretation of the images that God provides them. For each individual, the interpretation can be different, so do not panic when you see different views of the same principles. As long as the principle itself remains intact, it is okay to understand it in differing ways. For example, some people worship God with older music and reverence, while others joyfully sing to the Lord. When both stem from loving your God, both are acceptable ways of worship.

Most spiritual things revealed to me are revealed in physical ways by example in this world. Almost like the Holy Spirit says, “Watch a healthy family, this is how we relate in heaven.” He has taught me how our family relationship here is similar to our relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. He has taught me who we are by comparing us with little children. He has even taught me to watch his creation because in it he has placed the key to all truth about both our spiritual and physical lives.

If there is any lesson, I have learned about my faith in God is this: “Faith is not about religions, customs, lifestyles, or choices. It is about seeking the truth. When you find the truth, you also inevitably find God.” You can use a religion as a steppingstone or a starting place to start looking for God. You can use it as a way of service for

God and a way to fellowship with other people seeking God too. Faith, however, is something deeper. It is the *consuming* of the truth about Jesus, *loving* as God loves, and developing a *deep relationship* with him who feeds us. You can attend church and never feel it, you can live a good lifestyle and never know him, and you can even follow all the customs that you are taught but never take the final step. Faith is the final step—to accept with all your heart, desire with your entire mind, and humbly give yourself over to his unending love. *Depth* learns to *love* God.

If you can learn to have depth in your relationship with Jesus, all the meaningless customs have life, whatever Christian religion you belong to, you will become livelier. Most of all, your lifestyles and choices will be changed by the knowledge of truth, and the truth shall set you free. We all need to be reminded of these things from time to time; that is the other purpose of this book—to remind me of the power of the Holy Spirit and that I was blessed by God's grace to receive these things. This way I cannot forget.

I pray that each of you is blessed
By God's Holy Spirit
That he may open your eyes
And make the blind see
Open your ears
And allow the ears to hear
As well as to touch each of you
In ways known only to him.

In the name of our Father
In the name of Jesus our Brother and King
And in the name of the most Holy Spirit
Amen

In thanks to the Holy Spirit who inspired this book

In thanks to Harry and Peggy B. for their aid and encouragement,
making this book possible.



CHAPTER 1

Why We Need God?

Some of you who may be reading this may not yet have committed yourself to Jesus. You may find some areas difficult to understand. It is not important that you understand everything in this book now. It is not something you can just read and then automatically understand. Like life itself, we learn it in steps. We understand what we are ready for and must learn the rest later. One does not learn calculus before one learns to do the math. Many things may seem hard to believe at first until you study and prove them for yourself.

God's Word has been proven for over four thousand years. However, each individual must learn the basics from scratch before he will understand the more involved truths. Man's nature does not change, and neither does God's truth. If I were asked, "If God's Word was proven for over four thousand years, why is a man no better off?" I would answer, "Most men ignore God's truth, and that is why we as a people still remain in sin." The few who have learned the truth still attempt to reach the others. This is how it will always be, for we are born into a physical world and do not know another way until we seek Jesus. It is Jesus who teaches us who God is and shows us how to come to him.

Please read on. We encourage you to learn all that you are missing out on. God's Word is open to all people. We do not know if we are children of God unless we seek him. We cannot know what choices we will make in the future. We also do not know if God has chosen us until he has moved in our lives. If you are curious to know more, maybe the spirit is calling you into a greater level of under-

standing. Do you value truth and love? Have you ever hurt inside and wished you had a comforter to help you? If you would like to become a member of God's family and be alone no more, seek Jesus and the truth for yourself. There is no other way.

I have heard many say, "It's brainwashing!" but I ask you this, how many of them who said this has ever tried it? You only hear that from those who never even tried or never truly wished to change their life. I have never met a truly born-again Christian who ever believed this or made such a claim. Even those who had fallen away never made such claims! Think for yourself. Did the person telling you this stuff ever really try it out himself? Of course not! He is telling you something he heard from someone who heard it from someone else, etc., etc. I heard the same things when I faced the choice of searching for God. I chose to find out for myself. I went ahead and was careful about all that I did. I found no such evidence. I never received anything I did not want nor did I change anything in my life that I did not decide to change. If anything, for once in my life, someone was showing me the truth. I made the changes in my life because I knew the facts, and I did not like the direction my life was taking. So I chose to better my life, not to blindly give it up to some brainwasher.

God is truth. God does not ask us to do things his way simply to make him happy. He does not ask us to follow his commands just to please his own pride. God made everything! Do you really think that he would not know the easiest way to have a good and happy life? He would know the best way to get things done and the best way out of life's problems. God has never been there to beat us down. Rather, he always wished to lift up his children. We, on the other hand, always foolishly push his hand away. If God is truth, and so is his word (the Bible), why do we choose to ignore it?

Man has always been the type that does not want to read instruction manuals (the Bible)—especially when it comes to how we live. We always say we can do it on our own. For example: "I can figure this out. I do not need to read the instructions." We do not want to listen to anyone, "even God," to tell us how to lead our lives. Our pride gets in the way. So what we do build always takes longer than necessary, is always missing parts, and usually will fall apart sooner

than it should. So it is with our lives. I am guilty of this too. That is why I can speak about it so well. God knows that there is only one way to get through life without getting ourselves in trouble. Every time we try to do it on our own, we will reap the pains of messing up. God does not give us this pain, we do.

To go a step further, God sends his son as an example for us on how to live a good life, how to treat each other and to love each other. Jesus himself never had troubles because of the way he lived. He lived an honest and loving existence; it was the blind people around him who feared him because they did not understand him. He even gave himself up for us so that we could live.

Again, God does not stop there. He also sends us a helper—the Holy Spirit, who acts as an aid to us in all our troubles. That is if we accept Jesus and God in our hearts. He has sent so much help to us, all we must do is accept it and believe in all that God *stands for*. In truth, anyone can believe God exists, even Satan, but only the wise know that true belief in God comes from belief in his Word and the belief in what he stands for.

If all these reasons are not enough reason to seek Jesus, then consider some of these. God is wisdom, and he who searches out God finds wisdom. God is the truth. He who seeks out truth also finds God. Through his wisdom and truth, you can find happiness in your marriage, in the workplace, in your home, as well as in your life. You can find peace of mind in your finances, in times of tragedy, and even in death. You find strength and stability in all that you do. It gives you freedom from addictions, depression, and self-destructive lifestyles. You'll discover the truth about love and friendship and will never be alone again. With salvation in heaven being your greatest reward, how easy we throw these things away.

This is not to say that you'll experience all of these at once because growing in God is something that we step into often a little at a time. God will reveal to you through his word what you need to know on how to improve yourself. Before this can happen however you must accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You have to accept Jesus Christ and then God can send his Holy Spirit to reveal these things to you. Man, alone cannot give you a changed heart nor a

change of life. This can only happen by Jesus Christ and through his spirit. I can tell you this, the love and grace of God can overcome all obstacles, as long as we are willing to listen.

For those of you who have already experienced God in a very real way, this book is especially geared for you. I thought that once I was born again in Christ that I was “OK”. I was ready for everything life had to throw at me. That I knew all I would need to sustain my faith and to know God in my life from then on. Well, simply put. I still had a lot to learn. Indeed, every day of your life will be a learning experience. Once you have chosen God, (or as some believe as he has chosen you). Once you take that step, you are really just beginning your journey. As Jesus had said:

Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3–4)

This statement is truer than we may realize. We are not born again as a mature Christian but as a child. We cannot afford to hold our heads up and say, “We made it.” Our journey is still just starting. You could almost say that our entire purpose in life is to grow up in the spirit, and when we finally do, we will be brought before God and we will know him, and he will know us. All the knowledge we have learned beforehand was to prepare us for the greater personal knowledge of God himself. What was before a history lesson is now to become a deep personal relationship with our loving creator, our self-professed “Father” or Dad, as I like to think of him.

Being a true Christian is truly a blessing because now we have two families. Our own earthly family and God’s. Even when our earthly families fail to provide the love and care we need, God’s family will always be there. God does not suffer the weakness of sin, so he will always be near to us. We, however, *must* remain sinless to be able to feel his presence. Repent immediately when you sin. Fight off the urges to sin as best you can. For like the Israelites would be

cut off from God by their sins, so shall we. Also like the Israelites, all God asks is that we repent and try to sin no more. He wishes to be with us too. He has no desire to see us falter. We as children of God can no longer afford to see God a giant of a being locked high in the clouds of heaven.

Jesus as our example, he treated God as we should too—as our Father. He must be involved in every facet of our lives, he is personal in nature, and we need to have a relationship with God as a close trusted friend. Indeed, without this closeness, we are in danger of falling away and becoming lost in this age and the next.

The unfaithful would ask, “How do we know that God exists? What proof can you offer us?” Each portion of God provides its own proof. God provides proof by all the beauty around us, by the truth of his Word in the Bible. Careful study proves it out. Jesus is proven by history, by his physical presence, by the almost two thousand years of his teachings, and in his very actions in giving himself up. He died for his beliefs, just as so many others who believed in God’s love. The Holy Spirit is proof by being a gift from God, still touching our lives so many years after Christ has risen and providing holy insight, comfort, love, tongues, healings, miracles, and personal experiences such as spiritual sensations as well life-changing experiences. We must not forget all the fruits of the spirit.

Each of these proofs points to each other. Jesus does not credit himself; he points to God. The Spirit does not point to himself but rather to Jesus. How can we charge them with wanting to be out for themselves, when they had nothing, wanted nothing from us, except the love and respect for God who created us? Just as most respect and love their worldly father. Everything else that God has asked us for is for our own benefit, not his. As my last statement of proof, I give you this. Every last detail of the Bible, even the difficult to believe, I have found out through study to be the truth. The more I study, the truer it proves to be. I do not expect everyone to take my word for it. I do dare you to prove me wrong. I challenge you to find out for yourselves.

Do not just glimpse it over and make a judgment, really study it and find the truth. It will be more convincing than anything that

I will be able to say. I will have some difficult quotes from the Bible later on in this book. Some of them could open your eyes. There are many other proofs about God; I cannot, however, prove something to someone who has already made up their mind about God. If you are serious about learning about God, open your hearts and minds and continue on. I tell you this. There is nothing boring about what comes from God. It can be downright surprising sometimes.

As Christians, we cannot afford to rest on our personal knowledge, we must continue to grow. A businessman told me once that when you are in a business and your business is not growing, you are really falling behind. It is also true with God; we cannot rest believing that our faith is okay or that our knowledge is enough to keep us close to God. Satan is always attempting to draw the knowledge we have away from us. So we must constantly reaffirm it by seeking to deepen the personal level of faith that we have, to build up the relationship that we seek with God. Just like other relationships that we have, they must be nurtured to grow.

One of Satan's tricks is to convince us not to try hard, to take the easy route or just plain give up. He teaches us this in life, in the workplace, in school, and especially when it comes to God. He did this even to Jesus Christ himself. He offered Jesus the world without the pain and suffering if only he would worship Satan. He did this at the end of Jesus's forty days in the desert. If he did it to Jesus, are you surprised that he tries it with us?

The title of this chapter is "Why We Need God." With an evil being like Satan trying to trip us up, using any and all means at his disposal, can we afford not to have God to save us from Satan's evil ways? If we do not choose God, then it is automatic that we choose Satan. Indeed, it is a choice between building and destroying, loving and hating, life and death. There is no middle ground in a war. This is a war between the powers of body and soul, principles and spiritual beings, and we as humans are caught in the middle. This is why we must seek our Father for his protection and listen to his good advice. We do this by seeking out his son and following in his footsteps. Jesus reveals the true nature of God and shows us "the Way" to know God.



CHAPTER 2

Born Into the World but Not the Spirit

This chapter speaks of how my journey started—the life and learning of one born-again Christian, whose heart and mind pray for guidance by the Holy Spirit. It is about the daily struggles we born-again Christians *must face*, the crosses we will bear, and the victories and defeats we will encounter in the name of the Lord. I am proud to say that I am born again. My Lord God is my Father. I am his adopted son.

I do not deserve this honor, I am not holy, I am but a sinner seeking his help and love. Much like a physical son, seeking your earthly father's help and love. There is no difference between your earthly father's aid and love or God's. The rules and laws of the parent-child relationship apply to in spirit as well as flesh. God's relationship with us mirrors the father-child relationship here on Earth (or the "proper role" of the father). God is the perfect father, not subject to failures or sin. I will go into this further later on in this book. The point that I am trying to make is this. When we refuse to recognize God, we refuse to honor God, especially when we choose to lead a sinful life. We are *not* denying God anything. We deny ourselves! We deny ourselves our rightful place in his family.

I was born a Catholic child, baptized and brought up in the Catholic religion. Although my mother was Catholic, my father was Protestant. My siblings and I were brought up in the Catholic religion. Due to my parents' mixed marriage, I was able to be exposed

to a little of both religions and to choose for myself where I wished to be.

As a child, my understanding of God was secularly based rather than spiritually based. I understood God as a history lesson or as a mystical figure who had little effect on my life. For me, God and religion was the same thing, and as long as I did the minimum like everyone else, I would be okay. I judged myself not according to God's Word but according to the others around me. I also did not waste too much time learning about God or his Word. "After all, I had time to concern myself later."

I was too young to understand the differences between religion and faith, for indeed there is a difference. I was to learn these and many other lessons later in life when I had matured as a Christian.

March 8, 1963 was the day of my birth—my birth in the flesh that is. Although I was born then, I knew not God in my heart but grew steadily over the next sixteen years with this quasi-historical belief. My eyes were still closed to the Lord. I went to school, went to church, and went to catechism school (CCD). The Lord was still but a history lesson to me. I believed there was someone out there, there was a God. However, I felt that none of this touched my life; it didn't really matter until I passed on, so I put it on a backburner in my life. It became something I had to do to be saved but had no bearing on my life here and now. At that time, I had not accepted fully Jesus Christ in my life yet. I thought myself safe in my understanding of God even though I saw no real proof of his activity.

Let me tell you something. Even the devil recognizes that God exists. Being a part of God is *now!* Not for someday when you die. The teaching of the Bible is for *our* benefit, not God's. We have nothing to offer God. The only thing we can give God is our love, like a human child, would for his father. What father expects his child to "pay him back" for giving them life? A human man and woman created our physical selves, and we know we should respect them for giving us life and nurturing it. How much less should we give our spiritual Father that same love and respect?

Let me tell you a little bit about my spiritual self before I learned to accept Christ into my life. I was born as we all are in the physi-

cal world. I had not yet had the Holy Spirit enter me and give me my spiritual rebirth. I was baptized into Christ as a child. I had no choice in this baptism; however, I was informed that the baptism was not complete until I confirmed my desire to join with Christ in "confirmation." Knowing this, I took my confirmation seriously as a completion of my faith. Little did I know it was just the beginning.

I did not know what I was seeking nor did I understand the meaning of being reborn. Once we're reborn of the Spirit, we can claim our birthright to God's kingdom. Not only that, but we can live lives empowered by the Spirit's gifts. We also must be very careful because I think that we can give up this birthright by falling away. We then can lose the power of the Spirit to guide our lives and fall back into secular living. We must live in the spirit to have the help we need to survive *now* and in the *hereafter*.

I could not see this before my birth to my spiritual Father. I was still dead inside. I tried to do good, I tried to follow the rules. However, inside I did not believe in them. They were not a part of me. Only through God can you see the truth. That can only occur once you give up yourself to his love. I do not mean just saying it; it has to come from deep within you. You have to be willing to release everything you know and trust in him. On the surface, it appears that you are being asked to give up everything, but in truth, you will always gain far more than you lose.

I do not mean to say that the teaching I received in Catholic school was meaningless. Far from it, I needed the background to understand what I was a part of, of what my choices were, as well as to know who God was and what he stood for. I am ever grateful to the church for my education. I never would have found God without it.

I learned who God was, what he believed in, and how he was related to us in the physical world. I learned the history of the Jewish people and the history of Jesus Christ. I even learned many songs of praise and prayers that I could use when asking God for something. Although I also know that it is also important to develop personal prayer to God, to speak with him like a dad.

Like many unseeing children, I too took all this for granted. I felt someday I would pay attention to God, but I had time to do that

later. I never gave to God from my heart. I denied myself the benefits that come from being in the family of God and then complained to God when I did not get what I wanted. That is until I reached out to God, and he reached down to touch my heart. I had no idea who he was.

Do not be afraid, if you see some of these things in yourself; I believe most people start off this way. We are blinded to the truth because the spirit has not come to open our eyes yet. If you feel that you are safe, that you are where you are supposed to be, beware! That is when you are in the greatest danger of all! The Spirit gives you a hunger for truth. If you do not hunger, you may have to re-examine yourself. Do not deny yourself the chance to be a part of God's family. God can be your dad, Jesus your brother, and the Spirit your constant companion. They will always be there, twenty-four hours a day, and will never leave your side as long as you wish them there.

Unlike Satan, the Spirit of God will not come to you uninvited. He will not use you without your permission nor will harm you in any way. Evil asks no permission, uses you when unaware, and seeks to serve his pleasure, harmful to you or not. Indeed, Satan lures us with what appears to be fun or pleasurable, but in reality, these things ultimately enslave us to our harm. I, however, did not understand this until much later in life. I lived a "worldly" life that caused me to seek out these pleasures that blinded me to God's truth.

Some of these distractive pleasures that I fell into were food, booze, lust, and wanting all sorts of physical things like new cars and computers. By themselves, these things seem innocent enough. However, when they eclipse God, and they change our way of living in order to feed this hunger, they soon control us rather than us controlling them. They become our gods. We will lie to ourselves; we will work long hours and will ignore important things in life in order to get our fix. My love of material things caused me to work too much to be a good husband, to spend time with God, or even to have time to enjoy the very things that I owned. That is when your desires own you—when you are no longer doing what is good for yourself. Now the addiction is forcing you to do what you do not want. For example, food has hurt me by causing me to become overweight and

unhealthy. Despite this, I can no longer control my eating, it controls me. Lastly, I was trained by the world to watch women, to enjoy their beauty, and to desire their sexy bodies. So much so that I would turn my head to check out the nearest babe. As a teenager, I found this desire easy to get into. From there, it is easy to pervert our minds with pornography and revealing movies. All this being disguised as normal because everyone I knew was doing it. Little did I understand what this was doing to my relationship to God.

I considered myself a "good" person. I tried to keep God's commandments. I broke them from time to time. I spent a lot of time struggling with myself, fighting off my evil tendencies. Maybe natural tendencies would work here better. I was a growing boy, becoming a man. I faced all the temptations that others my age felt, did the things natural to my age group. I was controlled by my worldly tendencies even though I attempted to be a better person. I was trying to control myself, not allowing God the chance to help me. Thus, I failed a lot.

About this time, I was nearing the end of my Catechism classes. The priest in charge said that before we could graduate, we had to go to a retreat or Teen-Encounter weekend. This retreat was a one-day affair, and the encounter was a full weekend. I at first wanted to get it over with quickly and was going to go to the "boring" retreat. Anything to get it over with. Then a person I never met before said, "I will go to the encounter weekend if you will." I do not know why, but I chose to go to the encounter with the "new kid." It was the best choice I ever made. I also had made up my mind that I would do what they asked, give it a full try before I decided it was some sort of brainwashing or bull. That was another good decision. I chose to keep an open mind, at least long enough to see what was going on. So with this in mind, I went with this new friend of mine.

Let's face it, when the day arrived, I was scared! I thought to myself, *What did I get myself into?* We got there, and there were kids everywhere—all as scared as I was. The first thing that we did was conduct some exercises that would help us get to know each other and the staff. I believe its purpose was to help us to loosen up, and I did feel more relaxed, after the exercise. They wasted no time in

teaching us to pray and to sing praises to God. The whole experience became a whirlwind of activity—reading the Bible, prayer, song, etc. Some people were born again during this time. I myself found myself enjoying the weekend, but I had not felt “born again” like some of the others were feeling. I had come to enjoy the experience of worship and prayer; I did not wish to leave the place. I felt loved and cared for here, among the other people. I was actually more afraid of returning to the outside world than I was to get into here. There was no brainwashing here, there was only love and caring, people who cared about people, and something even better. I still had not been born again, however. Most people I had seen become born-again did so during prayer. We would gather together in a large circle in the church area, singing and praising God. Then with the lights out, we would pass a candle around the room and each person receiving the candle would say a prayer. Many who were there would pray for Jesus to come into their lives. It was these people who felt the presence of the Holy Spirit move inside them. It was very moving to watch as well as to participate in, especially to see the change in their lives and the joy that came with it.

I had not been born again yet! I do not know what to say about being born again. There are many different views of what it is and what it means. It can happen in different ways and to any type of person. I believe it is a personal experience between you and God. It may differ for all people. I do know that being born again does not make you “holy” and incorruptible. You are not at the finish line but only at the starting line. We can sin, reject God, hurt others, and make many other mistakes in our search for God. This is why this book is being written. I hope it could serve as a guide to other born-again, who may stumble and need a better understanding of what is going on within oneself.

I myself had stumbled and fallen from grace later in life and was nearly lost forever if the Good Shepherd had not come back for me. I greatly appreciate the love of our Lord to call me back into the fold. I had grown overly confident in my ability to remain close to God. So much so that when I moved out of my house and moved to a different town. I did not continue to go to church because of the church

in my new local community was less than fulfilling to me. I felt that my faith was strong enough to keep me from falling away from God.

It didn't happen overnight, but rather I slowly became less and less involved. I began to hang out with people who were not faithful, and because of this, I began to sin. A little at first, just enough to blind me to God, then the sinning grew in frequency and an awfulness. Indeed, I had no idea of where I was in my relationship with God. It took a friend who, by serving God, reminded me of what I lost and where I was. To shock me back to the truth and cause me to search for God again. It was the old habits and the old sins that had finally brought me down. Without maturity of spirit to defend myself, without fellow Christians in a church help me maintain my spirituality, I eventually grew away from God and became lost in my sin. Lucky for me that God forgives all sinners when we realize we are wrong. I repented from my sins, and with help of God, I will have a life.

I have chosen as my Christian name, “Paul,” after the Paul who has written so much of the Bible. Not because I feel that I am worthy of such a name, but because of the way that Paul (who was first Saul) was introduced to Jesus. Saul was riding on his horse to go to persecute Christians when Jesus knocked him off his horse and changed his life. It was then that he became known as Paul. He gave up his old life and started up a new one, with a new name. That is why I chose “Paul” as my Christian name. God knocked me off my horse and changed my life. There are many other similarities as well. We shared a gift of the Holy Spirit and knowledge of the Word. God had revealed many secrets beyond a formal education in the church. I have never gone to seminary school nor had a special education in the word. What I have received in terms of knowledge has come from reading the Bible and having the scripture open up before me, as well as “gifts” by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul was teaching for three years before he finally met the apostles who could have instructed him into who Jesus was. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit as a child, amazed scribes and Pharisees with his knowledge of the Word and God. The Holy Spirit works this wisdom through me and through all that seek the gift out.

There are other common things between the Apostle Paul and me. I have the driving need to serve God and to speak his Word to all peoples. I dislike ritualistic worship, denominational boundaries, and people who use the Word of God as a way to put down people who are searching to find God. I tend to be non-denominational in my outlook; I do not see Catholics, Protestants, etc. I see people who need to come closer to God. I see people who have different needs that need to be filled in order for them to come to Christ. God is the God of individuals, and as such he will draw us in the manner we are capable of understanding, whether it is in one Christian church or another.

Since the time of my falling away, God had brought me back into the fold at a time when I needed him most. He brought me back three months before sickness had struck my parents, with God supporting me through the death of my father and extended illness of my mother, all the while being held firm by the spirit and given wisdom and how to deal with the situation. Three years have passed since that time, and God walks with me stronger every day. He has given me the secrets of how to maintain my faith in Christian maturity and in dealing with the world. He has set my feet on solid ground. I teach the Word of God at my church to those who were about to be confirmed in their faith, as well as teach adult Christians how to have a personal relationship with God. I teach out of the gladness of my heart, as this book is also a joy because it is my chance to give just a little bit back to God. He has done so much for me; I could never truly repay him. So I will do what he has asked—to love, honor, and serve him. It is in this manner we are all called to serve—not out of obligation but out of love and appreciation. If you struggle in this area, please spend extra time getting to know Jesus. Only through a personal relationship with God can there be the power to serve with joy and Love.

Without any further delay, I would like to finish the story of my experiences at the teen encounter weekend in giving testimony to how God touched my life.



CHAPTER 3

Born Again!

Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”

—John 3:5

It was getting to be the end of the teen-encounter weekend, and I was beginning to wonder what was wrong with me, why others had been born again and not me. I knew many others had not too, but that didn't make me any more comfortable with being untouched by the spirit. It was the end of the encounter; our parents were here, and everyone was to get up and say something about the experience they had here, whether it was good, bad, or had no change in them. When it was my turn to get up, I planned to say how much fun I had and how I saw it change other people's lives. How wonderful it had turned out for others, but I was not “touched” yet. So I got up to say my speech, and I got in front of everyone, was just about to open my mouth, and *wham!*

Yes, I was born again, right in front of everyone! (I shake from the memory as I write this.) I was standing there, ready to say what I intended, and then a wave washed through me. A burning wave, it was a fire, but one that did not hurt. I felt a flushing of all my sins and hurts just leave my body. I burst into tears. I cried for joy! I said a

speech, I gave a testimony; however, I do not know what I said. Even as I stepped down from the podium, I did not know what I said. I was told later that “it was beautiful,” “others had tears in their eyes,” etc. I tell you this: it could not have been me speaking those words. It was the Holy Spirit that spoke those words through me. I was lucky indeed. God in his wisdom chose to save me at a time I could affect the lives of others. Praise God!

When I say I was born again, I mean it in every sense of the word. My born-again experience was much like the birth of a child. The Spirit washed through me and cleansed me of my sins, showed me a brand-new life full of new feelings, experiences, and thoughts. Being newborn, I knew not how to handle these experiences. I reacted by impulse. I wanted everyone to feel the way I did, to experience the joy and the peace God had to offer. I was high from the goodness God had to offer. I was yet to discover how to grow and use this gift, how to remain in God’s Path, and most of all, how to establish a real relationship with God through his spirit. That is what I write about today. We are not born again as a grown adult; we are born again as a baby in God’s arms. We shall cry, we shall make mistakes, we shall be stubborn, we even will *still sin*. The difference is this, we have true knowledge of our Father and God, and with that, we shall grow toward God as our spirit matures.

We are fortunate to have felt God’s spirit touch our lives, and now we bear the responsibility to help others find the truth about God. Welcome to the journey into God’s kingdom. His kingdom starts here and comes into completion when we are called to worship before his throne. Each of us has a calling to keep and a trial to fulfill. Whether it is in the ministry or to act as disciples among the dead in spirit, so that they can come to life or any purpose that is the Lord’s.

Before we can help him, we must become close to him, to mature in his teaching, so that we do not become lost ourselves. For how can we help Jesus, or God, if we do not know him like a son knows his earthly Dad? A brother knows his brother or a friend

knows his friend. How can we advise others about their problems, if we are doing the same things?

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye. (Matthew 7:3–5)

Now I was born-again at this moment. I could feel the spirit of the lord inside me. It was a warm comfortable burning inside my heart. I felt warm, protected, and happier than I ever felt in my life. I could not wait to tell everyone about it. I wanted everyone to feel as happy as I was at this time. I, like many other new born-again Christians, went out and spread the word to anyone who would listen—even chasing people who did not want to listen. I wanted everyone to be close to God like I was. It is so important that I would have done anything to help people. I knew how I felt, and I knew the penalty for those who did not follow God. I did not wish it on anyone.

However, I also thought that after I was born-again that I had made it. I was on God’s list, and I was ready for my tasks. Little did I know I was more like a newborn baby, seeing the light for the first time. I was feeling emotions, feeling the new surroundings around me, and was unlearned in the way to the Lord. I was taught that I would go through highs and lows after being born again. I would feel great one day and feel down the next, and that that would be normal. I was soon to find out that that was truer than I knew. I knew nothing about holding my faith together or growing closer to God. I had no experience with dealing with the Holy Spirit or even how to pray. I was literally a crying baby just brought forth from the womb of God.

I reacted mostly from feeling, not understanding what was going on around me, following my heart, and attempting to learn more and more each day. I had a great hunger for knowledge of God and his Word. I wished to pray often and joined a prayer group. Indeed, I was happy and content with my life. I thank God, and I thank the Catholic church for its wisdom to send me to this awakening of my spirit. I only hope that this still continues to this day, for it is a good program, and I for one support it. I would still be lost without it.

At this time, my understanding of the Bible was limited. I read the Bible often but did not understand it. I soon found that the Holy Spirit helped open up the pages for me whenever I was in trouble and needed assistance from the bible. Even as this went on, I did not realize what was revealing the Scripture to me. I just knew all of a sudden, I understood what before was gibberish. Much of the Bible is hidden from our eyes until we give ourselves to God. The spirit reveals it to us. In the Bible, it is explained to us:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.” (John 14:22–24)

We have to be ready for the message. Open to it. If we have our hearts hardened against him, we cannot hear him or listen to his help. If you do not know God in your hearts, how can you ever hope to listen to him? Your hearts would be cluttered up with all the worldly noise and God would need to shout above the distractions to get through to you. You must seek to keep the Holy Spirit inside you.

For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our mes-

sage of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. **(1 Thessalonians 1:4–5)**

I have been truly blessed by the lord to have knowledge of these things. It is not to my credit but to the credit of the Lord our God. His blessing upon me allows the knowledge to come by the Holy Spirit. I am not wise enough or strong enough to see these things without spiritual guidance. Like a child newborn being held by the Father, I am cared for and nurtured. My Father protects me and sends me help, through Jesus my brother and the Holy Spirit my friend. I have not grown yet enough to walk in faith on my own yet. My holy family is carrying me. Praise God for his love and compassion.

Rebirth has many names—baptism in the spirit, conversion, coming to God, renewing one’s soul, etc. Each occurrence is individual in nature. It happens to people at different times of their lives, since each person is an individual with different needs; God helps us individually through his spirit. He touches us all at different levels and with different results. I myself do not understand God’s ways completely in this matter. After all, who can capture or understand all of which God is? For this reason, I encourage you all to seek God’s truth, to seek a closer relationship with him every day, to search for the power of his essence, the Holy Spirit, in your lives, as well as the fruits of his spirit. Most of all seek the ability to love all men and God as your Father.

The spirit is needed in your life for he puts the flavor in your faith. The holy fire in your beliefs. He makes you *alive* in God, not just living. Indeed, he is the very power to holds our entire lives together.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot” (Matthew 5:13).

We have to be the salt of Earth; however, we need our faith to be real and alive within us or we fall prey to the world around us.

There are some who argue that once saved always saved and those who argue that you must convert your life to God daily to live in the spirit. I personally believe that both are true. We can easily turn our backs to God and fall from his grace. However, I also believe that Jesus will not leave us without trying to draw us back into the fold.

“Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward” (2 John 1:8).

The damage that we do during the time of our lost state can be considerable. And I do not know if all those who backslide will accept Jesus when he tries to bring us back into the fold. He promises to come after us; however, that does not mean we will be willing to listen. It is a risk that we cannot afford to take. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” (Luke 15:4–6)

Whether we can die in our sin, I believe is answered in the parable of the sower. I believe that the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3–9) is directed at the church body and not the unbeliever, for rejection of the message cannot happen until the person has heard it first. We, therefore, must examine our own faith in order to deter-

mine which one of these pertains to us. Below is the explanation by Jesus of the parable of the sower.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. (Matthew 13:19–22)

However, I am not God and reserve that judgment to him who can see into the heart of man. What name we choose to call this event that changes our lives in so drastic a manner is of little importance. What is of importance is that it leads men into a deeper relationship with God. Once a person finds that personal relationship, God can begin to teach him or her from there. We must be aware that God can teach us personally in many ways. He teaches us through the Bible, through each other, by the circumstances that surround us, by direct intervention, and by the experiences we live through. The Holy Spirit will confirm or reject these teachings if we can maintain our close relationship with the Father. Only if we truly love God and cherish his ways.

Personally, I believe that at some point in life, you must choose to want God in your life. You also need to reaffirm that every day.

Like marriage, we choose to be married to our husband or wife at one point in our lives. This choice is supposed to be “until death does us part.” However, one spouse can change their mind and divorce the other person in their marriage at any time. So it is with God. We can choose to love God and then divorce ourselves from our union with him. This puts us outside of his grace, maybe outside of salvation, and most definitely outside of his will. Unlike a human spouse, he always waits to take us to back. This understanding of faith may be the continual conversion of heart we are speaking about.

As human beings, with hardened hearts, we divorce one another and re-marry. We forget our love for each other, we forget our promises to one another, and we fail to treat each other as Jesus has taught us. We are fallible. God does not believe in divorce. When we separate from him, he gently awaits our return. He waits for us to come back into our relationship with him. Indeed he even calls us unto him. If only our hearts would soften enough for us to hear his call.

“For I hate divorce, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and covering one’s garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless” (Malachi 2:16).

It is our choice to remain divorced or separated from God. It is up to us to reconcile ourselves to Jesus, who is God’s way of putting ourselves right with him.



CHAPTER 4

The Family of God

I believe true faith starts at the point of being born again (conversion to Christ). Faith has no barriers, no select religion, and no worldly leader. God is now your father, Jesus your brother, and the Holy Spirit your friend. Spiritual life becomes a mirror image of the family life here on earth. Our relationship with God is truly like being a member of God’s family. With God as our father, who serves as our provider, who loves, instructs, and disciplines us when we are bad. Jesus is our brother; we look up to him, speak with him, share in our good times and bad, and seek him out when we are in need. The Holy Spirit serves as our friend—someone we interact with, depend on, take advice from, and even experience joys and sorrows with. Every facet of life experienced in the worldly family can be compared to our relationship with God. I believe that is part of the reason that Jesus speaks the way he does about family. Faith is a personal thing between you and the Holy Trinity. Your adoption into this family starts when you search it out.

How is God like a father?

God is the perfect Father. He is our Father, he acts as a good father should, and we are his children. When you choose to follow God, you become his adopted child. All the same rules apply to our relationship to God as would to our physical fathers. There is no difference. A physical father’s relationship with us mirrors the relationship of God in heaven that is why the family is sacred. That is also why Satan targets the family as something he wishes to break up. He can pervert the sacredness of family and thus harm God’s children.

We as adults tend to think of ourselves “as beyond the errors of adolescence.” We no longer feel the rebelliousness of our teen years and have become more sensible. We have changed less than we think! The difference is, instead of rebelling against our natural fathers, we rebel against God’s teachings. We no longer have to answer to a physical parent, now we must answer for our actions by suffering the results of our own choices. We think of ourselves as adults, but in God’s eyes, we are still little children. When someone tells us “like it is,” we still go our own way. When we do something wrong, we cover it up, even though it cannot be hidden from God. The truth will never remain hidden forever; truth always comes to the surface. When we do not get our way, we cry (complain) and get angry until we get it. Gee, doesn’t that sound like a child’s tantrum? God has always tried to teach us how to get through life with as little hurt as possible, we just choose not to listen.

The Bible is God’s teachings to his children. How to lead a happy life and be both fulfilled and productive. It’s a book full of cautions on how to avoid danger and how not to destroy ourselves. It is not really any different than our dad saying to us not to run in the street or not to touch a hot stove or not to pull your sister’s hair. It teaches us how to make friends, how to avoid debt., how to have a happy marriage, and much more. These lessons alone we all need, but God does not stop there. He sends us a helper, a guide, and a shoulder to cry on when we need him. Before we can get that help however, we must invite him in.

If we accept God in our lives, he will send his Spirit to be with us. His Spirit alone can open up the lock that is placed on his Word. Only the children of God can understand the Bible because it must be opened to you. Otherwise, it will appear as gibberish to the worldly. The worldly cannot see the truth because they have rejected it in order to do what they want, right or wrong. His Spirit will comfort you through some of the toughest parts of your life. It will hug you to him like a father hugging his child to take away the fear, pain, and sorrow that a child experiences (usually when they did something wrong and got hurt because of it). He will protect you from evil with the force of a father protecting his children from a dangerous man.

We, on the other hand, like the teenager who rebels against his parents, say, “We can do it ourselves.” Here is where we lose our protection. Like a natural father, sometimes he allows us to make our own mistakes, waiting for us to come back to him for help. He allows us to make mistakes on our own, knowing that some things that will be the only way we will learn the truth. This is not unlike a natural father. You will find much correlation’s between God and a natural father. Read on and you will find many more and more I have not mentioned. God allows us to strengthen ourselves through our errors, but as a dad, is there to pick up the pieces of our lives when we fail.

The great thing about God is he is not human. He can always be there, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year. All we have to do is be close enough to listen. God is always there, however, we blind ourselves to him because we do not always like what he has to say. How many times as a teenager have you stopped listening to Dad because he wanted you to do something that you did not want to do? Take out the garbage or do a chore you hate. Maybe he refused you the chance to go to a late-night party or some other occasion where you could get into trouble. We rebel at this with our natural fathers even if he is right. God sometimes asks us to do things we would rather not or tells us we should not do things because they are wrong. Like the child who sneaks out of the house, we often ignore God’s advice and do it anyway. If you spend time talking with him and develop a relationship with him, it will be far easier to know what he is trying to tell you. If you allow a gulf to come between you, or you never associate with him, how can he help you with your problems?

If you keep him close to your heart and talk with him every day, if you try to seek him for all your little problems, he will be easier to find when a catastrophic one comes along. God never said you would not have problems, only you would not be alone to face them. If you’re used to seeking his help, you will find it easier to hear his guidance. It is better not to have to hear his voice across a vast distance between you. Your father is not there to hurt you; he gave you life. The same is true with your spiritual father.

Do not stumble and fall because you do not get your every wish. Does your natural father grant your every wish? (Of course not!) Some things we request are bad for us, for others, or maybe a problem down the road. Like the worldly family, we must accept what he can give and enjoy the benefits of being part of God's family.

God the Father is our provider, just like your physical father is. He allows us to play, eat, have a roof over our heads, and give us an allowance so we can buy the things we need. We do not even think about or worry about how he earned that money that provides for our needs, we just take it for granted. God wants us to remember that that is his job too.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So

do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Matthew 6:25–34)

We too often take for granted what our Father in heaven has provided for us. We forget to be thankful and live a life like a child playing in the sandbox with nothing on our minds but the joy we experience using what God gave us. Life is often like a sandbox. We become distracted by all the toys and forget that life is more than having the best toys and playing games. Often God calls us to come to him, and we respond, "Aww! Can't I play a little longer?" or "No, I won't go to bed." Even though it's for our own good.

A father often plays the role of the disciplinarian in the family. He is the final judge when we chose to misbehave. Although a human father cannot know the truth in all cases, God cannot be lied to, hidden from, or talked out of issuing punishment. Since he is the truth, he must act in a fair and decisive way for all his children. The only method of intervention for our sins is Jesus our brother who took our punishment for those who love him and depend upon his sacrifice. We must be repentant however or his sacrifice will not help us. God is a righteous judge who will judge us by our actions or look past our sins by seeing his son. We have a family, a father who judges fairly, and a brother willing to die for us.

Another example of God compared to a physical father is this: when we need to learn something, to get the advice we often would turn to our fathers for help. He would to the best of his ability to tell us all he knew to help us along in life. God the Father has not left us to fend on our own. He provided his own words to us to instruct and teach us what he knows about the world around us. Kind of a love letter to his children. Since we cannot see him directly, he used the spirit to work through his children to compose the Bible. The Bible is one of God's ways to instruct and guide us. Using both the Bible and his Holy Spirit to open up the meanings to the Bible, he is able to teach us about the truths we need to know. These truths can help you in every stage and part of life. It helps kings rule lands, bosses their help, marriages, moral decisions, self-improvement, psycholog-

ical strength, character, and helps you know God the Father through Jesus his son.

I am sure I could go on and on in these comparisons between an earthly dad and our spiritual one. Open your eyes and see the similarities around you. There are many dads that fail to live up to the level of being called a good dad. We know this. Even though this to be true, most of us know what a good father should be. God is that good and perfect father, why deny yourself the goodness of God's family relationship and cheat yourself from having the love we all need?

The family has more than just a father in it. He just provides *some* of the qualities that we all need to be happy and fulfilled. Since our relationship to God is like the physical family, there must be more to God than just what we have spoken of above. In fact, there are two more segments to the family—a mother and our brothers and sisters. In truth, God provides us with a motherly figure—a helper, so to speak, who provides even more support and guidance. Often fathers are busy working to earn a wage or fixing up the house, and they do not have as intimate a relationship with the children as they need. They need constant help and guidance to grow and to learn. As in a real-life family, God provides a mother to watch over us. This mother that I envision is the Holy Spirit. Now understand I do not say God calls the Holy Spirit the mother of us all, only that the actions the Spirit performs seem to fit into the role of the mother. We know that he declares himself father and Jesus as a brother.

The mothers of the olden days had specific duties toward the family. These duties included the education of their children in both how to care for themselves and to provide higher knowledge. They comforted their children when they were hurt. They spread their love upon them and helped them grow up strong and healthy. They fed the family and made a clean happy home environment for both the father and the family to reside. She is commonly the glue that holds the family together and makes the house a clean and pleasant environment.

The Holy Spirit's job is to help us to clean up our inner temple of God so that the father can reside in our hearts. The spirit does this

by teaching us about God, revealing the truth about ourselves and giving us strength and comfort when we need it most. Jesus knew how difficult it was to live in this world even with the Holy Spirit in him, never mind us being left solely to our own strength and wisdom. That is one of the reasons he promised us that when he left this world, he would send an advocate.

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (John 14:25–26)

These are just some of the qualities of the Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the truth, for he reveals the Word of God to God's chosen people. He also reveals many truths about living in this world. Helping us avoid danger and conflict.

The Holy Spirit is love; he is the spirit of God poured out upon us to share in his life and love. He surrounds us in his web of love and protection much like a father for a child.

The Spirit is compassion—a compassionate being who grieves when we grieve feels joy when we are full of joy and comforts us in times of despair.

The Spirit of God is wisdom, for who knows the world better than God, who made it? Who reveals the Word of God and convicts us when we do wrong?

The Spirit is hope; it is in his indwelling that we depend on to give us hope to defeat the sin that resides within us and to strengthen us to follow the way of the lord.

He most of all is the Spirit of life; without the indwelling of the Spirit, we are not marked by God as his children and cannot attain eternal life. It is this that God pours forth from himself to give us life eternal, and this we are commanded to pour forth from ourselves to others so that they too may receive the God's gift.

God acts the part of mother and comforter through the Holy Spirit so that we can share in his spirit and his love. So we can draw

from his spirit the things we need to get through the trials in this world. If we are listless or powerless before the world, we need to check where our hearts are toward God. Have we hardened our hearts against him and his spirit? We are not meant to lead wimpy lives devoid of God's spirit. If we find no activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives, it is time to spend time with God. It is easy to become lost and spiritually void and takes the effort to live a spirit-driven life.

Things that reveal the presence of the spirit in us are a hunger for knowledge of Jesus and God, the opening up of understanding of the Bible, a renewed desire for prayer and the wish to sing praises to God. You could have excessive amounts of brotherly love, as well as many of the gifts of the spirit found in the Bible. Now not everyone will have all the gifts, some will exhibit one gift more than others will; however, the desire to know and be with our Lord is a sure sign of your spiritual health. We "desire" to be with God and his spirit, it is not out of obligation but out of joy.

If there is anything surer that the Holy Spirit has taught me, it is that you cannot follow God out of fear (especially fear of hell), you can only truly follow God out of a true, giving love. A love of appreciation and a love strong enough to give of yourself, purely to honor and love your father in heaven. As most women react in emotional ways, providing compassion and love with those around them, the spirit provides that same nurturing flow of love and strength. We are to bath in this flow of the spirit until it overflows in our lives, to touch the others who are around us from God's spring of life. We teach, we care for, and we help those around us from the abundance of overflow the spirit causes in our life. This is the secret to be a powerful servant of God. To try to teach from a book without a spirit-filled life makes serving God a chore and those around you will not be touched as powerfully because they can detect that you do not believe in what you are doing.

Does this mean we give up and stop serving where we are now? No, it means we need to seek a deeper relationship with God and His spirit, then go forth and serve. Always leave time in your life for your own spiritual growth; we must grow every day too. This will make you alive and not just living.

I have experienced the inner strength attained by closeness to the spirit when my parents died, then my brother. Despite the pain and sorrow around me, my inner voice comforted me and reassured me that death was nothing but a beginning and that would deny my family the beauty that I have experienced when I have felt God's presence. I have felt the spirit comfort me in times of sorrow. I have experienced hope in times of hopelessness. I have experienced wisdom to see and understand God's Word, in the Bible, and through others who teach. I have been blessed in receiving direct knowledge of Christ and God's truth. I have felt the Holy Spirit cleans me of my sins and watched in horror as the truth about what I had done and who I was before coming back to Christ was revealed to me. I have been blessed in many ways to feel the presence of the spirit within me. However, I do not control it, only God does. I opened my heart to God, and he blessed me with these gifts.

I tell you these things because I want you to understand how the spirit works within us. I also wish to witness that the Spirit is very active even in this day and age. We have not been left alone with no help or no hope. God has given us his very essence to guide us through life, but we must seek a close relationship with him to be able to draw from it. Many of you have had the Spirit move in your lives, and you did not recognize its works. To understand the Spirit and how it works, you must seek the wisdom of God. By knowing God, you will know his will and his Spirit's works. To know God, you must come to know him through Jesus his son. This leads us into the last member of the Trinity, Jesus the son, who is our brother and king in our family.

What can I say about our brother? He is the key to everything. He is our older brother who we should look up to and learn from his example. He is both someone we can relate to because he was down here on earth suffering the same things we have suffered and more. He knows what it is like to be disappointed, betrayed by friends, wrongly accused, and so many other evil things that tear us down. We can watch his example of how he dealt with troubles we too will face. Like a big brother, he explains to us in words we can understand the teachings of the Father. Jesus is all in all. He is the example of

who the Father is, he is our example how we should be, and his sacrifice for us provides us with the gate to heaven.

Can you relate to Jesus as a big brother? Can you relate to him as king? Many of us find it easier to accept him as our savior, but we tend to forget the rest. He even describes us as brothers and sisters to each other. Do we view each other in this manner? Or do we neglect our duties to each other by failing to share in our faith together?

There is no getting around accepting Jesus as your king, your brother, and your savior. You cannot pretend to accept him. You cannot just mouth the words to trick people into thinking you do. It must be done completely within your heart. Jesus knows your heart and cannot be fooled. Because of this, you can be an active church member and still not be right with Christ. So do not look at other church members and measure yourself against them. Christ is the only person you must look to for an example of how to live. We are not called to be disciples by accident. We are not just supposed to live a good life but also to serve as well. We are also not to serve out of weakness but out of power and love. We cannot do this until we accept Christ and receive the power of the Holy Spirit. We must not serve out of habit; we must not allow our lives to become ordinary in worship. As a family, we should do things for each other out of love and joy. If we do not have that, there is something missing from our faith life.

As Jesus plays the part of the elder brother, we play the part of younger brothers and sisters. We are an example to the world of who our brother is. We are called to live as he did and act as he did so that people could get to know who Jesus is and, through him, know the Father.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the

one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. (John 14:10–12)

When we accept Jesus as our brother, we accept God as our Father and the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. If you can accept the teaching and life of Jesus, you are accepting the Father because his life mirrors who the Father is. Now that you understand the relationship we have with our father, mother, and brother, we now must look at who we are in the family, as well as how we respond to the actions of our spiritual parents.

The child in us:

[A] nd said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:3–6)

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. (Luke 18:17)

What does this mean? I believe that we must humble ourselves like little children if we are to understand how much like children we still are, to view God with the eyes of a child, looking to their father for their needs, guidance, and for love. Indeed, we must look for all the things we would look for in a physical father. These things then we can expect from our spiritual father. We must look to our spiritual

father who made us and gave us life, both physical and spiritual, to trust in him who takes care of us and provides for us.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:25–26)

We think that because we are older, we have outgrown our childish ways. We have not outgrown them; we just no longer have parents to question them. We are now living on our own and must live with the consequences of what we do. We often regret decisions we made but cannot change the end result. We have our Father in heaven that allows us to learn from our mistakes. He uses truth and his Word to guide our ways. When we choose to go our own way, we pay the penalty because we are fighting against the truth and living in a lie. So often we fail to heed his call.

But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.” (Matthew 11:16–17)

We as God’s children are no different than any other child. We would rather play with our toys than do chores. We tend to listen to our parents only when they are telling us something we like. We would rather be distracted by worldly things than to spend time with our spiritual family. What child would rather spend time at a family gathering than go out with his friends? We almost always choose to be with our friends because it seems more exciting for us. We do not

learn the importance of family until much later when we have lost them. We take them for granted, as we do our spiritual life with God.

We play the part of the child in many ways. We carry on and complain when things do not go our way, we do not like following instructions, we do not like doing chores, and we would rather play than listen when God calls us. We take our parents for granted and often look at them as our enemy rather than our friend. These qualities we exhibit toward our natural parents we also exhibit to God.

As children, we do not think about what it takes to provide food for the table or a roof over our heads. We just know that they are there and take them for granted. Like the world around us, God provides a world in which we can live and allows us ways to feed ourselves and go about our lives. These things would not be here if he did not will it first.

Children can sometimes be in danger from the home if they do not follow the rules to live there safely. Even in the safety of home, there are hot burners, electrical outlets, kitchen chemicals, etc. This world God provided us is similar in that there is some dangerous stuff that we should avoid. If we listen to our parent, we will not get into trouble; however as children, we often still experience some pain from ignoring good advice. God also advises us to be careful of certain things, not because he wants to put us down but rather so we will not get hurt.

The child in us rebels and we often do the very things we were told not to. The very act of saying, “Don’t do that” makes it more tempting to do that very thing. As Bill Cosby once said in a joke, “If I asked you not to touch the phone, why did you touch it?” Our answer, like his children, would often be “I don’t know?” We simply cannot resist our natural urges. It is all part of growing up. Once we mess up and come up crying, Daddy picks us up, dusts us off, and sends us on our way again. God treats us the same when we sin. He knows we cannot help ourselves completely, that we will mess up. We are just kids. So he forgives us all our transgressions if we call on him too.

It is when we refuse to own up to our guilt is when we really upset our father. Or worse, try to blame someone else. Parents do not

like being lied to or talked back to because it shows a lack of remorse. It proves that you have not learned anything from the mistake and will do it again. This is the very principle behind the forgiveness of sins. God looks to see if you are truly sorry in your heart and if you intend to repeat the sin. Conversion of the heart means “change.” Almost all segments of family life mimic the relationship with God’s family.

We *must* understand that as adults, we change less than we think and be humbled because of that knowledge. It will help you in dealing with God and also with other people in life. The expectations of your fellow man are less high, and you will be less disappointed with how people react to things. Knowing how we as children will react to things around us will help us to avoid needless confrontations, fits, complaints, etc. I also find it easier to understand how and why people fall into sin so easily.

I do not place blame on them so much for what they do but blame the principalities that mislead them from the truth. They are still responsible for their choices. However, they often make them blindly and are led to the more serious sins by committing less noticeable ones until they cannot see the danger.

We are truly children—children who are adopted by God through Jesus Christ. We are adopted as lost and disrespectful children and need to learn how to interact with of new family. When God gets us, we are no prize. We are disrespectful, full of vile habits, and need lots of love and attention to be put back together as a child of God. Indeed, it will take our whole life to do it. I believe that is what we are here for. We are lucky that God loves us enough to save us even when we are bad.

I mean no disrespect to either adult or to children when I say we act childlike. We all are no better than each other, and as adults, we sometimes need to see just how similar our actions can be to our children. We often come to believe we have passed being held accountable for our actions because we no longer live with our parents. In reality, we all will always be accountable to God, who is also our parent. In fact, he sees all we do, and we cannot hide any of our actions from him. God *is the* truth and will not change his

reactions to our choices because we want something done our way. If we choose to live a lie, we must expect to reap the penalties that result from our foolish actions. If you see a red brick on the ground and toss it in the air and claim that there is no such thing as gravity, you will still get hit on the head. Or if you claim the same brick is yellow, you can say this forever, but the brick will never change color. We want God to follow our plan rather than we follow his. We know better, or do we? Children have always had trouble listening to their parents; it is natural, and it is normal behavior for a child. It is the same behavior we exhibit toward God. The sooner we humble ourselves and realize that we are still children to God, the sooner we can continue our growing up in his family. Be humble, love your family in God, and understand that the trials we face in life are the growing pains we suffer as we grow to Christian maturity. Faith imitates life in more ways than one, not only are we called to be in God’s family, but we are called to a wedding too. The wedding between Christ and the church, and we are the church.



CHAPTER 5

Marriage to God

Like the family, there are many similarities between marriage and the relationship that we share with Christ. Many times, the relationship with God is described in the Bible in ways that seem more appropriate a love affair between two people deeply in love with each other. Song of Solomon and Paul's teachings on marriage mentions how men are to love their wives as Christ loves the church, etc. These are just a few examples of the similarities between marriage and the relationship to Christ.

Most people reading this already understand that the way to salvation is through Jesus Christ by accepting his death on the cross for our sins and by choosing to follow in his footsteps and be his disciples. We have to take a step forward in faith and decide to follow Christ, similar to taking the step to decide if you wish to marry a person. Many Christian denominations practice this choice at adult baptism. Some do it by confirming their child baptism at a later time in life. Either way, it is a far more serious event than most people give it credit for. The same is true for marriage today; people no longer hold it with enough respect to enter into it carefully.

Marriage between two people is not just an emotional reaction that two people feel toward each other. It is not just a mutual love that they share. Marriage is a *commitment*—a commitment to care for each other for the rest of your life. Whether they are happy or sad, healthy or sick, until death separates you. The love shared between people is not the love of the world but the love of God. If two people marry because of the love of the world, they marry because their

spouse fulfills some desire in them, whether lust, comfort, companionship, or other selfish desires. The love of God is selfless; he loves the sick, the infirm, the unlovable, and those who need him most. I believe some marriages develop God's love as time goes by, and that is why they last. Others based upon selfish love crumble when the first of the trials begin. Today we have a corrupted view of what marriages are for, and because of this, they do not last. Marriage before anything else is a promise to God and each other to help each other and care for each other in the face of adversity.

Now understanding what marriage was meant to be and what type of love bonds it, you can understand why God says that it is inseparable by man. You have made a promise before God and man to take care of each other till the end of your life. To divorce is to break your contract with God and with your spouse—with both your families and your children. Needless to say, this causes all sorts of mayhem. Pain and suffering results in the divorcees, their children, family, and friends. The act of divorce is sinful for these reasons. *I personally do not believe* that the sin is ongoing, however. I believe that the sin is done at the time of the divorce. If a man remarries, he should not divorce the new spouse in order to rectify the situation and remarry his old spouse. Like other sins, it is confessable and can be forgiven the divorcee. You do not commit the same sin twice to rectify the other. (This is my advice, not God's.) I believe that I am scripturally correct in this assessment, however, no one verse verifies this.

God views marriage as permanent. There is no divorce from his perspective. He will not break his commitment to us; we, however, do divorce ourselves from him. God says, "I hate divorce" and will wait for his betrothed to return to him faithfully. He recognizes our marriage to him as permanent even if we do not. When God speaks of Israel in the Old Testament, he commonly refers to her as a hoar that constantly strays from worshipping him and turns to idols and evil. God always tries to call Israel back to him only to have his prophets killed and ignored. "We" are Israel—like Israel, we are wed to God if we commit to him and his son Jesus. We are the ones that divorce God and stray after our lusts and desires. God does not rec-

ognize our divorce from him and awaits our return (unconditional love). Would we prefer that he change?

For two people to be married, there are a few common conditions that first must be met. The two to be married need to know one another and spend time with one another in order to know whom they marry. They also need to care for one another and be willing to carry out the conditions stated at the ceremony. They both need to be ready for the commitment as well as share in the same values that their spouse has. If any of these conditions remain unmet, a difficult marriage can follow. The same applies to your commitment to Christ. If you do not have the same values, and you do not have a true commitment to Jesus, your faith will be shaky.

This is why it is important you know Jesus before you can accept Christ into your heart. It is also important to spend years in study after coming to Christ so you will have a good relationship with him. As with marriage, a spiritual relationship depends on mutual love and understanding. If you fail to share the same values, desires, and goals, you will be unhappy.

Neither should a person jump into confirmation or baptism without the surety that knowledge provides. So many do so because of false reasons. They can be pressured into accepting Jesus by parents, friends, or even the church itself. They can live a faith that is dead in their hearts. It becomes an unhappy marriage—one without joy and happiness and meaningless to them. We see this in marriages today. People going through the motions of being married yet leading miserable lives instead of happy ones. Many of these marriages end in divorce or worse. Many false faiths end in turmoil, hopelessness, and the splitting from God and faith.

It does not need to end this way. Using God's love can revive marriages that seem hopeless. The love that God gives is free and unconditional. It is given even if it is not received back. It is shared freely and holds no bounds. This love for God can revive dead faith, can cause a true conversion to Jesus Christ, and remarry us to our savior Jesus. Jesus, who is God, will always take us back, even if we had long forgotten him.

Many marry with the wrong idea of what marriage is, so they divorce later. You could say in a sense they never truly were married in the heart. This is the final judge of marriage or anything for that matter. It is the heart, and only God knows the heart. Just because you went through the motions of a ceremony, whether it is baptism, confirmation, marriage, etc., unless it was true to the heart, you may be condemning yourself instead of saving yourself.

Unless you truly committed your life to Jesus, you cannot do it by following a ceremony. It must be done by your heart—by conversion of the heart. The ceremony is only a public display of what is (supposed to be) happening in your heart. You cannot lie to God, but you can fool yourself. If you are not sure of your faith, confirm it in your heart by seeking it out.

Here is how to form a relationship with God—through Jesus his son who is God. Before you can form a relationship, certain things must happen. You must notice who Jesus is. Somehow in life, Jesus catches your eye. So like a lost love, you must seek him out. You ask people who would know about Jesus to learn all you can. You try to find out how to speak to him. You meet and you spend time getting to know him. You go places and do things together; you ask questions and seek answers. Your relationship deepens. You start to become committed. You begin to dream of the day you can be wed (joined with Jesus). In your heart, you are now committed to Jesus/your love. You believe in what he believes, you want what he wants. You share in everything you do together. The day arrives, and you are wed (baptized and confirmed into Jesus).

Your life together has just started. It is emotional, torrid, and a wild ride on the rollercoaster of life. As all new marriages, it is colorful and new. Everything in the life of the new believer is exciting and wonderful. As time goes on the luster may fade, the newness falter. You may run into times of difficulties and trials. Your faith in each other seems to waver a bit. The faith has dulled into a rut of servitude or complacency.

Now is the time to hold your faith together by returning to your first love (Christ). Time and Satan has worn your faith down, drawn you away. Other gods—lusts, greed, selfishness, etc.—have caught

your attention. You are now going through a trial in your life. You falter, you fail, and you live in sin.

All the while Christ awaits your return to him, pleading with you to turn back to him. Finally, humbly, you return. Like the prodigal son, you return. Jesus sends his spirit to comfort you, to lift you up, and love you as if you never left. Your bond has become greater because you cannot believe that he could forgive such transgressions, and you love him all the more for it. Your spirit is stronger, your love more real, more like God's love. Now you are ready to stand up for your faith and your love, Christ.

Does the above sound a little like married life? We are swept away in the beginning, then our lives change. We go through struggles, some may fall away, Christ who would never divorce us waits patiently for our return, and when we do, he loves us just the same as before we left him. When we depend upon our loved ones, and they come through for us, we feel a closer bond, a trust that we never felt before. It bonds and strengthens us. Our love has become more mature and stable. Our faith becomes our true love. The love that God has shown us. Marriage has its ups and downs, its times of trials, its times of sorrow and joy. The walk-in faith will be the same; you will depend upon Christ as you would depend on a spouse and more.

In marriage, we have responsibilities—to keep our homes clean and maintained so our spouse can be cared for and loved. We are called to keep our bodies clean and undefiled so that the Holy Spirit can reside within us. We have tasks to perform to keep our lives running smoothly and happily. We must live the life of a Christian and perform the tasks God requires of a disciple of Christ. Like marriage in this world, it is an everyday experience. As we live the life we are called to, we will grow in faith and hope. You will know your God and be able to know his will. Before you know it you will be able to speak the words right out of your mouth.

Your faith life is not meant to be hollow. Your marriage is not either. They only become so after time and distance between each other. When you love someone, you go out of your way to please him or her, to care for them. It is only after the relationship flounders, that the things you used to do become a task or work. Life with

your spouse and with Jesus should be a joy and never a burden. If it is, it is time to return to your first love, to rekindle the flame of your relationship, and the only way to do that is to spend time with your spouse. This will rekindle that deep relationship.



CHAPTER 6

Why Ten Commandments?

I have come to understand that all of the commandments of the Lord are not hindrances to our freedoms as God's people. These commandments that God has given us are solely for our own good. There is little that we can do to God to harm him or to damage him in any way. He is all-powerful, he exists on a different plane, and we cannot even see him let alone understand him. We do not control his existence nor do we have control of ourselves. God would still exist even if we did not. If he wanted the company, he can create anything to take our place. There is nothing we can give him except our love. So for us to say that God is forcing upon us his rules for his pleasure is a lie.

These commandments were given to us for our benefit. They serve as a guide to provide us with a long and happy life without getting hurt or hurting others. God can easily force us to obey; however, there is more value choosing the right course for our lives than be forced into doing it. As I have said in earlier parts of the book, that we are God's children, and he takes pride in our choosing the right paths in life like any good father would be of his child. I will go over each commandment and explain the reasons God gave them to us.

1). Thou shall love your God with all your heart.

When we break this commandment, we are separated from God. We experience confusion, fear, lawlessness, and this commandment precipitates the fall of all the other commandments. We deny our-

selves peace, tranquility, the feeling of family, hope, love, fulfillment, and many other gifts from God. The worst part is if we never develop this love for God, we do not know what we are missing and believe the bad stuff is normal. We then lead confused and unfulfilling lives, trying to fill ourselves with physical things or false dreams in place of God. Some who have fallen from grace can experience these things too. We too easily forget the gifts we had and embrace secular teaching. This commandment alone is the very strength of your being. To be without faith in God damns you to a weak life, without guidance or God's help. You become a slave to Satan and to sin here and in the hereafter. Without belief in God—indeed without love for God—you will become separated from him forever after death.

2). Thou shall love thy neighbor.

When we are devoid of love for others, we cannot truly love God. We lead miserable unhappy lives, unable to trust or to share with anyone. Indeed, everyone is perceived as an enemy or competitor. Having this perception makes it true. If you cannot show love to others, they will not return it to you. This makes life far more difficult to live. It creates enemies and people who wish you ill. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is a sad way to live your life. If you cannot love others, you cannot love God. You also cannot love others until you love God. The teaching that you must love yourself before you love others is false. If you do not know how to love God, you do not know what love is. God's love is a selfless love where the world teaches selfish love. If you understand and can follow these first two commandments, the rest will follow.

3). You should not take the Lord's name in vain.

True Christians recognize God as a father. And as such, when we speak ill of our father, it is to speak disrespectfully of him. This we do out of rebellion, anger, or meanness. If you can see what is wrong with speaking ill of your worldly father, then you can understand why it is ill to speak of the spiritual father in the same way. Your

physical father had bred you, clothed you, and provided your needs, while your spiritual father provides you guidance, love, and eternal life. When we speak disrespectfully of our father, you create antagonism and walls between you. This separation brings on your fall to sin and hatefulness. This sin also breaks the first commandment to love God with all our hearts. You cannot truly love God if you do not care about abusing his name.

4). To keep the Sabbath holy.

What does it mean to keep to Sabbath holy? The Jews felt that no work must be done on this day because it was the day of God's rest. Many Christians believe it to be a day when you worship God. The Jewish people celebrated on Saturday, while the Christian people celebrated on Sunday. What did Jesus think of the Sabbath? He said that the Sabbath was for man and not man the Sabbath.

He said to them, "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:11–12)

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27–28)

I believe that the Sabbath is a time of rest from our labors, the time of celebration of God's gift, a time for family gatherings and a time for just having fun. God understands that if you keep yourself too busy, you'll find out that you are missing out on the very things in life that make life worth living—love, family, God, and the joys that come with them. By overworking, we weaken ourselves bodily and spiritually. Our marriages crumble because we pay no attention

to our spouses, and our faith crumbles because we spend no time with God. We also become sickly from exhaustion in the spirit's fall because we feel that we are accomplishing nothing. Man has a tendency to get caught up in his work or in anything he tries to do. That is why Satan tries to distract us with all sorts of worldly problems and physical pleasures. He knows that we become so involved in these things that they blind us to God. The Lord wishes that we have time to regain our balance in life. So you see even keeping the Sabbath holy is to help us live good and fruitful lives.

5). Honor your father and mother.

As with cursing God, disrespecting your parents is biting the hand that feeds you. Your parents often treat you as you treat them. Although not all parents are good parents, the parents who bring you up are still providing you with a way to live. Despite any problems they may have that may prevent them from being perfect parents, they still choose to give you life. Unlike God, we human parents are subject to making mistakes—sinning against each other, God, and you. It is as God has already told us. We are to forgive those that sin against us. We must honor and respect them for giving us life and in teaching us what they know. They teach us in order to help us through our lives. If we cannot respect our parents, how can we respect God our spiritual parent? Many times, our parents will tell us to do something that we do not understand. Many times, God will tell us to do things that we don't understand. They tell us these things because they have experienced something before, we have and know that these things must be done to benefit our family or us. We are not to think solely for ourselves but rather for the whole good of the family. That is, both our physical and our spiritual families. To resist this in the end only damages the people we love and ourselves.

6). You shall not kill.

Anger, death, and destruction are the breeding ground for misery, horror, and permanent death. Even anger uncontrolled means

you're guilty of this sin. It is the intent that determines this sin. It is the heart that can murder the soul. With the death of the one you kill comes the death of your soul, now and hereafter. Have you ever wondered why soldiers who come back from war have psychiatric problems? Have you ever wondered why those who are used to killing are so hard and lifeless? Murder is wrong because hate, anger, and malicious evil intent breed it. These feelings lead to this sin, as Jesus told us himself.

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”; and “whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You fool,” you will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:21–22)

So can't greed, selfishness, fear, and a host of other evils. Death by itself is not a sin; it is the intent or the reasoning behind that death. Clearly, in the Old Testament, God spoke about the differences between wrongful death and accidental death, as well as natural death. It is natural that we all will die. There is no evil intent in an accidental death. Wrongful death has words like premeditated or conspired against or murdered. Jesus has said above when you hold anger or hatred in your heart, you are already committed murder. These feelings and emotions that run out of control within us are a danger to our very being, our piece of mind, and maybe even our physical freedom. Once again God's commandments are to save us from those around us and ourselves.

7). You shall not commit adultery (lust in the heart).

Adultery is the sin of turmoil. It destroys marriages, imprisons the heart, brings fatherless children, and causes anger—even murder.

Murder due to anger and treachery, as well as death by abortion due to fear and shame. Lust confuses what is to be a normal relationship by making you want something for the wrong reasons. Adultery of the heart is a lie to oneself to believe the grass is greener in the other person's yard. We as humans seem to never be happy with what we have but always seemed to want something new or different. But will it be better? Lust is a lie of the heart, which makes false promises and gives us impossible goals to attain.

Look at the commercial world in which we live. They use models to paint the picture of what beauty is with a promise that each one of us could attain it—to have it forever. But this is a lie. That is not how the world works. It creates an environment where the women of this day must compete against these lies in fear of each other to attain happiness. Thus, they shed more clothes to outdo each other; they try to remain impossibly thin in order to look like the models on TV, even to the point of becoming sick and possibly even death. For men, these false promises lead a man to think that happiness comes from a woman's beauty alone and not from her heart. It distorts the meaning and purpose of marriage and leads them into thinking that we always must look to others for perfection. Love and lust are not the same things. Though many believe that they are, many simply have never had a chance to find out the difference. Adultery and lust go hand in hand. They lead you down the sewer by drawing you with beauty and pleasure, similar to fishing where the fishermen dangle an attractive looking bait before the fish to trap and hook it. Once hooked, it is too late to save yourself from the pain and agony of a destroyed life. God, in his wisdom, has sought to save us from our affliction by warning us ahead of time. We, however, cannot resist our own human nature and fall to this lie far too easy.

8). You shall not steal.

We are commanded to love each other, to help one another, to put others first and ourselves last. When we steal, we act on greed and selfishness. When we steal, we break a trust with our neighbor and steal much more than the item which is taken; we steal their peace

of mind, their honor, their sense of people's worth, and maybe even their ability to see God, for the anger that comes with a loss can cause us to lose hope and trust in God. This breeds fear, distrust, corruption, mental problems, and many other ills.

For the criminal who may have gained a piece of property, he will lose his peace of mind; he will gain the fear of being caught and will not be able to trust others because he knows he is not trustworthy. He will fear jail, and he does not change his ways will go there. Those who lead this life will always self-destruct, for those like him will feed on each other and take from each other and hurt each other because it is ordained there is no honor among thieves. God had commanded that we are to suffer the pains of our own sins. In other words, we create our own pain, we decide our own sentence and fate carries out that sentence. There is no escape. There is no hope outside of Jesus Christ to change the direction of our lives. Through Jesus, we can change, and that change offers us life rather than destruction. The path to destruction is the path a sinner always chooses.

9). You shall not bear false witness.

Satan is the father of all lies, while God is the creator of all truth. When we choose to lie, we in our hearts worship Satan. When we speak lies, we create sin which blinds us to God. It takes us out of his will, and anything that takes us out of his will ultimately corrupts us. The tongue can be the most devastating of all evils. It is the hardest to control and the easiest method to hurt others. Lies having been used to cheat, kill, put down, deceive, and cause all sorts of trouble. We not only lie to others; we commonly lie to ourselves. For instance, we might say to ourselves that it is okay to steal from the rich because they will not miss it or that it's okay to eat something that's not on your diet. We soon end up telling lies to cover up other lies. No matter how good a liar we may be, the fact is, the truth always comes to light. The truth cannot be changed nor hidden. The best way to deal with truth is head-on. The more we try to avoid it by lying the worst it is when the truth comes to light. In the end, we end up digging a bigger hole for ourselves.

10). You shall not covet.

Coveting is often the prelude to many other sins. It is often the beginning of stealing, adultery, murder, and lack of love for your neighbor. Coveting, like lust, starts out with us putting too much value on something we want. It grows and grows until we must have it at any cost. Once you reach that point, you no longer control your lusts. It now controls you! When you go well out of your way to have something that was never yours in the first place, this is the sin of coveting. In truth, we cannot own anything that cannot be taken from us. In reality, everything is God's, and we're only just stewards of his creation. He can give or take what we have when he chooses. Like all the other sins, these things blind us to God and cause us to hurt one another. Like I said many times before, these commandments out for our sake and not for God's.

Even though the Ten Commandments are a part of the old covenant with the Jews does not make them outdated or not for the Gentile Christians. Also, just because the new covenant says that we are justified by faith and not by law does *not mean* that we can ignore the law either. Those who truly believe in Jesus Christ and truly love him will keep his commandments out of love and not because they have to. We become empowered by the spirit of giving and wish to do good in God's eyes. The law no longer becomes a list of things we must do but becomes a way for us to please our Father—even serve as an example to others of how to mimic Jesus and his values.

Those Jews who sought to please God by keeping the law soon found that it was impossible because of human nature. No man is able to overcome our sinful natures without Jesus. In confessing the sins to Jesus, he can impart his saving grace to overcome our very natures. Without God's grace and love, we would fall away from him and become blind to our sin. Jesus becomes the healer that mends the damage that sin does to us and then allows us to return to the grace of God. That grace, I believe, is the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that raises us up from the dead in the end times.

The Ten Commandments were never intended as the way to salvation; their purpose was to teach us what sin was so that we could

know that we needed to turn to God for forgiveness when we did wrong that blinded us to his glory and will.

God's rules never change and neither does the ways of man change. Even though technology abounds and changes constantly, our very nature does not. God has placed these rules for us to follow to save us from our very natures, to expose our desires, and to keep us from being controlled by them.



CHAPTER 7

Living a Life in the Spirit

The Pagan Christian

The Spirit revealed to me that the double standards in society that we face is really a choice between living spiritual life and a secular life. In other words, it is really a choice between living as spiritual life along with God's will or follow the worldly teachings and doing what you want without regard for hurting other people. A good example is this: it is taught in society by peer pressure that a boy should look to find easy women to have sex with, yet they should marry a virgin. The girl, on the other hand, is taught abstain from sex, yet watch all her friends steal the boys by being willing! These choices our children face is a choice between what the world teaches and God. This is but one example of many double standards we face every day as many "name-only" Christians face every day without truly understanding the meaning of the struggle. We need to accept that to be true to God means to be different from 90 percent of the normal people we interact with every day. Even many of our fellow parishioners are deeply buried in the secular world.

Many Christians, who frequent the church, also follow many pagan rituals and conduct themselves as the Gentiles would. They no longer honor God at church. Instead of participating in the service, many just watch as if they're there to be entertained. There is no desire to worship, sing songs, deep prayer, or any other spiritual activity. All matters of faith are acts of the heart. When the heart is not in it, the whole service becomes meaningless. This is not how it is

meant to be. You cannot fool the spirit. If you hold back from serving Christ, how can you expect God to work in your life?

People who become too secularized stop looking to God for the answers to their problems. They now look to people, like psychiatrists, scientists, and doctors as the sole answers to their everyday problems. Many times, the answers to their everyday problems reside within God's Holy Word (the Bible). It is a "living word." That means that we can read it thousands of times over and still find new answers to our problems through the power of the Spirit. It is an active teaching if we seek the Holy Spirit's help. Many have forgotten or have never experienced the power of God's spirit to teach us. However, the spirit is there for our use if we are willing enough to seek God. Yet many reject this teaching and seek other sources of advice. Maybe because these sources are more attractive or because they are easy to listen too.

Some even watch soap operas and talk shows to determine their values. They seek advice in secular books, written by people just as fallible as they are themselves. They seek psychologists and science to teach them how to lead their lives. They seek out what a neighbor is doing but spend no time with God. They are like a teenager who would rather believe a stranger than their own parents. Like children who have forgotten their parent, they become lost in their play world. We have to examine our lives and see if we are living this way. We cannot judge our lives according to those around us. We are called to measure ourselves against Christ.

The problem with watching everyone else around us is that they are in the same sinful condition, and we feel safe and normal. However, in reality, God is not in our hearts and mind. God has to keep calling us to get our attention. We have grown so used to our worldly ways that we do not realize we do not have God in our hearts.

This is why it is so easy to lead a sinful life. That is why we cannot contemplate the possibility of leading a sinless one. You become good at what you practice at. You spend time away from God, you become good at it, and it takes no effort. If you live a life of sin long enough, it becomes easy for you. Now to live a life close to God becomes difficult. We must raise our lives so much above the sin that

is actually harder to sin than to do good. We must judge our own lives and measure it against Jesus.

We must be careful not to judge others or claim them to be lost or damned. They are not to receive this evaluation from us; that is what Jesus will do. We are, rather, to try to bring them back by enlightening them to the truth. These 90 percent who are out of God's will. Some of them have known God in the past and may have walked away, some of them may have never known God, and some of them have become in this state because of some bad occurrence in their life. So we must not be judgmental to them. We must ask ourselves, how would Jesus confront these people? How would he choose to bring them back to God? Jesus is our loving standard; you must always look to him to find our way.

There are many other double standards that we deal with daily that you may not realize affect your faith. Here is a perfect example of worldly teaching vs. godly. Science vs. spirituality is the belief that man uses gods to explain our inability to understand the world and that science is all the reality we need. In business, we are told to take out credit if we can't afford something, which makes us slaves to our debtors. While God teaches us not to spend money that we do not have on useless possessions that have no meaning in the end, we are taught by the secular world to search after love by looking at all the wrong things. We are told to look for people who are beautiful, rich, smart, and have something that fulfills "us." God teaches that anyone who truly loves God will truly love each other, so you could say that any *true* Christian could marry any *true* Christian and fall and love after being married. If two people possessed true, selfless love, they could not help but fall in love with each other. In the old days, a parent could assign their child to be married to another child, and the marriage would last because they worked to help each other. True love is an act of giving, not an act of selfishness. People who are forced into marriage together by their parents had to love each other, had to take care of each other, and in doing so fell in love. (I am not saying that this always happened, but I do say that a truly Christian family practicing God's love should experience this.)

The secular world treats people like the marketplace, forcing girls to sell themselves to gain the interest of men. They do so by exposing more of their bodies to interest men, and each time one girl exposes another part of her body, the others have to follow to keep up. Society is now so bad that girls starve themselves in order to keep up with the supermodels and the loose woman who offers the men anything they want. On the other side of the point, the woman seeks to use the man's weakness against him. The lust that is already within the man's heart is accentuated to the point where his decisions cannot be made rationally, and the woman is made an object to be had rather than a person.

These and many other examples show the confused state that the world is in today. Our values are backward. We slaughter our children before they are born because they may be an inconvenience in our lives. We push off our parents upon strangers because we have no room in our homes to care for them. We have become a culture fixated on death, violence, and watching the foolishness of others for entertainment. How do we defend ourselves from these things when even our fellow Christians brothers and sisters are caught up in this? What chance do we have to find the truth? Having a close personal relationship with God.

The Spirit's Answer

We are called to live a spirit-filled life, one with direct activity between God the Holy Spirit and us. We are not called to a humdrum boring faith that little if anything ever happens in our lives. God promises that the Holy Spirit will teach us and guide us. We, however, have to know how to hear his voice and to dedicate our lives to God to experience this promise.

Someone once told me that faith is like swimming in a river. You have two choices—to swim upriver or down the river. You see the easy route that the majority of people seem to be taking. They are swimming down the river. Yet you see a few trying to swim upstream. Which do you follow? The road to the kingdom is narrow and the door small. If your spiritual life is no struggle, and you experience

little trouble or bumps, you're swimming down the river with all the others. You need to swim against the current to get to where you want to be. It is in this river you are *proven*, in this river you build character, and in this river, you can experience true faith or be misled by the great crowd and be lost forever. Which way are you swimming? The way to life is upriver, and maybe you will lead a few with you. Travel down the river, and you will go over the falls.

Living a life in the spirit can sound scary to some people. It sounds foreign and mysterious. In reality, it is attempting to live your life in the way of truth. It means to take off the blinders that we all get and to start thinking for ourselves. It means to look before you leap; to choose to live in moderation instead of excess; to choose to do things because they are right and not only because they may be fun; to be in control of your life, not allowing your desires to control you, allowing God to direct your actions instead of trying to do things alone.

Living a life in the spirit actually puts your life in more control by handing it over to God to guide. God has the homefield advantage when it comes to guiding our lives. I like to think of it like this: say a group of people are conducting a search for something on the ground. You have a person on the ground that can only see a few yards around him because of trees and bushes. God, however, is hovering in a helicopter overhead. God can see everything around the searcher on the ground. The Holy Spirit is kind of like the two-way radio that the searcher has. Although he cannot see his destination, the helicopter can direct him by radio, as to which way to go, what to avoid, and anything else he needs to know. Quite an advantage to have when the going gets tough. We need that relationship with God built and ready before we go into the woods, before trouble comes so we can get God's help. It pays to have that radio to God (Holy Spirit), batteries charged fully.

This is what we mean when we refer to people living in a blind state. They can see things that are right before them but fail to see the things down the road. They can see that drug use can be fun in the short term but fail to see its ultimate destructive nature as it enslaves and takes their lives over. The alcoholic foolishly sings merry tunes

as his life falls apart around him. The sinner joyfully goes down to destruction because he cannot see where the path is leading him. He can only see what is directly before him. By the time you see the error, it is often too late to escape, the sin has bound you to it through habit and physical addiction.

Living the life in the spirit is meant to free you from these things, to prevent you from falling victim to your own desires, to let you be in charge of your life, to be close enough to God to hear his advice about avoiding these dangers before you get caught in them. It is a gospel of hope and truth rather than deception and enslavement. Jesus came to free us from the bonds of sin and death. He also came as a witness to the Father in heaven. Lastly, he came as a witness to show us the way to be free of the trap of the world and be free.

Living a life in the world is to live your life controlled by your desires rather than you being in control. For example, when you overeat because you want too not because you need to or you sleep with someone because they look good, not because you love them. You do drugs and alcohol because it makes you feel good, and you desire them. You take something because you want it; it does not matter if it's someone else's. You fight because of your anger, even though God asks us to forgive. The list goes on. Every part of our lives is controlled by our desire to make our bodies happy. We cannot help being driven to please the body, but we must control our desires through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The problem begins when our bodies make our decisions for us. When we start doing things because we desire them and not because they are right or wrong, we do things only for ourselves and forget to care for others. In short, we become like animals that care for nothing but their desires and instincts. It is the spirit of self-sacrifice that separates us from the animals. That allows us to build things and work together as a people. The more we let our worldly tendencies run our lives, the more out of control we become. Now I am not saying that you are not allowed to have fun sometimes. I do not believe Jesus means this either. I believe that you must be in control of your body and not your body control you. Before you do something that you desire, do you consider what the consequences may be? Will it

hurt you or someone else? Will it cause you to be irresponsible? Will you neglect God or someone else because of your actions? Having fun is not a sin but to hurt others or yourself is.

Some things in life are traps. Things like drugs, alcohol, food, and sex are slow-closing traps. They start out fun and may seem harmless; however, the more you do of them, the tighter the trap closes. You start out doing it only because you like it, and before long, you desire more and more. Eventually, you feel you cannot do without it. That is when the trap swings shut. You are now addicted. You have now formed a habit. You now are a prisoner to the very thing you embraced for fun. Some would kill and steal to support their habit, to quell their desires. Who controls whom now? Jesus teaches freedom from these things. He advises you not to follow these things, not because he does not want you to have fun but to keep you from falling into a trap that some never escape.

Living a life in the spirit means to live a life that is close to God, to develop a relationship with him every day and to seek his Holy Spirit—a life lived in the truth and the light. Until we seek him out, we lack the gift of wisdom that is a gift of his spirit. We need that holy helicopter to radio down to us the proper path through life. We need a person to go to for advice and the ears to hear it when it comes. Living a life in the spirit means freedom from oppression, the ability to see through the world's lies, and to avoid the baited hook. Living in the spirit means the sacrifice of some of the things we love to do—both to train us to be able to say no to our bodies and to avoid the things that do enslave us. It will help us to learn to use the things that are not a sin in moderation, so as not to make them sinful by hurting others or ourselves.

We cannot do this by ourselves. Our bodies would eventually corrupt us and destroy our souls. We need Jesus to help us through his Holy Spirit. We need the aid of our spiritual family in times that would normally make us fall. That is why it is critical that we maintain a very close relationship with God. We do this in several ways—through prayer, worship, song, reading the Bible, some devotions, and especially the act of repentance. We as humans are constantly messing up and doing things we know are wrong. We even do things

wrong more because we know we should not. This is what I refer to as the “insanity”—when a person does something that they know will harm them but do it anyway. Smoking is a good example, drugs are another. We humans do many things not necessarily good for us. Some things are damaging to others as well. As Christians, we cannot continue to live this way without falling away from God. So we often damage ourselves both in a physical and a spiritual manner when the insanity takes over.

When you come to Jesus do you always live a clean life and never sin? No, you will be purified in your soul, but habit and addiction can still tempt you to fall again. Sometimes God allows us to struggle with our temptations in order that we grow stronger and eventually overcome our sinful ways. By making us see the truth about what we do, we learn to not want what hurts us even though the temptation is still around you. As an example, I once tried to smoke pot when I was young. Over time, I learned that it was not worth the trouble it caused me in life. I no longer even have a desire for it; it means nothing to me because of the painful experiences that went along with the habit. Even though it is easily available, it does not tempt me anymore. I chose a different direction for my life. God can give you an instantaneous healing but more often the slow healing by example is best. What is learned when you pay no penalty nor revealed no truth? So rejoice in good times and bad because each step in our lives is meant to strengthen us and allow us to grow.

Most important and greatly overlooked is the way to live in the spirit—how to maintain that radio link to the Father. In this very technical world, the answer seems inadequate. It is the same advice given countless times over the centuries. We have given a deaf ear to it because it seems to us that there must be a better way to keep the connection alive. There are four desperately important methods to a close relationship to Christ. These are prayer, worship, Bible study, and repentance. I know you have heard this before and know you can be doing them, but remember, if it is not done of the heart, it will not benefit you as it should.

All four of these actions must be done daily out of love for the Lord. They must not be done out of fear or done out of blind adher-

ence to a rule or requirement. When your actions are done out of fear or repetition, the benefits fade severely. God knows the heart, and he knows when we truly are not seeking him.

Understand that we all share times of difficulty in prayer and worship. That is normal in the course of life. However, we must seek this deep relationship. Seek this depth of faith at all times. We must not accept a powerless faith as the normal way that we deal with God. When your faith life has become dull, boring, or humdrum, this is the time to take action to deepen your relationship with God.

I suggest going to prayer meetings, Bible studies, or another spiritual event that could reawaken the sleeping spirit within. Not only that, but I suggest that you actively pursue the “spirit-filled” event weekly to “feed” yourself, besides providing service to your church. How can you serve your church with happiness and fervor if you are starving in your faith? If anything, this will cause you to resent the work you do and do it poorly. Of course, beside the weekly event (other than going to Sunday service), you must desire to follow the four principles to Christ daily.

Potentially, the more time you spend with God on a daily basis, the closer your relationship will be to him. I know that not everyone desires the same level of commitment to Christ that I may have. I understand also that it is a leap of faith for many to spend as much time as suggested for a goal that you are only told about by a writer you have never met. I cannot “give” you an experience to prove to you of the value of following these principles. You must seek them out for yourself, to prove them out to yourself. Nothing short of that will satisfy the hunger for the truth. Prayer, worship, Bible study, and repentance—each holds spiritual gains and personal benefits, as well as the importance of recognizing God. I would like to speak about a few of them below.

Prayer—we know that through prayer we can speak to God. We also know that through prayer we can ask for things. We also should know that God already knows our needs before we ask for them. As like a parent, he knows you need things like food, clothes, and even some things you desire like toys. God is the Santa Claus who wishes to know our needs and wants. What parent could refuse their child

to grant them a gift if it is truly good for them? God places us into the father-child relationship when we pray to him. We recognize him for who he is (our provider) and learn to come to him when we are in need. We can pray to him just like we speak to each other as well as through special prayers. This develops the relationship between us. We are called to “pray constantly.” Praying constantly does not necessarily mean on your knees. You can pray while you work or drive your car. You can talk with God while in the shower or just about anywhere. You can pray within yourself or out loud.

Prayer is our interaction with God, our daily walk with him. We must learn to listen during our prayer times as well. The Holy Spirit can communicate through the “Word” and directly through us if we maintain the close relationship with him. Through prayer and meditation, you can learn how the spirit moves within you and learn to hear his voice. Often it is only a gentle nudge, persistent and only noticeable if you pay attention. The Holy Spirit often is the revealer of truth, of wisdom, and of peace. These things cannot be had without separating yourself from the noisy world around you. Prayer is your first line of defense against trials, tribulation, temptation, and all other things that happen in our lives that take away our relationship with God.

Prayer is often more beneficial to the person praying than to the person that we pray for. God may answer our prayers for someone’s needs, but we receive all the above benefits and more. The act of prayer allows grace to flow into us and deepen our experiences with our heavenly Father. As we receive his grace by remaining close to him who gives it, we help others around us who see Christ through our actions and our hearts. Never underestimate the power of prayer, it is the very lifeblood of our relationship with God.

Worship is prayer and more. You can worship God through prayer or song. Some have said that worshiping God through song is like praying twice. I believe that in a sense this is true. Like prayer, the depth of your benefits depends on the depth of your commitment to worship. If you sing because everyone else is doing it or because it is expected of you, the benefits are almost nothing. You leave as empty as you come in. If you give all you have out of love and appreciation

of God, the graces poured upon you are endless. You must ask yourselves, do you love God? Do you appreciate all that he has done for you? Do you believe that he deserves your undivided attention? So many go to church looking to get something from God but do not want to give to God from their hearts. Every time you hold back, every time you look at God with doubt and suspicion. You prevent the flow of grace into your heart. Before you can receive, you must give of yourself completely. Take the risk and love Jesus, to open your heart to him. You go to church not to sing for other people’s sakes but solely for God. You must focus upon him before grace can follow.

So often I see people hold back because they are afraid they cannot sing well. So often I see people judging others who cannot sing. Let me tell you, those who are listening to others sing cannot be paying attention to God. They are the ones who will not receive the grace of God because their heart is not with him. Forget about what your neighbor thinks, you should be concerned about what God thinks. After all, he is whom you have come to see. I have been to lifeless services where no one sings but the choir and was brought down by the experience rather than strengthened. I have been at powerful services that only differed by the intent of those present—those who did not hold back their worship of God and had seen great happenings. Not only that but left with joy and strength to face the rigors of life, as opposed to feeling defeated and alone. We were not meant to live defeated and hopeless lives but rather to be on fire for God and carried by the power of his spirit.

Worship is a powerful instrument that God has given us to empower us to live joyful and productive lives. In times of trial and difficulties, if we start praising God, we cannot remain in a state of depression. We cannot remain there because we will shift the focus off ourselves and onto another (God). We will be lifted out of our depression through the grace of God and given something no one else can give—joy even in the most difficult of circumstances. Only God can do that. Only God can forgive us and make all things new. Only God can relieve the pain of hopelessness. He has the ability to give us a new start, and when we put our faith and hope in him, he gives us a stable place to rest our feet.

It is physically impossible to remain in depression at the same time as worshipping God. As we worship him through praise and song, he lifts us out of our depression and helps us to focus on him. This makes us see that there are things more important than the problems that we face, that he is greater than any trouble, and often he lets us see the plights of others that are in greater difficulty than we are, which shifts our focus off ourselves and onto others. As we sing praises to God, we can come into a peace and serenity that can be found no other way. It helps us to focus on the truth, which leads us to the answers to our problems.

As we focus on God, as we focus on Jesus, the Holy Spirit will work on us, build us up, and strengthen us so we can handle things using the power and wisdom of our God. Worship and song tune us into the power of God and help us lead empowered lives—lives with meaning and hope. So few today worship as we are meant to. It should be a joyous occasion—one we look forward to. It should not be a job or something we fear. The only shame found in worship and singing is when we hold back and refuse to give to God what he needs from us, love, respect, and a joyous heart to be in his presence. We are told that to give is greater than to receive—can't we seek to give our love to God first, and let him bless us for it?

Now the first two principles I have mentioned are important to be close to God. The Bible is one of God's ways of speaking back to us. Without it, we would have no way to know and learn from God. I think of it as his love letter to his children. It teaches his children every possible situation that we as humans can get into. It teaches us who he is, as well as what he expects from his children. It explains the history of his plan for the world. It explains where we came from and where we are going. Indeed, there is so much knowledge in this book that it can make the foolish wise and give the hopeless hope. That is why it is called the good news.

To go through life without knowing it well is like a person driving a car without a single driving lesson. Your life will have many accidents; some could be fatal or worse. Only a fool walks away when he is offered knowledge that can make his life better. The Bible is called the living Word because it is the Holy Spirit who opens up the

truth of what is written inside. Some writings are hard to understand, and some must be read with when it was written in mind. Yet others have a multitude of lessons within each teaching. It is the Holy Spirit, which helps us to learn the lessons that are important for us to know. He reveals the truth to you and lets you see things you never have seen before. Often, he will teach you other things in life, and you can go to the bible to confirm the truth of his lessons.

I consider the Bible to be the last word in our faith, unlike some that claim that all teaching ended with the Bible. "If it is not in there, it is not of God." I believe that God still interacts with us even to this day. We, however, must check these new understandings and new visions against the Bible for validity. We are taught to "test the spirits" against the teachings of God. How can you know if a vision is real? How can you know a teacher is not a false one? How can you tell if a new technology is morally wrong? If you do not know the Bible well, you expose yourself to danger from all these questions.

There are two things that never change—the nature of man and the nature of God. God will not change his mind about how he deals with us. He will not make a promise and break it. His moral values are the same now, as they were thousands of years ago, even from the beginning of creation. Man's moral values will always be in trouble. He will always sin; he will always be independent and stubborn. Our technology will improve, but our natures are still out of control. That is why the Bible is as true today as it was even before Christ was born. The names have changed, the technology is still growing, but the heart of man never changes.

Speaking of sin and the morals of a man, we come to the last of the principles of remaining close to God. Repentance is God's way to reconcile us to himself. When a person does something wrong to someone, they commonly avoid that person because of guilty feelings and fear of that person's anger. For example, say as a child you broke something in the house, your parent comes to you and asks you what happened. Your first impression is to run away, to lie, or to place the blame on someone else. Then you try to avoid them for a while out of fear and guilt. It is the same with God. You sin, you know you did wrong, you feel guilty, so you avoid his presence out of fear and

guilt. The more you sin, the farther away you stay. After a time, you no longer think of the sin as bad and do it more, all the while falling further and further from God. Soon you are lost.

God does not want this separation. He has always wanted to be in the presence of his children. The only way he could bring us back to him was to provide a way for us to be forgiven—a way that we can confess our sins and know that he still loves us. That is why Jesus died on the cross. So that through him, we could confess our sins and return to being in his presence, so we had hope and so he could teach us how to live without sin, to grow and better ourselves, to live both full and joyful lives under his wing. Confession to Jesus is critical to our salvation and walk with God. Sometimes confession to other Christians can be helpful and lead us in the proper direction. Talking with the pastor or priest can be an essential part of the healing process. Without the reconciliation with God through the confession of our sins, we cannot remain in his presence. It is impossible to be sinless. As this scripture notes:

[A]s it is written: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.” (Romans 3:10–11)

This does not mean that we should seek to sin! Rather it means that even if we do, God has provided a way back to him. We need to learn to depend more upon God and less on ourselves. We have to learn to let God be in the driver’s seat and seek to live our lives empowered by his will. When we live according to the gifts that he has given us, it is they that we experience true joy and prosperity. Living life in the spirit means living these four principles every day. It means seeking God’s will and following it for our lives. Doing this will lead to peace, truth, joy, and salvation for all of God’s children.



CHAPTER 8

Maturity in Christ

How do we know we are where we should be?

As we journey closer to God, we should find it easier to do good and have more difficulty to sin. Eventually we should find that hate, violence, untruths, and other sinful works to be uncomfortable to be around or to watch. The closer to the spirit we become, the more evil appears monstrous and hideous. The further away from God we are, the less sinful sin appears—indeed we hardly notice it all. While we embrace the world, we are unable to see how we could remain in the righteous state. As we get closer to God, we understand how it becomes easier. The impossible at first becomes possible with experience and maturity of the spirit. A journey to God is just that—a slow steady journey. As we mature, we should leave behind our sinful ways and embrace the light.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12–14)

This solid food of which we speak are the deeper teachings that we must come to know through the teachings of the Spirit. We all are aquainted with the basic truths that Christ has died; Christ has risen, and Christ will come again. We also know that he died for our sins. His death and resurrection are firmly understood by us, but do we know why it had to happen this way? Do you understand the reasons behind our faith? Could you defend your faith to an unbeliever who is threatening you? Do you know the will of God? These questions and more require a deeper understanding of your faith. We are called a royal priesthood to be disciples of Christ. Yet often we fail to get to know him well enough to serve him properly. Many times, we do not have the depth of faith to help us avoid the many pitfalls in life. Our faith weakens because we failed to support it and we fall to sin.

It is not enough to just be told how to think, even if you believe the teaching. It is no defense against the evil one. We need to seek a new level of maturity in Christ. We need to submit our lives to him, and then the Holy Spirit can work with us. Man can teach you only so much, then the Holy Spirit must take over and teach you by the power of God. Pray to the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the reasons behind the way things happened. Ask Jesus to teach you why we must act a certain way. The Word of God is living. The Bible can teach so much more through the power of the Spirit. We can learn from just about anything around us by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that is inside us.

Do not let your only teaching be that what is taught from the pulpit on Sunday. You must seek more. Not to say that it is worthless to go to church, but rather to say, why settle for a once-a-week shot in the arm when you can experience healing every day? When Jesus taught us to seek the truth, he did not say to peek inside the door and give up. No, he asks us to strive, to seek, to be determined and unrelenting until the goal is reached. Here is an example of what he said:

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7–8)

Be persistent, go to prayer groups, go to Bible studies, seek knowledge, reading the Bible at home and other spirit driven books that teach the truth. Do things that will bring you closer to God. We are not meant to lead blind and desperate lives. We are meant to live lives empowered by the Holy Spirit and live life to its fullest in Christ. Your walk with Christ should be just that—a walk together through the Holy Spirit. You should see things you normally would not, understand things in a new light, be at peace with God and with yourself. You should have love in your hearts for the people around you and a desire for learning about God.

If you do not have these things in your life, beware, because the spirit is not active in you. You are in danger of falling. This means that your relationship with God is dwindling and your faith is suffering. Jesus says:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28–30)

We cannot keep our faith alive without the help of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends. The Holy Spirit will not be active in us if we continually sin against God and live a life rejecting his teachings. That is why we must repent and open our hearts to Jesus afresh each day. This allows us to remain living in the spirit. Evil and good cannot remain in the same house. Banish the evil from you with the Spirit's help and lean on Jesus until you can stand on your own. You may never live a completely sinless life, but the more you live in the Spirit, the easier it will be to become like Christ and the stronger your relationship will be with him.

Another thing that blocks the activity of the Holy Spirit within us is lack of serving God. God does not force us to serve him; however, the spirit does not give us gifts that we do not use. We have to be willing to seek the gift that God has given us and make use of it

for Jesus. We lose these gifts if we do not take advantage of the gifts of God. These gifts are truly gifts we will be glad to use, after we get over the fear of doing something we never tried before. We indeed fear all new things, especially something that requires a step of faith. It is natural to be reluctant to try things out for the first time. If you are gifted to do something, you will be good at it and love doing it. For some it is music, for others it is caring for the elderly, and yet others it may be some other kind of service. Pray for guidance in discovering your gift.

As a mature Christian, you will have responsibilities in the church. Jesus calls us all to be disciples of God and to go forth and bring the message to all in the world. Parents, that means truly teaching your children by living the message daily in your family. The family should be a mini-church for God with the main church to draw education and support from. Even before this happens, you must know Christ personally in your heart and develop maturity in Christ before you can teach your children. How can you give what you do not have? Do not depend upon the church to teach your children; there is just not enough time or teachers to do the job right. Faith must be lived. If your children see your lack of faith, how do you think we can impress the importance on them? You hold your children's spiritual life in your hands, treat it as unimportant, and they will learn that message.

As mature Christians, our lives should revolve around our faith life. Our priorities should be faith, family, work, friends, and fun last upon the list. Fun encompasses TV, radio, computer, games, parties, etc. You need to look at the balance of your life to see if anything is out of sync or takes too much of your time. Faith includes private time with God, family time with God, serving in the church, going to the services, and prayer meetings or Bible studies. If you do not feed your faith, it will dry up and leave you empty inside. I call it spiritual starvation. Many in church suffer from this disease and do not even know it.

If your spiritual life is humdrum, boring, not even thought of, or disappointing, your soul is starving for a relationship with God. If you feel powerless and weak in faith, it is because you have stopped

struggling to come closer. Be warned this condition effects all parts of your life. It affects your marriage, your work, your decisions, your family, and even your financial health. God freely gives out wisdom to all that seek his face. If you ignore him, he allows you to wallow in your foolishness.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:28–31)

You cannot be a mature Christian and not be active in your faith life. In fact I would be worried about my salvation with God if you shun him too long. There are many scriptures that speak of those with lukewarm faith and those who never develop a relationship with Christ.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (Revelations 3:15–16)

Is serving the church enough? Without knowing God personally, many serve because they feel they have to or out of guilt or out of fear of death, never bothering to get to know God or love him. Jesus makes it clear that we are to serve him first by getting to know him. How can you serve someone you do not know?

On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast

out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.” (Matthew 7:22–23)

Does that mean we have to be a preacher or leader to be saved? Or lead perfect lives until our death to be saved? No, first, it is not up to us to decide who goes to heaven; it is up to Jesus. We can serve God in many ways besides becoming a priest, a pastor, or a nun. We must, however, have God as a top priority in our lives and serve him in the manner he calls us. God can find use for us using our own gifts and in the place that fate calls us. We cannot claim to be Christian and fail to live it in our lives. If we do this, we embarrass ourselves and corrupt the faith. We are called to serve and should be empowered to do so; each task we perform will be a joy for us and will fit into the unique gifts that God has given, even when the task is small or we do not see the results clearly.

Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God. (1 Corinthians 7:20–24)

How do we relate to those who are not saved yet? What about those not leading spiritual lives? Leading a truly spiritual life makes you very different from worldly people. Those who live their lives according to secular society cannot understand you. Even your loved

ones, family, and your friends may not understand you. They may even seek to leave your presence or persecute you for your beliefs. It is common that this should occur. That is why Jesus said it is so:

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:21–22)

We become by our presence, a walking conscience to everyone around us. The spirit within us convicts those who live in the secular world. This makes them uncomfortable, even makes them strike out against us because they become defensive. From the state they are in, they cannot accept what we have become and will seek to deny where they are in God. They are truly blind in the ways of God and, without God's aid, can never understand you or his Word.

What are we to do about this? Are we to hate them for not understanding God's Word or us? Are we to leave them in the blindness that is their choice? Are we to lord it over them that we know God and they do not? No. It should sadden us that so many even so many that we love should be blind to what we can see. Sadness should well out up within us, so we reach out them and try to show them the truth that they are missing. We must share in what we know so that some of them may have the opportunity to see too. Above all, we must pray that God will reveal himself to them through his spirit.

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (John 15:26).

We often think that it is our speech about God that brings converts to God. By using “the right” words or being eloquent or forceful will convince people to join God. There can be nothing further from

the truth. We are commanded to proclaim the word of God to all people's and races on the earth, but it is the Holy Spirit who draws them to God.

No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. (John 6:44–45)

It is only through his work that people come to see the light of the world. We can only provide the media or a background for the spirit to work.

If we think that we will win converts by our own efforts, we will be disappointed. It is only through the Spirit that these things may come to pass. Once again, it is prideful for us to take on any glory upon ourselves for the salvation of others. On the day of Pentecost, more than three thousand people were brought to God by the sermon of Peter to the Jews. Peter only made them aware of the truth, the Holy Spirit was there to pull on their hearts and to convict them through Peter's message. It was the Holy Spirit who drawn the crowd and readied their hearts for Peters message

There is nothing we can do in his physical world that can heal people, save people, rebirth people, or bring them back to life without the power of the Spirit. We are commanded however to lay on of hands, but the Spirit decides when and where he will act. For this reason, we should not have faith in the layer of hands but in the Spirit who sees all and is all, including the power behind the laying of hands. We also should not lose faith in God because his Spirit has chosen not to bestow his power upon the recipient of a blessing, for God knows the proper time and the hour to perform his miracles.

Understanding Religion vs. Faith

I did not understand what faith was and how it differed from the teaching of each religion. Religion is man's attempt to teach each other about God, to introduce us to his person, and to give us a closer understanding of his will. There are many versions of how to get to "God," and most Christian churches I believe have helped people experience the renewing of one's soul (being born again). I cannot declare any of them the only correct religion, for God himself chooses whom he will save or not. Being born again is a personal experience between you and God. However, it happens. Wherever it happens and under what circumstances it occurs, you must find a church that fulfills your ability to find God. I was born into the Catholic church; my basis knowledge came from there and was born again in it. I have also seen good people—people of God in other Christian religions too. They teach many truths about God as well, so like Peter I must say this.

If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God? (Acts 11:17)

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward." (Mark 9:38–41)

Do not, however, look upon any priest or minister of the word as a person beyond mistakes. Always read and learn for yourself the

truth about God. All of man is fallible; we are imperfect receptors of God's will. Actively seek God and you will find him; leave it up to someone else, and you are not truly seeking God. Each religion has man-made edicts, thus each religion is imperfect. That is not to say religion is bad. You should seek out the church that best helps you find God—one that helps you come closer and feeds the personal needs you have. Always remember, however, do not let religion or one of its rules overrule your faith in God. Jesus is your king, and it is he you answer to.

A priest once told me this: "No rule can apply to all situations. When in doubt, ask yourself what Jesus would have done." Follow the Spirit and Jesus. Check the Bible to cross-reference your choice and pray to the Spirit for guidance, for that is his purpose here on earth. Christ is our ultimate leader of the church, and he dwells over all his people, whether Catholic, Protestant, or Messianic Jew. Before you start saying, "I am saved, and he is not," remember God chooses who is saved, not man, and he could be from any church. We do not know who may come to Christ in the future. We do not know all of God's plan. You cannot convert a person to Christ by putting them down or destroying their beliefs, both good and bad. Rather, we are to witness to the truth and let the truth convince each person. I believe God does not see religions, but rather he sees individual people and their faith towards him. Also be aware when you ask the Spirit for help, the Spirit may not help you specifically the way you wish it but instead, may grant your wish in a different way. Always be receptive to the Spirit, then you will see how he may answer you.

Experiencing Good and Evil

Sin is like a disease; it spreads from person to person like a plague. Anger is spread by the first person to the person he argued with. That person takes it home to his family and spreads it to his family, etc. Although lust starts from within the heart, it is passed through human contact, pornography, movies, and all other forms of communication. Swearing is communicated through the language of the people around you. Listen to it enough and you start to do it.

Once the seed is planted, it grows and gets worse, growing worse and blinding you to God and your ability to recognize what is wrong in what you do. Like cancer, it eventually corrupts the whole body and soul. When it gets bad enough, you forget God and die spiritually.

Sin like hunger—rises and falls depending on outside stimulus. Like hunger, when the stomach is empty, it sends messages to the mind that it requires food. The messages occur as hunger "pang," and it will pass when you do something incompatible with eating or ignore it until it passes. So it is with lust; you receive visual stimulus through society, by pictures, movies, or interaction with the opposite sex. I can be beaten by doing something incompatible with it or waiting out the pang.

Someone said, "If you stare at a naked woman too long, you will go blind." Believe him. You will not lose your worldly sight, but you will lose your ability to see God and to see things clearly.

As God's children, we cannot expect that we will be spared the normal sufferings in life—death in family, sickness, loss of jobs, loss of friends, or even our own death. However, we as children of God have our Father's teaching to guide us, his son as an example to us, and his Spirit to comfort us. So that in all tragedies, we will never be alone. We will always have a guide to send us on our way, teaching us to walk around the dangers before us, as well as walking "through" our trials and difficult decisions. We the children of God will always take the "different" road compared to the rest of the world. We could never be truly understood by the world around us, for God is not of this world, and the closer we get to him, the less worldly we become. If a man made a tool for you to use, he would probably be the best man to know how to use it. So it is with God; he created the world, and only he knows best on how to get through it. All others are like people who refuse to "read the instructions" and cause life to be more difficult than necessary.



CHAPTER 9

The Law of Love

A true understanding of what love is has been lost in this modern age. We have returned to the days of Sodom and Gomorra. Love and lust have become confused. Loving as the world loves and loving as God loves have proven to be very different. Lust, that animal attraction we feel for one another, replaces the sound love of caring for each other. When we see another of the opposite gender, what do we notice first? Is it their intellect, their compassion, the way they act? Or is it how they look or how cool they appear to our eyes? Do we see the person, or do we see their reputation and status? This is lust. Lust is not always solely sexual. You can lust after status, money, power, sex, and many other things that are pleasurable to us. It is a hard truth to face because most of us have been trained from birth to seek these things.

When we claim we love someone, what makes us feel this way? Do we love them because they make us feel special? Do we love the way they go out of the way for us? Do we love them because they fill a need that we are missing or just want to be able to sleep with them? Some or all of these things we may feel when we meet someone. These feelings are deceptive. Worse, these feelings are selfish. These are the feelings that the world teaches you are good for marriage. I will tell you they are not what real love is about. The love you need to be married is not a selfish love but a selfless one. Few marriages survive unless those who get married change their selfish love to a giving love. This is the secret to a long and happy marriage.

We all go into marriage with a mental image of what the other person will do for me. In the beginning, your spouse will most likely fulfill them too. We cannot expect things to remain the same forever. Times change, people change, and we grow disappointed in our mental image (the lie) that we believed marriage to be. Many marriages fail at this point. Your eyes are no longer on each other but on yourselves. Selfishness like a serpent makes us feel like your mate is not fulfilling you anymore. You resent it and fight back. You go through tough times, and it cracks the walls of your marriage. The very things that should bring you together drive you apart. This is because your marriage is based on the selfish image that we tend to try to attain but cannot.

Marriage was never meant as a feel-good relationship. It was to provide stability to a family—especially during times of sorrow and pain—for one mate to support the other when needed and both to raise and support their children, to provide an outlet to our physical needs, and to work together for the common good. It means you need brotherly love for each other, the love of God for each other. Lastly, it is not a sin for the love of desire to flow in your veins if the other two are present first. We must have a good balance in all things.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:7–12)

You must know and love God first before you can truly understand what love is. God is love and defines it in his revelations to us through Christ. Jesus defines what true love is. Once we know this, we can have brotherly love for each other, and our mates.

God's love is an unconditional giving love. He asks us for nothing; he knows we cannot repay him except to love him back. He

sacrificed his son for our benefit even as we sinned against him, even knowing we would kill his son—all because he loves us. He gives us life, instruction, free will, all our goods and needs without complaint or the expectation of payback—with only the hope that we will use our free will to love him back. This allows him to bless us even more. If we can apply this giving love to our neighbor, how much more should we have this love for our mates?

Your spouse will need to depend on you when their parents get sick and die. They will need you to care for them when they are sick or hurt themselves. They must be able to depend on you in all the ugly moments of their lives, as well as the good. If you do not have enough love to care for someone when they are down, you do not have enough love to be married. These things *will* happen and more.

This giving love is truly the only love that is God's love. If you do not know it, you do not know God nor can you give it to others. If you cannot love God, your Father, you cannot love anyone. If you do not love your brothers in Christ, you cannot love your husband or wife in the way necessary to have a happy marriage. There will be many times when you will have to carry the load for both of you. You must bear it with love without complaint and give the glory to God.

We have heard it said in the world. "You can't love another until you love yourself first". I say this is a lie. You cannot know what love is until you know God. This worldly teaching causes people to think that selfishness must come first before you can love others. I say that selfishness blocks the love for others and creates evil in the heart of the selfish person. Selfishness is a prison we create ourselves. Few who stay in it ever find happiness.

Peace, joy and true happiness do not come from being self-serving. You will only find it in the giving of oneself without regret, or condition. Love is the product of the giving heart, not just in giving materials or money but of time also. It is in the act of giving that a state of grace exists between the giver and the receiver. He who receives from love finds hope, joy, truth, and the nearness of Christ. While the giver; receives joy through giving, as well as honor, respect

and the forgiving grace of God. Love can wipe away a multitude of sins.

“Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Love is the key to faith. Without it, our faith is locked from us, and we live dead lives. You cannot love someone you barely know; especially a holy God. You must seek to get to know who God really is, personally, and we do that through getting to know his son Jesus. He is our example of who the Father is.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. (John 15:10–11)

Of all the examples of love found in the world, I think the love between parent and child is the best. They do not need to do anything other than exist for the parent to love and care for them. They do not place restrictions or a condition upon their love. It is natural and pure. We are to share this kind of love with each other and with our spouses. The quality of our marriages, the quality of our faith life, and the ability of having peace in the world depends upon this understanding. It is impossible to limit this love by giving it to one but not to another. It is equally wrong to give it only if it is returned to you and still be living in the ways of Christ.

This is the cornerstone of our faith. Jesus himself had said that the first two commandments of the law complete all the rest—to love God with all your heart and to love each other. If we follow these two commands, all the others will be met. Paul the Apostle has also said that you can have many gifts from God, but if you do not have love,

they are nothing more than a noise (1 Corinthians 13:1–3). He goes on to describe the ways of true love and how to recognize them (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). Love is never selfish or self-serving. When we seek something because it appeals to us, this is lust. It is people with lust in their hearts that hunger for what others can do for them. Love endures all struggles and trials. Love is patient and kind; it is never jealous or hurtful.

Would you be willing to spend day and night beside your spouse while they lay in bed in a coma, caring for them and nurturing them? Will you be there for them when their family goes through crisis? Will you be willing to stand by them when they need you the most, even if you are unhappy with the situation? Many of you, no, all of you will face these things and more during your lifetime. Maybe not each specific example but problems equal to them. Do you truly love your spouse?

If you are unsure of your answer or feel the answer to be no, the problem is not with them but with your love. We are all called to love each other completely and without condition. If we choose to limit our love, to lock it away because we feel they do not deserve it, it is our hearts which have been hardened. Even if they sin against you, this does not warrant the removal of your love. Jesus loved Peter even though Peter denied him three times while he was being persecuted. In fact, he loves us even though we are sinners against him too. We are to display this same love to our families and to each other that Jesus gave us.

Each one of us has a different level of love for each other, depending upon our relationship to God. As we grow closer to God and come to understand his love for us, we in turn learn to love others in the same way. Lust-love comes naturally and is undependable. We do not need to learn this because it is a part of the body and its desires. It is worshipped in the world today as true love, while in reality it is teaching selfishness and cannot survive the test of time. Any conditional love will fail—guaranteed.

The conditions of life change constantly, from day to day and year to year. Those who marry for lust of the body grow tired of seeing the same person day to day and become drawn to new and more

beautiful people they meet in life. They grow weary of the overweight or older spouse, and their desires cause them to lust after younger or prettier people. Those who marry for money can never have enough and are drawn away to richer people, or the marriage fails when times grow tough. Those who lust for power or status are never happy because of these things are fleeting too. We fail to look ahead to see beyond the surface. We fail to love the person; we love the condition that pleases us. We can however learn to change this selfish love into true love. That is what I believe saves some marriages from failure.

Love is not solely about marriage, however. Before, I asked you if you could sit with a wife or husband who was ill and in a coma. Now I ask you if you could sit with a stranger who is ill and has no family? Are you willing to help your coworkers doing a difficult job? Are you willing to even bother to know the people who live next door, to treat them kindly or help them when they are in need?

It is not possible to help everyone and meet every need that comes your way. We can, however, help those who come into contact with us, be generous to the needy and each other, to take one small step out of our (normal) travels to be kind and forgiving. If we can do this without regret and from the kindness of our hearts, we will grow in love and faith. We as people we cannot become this way on our own. We must develop that relationship with Christ first. He is the one who changes hearts. He is the power behind our faith. He is the one who holds the key. As we seek a closer relationship with Jesus, we come to know God and come to understand the mystery of his love.

It is truly a barren and loveless world in which we live today. There are far too few that know what true love is and not enough people who live it. We are called to be a light to the world, to offer hope, truth, and love. The responsibility falls on our shoulders to both understand the Word and to bring it to others. Study Jesus, study 1 Corinthians 13), and learn about the love that saves marriages, offers hope, and brings the promise of peace.

Faith like love cannot be measured with a ruler. It cannot be faked nor ignored. It is measured in the depth of your heart. The deeper in love with God you become, the deeper your love will be for those around you. Faith is not just the belief that God exists. It is the

depth of love you feel for him and his son Jesus—the desire to hold the Holy Spirit close to you and to live through him every day. Do not let sin, anger, hatred, or selfishness block your love for God. He loves you so much he gave his only son for you. He wants to forgive your every sin and love you as only he can. Then you can show his love to others.



CHAPTER 10

Spiritual Revelations

The next chapter deals with some personal revelations that I have come to know and understand about our relationship to God. Before I continue, I would like to say that these revelations are personal in nature and may not suit everyone's vision of their faith in God. Weigh each revelation against God's Word and against the truth.

One of the things that I have come to realize after spending a lot of time in the Spirit is that the Spirit often uses real life around us kind of like a chalkboard. Many of the truths about God, about ourselves, as well as our relationship with him are visible to us through the earthly kingdom. A few examples are the revelation of his fatherhood revealed by the family on Earth or the child in us all as revealed by our own children. I believe many more truths are revealed through experiencing God's creation than we are capable of seeing on our own. We need the Holy Spirit to reveal them to us.

Often when a person sins, we can see the problems associated with their sin. Yet the person who is committing it seems to be blind to the consequences and end result of the sin he is committing. Seeing this example from our brothers and sisters, you would think we would learn the principle that God blinds us to our sin when we are in the middle of it. Here is a warning to us from the Spirit that we too can live our lives in the same state.

We wonder what hell will be like when we see examples of it in our prisons and in the evil those men do to each other. Prison would not be such a bad place if the people within it did not make it so. Many religious communities are as sparse in accommodations

as a prison cell, yet the people there get along and are joyous in the Lord. Satan and his evil ones inspire man to cause misery, pain, and suffering. Could you imagine a place surrounded by them with no way out and without a good God to balance out the evil? I am not saying there will be no flames, but who needs flames when the evil itself will torment you?

We wonder about heaven, when many of us have experienced God's spirit. We know the company we will keep, and we know that God is a dad to us. Most of us should have at some time experienced this peace, joy, and love, which the spirit can envelop us in. These are the things of heaven. They are but a foretaste of the glory of God. I am sure there are angels and saints up there too, but what is it that makes heaven beautiful? It is the love and the joy that comes from God's grace. That is why we will be rejoicing in heaven—to be so loved that it brings us joy, so lovingly watched over that we are comforted. Kind of like a perpetual hug.

These simple things we tend to forget. We get so caught up in our day-to-day living that there is no room for this love. If we watch nature, we learn that all things work in harmony. Even the death of a plant or an animal regenerates into a new and fresh creation. The tree grows tall because of water and sunlight because it was made to do so. When God's creation follows the plan of life, it cannot help but to succeed, for God nurtures the growth and provides for its needs. When a tree tries to grow in a shady place without water, it becomes stunted and knurled. It struggles and dies. It is so with us as well. When we follow God's plan for us, we succeed in what we do and are happy, even though we do not understand his plan. When we rebel and try to go our own way, we fail and struggle and are unhappy.

This is true of many women today who fail to grasp their best qualities and fail to live the life God has given them. They hunger/lust after something they are not. They do not value what God values and want to live like men do. I am not saying that women are not equal; indeed they are and should be treated as such. I am saying that both men and women have different qualities about them that complement each other. It is such a loss when we fail to realize our own potential. A great hole has opened up in society that a man

cannot fill. The nurturing environment for our children has been all but destroyed. Children have been changed from an asset to an expense and been left to strangers to raise. There is no replacement for the mother in the family. The role is too critical to both the child and to society. Many women are being told to forsake what they were created for in order to be something they are not. Sure, a woman can do anything, but the question is, should she?

I used to support the feminist movement until these truths were revealed to me. Our poor children are suffering the loss of their parents. Women have forsaken having children because they are told that it is detrimental to them. Abortion and contraception are normal parts of society because feminists teach that this enslaves women to the role they were created for. So much of society has been damaged over this movement. It is the rejecting of who you are so that you can do what you want. It is the common denominator for all sin. It is the same excuses gays use to justify their lifestyles. I have heard transvestites claim God made a mistake and created them men instead of women. It is the rejecting of God's plan for one we like better.

We often reject our roles that we must play here on earth, yet if we followed God's plan, ultimately, we would be much happier. Let us examine what happens when a person who knowingly does something that they know is wrong. What is the first thing they do? They try to convince others that what they do is okay. They try to convince others to become like them to soothe their guilty conscience. Don't we see this today with all the gay and lesbian movements, the feminist movement, pro-abortion movement, etc. What they fail to show you is the truth.

There is great pain in abortion, in living in ways we were not created for. As a society, we became lulled into believing these movements were to offer freedom and a better lifestyle, but in reality, it was accepting our own destruction. How can you build a society by cutting off the children who would make it? By failing to teach them proper values and a sense of community. How can our society remain healthy and grow when we promote same sex marriages and

fail to encourage marriage between man & women? We are cutting our own throats with our faulty beliefs.

I did not wish to speak of this issue here; however, it is current to our day and the spirit had placed it on my heart to speak of such things. God has no wish for us to be blinded to the truth, and so the truth cannot remain hidden.

One of the many things that have been revealed to me through the Holy Spirit is the understanding of the Holy Trinity and the statement in the Bible that we are made in God's image. This is my understanding of it and may differ from others. To comprehend the greatness of God is difficult to translate into physical images. So I will say that this is not the only possible interpretation of his being, but one I find comfort in.

Man was made in God's image in more than just physical appearance. He made us to have the same emotions, reactions, and spiritual makeup. We feel love, anger, hope, compassion, jealousy, and many other feelings. So does God; he can become angry with us when we sin against him. He can be jealous of false gods. He can have compassion on people, etc. The difference is his emotions are perfect and without sin. He is all-knowing and judges correctly in when he reacts to them. He punishes when it is needed and has control of his reactions to feelings. In other words, he does not overreact. He does not punish the wrong people nor does he punish for the wrong reasons. His first and foremost emotion is love. Love, compassion, and mercy are his yardstick. The perfect parent.

Man is made up of three things—body, soul, and spirit. This is how Adam was made. It is said in the Bible (Genesis 2:7) that God created man from the clay and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, so he became a living being. The "breath of life" I believe is a reference to the Holy Spirit. So Adam, having a body, a soul, and a spirit, had true union with God. God could exist within him by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the two were one. When God spoke about Adam dying from eating the forbidden fruit, I believe that he meant both physical and spiritual death. The spiritual death occurred immediately, and the physical death came later. Adam brought sin into the world and sin brought eternal separation from God. Death

became permanent, and we could no longer stay in the presence of God.

So man was evicted from Eden, and he now existed as a body and a soul. When man died, he had no Spirit to raise him from the dead. So death held him in its grip until a time which God planned to save all of the earth from this death. The Jewish faith named the place where the souls were stored. This place was named Sheol. In Sheol, there were two sides—one called paradise and the other Hades. Paradise was the place of confinement for the good souls who, God favored because of their faith, and Hades being the place for evildoers whom God has held for punishment. Both places existed apart from God, as the savior had not come yet. This, I believe, answers the argument by rabbis over if man has only a body and soul and the argument that man is made up of body, soul, and spirit. During the time of the Jewish faith, there was only body and soul because of the death of the spirit by Adam. That is until the coming of Christ. Jesus came to die on the cross for us, to save us from permanent death and eternal separation from God. His death and resurrection cleansed all that believed upon him and received the Holy Spirit. Until that time, the Holy Spirit was separated from men with a few God-chosen exceptions that he chose to reveal his plan. Jesus descended into paradise and saved all the lost souls there and opened the door to heaven for all that will follow him. Thus, Jesus said to the fellow criminal who died with him on the cross, "Today we will be together in paradise."

Until the time Christ died, heaven was closed, and at the victory of the cross, God's plan for salvation was complete. Jesus even said this as his last words: "It is finished." His work on the world was done. Three days later, he appeared to the apostles (John 20:21–22). He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit could not be received until after his death and resurrection. So that was the very first thing he did upon seeing them.

Now I was confused about this action because I knew that the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles later on in the Bible. Upon searching for the answers, it was explained to me that there is a difference between receiving the Spirit and receiving the power of the Spirit to

perform God's work. These two works of the Spirit are different in nature and perform different tasks.

Once you have accepted Jesus as your savior and are baptized into his kingdom, you once again become body, soul, and spirit because the Holy Spirit resides in you. You become the temple of God and receive his graces. You can however repeat the sin of Adam by sinning afresh.

You are still human in nature and subject to temptations. Because of this, Jesus allows for our failings and provides for a means for restoration, by asking him for forgiveness and repenting from our sins. As Christians, we must seek to close the distance between God and us and to live a spiritual life rather than a worldly one. We must learn to use the Spirit of God to teach us and to bring us up into his kingdom, now and in the hereafter.

This is why Jesus is the only way to the Father. It is his death and resurrection that saves us by returning the Holy Spirit into our human bodies, by accepting him as the Son of God. This is where all the other religions fall short. Their teachings about right and wrong may not be the problem. It is the fact that they do not know whom Jesus is that makes their teachings incomplete. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot live after death. Jesus is the one who gives his Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, the teachings of any religion are just a history lesson, a bunch of good words on a page, but without life. Religion becomes a tradition to be carried out, without any real meaning. So what does all this mean?

It means we are spiritually stillborn when we come into the world. We are the walking dead. We are body and soul without the spirit. We are the property of Satan. We will live our lives as if we are alive, not knowing that there is more until we are taught about Jesus, baptized, and born-again by accepting Jesus and given new life in the Holy Spirit.

How are we different after being born again? For the most part, we remain the same. We can sin; we can act and talk like normal body-souled people. We certainly look the same. We can go to church and attend social gatherings. So where is the difference?

When you come to accept Christ truly in your heart, you experience a change inside. Your perception will change, and your desires will change. Learning about God will not be difficult anymore, it will be a joy. You will not serve your church because you have to but because you really want to. You will begin to desire good over evil. You still will sin, but you will wish you had not. You will have a desire to get to know Jesus and the Father better. Some will receive spiritual gifts from God. Most will have the Word of God opened up to them so they can understand. Faith will no longer be something you have to do but rather something you live all day long. These changes are the influence of the Holy Spirit. I personally have experienced these and more, and many others I know have too.

Now I am not saying that you will always experience these at all times. I do, however, believe that you should have experienced them during your life. We can fall away from time to time, go through dry times, and be in the middle of a trial. Unless you truly believe and are active in the Lord, you may need to re-evaluate the way your life is headed. We are not meant to lead lost and defeated lives but lives made alive in the spirit of God.

We are born dead to Christ until we accept Christ *and* become baptized into him. We then become alive to the Spirit, and he lives in us. Then we can receive the baptism of the Spirit, which gives us special gifts and the strength to serve God as the Spirit teaches us. You can receive the baptism of the Spirit many times in your life, especially when God is preparing you for work. He also baptizes you when he wishes to teach you something. Be prepared to receive his love and blessing, and when he touches your heart, do not be afraid to ask, "What is your will, Lord?"

To explain how we are in the image of God, I have already shown you how we are similar to the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are flesh like Jesus was, and believers have the Holy Spirit residing in them. Now I will put it together. God acts like the soul; he makes the decisions. Jesus is the body, who carries out his will, and the Holy Spirit is the power behind it. God is body (in Christ), soul, and spirit. We also are body, soul, and spirit. Our soul decides between good and evil; our body carries it out, and the Spirit connects us to God in

a mysterious way, which only God knows. It is this Spirit which ties us to the body of Christ. Our soul's decisions can either hurt or glorify his body by our actions. If we sin, it is like a disease that infects the body and weakens it. We have become one in Christ. What each of us does matters, and if we allow our part of the body to become too sick, we will be cut off.

Secular philosophers even recognized the trinity of the human mind (Spirit). Sigmund Freud taught that the mind was divided into three sections—the “id,” the “ego,” and the “super ego.” The Id is our animal nature (the body), the super ego (spirit) is our conscience, and the ego (the soul) is the mind that decides between the two. We are stuck between the two, forced to choose between what we want (desire) and what we know is right. While most of us place the ego (our soul) first as the controlling power over our lives (because we want to make the decisions about our own life), God wants us to trust him and allow him to make all the decisions (the super ego or the Spirit). When we are choosing between right and wrong, after all when is it okay to choose wrong? With the Holy Spirit driving your actions (super ego), you will always profit from it.

I am sure there is more to this and look forward to future revelations about the Trinity. It is a beautiful thing to witness the truth to unfold by the power of the Spirit. I never cease to be surprised and joyous over the things revealed.

God reveals our relationship with him, with each other, and with the world around us through the structure of the family. He reveals the truth about his creation by nature around us. He reveals the position of man in the divine revelation by our example here. We are responsible to be caretakers of this world, to keep both people and animals fruitful and healthy and all of his creation. He has given us dominion over the world so that we can subdue it *and care* for it. We are to use God's example for us and make wise use of what is given to us, not to go to either extreme but to be moderate in our protection of and use of our resources. The future of the world depends upon our wise use of our world, and so does our existence.

Life and death are laid out in example for us in the life cycle of all creatures. God created all things that they must die, so that others

can grow. We can watch the aging process in the animals and plants around us. We can see it in our parents and our grandparents. We cannot deny the truth that death exists in the world. It is a normal part of life just as pain and sufferings are too. We often choose to forget or reject these truths because they are painful to think about.

In this society, we have come to forget what it means to go without fear ever living that way. It is treated as an evil in itself, which it is not always. Some need and want is good because it gives us the drive to live. We can very easily get spoiled by having everything we desire and forget to share with those in need. Think of the child, who has everything; they become spoiled and difficult. They never learn to share or to struggle. So when tough times do come, they cannot cope with it.

Things like pain, sadness, aging, and many other life-changing events cannot be avoided. Fate stands at each of our doors and will ring the bell when the time is right. Will we be prepared to handle it? Will ignoring the problem make it go away? There are lessons to be learned from life. Let the Spirit open your eyes to the truth. So when the day comes, you will be prepared for it. God loves us and knows the truth about our lives, he has even provided the means to prepare us for what the future brings. He provides examples and advice through the Bible. He even provides examples through life. All we have to do is open our eyes to the truth and to his Son Jesus, and we have this help.

Here are the two of the most important things revealed to me that has strengthened my faith in God. One is learning Christian balance, and the other is the knowledge that God *is* truth. Christian balance is about Christian maturity. It is the knowledge of the basics of faith so well that false teachers cannot shake your faith. It is the knowledge of the difference between religious intolerance and accepting people's different understandings of their faith. It is accepting the fact that we do not know it all, and because of this, we must strive to learn all we can about what we believe in. I have learned that there are as many ways to understand and practice faith in God as there are people in the world. I do not put them down but rather enter into discussion with them despite their differences, and often we both go

away the wiser. Paul had said that we are to become all things to all people. That means we can reach out to them in their own cultures and teach them the truth.

I understand that God is truth, and everything he created has truth to it. When faith and truth collide, it does not throw me because I realize that it is not faith that was wrong but my interpretation of it. For instance, the teaching that the earth was the center of the universe. We have learned that in truth it is not. God never said it was, man interpreted it as such, and many fell away thinking that the Bible was false when in reality, it was an assumption made by man.

When you judge your faith against a proven truth, you must recognize that the truth is God and re-evaluate your understanding of your faith. Be careful though, some truths are hard to see such as loving an enemy. Where it appears false on the surface, it proves true after careful study. So when your faith is confronted with a truth that appears contrary to your faith, do not panic, do not be discouraged, instead seek the truth in what you believe. Discuss things with those who oppose you, seek the truth, and you will both walk away the better.

When faith and science collide, admit that neither party knows all and that there is still more to understand. Truth will eventually prove itself out. Remember truth is God and he created all things in harmony with each other. It is left for us to attempt to understand not only the world around us but God too. Who could ever know all of who God is?

Another thing to consider is this. When we come to accept Christ in our lives, it is like a marriage. Can we ever truly know a wife or husband by reading their biography, reading text, and hearing about a person's history? It is not enough to make a good marriage between two people. It helps you to understand them, but until you spend time with each other, you will never truly know the other person. So it is with Christ; book-learning is never enough to truly accept Christ in your heart. You need to experience him firsthand and then strive to keep your life walking with him. Some marriage, it would be if a man marries his wife and then never bothers to see her

after the wedding. Keep your first love alive! Do not be the one that Jesus says to: "I never knew you."

Many people are afraid of their feelings, especially tears. I have come to know that there are many kinds of tears—tears of sorrow and tears of joy, tears of compassion and tears that heal. God moves through the heart, and because of this, tears often accompany his movement through us. I have cried tears of joy when the Holy Spirit had converted me to Christ. I have held tears of compassion for those who suffer. I have many times had tears of healing as God fixed different parts of my life. I would never trade any of them away because it is better to feel alive than to never feel anything. Only the dead feel nothing, so never fear the coming of tears for healing and joy are soon to follow.

Communion? What does this really mean? Is communion only when a Catholic goes up to receive the bread of life? Communion starts when you wake up in the morning and greet God with a morning prayer. Communion is living in the Spirit daily and living the life of Christ. It means spending time in prayer before coming to the Mass or service in order to set your heart right with God. It starts long before you enter your church. We are called to be in communion with God at all times—to glorify his name and to honor him by being holy before receiving the actual bread of life. He that eats the bread unworthily takes upon himself damnation. It is not in how you appear that makes you so but rather where your heart is.

I will not enter into debate upon whether the bread of life is either the real body of Christ or a symbol. These bickering divide the churches and the people of God. I would rather focus on our hearts and the preparedness that we take for granted every time we receive the body and blood of Christ. It is sad that we try to decide who can receive and who cannot. The choice is Christ's whether to bless or curse each individual. We are only called to witness to the truth, to warn each other that to receive unworthily is to eat and drink damnation. It is up to the individual if he chooses to deceive himself or God and pay the cost of disrespect. We cannot play God, only he can see the heart with a clear view. That is why I speak of what communion

is. I cannot determine your place with God, but I can advise you to examine yourself and seek his presence.

It is important as God's children to be active in your faith. I do not mean in secular activities like bingo night and fundraisers, which are secular activities, but I am speaking spiritual activities like Bible studies and prayer groups and serving in the church or serving the community. You need to feed the spirit within you to remain in communion with Christ. I suggest as a good balance that you go to church regularly, do something that feeds the spirit weekly (public activity), and do something in service to God weekly. Three events on top of your private studies. We are called to live the message of God. It is to be our lifestyle, our culture, and we are not to conform to the world but to transform it.

I do not know when God saves each individual. Only God knows this. I can, however, help you understand when we exist outside of communion with God. Our lives reflect the condition of our souls. Does life seem out of control? Do you find faith confusing? Do you feel empty inside? Do you have a problem with anger? Is there no peace in your life? All these and more are symptoms to a life that is lacking communion with Jesus. A person will normally have times like this in their lives, but it should not be for extended periods of time. If these conditions seem to afflict you, maybe you need to focus on Jesus again.

Powers of the Spirit

As a person who has come to accept Jesus (born-again) knows, along with accepting Jesus comes the Holy Spirit. This in-filling we get can be vastly different from person to person. In fact, even the gifts we receive vary widely from person to person. We need to learn how to recognize and use the gifts that we receive from the Spirit so that we can have effective faith in God. As Paul has said in his letters, there are many gifts, and each part works to complement each other, similar to the body having hands, feet, and mouth, etc. I do not believe that a person only receives one gift. Sometimes we receive several gifts at the same time. Sometimes we have one at one time

and another at another time. Many gifted Christians think they only receive a single gift and that is *their* power from the Spirit. This can commonly lead to the receiver of the gift to feel he has control over it. I will say right now that no man controls the gifts of the Spirit. The spirit controls when, where, and how much gift is used. It also decides which gift you can receive. It is the power of God and not the other way around. We must be open to the work of the Spirit in order for the Spirit to work through us. I speak by my own experience that I have been used for gifts of knowledge, wisdom, prophecy, opening of the word, internal healing (spiritual), and many others.

The Spirit guides us in the will of God, and we serve his ends. We may sometimes feel it is our will that made something happen, but in reality, we were asking something within God's will to occur. The Spirit of God often acts quietly behind the scenes of our lives. The Spirit often leads us to use a gift by putting it in our heart. Let's take our example from the Trinity; the Holy Spirit does nothing on its own but points to Jesus, and Jesus does nothing on his own but rather does the will of the Father.

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. (John 15:26)

[B]ut I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. (John 15:31)

Another point about spiritual gifts is healing. Many people fail to realize that healing services are more about spiritual healing than physical healing. You should go to these services for healing of habitual sins like drug, alcohol, food addiction, lust, spiritual poverty, and a host of other ailments. Spiritual healings are far more common and far more important than physical ones. The soul lives forever, but the body does not. We must never take for granted the power of the Holy Spirit to heal us and purify our minds and hearts.

I had mentioned Christian balance a little earlier in this chapter, and I feel I need to go into it a little deeper. As born-again Christians, we have a tendency to overdo things in our excitement to serve God. We fail to recognize when the Spirit is moving inside us and when we are doing things of our own will. I have caught myself several times urged by the Spirit to speak on something and then continue discussing it after the power of the Spirit has left me. I have now become aware that I sometimes have begun to speak from my own understanding and was not being urged by the Spirit to do so. While this is not necessarily wrong, it has lost the power associated with the truth of God. There is risk of fallibility and of driving the other person away. We may have done this soon after being baptized in the Spirit of God because we are so happy, we want all to come to know God. We must remember, however, that not everyone is ready to hear the Word of God, and some will not understand our genuine love in sharing it. We have to learn to watch for the Spirit's activity in others and understand when the Spirit is using us.

Another problem that is common to Christians is the fact that when we receive the grace of God, we tend to think that wherever or however we received it is "the Way" to come to God. Some find God through one church and others in another. Some experience visions or follow different devotional methods. Some believe that clapping your hands and shouting to the Lord is better than solemn worshiping. God is the God of the individual; he looks into your heart to see what's there. It is the love you bear him that matters, not the style of worship, not the church you attend, and not which devotional or saint you respect. If you know and love God, you will know and love his Son. And worship him.

I would like to ask a question. How can we understand how to feel the power of God? How can we recognize the power of his presence? We often see it revealed as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some more obvious than others and some we sense more. Some give us a spiritual high that gives us a glimpse into what the presence of God is like. Most of us wish these feelings and gifts could go on forever. Deep down, I realize that it cannot go on forever while we live on this earth. We cannot expect to be in a constant spiritual high either.

We would learn nothing and grow little in spirit if we did. Do not allow personal feelings to separate you from the Spirit of God. It is important that we go through all things in life, the good and the bad, and give the glory to God. It is this we are called for.

How can I describe the movement of the Spirit? It is different for everyone yet has common traits that are recognizable. Baptism in the Spirit can be overwhelming. I had felt a pleasant burning inside that washed through me, causing tears of joy to be produced. It is common that tears follow conversion.

I have felt a mental nudge that would not disappear when God wished me to do something in his will. It would stay with me for days until I accomplished what he wanted.

I have had revelations of knowledge revealed in an instant's time. Not thought-out nor was I occupied with the thoughts, indeed I was thinking and doing other things entirely. Usually prayer or singing to God or other activity.

I have had a change in my level of wisdom, an ability to see the truth in things I could not before. I have felt that wave of baptism during times of deep devotion or when something spiritual has been revealed to me. It was much weaker than when I was baptized the first time, but it reminded me of a spiritual hug. I have felt it when other Christians have revealed spiritual truths kind of confirming their statements.

I have read the Bible and had verses strike me very hard, as if it was written just for me. The same is true when it is revealed by listening to someone teaching the Word. I have even had truths revealed to me from everyday life. Almost like the Spirit saying, "See this is what I mean."

Not everyone experiences all of these, but you will from time to time in your lifetime if the Spirit dwells within.

Many do not know what to look for or what to expect, so they never realize what is going on inside. We need someone to teach us these things are spiritual in nature or we tend to explain them away. If Moses did not lift his hands and declare that God was parting the Red Sea, people would say, "Boy, what luck the wind just happened

to blow for us at the right time to part the waves” or “What a freak of nature, must have been a micro blast.”

I have also experienced the other side of the coin and I am glad I am one with Jesus. I encountered a “ghost” once shortly after my born-again experience. It was probably a year later or so, and I was visiting a person’s home when I witnessed and felt an evil presence envelope me. I would describe it as a spiritual attack. It backed me up right out of the room I was in and did not stop till I evoked, “In the name of the Lord Jesus, leave me alone.” At once, the presence left me, and things returned to normal inside the house. Including the rocking chair that started and stopped its movement before my eyes. I believe the Holy Spirit gave me those words; I was scared to the very marrow of my being. The sensation was cold and suppressing. It made my skin crawl, and my knees got weak. I was amazed how fast the evil left responded to my calling on the Lord for protection. After the event, I pulled my girlfriend out of the house and asked her if anything weird ever happened in the house. When her response was “You have seen it!” I nearly fell over.

Over ten years later, I learned that my encounter was with a demon and not a ghost. I know this because she told me about what had been happening in the house before my experience, and years later, I read a book on exorcism, and it described what happened to a *T*. I also sought out the help of two different pastors who confirmed my belief. I also have felt evil presences in connection with other events like movies and TV shows that glorifies evil. I am not saying that the shows themselves carry evil airwaves but rather, the temptation to evil offers an opportunity for evil presences to apply pressure. In these cases, I have felt almost a headrush of lust or desire, when I am fully opposed to it. It can make you feel out of control or drunk with foolishness. I believe these are the evil one’s minions behind the scenes trying to make you fall.

Do not be fooled. Behind every event, every addiction, every overt sinful act is an evil being that is acting behind the scenes. Children like those who killed their fellow classmates at Columbine High did not act on their own. They were led to the point by the principalities. They were initially tempted by other sinful acts. Maybe

it was drugs or alcohol. Maybe it was their peers steering them into devil worship or their love for dark music. Somehow, they were blinded by the lesser sins, and when it reached a point that they were blinded to God and morals, they were indeed controlled by Satan. He used them like puppets to do his will and they slayed those children. I am not saying this as an excuse for them but a warning to us.

As people sin, it snowballs. The sin blinds us gradually until you cannot see the evil that you do. Then the principalities increase the level of sin till it reaches a level when you are no longer in control. The drug is or the hate is or the desire is, and there is no longer a thought for consequence for others. This is why we must seek God and stay with him. It is for freedom from domination by the evil principalities. It will happen, unless you focus your life on God.

There are also the good principalities at work too. The difference is, the good principalities require your free will to act. Unlike Satan and his followers, who take what they want, you must choose Jesus daily and support your faith. The evil principalities work day and night to steal your faith and imprison you in your evil desires. Working to gain the kingdom of God is not an option but a necessity for life. If we stop trying, learning, and being in fellowship with God, Satan *will* bear us down, *will* snatch what we learned away from us, and *can* destroy us.



CHAPTER 11

Final Thoughts

I would like to sum up my thoughts for you here in this final chapter. Maturity in Christ is the seeking of his truth and using it in a loving and well-balanced way. It is not about accusing each other nor is it in lording our knowledge over the weak or the blind sinner. We are to be a ray of hope to those around us, where no hope exists. We as born-again Christians have a responsibility to the world to be the face of Jesus—to teach the truth and not to get fouled up in religious customs. Teaching the truth about Christ does not need to include denominationalism. We do not need to put pressure on them or threaten them to comply with our way of thinking. This has been a great scandal in the churches and discredits all of us. We are called to teach the truth about Jesus and the truth about our relationship with him, to witness his actions in our lives and point them in the correct direction of salvation. We are not to put more upon them than God does.

When they see the truth that we speak in our lives and see it around them, they will start seeking God. It is the Holy Spirit that puts this in their hearts. We cannot save anyone by using the right words; it is the Holy Spirit who converts. We must always keep this in mind. As Christians, we commonly try to go beyond that which the Spirit tells us. We must learn to listen to the Spirit.

We are born again as newborn children, without full knowledge of our relationship with God. We must be patient and grow as the Holy Spirit teaches us and never be sure we know it all. Patience, openness, and continuous seeking is the way to truth and to God.

Focusing on Jesus will keep our balance, and humbleness keeps our faith.

We need each other to learn from what the Spirit has revealed to each one of us, for the Spirit reveals some things to one person and other things to others. I believe this is to make us interact with each other. No person is an Island, together we are a holy nation of priests.

Focus on your spiritual family. Learn how to interact from loving physical families. In each part of the family, there is a lesson. Pray to the Holy Spirit to reveal this to you. I have barely touched on this topic here. There is hope for even the alone or unloved; you still have the family of God to embrace. Do not let the sins of the human family cause you to miss out on the best family life there is.

I have spent over two years working on this book, fretting over every detail in the hopes of keeping it pure and in truth. I am not a writer, yet I felt called by God to write this for all who desire to deepen their faith. I wrote this as a guide to myself so I would not lose the knowledge gained and to remind myself of the power of God that worked in me. As always, I advise using discernment and caution when reading any human written book, no matter how inspired it may be. Even the best human being has faulty connection through the Spirit. Try all against God's Word and against the will of God. Pray for the Spirit to open up your eyes and reveal that which I teach.

I am interested in hearing any witness you have about reading this book. If it touches you, it touches me. I will let the Spirit decide if this book is worthy of further publication. I believe this to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, at least I felt his push to write. I will let him do the rest. Here is my witness! Holy Spirit the rest is up to you!

Thanks and God bless.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Andrew W.P. Gage considers himself a Catholic-Christian. While he grew up in the Catholic church, God sent him to visit many of the Protestant denominations. He closely relates to the Pentecostals and shares the love of the Bible like the Baptists. He visited the Lutheran and Episcopal churches and preached in a congregational church. God has shown him that he loves you all. Who is he to argue with God?

Newborn! Into Life in Christ was written back in 2000 but remains as real today as it was back then. God remains with Andrew, and he has continued to write, not because he loves it but because he loves God. The Holy Spirit pestered him for years to write *Newborn* and has put it on his heart to publish it again! Pray to the Holy Spirit to open up this book to you. Like being newborn, it is only the beginning!