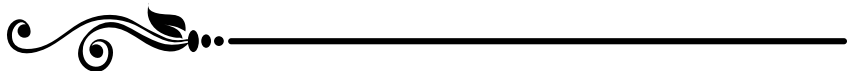


TRUTH



and

FAITH



Andrew W. P. Gage

I dedicate this book to my wife, Dulcie, and all
others who have raised the question

what is the truth?

Pilate saith unto him, What is Truth? (John 18:38 KJV)

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

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INTRODUCTION

As I write this book about truth and faith, I wish to make note that I neither wish to put down any person's beliefs or put down any religion that seeks the truth. I do, however, also do not believe that any one religion knows all truth. We as men are not capable of knowing all truth, nor are we capable of true perfection. If it was true, then we would be God. Only God knows all truth. We are capable of grasping small segments of it and using it to help one another come closer to God. I do not mean to say that there are not faiths closer to God than others, nor do I mean to say that truth is relative to the individual. Truth is truth. There can be only one truth as God created it.

We, however, fail to understand these truths or understand only a small portion of them, giving the impression that there is more than one truth. In reality, there is only one truth, seen from different perspectives, like an accident witnessed by several different people. The stories from each witness varies a little because of the narrow view of the witness. For example, the person on the right side of the accident failed to see a left turn signal was used by one car, yet someone on the other side of the road clearly saw the signal on. This causes two fully truthful witnesses to report different truths about the same accident. They would both swear by what they saw, yet both are missing the full picture. The person did put on their turn signal before turning, but one witnessed it and the other did not. This does not make the person who did not witness the fact a liar or even wrong.

Faith and truth tend to be the same way. Too often we feel that we see the real truth and put down others because it does not meet our way of understanding it. To love one another is a universal truth,

whether we are taught this by Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha, etc. We so often toss out the truth because it is taught by someone we do not recognize. I have another thought—instead of tossing out the baby with the bathwater, we build our faith on the truths we seek. I have always believed that in seeking the truth, you will bring yourself into a greater understanding of God, who is all truth because He created it.

I am not afraid that in speaking the truth, I will lose people's interest in my faith. I am not afraid to show my weakness, my imperfections, or my errors. I am not God, and as such, I am not worthy of total and blind belief in what I teach. I ask others to open their eyes to the truth—not mine, not theirs, but to the real truths that we find in our faith. I believe that there are truths to be found in many faiths, and instead of bullying one another and declaring one another false, we should pursue these truths and grow together. Let us discover the truth together and use what binds us rather than what divides us.

The apostle Paul once went into a Greek city and saw a statue of an unknown god. Instead of putting that god down or saying my God is better than your god. He said, "I know that god!" Then he went on to teach the truth about his God. Christ is not the king of force and power, but rather the Truth and the Light. He is not the son of the God (you better follow me), but rather the son of the God who holds out His hand's day and night so that we can accept His truth willingly, with our eyes open and truth revealed.

Most faiths honor Jesus Christ as a great prophet. Some honor Him as God's own Son. Few argue the truths that He has spoken during His time with us. I believe we pursue these truths. As we grow and learn about these truths, we will grow to know our God and accept the truths He places before us. We should never be afraid of the truth or of one another because there is much to learn from one another. The discovery of truth is an adventure, one that all of us need to pursue. We cannot afford to close our eyes to anything, whether it is religion or life, simply because we can learn from both good and evil, truth and lies, and we can learn from one another. Most people want someone to show them how to believe, to take the easy road to faith. I say if you take that road and fail to pursue it

beyond simply what you are taught, you will fail to grow into maturity in your faith.

I am a Christian (Catholic) in my faith. I believe the teachings of my church, and I test them constantly in order to understand them better. I do not reject all other faiths because I know to do so would be to reject the truth that they teach as well as any errors. I do not claim my faith perfect either, for man can distort the truth or emphasize truths beyond their original meanings. My purpose is to seek a common ground with others to pursue the truth and make it my own, to go with open eyes before God and man, and seek to do the will of God—to seek the truth and live it. That is what this book is about, to say that we do not know it all nor can we ever close our eyes to the truth around us. That it is by pursuing that truth that will bring us closer to God.

It is my prayer that man will learn to live together in peace and share in one another's knowledge in the hope of honoring God as we discover the truth together.

Truth—This Misunderstood Word

Truth is probably the most confusing of all words used today in society. Everyone asks, “What is the truth?” Everyone claims to have the answer, yet few agree on what it is. Many different groups of religions, political affiliations, and even individuals claim to have the whole truth. In reality, no man, group of men, or group of philosophers can know the whole truth. Only God knows all truths. Even the angels do not know all truth or some could not have fallen.

Since God created all, would He not have created the truth as well? Had He not created how things worked and functioned? Had He not made the rules that created an ordered universe? In a sense, the search for truth is the search for God. Man, in a false sense of pride, sees only part of the picture and then we claim to know it all. How foolish we are. Until we can face this fact, we remain blinded to greater knowledge in our faith and a closer relationship with our God.

I am neither attempting to damage or destroy our faith in our churches or denominations or claim all philosophies void and incorrect. I am only trying to point out the truth—that each holds truth, but also each has limitations. Otherwise, we would be gods ourselves. My job here is not to convince you to join this denomination over that one, but to strengthen you wherever you are to seek the truth found in God.

People tend to think that they need to find the perfect church to worship God in, to be perfect themselves, and to expect it from their leaders. The truth is, we are not perfect; there is no perfect church, nor is there a perfect leader. The Old and New Testaments tells us

this: “There is no one good, not one.” I compare the word *good* with *truth* because they tend to coexist. God is both good and truthful, while Satan is both evil and false. To live a lie is evil; to accept a truth is good.

All have turned away from God: they have all gone wrong; no one does what is right, not even one. (Romans 3:12 GNT)

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him.
“No one is good except God alone.” (Luke 18:19 GNT)

It was truth that separated scientists from the church in the days of Newton and Galileo, and it is the truth that will bring the separation of science and the church back together.

In Galileo’s time, the church failed to recognize the truth about the nature of the world being round and the earth rotating around the sun. They believed they knew better, however, God never spoke directly concerning these things. It was man putting his own opinions in God’s name. Our pride caused friction in the church and caused division and people to lose faith.

At the same time, scientists have bitten off more than they could chew by making wild claims and passing them off as truth. Many said that the speed of sound could not be broken or that anything could move faster than the speed of light. Today, both have been proven false. We just cannot have the full capacity to understand either God or His creation. To say you do is false and prideful.

Here is the nature of the problem: what is truth if we cannot trust ourselves? If we cannot trust our perception of things, how can we know it? There are several methods that work well to help us sift through the truth. Time proves all things. Truths that have proven

themselves over long periods of time can be trusted much more than recent discoveries.

Truthful words stand the test of time, but lies are soon exposed. (Proverbs 12:19 NLT)

Events witnessed by several people tend to be more reliable than those witnessed by one person. Things that build up rather than tear down tend to be more reliable truths.

The Bible has proven trustworthy for thousands of years; some truths are over four thousand years old. Many Christian writings have existed for hundreds of years and been tested by millions of people.

The existence of God has been witnessed by billions of people over the entire existence of man by several different faiths and peoples—the existence of Jesus by history, millions of people in all walks of life, and by the Holy Spirit seen in countless miracles and changed hearts. By people willing to give their lives for the truths that they have found. What better proof do we need than to know that a person is willing to die for the truth? Would you die for a lie?

Another aspect that causes truth to be difficult to see clearly is the fact that truth is often painful to accept or face. As humans, there are many painful truths we choose to ignore or forget entirely. Things such as death, sickness, pain, suffering, or even things we know we should do but have not. We lie to ourselves to placate our consciences; we busy ourselves with other things rather than face difficult circumstances. We even run and hide from the truth when it becomes too much to bear.

This truth is the truth that keeps us from God, who is all truth. Since we cannot bear to face truth head-on, neither can we bear to face God. As the Creator, and as Creator of all truth, both painful and beautiful, God has placed a balance in all things as we see proven in nature. He has made a balance in our spiritual essence as well. Without balance, there is no choice, and with no choice, there is no freedom. We become instead of children of God, slaves to a taskmaster without freedom or choice. With freedom comes responsibility and accountability. We desire the freedom of choice, but reject the

consequences of our actions. We desire the pleasure, but reject the balance of pain. We often run from God because we see Him as the consequences of our actions; the full truth unveiled—the discipline of the father for a child who misbehaves. We fear punishment and become estranged from God by our own guilt.

It is important that we learn to face the truth about God, our world that we live in, and most of all, about ourselves. Until that time, we shall always run from God and the truth. I believe that this is the power of confession: to face the truth, to accept it, and to seek forgiveness. Once this is done, truly in the heart, the healing of God can begin.

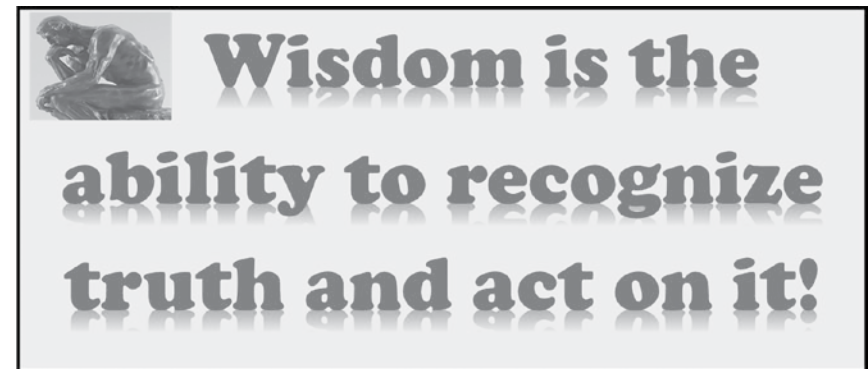
Until that time, guilt, fear, and falseness rule our lives, imprisoning us in a self-imposed prison that hardens with time. We feel the guilt, which leads to depression, anxiety, and a host of other mental/physical problems. It hardens us to reject any attempt to believe the truth, for it becomes too painful to see. We act out of pain and spite and sin more to cover up the other sins we have committed until we become spiritually blind and cannot feel the pain anymore nor can we know God, truth, or see things as they really are. In this state, we become spiritually dead inside.

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. (Ephesians 4:18 KJB)

Faith in God as we can see is really about the pursuit of the truth of His nature, the truth about ourselves, and the meaning of life itself. With truth comes wisdom. Can there be anything more important in our lives than the pursuit of wisdom? It affects all aspects of our lives. It affects our families, our jobs, and our very existence. How can we ignore these profound truths to our own destruction and blindness?

Finally, I would like to speak about our own pride. Let us not be proud of our wisdom because it is only lent to us by God and by the power of His Holy Spirit. We only see portions of His great truths. We cannot possibly see it all, and it can be withdrawn from us as

easily as it was given. No one is wise without God because there is no wisdom without truth.



CHAPTER 2

Truth and Our Nature

Truth and nature are both inseparable. In many ways, the nature of the earth reveals secrets both to the nature of God and the world of the Spirit. Truth is final, whether it is spiritual or physical. There is no bargaining or any way of changing the truth—truth is truth. We can choose to ignore it, lie to ourselves about it, or even fight against it, but it does not change the facts. Truth always comes to light sooner or later, and fate is soon to follow. I am not attempting to paint a bleak picture; I am just attempting to bring the nature of truth to light. To cast a light upon our true natures and reveal both our strengths and weaknesses. Once this is revealed, you can judge correctly the proper course of action in life.

Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. (Psalm 85:11 KJV)

As humans, there are many painful truths we choose to ignore or forget entirely. Things such as death, sickness, pain, suffering, or even things we know we should do but have not. We lie to ourselves to placate our consciences; we busy ourselves with other things rather than face difficult circumstances. We even run and hide from the truth when it becomes too much.

We must not blame ourselves too harshly that we do these things. It comes with our nature; it is natural to do them. We must remain aware that these things are part of our nature and counter

them with the truth. God is aware of our human frailties too and is forgiving because of this.

You might ask, “If it is natural for us to act this way, why should we change and act against our own natures? Isn’t that a lie too?”

My answer to that question is this: Do animals act always in the best interest of all? Or can they think ahead instead of acting only by instinct? Are we to take away the only thing that separates us from the animals? We are created in the image of God; as such, we bear both instinct and soul. We also bear the ability to have the Holy Spirit too. These gifts rise us to a level above our base instincts. To see both good and evil, and the choice between them. With knowledge and power comes responsibility. We are not mere animals nor could we be animals and still be ourselves. It would lessen what we are to be.

We are born to be both physical and spiritual, and as such, we are subject to the same laws of both worlds. Worlds that sometimes are at odds with each other. As we grow, as we learn, we come to accept the higher truths and grow toward God, or we rebel and accept the way of our natural selves and become the animal that is inside all of us. It is a battle between our animal tendencies (desires) and our higher purpose (conscience). We choose every day—choices that we will allow to rule us. In reality, the natural tendencies tend to be addictive and controlling, while the spiritual choices tend to put you in control of yourself, liberating you from instinctual habits.

The ability to see truth is not a natural (instinctive) ability. Instinct is only reactionary; it reacts to external stimulation and responds without thought of consequence. If something angers the body’s instinct, it strikes out; if it attracts its desire, it pursues it; and if it hurts the body it, it runs away, etc. It does not think about the future or what harm may come from its actions. Thus, oftentimes, instinct can be both harmful as well as do good.

Wisdom and the ability to see truth for what it is, is a higher gift. One that comes from God. It comes from pursuing God. There is no other way to grow in it. Thus, as I have said, “To seek truth, you will find God, and to seek God is to find truth.”

This duality of truth confuses most people. There are truths that control the body and truths that describe the spirit. People question, “They both cannot be right.” Yet they are. This is where the freedom of choice comes in. It is this choice that we choose that determines our accepting God or rejecting God.

Let me use an example of this duality:

Say you are a married man and you meet a woman who desires to sleep with you. She attracts you very much. She even knows your situation and does not care. It is up to you. What do you do?

The Body’s (Instinct) Response

The first instinct is “Yeehaw!” Then this may be followed by a vague fear of getting caught. At once, the tendency is to lean toward the sinful act. It is a selfish/survivalist view that does not look at consequence or the future potential of the act.

The Soul’s (Conscience) Response

Boy, this is really tempting. I know I really shouldn’t. What should I do?

The Spirit’s (Holy Spirit) Response

Whoa! Look out! What do you think you’re doing! Let’s look at what doing this deed is going to do. This might lead to divorce, pain, and suffering, crushing the heart of the woman I married. Destroy my children’s faith in me. Rip up their lives. All for what? A moment of selfish pleasure. Is it worth it? Never mind the risks of disease, etc.

As you can see, the choices are very different in the same situation. The body does not consider anything but itself; I soul is confused which to choose (although following the body is the easy way out), and the spirit is crying out to you to look at the truth.

The fact is, many of us try to ignore the truth so we can do what we want. This same principle applies to all sin. Maybe for the

woman, it could be gossip or even not loving your husband. We each face the selfish nature of our bodies every day. It is an extension of our preservation instincts to preserve and please the body, which drives us. In some cases, it is necessary, but at other times, it can prove disastrous. Therefore, we need to constantly seek the Spirit’s counsel when we run across moral issues. The body will lead you into danger and death.

We as free children of God must choose to listen to the Holy Spirit in matters of morality and truth. Our soul needs to choose God (and his teachings) in these instances: to listen to the Spirit and avoid the dangers. The Spirit of God does not want to keep you from having fun or take away all joy from your life, but rather to free you from the bonds of sin and allow you to have joy from God and the many other safer joys God created for us.

Think of it like when you were a teenager and your parents did not allow you to go to a certain party because they thought it unsafe. It stunk at the time, but you did not come to harm, and you shared many other fun things that you could do. Our bodies cannot think beyond the here and now. Future consequences are too abstract for the body to contemplate.

You have a choice: to follow the body’s whims and face the consequences of your actions or to listen to the truth and live both a peaceful life and a more abundant one. Live for the moment and suffer forever, or open your eyes to see the truth and live.

Satan is a very real being, but our own natures are enough to devastate our lives here and destroy our hope in salvation. Once you lose sight of God, you are in a very dangerous place, and only God can say if you live or die for eternity. In reality, He may pass judgment, but we decide our own fate. No, even more than we decide our own fate, God gives us over to our own choices: to sin and rejection of Him or to seek the truth and live. The truth is, we can blame no one but ourselves.

The war is within us. Satan desires that we fall to our desires. He may influence the situation that places us in temptation, but the body desires do the rest. Who is in control of your life? Is it your

body? Yourself? Or God? Who should be in control? Most would answer “Myself, of course!”

Let me put it to you this way: Say you have three people trying to decide what to do. The first is the man named Body; he wants to do something that will get you in trouble. The next man’s name is Spirit, and he says, “Hey, guys, this is the way to avoid trouble.” Finally, the man named Soul says, “Well, I have to side with one of you, Mr. Body, your suggestion sounds like fun, but, Mr. Spirit, you are speaking the truth.” My question is this: when is it ever right to do wrong?. Besides, the true question isn’t between having fun or doing good. Here is the lie of the body. There are plenty of things to do that are both fun and are not a sin, but the body wants you to do what it desires, not what is best for you.

You are in control; at least that is until you make your choice—choices that we make every day. Each choice brings you either closer or farther from God. When is it ever good to choose evil? When is it ever good in choosing a lie over truth? Remember God is truth and choosing a life other than one that is true is destined to fail. Truth always comes to light, even if it takes a while to be revealed it always returns.

But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God. (John 3:21 GNT).

Our nature is threefold, just like God is the Trinity of God the Spirit, God the Son (Body), God the Father (Soul). Jesus had a body like ours and understood the battle between the body and spirit. He always understood that the pressures and our own nature serve to corrupt us. That is why we need to practice our faith daily like he did. If you played sports, you would know that to become good enough to even play the game, you must spend time in practice. If you do not, you cannot hope to have victory over your rival. It is the same in life. If we do not practice our faith life, we lose our ability to know God. As we lose our ability to know God, we lose the ability to see the truth. If you lose the ability to see the truth, you lose wisdom. As

you lose wisdom, you become damned to death eternal, and damned to fall to every lie the world has to offer.

To understand ourselves and why faith and truth are the same is the key to knowing why we must live the Christian life. Not because someone tells us to. Not because we think it sounds like fun, but because it is the only life that makes sense. To live a lie intentionally is to blindly lead your life down rocky roads that end in destruction. Seeking faith and truth leads to wisdom, peace, strength, happiness, and contentment, and of course God.

To sum this up: God by nature is truth; we by nature have the choice to follow our natural natures or seek the higher one—one that leads to God and truth. Satan is the father of all lies and desires us to be controlled by our base instincts, which leads to chaos, corruption, and evil. I know I am repeating myself. Bear with me, as repetition helps us remember.

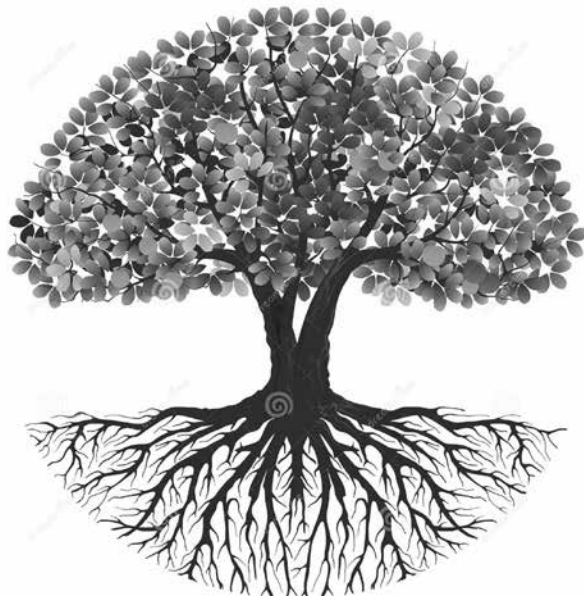
But I devoted myself to knowledge and study; I was determined to find wisdom and the answers to my questions, and to learn how wicked and foolish stupidity is. (Ecclesiastes 7:25 GNT)

So you see, we are born into Satan’s dominion; as children, we are automatically given over to our base natures without understanding truth or lie, evil or good. At some point in our lives, we become aware of these principles and must then make the choice that will rule us: good or evil, instinct or truth, life or death, God or the world. The choice is ongoing, and we grow or shrink from God by the choices we make. The choices we make form a weaving path to or away from God. It is not a matter of who is good and who is evil so much as which path you are on. We all are good at times and evil at others. We all sometimes let our natures get the best of us. If we deny this fact, we lie to ourselves.

God did not create us to be automations. He gave us free choice, so this makes us His children rather than robots. Which path do you choose? The path to truth and God, or the path to blind beastly destruction? We have choice and, with that choice, responsibility.

Beware! To those of us who seek wisdom and truth. With knowledge comes responsibility. The animal is not held accountable for his instinctual actions because he does not know better. Before the apple in the garden of Eden, we were innocent of guilt because we did not know better. Once we ate the apple of knowledge, we became aware we were naked, aware of right and wrong. We ate the curse of knowing and became responsible for our actions.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.
(Genesis 2:17 KJV)



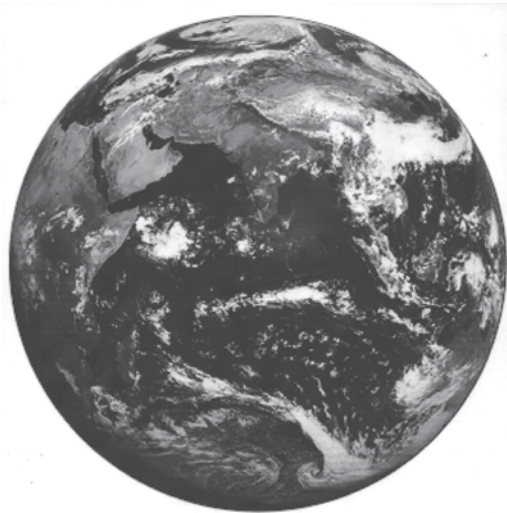
God knew we were not capable of living the truth, just as the parent knows their two-year-old will get into trouble. While we gained the knowledge of good and evil, we were not prepared to live it.

We became in the image of God, and now have the right to be His children. To do this, however, we must choose Him, wish to be

in His family, and wish to accept His truth and live it. This is why Jesus is so important, since sin is death and death must be satisfied for us to be forgiven. Jesus provides a way, but we must still choose it.

CHAPTER 3

Truth in Our Natural World



There are many physical and spiritual truths revealed through nature. You just have to examine them to come to the realization of them. For instance, God is an orderly god, one that places order and balance in all things. For every life, there is death; for every plus, there is a minus. There is evil, and there is good.

The power of God is seen in the greatness of the universe. His love for us is seen in countless ways, not to mention our very existence, which could just disappear with a stray thought from God. He still interacts with us by His Holy Spirit and His Word. He brings us up like a father his child.

We see the nature of the flesh in one another and the animals He created. His truth is written on our lives. We see both majestic beauties, and we see harsh realities, which we tend to ignore. We see how the natures of these realities work together, and we can understand the physical realities around us.

Since we can understand physical realities better than spiritual realities, God provides physical representations of spiritual realities so that we can better understand the spiritual through His physical examples. Easier put: God created things we can see and touch to help us understand that which we cannot see or touch.


Old and New Testament Scripture is full of these examples: sacrifice of an animal for sin, Abraham's son as an example of faith, a prediction of God's sacrifice of His son, the lamb's blood on the doors in Egypt, descriptions of the Holy Spirit as wind or as a river, etc.

These are just a few examples of truths found in the world used to describe spiritual realities. The makeup of the family (I structure) symbolizes the nature and structure of our holy family in heaven. We see how truth affects our lives here and how lies affect us here. It is no different in heaven. A lie is a lie; a truth is still a truth. We have feelings, joy, love, happiness, anger, grief, etc., here. Scripture tells us God feels all these things.

Can you imagine a god who feels despair with us? Our pain with us? Or Even our joys and pride in a job well done? He does this through the Holy Spirit. When we accept Christ in our hearts, He sends the Holy Spirit to indwell in us. It is said that when we cannot find the words to pray, the spirit prays in words only God can hear. I think when we are in our most desperate moments, He is there telling God we need His help. I have experienced this many times when hard times came and left me barren. Think of the "Footsteps in the Sand" poem—when we are down and hurt, we see only one set of footsteps; that is because Jesus is carrying us. We are never alone.

There is a witness to this in the world. As we are called to be the hand of God and help each other, we become the example of God's love. We as Christians are called to be His face in keeping with the law of the physical example of a spiritual truth.

Death is an example for us. It is the opposite of life. It is an ending forever, a dark place that we fear. Why do we fear nothingness? Because nothingness is devoid of love, joy, and many things we treasure in our hearts. We fear death; we can see yet cannot contemplate spiritual death? A lie on earth is a lie in heaven. It is the rejection of the truth in order to live a lie for foolish purposes. Remember to reject truth is to reject God.

Some may think of the yin and yang  of other faiths as the balance to life. It is readily evident through the world that there are two sides to the world: light and dark, positive and negative, truth and lie. God placed visible examples of these things on earth so we can understand the Spirit. Other faiths can see this too, but may interpret them differently. God made the matters of the spirit in our hearts.

I have written my word on the hearts of men.

Their conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them. (Romans 2:15 GNT)

Is it a surprise that other religions in the world can see these examples left for us in this world? I do not say that the other mainline religions are false, but rather they are examples of men reaching out to understand God. They have truths that they discovered as well as us Christians; however, the difference is that God came to us to explain who He is (Jesus). Rather than try to understand Him from the outside, Jesus came to explain God from the inside. We should celebrate our common understanding of the truth and let it draw us together, rather than rip us apart, especially the many Christian denominations. It is a shame we hurt one another and muddy God's good name.

To fight over the Holy Land is the greatest folly of all! Do we think we are winning the land for God? He already owns everything, and we are just stewards of this earth. We fight because we

want power or control over our fellow man. Human nations have fooled the religious throughout the centuries. "Do this in the name of God!" Really, look around; the God who made the universe, the planet earth, and each individual hair on your head needs our help. Examples of God is all around us, and we still fail to see.

The circle of life—as a hunter, I understand the circle of life better than most. If anything, I hold life more precious because I see how frail it is. I understand how valuable life is and how it is harder to provide life than to take it. Yet life comes from death, and God planned it this way. Life in the Spirit is even more precious because it comes from God and is eternal. What spiritual lessons can we learn from life itself?

If the soul is eternal and each life brought into the world must live at the death of something else, is this wrong? New life replacing the old and infirm? I believe we are meant to grow old and die. If we remain young and vibrant, we would never let go of this life to pursue a greater one. Our spirits go on, and we make room for the seed of new souls that spring forth from the dust we become.

We see this represented in nature. The animal grows and dies, then becomes dirt to feed the grass and the grass to feed the animals. This keeps the world young and beautiful. It teaches us all life here must fail and become something else. It is the balance that is God, and who are we to disagree? God promises us there is more. A few have been blessed to have visions of it. Most must trust in our faith. I for one have been blessed with that vision; however, even I do not think I could willingly walk away from life here without the natural push of growing old.

We are like children playing in the sandbox. Dad calls us to come in for dinner, and we say, "Another five minutes," or pretend we did not hear him call so that we can continue to play in our sandbox called the world. God is wise enough to know this and provide a way to get us to move on when called. This is a difficult truth, one that makes us want to ignore it. However, we are just on this world temporarily. We are meant for something better.

Can you love God when He calls you away from the sandbox? When you become ill and weak and no longer desire the pain of

this world? Just remember, He is not being mean to you; even Jesus Christ (who is God Himself) traveled from this world to the next in pain and suffering. It is part of the balance of this world. We cannot see it because we are not as wise as God; we must trust He will be waiting for us on the other side.

I have some small experience of God's touch. You will read about it later in this book. With that touch of God, my fear of death disappeared, for I know what is waiting for me on the other side. We often look at death as an end, but it is really a beginning—a rite of passage, a coming of age. That is if we choose to be God's children.

Another example of a spiritual truth can be found in this world: hell or separation from God. It is found in the nature of man himself. I have done ministry in the prisons—a sure example of hell on earth. The buildings are clean, the prisoners are fed, they are allowed exercise time, and more. A monk would find it quite a comfy place to live. It is the people you spend your time with that makes it hell. Try sharing a cell with a murderer or a rapist or a thief. Evil feeds of itself and others, making it hell. Imagine being locked up in a place with no light, no hope, and with those who act like I just described. No love exists there. I do not know if hell will be a fiery furnace, but that certainly describes the horror of living in a place devoid of hope. Yet rejecting the truth of God condemns us to this place. We choose to go there because we cannot bear the truth. The wicked runs from the light, for it reveals them for who they are. We run from God because of the shame of our sin. In the end, we condemn ourselves.

That evening they heard the LORD God walking in the garden, and they hid from him among the trees. But the LORD God called out to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden; I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked." (Genesis 3:8–10 GNT)



Adam and Eve hid from God because of their sin, and you, too, could not bear to have your sin revealed before God and the light of truth. If you cannot find forgiveness from God, you must cast yourself out of His presence to a place void of love, kindness, and truth—to a place where all evil men exist instead. I call that hell.

CHAPTER 4

Truth Healing and Forgiveness

Truth is not often thought of as a healing salve. It also is not thought of as the path to forgiveness, yet without truth, there can be no healing or forgiveness. Many people who have been through drug rehab or AA know that they have a method to free them from their addictions. One of the first steps one *has to* make is to recognize the truth that they are an addict. Without recognizing this simple truth, they can never start on the path of healing. How can you stop doing something that is bad when you do not accept that it is wrong? You cannot. Until you come face-to-face with the painful truths that hold you bound.

Sin is an action that we take that causes harm to either ourselves or to another person. It is not simply breaking a rule of a distant God, but rather a harmful act that can cause limitless hurt to those around us, both physical hurt and emotional trauma—not to mention the spiritual damage to our relationship with God. Sin also blinds us to what we are doing so that we continue doing it. As such, it enslaves us with the desires to do whatever the sin we are committing. Have you ever known anyone in the midst of sin recognize it as wrong? Or if they do, do they try to justify it with a lie? It is so common that we do this that it is not even recognized for what it is: a lie.

People who do drugs try to believe the lie that it is not addictive, despite all the studies to the contrary. People who are overweight often justify eating bad things by saying “Just one will not hurt” or some other excuse to allow them to do the very thing they know they shouldn’t. (I know because I have been there.) There are people who

lie to themselves in order to do these things, who start believing their own lies.

We are all guilty of these things. The truth hurts, don’t it? I feel its sting even as *I* write this chapter. I am not spared the torment of sin or its effect. Welcome to the club; we are all human and fallible. So understand the power of sin lies in its ability to trick us into remaining in it, thus it enslaves us. It is important to understand what it does, so we can escape it.

Truth is the way to escape the trap that sin sets. Once the blinders are removed and you can see things as they really are, you are able to be freed from the bondage that controls you. As the Bible says, “Seek the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall
make you free. (John 8:32 KJV)

God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, helps reveal these truths to us, often through the Bible or other Spirit-filled people. The Holy Spirit often convicts us of our sins—that is, reveals our sins to us. That way we can deal with them. It is a painful process, but without it, we will never recover from our blindness. We will never heal and will even cause more damage to others and ourselves.

Once we have the sin revealed by the Holy Spirit, we find the road to recovery by following the truth, accepting our guilt, seeking the proper path, and asking God to help us to take it. Sometimes the healing is fast; sometimes the healing is slower. Once you find the path of truth, it *will* lead you to freedom, but we must first want the freedom.

Many people are afraid of this change of heart. They are afraid to change or are attached to the sin they commit. God does not force His will on you. He reveals the truth and lets you choose freely what you want. As you see the truth, however, you yourself will desire the change.

This is commonly how the Spirit of God works. That is why it is said, “We change by God’s power and not our own.” We, by ourselves, could never overcome sin because we become blinded to

it, controlled by it, and ruined by it. We need the power of God to reveal the truth and allow ourselves to be seen in the light. This revelation gives us the power to overthrow the power of sin.

Do not think that truth is weak and powerless. It has overthrown nations and kingdoms, humbled kings and presidents, and helped change the hearts of billions of people throughout the ages. All men fear the truth to some extent because it means revealing our true selves—the sin, the failures, the ugliness, but also the good. We cannot get past the sin, failures, and ugliness alone. That is why God sent His Son.

No one will ever be holy and perfect on their own, to live from birth till death sinless, to make no mistakes, fail no one, lie, cheat, or any other sinful act. In reality, most of us sin almost daily. We look at people like the Dalai Lama or Mother Teresa or the saints and think they did not sin. No way! In fact, they would be the last to say they were sinless. In fact, the closer to God and holiness you get, the more your sins are revealed. The holier you are, the more truth you see and the more scarlet are your sins.

Do not let fear of your sin being revealed stop you from pursuing it, approaching the truth despite the painfulness of it. It is a grace that teaches us how to avoid trouble and to walk the road to holiness. It allows us to lose our desire for sinful acts. What we thought we could never give up becomes abhorrent to our minds and hearts.

Teachers, pastors, and priests, be aware that the less people confess, the more likely the sin that is in their lives remains hidden. The more okay they think they are, the sicker they could be. We all harbor vast mounds of sinful acts—those we are aware of and those we are not. This sin ravages our insides and blinds us to future sin. A person builds a wall of sin one block at a time. The wall is hard to tear down until it is revealed. Truth is the key to this revelation of self. God and truth are one in the Spirit.

Truth is the last and final judgment of God. It finds us either innocent or guilty. This is the measuring stick that God uses to judge our actions on earth. There is only one measuring stick more powerful than truth, however, and that is God's mercy. No one could possibly bear the power of truth, nor could we be found guiltless

before it's measurement. That is why Jesus came. He is the symbol of God's mercy.

Before, we have talked about seeing the truth so we can be healed and to see the truth to know we need healing. Now I would like to show you how this healing takes place. This healing comes through forgiveness by the power of Jesus the Christ—by a selfless act of kindness, an act of love, which is mercy defined. I will explain this further.

In Christianity, the way to forgiveness is to recognize God's authority, confession of your sins, and repentance. In other words, humbly recognizing Jesus as your Lord and Savior, recognizing the sins in your life (revealed by truth), and recognizing that the sin is bad and wishing to change, and to follow the teachings of Christ Jesus.

Once the Holy Spirit has convicted you of your sin, you recognize the need for forgiveness. Conviction alone leads to hopelessness. You find yourself in a place where you cannot face God (or the truth). It's too awful to face, and you run from God just as Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden. It was sin that separated them from God. Their guilt, their pain, and their fear drove them out of Eden. In the end, they could not face the truth. God does not keep us from Him; we keep ourselves from Him. We cannot bear the truth of the acts we have done or failed to do. The sin also will prevent our entry into heaven because if we cannot bear it here on earth, how would we be able to exist in God's presence in heaven?

This guilt, pain, and fear churns within us and creates emotional turmoil, physical illness, and mental illness. It creates hatred, anger, lies, and self-destructive behavior, as well as a host of other sinful acts and attitudes. For each sinful act we commit, we place another block on the wall between God and us. Eventually, the wall will become too large to see around, separating us fully from all hope.

The Holy Spirit reveals the nature of our sins, and Jesus provides a way to be forgiven. He provides a way to break down this wall between us and God. He gives us a way to be forgiven by God and a way to forgive ourselves. He also gives us a way to forgive others.

So much damage is caused by the sin in our lives and the unforgiveness of others. Each build upon the other. Many psychiatric problems are sin-related or forgiveness-related.

Jesus came to do at least three things: reveal who God the Father is, die for our sins, and be an example to us as to how we should act as children of God. His death upon the cross means we can enter heaven because of His act and not our actions. The penalty for sin was death, and His death fulfilled the law of truth, the law set down by God himself. Like a worldly king, even God must keep His own laws, or the laws become meaningless. When Adam sinned and caused death to become a part of our natures, God could not, all of a sudden, change His mind because He liked Adam. The law had to be fulfilled. Blood is the symbol of life, and the letting of blood was the fulfillment of death. So in preparation for the gift of His Son, He taught the Jews to sacrifice animals as a preview of what was to come: to sacrifice a spotless ram or bull—not the runt of the herd, but the best—the most spotless and innocent to take away our sins, and to die to fulfill the law. Abraham was told to sacrifice his son, yet God held back his hand from striking down his son. God said that He would provide the sacrifice—a sacrifice for all time, forward and back.

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

(1 Peter 19 KJV)

No man could enter heaven before Christ, for no man could remain sinless their whole life, even from birth. Now with the sacrifice of Jesus, we do not have to be perfect. We have a way to be forgiven, to seek the kingdom by following the teachings of God. Be aware, however, just saying you believe in Christ is not enough; you have to live the life to the best of your ability. The truth teaches us

that you cannot say one thing and believe another. You may be able to fool people, but you cannot fool God, who is truth.

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. (John 18:37 KJV)



Jesus came into the world to reveal the truth we failed to notice, a truth that was building since man bit of the fruit. God did all these things in the Old Testament to prepare us for the truth to come (Jesus Christ) who would not end the Old Testament, but fulfill it. The Old Testament taught us sin causes death, the law taught us what sin was. The sacrifices of the Jews for sin taught us what must happen to fulfill the law and that death (the blood of the Lamb) is poured out for the forgiveness of sin. The law taught us no one alive can remain sinless, and Jesus, the blood of the spotless Lamb, died for us to save us from that sin.

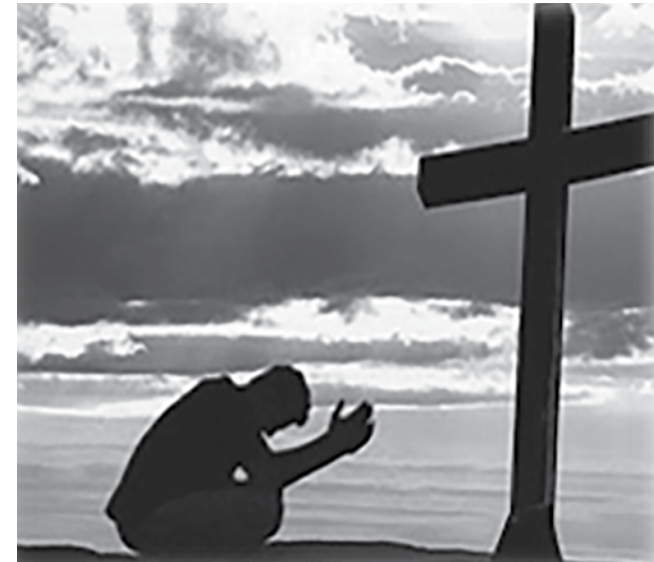
God, who created the heavens and the earth and created the rules that allow it to function, could not change the rules after the

fact. Like a good king, He obeyed even His own law. Instead, He provided a part of Himself in His Son as a sacrifice to save us from eternal separation from Him. He loves us so much.

Satan can neither understand that sort of love nor abide by it. Instead, he is the great accuser, denying our worthiness to stand with the angels. In the end, he will be stuck with all those he accuses in that void called hell.

CHAPTER 5

Sin and Confession



To the world, we are the church, the organization of guilt and sin! I personally can give witness to this attitude. I would walk among those who knew me and my association with God, and I would find them hiding pornography when I walked in the room. I never told them to do it. I never chastised them for looking at it, yet they felt that guilt and shame anyway. It was not I who caused them to react this way, but the Spirit of God. Many times, I have been verbally accosted by unbelievers just because they knew I believed. They felt that keen pain of guilt without me pointing the finger at them.

For those who believe and have experienced this, be encouraged and watch the hand of God move! Conviction is the realm of the Spirit, not our job to point the finger. The Spirit is a sharp sword that pierces the heart far deeper than we ever could. Witness your faith with kindness and love, and the Spirit will do the rest.

In truth, when confronted by an agitated person under conviction, show love, kindness, and patience. I have had this happen many times. People throw pointed questions in an attempt to trip me up, just like the Pharisees questioned Jesus. Be honest, kind, and keep your temper, as they will surely test this as well. Your job is to help them, not correct them. It is the job of the Spirit to correct them.

We represent the church and our God, so we will always be under scrutiny. To them, we represent guilt, pain, suffering, and shame. It is our job not to point it out and make it worse, but to show kindness, offer our help, and speak of the hope we have in Jesus.

Sometimes, the fallen Christian may feel this way as well. Again, we are to help them and guide them with a loving heart. Speak with them in our weakness so they know we are not better than they are, because we are not.

As you grow closer to God, you see more of your sins—sins you never thought of as sins, sins of ignoring something you should have helped with, or little white lies, etc. We may think seeing more sin proves the guilt mongers, right? Not at all. As we progress in the grace of God, we draw farther from committing something we will really regret. We become safer in our faith and develop a new set of gifts from God. We understand a new safety in the love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

Sin is like a weighty chain that weighs us down. As you build it link by link, it becomes unbearable. It shades your thinking and changes the direction of your life. Not unlike the ghost of Marley from *A Christmas Carol*. As you sin more, you become blinded to lesser sins. White lies no longer register as you blatantly lie for your own good or to hurt someone else. Eventually, murder becomes acceptable or stealing or other sins. This is a hardbound truth. No one can escape it by themselves.

Here enters Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Once we become blinded to our sins, we become hopeless to save ourselves. We cannot even see the sins we commit ourselves and lie to ourselves to justify our actions. We need the conviction of the Holy Spirit to remind us of our actions. Never fear the conviction of the Spirit because it helps us track. Instead, we should fear becoming too comfortable in our lives. How many sins have we grown to accustomed to notice?

Guilt is good as it helps us know when we are falling away from God. Desire is another important emotion to pay attention to. Do you desire to know God better?

Fuel for Thought

Many who call themselves Christians have done this. Have taken Christ out of their lives and made it something to be done once a week. Another chore to do like doing the laundry.

It is a rare thing that someone outright rejects God. Mostly because the fear that God may be real and of the possibility of punishment. It is common, however, to reject God by rejecting His teachings or rejecting to live the life He asks of us.

As Christians, we should desire to spend time with God just like you would with family or your husband or wife. Note that you should also want to spend time with family and spouse. If not, seek God as well. God is the filter we need to know when we are failing in the love department. It is why the first commandment is first; if you know not God, you cannot not know true love.

Sin is like a wall we build brick by brick. It separates us from communication with God. Build it high and thick enough, and you are lost. You will feel nothing—no guilt, no pain, no hope, no understanding of sin, no wisdom, no love, no joy, and eventually, no life. Once separated from God on earth, we are capable of horrendous acts of evil and selfish behavior. We can hurt others without restraint.

Death and destruction will follow us wherever we go, and we can hurt the ones we care about even without being aware.

If you stay in this condition till you die, hell is the place you build yourself, cut off from love, hope, truth, joy, and God Himself. Picture a world devoid of hope, with no joy, but plenty of sorrow, plenty of guilt that you can no longer hide from or lie to yourself about. Imagine a place with billions of souls suffering the same way, hurting one another and trying to find something that will offer them peace, but not finding it. I do not believe that God condemns people to hell; I believe we condemn ourselves. We cannot bear the presence of God because we see our sins and cannot live with them. We prefer the darkness to the light to try and hide our sins, but they can never be hidden in this fashion. Jesus died for our sins to wash them away, but we have to choose Him. We have to ask for forgiveness and forgive ourselves. We have to want to be a child of God, to be in His family so as to be judged as a child and not with justice.

I do not say these things to cause fear, but to speak the truth. We cannot escape our own justice unless we seek God. I cannot explain the how of Jesus's sacrifice here, as it would be a study in itself. Death must pay for sin, and Jesus paid the bill for us.

When I first came to be close to God, I had an experience with the Holy Spirit like no other. The Spirit of God descended upon this tough kid and peeled away the outer layer of sin like a banana. As my sin was forgiven, my soul felt lighter than I ever felt before. I experienced a joy, a love that is indescribable. I remember it clearly forty years later. I have felt this after confessing my sins, but not quite as fully. The greater the sin, the greater the relief! It is about grace and goodness, not about sin and shame.

Whether you resent the conviction of the Spirit or the guilt you feel from the church, there is no escaping the reality of what sin does to you. You become a walking cripple emotionally. You will carry the sin and guilt whether I say so or not. Sin exists despite God's will for you. It is part of your free will. It is part of your nature, like it or not. God offers you a way out—a way for forgiveness, a way for relief from the chains that weigh each of us down, and a way for peace within oneself here on earth as well as eternity.

There is a catch, however. You must mean it. You must be sorry, not because you got caught, but because of the harm you did. You must not want to do it ever again. You may sin again, but not because you will it (e.g., a person could lust after a girl, ask for forgiveness, and later in life find himself lusting again, but never intended to fall again). He can seek forgiveness again. In another example, a thief asks forgiveness for stealing, knowing tonight he plans on doing it again—this man will not get forgiveness as he is making a mockery of God's forgiveness.

This brings us to confession and why we need to confess our sins to a priest or other holy man. People can fool themselves by lying to himself or others about his actions. Confessing to a trained priest can offer the person advice and help them make a good confession. To understand what it means to give a good confession, it is also helping the person forgive himself of his part of the sin. If you use a priest who is ordained for that mission, he is also forbidden by vow to share the confession with anybody.

Sin is a condition that needs three types of forgiveness: forgiveness by God, forgiveness by the person hurt, and forgiveness by oneself for committing the act.

We need God's forgiveness because any act of evil is an act directly against Him. While we cannot damage God, He feels for His children through the Holy Spirit. He feels our emotional hurt and grieves for us. We need our sins forgiven to keep our relationship right with God.

While it is better to be forgiven by the person you sinned against, it will not keep you from heaven. Forgiveness can heal the breach between you and the person you hurt. This healing helps the victim move on and stop hurting. When a person has been sinned against, it takes away their trust, their joy, and their peace; and only through forgiveness can these things be restored. Lack of forgiveness can be their sin as well, blinding them from their own happiness.

Finally, some who commit the sin must put it behind them for a full conversion. Guilt, pain, shame, and suffering can be a cause a wall between you and God. You have to believe that you can be forgiven to allow the free flow of grace from God. I have personally

experienced this where I was failing to forgive myself and had to be woken up by God to release my sin. I have also seen it in the prisons when I witnessed to the prisoners.

Sin can be a horror that we cannot face alone. Sometimes we need the aid of a fellow Christian to bring it out to full forgiveness.

Confession is about the release from the prison of guilt and death. It is something we should be eager to do. It is a joy and a release of our spirits from the prison of Satan. Satan is the accuser, the angel who points out man's every flaw. God does not care to see us this way. He sees His children in trouble and wants to save them. Our own free will gets in the way. If we believe Satan, our sins are unforgivable; if we are children of God, we know we may be punished, but it is done out of love and care for us, and we can be forgiven our childlike mistakes.

This brings us back to Genesis. Adam and Eve hid from God out of guilt and shame, but God called after them, wanting to love them. Satan pointed out our failings then and has accused us throughout history, but God still loves us. When you feel unforgivable, remember this message. Satan is the great accuser, pointing out our every flaw and claiming we are unworthy to ascend to heaven. It is his voice that makes you think you are unworthy. It is his voice that makes you look at fellow Christians and say "Look what he is doing!" instead of focusing on your interior castle.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of conscience, the battle fought within yourself. You cannot control the actions of another, but you can train your body and spirit to focus on God. You will not be perfect. You will sin, just as Satan likes to point out. Satan focuses on the sin we do and judges us on it. God the Father looks at His little children with compassion and love. He sees our brokenness and helplessness against sin and chooses to forgive us and attempts to instruct us to a better way.

He sees His children lost in a sea of emotions, desires, and temptation—too inexperienced to fend off the attacks of the evil one, too inexperienced and naive to choose with wisdom. We are like babies in a crib, playing with the dangly, colorful toys hanging above us, not knowing the dangers around us.

Do we slap a child for stumbling out of their crib and crying because falling hurts, or do we hug the child to us, cooing and comforting the child till the pain goes away? This is the difference between the way God and Satan sees us. To God, we are crying children needing comfort; to Satan, we are noisy pests who interrupts his quiet time—who dares to disturb his life? He accuses us as unworthy.

We can reject this loving, comforting God. We can choose to live with a wall of sin between us and Him—a wall of our own building, one that isolates us from his love. When we put up walls even to the people around us, we are isolated and alone. Here is a worldly example of a spiritual truth. You can see and feel the isolation from other people. The same rules apply to our relationship to God. God is always found inside our hearts. When we harden our hearts to protect ourselves from harm, we also lock out the healing power of God.

Confessing our sins, however you choose to do it, gives us back our hearts, allowing the healing to begin. Christianity is not about guilt and sin. That already exists without Christianity. Christianity provides a way to break free from the prison that sin and guilt build, a way to soften our hearts so that true healing can begin. Our faith is the hope when all hope is extinguished. It is a way to start again, free from the burden.

Here are the lies of the world meant to keep us prisoner to the darkness:

1. Your sin is too great to be forgiven.
2. You are not worthy of God.
3. God cannot be known.
4. God is somewhere far off and does not care.
5. Truth and faith are opposite principles.
6. Science will disprove faith.
7. Faith is some form of delusion.

And the list goes on.



The truth is this:

1. No sin is too great to be forgiven.
2. God already loves us despite our failings.
3. God is found within each person; we only need desire to know him.
4. God does care and holds His arms out to us all day long.
5. Truth and faith are the same thing. As you seek the truth, you will find God.
6. Science is man's limited knowledge against God's timeless knowledge. Who knows the universe better—the speck of a creature who is in it or the one who made it happen?

7. Delusion? Men suffer the same delusion across a world, across thousands of years and billions of lives. In court, the testimony of one can convict a man; what would a billion do?

I digress a bit. We are talking about confession and sin in this chapter. To sum it up, we as humans build up walls of sin in our lives. As we do so, we become more isolated from God and one another. The wall is so big nothing can get through. Not even hope. Confession allows us the chance to break down these walls so we can know God, become free, and restore hope and love in our lives. This is known as being broken, and out of this brokenness, we rediscover our hearts and can feel again. Once this occurs, you can find forgiveness and the power of God. You can experience Him, receive His grace, and have hope now and in the end of life—which is a beginning. The world says confession is about guilt and condemnation. God says it is about hope, love, and freedom. This is a worthy contemplation.

CHAPTER 6

Wisdom and Truth

What is wisdom but the ability to recognize truth and live it. You can have a great amount of knowledge, like a living encyclopedia, yet not be able to tie your shoes. We each are given gifts that we do better at, and some things we just cannot do well. God has always balanced these things so we do not think too much of ourselves. He also grants different gifts to different people to force us to work together in harmony with His creation.

Knowledge can be a great thing, but to know how to use that knowledge is better still. You use knowledge to understand the physical properties of the world. Chemistry, physics, geography, and geology are some of the sciences that describe our world. They help to teach us the rules of how things work and how they were created. Since God made all things, He made the how and the why we have these rules. Much of discovery is in between actual knowledge and the wisdom of how to apply it.

Scientists sometime stumble over the facts as if that is the beginning and the end. They find something measurable, measure it, and decide that that is all there is to know. Their vision is limited to what is visible and measurable and deny that anything can exist outside the measuring stick.

Science once believed man could not travel faster than sound, then they claimed nothing was faster than light. This, too, was disproven. We thought the atom was the smallest particle until we found particles even smaller. We seem unable to understand the concept of infinitely small and infinitely large. Science is limited to our present knowledge and capabilities.

Concepts of space, time, dimensions, and other unknown, unmeasurable realities cannot be just denied because they are outside our yardstick. To think this way can be a violation of the scientific code and certainly the code of philosophy thought.

Wisdom is the ability to read between the lines and find new ways of discovery. Some men of science have trouble with this, and that is why they cannot make sense of the Bible. They read to love one's enemy and consider it crazy on the surface, but they never read into the in-between, where making an enemy your friend is far better than having to watch your back all the time.

The giver of wisdom is the Holy Spirit. You cannot hope to understand the wisdom of the Bible apart from His help. Jesus spoke in parables so that we can use the Holy Spirit to help us understand the message/messages. I say messages—plural—because I have found sixteen messages in the “Lost Son” parable alone. One parable, many messages. Most of Christianity's teachings exist within that one parable.

Just like the “Our Father,” which is loaded with lessons and is almost the perfect prayer, the Holy Spirit opens up the Bible in a perfect way that leads one to be amazed and awed by the lesson learned. There have been times when I sought the Bible to help me solve a problem, find it, then many years later, have a different type of problem, view the same verse, and have that problem solved too.

That is why the Word is referred to as a living Word. It is not a text of past ages; it is not a history lesson, but rather a series of books that, when read with the Spirit, opens a road map to life today. I often relate it to a user's manual for living your life to its fullest, yet it is more than that. This book is a guide to life, a guide to understanding your relationship with God, a guide to understanding heaven and the world around us. This is why wisdom is the seeking of the Word, the single greatest goal to achieve, for when you master wisdom, it reflects on all you do and everyone you meet.

I am a bit harsh with science. Not all scientists disregard the wisdom of the Bible, yet it is harder for those who pursue science in a pure manner to see beyond the visible facts. It would be a sad state of affairs if all science failed to see that we still do not know it all.

That would be the end of discovery. The denial of the unknown may be comforting yet is the greatest failure of all. The true meaning of science is to explore that which we do not know so that we can.

I speak of science because it is one part of the truth. It is the truth of our reality, as proven through scientific law. I do not see a problem between faith and science. The two should meet. When all truths are known, I expect them to work side by side. When they are opposing one group or another, someone is missing some of the facts.

For example, the world being round! God never said the world was flat. Men did. Scientists, studying the world as God wants us to, proved the facts out—not disproving God, but man’s interpretation of our own world. If science proves the existence of ET, it does not disprove the Bible either, as God never spoke about them! Like the scientist, we cannot assume because God did not mention them, he did not create them somewhere else. It just was not important to our story, and we would not be smart enough to understand it back then. We would more likely think they were gods and confuse the issue.

It is like the big bang theory, even if we proved they were right. How can we know God did not just will the big bang into existence? If it were true, and God created the universe, he would have to have existed outside of it to create it. Different plane of existence or the like.

Looking at the Bible in this manner is an error in the first place. The real purpose of the Bible is to help us understand ourselves and our relationship to God. Wisdom is the act of seeking to know God through His Word and through His heart. Wisdom helps us know what to do with all this knowledge.

There is a reason that the first commandment is to love your God with all your heart and all your mind. Obeying this commandment opens our hearts to allow the Holy Spirit in. It is the perfect security measure to ensure that the person seeking wisdom does not use it for evil. You must be in love, and by loving, you must act in accordance with His Spirit. This is why it is said that to the unbeliever, the Word is nonsense, and to the faithful, a guide.

There is far more reason to love God than to receive wisdom; however, it is with certainty that God denies the wicked to protect

the innocent. The whole act of sin is folly. God gives us to our foolishness and denies our desire for wisdom as the punishment for our crimes. All it takes is a desire to love, honor, and cherish God. That is to love, honor, and cherish life. To know and love God is to truly know what real love is. You cannot love yourself or love others truly unless you love God first, who is love itself.

Faith, truth, and wisdom are different facets of the same thing. Wisdom guides us to the truth. Faith helps us reach out for the truth. God is all truth. He is it. He created it. He calls us to it. Since He created all things, He created how they work, what they look like, what they are made of, and what is the best way to use them. He created the truth of all creation.

If you want wisdom, especially to understand the living Word, you must bend the knee to God. He hides the truth from those who wish to do evil, from those who want to use it selfishly. It is for the protection of all. If you wish to honor God and get to know Him, all you need do is ask. God is a gentleman. He will not force His will on you, but you must invite Him first.

It is a lifelong journey. You must trust God to feed you wisdom when you need it most. I have seen this happen countless times—finding answers in the Bible just when they could help me most. The Holy Spirit opens the Word to you as you need it. Think of it as God whispering in your ear, because that is exactly what it is.

I will tell you a secret. You have as much God in you as you desire. You control the depth of your faith. If you want to know more, you must seek it out. The secret to seeking is prayer, song, and reading the Bible. The more you read, the greater the revelation. There is another key part: To bend the knee. To internally open your heart to hear His message. This is no easy thing. You must prostrate your heart, lay it all before God, and trust Him with it. Some people must be broken inside to release their hearts to God. Sin is a major block to the relationship to God; this is why confession is so important. It is not God who blocks us, but we who block Him. Taking these steps does not mean you have to be a priest or nun—those are unique callings—rather opening your heart to God allows the action of the Holy Spirit to help you.

For me, I use song as a meditation. I meditate on God, prayer, and Bible study to enter in that state that allows deeper communication with the Spirit. By doing so, I receive wisdom from the Spirit to interpret the Bible, to receive grace from God, and to use this as a filter for my choices in life. Some days my heart is nearly leaping for joy from the presence of His grace.

I have often said, “Faith is about the depth.” Each of us descends to a different level in our faith, but God calls us to go as deep as we dare in order for our faith to be real. We have the power to open the door to God; however, God controls the gifts and the grace we are asking for. If you take the time, open your heart and love God. Everyone can achieve these experiences. Remember, you yourself control the depth. We deny ourselves the greater benefits that God freely renders.

Wisdom is the desire to know God more and attempt to delve into the depths of His love. Once you have done this, wisdom becomes a part of you. It is to a great benefit, but to seek it only for that is a weak use of the gift. By loving and seeking God’s Spirit, all other things come naturally.

Wisdom is recognizing the truth of God and the world He has made. We have become wise. When I received the Spirit of God, it was like the blinders taken off. I see the world, not only from my perspective, but of others as well. I have seen men sin from a grievous heart and know their suffering. I can see how the Holy Spirit grieves with our spirits as we grieve, feeling the losses as we feel them. Understand, sometimes seeing the truth can be painful, but knowing the Spirit is with us, suffering with us, can be a font of hope that God will be with us through it all.

There is no wisdom without truth and no truth without wisdom; because of this, faith is interlocked with God. Without God, what is truth?

What more can I say about wisdom? It touches all parts of life. It helps you judge truth from lie. It helps you separate facts from fiction. It helps you choose good from evil. It helps you understand relationships and provides common sense. It touches every decision you will ever make. Only a fool would intentionally choose not to

have it. Here is the danger: those who reject God and the faith are already condemned by wisdom itself.

Truth and wisdom run hand in hand. Rejection of the facts of life do not change them. Facts are facts, and truth are truth. Sometimes we fail to see it or reject it because it does not fit in our plans, but ultimately, truth always wins. It is written that God withdraws wisdom from the foolish and hands them over to their fate. In other words, a man may argue that when standing in the rain, he will not get wet. However, you cannot argue with the nature of rain—you will get wet unless you have an umbrella!

Wisdom is accepting the established facts and making wise choices because of them. It affects every part of your life, why would you choose to ignore it?

Granted, wisdom can sometimes be hard to see. That is why we need the Holy Spirit to direct us. That is why the Holy Bible is foolishness to some and greatest wisdom to others. Again, if God granted wisdom to the evil man, he would try to use it to cause harm, so God makes fools of those with evil hearts. The desire to ignore truth and seek to cause harm is already foolishness. God could never encourage it.

True wisdom is the ability to see truth, act on it, and use it to build a better world. Anything less would be foolishness. The act of humbleness is an act of wisdom because it is wisdom to recognize we do not understand everything in the world, that there are truths beyond our grasp, and to give glory to the Lord who created them all.

CHAPTER 7

Truth and the Church

Truth can be an evasive thing; while many people believe they have the truth, we still trip up over how we perceive them. Two men witnessing an accident may both report differences in the facts as they see them and still be both truthful and accurate, without their testimonies being exactly the same.

For instance, the two men may have witnessed the accident from different angles or one recalls more than the other man or how they understood what they witnessed may be different. Say an atheist would see science at work, and a faithful man, a miracle of God.

Does this mean there is no truth? No! It means that our understanding of it is limited and imperfect. It is not a problem with God, but our understanding of Him. Calvin claims that man has no choice and that we are predestined to salvation or not, while Catholicism teaches each man has free will and we must choose God to become saved. Cannot both be true?

In God's perspective, He knows the future and the past. It is all part of eternity. Since God exists outside of time, He knows everything and how it plays out. Although He knows what we will pick, He does not have a hand in making us do it. Thus, Calvin was right from God's perspective.

We, on the other hand, exist in time, and we do not know what is to happen in the future. We have no clue what we are going to choose for our next meal, never mind if someday we shall choose to become a child of God or not. We neither know the events surrounding our choices nor what compels us to choose one way or another.

Which way is true? They both can be at the same time. While we are only privileged to see one side of the truth, it does not mean there cannot be more to it. Here is another way to view it. I learned this from the saint's visions. All people who have had visions or other holy events tend to see them as they can understand them. They are like a living parable. The fires of hell are a symbol of the horror of existing in it. Not necessarily a physical representation, or rather, it is a physical representation of a spiritual truth. Most people can relate to the horror of being on fire and the real suffering it portrays.

God, in His great wisdom, sees all truths at once. That is why we can trust in His judgment. We are limited in our ability to see it all. This is the secret to God's ability to forgive us. He can see the why behind our actions. The drug user, desperate to feed his cravings, even stealing from his own family because of the pain and suffering for his next fix—God sees his pain as clear as day.

Our own sins stand blaring before God. There is no hiding them nor the feelings that caused us to sin in the first place. He knows this, as He created us in a manner that is imperfect, with the intention of allowing us to grow.

How does understanding our limitations help us to see the truth better?

It should help us to be tolerant of one another, our differences, our sinfulness, as well as our understanding of our Father in heaven. It should teach us to not respond with anger when someone gets in our face for no reason. He or she may have had something bad happen that we are unaware of and showing love will help them recover and stop the flow of sin from spreading.

It should help us forgive those who are in personal torment and act out against us in their pain. It is easier to forgive others when you can understand their perspective. When you come closer to God, you start to see a bigger picture than just your view. Many a man has been murdered by those who only care about their own view.

In fact, the world itself is in a crisis right now about only accepting the self-view. We see it in politics, world affairs, even in the home. God does not see the world as we mortal men do. Even the churches of the world can be guilty of this.

It was once said, “If Satan cannot get you to fall by making you sin, he will make you stumble over being self-righteous.” In other words, “I am better than he is” by going to church more often or the “my church is better than yours” mentality.

We all fall short, even the churches. We are the bride of Christ, not God Himself. That is why our faith is in Him and not this church or that church. We tend to gravitate to the church that brings meaning and a closer relationship to God. I have seen people jump from church to church trying to find God when God exists within us if we want Him. You will never find a perfect church because it is run by men. Some may be better than others, but the perfect church is nonexistent. It is like the grass is greener on the neighbor’s lawn. In the end, the true church is belief in Christ Himself—a kingdom of conscience within us. The physical church on earth is our way to share our faith and do good works together.

I do not say this to cause you to lose your faith in any church. Your faith should be in God, and you work in the church to help others. It is just true that men get caught up in the local politics and scandals that will always be a threat, as the church is made up of imperfect man. We expect more from our teachers and pastors, yet they are not worthy of the pedestal we put them on, and that is our fault. Any good pastor will say not to think him perfect and without fault. Yet we do it anyways. It is God who is without fault.

What is religion? I believe religion is man’s attempt to understand God. We want to understand the world we live in and have planted in us, an understanding that there is something more than just the physical world. We as humans have enough difficulty understanding the physical world, never mind the laws outside of nature. We see glimpses into this spiritual world, hear stories of people interacting with beings beyond our touch and understanding, so we try to piece these events together and form a belief system.

Men in different places in the world, in different cultures and ways of thought, we each see these things happen and witness them. Is it any wonder, like the men who had differing stories about the accident they witnessed, that we would have some differences in our understanding of God? Could some have misunderstood the events

and worshipped false gods? Could some have worshipped the angels by accident? Could some have had similar events as ours, yet understood them differently than we do? As you can see, this can be a slippery slope.

We must not bluntly declare our faith right and everyone else as wrong because you throw out the truth with the misconception. All the mainline churches accept some basic truths. We worship truth, life, goodness, and a future life, whether reincarnation or a form of heaven. So to declare any religion false and worthless would be telling these people the truths they are sure about to be false. This, of course, will shut off their willingness to listen further. It would be like telling a Christian that murder is good, which we would have serious problem with and would probably end the conversation.

I am not prepared to say Allah is not a different representation of the same god. Seen from a different perspective, a different culture, and the differences between our beliefs are the fault of man’s view, not God’s. Buddha may not be a different god either, but a different view of the same god limited by man. All the faiths before Christianity was driven by prophets of some kind and thus man’s interpretation.

To me, Jesus the Christ is God coming to us to better explain who He is—God Himself teaching us about the unknowable. Instead of the different religions putting one another down, like opposing salesmen, we build on the truth and grow together through it. First, we have to learn to respect one another and the truths we hold dear and build on them to learn more. God is truth, and any seeking of the truth will guide us to Him.

In this, science and faith are on the same mission. The only difference is that science stops at what we can see and measure, and philosophy and faith accept the reality of the possibility of something more. Really, it is a sad breaking of their own rules for science to disregard the unknown, as all the known to science was once unknown. Gravity existed long before it’s discovery.

Do I believe all religions are valid? No. Some religion’s worship the senses like sex, power, war, and other depravities. Some supposed religions worship the creature or the angel rather than God Himself.

Some cults try to hide behind a religious status, but the telling reality is always truth. Do they teach it or against it? Satan is the father of all lies.

No matter what others believe, we are called to respect it and find our commonalities. We also must share our known truths freely, willingly, and without condemnation. Our Father in heaven is a creator (builder), and so should we be. When Paul was before Agrippa and the Greeks, he did not put down their gods, but rather he spoke of a better god who was called the unknown God.

For as I walked through your city and looked at the places where you worship, I found an altar on which is written, “To an Unknown God.” That which you worship, then, even though you do not know it, is what I now proclaim to you. God, who made the world and everything in it, is Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands. (Acts 17:23–24 GNT)

I cannot speak intelligently enough about other faiths, like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Muslims, as I never was one. I will spend some time discussing the Christian churches, as God sent me among them to learn why we have differences.

First, understand that God is one God and is the God of truth, so He never changes. The division is not that God is different. It is about us. It is always about us. It is about what we can accept as truth and what is too much for us to accept. We tend to gravitate to those with like minds and like beliefs. This is not a Christian thing but a human thing. People immigrating from a foreign land will live together because of their natural fear and comfort levels.

Some are drawn by worship types like music or how we view scripture. Some by how rules are perceived or are offended by something. Others just feel more comfortable in one church or another.

Understand that all these are limits to our ability to understand God. I believe God allows us to come to Him wherever we are and will allow His grace to flow if we choose Him. If you're called to

praise God with upraised hands and shouts of joy great, if you prefer being humble and worship with quiet music and reverent behavior—great! It is not in the how but in the desire too!

My advice about finding a church is to seek the truth; it is a lifetime journey. I was born in the Catholic church; I was reborn in the Catholic church, and I understand and see the truth here. I also see weakness and imperfection, but we are the bride and not the groom. We are human and not God. There is imperfection in all the churches, as well as things they do better than the others. Pentecostals tend to do better with the gifts of the Spirit; Baptists are better at Bible study, etc. I find the Catholic church has it all but is big and hard to make change. Like I said, each has good and bad, just like people. God loves us as an individual.

It is a black splotch on anyone who harms another over religion. Really, God asks us to share the truth. The rest is His job.

CHAPTER 8

The Freedom to Choose Truth

One of the most important and dynamic part of our faith is we get to freely choose truth. While some governments force their citizen to live a certain way, even some religions force worship upon the people. I believe this is an error. Christianity has, in the past, allowed governments to declare their states Christian states and forced the beliefs on others. While this may bring large numbers of converts, I question the quality of the converted.

God does not need us to worship Him. He is not dependent upon our worship for His survival. The only ones who benefit from our worshipping Him is us. He, God, does not prevent us from sinning, although He is always waiting for us to come back to Him. He does not go out of His way to punish us for our sin; our own actions bring it down upon ourselves. When you go against the truth, you pay the price of fate.

An alcoholic may lose his job, or the angry man may get injured in a fight. This is not God punishing us, but rather the results of ignoring His truths in the world. We trade a temporary natural response to external influence with common sense and allow our base nature to control us. While it may be pleasant at the moment, we will pay the price to fate.

I was afraid going to a religious event would be brainwashing or worse. What I found was people speaking about the truth, showing me a better way to live and one that was far better than the way I was living my life. It was like blinders being pulled off my eyes and seeing the world with common sense and more understanding.

I did not choose God because I had to. I was not brainwashed into it. I was not forced under the gun or threatened into it. I chose for myself. I looked at the facts and decided for myself. I did not choose for financial gain; in fact, my beliefs often cost me both financially and personally.

Why do it if it will cost you personally? you ask. Because it is still the truth. Not all truth is painless or profitable, but it remains the truth. Many Christians died in the lion pits because they could not deny the truth to those who did. It cost them their lives; I have not been asked to protect the truth to that level yet. I am prepared.

I read in the newspaper once about the desecration of a painting of Mary, and some men asked why we did not chase down the perpetrators and punish them. We as Christians are not to fight God's battles. He can far better judge and punish the individuals than we. God uses fate to right a wrong. The sinner gleefully sprints to their own demise, like the alcoholic laughs when confronted with their affliction.

So getting back to the free choice. After forty-plus years after making that choice, I asked myself, Would I make this choice again? Absolutely. Without question, because once you realize the truth, you can never go back—you would not want to. I suppose there are a few who would rather remain in the dark because when you are in the dark, you remain not responsible to act, to deny your knowledge, thus be excused for your inaction. Just understand, this will not work as an excuse to truth.

I see this in the workplace all the time. People denying being trained or refusing to be trained for a part of their job so they will not have to do it. *What is the harm?* you think. Someone always suffers when you deny the truth. Others get overworked or people do not get proper care or the quality suffers. Eventually, these things catch up to you. People resent you, your character takes a hit, and eventually, you lose your job.

Truth can be painful as fate follows closely behind your actions. I chose to recognize the truth and God for my own good and the good of everyone around me. It is a decision I will never be ashamed of. Choosing faith in God is life to me, a life lived in the light and

not in the darkness. I use the faith in God as a filter for my decisions in life, and it has served me well.

I cannot speak of the other faiths other than Christianity, as I am not well-versed in their beliefs. I suspect they have many truths found within their teachings; I know that my Christian faith certainly has. We have a free hand in our choice to choose God. It is personal and cannot be revoked even in death.

To sum all this up, God does not pressure you to follow Him. You are free to choose not to. He loves you and wishes you to join His family. He offers advice through the Bible and via the Holy Spirit. This advice comes from the one who created the universe and should know how it works best, and it has been proven over four thousand years to be true and has been witnessed to by billions of people throughout time. There is no selling going on as He personally cannot be paid back; all He wants is your love.

Do not confuse the physical church for the kingdom of God. Belief in Jesus and following Him benefits God in no way other than showing your love. We join a physical church to help others come to know Him and to work together to do good works. By the nature of the world, they need donations to carry out that work. We must be free to donate our money, time, and talents as we see fit—a gift from us to God for saving us and sending His Holy Spirit to guide us. You must ask yourself, “Am I willing to give of myself for God in thanksgiving for His love?” It does not matter if it is donating to your church, a cause, or just your neighbor down the street. The joy and help should flow easily from you with a happy, giving heart, an overflow of the abundance of your heart. If that heart is not there, there may be a problem in your relationship between you and your God.

Christianity is about freedom, not a tax. It is about giving of yourself from the joy you experience through Christ and His saving action. I firmly believe that people who feel truly fed by the gospel give more naturally from their desire to help. Churches should not have to spend 90 percent of their time fundraising. It is a shame that we have to use human methods to part the churchgoer from their dollar. Raffles, bingo, and fundraiser events to convince a person to

part with their money for the chance of gain—not very Christian. Yet it has become necessary because no church can survive without it.

I have always believed that if a person is truly fed in the gospel, we would not need this! The reality is that we, as Christians, should be choosing to read the Bible and attend spiritual uplifting events for our own good and the support of the faith. We have failed in that, and it shows in our willingness to help. Too often I see churches spend 90 percent of their time raising money, wasting the time of parishioners who should be using half of their donated time seeking a better understanding of God.

CHAPTER 9

Truth and Human Law



Why is there always tension between religious belief and human law? There is overlap because laws deal with human action and sometimes human morals. Wisdom is the ability to recognize the truth and live it. Yet we cannot legislate wisdom. You either choose to see it or ignore it. Society's laws are to protect others from those who choose to ignore wisdom and cause hurt to others and themselves.

God's laws are words of wisdom to help us lead peaceful and healthy lives. They are fairly simple, as there are only ten, but we cannot keep them anyway, and we sin and hurt and cause hurt to others. As Christians, we fail to use wisdom and keep our own laws. How can we expect the others in the world who do not believe in God to keep them?

Here is the point of contention. Does God's laws supersede the laws of man, or does the law of man become more important than the laws of God. We know the laws of man count in the thousands while God says we really need to obey two: to love your God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. Yet we cannot keep even these. All the commandments fall under these two.

Man makes new laws because we cause harm to one another in many different ways. When we recognize that an action is wrong, we write a new law to forbid the action. Each time we do this, we limit our own freedom in order to maintain the peace. Eventually, there will be no room to live, as we would be afraid that any action can be abused. We find ourselves trying to legislate wisdom and morality.

Writing laws does not prevent a person from breaking them, but it only allows for punishment after the fact. It only applies when they get caught in the act and never creates change in the individual who will always lie to themselves and believe they can get away with it. People like that are sorry—sorry they got caught and, in my understanding, never changes their ways.

To seek God is to seek wisdom, to seek truth and live in it. A wise man would not want to commit a crime because it is foolish and wrong, not because they may get caught. Faith in God and His wisdom supersedes the law of man because it prevents the sin in the first place, before you do something stupid, that you must not get caught at in the first place.

Yet we must have human laws, as many do not believe in God and must have rules and punishment to make those who believe in nothing think twice before committing a crime. Rarely does it work, as we all think we are right to cause harm or believe if we are careful enough, we will not get caught. Vengeance, justice, and correcting an offence are all excuses for hurting others; yet they are invalid reasons to cause more harm. Pleasure, instant gratification, and fun are some examples how we convince ourselves that sinning and harming ourselves with drink and drugs or sex and depravity are okay to consider. We are very good at lying to ourselves, so we can do what we want in the moment.

We must respect the laws of our land as long as they do not offend the Ten Commandments or break the first two. I find it interesting that the Ten Commandments must be removed from government buildings, as if they were incorrect or offend some people. It is nothing more than truth and wisdom. As if the ten rules insult the thousands of laws written by man. It is a rejection of the foolish who want to kill, steal, and cause harm.

Therefore, the church fights so hard to keep them in human law because to reject it is to reject truth itself. As humans, we seek to preserve what is good for society as a whole. We can see the wisdom of it. Yet here is the question: Do we have a right to force what we see on those who cannot see it?

It is a slippery slope to try and force morals on others. While it benefits all, even God does not do this, but rather allows the truth to punish us for rejecting it. If society allows abortion, society becomes weaker because it is people who make the world go around. They are voters, workers, a source of income, and sheer numbers make a nation strong.

On the personal level, destroying a child's future also destroys the parent's potential future. You will never have a child to love you, to be proud to watch grow, to maybe help you when you grow old and feeble. It may destroy the heart of the girl who was pregnant and be a source of shame the rest of their lives.

Yet despite this, is it right to deny them the right of choice even if it causes great harm? God allows the truth to teach us, rather than force us to do what is right. This applies to all sin; I am just using abortion as the example.

I understand the church wanting to save everyone from that pain and suffering. My heart bleeds for the masses that choose foolish behavior over the truth. Yet no amount of chasing them and "Let me tell you about Jesus" will help. Some people must go through the horror to learn the lesson, and sadly some never do.

As Christians, we must use God's example. Jesus says to go into a town and preach the good news. If they reject you, wipe the dust off your feet and move on to another town.

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. (Matthew 10:14 KJV)

Jesus knows not all will receive the message; some will resent you for it. Some will harm you for it. Some will attack you because it

makes them feel convicted. I have witnessed this many times. Those who wish to sin will try to convince you to think like they do to satisfy their guilt. It does not change the facts or the results of their actions. When you argue with God, you are arguing with the truth.

Our job is to speak the truth as we know it, but not to force our wills on the godless world. It is bad enough that we stand as a painful reminder to the ungodly of the failure of their philosophy. To actually move to the point of forbidding their choice to sin is beyond our role.

As Christians, we live in a kingdom of conscience, now as well as after we die. Jesus is our king now. We are not held to human law, but by a greater law. One that keeps you from committing the sin because it is wrong, not because we fear getting caught. We are taught not only not to kill but to defend the weak. We are taught not to steal but instead to give of ourselves and help those around us. We are called to a higher level of truth; we are called to be Knights of the Word. I will dedicate a chapter to this later on.

There will be those who will disagree with this stance I take. Who believes the horror of the sin warrants a forceful act? We have seen it argued that killing a doctor to save children from abortion is a kindness. To save an unborn child, no. It is a sin to kill for any reason than self-defense or to defend others. No one is saved as the person committed to the sin will find someone else.

Moral law is inside the person and must be the decision of the person involved. We can only deal with our own conscience and live with the results. We can advise, tell them what we believe, and try to teach them the truth. As the saying goes, "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink."

Our job is to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives, to lead them to truth, and to forgive them when they realize their errors. People think laws are meant to limit their fun or keep them under our thumb. It is all about faith and truth. The laws of God are the laws of life. To reject them does not harm him in any way. When you reject the truth, you pay the price. Simple, really.

This is why Christians do not understand the resistance from the ungodly. We can see the error, the pain, the suffering, but they

cannot. In their eyes, we are trying to control them, force them to our opinion. We are putting our laws on them, when in reality, we see the end result of sin and wish to save them from it and those innocents who get in the sinner's way. To them, our religion is a philosophy, a way of thinking, a culture that we chose. They do not see it as fact, truth, or reality, but a human culture.

That is why I feel the timing of this book is so relevant. Science views us as a cult or witchcraft; the ungodly think of us as mythology or just plain wrong. When the truth is, faith is all about truth—a truth beyond the human mind to understand without help. We chose God because we can recognize truths found in the Bible, and though we only see a little, we seek, or we should seek, more. The deeper I dig, the more truth I see. We have been studying the Bible for millennia and still finding facts that blow our minds.

CHAPTER 10

The Truth About Heaven

Let me first start with a prayer: Father, help us now to understand the meaning of your kingdom, both here and in heaven. There is nothing I can see without you first opening my eyes.

Once before, I prayed a prayer for God to open my eyes to reveal to me something about heaven and Himself. This chapter is an answer to me, not the answer I expected nor even imagined. Nevertheless, it is far greater than what I had asked for. I have learned God never really answers our prayers as we expect. But He answers them better than we could imagine.

When I asked God to reveal to me a bit of heaven, I expected angels and thrones and maybe a vision of God Himself. It was a rather childish request for me to have a visible sign of His kingdom. Asking for so much less than God had to offer me in His wisdom revealed something I desperately needed, something missing in my life. Something that told me more completely about His kingdom, more vital to my ability to exist within it. Something that would lead me to stability and strength in my faith. And I revealed the depth of truth that is God.

This secret is the very fabric of life—church, government, family, and God's kingdom. All these things are dependent upon a simple truth, a simple example that God placed on this earth to reveal His nature to us, as God has so often done. He provides living, breathing examples of a spiritual truth for us to see and to learn and to understand.

The simple truth is structure. I speak of none other than the family. Read on and discover how God uses the family as the struc-

ture of His kingdom, His church, His plan for our future with Him. There is a beauty we all can have and experience through the loving grace and mercy of our Father. Some of you may think this answer too simple; some may feel it too hard to understand, and others may have had less than perfect family lives. Rest assured, this chapter is for all of you.

It is neither simple nor too hard to read. And those who have had hard childhoods will finally have the opportunity to experience true family life. We just need to want it bad enough to be willing to take a chance and open our hearts to God. And God has promised to be there if we ask with a sincere heart.

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13 KJV)

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. (Luke 11:9 KJV)

This book is only a beginning, a starting place. Open your eyes and let the Holy Spirit reveal to you the truth found in living your life. It will show you what God has shown me. The rest will be up to you.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. (1 Corinthians 2:12 KJV)

What can I say about my Father? Your Father? We treat Him as we have treated our natural fathers; we take Him for granted. We do not appreciate the work He does for us, the time, the effort. He works hard to keep His family healthy and provided for. Like most fathers, He seems gone, often at work, giving up of His time so we can live. He is distant, working at work, fixing things at home, and

rarely has time to spend playing with His children. It is any surprise to us that He seems so distant, making sure to provide for our needs, giving up his time, knowing we must be cared for? And he could never ignore our needs.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matthew 7:11 KJV)

If a natural father can treat us with love, how much more can our Father, God? You will see I will always compare our relationships with our natural fathers with our relationship with God the Father. You could almost replace all the words *father* with God and see how his physical truth mirrors the spiritual truth found in God. Not only does God appear as the father in the family, but also as the mother, brother, and friend. Through the Trinity, I will discuss this more in-depth later.

God has many ways to interact with us in the family. The family is the key to unlocking those truths. What part does the father play in the family? He is the provider, protector, judge, disciplinarian, and example and head of the family. I have already touched on God as the provider. It is also the part we see and recognize the most.

We play the part of God's children, and we act just like our children do: we grow accustomed to the earth beneath our feet, the air we breathe, the food we eat, and all of life around us. We forget that God provides all this for us. He could stop that in an instant. He could stop, and it would cease to exist. We know our Father is consistent and would not disappoint us, so we take it for granted and are busy playing in our sandbox called the earth. We have forgotten His efforts are an act of love. I do not say these things to promote guilt; not one of us is any different. I say them so we may understand that we to have a place in the family, and we naturally play our part. We are the children of God. As such, we are not expected to have all the answers, nor are we expected to be all-knowing. Our job is to grow, learn, and be children of God.

This is what God calls us to be. God is also our protector. He watches over us while we sleep, guides us away from harm, and provides us with His wisdom: the Bible, to help us avoid harming others and ourselves. He is the father who tells us, “You cannot go to that all-night party,” not to limit our fun, but to protect us from harm.

If you read His Ten Commandments, you would learn that they are not there to keep us from having fun, but rather to keep us safe and sound. Even the commandment to love your God with all your heart is for our sake, and not for His. God could live without us, but we could not live without Him. If we reject Him, we reject that provider, protector, and fail to know truth.

Think about it. What sort of life would we have without law? I could kill you at whim, steal your wife, take your home, and beat you up just because I desire to or just because I am stronger than you. Without law and the Father as judge, there would be no peace anywhere. No hope, no future, and no happiness. No one to decide what is right or wrong. No mediator either in a dispute. No neutral person to judge things. Everything would be chaos. Indeed, life would become a living hell.

God is the father of continuity and order. While Satan is the father of chaos and lies. Well, chaos may appear fun on the surface, it will destroy those who worship it, like it or not. No one likes rules. Yet we could not be happy without them.

God in the role of father maintains order in peace. He provides stability and a haven where we can rest and recover from our struggles. As I start this work. A work that means so much to me. I fear it is a subject so deep that it may be impossible to present to you, the reader. I hope in the Holy Spirit to reveal the truths to you, over my shortcomings. It is a set of truths that must be lived to be experienced fully, to ever truly reveal His entire message.

I once prayed to God to reveal a little bit of heaven to me. Little did I know that that prayer would be answered then as it continues to be answered today. I expected angels or clouds or thrones and such. God, in His wisdom, showed me things far more important than the things I desired to see. He showed me what life is in His kingdom

and in a relationship with Him, the ground rules, and the very nature of Himself.

All using examples we find here on earth, what I call one of God’s greatest sacraments is the family.

There is one thing a child fears more than rules and punishment. And that’s abandonment. Ask any orphan, a child rejected by their parents, or who has lost their parents. It is profoundly affecting their outlook on life.

Before we get too heated over this word *sacrament*, let me explain what I mean. To me, a sacrament is a physical example of a spiritual truth, a physical event that helps us understand the spiritual event behind it. I am not creating a new doctrine or trying to remove an old one, but rather to free us from all potential misunderstandings. The Catholic church refers this to the sacrament of marriage, which has been watered down and forgotten over the years.

The good family is the foundation of our faith, our church, and even our civilization. God has placed this great truth for us, His children, to discover, to experience, and to grow from.

The church also provides this example for us. But the closest and best example can be found in our dad or mom or brother or sister, with all these joys and sorrows. *Too simple*, you think, or maybe, too hard to see. Follow me in the next few chapters, and I will think you will see the light very differently. Afterward, it may very well open your eyes to see things in a different light.

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 like 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 it 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, 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 phys-

ical 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. 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 you sister's hair. It teaches us how to make friends, how to avoid debt, how to have a happy marriage, and much more. We all need these lessons, 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 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

will be the only way we will learn the truth; this is not unlike a natural father. You will find much correlation 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, like 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, 365 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 heard His voice across a vast distance between you. Your father is not there to hurt you; he gave you your 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 you're every wish? (Of course not!) Some things we request are bad for us, for others, or may be 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 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 advice, we often would turn to our fathers for help. He would, to the best of his ability, tell us all he knows 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 like 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 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, employers their employees, marriages, moral decisions, self-improvement, psychological 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 is

true, most of us know what a good father should be. God is that good and perfect father—why deny ourselves the goodness of God’s family relationship and cheat ourselves 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 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 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 wis-

dom. 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 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 it takes 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 and understanding of the Bible, and 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. However, the desire to know and be with our Lord is a sure sign of our 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 bathe in this flow of the Spirit until it overflows in our lives—to touch 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 the Bible 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 I deny my family the beauty that I have experienced when I 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 cleanse 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, but 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 whom 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 one another. Do we view one another in this manner? Or do we neglect our duties to one another 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 one another 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 like 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. 11 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:

And said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes hum-

ble 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, viewing 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 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, and 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 that 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. He 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 are 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 child’s, 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 that 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 principal 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 we should be humbled because of that knowledge. It will help you in dealing with God and also with other people in life. Your expectations of your fellowman 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 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 misled 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 a 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 adults or to children when I say we act childlike. We all are no better than one another, 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 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 11

Revelations on Heaven?



I have had quite a bit of time to contemplate the kingdom of God, of the nature of heaven as revealed to us throughout the Bible, and there seems to be some standards about heaven that can be known and understood. These things I reveal in this chapter I consider personal musings and not biblical fact, although there is plenty of fact to pull from the Bible to back up my assumptions. This is meant as a contemplation, something to stir up thought.

Heaven is being referred to throughout the ages as timeless. God exists out of time, so He can view time from beginning to end. He will know what we do and what we will choose before we do it. This puts God in the unique position to know all things. As you get to understand the Bible better, you will discover that there are mirrors of what is to come in Jesus's life. A few examples are Abraham sacri-

ficing Isaac, Passover, and the sacrifice of Jesus (the Lamb). There are so many; in fact, we are still discovering them today.

Calvin and the Calvinist church believes God has predestined all things, and if you are saved, you are saved, and if not, not. They believe that there is nothing you can do to change predestination. Calvin sees heaven as the timeless place that heaven is and understands the concept of an all-knowing God. This fact does not, however, destroy free will. Free will would be destroyed if we knew what choices we would make before we made them. This, however, is a power denied to us, thankfully. We cannot predict the outcome of the next football game, never mind our lives. Because of this highly debated argument and references in the Bible, we know and trust in the timelessness of heaven and the timeless knowledge of God. This feature of heaven is not up for debate.

I have heard the argument for rapture or the end of the world. While I believe there eventually will be an end of the world, I do not believe it is as many think of it. I do not believe we die and lie in the grave until the Lord raises us up on the last day. I believe that to be absent, the body is to be present to the Lord. When Christ died, He descended into hell, then rose to open heaven. As Jesus said, "It is finished"; His saving work was complete.

I am a firm believer in the truth found in the Bible. The only times I have seen error has been in our human understanding of it, not in the writing. Matthew writing about the end times wrote,

Remember that all these things will happen before the people now living have all died. (Matthew 24:34 GNT)

Although this is only a one line from the description of the end of the world, I do not think it taken out of context or misunderstood. If the time He was talking about was back in His time, the line would be false, as no one could survive till today. If it is interpreted as in *your* lifetime, it definitely fits, as all of us have witnessed fire, famine, flood, and wars in each of our lifetimes.

I tend to believe the great crowd in heaven worshipping at the altar of God exist in that timeless place; meaning, the end of the world could be getting hit by that bus while crossing the street. There are many references from near-death experiences to seeing Jesus or being greeted by angels as we pass from one domain to another. I am not saying I am right here. No man has the true knowledge of heaven.

Some may argue about the two people in the field where one was taken and the other left is proof of the theory of rapture. This, too, can fit into a journey from a place in time to a timeless place. I do not mean to take away the power of the message "The end is near," as it may reach someone who would never come to God without fear of hell and punishment. I do question the quality of an individual who is afraid of getting caught but does not follow our Lord out of love and belief in his beliefs.

Still, like a small child, we sometimes have to threaten our children to get them to behave, until they grow old enough to choose right for themselves. There is plenty of examples of this in the Bible. For example, the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Old Testament tends to be crime and punishment, where the New Testament is about forgiveness and higher truths: an eye for an eye (Old Testament) or forgiveness (New Testament).

I am going to discuss the spiritual goings on inside us for a bit. Again, I say I am querying about a possible truth. Please prove it to yourselves as you contemplate it.

In Jesus's time, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had a disagreement about the inner workings of our inner selves. The Pharisees believed in a body, soul, and spirit, where the Sadducees only believed in a body and soul. Again, after years of study of the Bible, I have come to the conclusion that both were correct, but at differing times.

Here is what I believe is the normal flow of life on earth: As babies, we are born with bodies and souls, and we remain like this until a few things happen, if ever. We are born devoid of any understanding of God, faith, and the Holy Spirit. We are still born (spiritually), shall we say. This explains why we each need to start from ground zero when it comes to faith. Now to ward off argument about

children dying before baptism, I believe God is a loving God and can offer the chance of life to anyone, especially in difficult situations. God is not a monster. He is truth that can sometime appear harsh, but never heartless.

When we are born, we know not God. We are born into a dangerous, selfish world where we all must fight for survival. In the old Jewish tradition, they used to dedicate their children to God, usually the firstborn son. This dedication had meaning, just as child baptism does. Baptism is done to remove original sin and dedicate us to God. I guess you can say it puts the Holy Spirit as an influence in our lives. God is a gentleman; He will not force Himself on our lives. By our parents dedicating us to the Lord and clearing us of original sin, they say yes to the Spirit of God to play a part in our lives.

This does not mean that baptism by water as an adult and receiving the Holy Spirit by confessing that Christ is Lord is any less powerful. It is just done all at one time. I am sure God fulfills His promise either way we choose to come to God.

Confirmation or the professing that Jesus Christ is Lord in the baptism of the Spirit is the more powerful of the two. At this point, the Holy Spirit bonds with the individual and becomes a part of Him. What was once two-in-one is now three-in-one, proving both the Pharisees and Sadducees both correct, depending upon the stage of accepting God in your life.

Interesting enough, we are talking about a triune being. After all, we are made in the image of God. Father, the soul; Jesus, the body; and the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God. This mystery is not that much a mystery to me. Again, a timeless heaven, Jesus was before creation, always part of the plan.

In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to people. (John 1:1–4 GNT)

Jesus is the Word. He was always a part of the plan from before Adam. Adam was once three-in-one before the bitter fruit, and then he became two-in-one. His Spirit died. It is the Holy Spirit that connects us to God. When we say yes to Jesus, we open the door for the Spirit to enter us and become one with us. It allows the gifts of the Spirit to work within us, open our eyes to scripture, and serve with a kind heart.

It is said you must have the Spirit inside you to ascend into heaven. The Spirit acts like a marker and provides the power to be with God. It links us to God and is the power of renewed life.

If the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, lives in you, then he who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of his Spirit in you. (Romans 8:11 GNT)

The question can be asked, If you do not want God in your life here in this world, why would you want to be with him in heaven?

Although there are many gifts of the Spirit, the ones that mark us as God's is our desire to know Him, our love for one another, and welcoming of His spirit in our lives. The only unforgivable sin is to grieve the Holy Spirit, which means to hate and fear God. Many show lip service in the hopes of avoiding hell. Being sorry you got caught is not going to save you from the truth. Hell will be full of those trying to hide behind Jesus's cloak to save themselves from punishment. That is the way of the world. Remember, you cannot hide from the truth; it always comes to light, and you must bare your soul before God and survive it. That is what Jesus offers—a way to be forgiven. No man could survive in God's presence without knowing that.

So I believe it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that is taken up to heaven when we die. No waiting in the grave to rise later. Once we are done here, we are in timeless heaven, hopefully.

To a Catholic, we believe that our lost loved ones are alive in heaven now. Soul and Spirit, I am not sure we will be recognized as anything more than a soul. The Holy Spirit *is* God, a connecting

power, a way to communicate from our souls to His. It is a part of God that is a living filament of life. It is this filament that allows us to believe we can pray to family, saints, Mary, Jesus, and especially the Father. To our minds, they are not dead. To those who do not believe in praying for intercession from the saints, it should not divide us, as you can pray directly to God, which we do too.

We believe God's grace can bless things by prayer. We ask God to bless our food, bless water, even a handkerchief for passing healing, which is biblical. It is not by our power, but God as a Father, giving good things to His children who ask. We cannot force His hand and demand wrong things, as it is the Holy Spirit who carries the prayer to God and, by His power, answers them yes or no.

Please, my Protestant brothers and sisters, do not take offense. I also understand your beliefs and views and will respect them. Like Calvin, I see and respect his truth, while I also see the truth from the human perspective. Both are right. I have come to all your services—Baptists, Calvinist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Methodist, and found God in each of your churches. Who am I to argue with God?

Back to heaven. I argued day and night with a coworker over his view of *rest* in heaven. He likened it to sitting on a lounge chair and sipping iced tea. As the Bible says, we will go to our rest. I suspect that God did not put us through such serious testing unless He was going to *use* us in heaven. I am sure it would be a joy to serve God. Maybe we will look after a granddaughter or worship day and night. This, I have no clue about in reality.

I decided I will end this chapter with some witnesses I have experienced and those I trust, as I believe this may help us have an understanding of the *feel* of heaven.

When I first received the Holy Spirit, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I felt the sin and crud of the world peel off my body. This happened in an instant. It was a grand release of hurts, disappointments, all the negative that life tends to throw at us, weighing us down. In its place was a sunburst of joy, love beyond any possibility of describing. Hope, faith, and desire to know God came into my being. I was not left empty. I burst into tears of joy when this happened to me. It was overwhelming, but it was a welcome place to be.

This is the Holy Spirit of God in its pure form. The form He exists in heaven. I have talked with many who have had experiences with God. While the details are different, the experience is quite common. All describe it as indescribable; all were changed for life by the event, all lost all fear of death and had told me they were tempted to stay in that experience. Each also knew crossing over to that meant leave this world.

Like many of them, I felt a responsibility to live my life as God planned it. To come back to this dark place and do my duty as a follower of Christ. I envisioned this beautiful place *as* heaven. I cannot imagine traveling to a dark and empty void. A place with no love, joy, hope forever. This hell frightens me more than the fiery pits described in the Bible. The true horror story is being in that place with every rapist, murderer, thief, abuser, or other followers of destruction.

God sits upon the judgment seat in heaven. He does not condemn us; we condemn ourselves by hating God. You hate those who make you feel guilty. God reveals our every deed. That is why Adam hid from God after eating the fruit. He knew he did wrong and was afraid to admit it to God.

You can understand this principle from the world. People commit greater sins in the attempt to hide smaller ones. Big lies to cover up small ones, murder to cover up theft and the list goes on. The Holy Spirit, acting in the world convicts the guilty, which makes them hate us and strike out. It makes them try to convince others to accept their sin to soothe their consciences. In heaven, there is no hiding, you either ask for forgiveness or run from the exposing presence of God. Thus, we damn ourselves to hell.

CHAPTER 12

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 to 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. These are just two examples of the similarities between marriage and the relationship to Christ.

Most people reading this already understands 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 had to take a step forward in faith and decide to follow Christ. Like 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 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 that are 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 indissoluble 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 result 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 of 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 whore that constantly strays from worshiping 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, and 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 recognize 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 each other and spend time with each other in order to know whom they marry. They also need to care for each other 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.

Therefore, 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 is meaningless to them. We see this in marriages today. People going through the motions of being married yet lead 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 bonds. 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 though 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 with 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 have 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 to 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 marriage life? We are swept away in the beginning, then our lives change. We go through struggles, and 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; it has times

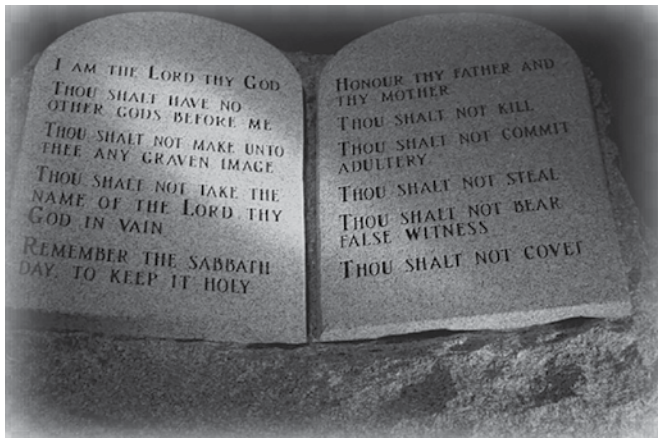
of trials and times of sorrow and joy. The walk in faith will be the same; you will depend upon Christ as you would depend on a spouse and more.

In marriage, we have responsibilities. Like keeping 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 away from 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 13

The Truth about the Ten Commandments



I have come to understand that all 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 could 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 a long and happy life without getting hurt or hurting others. God can be 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, 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, and lawlessness, and this commandment precipitates the fall of all the other commandments. We deny ourselves 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.

Many wonder what true love is. True love is God's love. A giving love. A selfless love, like the love of a parent for their child. If you do not know God, you do not know true love. If you cannot comprehend true love, you are destined to break all the other commandments.

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, we 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 celebrate on Saturday, while the Christian people celebrate 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 makes 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 tends 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 a way to live. Despite any problems they may have that may prevent them from being perfect parents, they still choose to give you your 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? Murderer 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)

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 premed-

itated or conspired against or murdered. Jesus has said above when you hold anger or hatred in your heart, you already commit murder. These feelings and emotions that run out of control within us are a danger to our very being, our peace 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 his 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 thing. 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. It is 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 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 that was taken; we steal their peace of mind, their honor, their sense of 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 fear of being caught, and he will not be able to trust others because he knows he is not trustworthy. He will fear jail, and if he does not change his ways, he 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 that 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 worship Satan in our hearts. 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, will ultimately corrupt 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 have been used to cheat, kill, put down, deceive, and cause all sorts of

trouble. We not only lie to others, but 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 or hidden. The best way to deal with truth is head-on. The more we try to avoid it by lying, the worse 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, it 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, it 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 must. 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 can 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 sins. 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 change is constant, 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 14

Living a Life in the Spirit



The Pagan Christian

The Spirit revealed to me that the double standards in society we face is really a choice between living a spiritual life and a secular life. In other words, it is really a choice between living a spiritual life along God's will or following 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, say 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 we can read it thousands of times over and still find new answers to our problems by 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 to.

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 their 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 parents, they become lost in their play world. We must 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 must 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.

Therefore, 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 to you. Now to live a life close to God becomes difficult. We must raise our lives so much above the sin that it 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 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. Rather, we are 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 come 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). It is the belief that man uses gods to explain our inability to understand the world and that science is all the reality we need (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 in 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 true 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 women who offer men anything they want. On the other side of the point is the woman seeks to use a 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 Christian 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, must 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 downriver. You see the easy route that most people seem to be taking. They are swimming downriver. 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 downriver 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 you can 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 downriver, and you will go over the falls.

Living a life in the spirit can sound scary to some people. It sounds foreign and mysterious. 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. To allow 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 home-field advantage when it comes to guiding our lives. I like to think of it like this: Say there's a group of people 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 full.

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 be in control. For example, when you overeat because you want to 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 you are angry, 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. It 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 controlling 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 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 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 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 is 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 or reveal 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 mostly 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 throughout 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 adherence 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, always seek this depth of faith. 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 other spiritual events 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, besides 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

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 hold 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 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 He 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 worshipping 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 I love God? Do I appreciate all that He has done for me? Do I believe that He deserves my 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 to powerful services that only differed by the intent of those present, those who did not hold back their worship of God and saw great happenings. Not only that, but they 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 worshiping 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 we face. 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 focus upon 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. It will 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 too. 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 being close to God. The Bible is one of God's ways of speaking back

to us. Without it, we would have no way of knowing and learning 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 that helps us learn the lessons that are important for us to know. He reveals the truth to you, and lets you see things you never 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 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 and 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 while, 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 could have 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:

As 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 our 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 15

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. (Hebrew 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 acquainted 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 from what is taught from the pulpit on Sunday. You must seek more. This is not to say it is worthless to go to church, but rather, 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, and 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 them 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, it means 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 affects 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. (Revelation 3:15–16)

Is serving the church enough? Without knowing God personally, many serve because they feel they must or out of guilt or out of fear of death. They never bother 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 when 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, your 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)

By our presence, we become by 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, they 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 whom we love, should be blind to what we can see. Sadness should well out from 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 by 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 peoples 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 drew the crowd and readied their hearts for Peter's message.

There is nothing we can do in this 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 basic 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 by 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 toward 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; it 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 pangs, 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, 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 16

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 Gomorrah. Love and lust have become confused. Love as the world loves and love 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 one another. 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 because we want to be able to sleep with them? Some or all 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 you. 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 our mate is not fulfilling us 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 4:7–8, 11–12)

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, and 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 one another 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? For 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 one another 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 that 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 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 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, to 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 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 or 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. It is 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 17

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: 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—o 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 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 OK. 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, the pro-abortion movement, and others? 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.

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 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 that God planned to save all 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 was the place for evil-doers, whom God held for punishment. Both places existed apart from God, as the Savior had not come yet. This I believe answers the argument by rabbis whether man have 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 whom 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 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 who 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 must 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 reevaluate 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 power of the Spirit many times in your life, especially when God is preparing you for work. He also gives you power (grace) 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 like 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 that 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 superego. The id is our animal nature (the body); the superego (spirit) is our conscience, and the ego (the soul) is the mind that decided 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 superego, i.e., the Spirit). When we are choosing between right and wrong, after all, when is it OK to choose wrong? With the Holy Spirit driving your actions (superego), 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 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 and all His creation fruitful and healthy. 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. We should not go to either extreme, but to be moderate in our protection 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, and we 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 reevaluate 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 one another. 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 "I never knew you" to.

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. Like the body having hands, feet, 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 a 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 hearts. 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)

But 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 were so happy, we wanted 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 the 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 time. Not thought-out, nor was I occupied with the thoughts. Indeed, I was thinking and doing other things entirely, usually praying 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 they were 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 that 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 invoked, "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 get weak. I was amazed how fast the evil left, responding 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 head rush 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 then 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; he *will* snatch what we learned away from us and *can* destroy us.

CHAPTER 18

Spiritual Blogs

Blogs

Below I list some blogs written by me that I consider to be influenced by the Holy Spirit. They may jump around a bit, but each blog carries an important message that I did not wish to lose to time. I hope you find them interesting as I did.

Man's Deep Desire to Be Needed
March 8, 2019

Man has a great need to be needed. Man wants to be needed by women; women need to be needed by man. Both need to be needed by a child. Even owning pets help fulfill that need. God has put it into us to understand His love for us. The loss of a child is devastating because of that need to look after our little ones. We feel empty and devoid of purpose. We need more than just the selfish desire to survive. This need is in the subconscious, and we may not even be aware of it. However, it affects everything we do. This is the bond of agape love that a parent feels for their child. Not all people have this. However, any parent worth their salt does. Some try to fill this gap with work or games or things, but it is always there. Just below the surface.

When you consider the quality of life, this need or desire takes precedence in our life. What truly makes our lives better is the interaction between a man and his wife or a family with each other. We get busy in life and sometimes lose sight of this fact. Search deep

down inside you and you know it to be true. It is why we feel the need to donate to causes, as donating makes us feel more whole. God feels. He knows our losses and our triumphs. He takes the pride of a parent when He sees us do good and feels our pain when we lose someone. We are not God, but to those who accept Him in our lives, He is part of our experience. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He sees through our eyes, hears through our ears, and feels our pain and joy. The experience of family is one with us as we are one with Him.

More Examples of Family in Our Relationship with God
January 16, 2019

For a family to be healthy, they have to see one another, interact, and share their lives. The further apart they are, the less they are close, until they really do not know one another anymore. Our relationship with God is the same. When your faith is healthy, you know God well enough to trust in His love for you and His ability to forgive your transgressions, no matter how great they appear. As you drift away from the relationship with God, He becomes a stranger to you, and you start to see your sins as unforgivable. Just as a stranger has very little trust in you, you have very little trust in God. As you deal with God day in and day out, like a physical Father, you may fear being bad. You know deep down that your father will be mad but eventually will forgive you. As a stranger, you receive justice for your sins; as a son or daughter, you may be punished, but it is more for instruction than as a penalty to equal the wrong done. Is your life close to God, or do you barely know him?

On Pope's Stance on Homosexual People
May 25, 2018

Let me see if I can explain this better. Being gay is no different than being born fat and heavy all your life or born missing a limb or other deformity. It does not make the person evil. Nor does it make them good. It means they are human. The sin of having gay tendencies are no greater than a man lusting after a woman. To do so outside

the acceptable manner (marriage) causes trouble. A man who sleeps with a woman outside of marriage is just as guilty as a gay man doing the same. We hate the sin and not the sinner.

God is the god of life. The greatest good is the creation of life or sustaining life. I know some gay people who adopted to preserve life, and I find that acceptable, as this is in God's will to promote life.

Some sins are personal; some actions are public. I tend to believe the marriage, fornication, and gay rules are made for the public good. The church, to encourage life and the production of life and the preserving of life, must encourage the possibility of family, marriage, and children for both our good and society's. Government used to understand this as well and gave benefits to married people to encourage more families. Government used to measure its strength from its citizens. With the pill and the women's movement, we are in greater danger of imploding both our society and the family.

Gay individuals should have all the rights and not be subject to harm or limitations to be able to live their lives in peace. Just like a fat man who is sinful by not taking better care of their bodies. People with deformations live their lives without ridicule. People, individuals, tend to be judgmental or hateful on their own without government or religion to add to it. I understand what the pope is saying. It is better that people be taught the best way to live, but we must love all people, even if they are broken in some way. We all are.

Guiding Principles of Advanced Christianity
April 28, 2018

It is all about the heart. Where your heart is determines the level of your faith. It is about depth. How deep are you willing to go to dig out the power of our faith? Treat it with disdain and it becomes worthless. Ignore and put it far back in the background of your life, and that is what it will be. You and you alone are the faith; you make it what it is in your heart. Morals, self-control, traditions, and other aspects of the faith are important because we give them importance. When you show your child that you believe in the value of truth and kindness and love. You impress upon them that it is valuable. How

do we do this? We must make it our own. I once talked with a teen about the truth of faith. His answer was golden. “I live my life in the truth. I know what I believe in, and it is truth.” His faith was proven to him beyond doubt and contestation. He could see the truth as it was and had no doubt of his direction.

When we seek this out. We bear responsibility to seek it out and prove it to ourselves. Beyond doubt, beyond need to continually question. Then it is not your parent’s faith, but your own. Each of us bear this responsibility. Before Adam ate the apple, we had no knowledge of good or bad. Once he gained this knowledge, he was responsible for choosing truth, to choose right over wrong.

When we seek God, we need to do a few things to help us seek the truth. I use this plan in my prayer meetings. First, we must leave our lives problems behind. I do this through prayer and song. I use it as a meditation to exit our problems in the world and focus on God. Second is to take time with prayer. This further separates us from the world and gets us in communication with God. The last is Bible study—once we have reached the point of hearing the small soft voice of the Spirit, we can truly learn from God Himself. Lastly, we share this with each other in discussion, as it was meant to be.

Motherhood: An Example of the Spirit of God April 6, 2018

Who is the Spirit of God? Why do I compare the Spirit of God to the mother? Before the confusion of the roles of women that we have today, it was clear the role of the mother played in the lives of her children. She was the first level of protection to her kids. She was the first teacher. She was the first to provide comfort and security, warmth and food, and provider of a clean environment. She was our first example of morality and understanding the world we live. Stuff that builds society. She builds the children’s lives to offer them a better life. The most important lessons in life, the greatest of all jobs abandoned.

Like the mother, the role of the Holy Spirit is to teach us, protect us, and comfort us in matters of the Spirit. Have you ever been

listening to a sermon that seems just for you? Read the Bible and found some new lesson spurned by the reading? Beyond the words *basic understanding*. When you are suffering and in dire need, have you ever felt the comfort in prayer? When I fell, the Spirit lifted me up, comforted me, and sent me on my way. The Spirit teaches us what we need to know, comforts us in our pain, and gives us life. It is the Spirit of God that will carry us to God when we die. This is only a beginning of the comparison. Search for more examples of the nature of the spirit.

Fatherhood: Being the Face of God March 29, 2018

God created the world. He created the natures of everything He created. He created man in His image. Maybe more importantly in man’s spirit, more than body. God tells us we can know Him by looking at His creation. Children can get glimpses of God by watching our nature. While not all men are worthy of being the image of a good Father, I believe we all know what a good father should be. The closest thing to God’s love is a father’s love for his kids. Good fathers protect their children, with their life even. We want to provide a good life for them to smooth their way. We do not look to be paid back for giving them life. It is an extension of ourselves. We look upon them, see how fragile their lives are, and cannot help looking after them. It is love for love’s sake. This is the face of God. Without an example like this, how can a child ever know that type of love? Without a child knowing this giving love, how can they share it? It is why they say, “Without knowing God’s love, we cannot share it.”

The Family as a Sacrament (Spiritual Truth Seen in a Physical Way) April 2, 2017

Before all my Protestant friends panic at the word *sacrament*, let me explain. The Catholic church refers to sacraments like marriage, priesthood, and bread and wine because they are physical examples of spiritual truths. Let us examine what this means. Aside from the

disagreement over the understanding of the word *sacrament*. Let us delve into why God uses it to teach us things. Teaching us things is the whole purpose of spiritual examples. There are more sacraments in the world than the church teaches. Any physical representation of a spiritual truth can be considered sacramental. The universe as a whole could be argued that is a representation of how great God is. If God created the universe, He is certainly greater than it. The Father is a sacramental representation of the person of the father. The mother is the representation of the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the representative of the human in us—the brother we can understand and be understood by. As a whole, these beings, these examples, represent the family as a whole. This in turn represents heaven and its structure. How we interact with family is an example of how we interact with God. We sometimes love God for the blessings He gives us, and we sometimes hate God when He stands in the way of us doing what we want. Marriage is both holy and sacramental because in the act, we are both partnering with God and each other, as well as becoming an example of the Holy family and of heaven itself. It is when we forget how valuable this is, is when marriage fails to live up to its potential. We, by treating it as something ordinary, diminish the example, and marriage becomes no longer a sacrament. My advice is to treat it within your household as the most important and holy example it is. Remember, the family is the first church.

Can We, Who Have Imperfect Parents, Still

Know God through the Family?

March 7, 2017

I have thought long and hard about this. Can a person who had no parents or had bad parents know God by this teaching? I think it is harder without a parent being an example of what family life should be. I do not think it impossible though. Most of us who are disappointed with our parents know what a good parent should be, know what they are missing, and what they would have liked as they grew up. I think most resent not having the secure basis of family to grow from. Despite this fact, God as your spiritual Father holds

His hands out all day long in the hopes you will accept Him as your Father. We are alone because we choose to be alone. We choose not to live under God's rules; we reject His love because it may mean change. God, like the human father, has rules to live under His roof. Rules that protect the child from himself and from other family members. To live in peace anywhere, we must seek to make a better world, and that starts with ourselves. A family loves and gets along because it must choose to. God is a gentleman; He will not force you to follow Him. He allows you to choose to be without Him. He allows you to choose hell. People who never had a family, never had love in their life, already know what hell is like. They need to come to God to become part of His family to experience love and to become something greater than themselves.

CHAPTER 19

Selfishness and
Selflessness of Man

Do we really understand the state of man and what God calls us to be? I do not think we as humans really put a lot of thought into who and what we are, especially what we could be. Life around us keeps us too busy trying to survive.

Let us examine the animal kingdom a bit to help us understand ourselves; after all, we are still part animal. Driven by our instincts to survive, procreate, and compete with one another and the other creatures that live in this world.

If you look at the wild animal, as a hunter, I can speak on this with some true understanding. They have to compete first with the elements for survival. Freezing cold, killing heat, no water, no food, insects, and even each other. Never mind the threat of wolves, bears, disease, and even human hunters. There is no time to learn to communicate or show emotional responses or understand much more than survival. Wild animals are wild because they are hunted by everything and afraid of everything.

Pets have a more secure environment, so it is possible to determine personal character traits. They may be able to understand some words like *supper* or *bad dog*. They may even be able to be trained to some level. Most pets do not have the long lifespan of the human so we can only go so far in teaching them things. They do not have a voice box like ours and can never speak with us directly. If you pay attention long enough, you can learn to know what they want by their actions.

Because animals have not risen above the instinctive pleasure or fear reactions due to their natures, we as humans have the ability to rise above our base natures. Some humans who live in squalor are like the wild animals that live in the woods. The basic fight for survival makes it hard for them to see hope. To believe in something greater than the next meal or not getting killed in the attempt to claw their way out of the gutter.

Humans can be enslaved by their situation and have difficulty getting out. I have seen this firsthand. While it is true that many come to be in this horrific state by their own choices: alcoholism, drugs, crime, foolish choices, and sin. Many come to this horrible place in life because of ailing health, war, unfair conditions, or just plain bad luck. These people cannot rise out of this helpless state without assistance. We must show wisdom in determining who is who. This state of fear is just as real and just as deadly as living in the wild. Remember this as we progress through this chapter.

When a human baby is born, he or she is in their most helpless state. We cannot change our diapers, feed ourselves, clothe ourselves, provide a roof over our heads, or heat to stay warm. We are born like an animal in the wild. We do not understand love or truth. All we know is we need. When we find ourselves needing, we cry. It is the international symbol for help. We are born helpless, thoughtless, and completely selfish out of necessity. We have no reality, no understanding of good and bad, no understanding of what to embrace or be afraid of.

Someone once asked me, Why, after so many years, do we still struggle with religion and faith? Each one of us is born as a new slate. Each of us must learn and grow and experience faith for ourselves. It is new to each and every one of us. It is really incredible how far each of us comes in the journey of life. We have to learn to poop, dress, talk, walk, write, go to school, learn right from wrong, and learn our faith for the very first time. That is a lot to ask anyone.

The environment we grow up in retards our ability to learn things both in school and morally. The more we have to fight for our survival, the less time we have to contemplate the wisdom of a moral life. For those of us who struggle at the bottom of the scale of society,

the harder it is for us to spend the time needed to grow close to God. We have to work harder. On the other hand, those who are rich and wealthy tend to become self-satisfied and fail to even look for God. They become self-righteous and believe they are right simply because their life is easier. As Jesus said,

“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:24)

There are many dynamics that control our ability to seek and discover God. It is not impossible for anyone. It does not make it easy. It is quite extraordinary that people can grow and learn so much. Not everyone will learn to the same level nor have the same gifts as we are not gods ourselves. We are called, however, to grow in wisdom and faith to the best we can, and the better you can learn, the better life will be for you. As we have discussed earlier, truth and wisdom are one, and both lead to faith and God.

Assuming we all begin knowing nothing, we need to grow and learn. Babies learn what love is from their parents or not. A parent is the closest example of God on this earth. Hopefully, the parent looks at that helpless baby and feels the desire to protect it. To try to provide the environment that the child can grow and learn. To show love and tenderness. To make the child feel safe and secure. We may feel fear, fear that we may fail. We must not let that cause ourselves to lose hope. I am sure every first-time parent feels these things. These things tend to work their way out.

After the child grows able to walk and speak and write, they become able to understand right from wrong. This is the best time to teach a child the basics of their faith. While they are learning not to touch a hot stove or run in the street, we should teach them not to lie and the basics of the faith.

I like to compare the Old Testament to teaching children. There is a lot of “Though shall not” found in it. God often appears to people as an angry god smiting this group or that. I often compare it to

your mother saying, “You wait till your father gets home,” or being told you are going to be punished. We are so new in our faith; we must be told “Do not do this” or “If you sin, you are going to hell.” Because you cannot reason with a child until they grow up some, you are better off just advising them what to avoid and threaten a punishment they can understand and fear. Once they grow older, you can explain to them the why.

I liken the New Testament to the higher learning of the why. Jesus explains much more to us and God the Father is not seen as so damning as in the Old Testament. Jesus and salvation and hope were always the plan from God. We now can see God as the loving and forgiving Father, who judges through the love of a dad, rather than just punishment from a judge. God’s judgment is a lesson, not vengeance.

The lessons of the Old Testament are kind of like this. God first had to introduce Himself through Abram/Abraham so we knew He existed. He needed to demonstrate His power so that we respected Him (Egypt). He needed to give us some basic laws to understand right from wrong. To provide a way for forgiveness for our sins, He created the sacrifice of the alter, which He did to help us understand Jesus’s sacrifice and all the basic building blocks to understanding our relationship to Him and to understand the nature of truth.

So you see, God knew He could not explain to Moses how He began the world by splitting atoms. He instead told a story to help us understand Him, ourselves, the nature of sin, and how we react to it. Then He made an example of how to forgive sins by the blood of an animal, as a way to help us understand why Jesus’s selfless act could save us all from sin.

One of the most important lessons we must learn is to go from that selfish all-needing baby to a selfless adult. If we remain in the animal state, we never throw off the burden of selfishness. It is one of the things that raises us above the animals: the ability to see need in others, sometimes even over ourselves. It is what makes us in the image of God. When you see others like the first-born baby, knowing they need your help, just as God sees each and every one of us, we are called to step out and help.

I got news for you. We are built in the image of God, and we need to be needed. Our souls cry out to be wanted. We desire to be useful in society. We feel better when we do good. Our value of self goes up. We need to see that small child reach up to us and giggle with glee. You are witnessing the bond. God needs our love for Him for the same reason you need to see your child ask to be picked up and hugged. You are seeing the nature of God's love in action. It is a circle. You need them as much as they need you. The bond is a circle.

When we remain selfish, we remain unfulfilled. Nothing is ever good enough, and we cannot trust in others because we know how we treat others and expect the same. Selfishness is like a disease that eats away at us. We were not meant to be this way.

We are born into a selfish state, and as we grow, we need to actively practice sharing and helping others. It does not come naturally to the body to share nor to consider others. Like the football player practicing all week for the big game, we need to practice this in a thousand little ways to overcome our animal nature, which desires to survive at all costs. While obeying the body may save the body, it destroys the soul.

CHAPTER 20

The Author's Journey

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 here too, 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. 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 parent's mixed marriage, I was exposed to a little of both religions and was able 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 quasihistorical 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 back burner in my life. It became something I had to do to be saved, but I had no bearing on my life here and now. At that time, I had not accepted Jesus Christ

fully in my life yet. I thought myself safe in my understanding of God even though I saw no real proof of His activities.

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 women 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, into the physical 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 in 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 must come from deep within you. You must 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 teachings I received in Catholic school were 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 and 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 reexamine 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 He 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 under-

stand 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 these hungers, they soon control us rather than us control 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 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 you. 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. I 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. At first, I 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 one another 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 did not feel 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 there 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 there. There was only love and caring, people who cared about people, and something even better. I still was not 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 agains 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 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, it was just enough to blind me to God; then the sinning grew in frequency and in 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 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 special education in the Word. What I have received in terms of knowledge has come from reading the Bible and having the scripture open 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 Pharisee's 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 Apostle Paul and me. I have the driving need to serve God and to speak His Word to all people. I dislike ritualistic worship, denominational boundaries, and people who use the Word or God as a way to put down people who are searching to find God. I tend to be nondenominational 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 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 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 has 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 are 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 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 in 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 my story of my experiences at the teen-encounter weekend in give testimony to how God touched my life.

CHAPTER 21

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 3:5–7)

It was getting to be the end of the teen-encounter weekend, and I was beginning to wonder what was wrong with me, why had others 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 on 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. He showed me a brand-new life, full of new feelings, experiences, and thought. 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, and 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, to 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? r 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 newborn-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, 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 continues to this day, for it is a good program, and I for one support it. I would still be lost without it.

At that 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 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 must be ready for the message, be 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 message 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, and 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

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 determine which one of these pertains to us. Below is the explanation by Jesus of the parable of the sower. (Matthew 13:3–9)

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 13:19–23)

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 do 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 each other and remarry. 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 22

Final Thoughts

I would like to sum up my thoughts for you here in this final chapter. *Truth and Faith* is really two books combined as one. The beginning shows how truth and faith is really the same thing. The world wants to teach us that Christianity is a fairy tale written to teach us fables. Some scientists want to prove that faith is a fantasy dreamed up by someone to control us uneducated people. Some like to shift the blame of all the world's problems, like war, violence, and suffering, on the teachings of religion.

I think I have pointed out that Christianity is not about fables, nor is it opposite science. Faith teaches us peace and not war or hatred or makes us the cause of suffering. Man himself is the cause of suffering. We fail to understand our own faith well enough to avoid creating evil. We punish those who do not think like us because we do not understand our own faith. We act foolishly, thinking we need to defend God with violent acts, rather than just to speak the truth. Poor Christians lose faith because a minister abuses a child or steals from the flock. These are human failings, which should not surprise us. Our faith is in God, Jesus, and His Holy Spirit, not in one man's foolishness.

Jesus is our King. The law is written and will never change. He is the king forever from the line of David, a king who does not fail, does not change His mind, and went to His death to buy us. One who will never deceive us. One with the backing of heaven itself. He is truth, all truth; He is God. The God who created everything known and unknown. God created truth itself. I have spent my whole life studying this and am more convinced today than ever that

the Word of God is true and is beyond our ability to grasp even a small portion of it.

The second half of this book were chapters that God had me write over twenty years ago. I was not an author then, nor even interested in pursuing writing. The Holy Spirit pestered me to write those words. Not knowing if anything would come of it, I have been asked to republish the book. So I am republishing *Newborn into Life with Christ*. I decided to publish several of the chapters in this book because of their importance. I believe the Holy Spirit guided me in them, and I published them to get the message out as God wished, and I added a couple of chapters of my conversion experience to help the reader understand where I came from.

Since the writing of the first book, I have had many experiences with God and the Holy Spirit. I have learned to recognize them and test them through the Bible. I have had mostly what is called word of knowledge, which is the opening of the Word of God for my understanding. Do you know that almost all the Christian faith can be understood through the parable of the lost son? I have found fifteen to sixteen messages as part of the whole: man's desire to sin, forgiveness, repentance, God's love for us, jealousy, condemnation, and much more indeed.

In the end, the last chapter, I do an appeal for a new kind of understanding of the kingdom of God. Think of it as an altar call, a stepping forward to accept Jesus Christ as your king now and forever. I want to make a new type of knight—a knight of conscience, a person willing to hold themselves to a higher standard for Jesus.

I hope this book has blessed you with opportunity to look at God in an eye-opening way. To view the faith in what it really is: a seeking of truth. God certainly open the floodgates of truth to me. Hopefully, I am able to share with you what He has freely given. I now consider myself a Christian author, although I never sought it, never dreamed of doing it. I struggled with myself of how to best serve God and decided that I could not take what He has shown me to my death without allowing the opportunity for His words to be shared. I challenge you to prove this book out to yourself. Do not just take my word for it. I think the journey is worth it.

AFTERWARD

Knights of the Word



I have created a new society called the Knights of the Word. Jesus is a king, and He has a kingdom. Yet the knights found in the world has fallen way short of the kingdom He wished to build. We had holy knight orders like the Templars, who slayed multitudes, defending the Holy Land for God. Funny, when did God ever lose it? God never needs us to win property for Him; it is all His. We just borrow it. Knights who follow this king or that, and they fell short as well.

They were to defend the weak, help the poor, live a more honorable life than those around them, yet they used their knighthood for power and riches.

This just did not seem to be the heart of Jesus, the one who would not bend a reed or cause harm.

Isaiah 42:3 Lookup
Verse Concept

A bruised reed He will not break and a dimly
burning wick He will not extinguish; He will
faithfully bring forth justice

I propose a knighthood that follows Jesus Christ's heart, a kingdom of conscience—one of kindness, of love, and that considers His Word as our law. I may run the society, but I am nothing more than a fellow knight seeking to serve my king. All Knights of the Word answer to Jesus, our King, only. If we donate money to a cause, we are doing it in Christ's name. If we help a person cross a street, we are helping Jesus, our King. If we teach His Word in any way, we are honoring His kingship and remembering His selfless act for us.

We follow our faith in Christianity and do it with more meaning, holding ourselves to a higher accountability. We are called to these three pillars of faith, Bible study, charity, and acts of kindness to all humanity. We are beyond the limits of human religion, yet serve in all the Christian churches. We can meet the expectations of service within our own faith communities, without demanding our brothers believe what we believe. Remember, faith in God is internal not external. God's relationship with us is personal.

The Knights of the Word are open to all Christians who desire to follow the Bible and Jesus Christ as King. Petty arguments between denominations is not allowed. Instead, we are to focus on Jesus and His Word, which we all agree on. You can go to a Pentecostal church and serve there or a Catholic church and serve there. We can work together in all churches to accomplish good in Christ's name. Our devotion is to God and not man. A Knight of the Word seeks to

build and not tear asunder. We promote working together and not division. Satan is the great accuser; we do not wish to give him more power. It is our duty as knights to stop the stain of division and to join each other in fellowship and serve our King in a united bond, which is His Word and our law.

The Knights of the Word welcome women in the ranks of the society, as they can server the truth as well as a man. Many women are great in the kingdom of God and server with great heart.

The Knights of the Word is not a worldly society. While we provide things like pins, certificates of accomplishment, awards, etc., we do not desire these things. We use them as a teaching tool. We wear these things to open a conversation about Jesus, our King. We get certificates to show the worldly that we have accomplished something to rise, for instance, a third-degree knight. Unlike a priest or deacon, everyday Christians have no way to show the worldly how involved we are in serving Christ. It offers some small comfort for them to trust your knowledge. It may open the door to evangelization. Teach them about your Lord and salvation, why you believe what you believe, and invite them to your church. I am not asking for the unbeliever to join us knights, but rather use the churches we belong to bring them up in the Lord.

Those who are already Christian, who already believe in the precepts of the Word of God, may join us in the knights. It is the goal of the knights to bring us to a higher level of conscience and understanding of God's Word and grow in humbleness and service. This is not the world where people only do things when it means a profit to themselves. It means being humble, giving out of your heart, and stepping out for your Lord and God.

While all this sounds difficult, it is not. As a Knight of the Word, you can rise in rank by acts of goodwill. These acts occur at your pace and can be done in your own church. You can choose how you serve and when. This group puts no demand on you apart from acting like a real Christian. To step out on your own will to serve Christ. Many of you already have the tasks being done to qualify you to rise in degree.

We are a group of Christians working together; this is not a new faith.

Since we as knights are dedicated to the Word of God, conducting a Bible study or a prayer group would be a fine way to serve. Dedicate some of your time toward reading the Bible. Encourage someone else to join the knights and squire them if they are not yet Christian. There are thousands of ways to serve. Lector in your church, teach Christian Bible school. Since we are a kingdom of conscience, what separates us from everyday Christians is our dedication to Jesus and one another.

To those who have read this book and like the idea of the Knights of the Word, you can join or check out our website: <http://knightsoftheword.org/>



It is a new concept of knighthood. One of conscience and love, not of violence. It is where honor is not mixed up with power, money, or control. Honor is humbleness; honor is truth. Honor is kindness and, most of all, service to God. Yes, we are counter-cultural. I am asking you to swim upriver against the current to serve

without reward, to put the self to death, and to rise up a new creation. I believe it separates the false Christian from the real Christian. Are you up to the challenge?

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 us all. Who am I to argue with God?

Truth and Faith is a book that is made to argue against people who think the Christian religion is just another fairy tale or science

and faith are in opposition. Nothing can be further from the truth! As we journey together discussing the Bible, you will find that God *is* truth and any journey—whether by philosophy, science, or study of the Bible—brings us closer to God and the truth. If God created the universe and all things in it, He created all truth. I just attempt to point this out in the book and help us understand our place in the universe. The seeming chaos of the universe is not chaos, but a planned creation by a uniform god. It looks like chaos only because our minds are not capable of grasping the immensity of God's creation.

Our relationship with God is just that—a relationship. It is a kingdom of conscience that we must be part of every day. The last chapter is about a group I formed dedicated to just that. We rededicate our lives to Jesus, our King, live that kingdom of conscience, and dedicate ourselves to bring the Word of God to everyone we know as part of that kingdom. Jesus is the leader of His kingdom, not I; I am just a fellow knight.