

*Starting
My New Life
in Christ*

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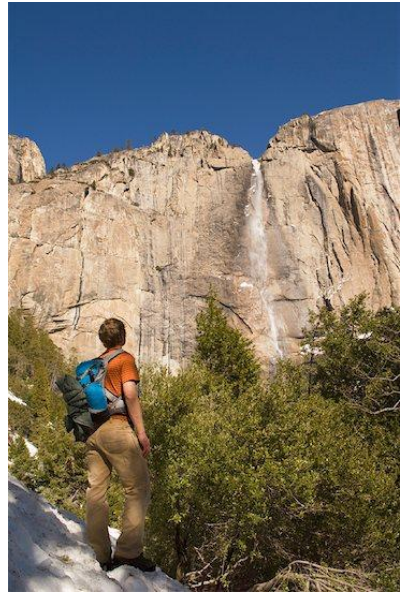


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INTRODUCTION

As you read the tract “The Secret to Life’s Meaning,” you discovered that the meaning to life is found in having a personal relationship with God. Amazingly God sent His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for our sins on the cross. This supreme sacrifice causes us to realize how much we mean to God and how much He loves us. If you trusted Christ as your Savior, then you are now a child of God and have eternal life. But this is only the beginning. You have now embarked on the great adventure for which you were created.

Now that you have become a child of God through faith in Christ, you are ready to start living a new life. At first you may not sense that changes are happening in your life, but you can be assured that changes are in store for you. God wants to do four important things in your life. First, He wants you to *know* Him in an intimate way. Second, He wants to see you become more and more *like* Him. Third, He wants you to have a meaningful *purpose* in life. Fourth, He ultimately wants to bring you into His very presence, so you can *live forever with Him*.

This booklet, *Starting My New Life in Christ*, is written to help you get started in your new life as a Christian.

TOPIC 1:

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME WHEN I BELIEVED?

Let’s start by reviewing what happened to you when you believed the gospel. It is very important to realize that none of us deserve what God has done for us. This is the essence of GRACE! Ephesians 2:1-3 describes our spiritual condition before we became a Christian: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

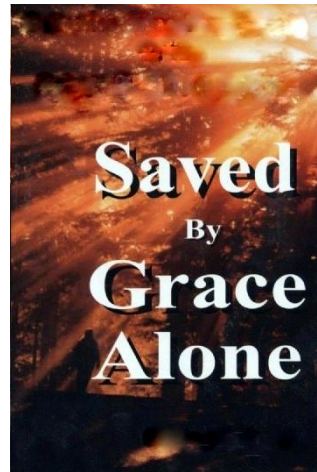


in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." What this passage is telling us is that previously we were spiritually dead, we were living sinful lives (harmful to us and dishonoring to God), and we deserved God's wrath. Fortunately, through faith in Christ, we have been saved (rescued) from this dilemma.

One result of our faith is that we are now spiritually alive. Ephesians 2:4-5 indicates that "even when we were dead in our transgressions, (God) made us alive together with Christ." Before, we were physically alive but spiritually dead. Now we are also spiritually alive. Though we will eventually die physically (like all men), we will never die spiritually.

God tells us that our salvation (or rescue) is based on His GRACE. Simply put, God did for us what He did not have to do and which we in no way deserved. We see this truth clearly taught in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." It is very important that you understand that salvation is by grace. Grace is the way

you have entered the Christian life, and grace is the way that God means for you to relate to Him as you live out the Christian life. Don't ever fall into the trap of thinking you must *perform* for God, as though He will love you more if you abide by a list of "do's and don'ts." True Christianity is about a relationship—a relationship



based on living by God’s grace—not about a performance.

Not only have we been made spiritually alive through faith in Christ, but we have been forgiven of all our sins—no matter

whether those sins were committed in the past or will be in the future. [When Christ died on the cross, all our sins were “in the future”]. God can forgive our sins, because Jesus Christ



has paid the penalty that our sins deserved. If God simply *ignored* our sins, He would not be a just God. Christ paid the penalty by going to the cross in our place. Acts 10:43 instructs us, “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” Notice that the only condition for receiving God’s forgiveness is to “believe in Him,” that is, in Jesus Christ. There is no good work or any religious act you can do that will gain you God’s forgiveness. When you believe (which is a response, not a work), God saves you and He gets all the credit. Otherwise you would have something to boast of.

TOPIC 2: GOD’S UNRELENTING LOVE FOR ME

We have already mentioned the love of God, but now we want to take a closer look at this very important subject. I would venture to say that the deepest need that each of us has is to love and to be loved. Without love, life loses all its significance. Apart from love, each of us would probably either retreat into a life of despondency or to a life of utter self-centeredness. Fortunately for us all, God is a God of love. This is part of His very nature and what motivates Him to do what He does for us. As John 3:16 so

eloquently puts it, "For God so loved the world that He gave" Though most of us can grasp the fact that God is a personal being who loves, what is sometimes difficult to comprehend is that he would love "me" individually. Maybe this is because we don't feel very lovable or that we are ashamed of things we have done in the past. We find it easier to believe that God loves other people than to believe He loves us.



Feelings are funny things. Sometimes they are dependable, but at other times they are not. Something can be true, whether or not we feel that it is. So it is with God's love. Whether or not we think He loves us, the truth is that He does. His Word says so. Not only does He love us, but He is also totally committed to us. In fact there is nothing you could possibly do that would cause God to love you more, and there is nothing you could possibly do that would cause God to stop loving you! His love for you is perfect. God's love for you will not get better with time, nor will it cease on account of your disobedience to Him. Listen carefully to these words from Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Can you think of anything that could be added to this list that might separate you from Christ's love? The words "nor any other created thing" certainly preclude any other possibility beyond those specifically listed here.

What are the implications of God's love for us? First, when we trusted Christ as our Savior, we entered into a personal relationship with God. We did not simply "become religious" or become a member of a religious group. We were joined in a living union with God Himself. Christ now lives in you! The Apostle Paul spoke of this as God's mystery . . . "the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27). You have not joined some sort of social club with a membership that can easily be revoked. You have been made one with Christ. He is now in you, and you in Him!

A second implication is that God is committed to you for the long haul . . . not only for the remainder of the time you have here on earth but also for all eternity.

During the course of your Christian

life here on earth, you will have many good moments and many that are difficult. God will bring blessings into your life that will cause you to rejoice, but He will also be there to walk with you through the valleys. Furthermore He will not give up on you when you disobey or fail to be all He wants you to be. That does not mean He will simply overlook your sin (He doesn't!), but it does mean that He sticks with you and never gives up on you. Never!

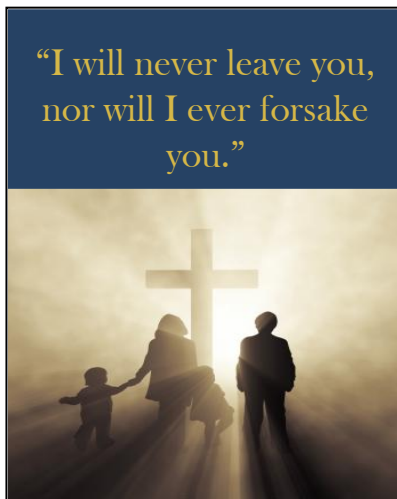
A third implication of God's love is that you will always be His



child. To have eternal life is to have something that is eternal and cannot be lost. Once you have become His child, you will always be His child. Nothing can ever change that. In Hebrews 13:5 we read, "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you.'" For some Christians, this is a difficult teaching to understand.

Admittedly there are some verses in the Bible that might at first reading imply we can lose our salvation—either on account of some sin we commit or because we might renounce our faith in Christ. A careful study of the Bible, however, teaches that we can have assurance of our salvation. It really is possible to

KNOW we are a Christian—that we have eternal life—and that we will go to heaven. The Apostle John at the close of one of his letters said, "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13). This biblical truth—what we call the assurance of the believer—is not hard to comprehend, once we thoroughly understand salvation by grace. If we did not gain eternal life because we deserved it, then it stands to reason that we will not lose it by becoming unworthy of it. We were never worthy of it to begin with!

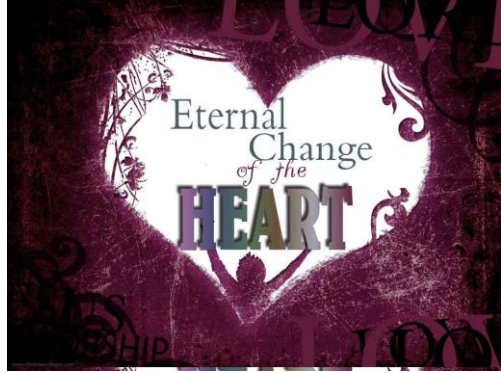


TOPIC 3: MY NEW IMAGE IN CHRIST

All kinds of people come to faith in Christ. Some are rich, some poor. Some are attractive, others not. Some are athletes,

others are nonathletic. The family of God is very diverse . . . a mosaic of different nationalities, personality types, and talents. Yet each one of us is special to God. Even if we don't feel very special, we are. To God, we are.

No matter what earthly things we bring with us when we come to Christ (whether good or bad), God has a plan to change us for the better. We must understand, however, that this is primarily an inward change at the heart level.



While all of us might wish to be more attractive or more athletic (or any one of a number of other things we might wish for), that is not what matters the most to God. He is primarily concerned about our character. It may turn out that in the course of time, God makes us more talented or develops our skills in a certain area. But the change that He is most interested in concerns our *inner person*.

God's desire is to make us more like Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:9-14 tells us that we now have a "new self" which is being renewed:

". . . to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

When we come to God, we come just as we are . . . warts and

all. We may have been a very moral person (by human standards), or we may have been on a very sinful path leading to self-destruction, but we are no longer that person we used to be. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we are told, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."



Regardless of what our morality may have looked like beforehand, the truth is that

all of us were sinners who needed a Savior. We stood condemned before a Holy God, and it is only because of His grace that we were shown mercy. Now God is pleased to call us His "beloved."

Having come to God through faith in Christ, He is now ready to begin an overhaul project with us. He will work in our life (and it will be a lifelong process!) to chip away at the rough places as He conforms us into the image of Christ. This means God is going to make us *holy*. We cannot make ourselves holy, but God works to make us more Christ-like, and in doing so He makes us more holy. This is not something we can do for ourselves (we don't have the power in ourselves to do that). Rather it is a *growth process*. Let me illustrate. When we were born physically, we needed good nourishment and exercise to grow physically and develop a healthy body. Similarly our spiritual new birth should result in spiritual growth. Once again we need good nourishment (through reading the Bible and listening to good Bible teachers), and we need exercise (opportunities to exercise our faith and act upon what God is teaching us).

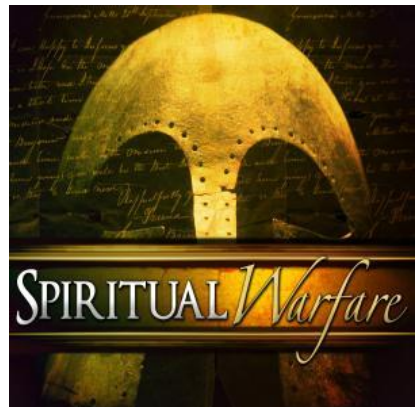
In addition God gives us a new source of power to respond to Him in obedience. This power comes from the Holy Spirit

(discussed in Topic 5). As we believe God and cooperate with His Holy Spirit, we grow spiritually.

To sum up, as a new Christian you are already clean in God's sight. Because you have exercised faith in Christ, God has done two very important things for you. First, He has forgiven all your sin for all time. Second, He has given you the righteousness of Christ. In Philippians 3:9 the Apostle Paul spoke about this gift of righteousness when he described His joy in being "found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Paul was describing in this verse His *positional* righteousness, how God actually viewed him. Even though we are forgiven and possess a righteous standing in God's eyes, He desires to transform us *practically* into the image of Christ. So my new image is Christ: I now have His righteousness, and God is at work in my life to transform me by making me more Christ-like.

TOPIC 4: UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE I FACE

Before you became a Christian, you already had some sort of worldview in place, that is, an outlook on life . . . what you considered to be real, what causes the world to operate the way it does, a set of values, etc. The moment you believed in Christ, however, your worldview was radically affected. What you considered to be *true* has now been changed. One of the crucial changes for many new Christians (especially those who have been



educated in the west) is a new perspective of the spiritual realm. Obviously you have come to believe there is a Creator God (for some people that alone is a worldview change). But there is also an unseen realm of spiritual beings that the Bible calls "angels." These angelic beings were created before man was placed on the earth. For reasons we do not fully understand, there was also a rebellion against God that was led by the highest of these angelic beings named Lucifer. Those who sided with Lucifer in his rebellion became known as "demons," while Lucifer himself is referred to in the Bible as Satan (a word meaning the "adversary") and also as the "devil" (meaning "slanderer"). The majority of angels remained faithful to God, and we refer to them as the "good angels" (or simply as "angels").

As Christians we understand that Satan and the demons in league with him are engaged in a war against God. Even though their efforts to defeat God and His purposes are futile, they nevertheless cause great turmoil and havoc upon the earth. This is part of the explanation for the philosophical problem of evil and suffering. Satan and his demons particularly hate those of us who are Christians. Not surprisingly they seek to oppose us, confuse us, and if possible even to wreck our lives. 1 Peter 5:8-9 instructs us, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." We do not need to be afraid of Satan and his demons, however, since we are



on the winning side. Yet it is important for us to recognize their existence, understand how they operate, and know how to counter their attack against us. We are in a great spiritual battle, and we must know our enemy if we are to prevail.

Satan and the demons have many tactics they use in their mischief. One of the most common tactics they use is *temptation*.

As evil angelic beings, they are not bound to operate according to God's righteous ways. Hence, they will lie and cheat in any way they can to try and get us to depart from God's will (and thus to disobey Him). In

Temptation

...sin a little!



Matthew 4:1-11 we are told that Satan even tempted the Lord Jesus Christ. As a Christian, you can expect that Satan is going to tempt you in various ways. For example, he may tempt you to steal money, to cheat on a test, to use drugs or alcohol, or to do things that are sexually immoral. By getting us to disobey God, Satan knows this will cause problems in our relationship with God.

Yet there are other ways that Satan works against us. He often seeks to deceive us, so that we get our eyes off the truth. In 2 Corinthians 11:3 we read, "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." Satan will try to deceive you into doing something that is not really God's will for you. Another of his tactics is to bring about discouragement in our lives and get us doubting God's Word (which leads to unbelief).

In conclusion, expect to face opposition from Satan and don't be surprised when you encounter this. Realize where this is coming from and ask God to help you rely on His Word, so you

can stand fast in the truth and resist Satan.

TOPIC 5: THE HOLY SPIRIT **—GOD'S POWER WITHIN ME**

Closely related to the topic of our spiritual battle is the promise of God's Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that there is only one God, but this one God is very complex (which shouldn't surprise us!). Hence we speak of God as being a Trinity—one God in three persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the concept of a triune God is really beyond our human comprehension, the truth remains that the Holy Spirit is God (as is the Father and the Son).



God's ultimate plan for your life is to give you a body that will be capable of existing forever. He will give you a resurrection body. Until the day that He does that, you will exist in your present human body. But . . . God has done something very special for us during this waiting time. He has placed His Holy Spirit within us. According to Ephesians 1:13-14, this happened at the very moment you trusted Christ as your Savior: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." So, if you are a Christian, then you already have the Holy Spirit living inside of you. God has given you the Holy Spirit as a "pledge"—a down-payment, as it were—until the day when He will give you a resurrection body.

Having the Holy Spirit within us makes all the difference in the

world to us. He comforts and encourages us, for instance, and in general "helps" us. In John 14:16-17 Jesus told His disciples, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that he may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth." The Holy Spirit also helps us to comprehend spiritual truth in ways that unbelievers cannot. "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The Holy Spirit also gives us power to be witnesses for Christ. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." These are just a few of the blessings and advantages that are ours as a result of having the Holy Spirit.

Though every true Christian has the Holy Spirit living within, not every Christian is necessarily fully benefiting from His



presence. We are easily prone to sin and giving in to temptation. There is a reason for this: even though we have become Christians and received God's Holy Spirit, there is something evil and corrupt within us. The Bible calls this the "flesh," not the physical skin that forms our body but a *nature* within us that has a propensity to sin. The flesh does not want to please God; in fact it cannot even do so. In fact there is a battle going on within every Christian, a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh. Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes this inner battle: "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you

may not do the things that you please. . . . Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Galatians 5:17-19). Paul could have gone on to describe other deeds of the flesh, but even this partial list gives us a good idea what happens when we allow the flesh to take control in our life.

What is the solution to this problem that we have with the flesh? The solution that Paul presented is to let the Holy Spirit have control in our life: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).



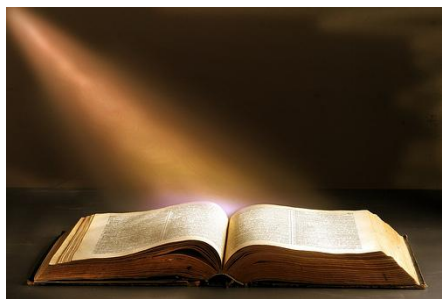
A similar truth is taught in Ephesians 5:18-20, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." So we learn from these verses that although every true Christian has the Holy Spirit, not every Christian is filled with the Holy Spirit and walking by the Spirit. In fact I would venture to say that most Christians today are (sadly) not living a Spirit-filled life. And yet it is the Spirit-filled life that is the true Christian life God wants us to experience.

We cannot fully describe how to experience the Spirit-filled life in such a short amount of space as we have here, but a few words of clarification will hopefully be of help. First, God will not force Himself upon you. Unless you desire to be filled with the

Spirit and to walk with God, you won't. This is not something that happens automatically to us as Christians. Second, you cannot walk in sin and be filled with the Spirit at the same time. Hence we need to allow God to cleanse us of things we have done wrong. You should start by confessing to God any known sin in your life and then repenting of it. This means you agree with God that what you have been doing is sin and then you turn from it (repent). In 1 John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Third, you need to *yield* yourself to God, telling Him that you really want to walk in His way and allow Him to be Lord in your life (that is, you submit yourself to Him and are ready to obey Him). Fourth, you need to allow His Word to "dwell" within you. Colossians 3:16 tells us, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." You may observe that this sounds very similar to what we read earlier in Ephesians 5:18-20. Indeed, the Spirit-filled life is the Word-filled life! You cannot have one without the other.

TOPIC 6: THE BIBLE—GOD SPEAKS TO ME

In the previous topic we learned about the Holy Spirit and concluded with the thought that our minds need to be filled with the Word of God if we are to experience the Spirit's power in our lives. What makes the Bible



different from all other books in the world? The answer is that God Himself has given the Bible to man, so that man can know what God has to say to him. In one sense, the Bible is a

collection of smaller books that were written by many different men over a period of about 1500 years. Yet what they wrote was the result of God's Holy Spirit guiding them in what to write down. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 puts it this way: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The Bible is not merely inspirational; it is inspired by God. That means that it comes from God Himself, for the word "inspired" literally means that it is breathed out from God. He may have used human authors to write things down, but the Holy Spirit made sure that what they wrote is what God wanted to say . . . word for word!

If we believe that the Word of God (the Bible) is inspired by God, then this makes all the difference in the world how we look at it. The implication (since it is ultimately authored by God) is that the Bible gives us the only completely dependable source about truth. Everything it says is true and reliable. Jesus said in His prayer to the Father in John 17:17, "Your word is truth."

Because the Word is inspired by God and is the truth, it only makes sense that we would want to study it carefully. In fact, if we want to be a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, we *must* be in His Word. In John 8:31-32 we read, "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'"



By reading and studying the Bible, we learn the truth about many things. First and foremost, we learn about God Himself and what He is like. The Bible teaches us how to know God and how to live wisely in a dangerous world where spiritual warfare is

going on. It also teaches us principles for living successfully. For example, we learn how to be happily married, how to raise children, how to use money wisely, and how to live more healthily. We learn valuable lessons from past history, and we learn many things about mankind's future.

As a new Christian you will find it fascinating to read and study the Bible. Yet we must remember that God did not give the Bible just to tickle our intellect. The Bible is given to us so that we will know how to obey God and walk in fellowship with Him. Therefore we must remember how important it is to apply the truth of the Bible to our lives. God wants us to be *doers* of the Word, just as it says in James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." If we are applying the Word of God to our lives (and this is part of submitting to Jesus as our Lord!), then we will experience more and more of God's blessing in our lives.

Without a doubt, the Bible is a complicated book. So don't be discouraged if you encounter many things that you don't understand. Act on what you do understand, and God will reveal more things from His Word to you. Jesus promised, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."

TOPIC 7: PRAYER—LEARNING TO SPEAK TO GOD

Imagine a small peasant boy from an obscure village who grows up working in the fields by the sweat of his brow. He has virtually nothing in terms of material wealth and no social standing to speak of.



Nevertheless a royal carriage comes riding up to the village one day with an envelope engraved with the king's seal. Inside the envelope is an invitation for this peasant boy to come to the palace of the king, to dine with him, and to spend the afternoon walking the palace grounds and talking with the king. Who could have imagined that such an insignificant peasant boy would have been granted such a high honor?

In some ways this make-believe story reflects a very real spiritual truth. The Lord God is eternal. He is the Creator of every natural thing we know in our universe, from the distant galaxies to the most minute microscopic creature. He is infinitely wise and utterly more intelligent than we are. Yet He has invited us to come into His royal presence that we might have the high honor of conversing with Him.

We might wish to excuse ourselves from prayer, thinking that God must surely be too busy to have time to hear our feeble murmurings. Yet He is not too busy to hear our prayers. There are many reasons why prayer is important to God. First and foremost, prayer brings glory to God. When we pray, we (in effect) kneel before Him in humility, acknowledging Him as Lord. Second, when we pray we demonstrate our dependency upon God. We were not meant to be self-sufficient automatons. We were created to be completely dependent upon the Lord.



Since the topic of prayer is one of the most extensive subjects in the Bible, we cannot possibly cover everything there is to know about prayer in this short space. Yet here are four key lessons to help you get started in becoming a person of prayer. First,

remember that prayer is a conversation between you and God, and you do not have to worry about how you say things. God is far more interested in the attitude of your heart than He is with the words you use. He is not entertained by a memorized prayer or in you using meaningless repetition. In Matthew 6:5-6 Jesus taught, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites [the Jewish religious leaders]; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Second, pray in faith.

Doubting is not the way to gain God's approval or move Him to act. In Mark 11:24 Jesus said,

"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you



have received them, and they will be granted you." God is pleased when we look to Him with eyes of faith, believing that nothing is too difficult for Him!

Third, we cannot come before God expecting His forgiveness, if we have an unforgiving spirit toward another person. In Mark 11:25 Jesus explained, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." This reminds us that prayer is not automatic; some heart preparation is necessary before we come asking God to hear our requests.

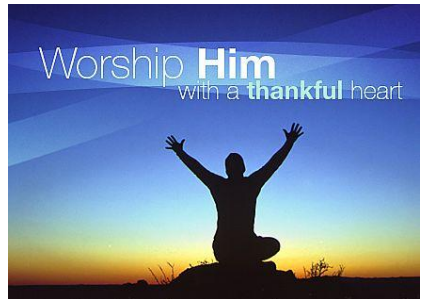
Fourth, prayer is the alternative to being consumed by anxiety and the way to having inner peace. In Philippians 4:6-7 we read, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and

supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Now that we have discussed a few of the important lessons regarding prayer, let us consider a model for how we can approach God in prayer. Rather than rudely darting into the King's presence, we should enter in humble recognition of who He is. Many believers have found the following acronym helpful: ACTS.

- A** - Adoration
- C** - Confession
- T** - Thanksgiving
- S** - Supplication

The Lord God is not a big genie in the sky, as though we only turn to Him to *get something we want*. Therefore it is appropriate when approaching the Lord in prayer to first "adore" Him. We do this by praising Him for who He is. For example, we can praise Him that He is always faithful, or that His love for us is always unconditional. Next, we should take time to "confess" any known sins in our life. We must remember that we are coming before a God who is perfectly holy. Psalm 66:18 declares, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." Then we should take time to "thank" God for things He has done. This could be in regard to our own life, but also in regard to our nation, our church, or anyone we know. Having a thankful spirit is pleasing to the Lord. Finally, we can "supplicate"



God, that is, ask Him for things we would like to see happen or for help that we need. Although we can certainly ask for things we

want or need, we should remember to ask Him for things we would like to see Him do for the sake of His kingdom.

Take time to pray often. Have a set time for prayer each day but also stand ready to pray at any time throughout the day. The Lord loves to hear your voice! "The prayer of the upright is His delight" (Proverbs 15:8).

TOPIC 8: FELLOWSHIPING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH

In the first century there was a church in a city called Colossae (in present-day Turkey). Even though the Apostle Paul did not evangelize this city, the gospel had found its way to these people and bore fruit. Paul then wrote them a letter saying, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel" (Colossians 1:3-5). Notice that he commended them for their faith, hope, and love. Their lives had been eternally changed by their faith in Jesus Christ. They were no longer merely citizens who happened to live in the same city; they were now brothers and sisters in Christ who comprised the church at Colossae. They now had a special relationship with one another.

Earlier in this booklet we talked about the miracle of becoming one with Jesus Christ at the moment we trusted Him to be our Savior (see Topic 2). Others who trust Christ are also joined with Him. So it is easy to understand that we are also joined spiritually with other believers. Together we make up the body of Christ. Hence the true church is not a building or a certain denomination, but rather those people (collectively) who have been "born again" through faith in Christ alone. At the moment a person *believes*, he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and joined to the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us, "For in one Spirit we were all

baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Because of our spiritual union in Christ, believers have a unique relationship with one another. We are not an organization or social club. We are Christ's body on earth. Furthermore we need each other, and our love for one



another is the greatest testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ. In John 13:34-35 Jesus told his disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." In Ephesians 4:32–5:2 we are admonished, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us."

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ humbly served others, so we are to do. An important aspect of walking in the Spirit (rather than letting the flesh dominate) is that "through love we serve one another" (Galatians 5:13). Learning what it means to be a servant to others . . . especially to those in the body of Christ . . . requires humility. Rather than being puffed up with pride, we are to regard others as more important than ourselves.

We are also responsible for one another's spiritual care and growth. "But encourage one another day after day, . . . so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). 1 Thessalonians 5:11 adds, "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also

are doing." As you participate in the "body life" of a local church, you will also discover that you have been given a spiritual gift(s) from the Lord. This is to be used to build up others and to glorify Christ. Likewise, others have been given spiritual gifts, and you will be blessed by their unique contribution.

All of these admonitions and observations reflect an important spiritual truth: we need one another. In order to grow as a Christian and become all that Christ wants us to be, we must have fellowship with other Christians. We need fellow believers whom we can pray with, study the Scriptures with, and be available to help and love. We need others who will keep us accountable, who will encourage us when we are discouraged, and with whom we can work for the sake of Christ's kingdom and glory on earth.

TOPIC 9: LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE FUTURE

One of the most famous military battles of all time was Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815. Had Napoleon been able



to gaze ahead into the future and discover beforehand what the outcome was going to be, surely he would have changed his strategy. Because he had no way of knowing the future, he was soundly defeated by the combined British and Prussian armies.

In contrast to Napoleon, those of us who are Christians do know a great deal about the future . . . thanks to what God has revealed to us in His Word. We know, for instance, that the Lord

Jesus Christ is going to return again to earth one day. We call this the second coming of Christ. Following His resurrection from the grave, His disciples were witnesses to His ascension into heaven. Acts 1:10-11 records, "And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.'"



Christ's second coming is described in many other places in the Bible. [Matthew 24 records Jesus' own prediction of His return]. Unlike His first coming, Jesus' return will be significantly different. In His second coming, He will come as a victorious king, and the whole world will be brought under His righteous rule. This will usher in a time of unparalleled peace, justice, and righteousness that will last for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-6).

In conjunction with Christ's second coming, we who are His disciples will be resurrected and made like Him (the final stage in our transformation). The Apostle John wrote, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

There are many things that will result from Christ's second coming. One of the more important for us as Christians is the fact that we will each have to stand before the presence of Christ individually for Him to evaluate us in terms of our faithfulness and our service to Him while we lived here on earth. The Bible calls this "the judgment seat of Christ." This is a judgment for

Christians only and is not for the purpose of determining our eternal destiny (that issue has already been settled), but for determining what rewards we shall receive and what role we will be given in Christ's kingdom.

The Apostle Paul described this scene in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10:

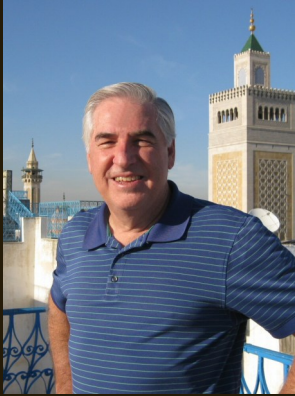
"Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the



judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." What then is our ambition while we live here on earth? To please Him! Why? Because we will have to answer to Christ one day. That is a very sobering thought that every Christian needs to take seriously. The life we live now does matter and will have consequences for our future resurrected life!

In Matthew 25:14-30 Christ told a parable of a man going away on a long journey. Before he departed, he entrusted to each of his slaves a sum of money for which they were to be responsible. Upon his return, the master brought them in to evaluate how they had done. Those who had been faithful were commended: "Well done, good and faithful slave." The one who was unfaithful was rebuked and suffered great loss.

So we as Christians cannot afford to console ourselves with the thought that after we die we will simply go to heaven. Although that is true, the reality is far more complex. Our goal is to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful slave" and to be rewarded for a life of faithfulness to our King, Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore we must live our lives now in light of the future we know is coming!



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