

GROWTH & DISCIPLESHIP

How to Grow Spiritually and How to Help Others Grow

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

**"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"
(Matthew 28:19)**

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SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND DISCIPLESHIP

Ever since I became a Christian 60 years ago it's been my desire to grow spiritually. I learned much about the Bible in my own study as well as in Bible College and seminary. However, I didn't just want to know answers in my head, I wanted to apply them to my life. I wanted to become more like Jesus. Like Paul, I wanted to know Jesus, not just know about Him (Philippians 3:10-11). It's my desire to know Jesus in a more personal, intimate way. That is still my main goal in life. I also desire to help others grow.

As a husband, father and pastor I've had the privilege of helping others grow as well. Sometimes this is done by teaching a group, other times by one-on-one counseling and example.

It's a privilege to write this book about how to grow spiritually and how to help others grow spiritually. I hope it can help you as you grow and also help you to train others around you so they also grow in their walk with the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago I read about a young man who dives in the ocean to catch exotic fish for aquariums. He said that one of the most popular aquarium fish is the shark. He explained that if you catch a baby shark and confine it, it will stay small enough to swim around the aquarium you put it in. Sharks can be six inches long yet fully matured. But if you turn them loose in the ocean, they grow to their normal length of eight feet.

That is like what happens to some Christians. They never grow to become fully mature Christians. Babies are cute but if they don't grow something is wrong. Christians are to grow spiritually in their faith as well. Unfortunately, there are many who come to Christ for salvation and will spend eternity in heaven, but don't grow spiritually in this life. This was true in Paul's time as well (1 Corinthians 3:1; Hebrews 5:12).

It is God's will that we grow to be more like Jesus (Hebrews 5:11; 6:1; 2 Peter 3:18). In fact, He commands it (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). We are also warned not to remain spiritual babies because of the danger of falling into various kinds of sin (Ephesians 4:14).

Not only are we to grow spiritually, but we are commanded to help others grow as well. Pastors, leaders, in fact all Christians are to disciple younger Christians so they mature in their faith. Jesus commands us to do that (Matthew 28:19-20). The early church did it (2 Timothy 2:2) and so must we.

The purpose of this book is two-fold. First, it is to help those who read it to grow spiritually. In addition, it is to help those who read it to know how to help others to grow as well. My desire is that it helps you in both ways.

1. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH & DISCIPLESHIP

A. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Spiritual growth is the process of becoming more mature in one's relationship with Jesus Christ. It's not just knowing more in our minds but being able to apply it to our daily lives. It starts with knowing God's Word: how to pray and live a life of obedience to God and the importance of sharing our faith with others. But it doesn't end with just knowing about these things. It means learning how to practice them daily.

Perhaps the best summary of spiritual growth is becoming more like Jesus Christ. Someone who is growing spiritually will think and act more and more like Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

It is a lifelong process. It begins the moment a person comes to faith in Christ and should continue until a person enters Christ's presence after this life.

B. WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP

One day Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. He saw the fishermen Peter and Andrew and invited them to come and follow Him. He promised that if they did so He would make them fishers of men (Mark 1:16-18). They had spent their lives taking that which was alive and killing it (fish). Then He challenged them to leave that life so they can take that which is dead in sin and make it alive (people). Later he saw Matthew and called him to make a change in life and follow Him as well (Mark 2:13-14). Their lives changed completely, they are known as disciples, followers of Jesus.

Jesus also calls us to give up our self-centered life and follow Him in all we say and do. He still needs those who will go beyond salvation and live their lives daily for Him. He calls us to be disciples. A disciple is someone who learns from another. They pattern their actions and thoughts after— Jesus. The goal is to become more like Him in what the person thinks, says and does. Spiritual growth, or discipleship, is a lifelong process. We are commanded to “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). We will never attain perfection in this life, but our goal is to keep growing and maturing as long as we are alive.

2. HOW TO GROW & HELP OTHERS GROW

A. HOW TO GROWING SPIRITUALLY

Only those who are spiritually alive can experience spiritual growth (1 John 5:11-12; Romans 6:7). Without being born again into new life one cannot grow in faith. When we turn to Jesus for salvation, His Holy Spirit lives inside us (2 Corinthians 5:17) and produces growth in us. As we yield to His guidance (Ephesians 5:18) and live in obedience to Him we will become more like Jesus (Galatians 5:16-18, 24-26). We must consciously choose by faith to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us in thought, word and action (Romans 6:11-14). It is Christ's power through the Holy Spirit in us that gives us the ability to grow spiritually (2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 3:20). As we rely on His power and follow His teachings, we can develop greater maturity.

Growing spiritually requires increasing our knowledge and understanding of God's Word while decreasing our self-centeredness and sin (2 Peter 1:5-8). It means getting stronger in faith and trust in God. There is no one way for everyone to grow spiritually. Everyone is different and grows in different ways and at different paces. Some grow quickly, others slowly.

Finding an older, more mature Christian to help guide and counsel you is very helpful in spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 11:1). Involvement in a local church (chapter 14) and exercising your spiritual gifts (chapter 13) also is important (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Growing spiritually is similar to growing physically. Both start as babies and need much healthy food to grow. For the Christian God's Word brings needed nourishment for health and growth. Babies desire to communicate and learn to talk. We grow in faith as we learn to connect with God in prayer. Walking without stumbling takes time and practice to learn and living a Christian life while gaining victory over sin also takes time and dedication. The list of parallels goes on and on and will be developed throughout this book.

Growing as a Christian is important, but it is not easy. Often great growth comes through great pain. Just as physical strength is built through exertion and straining against resistance, spiritual strength is developed in the hard times of life (James 1:2-4). Therefore, God encourages us to persevere in our walk with Him (2 Thessalonians 3:13; Galatians 6:9). Still, we have His promise that when we strive to become more like Jesus in all we think, do and say that He will honor that desire by slowly but surely helping grow to maturity (Philippians 1:6).

B. HOW TO DISCIPLE OTHERS

Not only is each Christian to grow, we are also commanded to help others grow as well. This is for all believers, but especially for pastors and leaders (1 Corinthians 11:1). Jesus is our example.

Jesus called people to salvation, to repent of their sin, and accept His gift of free salvation. Those who responded and followed, He then challenged to discipleship (Mark 1:17; 2:14). He asked them to put Him first, to live for Him, to serve Him, and give up all their plans for themselves. Some still worked at their careers, others left to have more time to serve. From this group of those who wanted to learn more and grow spiritually, He later chose some to be part of His inner circle of twelve. But first He challenged them to not stop at salvation, but to grow in their faith and live for Jesus (2 Peter 3:18).

Jesus taught them God's Word and how it applied to their lives. He showed them the importance of knowing and doing God's will instead of their own. He taught them by word and example, and then sent them out to practice and learn by experience (Mark 6:7). Evangelism is important, but just as important is training those who believe so they grow spiritually and live for Jesus. That way they can reach out to evangelize even more people. He trained them, so they could in turn train others (2 Timothy 2:2). Then after Jesus' resurrection, they were prepared to carry on the work He started.

There is no right or wrong way, no one way that is better than another way, to help someone grow in their faith. There is no special program or plan to use, each person is different, and God works differently in everyone's life. Jesus spent time with His disciples. He loved them, taught them, encouraged them and gave them many opportunities to apply what they were learning. Just like Jesus, we can disciple others by teaching several at once in a class or training them one-on-one. They can watch our life to see how we live and copy that (1 Corinthians 11:1). The best way to learn how to disciple others is to study Jesus' life and apply what He did to your own life.

Read through this book to make sure you understand all these aspects of living the Christian life. Be sure to practice them and keep growing yourself. At the end of each chapter you will find suggestions as to how to use that chapter to disciple others. Use them with those who are not as spiritually mature as you are.

HUSBANDS should go through this book with their wives as well as for themselves, making sure they disciple them in the areas covered. Teach these things to her and encourage her in them as well.

PARENTS must disciple their own children. They have several years to do this but should start when very young and include these things as a natural part of daily life (Deuteronomy 6:7; 11:19). When they are younger set an example in all you say and do. As they get older start helping them grow spiritually by teaching them the principles mentioned in this book. Focus especially on salvation so they understand their need for Jesus and can respond when He touches their heart. Teach them how to pray, live a godly life, overcome temptation and all the other necessary disciplines as well. When they are older, go through this book with them chapter by chapter. Even before they are born, pray daily for them and each aspect of their lives. Share with them the things God is teaching you. They must see that Jesus lives in you and makes a difference in your life or they won't be attracted to Him and want to follow Him.

C. HOW TO KNOW IF WE or OTHERS ARE GROWING

To evaluate spiritual growth, we can measure our improvement in the "fruit of the Spirit." The Spirit desires to produce these qualities in us: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). When we, or those we are working with, grow in these traits then we know spiritual growth is taking place for these best describe Jesus.

When my children were young we measured their growth every 6 months. We had a chart we would put against the wall and draw a line showing their height. We could see how much they had grown since the last time. We don't have that kind of measuring stick to tell if we or our people are growing spiritually, but we do have some standards in God's Word that can help us measure growth. I want to give you 10 of them. See how you are doing compared to them and see how your church is doing as well. (Taken from "What God Expects of Pastors" by Jerry Schroyer)

1. Do you think about and want to go to heaven more than you used to? (Philippians 1:21-24; Titus 2:11-13)
2. Are you becoming more loving in how you treat others? (Matthew 22:36-40; 1 John 4:20-21)
3. Are you more aware of God's work in your life? (Philippians 3:10; Galatians 2:20)
4. Does God's Word have a greater place in your life than it used to? (1 Peter 2:2-3; Psalms 119:9-11; Hebrews 4:12)
5. Is your worship more God-centered and frequent than it used to be? (Job 1:20-21; Psalm 100)
6. Are you more sensitive to sin than you used to be? (Romans 12:1-2; 7:14-19)
7. Are you quicker to forgive others who hurt you? (Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:13)
8. Are you becoming more aware of how great and powerful God is? (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 64:8; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 4:13)
9. Is your prayer life becoming stronger and more personal? (James 5:16; Jeremiah 29:12-13; Matthew 7:7-8)
10. Do you find yourself better able to recognize His voice when He speaks to you? (John 14:26; 10:4, 16, 27; Acts 9:11-15)

Remember, it is God who brings about growth in us as we allow His Spirit to work (John 15:1-8) and produce His fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-26). Just as a parent oversees the maturing of his child, so our heavenly Father oversees our growth. His promise is that He will work in us as long as we are on this earth so that we continue to grow more and more like Jesus (Philippians 1:6). What a blessing and what a privilege that is. God expects us to grow, but He doesn't expect us to do it on our own. He will bring that about as we follow Him.

D. THE BASICS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The Bible equates physical growth and spiritual growth (Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2). We will follow the same analogy in this book. First, we will talk about how new life begins, then about how it grows. We will look at the signs of life so we have assurance of salvation.

3. NEW LIFE HAS BEGUN

How do I become a Christian?

Physical life for us begins with a birth experience. Seeds are planted and the result is new life as crops grow. The same is true spiritually. Spiritual life also begins with a birth experience – a new birth. When a Jewish religious ruler, Nicodemus, asked Jesus what he needed to do to have a relationship with God in this life and live forever in the next life, Jesus told him that he needed to be ‘born again’ (John 3). Because he was thinking only in physical terms, Nicodemus missed the significance of what Jesus was saying.

The Bible tells us that we are all spiritually dead until our spirit is made alive by a new birth experience in Christ (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Salvation is all by God. We can’t do anything to earn or deserve it (Ephesians 2:8-9). We just receive it. It is a gift – free to us. Jesus paid the price for it.

When Jesus went to the cross He became our representative, our substitute. He identified Himself with our sins and, since sin brings judgment, God poured out His judgment on Jesus. Jesus suffered for every sin we ever have committed or ever will commit. He suffered what we would have suffered in hell for all eternity. Because He was a man He could be our substitute. Because He was God He felt the sufferings all the more intensely, thus being able to suffer all our sins during those hours on the cross. His suffering was much deeper and more intense than ours would have been.

By doing that for us, though, He provided free salvation for any who will receive it. He bridged the gap between God and man. He removed the enmity between God and us. Now we are God’s children, born into God’s family (John 3; 1John 2:23; John 1:12). God is our Heavenly Father. Jesus is God’s Son and also God. Jesus is our Brother. Welcome to the family!

NEED OF SALVATION “For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Because God is holy and perfect, He cannot allow sin in His presence. Still, He wants man to have fellowship with Him -- that’s why He created man. So, He planned to come to earth Himself, and go to the cross as man’s substitute. By taking the guilt for all the sins of the world on Himself, He experienced what we would experience in all eternity in hell, condensed and poured out on Him. Because He was man He could be our replacement. Because He was sinless He didn’t have sin of His own to pay for He could pay for ours. Because He was God He could experience hell for all of us at once, He had a greater capacity to suffer. There is nothing we can do to add to salvation, it is all by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

PROVISION OF SALVATION God provided it all, all we do is freely accept His provision (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). The word “it is finished” in the Greek means, “paid in full.” That was written on bills of receipt when paid. Jesus wasn’t killed for our sin, He suffered and paid for all of it, then, when it all was finished, and His life’s work completed, He voluntarily died for there was no longer any reason to suffer. HE paid it all!

RECEPTION OF SALVATION Salvation is received by faith (Romans 3:27-28; John 3:16). The artist who painted "Jesus at the Door" is said to have purposely left off the knob of the door, for the door represents the human heart, and on that door, the bolt is on the inside. Jesus stands and

knocks. But he will not come in unless we open the door. If salvation is rejected the person remains under God's wrath and judgment (John 3:16-26, 36; John 14:6).

REJECTION OF SALVATION Jesus is the only way to God, there is NO other way to salvation (John 14:6). Rejection of His gift of salvation means eternal condemnation in hell (John 3:36).

TENSES OF SALVATION At the moment of salvation all past sin and its penalty is removed (2 Timothy 1:9; Acts 16:31). No matter what, it will never be held against us for its penalty has been paid (Romans 8:1). Sin committed after salvation has also been paid for on the cross but must be confessed (admitted to - 1 John 1:9). and repented of then it is removed. Unconfessed sin does not endanger our salvation but hinders our closeness and fellowship with God. Sin between a husband and wife doesn't end the marriage but does keep the partners from being able to be close to and enjoy each other.

While salvation removes the penalty of all sin, it doesn't remove its power (Philippians 2:12-13; Romans 8:13). A Christian still has a sin nature and the capacity to sin just as much as before salvation. Lot is a good example of that (Genesis 13:12, 19:29-38; 2 Peter 2:7-8). While we CAN sin, we don't HAVE to sin! Sin's power is just as strong, but now instead of being powerless to resist, we have a greater Power, the Holy Spirit, and don't HAVE to sin any more. We are free from the power of sin, but not yet from the presence of sin.

In the future, when we are in heaven, we will be free from the very presence of sin and our sin nature will be gone (Romans 13:11; Titus 2:12-13). That is guaranteed to everyone who accepts God's free gift of salvation.

BLESSINGS OF SALVATION When a child is born into a family he immediately is the recipient of many blessings and privileges that come from that family. He shares in all the family possesses and the family name opens doors and gives special privileges. He gains a unique inheritance as well. The same is true of those born into God's family (2 Corinthians 5:17). Some of these blessings are:

1. Every spiritual blessing is ours (Ephesians 1:3).
 2. We were individually chosen by God before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4)
 3. All our shame and sin from the past is gone (Colossians 1:14)
 4. Present and future sins are also gone forever (Ephesians 1:4, 7-10; Romans 8:1-2)
 5. God deals with us in grace, not law (Romans 8:31-34; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Hebrews 4:16)
 6. We become a member of God's family (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:5)
 7. God calls us His friend (John 15:15)
 8. We have peace with God eternally (Romans 5:1)
 9. We also have peace from God in our daily lives (Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:15)
 10. We are unconditionally loved by God forever (Romans 8:35-39)
 11. We can come into God's presence and talk to Him at any time (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12)
 12. God gives us His power, so we can live for Him (Acts 1:8; Philippians 4:13)
 13. Guidance and wisdom from God is available for us (1 Corinthians 2:16)
 14. All our needs are provided (Philippians 4:19)
 15. We are in the family of all Christians (1 Corinthians 12:27)
 16. God has provided a way of victory over the control of sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:2; Galatians 2:20).
 17. We have victory in Jesus over Satan and demons (Colossians 1:13; Luke 10:18-20)
 18. God lives within us (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20)
 19. God uses everything in our life for something good (Romans 8:28)
 20. We have assurance of salvation forever (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
 21. We are guaranteed of being in heaven forever (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20)
- And many, many more.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help someone who has just become a Christian?

The first thing you should do is to teach them what salvation is, so they understand it as well as possible. Go over the material in this chapter with them. Answer any questions they may have. Be available to encourage them, answer questions and give basic guidance whenever they need it. Develop a close friendship with them so they trust you. Always remember to set a good example for them. They will learn more from watching your life than they will from what you say, so always set a good Christian example wherever you are, starting at home.

4. SIGNS OF LIFE

How can I be sure I am a Christian?

When a baby is born everyone immediately checks to make sure it is alive and healthy. There are certain signs that show life: movement, crying, pulse, etc. The same is true spiritually. There are certain spiritual 'signs' that show us that we have been born into God's family. I John lists 5 of these:

1. BELIEF IN JESUS AS SAVIOR AND LORD (1 John 5:1) A sign of spiritual life is a deep awareness that Jesus is God and Savior, that He is the One who provides salvation and it isn't anything we can do for ourselves or deserve.

2. STRONG DESIRE TO OVERCOME SIN IN LIFE (1 John 5:18) Along with new birth comes a different attitude to sin. We know it is wrong and have a strong desire to stop. While we may struggle with certain sins, there should be a slow but steady progress in godliness. Gradually we become more I Corinthians 3:1-3 and more like Jesus in what we think and do.

3. DOING WHAT GOD CONSIDERS RIGHT (1 John 2:29) Learning how to live is a process, it takes growth. Growth is a sign of life. God says that those who are alive spiritually will grow spiritually. We are commanded to grow spiritually (2 Peter 3:18). Paul was sad the Corinthian believers weren't (I Corinthians 3:1-3).

4. LOVE FOR OTHER BELIEVERS (1 John 3:14) Anyone who does not love remains in death. There will be a natural bond between those who have live in God's family. We have the most important things in life in common. Usually there is instant rapport. We have a desire to spend time with and get to know other Christians. That is a joy and encouragement, for we are likeminded.

5. VICTORY OVER WORLDLY WAYS (1 John 5:4) While victory over sin often comes slowly and gradually, as Christians we know that we have within us a Power greater than that which is in the world and we can experience God giving us victory over things that used to defeat us.

How can I be sure I am still a Christian? When first born, babies are very susceptible to disease and illness, so they must be protected from these. They are very vulnerable. Until they grow and become stronger they are in danger of things that won't be nearly as hard to fight off later on. When someone is a new believer there is danger they will start to doubt their salvation or fear they have lost it. Thus, it is important to make sure young Christians are protected from the diseases of doubt and fear. Satan can't take away our salvation, so he tries to take away the joy of our salvation in these ways.

DISEASE OF DOUBT It's not unusual for Satan to put doubt into a person's mind right after they become a Christian. Did it 'work'? Did they 'do it' right? There is no requirement to meet so there is nothing that can be done wrong. Salvation is simply the heart attitude believing that Jesus is God who paid for all of your sins on the cross. If you believe in Him, you have eternal life and can never lose it (Romans 3:28; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

If you aren't sure when you accepted Jesus as Savior and for that reason wonder if you really did, just take a moment right now to pray and ask Him to forgive your sins and live in you. You will know for sure that He has done that now if not before, so you never will have need to wonder or worry. Write down today's date so you can always go back to this time and remember that you really did put your faith in Him. _____

DISEASE OF FEAR If getting you to doubt your salvation doesn't work, Satan will try to have you believe that you have somehow lost your salvation. That will take away your peace and joy and replace it with fear. Believing you can lose your salvation will cause you to try to do all you can to not lose it. Thus, instead of the Christian life being one of security and assurance in what Christ has done, the emphasis focuses on what you do or don't do. Fear of doing something that will cause you to lose your salvation becomes the primary motivating force in your Christian life. How could a family operate if everyone had to be nice to the others for fear they would be kicked out of the family?

God wants us to know for sure that there is nothing we can do to lose our salvation. He wants us to be assured of His love forever. He wants us to serve Him out of love for Him, not because we are afraid He will send us to hell! We are under grace, not law, so there is nothing we can do to lose salvation (Romans 6:14). God is faithful to His promise to save us if we believe. Even if we become unfaithful He still keeps His promise to us (2 Timothy 2:11-13). He protects us when we are weak and faltering. When we sin and drift He does not cast us aside (Matthew 12:20; Psalm 37:24). He will never hold our sins against us for they were all paid for on the cross. Thus, there is no sin that will ever be charged to us (Romans 4:6-8). Salvation cannot be lost or given back, and Satan cannot take it from us (Romans 8:37-39). There is nothing that can come between us and God, not even we ourselves (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:37-39).

So, any time you feel one of these diseases trying to hit you and take your joy and strength, remember you have no reason to doubt your salvation and you have no reason to fear losing your salvation.

DISCIPLESHIP: How to help someone be sure they are a Christian? Does the new believer have any doubts or questions about their salvation? Answer these for them. Teach them that they cannot lose their salvation no matter what, but that this is not an excuse to sin. Show them verses in the Bible that give them assurance of salvation. Encourage them to memorize those verses.

5. LEARNING TO EAT

Where can I get spiritual nourishment?

When a baby is born the first thing it demands, after air, is nourishment. Babies need to eat often in order to grow. They have a strong appetite. The same is true of spiritual growth. Those born of God find they have an appetite to learn God's Word. A new appreciation for and love of the Bible appears. The desire to read the Bible isn't just to fill an intellectual curiosity but rather to feed our soul and spirit. We sense from the very start that there is much-needed nourishment to be found there. Paul talks about this similarity in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

When a person loses their appetite for food it is a sign of illness and the person becomes weak. The same thing happens spiritually. A desire for the Word of God must be fed (1 Peter 2:2-3). We must continually feed on God's Word.

How can I learn to feed myself?

Some time ago I read a story about a man who died in deep poverty. In fact, he died from lack of proper food and housing. Among his possessions was found a Bible and in the Bible thousands of dollars were stuffed. The Bible was left to him by his parents -- but he never opened it! How often we are like that man -- our soul is starving and we are living in spiritual poverty while the provision for our needs lies between the covers of our Bible. We must get it and use it.

Bible study can be broken down into three main steps: Observation ("What do I see?"), Interpretation ("What does it mean?") and Application ("How should I respond?"). The Bible provides spiritual nourishment for our souls as food provides physical nourishment for our bodies (1 Peter 2:2; Psalm 119:103; Hebrews 5:13-14). There is a close similarity between partaking of physical and spiritual food, also. (for more detailed information see Studying the Bible by Jerry Schroyer).

I. OBSERVATION When you are sick and go to a doctor he will closely examine you, gather facts, and ask questions before interpreting them and coming up with a plan of action. Likewise, a detective needs to look for things that aren't at first obvious. The same is true of a scientist. For all of these, the final application is only as good as the early observation. The better the discovery period, the more accurate and helpful the conclusion. That is also true in Bible study.

When you study a passage, first read it over several times. The better you know the passage the easier it is to notice things you miss the first time you read it. As you read keep a paper and pencil handy. After the first few times questions will start coming to mind, things you don't understand and would like to have answered for. Write them down! In fact, try to write down as many questions as you can. Don't worry about answering them now, most will answer themselves as you go along. However, if you don't ask the question you will never notice the answer when it comes floating by and will miss it! You won't answer questions you haven't asked, so make sure you are thorough, creative, and patient in writing down questions. Ask yourself, "If Paul were here, what would I ask Him about this word/verse?" I cannot overemphasize the importance of developing well the skill of asking the right questions.

II. INTERPRETATION Observation gathers the details: facts, questions, insights. Interpretation brings meaning and organization to these observations and answers to your questions. You must continue to ask and write down questions during this stage, but now you start to answer your questions. You don't start by going through your list of questions one by one, but as you interpret you will find many of the answers become clear. If you had not asked the questions you wouldn't have recognized the answers, they would have passed by unnoticed. With the questions in your mind you will pick up the answers as they come along in your interpreting. For a doctor this is the diagnosis stage when conclusions are drawn. The same is true of the detective and scientist who must make sense out of the information they have gleaned.

How do we do this in Bible study? The key to correct understanding of the Bible is to put yourself in the place of the writer and read his mind - what was he thinking? Why did he write this? What would he say it means? The Bible was written for us but not to us. It was addressed to people who lived at the time of the writer. To know what a passage means we must see it through their eyes. How would they understand what is written? Their culture and background make a big difference in how we interpret what was written. A passage only has one meaning, what the author was saying to the people. So interpreting it from their perspective is very important.

We interpret the Bible by making sure we understand what was written before and after the passage. We look at passages that talk about similar things. We make sure we understand who wrote it, when it was written, to whom it was written and what is happening in the passage. We interpret the Bible literally, like we would other books. We interpret history differently than poetry and doctrine differently than parables. (For more details about this see my book "Studying the Bible" by Jerry Schroyer).

III. APPLICATION The purpose of studying and learning it is to apply what you discover to areas of your life where needed. Prayer and being sensitive to God's Holy Spirit as He talks to you are important as you study the Bible. He will show you how the truths in the passage apply to you. Ask God to show you how what you have learned about the passage applies to you. There may be a command in it God wants you to obey or an example to follow. There could be a challenge to heed, a sin to avoid, a new teaching to learn, a promise to remember or some action to take. Perhaps there is something God wants you to pray about or to memorize. You won't find all of these in every passage but ask God to show you what He has for you in the passage.

MEMORIZING PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE This is very important to spiritual growth (Psalm 119:11). They become a part of who you are and form how you think. God will bring them to mind when you need them. When Jesus was tempted He quoted Scripture to have victory over Satan's temptations (Matthew 4:1-11). Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

I can't emphasize too strongly how important it is to memorize Scripture. Every believer should be memorizing passages. When you help others to grow make sure you encourage them to memorize passages that God shows them are important. Have them tell you the passages as they learn them. If you don't know which passages to start with here are some good ones: Psalm 119:11; Philippians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 5:11-12; John 16:24; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 3:5-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:1; John 15:7 and Ephesians 2:8-9.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help someone else learn how to study the Bible?

First, make sure you are studying and memorizing the Bible yourself. To help a newer believer, get together with them, open your Bibles, and take them through Bible study step by step as I described above. Take your time. Let them do it themselves with you watching. Don't just do it for them. Meet together with them regularly. Encourage them to study on their own then have them bring the results when you meet so you can see what they are doing and make recommendations. Be patient and very encouraging. Even after you are done going through this process with them keep asking them from time to time how they are doing in their Bible study.

6. LEARNING TO TALK

How can I communicate with God?

It's natural for a normal, healthy baby to try to communicate with those caring for them. Before they can talk they cry and use motions to let others know how they feel. As soon as they are able they begin using words. Before long they are able to communicate by talking.

Those born spiritually should desire to learn to communicate with God as well. Learning to pray is an essential part of spiritual growth. Prayer is powerful (John 14:13-14; 15:7,16; Mark 11:24; 11:22-24; Luke 11:9-10; 1 John 5:14; Jeremiah 33:3). Praying to God is the same as talking to a good friend. It's that easy. The better you know someone the easier it is to talk to them. That is true with God as well. There are several topics that should be covered in our prayers as they are needed.

1. CONFESSION (1 John 1:9; Psalm 66:18; 51:1). To confess means to agree with God that the issue at hand is sin (not a mistake, someone else's fault, etc.). After you confess your sin make sure you accept God's forgiveness (Daniel 9:9,19; Psalm 130:4; 86:5; 99:8; 103:3; Amos 7:2). Only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7; 11:25; Luke 5:24; Matthew 6:14; Colossians 3:13). God doesn't overlook sin, He forgives because it was paid for with the blood of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 9:22; Ephesians 4:32; 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Luke 24:46-47; Colossians 1:14; John 19:30). This forgiveness is available to all (Isaiah 53:6; Colossians 2:13; Romans 8:1). When you confess/admit

your sin God forgives it. This means He blots it out (Isaiah 43:25; 1:18; 44:22; Acts 3:19; Colossians 2:14; Psalm 32), casts it behind His back (a place He can't see - Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34), forgets it (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34), makes it disappear where it will never be found (Jeremiah 50:20), has it vanish like the morning mist at noon (Isaiah 44:22; John 20:31) and casts it into the deepest part of the sea (Micah 7:19) which will soon be gone forever (Revelation 21:1).

2. PRAISE (Psalm 34:1-3; 48:1; Hebrews 13:15). Praise is glorifying God for Who and What He is. It is different than thanking Him for things He has done. We will be praising God for all eternity, so we should start now! God is pleased with our praise (Psalm 22:3; Hebrews 13:15). The Bible says there is power in praise (Psalm 22:3). Praise can be done by word or song. Make sure you develop a strong praise life (Philippians 4:4; Hebrews 13:15). Read the following passages and turn them into praise prayers: Exodus 15:1-2; Deuteronomy 10:21; 32:3-4,43; 1 Samuel 2:1-2; 2 Samuel 22:4, 50; 1 Chronicles 16:9,25,31; 29:10-12; 2 Chronicles 5:12-14; 20:21-22,27; Psalm 8:1-2; 9:1-3; 31:21; 44:8; 40:16; 47:1-3; 68:3-4; 72:18-19; 86:12-13; 104:33; 108:3; 117:1-2; 119:108,175; 138:1-4; 142:7; 149:1,3,6-9; 150:1-6; Isaiah 25:1,9; 38:18-19; 60:18; Daniel 2:20-23; Jeremiah 20:13; Habakkuk 3:17-19; Zechariah 9:9; Luke 1:46-47; Luke 10:21; John 4:23-24; Ephesians 1:3; Jude 25; Revelation 4:10-11; 5:5,12-13; 15:3-4.

3. THANKSGIVING (Psalm 116:12; Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). Thanksgiving is thanking God for what He has done, is doing and is going to do in your life (as well as the lives of others). We all appreciate being thanked for things we do, and so does God. Be specific in your thanksgiving. Remember, everything comes from Him and is for our good (Romans 8:28) so we should thank Him for everything!

4. INTERCESSION (Psalm 28:9; James 5:14-20; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Samuel 12:23). Intercession is prayer for others. Often it is good to keep a list of prayer requests so you remember to pray for them and so you can mark down the answer, too. Then thank God for the answer. Remember God answers EVERY prayer. The answer is either yes (now), wait (later) or no (never). Every prayer gets one of these answers. God is able to do anything, but He isn't always willing to do what we want Him to do (Daniel 3:17). Therefore, when you pray for others first be sensitive to how God would have you pray. Don't be so quick to come up with a solution and make that your prayer. God may have another solution that is better than your. Don't pray solutions to God, pray problems and let Him come up with His own solution. You'll find prayers answered more often when you let Him figure out how to take care of something. Often instead of removing an obstacle, He gives us grace to endure it (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Include that option in your prayers for others as well as yourself.

5. PETITION (James 4:2; Hebrews 4:15-16; John 15:7). Petition means asking God for things for yourself. This is legitimate. We shouldn't always pray just for ourselves, nor should we feel unworthy to ever pray for ourselves. Much of what I said under "Intercession" above fits in here. There are some things the Bible says we should ask for: an understanding heart (1 Kings 3:7,9), fellowship with other believers (Philemon 4-6), forgiveness (Psalm 25:11,18,20), guidance (Psalm 25:4-5; 27:11), holiness (1 Thessalonians 5:23), love (Philippians 1:9-11), mercy (Psalm 6:1-6), power (Ephesians 3:16), spiritual growth (Ephesians 1:17-19) and to know and do God's will (Colossians 4:12). As you pray for yourself think of a Bible promise to claim for it. God promises He will not forget us (Isaiah 49:15), not fail us (Joshua 1:5), will show us what to do (1 Samuel 16:3), will help us (Isaiah 41:10) and will strengthen us (Isaiah 41:10).

6. LISTENING (1 Samuel 3:10; Hebrews 1:1-2; 3:15; Psalm 62:5; 46:10) Good communication is a two-way street. Pause a few minutes and listen to God talk to you. You should do that throughout your day. After all, which is more important: you passing on information to God or Him passing on information to you? Be still in your mind, let Him put in thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc., that you need. Be sensitive to His leading. As with any relationship, the better you know the person the better the

communication. Good, deep communication is difficult with a stranger, but the more time you spend with a person the better you can 'hear' them, and that's true with God, too. This is an art that takes time to develop. It won't happen if you don't work on it! (For more information about listening to God, see chapter 12).

UNANSWERED PRAYER Prayer is not telling God what to do and expecting Him to do all we ask. Prayer is talking about the problem with God and letting Him determine what is best for us. Are you praying the solution you want, not the problem? Let God determine what solution is best. Paul prayed to have his thorn in the flesh removed but God didn't do it because He had a good reason for allowing it to remain (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). Trust God to answer in whatever way is best.

Often our connection with God is broken because of sin in our life. This sin blocks communication. Selfishness (James 4:2-3), pride (Job 35:12-13), disobedience (1 John 3:22), not forgiving others (Mark 11:25), lack of compassion (Proverbs 21:13) and not getting along with your mate (1 Peter 3:7) all can come between you and God and hinder your prayers.

PRAYER PROMISES God does give us many wonderful promises concerning prayer. Read these and use them when you pray. Memorize those that speak loudest to you. Matthew 7:7-11; 21:22; John 14:13-14; 5:14-15; 15:7; Jeremiah 33:3; 29:12; Mark 11:24; James 4:2-3; 1 John 3:22; 5:14-15.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help a new believer learn to pray? Jesus' disciples asked this same question and He showed them how He prayed (Matthew 6:9-13). You should do the same. Always start and close your times together in prayer. If special needs come up at other times, pray together then as well. Just talk naturally and normally to God when you pray out loud, and then encourage them to do the same. Parents with children should take time throughout the day to stop and talk to God, thanking Him for something or praying for a need for yourself or another person. Always make sure you take time to thank Him afterwards as well. Set a godly example in all you say and do.

7. LEARNING TO WALK

How can I learn to move through life as a Christian?

How old does a baby need to be to start to walk? 12 months? 15 months? What if they are 5 years old and still crawling? Walking is natural, something healthy babies want to do. Learning to walk takes time and effort. It doesn't come quickly and easily but takes perseverance. Babies learn to walk one step at a time. Balance, timing and strength come slowly. They often fall down and have to get up and try again.

God says the same is true of a child of His learning to walk spiritually. He says we are to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, 25). Step by step we must learn how to move through our life each day in a godly manner. We need to live our daily lives in a way that is honoring and pleasing to Him. We get our balance, our timing and our strength from the Holy Spirit, not from ourselves. If we could live the Christian life merely by doing our best, there would have been no reason for God to send His Spirit. He knows we need His help and that the only way we can walk as He wants is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

THE TRINITY An important part of what we believe is that God is a Trinity: three in One. There is God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are separate Persons (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14) but still One (Deuteronomy 6:4). That three can be one and one three doesn't compute mathematically or in our minds, yet both truths are taught in the Bible. There is only one God, but in the unity of the godhead there are three eternal and coequal persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.

WORKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT The Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible, revealing and inspiring the writers (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16). In the Old Testament He came upon and filled believers at times of special need in their lives and ministry. It is in His power that Jesus ministered and did miracles, for Jesus voluntarily laid aside His divine attributes when He came to earth (Philippians 2:7).

Today He is the One Who restrains sin in general (2 Thessalonians 2:7), convicts unbelievers of sin (John 16:8-9), and seals (guarantee of assurance) believers (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). He indwells every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), produces fruit (good works) in believers (Galatians 5:22-23) and baptizes (identifies) all Christians into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). He guides and directs believers as well as teaching and reminding them of God's Word (John 14:26). He gives spiritual gifts to each believer and through them ministers to the whole Body (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).

We are commanded to be filled (controlled) by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) by continually being in total submission to God (Galatians 5:16,25) and not allowing any sin or disobedience in our lives (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

HOW TO WALK BY THE SPIRIT Paul writes about the importance of walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). That means we are to let God's Spirit guide and direct us in all we think and do. How can we do that? The Bible commands believers to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Being 'filled' with the Holy Spirit is not a matter of trying to get more of the Holy Spirit in us. It's a matter of us give more of ourselves to God and His Spirit. When you accept Jesus as Savior the Holy Spirit indwells you and stays as long as you are on this earth. That is like putting your fist in a glove. The glove is indwelt with your hand, but it isn't filled with your hand. Each finger must totally fill each finger of the glove before the glove is 'filled' with the hand. That's the way it is with us and God's Spirit. For the glove to perform the function it is made to do, it needs to be totally filled with the hand. In order for the children of God to live the way God wants us to live means we have to be totally filled by His Spirit. We must give Him full access to every part of our lives, holding nothing back from His control.

Salvation is a faith decision to accept God's free gift of salvation. The person who has done this is a Christian and has assurance of eternal life. Then another decision must be made. That concerns who the person will live life for: Jesus or self. This second decision is a commitment to live as a disciple of Jesus, becoming more like Him in all we do (Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 9:23; Luke 14:25-33). This commitment often needs to be remade to keep Jesus first in life. Salvation is free and easy. It costs us nothing for Jesus paid the price for us. We just receive it. But becoming a disciple is costly, for it means making a commitment to live for Jesus and not ourselves. It is costly for we must sacrifice our own sinful desires to live a life of obedience to God. This can only be done as we allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control us. We must be sensitive to His leading and direction. This is the only way to live the Christian life. Salvation is by faith in Jesus, living the Christian life is also by faith in Him.

The Bible also warns us to make sure we don't 'grieve' the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). This means we aren't to do anything that will make the Spirit sad. Sin, disobedience or being too busy to spend time with God will do this. When it happens, the Spirit doesn't leave us, but that sin does keep us from being totally controlled by Him. Thus, we don't enjoy His presence, power and protection as we otherwise would.

The other danger we are warned to watch out for is 'quenching' the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Quenching God's Spirit is like taking a hose or straw and bending it, so a kink prevents free flow of fluids through it. Sin or any kind of disobedience in our lives will prevent God's Spirit from totally filling and flowing through us as He desires and we need.

Jesus talks about this same principle in John 15:1-8. He tells His disciples that they must 'abide' in Him. That means they must stay connected to Him, depend on Him, and remain close to Him. That is the only way fruit can be produced. A branch not connected to the vine, no matter how close otherwise, will not produce fruit. Paul also uses the analogy of crucifixion to picture the same truth (Galatians 2:20).

Dwight L. Moody once demonstrated the principle like this: "Tell me," he said to his audience, "how can I get the air out of the glass I have in my hand?" One man said, "Suck it out with a pump." But the evangelist replied, "That would create a vacuum and shatter it." Finally, after many suggestions, moody picked up a pitcher and quietly filled the glass with water. "There," he said, "all the air is now removed." He then explained that victory for the child of God does not come by working hard to eliminate sinful habits, but rather by allowing the Holy Spirit to take full possession.

To live the Spirit-filled life you must be absolutely and thoroughly convinced you can do nothing apart from the indwelling strength of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-controlled life begins with an overwhelming realization that we are absolutely helpless and hopeless apart from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

If a Christian doesn't live a holy life and doesn't walk by the Holy Spirit, he or she is ~~they~~ are still a Christian. They do not lose their salvation (see chapter 4). Their fellowship with God is broken by the sin but they are still a Christian and are in God's family. Instead of a spiritual person the Bible says they are carnal, they are letting the desires of their flesh control them and not God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). The cure for getting back into fellowship with God is confession (1 John 1:9) and repentance of sin and asking God to fill them with His Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians learn how to live the Christian life?

The most important thing to do to help new believers is to set an example of godly living in everything that you say and do. That living ~~it~~ has to come from the heart and not just be outer actions. Emphasize that to them. Make sure there is no hypocrisy in anything you or your church does.

Remind them that we all live by grace, not by law (Romans 6:14). Set an example in that as well. Teach them about the Holy Spirit and the importance of being controlled and led by Him. Answer any questions they may have about the Trinity or Holy Spirit. In fact, as you teach them how to study the Bible you could focus on passages that teach about living the Christian life such as Galatians 5:16, 25; Ephesians 5:18 and Galatians 2:20.

Disciplining others in living the Christian life is an ongoing responsibility. Pray for them. Encourage them. Spend time listening to them share what they have been learning. Answer questions they may have. Make suggestions to help them grow. Love them no matter what (John 13:31-38).

8. WALKING WITHOUT STUMBLING

How can I move through life without always falling down?

When a young child starts learning to walk he is very careful. He focuses on every step and goes slowly. It is still easy to lose balance and fall. As he grows older and stronger and gets more experienced he still is in danger of falling but not as much. There will always be the danger of tripping and falling, but time and alertness can help prevent many falls.

The same is true of new Christians. It's easy for a new believer to be tripped up and sin for everything is so new. It takes time to develop spiritual balance, rely on God's strength, and not have

to focus on every movement. Still, there is always the danger of tripping and falling, no matter how long one has been a Christian. The key to walking in our Christian life without stumbling is to keep our eyes on Jesus.

Picture yourself walking down a street. Jesus is at the far end and that's where you are headed. Your goal is to be like Jesus. On either side of the street as you walk are store fronts, activities, distractions – anything to get your eyes off of Jesus and cause you to change your direction ever so slightly. When you do ~~we~~ you stumble and fall.

The things that distract us are attractions of the world. Satan puts temptations in our way as well. Then, too, our sin nature makes it natural for us to deviate from God's ways. Our normal tendency is to live for ourselves to meet our own needs and desires. Much of our sin comes because we are trying to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.

Satan uses lies to deceive us (Revelation 12:9) and we are all too quick to fall for them. Usually we don't realize they are lies until we find ourselves flat on our faces.

TEMPTATION You must remember that being tempted to sin isn't the same as sinning. Jesus was tempted (Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1-13), but He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Just because you are tempted doesn't mean you have sinned. You don't have to confess being tempted and ask God to forgive you. Also, we must remember that God never tempts us to sin (James 1:13-15).

Temptation is like coming to a "Y" in a road. You have an option to go in either direction, right or left. The wrong way is the way Satan tempts us. It is the way of sin. Instead of trusting God's provision in His own way and time, we try to meet that need in our own way right now. The other path in the road is testing. God wants us to trust Him and live His way, so we can see Him work in our lives.

One of Satan's biggest lies to us is that the temptation is so strong we have to give in to it. We can't help ourselves. We can't resist. The Bible says this will never happen (1 Corinthians 10:13). When we do sin, God's provision is for us to confess it to Him (1 John 1:9). If we confess our known sin, He forgives us for ALL our sins, even the ones we aren't aware of. That is more than fair! Our part, however, is to 'confess' the sin. That means 'agree with God,' 'say the same thing about the sin as God says.' When you recognize your sin is your fault, not someone else's fault, and when you take that blame yourself, then you are confessing your sin. You are seeing your sin as God sees it – so bad that Jesus had to die for it. If that had been the only sin that anyone would have ever committed, Jesus would still have had to go to the cross. That's how awful sin is. No wonder God hates it!

SUFFERING Closely related to the area of temptation is the area of suffering, for that often causes us to stumble and fall quicker than anything else. Before salvation people feel that everything in life should go well and that if it doesn't that is just bad luck. They don't see God as in control of everything and having a plan and purpose for everything that happens. They don't appreciate the role of stretching and suffering in bringing maturity. It is important to submit to whatever God has come our way in life. If we don't, if we blame Him or others or if we take things into our own hands, then we have stumbled and fallen for we have stopped trusting in God and His sovereign love.

Life is full of suffering and pain, much of it unfair and undeserved. Why do these things happen? I have only one answer for that question: "I don't know why God allows these things to happen, but He does." I don't know lots of things. I don't know why children die, why mothers suffer with cancer, why teenagers crash their cars into trees. I don't know lots of things. But just because I don't know the answer doesn't mean there isn't one.

We all know that bad things do happen. Jesus Himself didn't have any easy explanations for these things. When referring to the collapse of a tower in Siloam in which 18 people were killed (Luke

13:4), Jesus made the point that these people were not any guiltier than the ones who survived. Later on, Jesus cried when faced with the death of His friend Lazarus.

I don't know **why** suffering happens, but I do know God is in sovereign control over it all and I also know that what He does is ultimately for a good reason. By very definition, God is omnipotent and in control of everything. We know God is full of compassion and love. He's proven His love for mankind by leaving heaven and coming to live on earth with us. so He could ultimately die on the cross to pay for our sins and make the way for us to be with God in heaven for all eternity. Love is the guiding force behind all God does. Knowing that God is in control and that He is motivated by love in all He does is the rock we must hang onto when we don't have answers for the 'why' questions that keep popping up in life.

Don't blame God when things seem unfair. We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by what He does for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to cross to take the punishment for every sin that we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. If it weren't for that we would all face eternity in hell. So, anything less than hell is His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more mercy to some than others is not for to us to judge. So, don't try to understand God's character by His works (Matthew 5:45b). Instead understand His works by His character. His character is proven, and one day His works will be as well. Until we get to heaven and know all things we must just trust Him and not blame Him.

God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him-- Many things seem unfair to little children, but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor, having a pretty shiny knife taken away, many things seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them, but a child doesn't have the perspective to truly view what is happening and we don't have God's perspective on life either.

We do know that pain and suffering are a consequence of sin entering the world (Genesis 3:17-18). For unbelievers it can show them their need of a Savior. For believers God allows suffering for a different reason. We know it is never punishment for Jesus took our punishment and there is none for His children (Romans 8:1). God allowed Job to go through much emotional and physical suffering to show angels and demons his faithfulness (Job 1-2). Hosea suffered a marriage to an unfaithful wife to show what God was going through with His unfaithful people. Suffering can teach obedience, as in Jesus' case (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8). It causes us to lean on God's grace (2 Corinthians 12:9) and brings us closer to Jesus, making us more like Him (1 Peter 1:7-8; Isaiah 49:2). As God helps us through difficult times, His power becomes seen to others (John 3:16; 16:33; 1 Peter 1:13). As we respond to God's grace helping us through suffering, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is shown as well (Galatians 5:22-23). In addition, our suffering helps us understand and help others when they go through trials (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

So how are we to **respond** when facing pain in our lives? First, make sure you are living in obedience to God and His will for you, so the suffering isn't a consequence of your own sin (1 Peter 4:19). Realize that God only does what is best for us in the long run (Romans 8:28; John 15:2). Don't expect to understand the reasons for it now but remember that one day you will (John 13:7). Trust God and draw closer to Him (Hebrews 13:5) and don't be ashamed as if it is your own fault (1 Peter 4:16). Rest on God's promises as you endure: Psalm 126:5; Isaiah 66:13; Romans 8:28; James 1:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Psalm 91:4, 14-16).

Remember, He has our best interests at heart. He sees the bigger picture. There is the story of the man flying his plane above a mountain road. He looked down to see a car trying to pass a semi-truck. However, the man in the car could not see around the truck to pass due to the dips and curves in the road. The pilot could see that there were no other vehicles in the area, and that the car

would be in no danger in passing the truck. All he could do was sit up there and reflect on the fact that from his vantage point he could see what the man in the car could not see. He had a bigger picture. It is the same with God. He sees the BIG picture, which we don't see.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians walk without stumbling?

Spend time teaching them from God's Word what it means to resist temptation. Help them learn how to recognize temptation and know how to overcome it. Teach them that temptation is not sin. We don't need to confess being tempted as long as we don't give in to the temptation. Share lessons you have learned about overcoming temptation. Help them understand 1 John 1:9 and how it applies to their lives. Pray with them and for them concerning these issues.

Talk to them about the whole issue of suffering. You don't have to have all the answers – no one does. Help them keep their focus on God's sovereignty and love, even though we don't always understand what He does (or doesn't do). Remember God's love and sacrifice for us is greater than anything else so we know He is good and loving. Some things we'll have to trust Him with until we get to heaven then we'll see that He knows best.

9. WASHING AND SPANKING

What happens when I sin?

When a baby is born it is clean and sterile, but as it is exposed to the world it becomes dirty and contaminated. It needs washing and cleansing. When we are spiritually born again we are pure and sinless, but it doesn't take long for the contamination of the world and sin within to pollute us. We, too, need regular cleansing as we grow spiritually.

SIN IS REAL From the beginning, man has tried to deny sin. Adam and Eve, Cain, and everyone since has looked for a way out from sins consequences. Today is no different. Instead of acknowledging sin and changing, man would rather stay in his sin and deny his guilt by convincing himself there is no sin. To do this man must get rid of the idea that God, or any higher authority would have absolute standards which, when man breaks, would be sin. Thus, men run to philosophies like evolution, which seem to allow them to deny any higher accountability, and thus the existence of sin. If there is no God, man is the ultimate authority, there is no absolute right or wrong, and anything goes. But that's not what the Bible says (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Also, that doesn't seem to work in practicality. Guilt, drugs to mask the symptoms of guilt and stress, suicide, counseling, crime -- all are increasing at an alarming rate. Those who say that 'wrong' is just a learned response or a forced reaction to an imperfect culture are wrong. We live in a more progressive society than, ever before, yet these things not only remain but increase. Sin is not just learned -- it comes from within. Children are born selfish and self-centered; they don't need to learn that from anyone. They need to learn how to NOT be that way. What's the solution? First, correctly understand the problem.

SIN DEFINED Sin is anything that is contrary to the character of God. While a sin differs from a slip or mistake as to motive, dismissing all sin as mistakes is refusing to admit the true sinfulness of the act. That is like mislabeling dangerous poison as a mildly unpleasant substance. Sin can't be seen except in comparing ourselves with Jesus. His perfect standard is our goal. Anything that is not what He would think, say, do, or not do is sin.

THE ORIGIN OF SIN Sin started with Satan's prideful rebellion against God (Ezekiel 28:14-15). God is in no way responsible for sin. He gave Satan a free will but had nothing to do with the sin. If I give my son the keys to the car to go someplace and he drives off the road, is that my fault for letting him

drive? No, he is 100% responsible. Satan, not God, is responsible for sin. Satan brought it to earth in Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned.

GUILT OF SIN The Bible tells us we are guilty of sin in three areas:

Imputed sin means we are guilty with Adam for his sin (Romans 5:12). As representative of the human race, we all share his guilt. We would have done the same thing were it us.

Inherited sin describes the sin nature that is passed from parent to child (Psalm 51:5). This natural tendency to sin is something we are all born with. Each baby is naturally selfish, and self-centered. Because of this we are 'totally depraved.' This doesn't mean we always sin just as badly as we could in every area. Humanly speaking, man can and does do nice things and often chooses right over wrong. What it does mean is that there is nothing we can do to please God (Isaiah 64:6) or to impress Him. If our righteous acts are filthy in His sight (Isaiah 64:6), what must our sins be like? Inherited sin means we have a natural tendency to sin. It comes automatically. It means our every act and thought is polluted and unacceptable to God. Running clean water through contaminated pipes doesn't clean the pipes it taints the water. Thus, all we do is tainted by selfishness and sinfulness because of our inherited sin nature.

Individual sin refers to the acts of sin we daily commit: wrong thoughts, actions or motives. It also refers to the good things we should do but don't do. Our sinful actions are just the tip of the iceberg of our sinfulness, but the most visible portion.

Thus, we are triply guilty -- three strikes and you are out! Any one of these, actually any one individual act of sin (deed, thought, motive, good undone) would be enough to doom us forever. A holy God cannot allow any sin in His presence. So, what is the solution to sin?

SOLUTION TO SIN FOR THE BELIEVER Once God's free gift of salvation is accepted, we can never lose salvation. Sin causes separation between sinner and God it must be confessed (recognize and admit the sin - 1 John 1:9). Repent; make the decision to turn away from the sin. Then it is forgiven and fellowship with God is restored. Keeping from all sin is impossible in this life, but it is still our goal and what we must strive toward. It is only as we stay close to God that we can overcome sin.

A pilot was flying his small plane one day, when he heard a noise, which he recognized as the gnawing of a rat. Wondering what its sharp teeth were cutting through, he suddenly realized with horror that it might be an electronic wire. Then he would lose control of the plane. Then he remembered that rodents cannot survive at high altitudes. Immediately he began climbing until finally he had to put on his oxygen mask. Soon the gnawing sound ceased, and when he landed he found the rat -- dead. Staying close to God is the only way to grow in victory over sin in our lives. Know your enemy (sin) but know even more how to have victory (Jesus).

DISCIPLINE FOR SIN There is no judgment for the believer (Romans 8:1) but God does discipline us (Hebrews 12:3-11). Judgment is to punish us, make us suffer for sins we have committed. Discipline is for a positive purpose, to make us mature so we don't make the same mistake again. Judgment looks to the past sin?, discipline to future improvement. Parents should always discipline their children; never punish them. Our prison system is a picture of judgment. A shepherd who breaks a sheep's leg, so the sheep won't keep running away but will learn to trust the shepherd as he carries him around is a picture of discipline. While sin may be forgiven by God there are often earthly consequences of sin; loss of trust, physical injury, fines, jail time, pregnancy, etc.

SOLUTION TO SIN FOR THE UNBELIEVER The only solution is accepting the free gift of salvation: freely accepting Jesus' work on the cross (John 3:16). There He paid the penalty for all our sin. He suffered on the cross what we would have suffered for sin during all eternity in hell. Because He was

perfect He was without sin. Because He was human He could take our place. Because He is God He could suffer for all people at once because He had a greater capacity to suffer.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians understand sin & confession?

Teach those you are mentoring the things talked about in this chapter. Help them see the seriousness of sin and the importance of living a holy life. Make sure they know that sin starts in our heart, not just in outward actions. Assure them that God will forgive them if they confess and repent of their sin and He will restore them to fellowship with Himself, but not to take sin lightly. Encourage them when they fail and help them find ways to have victory over the specific sins they most struggle with.

10. PROTECTION FROM INJURY

How can I keep safe from Satan's attacks?

Babies are helpless and defenseless. They need adults to protect them from danger and from those who would harm them. God Himself protects us, but He often uses angels to carry out His wishes.

CREATION OF ANGELS God created angels before the world was created (Job 38:6-7), at the same time He planned to create each one of us (and already knew us in His mind). He created an "innumerable" number of angels (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11). No angels have been created or destroyed since then. The number is exactly the same. How do we know this? People who die do NOT become angels. In eternity we have a position greater than the angels will have (1 Corinthians 6:3).

PERSONALITY OF ANGELS God created angels and humans in His image in that we all have a mind to rationally think and reason (1 Peter 1:12), emotions to feel and experience (Luke 2:13), and a free will to choose our destiny (Jude 6). Soon after creation, the top angel (Lucifer, now called Satan Ezekiel 28:12-15) used his free will to rebel against God (2 Thessalonians 2:4) and as a result was kicked out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:15-17; Luke 10:18). The angels then had a one-time choice to follow Satan or God. About one third (Revelation 12:4) followed Satan in his rebellion and also lost their first position. They are now called demons. This was the only time angels ever had an opportunity to exercise their free will. They are now 'locked in' and cannot change their state (angels cannot fall to becoming demons, demons cannot move up to being angels). Angels do not know what it is to experience God's grace in their lives because they never struggle with sin. That is why they are so interested in watching us as we talk and live (1 Peter 1:12). Our lives show God's grace and love in operation in a way they don't personally experience. They are impressed with God and His mercy on us undeserving people.

NATURE OF ANGELS Angels are spirit beings. They are not like God in that they do not know everything. They are limited to being at one place at a time. They are not all powerful or all knowing (Psalms 103:20; 2 Thessalonians 1:7). They have no physical body, but sometimes do appear in the form of a person (Hebrews 13:1). This is to help God's people in need. Some have wings to show power and glory, but not all have wings. Angels are always referred to as masculine. Male pronouns are always used for them. Each angel is different, just like people are different: different abilities and functions in God's service, different traits and skills and different personalities. Angels can't and don't reproduce (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25), although it does seem that demons somehow impregnated women before the flood in Noah's day (Genesis 6:1-4). Angels and demons never die (Luke 20:36).

ORGANIZATION OF ANGELS Angels (and also demons) are organized in a military-like fashion with generals, colonels, lieutenants, sergeants, privates, etc. They are called archangels, princes, rulers, seraphim, etc. (Romans 8:38; Ephesians 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:5). Some have leadership over geographical areas, others over groups of people (as Michael seems to be the archangel caring for Israel).

DUTIES OF ANGELS The Greek word for 'angel' ('angelos') means "messenger." Actually, the word is just transliterated in our Bibles (English letters replace Greek letters but the word is the same). Were it translated we would have the word "messenger" every time 'angel' appears. That is basically their function -- messengers (servants) of God. They are God's servants who help God's people (Hebrews 1:14). Individual angels seem assigned to children and believers (Acts 12:7-11) to help them in special ways. God could use His sovereign power to do things such as prevent an accident, have a child fall safely and not be hurt, discover a set of lost keys, or similar actions, but usually He has His angels do that work. They protect God's people (Psalm 34:7; 91:12; Matthew 18:10). They bring answers to prayers (Acts 12:7), although sometimes demons oppose them and the answers are delayed (Daniel 10:10-21). Angels watch and learn from believers (1 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 12:22-23). They encourage us in danger (Acts 27:23-24). They even help in evangelism (Luke 15:10; Acts 8:26). They care for God's people when we die (Luke 16:22; Jude 9). They fight against demons (Revelation 12).

OUR RESPONSE TO ANGELS We are not to try and contact angels. They will minister to us as God directs. I'm sure we all have been recipients of angelic ministrations numerous times without knowing it. Angels are always present around us, especially when we gather with other believers in Jesus' name. However, we never can see them unless God opens our eyes in a special way (2 Kings 6:17). It's quite likely you have seen angels, but in appearance as people (Hebrews 13:2) and therefore not recognized as an angel. That stranger who just happens to show up at the right time to provide help or assistance, whom we called an 'angel,' might well have been one!

We are not to focus on angels or worship them (Revelation 19:10). They are created to bring honor and glory to God; they are His servants. So are we. When you hear of angels, think of the great God who created them to serve Him by helping us. Give Him the praise and honor and glory and attention, not angels. He alone is worthy of all praise (Revelation 4:11; 5:8-11).

NAMES OF SATAN The names of Satan reveal a lot about him and his character. He is called Satan ("adversary" of God and God's people), Devil ("accuser" of Christians), the Wicked or Evil One (showing his essential nature), Enemy (to God's people), Murderer, Deceiver, Beelzebub ("Prince of Demons"), Ruler of This World, God of this World, Serpent, Dragon and Angel of Light (counterfeit light to deceive people), father of lies. Surely these names clearly summarize what he is and does.

WORK FOR SATAN TODAY After enticing Adam and Eve to sin and getting control of the world from them, Satan and his forces have continued trying to keep worship from God and getting it for themselves. They blind the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4) and take the Word from their hearts (Luke 8:12). They do all they can to oppose God's work (Revelation 2:13). Since they can't attack God, they take their anger out on those who are God's people (Jews and Christians). Satan and his forces tempt Christians to lie (Acts 5:3), accuse and slander us before God (Revelation 12:10), hinder our work (1 Thessalonians 2:18), do anything possible to defeat us (Ephesians 6:11-12), tempt us to immorality (1 Corinthians 7:5) and incite persecution against us (Revelation 2:10).

DEFEAT OF SATAN Satan and his forces are defeated foes, having given their all to destroy Jesus on the cross, but being beaten by Him instead (Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22). When Jesus returns Satan and his demons will be cast into the lake of fire forever (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:1-15).

DEMONS "Demon" means "destroyer." They are also called evil or unclean spirits; referring to the fact they don't have a physical body. They spread their sin and uncleanness any way they can. They are spiritual terrorists, trying to destroy the work of God's kingdom. As with human terrorists, no one is safe from them, they are deadly serious and have no softness or mercy. They serve Satan, who is their commander, and carry out his orders. They receive the worship given to idols or anything other than God (1 Corinthians 10:20).

ORGANIZATION OF DEMONS Satan organizes his demons in the same manner God has angels organized - in a military-like structure. These are similar to generals, colonels, majors, lieutenants, sergeants, corporals, privates, etc. (Ephesians 6:12). Usually a "strong man" (or ruler) is assigned to a task, and he has lesser demons under his command to help in the work (Matthew 12:25-29; Daniel 10:2-6, 12-14). The names of these demons usually refer to their work ("Fear," "Anger," "Lust," "Pride," "Deception," etc.).

DEATH, DARKNESS & SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS All Satan's forces operate in the realm of darkness (fear, deception, blindness, confusion, hopelessness, depression, self-pity, anger, revenge, suicide, death, etc.) He blinds men to spiritual things (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 2:11). He hardens minds and hearts to spiritual things (2 Corinthians 3:14; Ephesians 4:18; Romans 1:21). He does this to individuals as well as nations (i.e.: Israel in Romans 11:7-10). His purpose is to keep men from God's light and salvation (2 Corinthians 4:4). God's light is greater than Satan's darkness (Genesis 1:14-19; John 1:5-9; 3:19-20; 8:12; 9:5; Matthew 17:2; Ephesians 5:8; 1 John 1:5-7; Revelation 21:11,23-24; 22:5; Isaiah 60:1). Believers are in the light, not darkness (Acts 26:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5; Colossians 1:12-13; John 8:12) so we must be careful we do not put ourselves back into the darkness.

The epitome of darkness is death. Satan's plan for man is death, just as God's plan for man is life. Satan is a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). His name, Abaddon means "destruction." Apollyon means "Destroyer." He tries to destroy physically (John 8:44; Mark 9:20-22; 1 John 3:12) or spiritually (2 Corinthians 4:4) life. Satan has power to bring death (Job 1:19; Luke 11:21-22; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 9:14-16), but because the power of death was destroyed at the cross (Hebrews 2:14-15) he cannot use that power without God's permission (Job 2:6; Revelation 9:4). Satan cannot separate us from God, even by death (Romans 8:37-39).

OVERCOMING SATAN & HIS FORCES God is greater than Satan and his forces (1 John 4:4), so we need not fear them (Luke 10:17-19). We must humbly depend on God's strength, not our own (James 4:6-7; 5:16). Admit sin and weaknesses that Satan uses in your life (Psalm 32:5; 139:23-24), and confess any sin (1 John 1:9). Accept God's forgiveness and, with His help, turn from the sin (Romans 2:4; Ezekiel 20:43). In prayer claim back any openings Satan is using in your life (Acts 19:18-19; Matthew 3:7-8). Develop a life of continuous praise & prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Stay in close fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25). Commit yourself to totally follow God (Ephesians 6:16).

CHECK YOURSELF.... Below is a list of evidences of demonic activity. The more that apply to you and the stronger and more often these things apply indicates more chance of it being something demonic.

- _____ Blackouts (Matthew 17:15, Mark 1:26; 7:24-30, Luke 4:35)
- _____ Compulsively eating, lying, stealing, drinking/drugs, sexual sin, greed (Acts 5:3)
- _____ Continuous violent thoughts (of suicide, rape, murder, self-abuse, etc.)
- _____ Deep depression and despondence (frequent and long)
- _____ Desire to live a holy life but inability to do so
- _____ Extreme sleepiness around spiritual things (Bible study, prayer, etc.)
- _____ Extremely low self-image (feel unworthy, unclean, guilt, unforgiveness, etc.) Luke 8:2
- _____ Hatred and bitterness toward others for no justifiable reason

- _____ Inability to believe spiritual truths that you hear or read
- _____ Irrational anger or rage (Matthew 8:28)
- _____ Irrational fears, panic, and phobias (Romans 8:15 Luke 9:39)
- _____ Mocking and blasphemous thoughts (esp. when hearing spiritual truths)
- _____ Pain without justifiable explanation, especially in the head or stomach (ANY medical problems which doctors can't understand or cure, Luke 9:39)
- _____ Terrible nightmares (sexual, horror-filled, fearful, etc)
- _____ Seizures (Mark 1:26; 7:24-30) It can't be said for sure they are all demonic, but they should be checked out to make sure.
- _____ Supernatural experiences (haunting, movement or disappearance of objects, other strange manifestations)
- _____ Voices heard in the mind (mock, intimidate, accuse, threaten, bargain)(John 13:22, 27; Acts 5:3; 1 Chronicles 21:1)

ARMOR OF GOD Satan seldom troubles those who aren't committed believers. They already belong to him (Colossian 1:13) and serve him (Ephesians 2:2). When one wants to turn from that path because he has accepted Jesus as Savior and wants to make Him Lord of his life, Satan opposes that person. Satan will not give up one of his subjects easily and will do all he can to gain that person back. He can't take his salvation but can have him live the same kind of life as before (one of sin and service to Satan). God does not want that for His children. He has defeated Satan and has made provision for us to share in that victory. As a good Commander, He provides the equipment we need to defeat Satan and to protect ourselves (Ephesians 6:10-17, 2 Corinthians 10:35, Matthew 12:29). Study and understand the armor of God and apply it to your life for victory!

USE THE WORD OF GOD Knowing and using God's Word, the sword of the Spirit, is key for victory (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 77:12; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Matthew 22:37-38; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 4:8). That's how Jesus defeated Satan (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan tries to plant doubts about God's word in man's mind. He deceived Eve into sinning by misquoting God's Word. Satan was undermining God's truth, and he won! We must be skillful in the use of our sword of the Word (Ephesians 6:17) to win. Stay in the Scriptures (Psalm 1:1-3). The Word is a mirror (James 1:22-25) a lamp (Psalm 119:105) a cleanser (Ephesians 5:25-26) a sword (Hebrews 4:12) and food (1 Peter 2:2; Matthew 4:4). Use it for all these applications.

PROMISES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO SPIRITUAL WARFARE:

Our Adversaries Will Be Defeated: Deuteronomy 32:43; Philippians 1:28; Deuteronomy 33:27

Victory is Promised: 1 Corinthians 15:57; 1 Chronicles 29:11; Proverbs 21:31; 1 John 5:4, 18; Revelation 12:11; 15:2; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; John 16:33

God Promises To Fight For Us: 1 Samuel 17:45-47; Jeremiah 1:8

No Weapon Formed Against The Believer Can Prosper: Isaiah 54:17

Jesus Is Constantly Praying & Interceding On Our Behalf: 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25

God Is Always With Us: Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 18:20; John 14:16, 21; Revelation 3:20

We will never Be Separated From God: Romans 8:35-39; John 10:27-29; 3:36; 5:24

God Will Meet All Our Needs: Philippians 4:19; Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32; 1 Samuel 12:24

There Is No Need To Worry or Fear: Matthew 6:25,34; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 5:38-39; Psalm 37:1-9; Jude 24; Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; 2 Samuel 22:33-35,40-41

God Promises His Care & Protection: Deuteronomy 33:27; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 23:24; 32:7

Everything Will Work Out Right In the End: Romans 8:28

You Won't Ever Face Anything You Can't Handle With God's Help: I Corinthians 10:13

Peace Is Available No Matter What: John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; II Timothy 1:7

Trials Are Allowed To Bring Spiritual Growth: Psalm 119:67, 71,75; 94:12; Isaiah 48:10; Romans 5:3

God Promises Comfort: Psalm 23:4; Lamentations 3:22-23; Matthew 5:4; 11:28-30; John 14:16, 18; Romans 15:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

God Will Give Us Courage: Joshua 1:9-11:1; I Corinthians 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:7

Wisdom Is Promised Those Who Ask: James 1:5; 3:14-17; Luke 21:15; Proverbs 1:7; 2:6; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 3:19

BIBLE VERSES TO MEMORIZE Memorizing God's Word so it is in our hearts when we need it is a very important way to have victory over sin, Satan and temptation (Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 119:9-11). There is no better way to victory! These are verses you should know by heart: Hebrews 4:12; John 8:32; Romans 12:1; James 4:6-8; 1 John 4:4; Philippians 4:19; Romans 12:2; James 5:16; Luke 10:18-19; Psalm 139:23-24; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 12:9-10; 1 Peter 5:8-9).

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians understand spiritual warfare, angels, Satan and demons?

There is a lot to talk about in this chapter so go slowly and explain it part by part. You can share personal experiences to help them understand. There may be someone you know who has a good understanding of spiritual warfare. You could ask them to talk to the person you are discipling. Answer any questions they may have. You can use my book, "Spiritual Warfare," to help learn about these things. This book and other things I have written can be found on my web site SW.ChristianTrainingOrganization.org. You can find a lot of helpful information there as well as a way to contact me with questions you may have. This is a hard subject but one that is important for you and others to learn. We have nothing to fear, God is victorious

11. SPENDING TIME WITH THE FATHER

How can I get to know God better?

No one can get to know another person better without spending time with him or her. That's why children and parents know each other so well. They talk to each other and listen to what each other has to say. That is the only way we can grow close to God as well. We need to spend time with Him, talking to Him and listening to Him. Doing that only on Sunday morning is like expecting to grow if you only eat one meal a week. We need time with Him every day!

We speak to God in prayer and worship. He speaks to us through His Word. That's another benefit of memorizing His Word. Not only do we need times of fellowship with Him, but He wants those times with us as well. He desires to have a personal relationship with us (1 John 4:10, 19; Genesis 5:1; Leviticus 26:12). That is why He created us and then paid the price to redeem us when we turned from Him to sin (Galatians 3:13).

An important ingredient to our spiritual growth is spending quality time with God, getting to know Him and His Word better. Spending time reading His Word while talking and listening to Him is crucial. It's impossible to grow without it.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. Each relationship we have with others is different, and so we will all have differences in how we spend time with God. Connecting with Him is what is important. As long as we have those three: reading His Word, talking to Him and listening to Him, we will grow closer to Him.

It is important to make this a top priority, before other things are done. Consider it an appointment with Jesus you have each day. Don't put Him off or leave Him waiting when you don't show up. Set aside a certain time and place each day. Be consistent, not out of obligation or guilt, but because you truly want to be with Him and come closer to Him. Have your Bible and also a paper and pencil handy so you can write down questions, things to pray about and things God is showing you that you want to remember or whatever comes up. Writing down your prayers or keeping a spiritual journal can be meaningful as well.

First confess any sin in your life and make sure there is nothing between you and God. Then carefully and slowly read and meditate on a few verses. Take some time for praise and worship. Thank Him for all He is doing for you. You can bring your requests for others to Him, and then your own needs. Be careful to ask God how you should pray for others needs as well as your own. Don't pray what you see as the solution to their or your problems. Just bring the problem before Him and let Him decide on what is the best solution and when to implement it. Make sure you take time to listen to Him throughout this process. No relationship grows when one person does all the talking. It's important to listen as well, as we will see in the next chapter.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians develop time with God and get to know Him better?

This is a VERY important part of discipleship and must start immediately after salvation. Go through the above information with them and share your own experiences and suggestions. At the start you should let them join in with you as you spend time praying and talking to God so they can see what you do. Do it together and let them take part as well. That will help them then to do something similar on their own.

Each time you meet ask them how they are doing with this, what they are learning about God and if they have any questions about spending time with Him. Be open and honest in your answers. Encourage them often to regularly spend quality time connecting with God.

12. FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

How can I know what God wants me to do?

As a child matures he or she will want to do what their parent wants to please them. They want to follow their parent and do what the parent desires them to do. It's important they hear what their parents say, so they need to learn how to listen to them when they speak. As Christians we must learn to listen to what our Heavenly Father is saying to us.

God does want to speak to us and He speaks often. He wants us to learn to hear His voice (Psalm 81:13; Jeremiah 33:3; Psalm 50:3). That is an important part of having a personal relationship with Him. We know communication from God is possible for He is God. If He can hear us speak to Him, He can certainly speak to us as well. Not only is it possible, it is probable for because He made us to fellowship with Him. Even more, it is necessary for it is the only way man can know God.

When we communicate with each other we use words, body language, or written words. God uses various means to communicate with us, too. How does God speak to us today? God's will, His

purposes and plans, His very nature, all are clearly revealed to us through the pages of the Holy Scripture (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16). God uses His Word to speak to us when a familiar Scripture just jumps off the page, when a promise that speaks to a situation we are in comes to mind and sticks, when a certain passage, story or verse pops into mind, when something comes alive in a new way or when something we hear goes deep into our soul and ministers to a need. That is the Holy Spirit taking the written Word and applying it to our hearts (John 16:6-13; Romans 8:26-27).

God also can speak through other people, especially mature believers who know us, to give good guidance and advice. His Spirit inside us helps us understand what they are saying and recognize it is good advice and comes from God.

In addition, sometimes God speaks directly to us. His voice is not a sound we hear with our ears. We hear it inside, in our mind or heart. Once you learn to recognize and respond to this voice you'll recognize Him speaking to you.

The first clue we have to what God's voice sounds like is in I Kings 19:11-13 where we see it is a still, small voice – **a gentle whisper**. In the still, small voice of God we are given a message that bears the stamp of His personality quite clearly and in a way we will learn to recognize.

I remember several years ago I was marrying a couple that had been coming to church and Bible studies for quite some time. They had some major sins in their lives, but it seemed that they had stopped them. However, the day before the wedding the groom did something that was part of his old pattern. I clearly heard God's voice in my spirit telling me not to marry them, so I didn't. The bride and both families really put a lot of pressure on me to go ahead with the wedding, but I knew that God had spoken and did not.

Remember, this is not verbal voice, a sensation or an emotional experience. In fact, it can be very easy to overlook His voice or just think it's a thought of our own. We need to learn to hear God's still voice when He speaks to us. I can think back on times He told me to talk to someone about Him and I didn't. Those still haunt me. Better memories are the times when God put it on my heart or mind to do something and I obeyed.

When we learn to listen, we recognize that He speaks **rich and enlightened thoughts to our minds**. God can put a new idea directly and immediately into our mind. He can give us a new perspective in viewing something. He can put new **desires into our hearts**. Often God's still, small voice takes the form of thoughts that seem to be ~~are~~ our thoughts, though they are not from us.

When I study and when I prepare sermons and lessons, I try to be very aware of the rich and enlightening thoughts that God sends me by means of His Spirit. When I counsel I always try to be sensitive to His leading and direction. When we are involved in spiritual warfare it is essential to be in tune to hear what warnings or suggestions God gives me. In writing these books I must be aware of what God is leading me to say or not say as well as how to say it.

Often this still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a desire within my heart. The disciples who talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus that first Resurrection Sunday experienced this (Luke 24:32). David experienced this as well (Psalm 39:1-3).

Have you ever found yourself moved by something you sense in your spirit? Perhaps it happens during a song or sermon, when listening to a testimony or out in nature? This stirring is God speaking to our hearts through His Holy Spirit, putting His fire within us to show something of importance.

This still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a desire within our hearts or putting His thoughts into our minds. It is always a gentle, quiet whisper. What does His

voice say? What can we expect to hear from God? What sort of things does He communicate to those who are listening?

For most of us, the first time we heard God speak to us He was **convicting us of sin**, showing us our need of salvation (John 16:7-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). After salvation a way in which God speaks to us is to show us the sin in our life. He convicts us of sin, so we can confess and remove it.

A second type of message God speaks to us is **information and guidance** (John 16:13). The Bible abounds with examples of this. Paul said the Holy Spirit warned him of what was to come when he went to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-23). Joseph heard of Pharaoh's dream and God told Him the meaning. God gave Daniel the contents and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Jacob (Genesis 46:2) and Samuel (2 Samuel 23:2) both said God spoke His guidance to them. Simeon was moved by the Spirit to find Jesus with His parents in the temple (Luke 2:25-28). Several times the Bible tells us that God guided Jesus by directing His spirit (Mark 2:8; John 13:21). God spoke to Ananias and told him to go to blind Paul (Acts 9:11-15).

An analogy I like which explains this is the shepherd-sheep illustration. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:4, 16, 27). Jesus' definition of a disciple is one who follows Him, who hears His voice and responds. Do you recognize His voice when He speaks to you? Do you follow whatever He says?

Many years ago, I was between churches and seeking where God would have me minister. A church invited us to come speak and apply so we did. We weren't sure if God wanted us to go there or not, but they went ahead with their procedure and voted on us. The vote was 100% - unanimous. I remember agonizing over the decision, awaiting their final call to see if we were coming or not. When the phone rang I still wasn't sure, but as I talked I knew God was telling me to turn it down. I really wanted to go there but knew God was saying "No." Six months later God led us to the church I pastored for 35 years, and where we still minister. The church had many problems and we were advised to not go there, but that is where God wanted us and where He blessed us. That's why it's so important to be listening to God and letting Him guide and direct.

It's not just in the big things, but in little things He leads us with as well. Many times I've not been able to find my keys or something I've misplaced. After frantically looking everywhere I finally stop and pray, and then soon after that I remember where to look for them.

God doesn't just speak information to us; quite often He speaks **words of encouragement**, peace, comfort and strength (John 14:27; Philippians 4:6-7). When we are going through trials, we feel peace and comfort.

His voice also **calls people into ministry** (1 Timothy 1:12; 2:6-7) and then tells those whom He has called **what to say or do**. Moses is an example of this (Exodus 4:10-12). I'm sure you've noticed times when you were talking to someone about spiritual things and all of a sudden right thoughts came to you and you were able to explain something in a way you never thought you could.

When I teach and preach I depend on God to give me the right words to say. I always pray before I start, asking Him to give me His words to speak and that everyone would hear Him through me. I need to listen to Him. You need to be hearing from Him as well.

The final form His communication may take is that of **revelation of Himself**. Often it will just seem to 'hit' us how wonderful, powerful or majestic God is. This is His Spirit revealing Jesus to us. He does this so we will respond in praise and worship. This often happens to me through music or testimonies.

So, we see that God speaks to us in a gentle whisper. Sometimes, when He does, He speaks rich and enlightening thoughts to our minds. Or He may cause a desire in our hearts as He speaks to

our emotions and feelings. The content, which He communicates to us, consists of conviction, information and guidance, encouragement and peace, enablement in ministry, and a revelation of Himself to cause us to worship Him.

In which of these areas has He been speaking to you during the last week? In which is He speaking to you now? Where do you need to hear Him speaking in the coming week? Now that you know a little better what God's voices sounds like and the kinds of things He talks about, make sure you are listening for them this week.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians learn to listen to God?

Learning to listen to God is a skill many believers never develop. Make sure you are growing in this in your own life. Teach the person you are discipling the information in this chapter, giving examples in your own life and answering any questions they may have. This is an ongoing process of bringing it up from time to time when you meet in the future. Ask them how they are doing with this and what they are learning. Encourage them to keep spending time doing this. Keep sharing what you are learning as well.

13. DOING YOUR PART IN THE FAMILY

How can I contribute to others in the family?

As soon as a child starts to walk and talk he wants to "help" around the house. He tries to do little things to assist others. While he isn't able to do much at first, still he tries and tries. He feels great when he can make a contribution and 'help' someone.

The same is true in God's family. A new believer isn't able to do a lot at first, but there should be a strong desire to do what they can. It is natural to want to contribute to the spiritual family and help in any way possible. Parents train their children to be able to contribute. God gives His children spiritual gifts to help us contribute to others.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS At the moment of salvation one of the many blessings we receive are spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12) These are enablements the Spirit provides for each one. Just as each person has a unique set of talents, each believer has a unique set of spiritual gifts. These are different than talents. These are special skills/abilities that God's Holy Spirit gives each believer to minister to others in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-31).

Spiritual gifts are not given to be used for one's own benefit. They are for the purpose of ministering to others in the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). If you're not using your gift, other Christians around you aren't benefitting as they should.

Each believer has a unique combination of gifts. Just like three colors, yellow, red and blue, are blended in various combinations to form thousands of colors, so these basic gifts are blended with others to form a unique combination in each believer. No two of us are gifted exactly alike.

Pastor: The gift of pastor is the special ability to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers.

Teaching: The gift of teaching is the special ability to communicate information relevant to the health and ministry of the body and its members in such a way that others will learn.

Preaching: The gift of preaching is the special ability to proclaim the written Word with clarity and to apply it to a particular situation with a view to correction or edification and spiritual growth.

Leadership: The gift of leadership is the special ability to set goals in accordance with God's purpose for the future and to communicate these goals to others in such a way that they voluntarily and harmoniously work together to accomplish these goals for the glory of God.

Evangelism: the gift of evangelism is the special ability to proclaim the Good News of salvation effectively so that individuals or groups of people may respond to the claims of Christ in conversion and discipleship.

Missionary: the gift of missionary is the special ability to minister whatever other spiritual gifts they have in a second culture.

Administration: The gift of administration is the special ability to understand clearly the immediate and long-range goals of a particular unit of the body of Christ and to devise and execute plans for the accomplishment of those goals.

Knowledge: The gift of knowledge is the special ability to observe Biblical facts and make conclusions, to study and understand the Bible in a special, deep way.

Wisdom: The gift of wisdom is the special ability to know the mind of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to receive insight into how given knowledge may be applied to specific needs arising in the Body of Christ.

Service: The gift of service is the special ability to identify the unmet needs involved in a task related to God's work and to make use of available resources to meet those needs and help accomplish the desired results.

Mercy: The gift of mercy is the special ability to feel genuine empathy and compassion for individuals who suffer distressing physical, mental or emotional problems and to translate that compassion into cheerfully done deeds that reflect Christ's love and alleviate the suffering.

Helps: The gift of helps is the special ability to invest the talents they have in the life and ministry of other members of the Body so the other can increase the effectiveness of their spiritual gifts.

Giving: The gift of giving is the special ability to contribute material resources to the work of the Lord with liberality and cheerfulness.

Hospitality: The gift of hospitality is the special ability to provide an open house and a warm welcome to those in need of food and lodging.

Encouragement: The gift of encouragement is the special ability to minister words of comfort, consolation, encouragement and counsel to other members of the Body in such a way that they feel helped and healed.

Faith: The gift of faith is the special ability to exercise a supernatural capacity for believing God.

Intercession: The gift of intercession is the special ability to pray for extended periods of time on a regular basis and see frequent and specific answers to their prayers (to a degree much greater than that which is expected of the average Christian).

Discernment: The gift of discernment is the special ability to know with assurance whether certain behavior or truth purported to be of God is in reality divine, human or satanic.

Exorcism: The gift of exorcism is the special ability to understand Satan's workings and know how to stop the work of demons in people's lives.

HOW TO DISCOVER YOUR GIFTS First, get to work helping and serving others in any way you can. You will find some ways easier and more enjoyable than others. There will be some areas of service which others recognize as being something you are good at and they will ask you to minister in those ways. You won't be able to do everything, and you won't be good at everything you try. But

those ways of ministering to others which you enjoy and are good at are the ways God has gifted you. It will be a combination of the gifts listed above and is different for everyone.

When you find areas where you are able to serve with good results learn more about them and look for more opportunities to perform these things. Find others who seem to be good at one of the things you can do and like to do. Learn from them how to better minister in these ways. Dedicate these abilities to God and use them. You will continue to improve throughout your whole life as you serve Jesus and others in the family of God.

DOES GOD WANT US TO SPEAK IN TONGUES TODAY? While talking about spiritual gifts we must cover gifts that often cause confusion or division among Christians. One of these is the gift of tongues that was a gift given to some in the early church but is not for us today.

The Bible teaches that each believer is **filled with the Holy Spirit** at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:3; 6:19; Ephesians 4:4-5; Romans 5:5). One cannot be saved without the Holy Spirit indwelling them (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). From there on it is not a matter of getting more of the Holy Spirit but of the Holy Spirit getting more of us! As we totally submit and live a holy life He fills and works through us.

Then what about Acts 2, 8, 10 and 19, when the Holy Spirit came on those who were already believers? **Acts 2** is a one-time, non-repeatable experience (not even repeated in Acts 8, 10 or 19). Just like the Second Person of the Trinity made a unique, one-time entrance into the world through a virgin in a stable, so the Third Person made His entrance in a unique, one-time way. When Jesus came back to earth after the resurrection appearing to the women, the apostles and Paul or His Revelation to John on Patmos, He never repeated the virgin-in-a-stable entrance. Acts 2, also, is non-repeatable.

Acts 2 is a transition, from Old Testament law when the Holy Spirit only indwelt some believers sometimes, to New Testament grace, when the Holy Spirit indwells all believers for their whole life after salvation. The apostles had already accepted Jesus' claims and had salvation. In **Acts 8** we see this same truth applied to half Jews and half Gentiles, in **Acts 10** to Gentiles in Palestine, and in **Acts 19** to Gentiles outside of Palestine. They were similar to Acts 2 to show that Jews and Gentiles were now equal in the same Body that the same thing happened to each. Each one showed the changeover from Old Testament law to New Testament grace. There had to be a definite time of change, showing the transfer had been made and those believers accepted. Still, what happened was different enough to show that it wasn't Acts 2 repeated again. There were no flames of fire or wind. Those were the only times anything even resembling Acts 2 happened in Acts, and it only happened once for each new group as the gospel spread from Jerusalem. All others received the Holy Spirit immediately at salvation.

Tongues is not proof of Spirit baptism. Many received the Holy Spirit but not tongues: 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41), early church believers (Acts 4:31), Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), Paul (Acts 9:17-18), John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-16), Jesus (Luke 3:21-22; 4:1,14,18,21) and many others (Acts 4:8,31; 6:5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9,52). Speaking in tongues is never mentioned in the leadership qualities in Titus or 1 Timothy. The Bible makes it clear that obedience is the proof of the Holy Spirit's indwelling, not tongues (Ephesians 5:18f).

Tongues in Acts and Corinth were the same. The same Greek word ('glossa' meaning 'tongue, to speak, language') is always used of known foreign languages and is used in both Jerusalem (Acts 2:6-11; Acts 10:46) and Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:21; 12:10). In Acts it is obvious that the listeners heard known languages spoken by those who had no previous knowledge of the language. There is no indication that what Corinth experienced was different. It is only the church at Corinth that is mentioned as using tongues, and then many corrections were needed because it was a very carnal church (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

The purpose of tongues was to show Jews that God's judgment was on them. They were to spread God's message to Gentiles but failed. God would show He was judging them for that by bringing His word to them by Gentiles in Gentile languages. This was prophesied in Isaiah 28:9-12; 33:19; Deuteronomy 28:49; and Jeremiah 5:15. Paul said tongues fulfilled those prophecies (1 Corinthians 14:21-22). When the Jews didn't heed this sign and repent, God's judgment came upon them in 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed. After 70 AD there is no record of tongues being used in the early church. Signs are placed before what they are to mark, not after! Paul said (1 Corinthians 13:8-12) that tongues "will be stilled." The Greek word, 'pauo,' is in the middle voice; they will stop by themselves and not start again. History records only a very few, very isolated, very minor outbreak of tongues from Acts to the present. These groups were often heretical in their beliefs. Obviously tongues did stop. There is nothing to indicate that they would ever begin again, for their purpose has been fulfilled. When Joel 2 talks about the Holy Spirit coming back after the Tribulation, there is no mention of tongues!

Then what about those with the gift of interpretation? First, the Greek word for this refers to someone who interprets known languages, like from Spanish to German. The use of foreign languages was to show God's judgment to the Jews present. The content of the message was God's good news, which the Jews should have been spreading. Since speaking in an unknown language would mean nothing to Gentiles present, Paul said there had to be an interpreter present when the gift was used (1 Corinthians 14:26-28). This was necessary for the weak and immature Corinthian believers (14:20-22) who were ignorant of God's truth (12:13). It was to be kept to a minimum (14:6-12) because it was an inferior gift (1 Corinthians 14:4). Paul himself only used his ability to speak in unknown languages in Jewish services (1 Corinthians 14:36-39) as a sign of judgment on Israel Isaiah 28:9-12.

Applying these criteria to tongues today (known foreign language, showing God's judgment on the Jews, used only with Jews present, sees as a lesser/minor gift whose use was to be kept to a minimum, etc.) shows that what is happening today is different from what happened back then.

Tongues are not a heavenly language. The Greek word makes it clear they are a KNOWN language (Acts 2:6-11; 1 Corinthians 14:21; 12:10). This is different from the intercessory 'groanings' of The Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26 for those are clearly said to be unutterable (not able to be spoken). The "tongues of angels" (1 Corinthians 13:1) is a hyperbole (overemphasis to make a point) like "faith to move mountains." Besides, when angels spoke in the Bible, it was always in the known language of those to whom they were speaking.

Tongues are not a private prayer language. All spiritual gifts are given for the sake of others to edify the church, not the one having the gift (1 Corinthians 12:7, 12; 14:19, 27), that's why an interpreter had to always be present in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14:26-28). Every time the gift of tongues was given in the Bible it was given to a group, not an individual. It was always used in a group; no instance of private use is recorded. The tongue is to be controlled by the speaker, not beyond his control (1 Corinthians 14:26-33; Galatians 5:23; James 3 1-12). Plus, tongues were to be a sign to unbelievers, not believers (1 Corinthians 14:22). Jesus Himself warned about praying words we don't understand (Mt 6:7). Paul said he always understood what he said when he prayed, even in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:15). When asked how to pray Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer, not tongues.

The Dangers of speaking in tongues today. Paul warns about Satan's ability to counterfeit this (1 Corinthians 12:2-3) as he has in other religions and cults today. Tongues is said to be an inferior gift because it is self-centered (1 Corinthians 14:4) and leads to the emphasis being put on the self-edification of the speaker and emotions which can lead people astray (2 Corinthians 6:11-12; Rom 16:17-18). We are told to pray with understanding (1 Corinthians 14:13-17) and control our spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). God arbitrarily chooses which gifts to give to whom (1 Corinthians 12:7,11,18,28). We are told to not seek any particular gift because all gifts are equal and none is

greater than the others (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1-5). Tongues speaking can become a substitute for spirituality (1 Corinthians 14:26-28). Worse of all, it can produce a false security by those who put faith in it as proof that God loves and accepts them. Many who practice “tongues-speaking” do not believe in eternal security of salvation, so their speaking in tongues can become their proof of acceptance by God. Our faith must be in Jesus’ work on the cross, not in our ability to speak in ‘tongues.’

IS IT GOD’S WILL FOR EVERYONE TO BE HEALED TODAY? Another gift that causes problems today is the so-called gift of healing. There are those today who believe that Jesus not only paid for sin on the cross, but that He also paid for our sickness. They say that each healing is received by faith, if you have enough faith you will be healed to receive it. Loss of faith, then, causes the loss of these healing benefits. They claim some are especially gifted in healing and can heal those who come to them. They say God did miracles in the Bible and He is still a miracle-working God today.

What about this? Is this true? This is not just a peripheral issue but stands very central in our salvation and Christian life. Is God’s sovereignty or man’s free will the final and ultimate deciding factor? It must be God’s sovereignty. The motive for living for Jesus should not be fear of losing our salvation. The goal of living for Jesus should not be a problem free life. Pain and suffering isn’t to be faced by whipping up enough ‘faith’ so that God removes it. We live with the feelings of failure and guilt if it isn’t removed and we believe that it is our fault by not having enough faith. What about these claims of ‘faith healers’? What does the Bible say?

Is the gift of healing for today? While it’s true that Jesus and the Apostles healed, it was done as a sign to authenticate that they were from God (Matthew 12:39). This was God’s way having people listen to them instead of all the counterfeits around. When they were fully authenticated, there was no longer any reason for the sign. In AD 35 all were healed but by AD 60 some were not (Epaphroditus was healed, Paul’s thorn in the flesh was not healed, etc.). Then by AD 67 very few were being healed (Trophimus was left at Miletus sick did he recover? We don’t know. Timothy’s stomach was unhealed, etc.). Jerusalem, the scene of many early miracles, had not one miracle done in it after Stephen was stoned. The people had the evidence but rejected it. James, the oldest book in the New Testament, says that if someone is sick we are to pray for him or her (James 5:14).

Should we see miracles today like in Bible times? Actually, if you list all the miracles in the Bible you will find almost all of them fit three time periods. They aren’t evenly spread out throughout history but cluster in the times of Moses/Joshua, Elijah/Elisha and Jesus/apostles. In each of these times a new difficulty had developed so God sent a new message through a new messenger whom He authenticated by miracles (“signs”). One more time of miracles is coming, called the Tribulation.

Is faith a requirement for healing? Jesus didn’t make faith a requirement for healing. Many that He healed didn’t have faith. The impotent man at the pool didn’t even know who He was. The man with the withered hand and the man with dropsy were healed as a sign to religious leaders who were present; they didn’t ask to be healed. The cripple that Peter and Paul healed outside the temple didn’t exercise any faith. Of course, the demoniacs who were delivered and those brought back from the dead didn’t exercise faith. Then there are others who had strong faith but weren’t healed: Stephen, Paul, Timothy, Job, David’s son, Elisha, etc.

Is ‘healing’ today the same as in Bible times? Today’s ‘healers’ must meet the same criteria as Jesus and the apostles to claim they are doing what was done by them. Jesus and the apostles healed with a word or touch any time and any place. There ~~was~~ were no special meetings, no chants or music, no gimmicks, nothing. Do today’s faith healers walk down the halls in a hospital and empty every room? That’s how Jesus and Peter did it. ~~Also~~, Bible miracles were done instantly, totally, not gradually or slowly and it was never lost. There was no healing to ‘claim’ or lose. Everyone was healed. All, 100%, no matter the need, were ~~was~~ healed. Organic diseases were healed: limbs grew

back instantly, strong enough to walk on, eyes were opened, leprosy was instantly gone and healthy flesh grown. The dead were raised. Today's faith healing doesn't come close to meeting these criteria.

Does God heal? Yes, a sovereign God can always heal. He is always able to heal, but He is not always willing. Healing isn't guaranteed. Healing isn't based on our having enough faith. Miracles by Jesus and the apostles were done as a sign to authenticate the One who could heal an unseen soul. God can and does heal, but He doesn't gift others to do it, nor does He say that everyone should be healed.

What are we to do when we need healing? When we are sick it's good to first make sure there it isn't for sin or disobedience. If there is sin, God may be using the sickness to point it out. Confess it and God will forgive and then use that illness for good (Romans 8:28). It's fine to pray, asking God to heal if that is His will. We are always to submit to His will, not demand He do what we want. Like the 3 Hebrew boys, remember God is always able to heal or deliver but, for reasons unknown to us, He isn't always willing to heal or deliver (Daniel 3:16-20). Ask Him to use the pain and suffering for His glory so that we and others can see His greatness through His provision and peace. Ask for the illness to be made part of your spiritual growth so you trust Him more and become more like Jesus. Use the best available resources: diet, rest, exercise and medical help. Realize that all healing does ultimately come from God. Leave the results up to His will.

STEWARDSHIP The word "stewardship" refers to someone who manages the household or possessions of another person. Think of a man who is the captain of a ship filled with possessions that belong to someone else. He must distribute and use these things as the owner wants. Enough for his own use is allowed to him as well. Joseph was the steward of Potiphar's possessions in Egypt and used them wisely so his master benefited. We are stewards of all that God has given us. Everything we have belongs to Him: our money, possessions, skills, talents, abilities health and time. He owns it all and we are to use it as He directs.

Stewardship refers to how we use our time and abilities, not just our material possessions. It also refers to taking good care of our health by getting proper rest, eating healthy foods and having enough exercise to keep ourselves in good physical shape. God has given us one body, in which to live and we must take good care of it so we can serve Him as long as we live.

In the Old Testament the people were commanded to give a tithe of their material possession, 10%, to support the priests and the temple. In the New Testament we are not commanded to tithe, but we are to give proportionally of what God has given to us (Deuteronomy 16:17; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 11). I think that means God's people should set 10% as a minimum to give to God. Someone pointed out that God doesn't look at what we give but at how much we keep for ourselves! We aren't to give out of fear or guilt, but out of love and appreciation in our hearts. Our attitude must be that we are giving back to Him some of what is His because He gave it to us. God is more concerned with our heart attitude than with the amount we give (Mark 12:41-44).

According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their possessions cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth. (Genesis 14:20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 6:1-4, 19-21; 25:14-29; Luke 12:16-21, 42; 16:1-13; Acts 2:44-47; 5:1-11; 17:24-25; 20:35; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 6:19-20; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:15; Philippians 4:10-19)

Something else to remember is that the Bible commands us not to go into debt (Romans 13:8; Proverbs 11:15; Psalm 37:21). Do not spend money you don't have! Before you do spend money pray for wisdom. Your money comes from God and is to be used for His glory. You can only spend it once so make sure you are using it wisely.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians develop their spiritual gifts and serve others in the church?

Teach the person this information about spiritual gifts and stewardship. Help them understand how they work and what gifts they might have. It may take a while before they are able to begin this process, so you can go slowly in this subject. Use yourself as an example.

The information about speaking in tongues and healing is supplemental and not something to bring up to a new Christian unless there is a reason to do so. Perhaps they have been taught these things or others are trying to influence them in this area. If that is the case teach this material now. However, if you can wait until it is needed, do so. There are so many very important things for them to learn that are more important than this.

14. GETTING TO KNOW YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY

What does my church believe and practice?

God puts babies in families with more mature people to take care of them and train them. A baby can't live on its own, it must have help from those who are grown. The same thing is true spiritually as well (Hebrews 10:25). New believers need older believers to help them grow. All believers need each other to keep growing. Even grown, mature adults need the others in a family for help, support, protection, encouragement, fellowship and enjoyment. That is true in earthly families as well as spiritual families. God calls our spiritual families 'the church.'

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH The Greek word translated 'church' (ekklesia) means "a called out group." It was used of a local assembly or gathering of people. In the New Testament it refers to those who have accepted Jesus as Savior during the time period starting with His resurrection and ending with the Rapture. It is the Bride of Christ. Those who accept Jesus before Jesus' resurrection or after the Rapture are part of redeemed Israel, not the Body of Christ. The church truly has a special position in God's plan and program. He is the Head. We are His Body. He is the Groom. We are the Bride. We are a distinct people of God, not part of Israel and not replacing Israel in God's plan. The church is composed of born-again people from every country, of every age and background, from the resurrection to the Rapture. The church is not a building, denomination or local group of people but each one who comes to Jesus for salvation during the Church Age.

THE LOCAL CHURCH Still, the Bible does talk about the local church ("assembling, gathering") as well as the universal church. Local churches all are part of the universal church. The local church is a group of believers, only secondarily is it a building or denomination. Someone said the church is a hospital for sinners, not a display case for saints. The church is not an ark for the saving of just a select few or a ferryboat to take effortless passengers to the shores of heaven. It is not an eternal life insurance company, nor is it a social set that welcomes certain people and excludes all others. Rather, the church is a lifeboat for the rescue of sin-wrecked and perishing souls. It is a family, in which love and service are expected from each person to each person. It is the representative, the 'body,' of Jesus Christ on earth, reflecting His Spirit and controlled by His will.

The purpose of the local church is two-fold. It is to go to those without and share the plan of salvation with them. It is to take the good news of Jesus to a lost and dying world. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

The church also exists to meet the needs of its members. A body needs to meet the needs of its parts for each part to function in a healthy manner. This takes balance between teaching (God communicating to man), worship (man communicating to God) and fellowship (man communicating to

man). They must all be present. (Acts 2:42). However, teaching & learning God's Word (hearing from God) must come first. Feeding the sheep is the main responsibility of the pastor and church leaders (Ephesians 4:11-12, John 21:17, 1 Corinthians 1:21)

The Holy Spirit is the power source for the church, sent by Jesus after His ascension into heaven. The Holy Spirit gives the wisdom, power, strength, gifts, guidance, direction and grace needed for us to function for God.

The Bible doesn't give any strict commands about church government. There were spiritual leaders (elder/pastor/bishop) and those who took care of church finances and property (deacon) who divided the responsibility.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians learn about the church and its importance?

Of course, a new believer should be invited to attend a church as soon as possible. By the time you get to this chapter they will be familiar with a church and how it works, so they should have a general idea of these things. They will probably have a lot of questions about how it operates. Make sure they understand the information presented in this chapter. Introduce them to the leaders in the church if they don't already know them. Emphasize the importance of being involved in a godly local church. If they aren't attending a church or if they don't go regularly find out why and encourage them to do so. Invite them to join you and bring them to church with you if they aren't attending on their own.

15. BRINGING NEW LIFE TO OTHERS

How can I help others understand about salvation?

Children grow into adults and then have children of their own. As a Christian grows spiritually it is natural for them to bring others into the Kingdom of God by the new birth as well. We are to always be ready to share our faith and the reason for it with others (1 Peter 3:15). We are to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus commanded His followers to tell the Good News about forgiveness in Him (Luke 24:45-49). Paul instructed his readers to do the same thing (2 Timothy 4:1-6). Jesus promises to be with us and bless us as we do this (Matthew 10:32; 1 Samuel 2:30).

HOW CAN WE SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH OTHERS? There is no right or wrong way to tell others about Jesus; no one way is better than any other. One of the easiest and most effective ways to share your faith is to tell others what Jesus has done for you. It's something you know and easier to share. Others will listen because you aren't telling them what they need to do, God will use it to show them their need of Him. Just tell them in a few words what life was like for you before you put your faith in Jesus. Then tell them what happened to cause you to believe in Him. Finally share how your life has changed since you became a Christian.

Another way I like to share salvation with others is by asking them two questions. First, I ask them if they were to die tonight, would they go to heaven. That is a non-threatening question for them to answer but helps me know where they stand spiritually. If they don't think they will go to heaven or don't believe in heaven that is what I talk to them about. If they believe they will go to heaven I, then ask them a second question. What would they say when God asked them why He should let them into heaven? This shows where they are placing their faith. I then can share with them the Bible says salvation is only in Jesus. It is a good way to start talking about spiritual things.

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help new Christians bring others to salvation?

Share the material in this chapter with the person you are teaching. Use examples in your own life and share what you have learned about how to tell others about Jesus. Take them with you when you go to you speak to someone about salvation in Jesus. Perhaps there are some in your church who are very good at this. You could ask them to talk to the person as well.

16. SPIRITUAL CHILD CARE

How can I help others grow after salvation?

It is natural for parents to care for the children they bring into the world and help them grow. That is true spiritually as well. A maturing believer has a responsibility to help others grow, especially ones he brings to faith in Jesus. That is a sign that one is maturing: reaching out to help others instead of just thinking about what others can do to help them. Now that you have gone through this process of learning and growing, you are responsible to pass this on to others. When a person has come to Jesus it is important to help them learn more about Jesus and become more like Him in what they think and do. What you need to do is bring them through the things already covered in this book, things you have already learned about living for Jesus. Teach them what others have taught you.

Seek out those who are younger believers than you are. Ask God to show you who He wants you to disciple. Get to know them. Pray for them and with them. Encourage them to stay faithful. Befriend them when they struggle and go through difficult times. Share with them lessons you have learned. Spend time with them and help them to keep moving ahead. Treat them as you would have wanted others to treat you when you were a young Christian (Matthew 7:12).

DISCIPLESHIP: How can I help the person I have been discipling begin to disciple someone else?

Now that you have gone through this process with someone, encourage them to do the same with someone else. If everyone you train trains others, and those also train others, then many new believers will be firmly grounded in the faith. You can start with them as they go through this same process with a newer believer. Then let them lead the session while you watch, and finally stop attending and let them do it all on their own. Then you should find someone else to again start this process. That's how Christianity has spread to our generation and how we are to spread it to the next (2 Timothy 2:2; Romans 1:16-17, Matthew 24:14, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15)

CONCLUSION

A person who is "born again" starts a new life as a newborn infant. Their spiritual growth is like the physical growth of a baby as well.

Remember, only God brings growth. We can't make ourselves grow, but we can provide the right conditions for God to bring the growth. After salvation growth is the natural expected result. We live for Jesus not to gain or keep our salvation, but in appreciation for it being freely given it. Our first major decision is to accept or reject God's free gift of salvation. This costs us nothing. Jesus paid it all. We merely accept it and our sins are gone, forgiven for all eternity. We will be with God forever in heaven. After we accept this free gift, though, we have another decision: how are we now going to live our lives each day. Will we live for ourselves, as before salvation? Or will we live for Jesus, submitting to Him and being His servant? This step does cost us, and it affects our lives on this earth. Jesus called this being a disciple. In Salvation we freely accept, now we give of ourselves to

live for Jesus each moment of each day. This is the basis for living the Christian life. One can't really live or grow spiritually until this commitment is made. However, when it is made, we aren't to assume things will be smooth or easy for us. Trials and difficulties stretch our faith and help us grow more like Jesus. We turn more to God for help and comfort. Others see His power as we respond to life's trials in a Christ-like manner.

This is what living the Christian life is all about. It's a privilege, but also a responsibility. You can't live the Christian life if you aren't a Christian. But just being a Christian (having been born into God's family) doesn't automatically mean you are living the Christian life. Check yourself: do you have spiritual life (born again)? Are you committed to living for Jesus instead of yourself? Do you show the signs of life? Are you growing in your communication, nourishment, walk and so forth? Living for Jesus is the best use of your life. You only have one life to live, so make it count for Him!

END OF BOOK REFLECTION QUESTIONS

To help you get more out of this book, think about the following questions and how you would answer them. You can write down your answers if you want, or just meditate on them. The answers don't get turned in; they are for your benefit.

In the last year where have you grown the most spiritually in the last year?

What caused you to grow?

What are you learning about God and serving Him?

What are you doing to make sure you keep growing more like Jesus?

What spiritual gifts has God given you?

How are you using these gifts?

What is your prayer life like?

Where is your prayer life weak? What can you do to improve it?