

# I WANT TO BE A.L.I.V.E.

Always Living In Victorious Experiences

PART I: Growing In Your Discipleship

On \_\_\_\_\_, I, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Insert date) (Insert Your Name)

began my personal journey to truly become A.L.I.V.E!!!!!!

*This book is dedicated to my Heavenly Father, who told me to help His people establish a relationship with Him through teaching them His word, and gave me the vision for this book one night while I was laying in bed. This book is also dedicated to my lovely wife, Sarafia Sams, whose love, support, and wisdom has given me the encouragement that I needed to finish this project. I couldn't have asked GOD for a better help-mate/soul-mate/best-friend.*

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ISBN 978-0-557-29407-7  
Author: Aaron C. Sams

[www.iwant2bealive.com](http://www.iwant2bealive.com)

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# DID YOU KNOW THAT GOD CREATED YOU TO BE ALIVE?

## Always Living In Victorious Experiences

A person who is A.L.I.V.E. in their discipleship is someone who:

- \*Develops a strong relationship with GOD while continually growing spiritually*
- \*Consistently displays Christ-like characteristics in their words and in their actions*
- \*Discovers their purpose in life and works towards achieving their goals and dreams*
- \*Maintains a life of peace and joy despite what is going on around them*
- \*Overcomes life's challenges, problems, difficulties, drawbacks, troubles, and hardships*

Unfortunately, due to many circumstances, situations, and events that occur in our life, most of us find ourselves at times feeling D.E.A.D.....

### **Discouraged Easily Accepting Defeat**

What is it that is causing you to feel D.E.A.D?

- \*Have you lost all the joy and the peace that GOD has given you?*
- \*Are you unable to overcome the problems and the challenges that you encounter in life?*
- \*Do you feel as if you have no hope, and that there is no possibility that your life can ever improve or change for the better?*
- \*Does the overall unpredictability of the future cause you to begin to worry excessively?*
- \*Are you bored being a Christian, are traditions and rituals beginning to wear you down?*
- \*Are you feeling distant from GOD because of your guilt?*
- \*Is your foolish behavior preventing you from positioning yourself on the right path?*
- \*Are you struggling to overcome and resist certain temptations?*

Are you tired of feeling D.E.A.D.? If so, then I have some information that will be of great value to you. I want you to know that the difference between being D.E.A.D. and being A.L.I.V.E. is having faith!!!! In other words, the difference is in your readiness to put your hope and your trust in the word of GOD, and your willingness to apply what the Bible teaches into your everyday life. The purpose of this book is to improve the lives of individuals by empowering them with the tools necessary to no longer be D.E.A.D., but to always be A.L.I.V.E. through the course of their discipleship.

What is Discipleship? Discipleship is the process that we undergo which enables us to grow spiritually by accurately applying the word of GOD in our life so that we become effective, productive, and victorious Christians.

### **What are the some of the key features of being A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship?**

The key features which enable you to become A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship are:

- \*Having a correct understanding of your salvation and what it means to be saved
- \*Understanding what to do after you've been saved
- \*Discovering and fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life
- \*Studying the word of GOD to gain a correct interpretation of its meaning and application
- \*Being involved in a local church
- \*Having unwavering faith in GOD and in His promises contained within the Bible
- \*Exercising a consistent and effective prayer life
- \*Understanding the grace of GOD and how it applies to you
- \*Possessing and displaying unconditional love towards others
- \*Being able and willing to offer forgiveness
- \*Obtaining and applying Godly wisdom
- \*Understanding righteousness and being aware of your position in right-standing with GOD
- \*Living a lifestyle that accurately reflects GOD's holiness
- \*Exercising the power and the authority that GOD has given you
- \* Exhibiting patience and endurance throughout the course of your spiritual walk
- \*Developing true humility
- \*Actively praising and worshipping your Heavenly Father
- \*Displaying compassion by extending the love of GOD to others
- \*Giving to others generously
- \* Effectively and confidently sharing your faith with others through evangelism
- \*Drawing closer to GOD through fasting
- \* Honoring GOD through tithes and offerings

- \* Announcing our affiliation with GOD through baptism
- \* Appreciating our bond with GOD through communion

The following chapters in this book are designed to provide you with Biblical truths about these areas of your discipleship. When these truths are applied to your personal life, they will enable you to become completely A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you fulfill GOD's purpose and accomplish your goals and dreams, rediscover your GOD-given peace and joy, overcome life's obstacles, and develop a stronger and closer relationship with your Heavenly Father. Enjoy!!!

## **“SPIRITUAL CROSS CHECK”**

### *A Daily Spiritual Self-Examination*

Have you ever flown in an airplane? Whenever you board the airplane and get situated in your seat, you'll notice that before taking off, the pilot will get on the intercom system and announce to the flight attendants that it is time to perform a “cross check.” So before takeoff, the flight attendants will check to make sure that all of the safety equipment is in place, and that the doors are properly shut. The reason the flight attendants perform a cross check is to ensure that the aircraft is operating properly prior to takeoff, so that it can reach its destination safely and securely.

In the spiritual sense, when you accepted Jesus Christ into your life as your Lord and your Savior, GOD began to prepare you for the journey that you have begun on your way to your destination, which is the place where you reach your full potential as a child of GOD by developing the Christ-like characteristics of love, joy, peace, compassion, kindness, patience, self-control, and by fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life by using your gifts, your talents, and your abilities to accomplish your GOD-given goals and dreams.

During the journey of your spiritual flight, you are going to encounter some things that may hinder you from reaching your destination. For instance, you will encounter some turbulence that causes you to experience some ups and downs in your Christian life, and this turbulence represents the tough times; the storms, the adversity, the challenges, the trials, and the tribulations that you will run into. Furthermore, because this is such a long flight that lasts throughout the entire course of your life, you have to ensure that you don't run low or run out of fuel, which represents your passion, your zeal, your joy, your excitement, and your enthusiasm to live for God. Frustration, discouragement, stress, depression, impatience, anxiety, and fear all drain the fuel that we need in order to persevere and keep moving forward in our spiritual journey.

If you would be willing to be honest with me, you would admit that you have experienced some turbulence during your spiritual walk, and that you have gone through some periods of time where you seemed to be running low on fuel. With this in mind, in order for us to make it to our destination, we must perform a “spiritual cross check” to ensure that we are operating in line with what Jesus did for us on the cross, which will enable us to make it safely through the turbulence that we encounter, and prevent us from running out of fuel.

Are you ready to perform a “Spiritual Cross Check?” Let's look at 5 truths that we should never lose sight of during our Christian life.

## **CROSS CHECK #1: YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT YOU ARE ON GOOD TERMS WITH GOD!!!!**

Sometimes we feel that we have to work to earn GOD's love by doing certain good deeds, or we feel that GOD remains angry at us when we feel that we disappointed Him because of our sins. I want to ask you...

- \*Do you feel that you and GOD are at odds? Do you feel or think that GOD doesn't love you?
- \*Are you feeling pressure or anxiety from believing that you have to do certain things in order for GOD to love you, accept you, or bless you? (i.e. reading the Bible enough, praying long enough, witnessing, etc) Are you constantly worried about losing your salvation or falling from grace?
- \*Do you view GOD as a harsh disciplinarian that wants to punish you for every mistake that you make?
- \*Do you honestly and truthfully see GOD as being your "friend?" Do you see GOD as being your ally who defends and supports you? Do you see GOD as an acquaintance that thinks well of you and sees the best in you? Are able to open up your heart to become emotionally close to GOD?

When we don't feel as if GOD loves us, and when we don't know that we are on good terms with Him, it places a tremendous burden on spiritual walk.....here's how:

- \*We begin to believe that we have to work to earn GOD's love, His approval, and His acceptance
  - \*We start to question our salvation and if we were ever truly saved in the first place
  - \*We develop a warped mindset that convinces us that GOD is waiting to punish us for our sins
  - \*We no longer see GOD as our friend, and we don't see him as an ally who will defend and support us
  - \*We won't take the time to truly develop a close connection or an intimate relationship with Him
- How does Jesus' death on the cross enable us to always remain on good terms with GOD?

Romans 10:9 states: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved."

Romans 3:22-23 proclaims: "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins."

Galatians 2:16 explains: "Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law."

Jesus died on the cross so that we can be placed in a position of right-standing with GOD not based on our own ability to follow GOD's commandments completely, but solely based on our faith in Jesus' death on the cross on our behalf. Even though we may fall at certain times, we can be assured that we have not fallen outside the realm of GOD's love and acceptance. The only way that Satan is able to manipulate our feelings of guilt to cause us to believe that GOD no longer loves us or accepts us is if we do not correctly understand how we were made to be righteous in the first place. As a result of inheriting Jesus' righteousness, we are placed in a position of good standing with GOD; we are judged to be innocent of any wrongdoing, and GOD pronounces that the way that we lead our life is pleasing and acceptable to Him. We as Christians must always remember that Jesus' death on the cross placed us in a position of right standing with GOD. This knowledge will enable us to enjoy our spiritual walk, and to reach our destination safely as we accomplish our goals and dreams, fulfill GOD's purpose for our life, and develop Christ-like characteristics.



## **CROSS CHECK #2: YOU HAVE A LIFE THAT IS RICH & SATISFYING!!!**

We often allow the present situation that we are faced with to cause us to feel frustrated, discouraged, or discontent. I want to ask you...

- \*Do you feel depressed because of certain circumstances in your life?
- \*Are you feeling discontent with your life and dissatisfied with where you are right now?
- \*Are you pessimistic about the future because you are afraid of what the future might hold for you?
- \*Do you feel that you are missing out on the best things in life because you have become a Christian?
- \*Have you been unable to experience the joy, the peace, and the enthusiasm that Christianity promises?
- \*Do you feel that you are wandering through life without any clear sense of purpose or direction?
- \*Do you experience a void in any area of your life? Are you bored in your Christian walk?
- \*Have you been unproductive and unfruitful throughout the course of your life?
- \*Are you frustrated because things in your life are not turning out the way that you desire them to?

When we are unaware of the plan that GOD has for our life, it negatively affects us in these ways:

- \*We allow ourselves to become discouraged and impatient, which results in us falling into depression
- \*We no longer expect that circumstances and situations will turn out favorably for us
- \*We begin to live by sight and how we perceive our life instead of living by faith in GOD's promises to us
- \*We become lazy, idle, and unproductive instead of passionately pursuing our goals and dreams
- \*We travel through life without advancing, moving forward, or making any real progress
- \*We lose our passion, our enthusiasm, and our zeal to serve GOD
- \*We resent our decision to give our life to GOD, and we backslide out of our relationship with Him

How does Jesus' death on the cross enable us to live a life that is rich and satisfying? John 10:10 states:

**"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life (or I have come so that they may have life, and have it in abundance.)"**

Along with the eternal life that He has given to us, Jesus also has promised to give us a life that is rich and satisfying here on Earth. We should never allow a worldly mindset or a secular way of thinking to cause us to lose focus of the rich and satisfying life that GOD has given to us. The abundant life that we have been given is about *quality*, not *quantity*. We experience the rich and satisfying life that Jesus has given us by maintaining a close relationship with our Heavenly Father, and by applying His wisdom and His teachings into our lives. For instance, we experience a rich and satisfying life when we are able to:

- \*Enjoy and experience quality relationships and marriages by exhibiting unconditional love
- \*Experience joy & peace because we trust that God will provide for us, support us, and delivers us
- \*Use our gifts and talents to successfully accomplish our GOD-given goals, dreams, and visions
- \*Let go of feelings of anger, resentment, and bitterness towards other people by forgiving them
- \*Grow spiritually by possessing the characteristics of love, compassion, kindness, patience, & self-control
- \*Avoid living a sinful and foolish lifestyle that will contribute to our misery, our ruin, and our downfall
- \*Become content, thankful, and appreciative for what we have instead of becoming jealous of other people
- \*Live a life that is free from the negative emotions of fear and anxiety because we have faith in GOD
- \*Experience a good level of self-esteem because we are secure in the person that GOD created us to be

These are all things that money cannot buy, but that enrich the quality of our lives as believers. We as Christians must always remember that Jesus' death on the cross enables us to experience a rich and satisfying life, and this knowledge will enable us to enjoy our journey, and to reach our destination safely by fulfilling GOD's purpose for our lives, accomplishing our goals and dreams, and developing Godly characteristics.

### **CROSS CHECK #3: YOU ARE AN OVERCOMER AND A CONQUEROR!!!**

Throughout the course of our lives, the challenges that we face can intimidate us and persuade us not to move forward in pursuit of our dreams. As a result, we never progress towards accomplishing our goals, and we become afraid whenever we encounter opposition or adversity. I want to ask you.....

- \*Do you feel overwhelmed by the problems, issues, adversity, and the challenges that you are facing?
- \*Do you tolerate certain issues in your life because you feel that you are unable to overcome them?
- \*Have your discouragements and your frustrations influenced you to accept defeat in an area of your life?
- \*Do you feel helpless when you encounter trials, and tribulations?
- \*Have you allowed the existence of certain obstacles to deter you from pursuing your goals and dreams?
- \*Does your lack of confidence in GOD cause you to talk yourself out of taking any risks to walk by faith?
- \*Do you have low self-esteem because you feel that you cannot rise to the occasion when needed?
- \*Are you afraid of Satan? Do his attacks and his schemes intimidate you as a child of GOD?

When we lose sight of the fact that we are overcomers and conquerors, it negatively affects us in these ways:

- \*We become consumed by the problems that we face to the point that they steal our peace and joy
- \*We begin to accept a lifestyle that is less than what GOD desires for us
- \*We feel that we may never be able to triumph over the strongholds in our life
- \*We accept defeat without even fighting to take possession of the things that GOD has given to us
- \*We become insecure and develop low self-esteem because we feel helpless and hopeless
- \*We never pursue our goals and dreams because we believe them to be impossible to achieve
- \*We don't follow GOD's guidance by walking in faith, so we settle for doing what seems comfortable to us
- \*We become afraid of Satan, who is the same enemy that Jesus says that we have been given victory over

How does Jesus' death on the cross enable us to be overcomers and conquerors? The Bible states:

John 16:33 states: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

1 John 5:4-5 explains: "For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God."

Romans 8:37 proclaims: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (A "conqueror" is someone who has success by overcoming a difficult situation or obstacle).

Jesus triumphed and obtained victory over Satan through his death on the cross. Due to this fact; no storm, no challenge, no issue, no problem, no circumstance, and no obstacle in this evil world can stop us, hinder us, or prevent us from advancing, progressing, and moving forward with GOD to fulfill His purpose for our life unless we allow it to. We should never lose sight of the fact that greater is He (the Holy Spirit) that is in us than he (Satan) that is in the world, and that the victories that we achieve in life come through maintaining and acting upon our faith in GOD's promises to us in His word. We as Christians must always remember that Jesus' death on the cross has provided us with the power that we need to be overcomers and conquerors. This knowledge will enable us to enjoy our spiritual walk, and to reach our destination safely as we accomplish our goals and dreams, fulfill GOD's purpose for our life, and develop Christ-like characteristics.

### **CROSS CHECK #4: YOU SHOULD BE GUILT FREE!!!**

When we violate GOD's teachings by not behaving in accordance with His word, we begin to feel guilty about what we have done, and if we do not repent and seek God's forgiveness, this guilt can influence us to turn away from our Heavenly Father. I want to ask you.....

- \*Are you holding on to feelings of guilt because of a past mistake? Are you unable to forgive yourself for it?
- \*Do you constantly reminisce about a sin that you committed in your past that you are now ashamed of?

#### ***\*Guilt Causes Us To Be Angry At Ourselves, And To Dislike Who We Are***

-When we become angry at ourselves for something that we have done, our guilt causes us to become resentful towards our own self. As a result, we begin to dislike who we are because of what we have done.

#### ***\*Guilt Influences Us Not To Pursue Our Goals And Dreams***

- If at any point we allow feelings of guilt to influence us to begin to question whether or not we are on favorable terms with our Heavenly Father, it causes us to hesitate when it comes to moving forward in life because we are not sure if GOD is with us, and we are not certain if He is going to help us whenever we encounter challenges that are too difficult for us to handle on our own.

#### ***\*Guilt Causes Us To Backslide***

-Satan uses our feelings of guilt to persuade us to do something wrong over and over again because we already feel guilty about having made the mistake once before. Over the course of time, we will harden our hearts towards GOD to the point where we separate ourselves from our relationship with Him.

#### ***\*Guilt Causes Us To Change What We Expect To Receive From GOD***

-When we as Christians feel guilty about the mistakes that we have made in the past, it often prevents us from asking GOD with confidence for the true desires of our heart, and for the best that He has to offer us. Contrarily, we begin to hesitate to make prayer requests because we doubt that they will be answered.

#### ***\*Guilt Robs Of Our Peace And Joy***

-Feeling guilty about a sin that we have committed causes us to spend our time and our energy either regretting what we've done, or covering up what we've done, instead of allowing us to spend our time and energy enjoying each day.

#### ***\*Guilt Suppresses Our Desire To Praise GOD***

-Our Guilt consumes our mind to the point where we begin to feel that we are not on good terms with GOD, and as a result, we refrain from expressing our love and our appreciation by praising Him.

How does Jesus' death on the cross enable us to live guilt free? Hebrews 10:21-22 proclaims: "Since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water."

Jesus died on the cross so that our sins could be completely atoned for, and as a result, our Heavenly Father no longer remembers or counts our sins against us whenever we ask for forgiveness. This enables us to have a clear conscience at all times that is free from guilt and the feelings of shame and regret that we experience in our life when we make mistakes. We as Christians need to ensure that never lose sight of the fact that Jesus' death on the cross completely paid the penalty for our sins, so when we ask GOD for forgiveness, we can be assured that He truly forgives us, and we no longer have to carry the burden of guilt that can prevent us from enjoying our spiritual walk, and from reaching our destination safely.

## **CROSS CHECK#5: YOU SHOULD RECOGNIZE AND BE AWARE OF GOD’S GRACE**

Grace is defined as the infinite love, mercy, favor, protection, blessings, and goodwill shown to us by God that has been given to us for free without us being able to do anything to deserve it or earn it. Through Jesus’ death on the cross, we are able to experience the grace of GOD in the following ways....

***Forgiveness For Our Sins-*** Hebrews 4:15-16 informs us that: “Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Through GOD’s grace we can boldly ask for forgiveness immediately after we make a mistake, and be immediately reconciled back into a close relationship with Him and continue to move forward towards fulfilling His purpose for our life.

***Provision For What We Need To Accomplish Our Dreams And Achieve Our Goals-*** 2 Corinthians 9:8 informs us that: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” Through GOD’s grace we receive the resources; the skills, the finances, the wisdom, the help, and the assistance that we need in order to accomplish the goals and dreams that GOD has placed on our hearts for us to achieve. When you know that GOD’s grace is with you, it erases the fear of failure that will stop you from moving forward, and it enables you to pursue those ideas, those plans, and the aspirations that GOD has given to you to accomplish with confidence.

***Deliverance And Victory-*** 1 Peter 5: 8-10 states: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” One of the benefits of GOD’s grace is that after we’ve suffered a little while as a result of our painful experiences, GOD will deliver us from our troubles and make us strong once again. GOD uses the painful experiences in our life to increase our level of faith in Him, and to develop perseverance and endurance within us. Through the grace of GOD we are able to come out victorious over the trials that we go through in which we have had to endure hardship and adversity for certain periods of time. GOD’s grace assures us that no painful experience will last forever, and that we as Christians will at one point triumphantly overcome every negative or troubling situation that we face.

***Abundance-*** 2 Corinthians 8:9 proclaims: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Furthermore, John 1:16 explains: “From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.” From these scriptures we discover that Jesus became poor so that by His grace we prosper (spiritually, mentally, and emotionally)

***GOD’s Power In Our Weakness-*** GOD states in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” To be “weak,” means to be in a position where you are unable to help yourself; provide for yourself, heal yourself, and solve your own problems. It is during these “weak” moments in our life that GOD demonstrates His grace and His power by helping us when we are in trouble, by providing for us when we are in need, by healing us when we are sick, and by resolving the problems that we encounter in our life that are too tough for us to handle on our own. Recognizing the benefits that we experience in our life through GOD’s grace will enable us to enjoy our spiritual walk, and reach our destination by accomplishing our goals and dreams, fulfilling GOD’s purpose for our lives, and developing Christ-like characteristics. After performing these 5 “spiritual cross checks,” you are now prepared to take off on your spiritual journey!!!! Amen!!!

## SALVATION 101

When I was 19 years old, I attended my first church service on my own just to see what it was like. I had finally moved away from home by joining the military, and I was starting my new career in a new place. I wondered if it was even worth-while to attend church because I didn't expect to enjoy the service, nor did I expect to see or hear anything that would interest me. However, while the pastor was preaching, I felt something or someone telling me that it was time to become a real man, and that it was time to become serious about what I was doing with my life. While I was listening to the message, I experienced an intense desire to make my life count for something instead of simply letting time pass by without doing something meaningful or significant. As a result, I went down to the altar to give my life to the Lord, and after I prayed with the pastor to receive salvation, I returned to my seat.

I remember asking myself this question after the service ended, "I'm saved, and that's great, but what does it mean to be saved?" I honestly could not answer this question on my own, and the only response that I got from a few other people that I asked is that "I'll get to go to Heaven instead of going to Hell." I've come to realize that many people, both Christians and non-Christians, do not understand what it truly means to be saved. Often times the church does not take the necessary time to properly explain the answer to this question so that people have a correct understanding of what salvation is. As a result, many believers that have been saved do not value and appreciate the wonderful gift that they have been given by GOD, nor do they recognize what to do with this gift that they have received either. If you've found yourself in this predicament, don't despair. The purpose of this chapter is to give you a clear understanding of what salvation is, and to explain to you how salvation benefits you as a believer in Jesus Christ.

### HOW DO WE RECEIVE SALVATION AND BECOME SAVED?

Giving your life to GOD is not similar to joining a club where you have to pay dues first in order to become a member. You do not have to struggle, strive, or strain to get your life right in order to qualify to receive salvation. Furthermore, no religious rituals or traditions need to occur or take place in order for you to be saved. So how do we receive salvation and become saved? The first thing we must do is repent for our sins. What does this mean? To "repent" means to recognize your wrongdoings; feel sorrowful and remorseful for your past sins, and to change your sinful ways and habits. Repentance occurs when we measure our lifestyle against God's perfect and holy law, and recognize that we deserve the wrath of God because we fall short of His standards in many areas (often because of our pride, our lust, our anger, our jealousy, our selfishness, our greed, our foolishness, our inability to resist sinful temptations, and because we have put other people or possessions before God in our personal lives).

Repentance is essential to our salvation as believers, and we cannot bypass it, jump over it, sidestep it, avoid it, or get around it if we truly desire to inherit eternal life. **We must have a change of heart in regard to our sins in order to be saved.** God sent His Son Jesus to the Earth to save us from our sins, but if our hearts are not changed in regards to our attitude towards sin, then our thoughts, our words, and our actions will not change either, so instead of being saved from our sins, we will begin to tolerate them and accept them without seeking to change for the better. Those who profess to be Christians without repenting for their sins will never truly seek to change their sinful habits, which will prevent them from experiencing the abundant life that comes from following God's commands and applying His teachings into their personal lives.

Once we have repented for our sins, the next thing we must do is confess and believe. While writing to his audience to explain to them that GOD desires for *everyone* to receive salvation, Paul spells out this next step in Romans 10: 9-10 when he writes, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe

in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved.”

Through our confession we profess what we believe to be true; we announce whom we have become devoted to, and we declare what we have begun to place our trust and our faith in. After repenting for our sins and confessing that Jesus is “Lord” over our life, we receive the wonderful gift of salvation and eternal life. What is the significance of confessing that Jesus is “Lord” over our life? “Lord” is a title that is given to someone who possess tremendous power, authority, and influence over us, and whom we are identifying as our master and our ruler. By confessing that Jesus is “Lord” over our life, we are affirming:

\*That we have placed ourselves under Jesus’ governing power...

\*That we follow Jesus’ leadership instead of our own guidance...

\*That we allow God to have final authority over our decisions and actions instead of our own desires.... and...

\* That we submit to God’s will over our own personal preferences...

It is important to note that we *cannot* receive the free gift of salvation and eternal life without confessing that Jesus is “Lord” of our life, and then living in such a way that accurately reflects what we have confessed to be true. Our belief that Jesus is “Lord” and that God raised Him from the dead should bring about a positive change in our attitude, our behavior, and our lifestyle. How can Jesus truly be “Lord” over our life if we still follow our own guidance, our own desires, and our own personal preferences that often contradict and oppose God’s will for us? At first we may struggle living according to God’s commandments and following His leadership once we become saved, but as we continue to grow spiritually by reading the Bible to discover His will for our life and by praying to God to ask Him for His strength and assistance, we will be able to live a life that reflects the Christ-like characteristics of love, peace, joy, compassion, kindness, patience, and self-control, and fulfill God’s purpose by using our gifts and talents to help edify and improve the lives of others (remember that this is a life-long process that does not occur overnight after being saved).

Once we have repented for our sins; confessed Jesus as Lord over our life, and believed that God raised Him from the dead, we are saved by receiving God’s gift of salvation and eternal life.

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “SAVED?”**

In order to properly answer this question, we must study and research the meaning of the Greek word from which the English word “saved” was translated from. The word “saved” in English is translated from the word “sozo” in the Greek language, and it means; “to save and rescue, to deliver, to protect and preserve, to heal and reconcile, and to bless and bestow favor upon.” Let’s look at each of these definitions of the Greek word “sozo” to see how they apply to our life and benefit us as believers.

#### **1. Sozo = To Rescue**

To “save” someone means to rescue them from harm and danger, and to spare someone from experiencing an undesired situation or activity. When we accept the gift of salvation that God has offered to us, we as Christians enter into a covenant agreement with our Heavenly Father in which He promises to rescue us from harm and danger, and to also spare us from experiencing certain undesirable situations and activities. Here are a few scriptures that outline what we have been rescued and spared from:

### ***Rescued from GOD's Wrath on the Day of Judgment***

To be “saved” means to be rescued from having to experience GOD’s wrath on The Day of Judgment, and to be spared from being condemned to hell because of our sins. The Bible provides us with the following scriptures that support this statement:

\*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. *John 3:16-18*

\*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. *John 3:36*

\*Jesus said "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. *John 5:24*

\*For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. *1 Thessalonians 5:8-10*

\*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. *Romans 5:8-10*

The Bible informs us in Romans 6:23 that, “the wages of sin is death.” Because of our sins, each one of us deserves to be eternally condemned to hell as punishment for our mistakes and transgressions. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 explains that, “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” Here is where we discover one of the most significant benefits of being saved. Because we are saved and have accepted GOD’s gift of salvation as a result of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for our sins, we now are spared from being condemned for our sins, which provides us with access to eternal life. The full scripture of Romans 6:23 states, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” As the Bible declares in Romans 8:1 that, “therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” we can have confidence and assurance that because we are in Christ Jesus through our acceptance of GOD’s gift of salvation, and because of our acceptance of His sacrifice on the cross as payment for the debt that we are in to GOD because of our sins, that we have been rescued from being condemned to the depths of hell as punishment for our sins.

### ***Rescued from a Sinful Life***

To be “saved” also means to be rescued from a life filled with sin which would cause our ruin, our downfall, and our destruction. The Bible provides us with the following scriptures that support this statement:

\*Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because

of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) *Ephesians 2:1-5*

\*When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free [saved] from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. *Romans 6:20-22*

\*So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The Law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, for all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. *Romans 8:1-13*

From these passages of scripture we find evidence that a critical aspect of our salvation is GOD working inside of us to save us from our sinful nature, which was contributing to our harm, our ruin, our misery, our downfall, our separation from GOD, and to ultimately our death. When we accepted the gift of salvation, GOD placed the Holy Spirit within us which enables us to live our life according to GOD's teachings and instructions. If we choose to live according to how the Holy Spirit directs us to live, we will be spared from encountering the negative consequences (strained relationships, failure, shame, guilt, etc.) that we experience throughout the course of our life by choosing to continually commit sin. To be "saved" means to be spared from being condemned and punished to hell, and to be rescued from a sinful life that would lead to our downfall, our misery, and our own destruction.

## **2. Sozo =To Deliver**

To "save" someone means to deliver them from trouble, and also to free someone from captivity, hardship, or evil. When we accept the gift of salvation that God has given to us, we as Christians enter into a covenant agreement with our Heavenly Father in which He promises to deliver us from sin, deliver us from our troubles, and to deliver us from evil. Here are a few scriptures that outline what GOD has promised to deliver us from:

### ***Deliverance From Fear***

\*Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear



of dying. *Hebrews 2:14-16*

\* For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. *Romans 8:15*

\* For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. *2 Timothy 1:7*

### ***Deliverance From Sin***

\* For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds. *Titus 2:11-14*

### ***Deliverance From Guilt***

\* And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. *Hebrews 10:19-22*

\* Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. *Psalms 32:1-5*

\* Where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant [His followers], overlooking the sins of his special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean! *Micah 7:18-19*

\* The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. *Psalms 103:8-13*

### ***Deliverance From Darkness (which represents ignorance, wickedness, evil, sin, and impurity)***

\* You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. *1 Peter 2:9*

\* For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom [saved us] and forgave our sins. *Colossians 1:12-14*

\*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." *John 8:12*

\*I [Jesus] have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. *John 12:46*

\*Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don't participate in the things these people do. For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, for the light makes everything visible. *Romans 5:3-14*

### ***Deliverance From Ungodly and Immoral Enemies***

David, whom was a man after GOD's own heart, continually asked GOD in the book of Psalms for deliverance from his enemies based on his relationship with GOD. The Bible includes these requests from David to show us that GOD will deliver us from our enemies as well:

\*You who love the LORD, hate evil! He protects the lives of his godly people and rescues them from the power of the wicked. *Psalms 97:10*

\*The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him. *Psalms 37:39-40*

### ***Deliverance From Troubles and Distress***

\*Many evils [troubles] confront the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. *Psalms 34:19*

\*When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their distress and troubles. *Psalms 34:17*

\*The godly are rescued from trouble, and it falls on the wicked instead. *Proverbs 11:8*

\*For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. *Psalms 72:12*

### ***Deliverance From Death***

\*Let my soul be at rest again, for the Lord has been good to me. He has saved me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. And so I walk in the Lord's presence as I live here on earth! *Psalms 116:7-9*

\*Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms. Our God is a God who saves! The Sovereign LORD rescues us from death. *Psalms 68:19-20*

\*The LORD watches over those who fear him, those who rely on his unfailing love. He rescues them from death and keeps them alive in times of famine. We put our hope in the LORD. He is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. Let your unfailing love surround us, LORD, for our hope is in you alone. *Psalms 33:18-20*

### ***Deliverance From Oppression and Unjust Treatment***

\*He will rescue the poor when they cry to him; he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them. He feels pity for the weak and the needy, and he will rescue them. *Psalms 72:11-13*

\*I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be glad because he rescues me. With every bone in my body I will praise him: "LORD, who can compare with you? Who else rescues the helpless from the strong? Who else protects the helpless and poor from those who rob them?" *Psalms 35:9-10*

As these various passages of scripture state, we can rely on GOD's deliverance from our troubles, from our enemies, from death, from His wrath, from fear, from guilt, and from sin as a result of our acceptance of GOD's gift of salvation that He has offered to us. To be "saved" means to have access to deliverance from anything that is intended to keep us in bondage. Furthermore, to be "saved" means to be delivered from anything that may be holding us back or preventing us from moving forward towards fulfilling GOD's purpose for our life.

### **3. Sozo = To Protect and Preserve**

To "save" someone means to protect them, and to prevent them from being harmed or damaged by defending and guarding them. To "save" someone also includes supplying refuge or shelter for a person that is in danger by providing them with safety and security in order to preserve their life. When we accept the gift of salvation that God has offered to us, we as Christians enter into a covenant agreement with our Heavenly Father in which He promises to protect us from harm, to preserve our lives by defending us from our enemies, and to serve as our refuge and shelter in times of trouble and adversity. Here are a few scriptures that draw our attention to the protection that GOD provides to us:

\*He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. *Proverbs 2:7-9*

\*If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone. You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! The LORD says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation." *Psalms 91:9-16*

\*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. *Psalms 46:1-3*

\*The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. *Psalms 27:1-3*

\*You who love the LORD, hate evil! He protects the lives of his godly people and rescues them from the power of the wicked. *Psalms 97:10*

The Bible reveals to us that GOD is our shelter, and that we should turn to Him in times of distress because He has promised to protect and defend us whenever we are faced with trouble or adversity. To be saved means that we are under GOD's protection and care as He defends us, guards our life, and serves as our refuge and provider of comfort and security.

It is important to note that along with preserving our life by protecting us from outside harm and danger inflicted by others, GOD also preserves our life by protecting us from the harm that we would cause to ourselves by continuing to live a sinful lifestyle. The Bible proclaims that, "the wages (the result) of sin is death" in Romans 6:23, which indicates to us that our sin can potentially destroy our lives in such a damaging way that we need protection from it as well. In this sense, when GOD placed the Holy Spirit within us to enable us to live Godly lives by supplying us with the power that is necessary to resist the temptation to sin, He provided us with protection from the sinful actions and behaviors that we were participating in that were detrimental to our health, our welfare, and our life.

#### **4. Sozo =To Heal and to Reconcile**

To "save" someone means to heal them, which means to restore a person, body part, or injury to health in order to make someone whole. To "save" someone is also characterized as repairing or rectifying a situation that causes discord and animosity by offering reconciliation, which is defined as putting two people back on friendly terms by ending a conflict. When we accept the gift of salvation that God has offered to us, we as Christians enter into a covenant agreement with our Heavenly Father in which He reconciles us to Himself by paying the debt of our sins through Jesus Christ, and in which He promises to heal us in every area of our lives. Here are a few scriptures that address the healing power and reconciliation acts of GOD:

##### ***Healed From Our Sicknesses***

\*He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. *Isaiah 53:3-5*

\*He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. *1 Peter 2:24-25*

\*Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! *Psalms 103:2-5*

\*Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven. *James 5:13-15*

##### ***A Healed Relationship with GOD through Reconciliation***

\*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. *2 Corinthians 5:17-21*

\* For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. *Colossians 1:19-22*

\*When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God. *Romans 5:6-11*

From these passages of scriptures we discover that GOD not only heals our diseases and illnesses, but that He has also healed our broken relationship with Him by reuniting us with Himself through the death of Jesus Christ. To be "saved" means to be reunited and reconciled with GOD, and it means that we have access to His healing power in our life to overcome sickness and illness.

## **5. Sozo = To Bless And Bestow Favor Upon**

Finally, to "save" someone means to bless them, which causes that person to experience contentment, fulfillment, satisfaction, enjoyment, and delight. It also refers to bestowing favor upon an individual, which causes them to prosper, to flourish, and to succeed. To be blessed and favored by GOD is characterized as being spiritually prosperous, which enables us to maintain an inner joy, an inner peace, and an inner sense of gratification that is not dependent on our life circumstances or the amount of material possessions that we own. When we accept the gift of salvation that God has offered to us, we as Christians enter into a covenant agreement with our Heavenly Father in which we receive His blessings and His favor. Because of GOD's blessings and favor in our life, we are able to discover true satisfaction, true fulfillment, and true joy through our relationship with Him. Here are a few scriptures that identify the types of blessings that we receive as a result of our salvation and our obedience to His teachings and His instructions:

### ***GOD's Blessings Bring Spiritual Prosperity [Contentment, Fulfillment, Peace, and Joy] and Success***

\* God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. *Matthew 5:3-10*

\*Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. *Psalm 112:1-3*

\*How joyful are those who fear the LORD— all who follow his ways! You will enjoy the fruit of your labor. How joyful and prosperous you will be! Your wife will be like a fruitful grapevine, flourishing within your home. Your children will be like vigorous young olive trees as they sit around your table. That is the LORD's blessing for those who fear him. *Psalm 128:1-4*

\*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. *Psalm 1:1-3*

\*Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. The LORD will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness. *Psalm 41:1-3*

\*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you. *Psalm 84:11-12*

\*The blessing of the Lord makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it. *Proverbs 10:22*

From these passages of scriptures we gain insight into the blessings that we receive from GOD as a result of our salvation. Through GOD's blessings and favor, we experience contentment, fulfillment, satisfaction, enjoyment, delight, and success because we are in a relationship with our Heavenly Father, and because we are applying His teachings and His instructions in our life.

### **CAN SALVATION BE LOST?**

A significant misunderstanding regarding salvation is that it is something that can be lost by the individual. As a result of this misunderstanding of salvation, many Christian believers fall victim to continuous feelings of guilt and condemnation because of the sins that they commit. Over the course of time, this could potentially result in a person's Christian walk becomes a source of burden and stress that gradually drains the individual of all of their GOD-given peace and joy.

The Bible informs us in Romans 3:23 that, "everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." Because we fall short of GOD's holy standard, there is nothing that we can do as believers to earn or deserve salvation. The good news (which is the gospel message) is that GOD is offering us salvation as a gift, which indicates that it is something that He desires to give to us even though we cannot do anything to ever deserve it. Upon receiving this wonderful gift of salvation, the Bible also informs us in Ephesians 1:13-14 that, "when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him." To make a guarantee to someone means to promise and assure them that a specific outcome will occur. In the above scripture, GOD is guaranteeing to us that we will experience eternal life as a result of receiving salvation. He mentions no exceptions to this guarantee that could possibly disqualify us from experiencing this outcome of eternal life, so to state that our salvation can be lost would be the equivalent of calling GOD a "liar."

We would be in error to believe that we would have to continually maintain our salvation through not sinning or through performing enough good works when neither of these things determined whether or not GOD would offer salvation to us in the first place. Ephesians 2:8-9 proclaims that, “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” Because GOD has offered salvation to us as a gift, we should treat it as such by thanking Him for it, and by showing Him how much we appreciate what He has given to us by using our skills, our talents, and our resources to be productive and effective Christians in our journey to fulfill His plan and His purpose for our life.

### **CONCLUSION**

To be “saved” means to be the rescued from the depths of Hell, along with receiving deliverance from sin, from guilt, from fear, from trouble, and from evil. Along with salvation, GOD also promises to protect us, to defend us, and to heal us as well. Because we have been saved, our relationship with GOD has been restored, allowing us to experience satisfaction, fulfillment, contentment, enjoyment, delight, and gratification as a result of His blessings and His favor that we receive through a repaired relationship with Him. I pray that you have found the information in this chapter to be insightful and beneficial to you, and that it provided you with a clear understanding of what it means to be “saved.” Amen!!!

## **GROWING IN YOUR DISCIPLESHIP**

It is extremely dangerous to view salvation as the finish line in the marathon that we run in our life as Christians. Many people who have adopted this incorrect view of salvation become lax and idle in their spiritual walk, causing them to also become nonchalant and uninterested in maintaining a personal relationship with their Heavenly Father by spending time with Him in prayer, by studying His word, and in worship. If we as believers develop an attitude of indifference towards GOD after receiving salvation, we will not experience the full extent of the benefits associated with being saved. Furthermore, our salvation will not accomplish the purpose for which GOD offered it to us in the first place, which is to enable us to become Christ-like in character as we also perform good works that bring Him glory, honor, and praise.

Our salvation provides us with the opportunity to explore and to enjoy the new and exciting life that we now have access to as GOD's children. Salvation is not the end of our spiritual journey; rather, it is the launching pad that propels us forward towards becoming the person that GOD has called us to be, and towards fulfilling His plan and His purpose for our life. With this in mind, Paul encourages all believers in Philippians 2:12-13 to, "work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." This verse of scripture informs us that we should persistently strive to reach our full potential, and the way that we reach our full potential is by obeying GOD and applying His teachings and instructions into our personal life. After we receive the gift of salvation, GOD becomes our divine partner who assists us as we progress towards becoming mature, productive, and effective Christians.

### ***What Do I Do Now That I'm Saved?***

I remember asking myself this exact question after giving my life to Lord. I began to think that the only thing left that I was required to do was to make sure I made it to church every Sunday. The fact of the matter is that many Christians do not know what to do next after accepting salvation, and because of this they miss out on the abundant life that Jesus came to Earth to give to them. Unfortunately, when we do not know what to do after receiving salvation, Christianity becomes nothing more to us than an obligation to follow certain rules, and a commitment to participate in certain rituals and traditions. When this occurs, our spiritual walk is reduced to a form of legalism that extinguishes our joy through constant feelings of guilt, causing us to backslide and to separate ourselves from our Heavenly Father.

Surely there is more to being a Christian after receiving salvation than just sitting in church for a couple of days out of the week. What is it that GOD wants you to do next after you've been saved? What does GOD want to do with your life? How do you begin to grow and mature as a Christian? This chapter is dedicated to answering these exact questions. By learning what GOD desires for you to do after receiving salvation, it will ignite your passion and your desire to serve Him by accomplishing what GOD has placed on your heart for you to achieve. Once your passion and desire is ignited, I believe that you will be excited and enthusiastic about being a Christian. Enjoy!!!

## **DEVELOPING CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER**

Our first aim and objective after accepting the gift of salvation should be to develop Christ-like character. Romans 8:28-30 informs us that; "GOD causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory." When GOD offered us the gift of salvation, He chose us to become like His Son Jesus Christ. How do we become like Jesus?



We become like Jesus by developing and displaying His character. The following paragraphs address what it means to become like Jesus, and how we as believers can develop His characteristics.

### ***Following the Leadership of the Holy Spirit***

The moment that we accept the gift of salvation, GOD places His Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit does many things for us; He encourages us, He comforts us, He gives us spiritual gifts, He counsels us, He intercedes for us, and He convicts us when we are in error in order to turn us away from our sins. Along with all these things, the Holy Spirit also works within us so that we can develop Christ-like character and qualities. Galatians 5:16-23 informs us that we should:

“Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

After receiving the gift of salvation, one of the most important things that we must do is to begin to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit in our life. It is only when we begin to follow the Holy Spirit’s direction and guidance in our life that we are able to develop the Christ-like qualities and attributes of love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are the qualities that GOD desires for us to possess as His children, and once we are able to exhibit these attributes, GOD can then use us to fulfill the purpose and the plan that He has for our lives.

Galatians 5:25 continues on to advise us that, “since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” For those who are unfamiliar with the military movement of marching, to keep in step with someone means that the two people move at the same pace towards the same destination, it means that one person’s actions will reflect the action of the other member, and it calls for the two members to be affiliated through some form of relationship or association. As Christians, it is when we are in step with the Spirit, meaning that it is when we are in a close relationship with our Heavenly Father and are allowing Him to direct our actions, our words, and our attitudes, that we begin to experience and display the fruits of the spirit such as love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, and self control in our life.

On the other hand, when we are out of step with the Holy Spirit, these emotions and actions will be absent altogether in our life. In other words, when we are out of step with the Spirit, meaning that we are not moving in the same direction that GOD is leading us in (GOD is going one way and you are going in the opposite direction), when our actions and our behavior are not reflecting how GOD desires for us to live, and when we have separated ourselves from our relationship with GOD, these emotions (joy, peace) and actions (love, kindness, patience, self control) are replaced with negative emotions (fear, guilt, hatred, impatience) and actions (harshness, selfishness, anxiety, lack of self-control) .

Here are a few examples that we can look at to determine if we are in step with GOD, or out of step with GOD:

\*When we are in step with GOD, it is easy for us to love people unconditionally and to be compassionate towards them, but when we are out of step with GOD, we become hateful and uncaring towards others.

\*When we are in step with GOD, our lives are full of joy and celebration, but when we are out of step with GOD, we become depressed and discouraged.

\*When we are in step with GOD, our mind, our heart, and our soul is at peace, but when we are out of step with GOD, we start to worry about things, and we begin to live in fear.

\*When we are in step with GOD, we are kind and patient, but when we are out of step with GOD, we become rude and anxious.

\*When we are in step with GOD, we have self control and personal restraint, but when we are out of step with GOD, we find it harder to resist the temptations of sin and to deny ourselves the desires of our flesh.

With this said, after we receive the gift of salvation we must begin to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit. As we keep in step with Holy Spirit by maintaining a close relationship with our Heavenly Father, and by allowing Him to direct our actions, our words, our thoughts, and our attitudes, we are able to develop the Christ-like characteristics that GOD desires for us to possess.

### ***Becoming Effective and Productive Christians***

Along with following the leadership and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, after we accept the gift of salvation we must ensure that we become effective and productive as Christians. How do we do this? The Bible shows us how to become productive Christians in 2 Peter 1:3-9 when it states that; “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

By providing us with His Holy Spirit, GOD has given us the capacity, the authority, the strength, and the power that we need as individuals to live Godly lives. Through the Holy Spirit we can develop Christ-like qualities, overcome the temptation to sin, and accomplish good deeds and good works that we would not be able to complete on our own. With this power that we now possess as Christians, GOD encourages us to be effective and productive, which will enable us to reach our full potential and to achieve the goals and the dreams that GOD has placed on our heart for us to pursue. In order to do this, we are told that we must acquire and develop the following attributes: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Let’s look at the definition of each of these attributes to see how they empower us to become effective and productive as Christians:

**\*Faith-** Faith is being confidence that what we hope for will actually happen, and it gives us assurance about things that we cannot see. We must have a firm foundation of faith in order to prevent our fears from deterring us from following GOD completely, and from discouraging us to courageously pursue our goals and dreams in life.

\***Goodness**- Goodness is defined as moral excellence. It is characterized as being a person of virtue and integrity who is honest and truthful. Without goodness, none of our actions or accomplishments will bring glory, honor, or praise to our Heavenly Father.

\***Knowledge**- Knowledge is our understanding, our awareness, and our comprehension of the truth and the wisdom contained within the Bible. If we do not possess knowledge of GOD's word, we become vulnerable to deception and to the lies of Satan.

\***Self-Control**- Self-control is the ability to exercise restraint by refraining from satisfying the desires and the cravings of our sinful nature (lust, pride, greed, anger, etc). Self-control is necessary because it enables us to overcome the temptations to sin that would result in our downfall, our ruin, and our destruction.

\***Perseverance**- Perseverance is characterized as the ability to endure suffering patiently without wavering or losing commitment to a cause. If we do not have the attribute of perseverance, we will be tempted to separate ourselves from GOD, and to quit pursuing our goals and dreams whenever we encounter challenges, obstacles, or adversity in our life.

\***Godliness**- Godliness is described as becoming spiritually mature by applying the teachings of GOD from the Bible into your personal life. Without godliness we become susceptible to destroying ourselves and our future through foolish and immoral behavior.

\***Brotherly Kindness**- Brotherly kindness is defined as the ability to display compassion towards those who are suffering. Brotherly kindness allows us to affect our community and our environment in a positive way. If we do not possess brotherly kindness, we run the risk of becoming selfish, self-centered, and prideful.

\***Love**- Love is the most important quality of all. Without this attribute, no good thing that we accomplish or achieve matters at all. What is love? Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Love reflects the very nature of GOD Himself, and when we exhibit this quality towards others it distinguishes us as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

If we possess these qualities as believers, we will be effective and productive in our Christian walk. The Bible warns us that if we do not develop these qualities in our personal life, that we will fall into the trap of returning to the previous sinful lifestyle that we lived prior to accepting Jesus Christ into our life as our Lord and our Savior. After we receive the gift of salvation, we should begin to diligently strive to grow in each of these areas so that we can accurately imitate the life of Jesus Christ.

### ***Renewing Our Mind***

In addition to allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and influence our actions, our words, and our behavior so that we become holy, we also must renew our mind and change the way that we think so that we no longer conform to the immoral practices and evil behavior of this world. The Bible teaches us in Romans 12:2 that we should not, "copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think (by renewing your mind). Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." When we ask to receive the gift of salvation, we are instantly saved, but the way that we think, the way that we act, and the way that we make decisions remains largely unchanged. This is why as a new believer you may still maintain the same thoughts, possess the same characteristics, and give into the same temptations that caused you to sin prior to accepting Jesus into your life.

In order to renew our mind and change the way that we think so that we no longer participate in these sinful activities, we must begin to study the Bible so that we can discover the way that GOD wants us to live our life, and how He wants us act and respond to life's situations. The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 2:15 to, "study the word of GOD to present yourself to GOD and receive His approval, Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth." As we continually study the word of GOD, we begin to get a new perspective on the way that we should be living our life; a way that is in accordance with GOD's will and no longer in accordance with how our society or our culture influences us to live.

By studying the word of God, our mind is renewed (or made new again) when we discover that the same temptations that the world views as acceptable, are not acceptable in GOD's sight, and therefore should be avoided. Our mind is also renewed when we discover that taking revenge and retaliating against others, which the world often influences us to do, is in direct opposition to GOD's instructions to us in which He teaches us to forgive our enemies and to let go of our anger and our bitterness towards them. Our society influences us to be selfish and self-centered, but when we renew our mind through reading the word of GOD, we discover that it is our responsibility to look out for the needs of others by being generous, and to be supportive and compassionate so that others are uplifted. Finally, as our culture continually promotes sexual immorality through music and television, we as GOD's children need to renew our mind through reading the word of GOD to apply His wisdom in our life that teaches us to avoid fornication by abstaining from sex outside of the confines of our marriage.

If we do not study the word of GOD in order to renew our mind, we will be easily influenced by our culture and society to engage in behavior that is contrary to the way that our Heavenly Father desires for us to live. On the other hand, if we do study the word of God and renew our mind, we will be able to maintain a lifestyle that is pleasing to our Heavenly Father. The process of renewing your mind and changing the way that you think is a continual process that lasts throughout your entire life, so it is very important to consistently study the word of GOD. After we receive the gift of salvation, we must begin to renew our mind by reading GOD's word so that we no longer react or respond to life's situations and circumstances as the world does, or as society influences us to, but that we react and respond the way that GOD wants us to.

### ***Living as the Salt of the Earth***

Jesus proclaims in Matthew 5:13 that we are, "the salt of the Earth and the light of the world" because we are His disciples. What does this verse of scripture tell us about our responsibilities as Christians? Salt is a mineral that is used to purify, to preserve, and to add flavor to whatever it is applied to. As the salt of the Earth, Jesus informs us that we were put here to purify this world by ridding it of wickedness, immorality, and evil. The way that we purify this world is by exhibiting GOD's love towards others, displaying compassion and generosity through performing good works, and by our lifestyle serving as a Godly example for others to follow.

Living as the salt of the Earth also implies that we are sent here to preserve the lives of others from spiritual death and condemnation. When we as believers share the gospel message with people who do not have a personal relationship with their Heavenly Father, and they respond to this message by accepting GOD's gift of salvation, their lives are preserved because they have crossed-over from spiritual death and condemnation to eternal life. Finally, similar to the way that salt improves and enhances the taste of certain foods by providing it with a distinct flavor, we as Christians are called to improve and to enhance the lives of others. Our Godly characteristics of love, compassion, generosity, kindness, and friendship add a distinct "flavor" that enriches the lives of those that are around us. With this in mind, I want to encourage you to begin to add "flavor" to the lives of those around you so that they will be enriched in a Godly way as you

display Christ-like characteristics towards them. As the salt of the Earth, we as Christians are instructed by Jesus to purify, to preserve, and to add flavor in the world that we live in.

### ***Living as the Light of the World***

Not only are Christians “the salt of the Earth,” Jesus informs us that we are also “the light of the world.” It is this “light” within us that Jesus warns us not to hide or to conceal. What are the qualities of light that Jesus proclaims that we possess? First, light is used as a metaphor to describe the attributes of GOD’s holiness. By calling us the light of the world, Jesus is indicating that we as His followers reflect and replicate GOD’s holiness in a world that is filled with darkness, which symbolizes wickedness, evil, and sin.

The Bible also uses light to symbolize wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Even though we live in a society that promotes and even encourages ignorance and foolish behavior, Christians are able to display wisdom by applying GOD’s teachings while making decisions concerning their personal life. Finally, light is used to characterize the good works that bring glory to GOD here on Earth. As the light of the world, Jesus is indicating that we are the agents through whom GOD receives glory whenever we accomplish good works or perform good deeds. For this reason, we as Christians must be humble, compassionate, and generous so that we will be able to take advantage of the opportunities that we have to perform good deeds that bring GOD glory. When Jesus refers to His followers as being “the light of the world,” He is stating that we should display our holiness, our wisdom, and our good deeds for the world to see.

## **BRINGING GLORY TO GOD**

Everything that GOD created was created with a specific purpose and for a specific reason. We as believers have been created for a specific reason as well. What is it? Our life’s purpose and the reason that we were created is to bring glory, honor, and praise to GOD. Romans 11:36 informs us that, “everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory.” Furthermore, Isaiah 43:7 proclaims that we were created for GOD’s glory when it states; “bring all who claim me as their God, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them.” From these two scriptures we discover that GOD created us to bring Him glory, which is defined as worshipful praise and honor. For this reason our actions, our words, and how we live our life should reflect what we were created to do.

As we begin the process of developing Christ-like character in our personal lives, we are presented with opportunities to perform good works and good deeds that bring glory to GOD. Ephesians 2:10 teaches us that, “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” GOD has distinctly equipped each and every one of us with unique gifts, skills, and talents to perform these good works which He has prepared for us, and throughout the course of our Christian life He begins to reveal to us the good works that He created us to accomplish. After receiving the gift of salvation, we should begin to use our gifts and talents to perform good deeds that bring glory to GOD. The following paragraphs address how we can bring GOD glory.

### ***Becoming Useful to GOD***

In the military, before we used any weapon on the battlefield, we were taught that we must inspect our weapon to ensure that it was functional. I can tell you that in a life or death situation, you don’t want your weapon to jam at the wrong moment. A weapon that is unable to fulfill its intended purpose when called upon is completely useless to a soldier, and a useless weapon is never used in combat. Likewise, GOD desires for us to be useful for the purpose that we were created for, which is to perform good works that bring Him glory. 2 Timothy 2:20-22 explains to us that, “in a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man

cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

This passage of scripture refers to a house, which has different kinds of articles within it. The house in this scripture represents who we as a GOD’s children, and the articles within this house are symbolic of the characteristics that we possess in our individual lives. It says that some articles (characteristics) are made of gold and silver for noble (honorable, respectable, righteous) purposes, but there are also articles within us that are made of wood and clay, and our used for ignoble (dishonorable, shameful, immoral) purposes. As a Christian, the articles within you that are made out of gold and silver are the characteristics that you possess which reflect the attributes of Jesus Christ, which can be used to edify and be a blessing to others. For example, unconditional love, kindness, compassion, and forgiveness are characteristics that touch the lives of others in a positive way, and also are a reflection of who Jesus is. These Godly characteristics are classified as articles that are made of gold and silver that are used for noble purposes.

On the contrary, even though we have accepted the gift of salvation, we still possess articles (characteristics) within us that are made out of wood and clay. These characteristics do not accurately reflect who Jesus is, nor can they be used to edify or be a positive blessing in the lives of others. Pride, hatred, lust, selfishness, foolishness, jealousy, and unforgiveness are examples of articles that do not reflect the characteristics that Jesus desires for us to display, and they prevent us from positively impacting the people in our life. The passage of scripture in 2 Timothy 2:20-22 explains to us that if we cleanse ourselves from the articles made out of wood and clay, then we will be useful to our Heavenly Father and prepared to do any good work. As you grow closer to GOD through reading His word, through prayer, through fasting, and through worship, the Holy Spirit inside of you begins to cleanse you of the ungodly characteristics that will hinder your spiritual growth. GOD uses the time that you spend with Him, and the trials that you experience in your life, to purge your heart of the attributes that you possess that cannot be used to fulfill your GOD-given purpose.

I want to inform you that this cleansing process is always ongoing, and for this reason we must become patient with ourselves so that we do not become overly frustrated whenever we make a mistake. I also want to point out that some people never fulfill the plans and the purpose that GOD has for their life, nor ever fulfill their destiny, because they were unwilling to allow GOD to cleanse them of their sinful characteristics (don’t let this be you!). After we receive the gift of salvation, we must begin to allow GOD to cleanse us from the ignoble articles (sinful characteristics) in our life so that we can be useful to GOD, which will enable us to effectively accomplish the good works that He has prepared for us to do.

### ***Developing Our Spiritual Gifts***

When you accepted the gift of salvation by placing your faith and your hope in Jesus Christ, GOD responded by placing His Holy Spirit within you. When you received the Holy Spirit, you also were given spiritual gifts which He wants you to use to bless others and to have a positive impact on their life. Your spiritual gifts include your talents, skills, and your abilities that you can use to do something meaningful in the local church and within your community, whether it be using your technological skills, singing, dancing, making music, encouraging, teaching, serving others, etc.

The Bible helps us to understand what spiritual gifts are, and how we should properly use them in Romans 12:4-8 when it states, “just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a

teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.” This scripture identifies some additional spiritual gifts that we may possess; along with encouraging us to put forth our best effort when using them (we should never half-step when using our spiritual gifts).

Now that we have received spiritual gifts as a result of being saved, the Bible instructs us to “fan into flame the gift of God.” What does it mean to fan into flame the gifts that GOD has given you? To fan a spark or a small fire into a flame means to cause it to develop, to increase in size, and to grow bigger and more powerful. Through this scripture GOD is teaching us that we should develop our gifts by using them, by applying them, and by not wasting them by keeping them to ourselves. For example, if GOD has given you talent as a writer, as a speaker, as an artist, or as a poet, you should use your creativity as best as you can and take the opportunities that you are presented with to use your gift to inspire others. If GOD has given you talent as an actor, as a dancer, or in theater, practice to become the best at it that you can be, and then get involved in activities that allow you to use your gift to bless others. If GOD has given you talent as an athlete, train your hardest, practice often, and give 100% in every game that you play. If GOD has given you talent as a singer, practice so that you become the best singer that you can be, and then use your gift in every way possible to encourage others. If GOD has given you the gift to be able to serve others, serve wholeheartedly in every capacity that GOD leads you to serve in. After you have received the gift of salvation, GOD wants you to begin to develop and to apply your gifts so that you can be highly effective whenever you use them to minister and to uplift others.

### ***Evangelizing By Sharing Our Faith***

GOD’s grace was not only meant to be experienced by us as believers when we accept the gift of salvation, rather, GOD intended for His love and His grace to have such a powerful impact on our lives that it inspired us to want to share it with others who do not know Him. In His great commission to all of His followers, Jesus instructs us in Matthew 28:19-20 to, “go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”

Christians possess knowledge of the one person (Jesus Christ) who can cure the ills and the troubles that people face within our society. We were not instructed to hold on to this knowledge of Jesus solely for our own personal benefit, instead, GOD desires for us to share our knowledge of Jesus with others so that they too can have access to His life-changing power, grace, and love as well. The process of sharing our faith and our knowledge of Jesus Christ with others is called “evangelism.”

Through evangelism and sharing the good news of the gospel (which is the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we can receive, eternal life, forgiveness for our sins, and be placed on good terms with GOD), other people who do not know GOD are introduced to Him and given the opportunity to accept the gift of salvation as well. Even more, those who are struggling with challenging circumstances or destructive behavior are also presented with a way to obtain the help that they desperately need through a personal relationship with GOD. We are presented with opportunities to share our faith when we share our testimony with others, when we are compassionate towards those who are suffering, when we are generous towards those that are in need, when we pray for those who are troubled, and when we live our life in accordance with GOD’s word. After receiving the gift of salvation, we should begin to share our faith and our experiences with GOD with others so that they too can be afforded the opportunity to enter into a personal relationship with Him as well.

## **LEARNING THE ART OF WAR**

For those who thought that after they received salvation that life was going to be trouble free, I have some bad news for you. I hate to burst your bubble, but the truth of the matter is that when you got saved, your life became a target to Satan, and he is going to maliciously attack you on repeated occasions to influence you to separate yourself from your relationship with GOD, and to give up on your GOD-given hopes and dreams. When you accepted the gift of salvation, you were enlisted into the army of GOD. Being in GOD's army, you must always be ready and prepared at all times to do battle, because there is an enemy, Satan, who is always on the prowl to steal, kill, and destroy. For this reason, now that you are saved you must begin to "fight the good fight of the faith," as we are instructed to do in 1 Timothy 6:12.

In this unseen spiritual war that we are fighting in, the enemy is constantly bombarding us with challenging circumstances in an attempt to cause us to become discouraged, and he floods our minds with negative thoughts that are intended to cause us to be afraid, with the hope of gaining victory over us by causing us to no longer put our hope and our faith in GOD and His word. If Satan is able to influence you to stop placing your faith and your trust in GOD, he will be able to successfully prevent you from fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life, and from reaching your full potential as a Christian. With this in mind, we must always be on guard against such attacks (challenging circumstances and negative thoughts) so that we are able to overcome the enemy by maintaining our faith and trust in GOD instead of allowing those attacks to overcome us.

Our Heavenly Father did not leave us completely vulnerable and helpless in this spiritual war. 2 Corinthians 10:4 informs us that, "the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." I want you to know that GOD has provided us with spiritual armor to protect us against Satan's attacks, and He gave us a weapon that we can use to defeat our adversary. Ephesians 6:11-18 teaches us that we must, "put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

Our ability to defend ourselves against the attacks of the devil is dependent on these things:

- Our personal understanding of the truth contained in GOD's word. This represents the belt of truth. Without the belt of truth the devil can deceive us into believing his lies.
- Our personal understanding of the fact that we are in a place of right-standing with GOD. This represents the breastplate of righteousness. Without the breastplate of righteousness the devil can influence us to feel guilty and to separate ourselves from GOD whenever we make mistakes by committing sin.
- Our personal understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the peace that we receive as a result of what He did for us on the cross. This represents having our feet fitted with the gospel of peace. Without having our feet fitted with the gospel of peace, the devil will be able to overwhelm us and overcome us whenever we encounter tough circumstances and difficult situations.



-Our ability to steadfastly believe and remain confident in GOD's word and His promises to us without wavering. This represents holding the shield of faith. Without the shield of faith we can become paralyzed by our fears, and the devil will hinder us from moving forward in life because we have begun to expect that the worst case scenario will always occur no matter what we do.

-Our personal understanding of the gift of salvation that we have received from GOD. This represents wearing the helmet of salvation. Without the helmet of salvation, the devil can influence us to believe that we will be condemned to hell because our sins have not been forgiven or atoned for.

-Our personal understanding of how to correctly apply the teachings from the scriptures contained in the word of GOD. GOD's will is revealed to us in the Bible, and it sheds light on how GOD desires and intends for us to live our lives as His children. This represents the sword of the spirit, which Jesus used to resist Satan while He was being tempted in the wilderness. Without the sword of the Spirit, the devil can cause us to live outside of the will of GOD because we do not accurately understand what GOD's will or GOD's plan is for us.

If we have not put on the whole armor of GOD as described in Ephesians 6, then we will be extremely vulnerable to Satan's attacks on our lives. However, if we have put on the whole armor of GOD as described in Ephesians 6, then we will be able to stand firmly against the attacks that Satan launches against us to cause us to separate ourselves from GOD. The difference between *standing* against Satan's attacks and *falling* to Satan's attacks is whether or not you have put on the whole spiritual armor of GOD as a believer. For this reason, once we receive the gift of salvation we must learn and understand how to resist our enemy by putting on the whole armor of GOD.

### **PREPARING FOR JESUS' RETURN**

Last but definitely not least, after we receive the gift of salvation we must begin to prepare ourselves for Jesus' second coming to Earth. The Bible teaches us to live holy lives in preparation for His return within the following scriptures:

\*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. *2 Peter 3:10-12*

\*Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write you. For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape. But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. *1 Thessalonians 5:1-8*

These scriptures reveal to us that we should be preparing ourselves for the second coming of Jesus Christ by living holy (not sinful and immoral), clear-headed (not under the influence of drugs or alcohol), and alert (not complacent, lazy, and unprepared) as we anticipate His return. Furthermore, we should also prepare ourselves for Jesus' second coming by pursuing the goals that He has given to us to accomplish, and

by diligently carrying out the roles and the responsibilities that He placed on us to fulfill. Because we do not know the day or the time of Jesus' second coming, we should begin to prepare ourselves right away for Jesus' return to Earth after we receive the gift of salvation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Once we have accepted the gift of salvation, we should immediately begin to prepare ourselves for the good works that GOD wants us to accomplish by developing Christ-like character as we follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and by renewing our mind through the study of His word. We must also allow GOD to cleanse us from our sinful characteristics so that we can be useful to Him. Furthermore, we must actively fight the good fight of faith by putting on our spiritual armor in order to resist Satan's attacks, which are intended to separate us from our relationship with GOD, and to stop us from accomplishing our goals and our dreams. Finally, we must immediately begin to prepare ourselves for Jesus' return by living a holy life, and by diligently working at the things that He has placed on our heart for us to do. As you do all of these things, GOD will begin to use your talents, your gifts, your abilities, and your resources to make a positive impact on others and advance His kingdom here on Earth. Amen!!!

## **DISCOVERING YOUR GOD-GIVEN PURPOSE**

When I was younger, my dream when I grew up was to play in the NBA. I had a strong desire to be a professional basketball player, and that desire constantly pushed me to become the best ball player that I could be. I would spend time working out, lifting weights, running, and shooting a basketball whenever I had a spare moment. As I've gotten older, I've never stopped having the desire to do certain things in life. I've never stopped dreaming, and I've never stopped setting goals for my life. Now my main desire is to help people, to own my own business, and instead of playing in the NBA, I want to own my own NBA team. I realize that no matter how young or how old you are, you are always going to have desires, you are always going to have dreams, and you are always going to have goals.

I want to use this chapter to address your desires. What is desire? Desire is simply the hope that you have for something to happen in your lifetime. I want to ask you right now, what are your desires? What are you hoping for? What are you wishing would happen in your life? While your desires may be different than mine, desire is something that plays an extremely important role in all of our lives because it shapes us into the person that we will become. Everything and everyone that GOD has created has been created with a specific purpose. In order to fulfill that purpose, GOD provides us with certain gifts, certain talents, and certain abilities. Not only does GOD bless us with certain talents and abilities, but He also puts a desire into our heart to do something meaningful, to do something significant, and to do something exciting. As a result of this, the only way that we truly become satisfied with our life and experience a sense of fulfillment is if we are using the gifts, the talents, and the abilities that GOD has given us.

For example, no matter how much money a job would offer me to sit in a room by myself, I wouldn't be truly happy unless I was doing something that allowed me to reach out to others. If you are a person who desires to work outdoors, you will never be truly happy working at a job that constrains you to a cubicle within an office environment (keep this in mind when you select your career and your next job). I want you to know that you should never choose a job or a career solely because of how much it pays you, instead, you should base which job or career you choose on whether or not it will allow you to use the gifts, the talents, and the abilities that GOD has given you. GOD gives us a desire to want to do something significant, something exciting, and something meaningful, and whenever our gifts, talents, and our abilities are connected into doing something positive, exciting, and meaningful, that's when we truly find satisfaction and fulfillment because we are doing what GOD created us to do. Our purpose on Earth as GOD's children is to use our gifts, our talents, and our abilities to do something positive, meaningful, and exciting. This is what we call your, "calling in life." That is what you were called to do.

The reason why a lot of people hesitate to give their life to GOD, especially at a young age, is because they believe that they will have to give up their desires for doing exciting things while using their gifts, their talents, and their abilities in order to be a Christian. They mistakenly believe that they are going to have to give up doing what they love to do. In that case, Christianity seems boring to them, and they don't see any value or worth in changing their life for the better. When a person believes this false notion, it causes them to begin to run from GOD instead of drawing closer towards Him.

## **USING OUR GIFTS TO GLORIFY GOD**

Our Heavenly Father is full of excitement and exhilaration, and I want you to know that GOD wants to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities to do something exciting and meaningful that is for a good purpose. If you are an athlete, and let's say GOD has given the gift of being a good basketball player, a good football player, or a good track runner, golfer, tennis player etc., GOD wants to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities as an athlete playing the sport that you enjoy to help people, and to reach out to those who don't know Him. If you like to sing, if you like to rap, if you like to write or recite poetry, GOD wants to use

those gifts, those talents, and those abilities to tell other people about how good He is, to encourage them, to inspire them, and to draw people closer to Him. If you like to act, if you like to dance, or if you like to do perform in theater, GOD wants to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities to reveal who He is, and to express His love towards others. If you like to draw, if you like technology, if you like to build and create things, GOD wants to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities to bring glory, honor, and praise to Him.

So you see, instead of keeping your talents, your gifts, and your abilities bottled up inside, GOD wants you to use them as He places it on your heart for you to do so. If you ask GOD how He wants to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities, He will show you how you can use them in a positive and meaningful way; all you have to do is ask Him to do this through prayer. Whenever you start using your gifts, talents, and abilities to do positive and meaningful things that bring glory to GOD, your life begins to change for the better as it begins to reflect the life that Jesus lived while He was here on Earth.

Once you begin to use your gifts and talents for GOD by pursuing your goals and dreams, you will no longer feel the need to turn sources outside of the will of GOD in order to fill the voids in your life, or to find fulfillment or satisfaction. For example, you will no longer have the desire to get drunk or to get high, because you are already satisfied and experience a sense of fulfillment in your life, and because it can stop you from getting GOD's help in doing what you desire to do, which will prevent you from reaching your goals in life. Once you begin to use your talents for GOD doing what you desire to do, you won't want to be sexually immoral or promiscuous, because you are already satisfied and experience a sense of fulfillment in your life, and because it can stop you from getting GOD's help in doing what you desire to do, which will prevent you from reaching your goals in life. Once you begin to use your talents for GOD doing what you desire to do, you won't want to skip school or commit illegal crimes, why, because doing these things can stop you from getting GOD's help in doing what you desire to do, and it can prevent you from reaching your goals in life.

Most often than not, the people that we encounter that are living immorally are the same people who have unclear goals for their life, and who aren't pursuing after their dreams and desires. But when you have goals for your life; when you are chasing after your dreams, and when you are using your gifts to do what you desire to do, it helps you to be able to resist the temptations that can lead to your downfall and cause you to be unsuccessful. When you know what your GOD-given purpose is here on Earth, it motivates you to want to change your life for the better so that you can excel at doing what GOD has called you to do. If we truly want to see people's lives start to change for the better, we should show them how to use their gifts, their talents, and their abilities for GOD to do something positive and meaningful that will help them accomplish their goals in life. The reason that I am presenting you this information at this time is because the decisions you make right now, such as finishing high school, going to college, and staying out of jail and prison, will determine how successful you will be in your life.

### **DON'T USE YOUR GIFT FOR THE WRONG REASON**

There is something that I want to warn you about and make you aware of. I want you to know that Satan does not want you to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities for GOD doing something that is positive and good. For this reason he is doing everything he can to persuade you and influence you to use them for the wrong purposes. For example, Satan is trying to convince you and persuade you to use your athletic skills to only draw attention to yourself instead of using those skills to be a role model or a positive influence on others. Satan is trying to convince you and influence you to use your ability to sing, to rap, and to write poetry to speak death and to convey a negative and sinful message instead of speaking life and conveying a positive and uplifting message to your audience. So instead of singing songs and writing lyrics that glorify GOD and encourage others, Satan wants you to sing songs and write lyrics about sin, about violence, about sex, about greed, and about drug use, which is what you mostly hear on the radio today.

Satan is trying to convince you and influence you to use your acting skills and your dancing skills to do things that GOD did not intend for you to use them for. So instead of acting or making a movie that inspires people and draws them closer to GOD, you begin to act in a movie, or create a television show that promotes sinful activities. This is what you mostly see in the theater and on television today. Satan promises you fame, riches, respect, and popularity in order to influence you to begin to use your gifts and talents for the wrong reasons, but what he doesn't tell you is that it will end up costing you your soul, which is significantly more valuable than anything that Satan can ever promise you. Because GOD is able to do more for us than we are able ask for, or to even imagine, I want you to know that what GOD can offer you (eternal life, true joy, true peace, a true sense of fulfillment, etc) is much greater than what Satan can offer you (temporary riches, temporary popularity, etc). However, the only way to discover what GOD can truly do for you is to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities for Him alone.

### **DON'T ALLOW YOUR PASSION TO BE EXTINGUISHED**

If Satan isn't able to convince you to use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities for the wrong purpose, then next he will attempt to persuade you to not use them at all. Satan will make every effort to extinguish the fire inside of you, which is your passion, your enthusiasm, and your motivation to achieve your goals and your dreams. How does he do this? Here are a few methods that he uses, and I want you to examine yourself to see if you have lost your "fire" to accomplish your goals in life for any of these reasons.

#### ***He Causes Us to Doubt***

Satan tries to extinguish the fire inside of us to accomplish our goals and dreams by first getting us to think that they are impossible to achieve. When you begin to feel or think that what GOD has called you to do is impossible, you immediately give up on your dreams without even making the effort to pursue them. Many people have decided not to chase after their goal of starting up their own business, finishing their education, or pursuing their dreams simply because Satan has convinced them that they will not be able to be successful (don't let this be you!). Instead of believing that your goals and dreams are impossible to accomplish, I want you to know that GOD said in Philippians 4:13 that you can do "all things through Christ who strengthens you," and that, "nothing is impossible with GOD." The only thing separating you from your dreams is your unbelief in GOD's word and the promises that He has made to you.

#### ***He Causes Us to Fear Failure***

The next method that Satan uses to extinguish our fire to achieve our goals and dreams is to get us to believe that we will be complete failures, and that we will disappoint ourselves and others. This fear of failure that he instills into our mind with negative thoughts prevents us from ever stepping out on faith and trusting GOD to help us accomplish our goals. We become afraid of being laughed at, talked about, humiliated, or even embarrassed. For this reason, many people don't start up their own businesses, apply for certain positions, or try out for sports teams or other auditions. But instead of believing that you fail and not be successful in life, I want you to know that GOD says in Proverbs 16:3 that if you "commit to the LORD whatever you do, your plans will succeed."

#### ***He Distracts Us From Our Goals***

Another thing that Satan will attempt to do in order to extinguish the fire inside of you to achieve your dreams is distract you from chasing your goals by causing you to lose your focus. How does this occur? This occurs when instead of you chasing after your goals and dreams; you begin to start chasing after money because you think that it is more important (greed). Instead of chasing after your goals and dreams, you begin to start chasing after the members of the opposite sex (lust). Instead of chasing your goals and

dreams, you begin to start wasting time doing things that aren't beneficial to you or productive (complacency and laziness). Or finally, instead of chasing after your goals and dreams, you now begin chasing after material possessions such as cars, houses, jewelry, clothes, or other things that you devote your life to (idolatry). This is why the Bible says that without focus and vision that many people perish, so I caution you to never lose focus and sight of what GOD has placed on your heart for you to accomplish.

### **FANNING OUR GIFTS INTO FLAME!!!**

While Satan is busy trying to extinguish the fire (excitement and enthusiasm) inside of you to achieve your goals and dreams, GOD wants you to do something different. GOD tells us in 2 Timothy 1: 5-7 to, "fan into flame the gift of GOD." What does it mean to fan into flame the gifts that GOD has given you? To fan a fire into a flame means to cause it to develop, to become more powerful and effective, to increase in size, and to grow bigger. GOD encourages us to develop our gifts by actively using them, and to not waste them by keeping them bottled up inside.

So if GOD has given you talent as an athlete, fan your gift into flame by training your hardest, practicing often, and giving 100% in every game that you play. If GOD has given you talent as a singer, fan your gift into flame by practicing so that you become the best singer that you can be, and then use your gift in every way possible to encourage others. If GOD has given you talent as a writer, as a rapper, or as a poet, fan your gift into flame by using your creativity to use your gift to inspire others. If GOD has given you talent as an actor, as a dancer, or in theater, fan your gift into flame by practicing to become the best at it that you can be, and then get involved in activities that allow you to use your gift to bless others. If GOD has given you talent in drawing, in technology, or in building and creating things, fan your gift into flame by getting involved using your gift to help other people.

This is why it is important that you get involved in a church that allows you to use your gifts and talents. By using your gifts and talents in the local church, you can develop them and become better and more effective at doing what GOD has called you to do. GOD wants us to love Him, to serve Him, and to help others not because we are obligated to do it, or because we feel like we have to in order to be a good person, but GOD wants us to love Him, to serve Him, and to help others because it is our desire to do so, which happens when you are using your gifts, your talents, and your abilities doing something positive and meaningful. This is why being a Christian is full of excitement, of passion, and of enthusiasm.

### **CONCLUSION**

I want you to know that GOD wants to take the fire inside of you to achieve your goals and dreams, and ignite it until it spreads like a wildfire within you to the point that you get excited and enthusiastic about using your gifts, talents, and abilities for Him. This is where as parents, we need to get actively involved in the lives of our children by spending quality time with them doing what they love to do, because the time that we spend with them helps them fan their gifts into flame and develop their skills and their abilities.

All people and all children, both young and old, need that extra push of motivation, encouragement, and inspiration to keep going forward in life when they face discouragement and feel like giving up. An involved parent leads to a child who is simply on fire for life, but an uninvolved parent leads to a child whose goals and dreams go up in smoke, and sadly this is what is happening to most of the youth in America. Let's not allow this to happen with our children and the youth of this generation. So I say to you, use your gifts, your talents, and your abilities for GOD doing something positive, exciting, and meaningful, then you will be fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life, then you will truly be joyful, and then you will truly experience a sense of fulfillment and be satisfied with your life. Amen!!!

## **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH?**

While I was growing up, my mother would frequently take me and my sister with her to church on Sundays. During that time, I didn't particularly enjoy going with her to church for numerous reasons. The first reason was that it prevented me from sleeping in an additional day. Another reason was that it forced me to sit still and remain quiet for a long period time (I liked to be active as a kid and I hated having to sit still). However, the main reason that I did not want to attend church was because I did not understand why I had to be there. I simply did not enjoy going to church because I did not know what the purpose of church was, even though I had been going for years. During that stage in my life everything about church seemed foreign to me, and I had a very difficult time grasping why we did some of the things that we did during the service. In my mind, church was simply an occasion for people to get dressed up for one day out of the week, and then to go eat out at a restaurant afterwards.

I believe that many people today, even those who have been attending church for many years, would not be able to clearly explain why they go to church. Furthermore, the reason why many non-believers choose not to come to church is because they don't see the value or the benefit in attending. To them, church is simply a fashion show where people perform rituals and other traditions. For this reason I would like to clarify what the purpose of church is, so that you can begin to see the value and the benefit that it provides to you as you continue to grow in your discipleship after you have received the gift of salvation. This chapter is dedicated to providing answers as to why we should be involved (not simply just attend) a local church, the function of the local church, and other frequently asked questions regarding this subject. Enjoy!!!

### **Why Should I Be Involved In a Local Church?**

“Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.” *Hebrews 10:23-25*

The Apostle Paul recognized the significance of uniting people together who had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ (which is that He died for our sins so that we can have eternal life), and who had also accepted the gift of salvation. Paul knew how important it was for these people to be taught the word of GOD so that they could understand it and know how to correctly apply it in their personal life. Paul could see that it was absolutely essential for these believers to receive encouragement and support from each other, and to be accountable to one another as well. Furthermore, he also recognized that we all had been given special gifts, talents, and abilities which we could use together to have a tremendous impact in this world, much more than what we would if we tried to do everything individually.

Even though Paul could understand all of these important facts, he noticed that others did not share this train of thought. Paul recognized that there had been some who had made the decision to refrain from associating with other believers altogether. With this in mind, he wrote the above passage encouraging us not to “neglect our meeting together, as some people do.” So now let's go in depth as to why we as Christians should be involved in a local church.

### ***We Attend Church To Learn How To Correctly Apply The Word Of GOD In Our Personal Life.***

The Bible can be described as a “road map to eternal life.” It contains warning signs of life's hazards (temptations) that you will encounter on this trip; instructions as to how to avoid them, advice as to how to maintain your vehicle (your body) properly so that it doesn't break down due to stormy weather (difficulties), long mileage (fatigue and weariness), the weight of excess baggage (guilt, anger,

disappointments), or improper refueling (not spending time with GOD in prayer and through reading His word). It also gives us proper direction and guidance to get us to our desired destination safely (accomplishing our goals and dreams).

Even though this road map (the Bible) is written in such a way that we can all read it and interpret what it is saying, it is still very beneficial to us to hear from someone who has experience using it. This person would be able to show us how to navigate through certain difficult times that we may experience in our life, and also provide us with wisdom and life lessons that will enable us to grow spiritually. This is why GOD chose and called certain people to be pastors. Through their preaching, we receive a better understanding of the road map (The Bible) that we are using for our life's journey, and we are able to obtain wisdom and guidance from GOD that is intended to help us become effective and productive Christians. One reason why we should be involved in a local church is that through preaching, we gain wisdom through the word of GOD, and we receive instruction as to how we can correctly apply what we learn to our personal life for our benefit.

### ***We Attend Church For Solidarity (Fellowship)***

Many people may not be familiar with the word “fellowship,” and if you are familiar with this word, its meaning has been misinterpreted and misconstrued throughout the course of time. So rather than using the expression “to fellowship,” to describe why we should be involved in a local church, I like to use the expression “for solidarity.” Solidarity is defined as: “a harmony of interests and responsibilities among individuals in a group, especially as manifested in unanimous support and collective action for something.” It is through solidarity and fellowshiping with other people who are believers that we receive encouragement and support from one another, especially when we are facing challenges, difficulties, and adversity in our life.

When we become involved in a local church, we have an opportunity to form bonds and friendships with other people who are living for GOD, which is important because the Bible teaches us that who we associate with (who we befriend) will play a major role in determining whether or not we *progress* or *regress* spiritually. Solidarity and fellowshiping with other people gives us the opportunity to “mourn with those who mourn,” and to “rejoice with those who are rejoicing.” At church, we have the chance to open up to others about what is going on in our life that is causing us trouble, and then receive prayer about it, rather than just allowing our struggles to burden our mind and our heart by keeping them bottled up inside. Also, we are able to pray and intercede for others who are experiencing difficult times in their life as well. Furthermore, church provides Christians with an opportunity to use their gifts and talents in a united effort to minister and to serve other people.

In Proverbs 27:17, the Bible describes solidarity and fellowship by stating, “as iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.” In order to sharpen a piece of iron to make it more effective for the purpose that it is going to be used for, another piece of iron is used to “strike” against it. The “striking” occurs when one piece of iron makes impact with another piece of iron. Similarly, when we come into contact with other Christians who have Christ-like values, characteristics, and qualities, their impact on our life helps us become the person that GOD has called us to be by following their example, or by developing their good habits. Without attending a local church, we as Christians run the risk of becoming dull, fruitless, and unproductive because we are not “striking” or coming into contact with other believers and allowing them to positively impact our lives. On the contrary, when we attend a local church, we become sharpened through our relationship and our connection with other believers. A very important reason for being involved in a local church is for solidarity purposes, which positively impacts our lives and enables us to receive love, support, guidance, and comfort from other Christians.



### *Accountability*

Any company that is listed on the stock market must present a detailed report of how much money it has made or loss during a certain period of time. In order to verify that these numbers are correct, and in order to confirm that these figures are not false or misleading, we have auditors that actually check these numbers to confirm that they are indeed accurate. In this way the company is accountable to the auditors, and it is through this accountability that the company is prevented from becoming corrupt, immoral, crooked, fraudulent, and dishonest. While I was in the military, we would hold “formations” which would ensure that we were all properly accounted for, and to verify that we were where we needed to be at the right time and at the right place. Just as Wall Street and the United States Military saw the need for accountability, we as Christians need to be accountable to those in the local church to ensure that we are living our life in accordance with GOD’s teachings and instructions.

To be accountable means to be held responsible for your actions and your behavior. If a child or a teenager is not being held responsible for their actions and behavior by a parent or mentor, I can pretty much guarantee that they will choose to live a life that will lead to their destruction, their downfall, and their ruin (This is why we as parents need to be involved in the lives of our children). Through accountability, we can hold our youth responsible for what they do by disciplining and correcting them when they make mistakes, and by doing so we can become actively involved in ensuring that they make good decisions, and that their life continues to stay on the right path. When we are involved in a local church, we become accountable to one another, and we all become accountable to the pastor, whom GOD uses to identify any areas in our life which need correction, fixing, or adjustment in order to ensure that we stay on the right path.

Without this accountability, it becomes easier for us to fall into temptations associated with lust, greed, anger, and other forms of sin that cause us to separate ourselves from our relationship with our Heavenly Father. However, with this accountability that comes from being involved in the local church, it influences us to resist temptations by causing us to be responsible to someone for our actions and behavior. By being accountable in a local church, you are much more likely to continue to live according to GOD’s word, resist temptations, and stay on the right path in life. For this reason, the Bible instructs us in Hebrews 13:17 to, “obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.” Accountability is a key reason why each of us as Christians should be involved in a local church.

### *To Use Our Gifts, Talents, and Abilities*

When you accepted the gift of salvation by placing your faith and your hope in Jesus Christ, GOD also placed within you the Holy Spirit, and by doing this He also gave you spiritual gifts which He wants you to use to bless others and to have a positive impact on their life. Your spiritual gifts include any talents, skills, or abilities that GOD has given to you. We were all given these talents, skills, and abilities not to earn praise for ourselves, or to compete with other individuals. The reason why we were given these spiritual gifts is because GOD wanted us to serve and to minister to others by doing something meaningful in the local church and in the community. In order to help us understand what spiritual gifts are and how we should properly use them, let’s look at the following scriptures contained in the Bible that address this subject:

\*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He

gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have. *1 Corinthians 12:4-11*

\*All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it. Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages. Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not!" *1 Corinthians 12:27-30*

\*Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. *Romans 12:4-8*

\*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. *1 Peter 4:10-11*

As the Apostle Paul was writing to a young man named Timothy, he encourages him in 2 Timothy 1:6 to always continue to, "fan into flame the gift of God." In other words, what Paul was instructing Timothy to do was to use the spiritual gifts (the spark) that GOD had given him instead of letting them remain idle. This way he would become effective at what he was doing by using his gifts continuously to minister to others (practice makes perfect). If we chose not to use our spiritual gifts by allowing them to remain dormant, we can actually extinguish the spark (our gifts) that GOD has given to us. But by continually using them to serve and to minister to others, we are able to fan our spark and the gifts that GOD has given to us into a wide-spread flame that will impact and touch many lives. This is why it is extremely important for us to not simply attend church, but to become involved in the church by using our gifts so that in various aspects so that we can fan them into flame.

### ***Praising and Worshipping Our Heavenly Father***

While there are things that we *receive* from going to church (support from one another, wisdom from our pastor, etc.), we must keep in mind that church is most importantly an opportunity to *give* praise to GOD and to worship Him for who He is and what He has done for us in our life. We should never lose sight of the fact that we come to church mainly to give of ourselves (our praise, our time, our talents, our resources, our love, etc) to GOD and to others. Church is not a place where we become selfish, self-centered, or self-seeking, particularly when we worship GOD. Church provides us with an opportunity to express our love, our appreciation, and our gratitude to GOD while being assembled with other people who are doing the same thing, which pleases our Heavenly Father. King David wrote many psalms which expressed how much he enjoyed praising GOD while being assembled with others in the following scriptures:

\*I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people.  
*Psalms 22:22*

\*My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly (the modern day church) I will praise the LORD.  
*Psalms 26:12*

\*I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you. *Psalms 35:18*

Many of us receive an abundance of GOD's love, His grace, His favor, and His blessings without ever taking the time to express our gratitude or our thankfulness to Him through praise and worship. We as Christians should continually convey to GOD how much we appreciate Him for who He is, and how much we appreciate all that He has done for us, and our local church provides us with an excellent opportunity to do so with other worshippers as well.

### **HOW DO I DECIDE WHICH CHURCH TO ATTEND?**

Deciding which church to attend is one of the most important decisions that you will ever make in your life. The church that you attend will play a large role in helping you grow and mature spiritually as you become the person that GOD has called you to be. The church also provides you with Biblical guidance and direction, and it allows you to use your gifts for the glory of GOD. Many people who are new to Christianity may want to know how to make this important decision, and if you are relocating to a new city, you are going to face the task of finding a new church home.

So how do you decide which church to attend? The very first thing that you should do is ask GOD through prayer to direct you to the church that He wants you to attend. You definitely do not want to attend a church where GOD does not want you to be. Some people choose which church they join based on who else they know that attends the church; the race and the background of the church members, the pastor, how many of their family members attend their church, how good the choir is, or they base their attendance on the size of the church. I want you to know that all of these criteria for selecting a church are absolutely wrong. Rather, we should allow GOD to lead us and direct us to the place that He knows will help us grow and mature spiritually. Here are some other things for you to take into consideration when choosing which church to attend (keep in mind that you should only go where GOD is leading you to).

#### ***Is There a Biblical Foundation?***

Is the church you are visiting "bible-based," meaning that the church does not engage in any activity, ritual, or tradition that is not found in the Bible or that does not accurately reflect the intent or the purpose of why it was done in the Bible? Does the church use the Bible as the final authority when teaching and preaching? Does the church quote and interpret the scriptures in the context that they were written so that it avoids teaching false doctrines or engaging in cult practices? You definitely want to make sure that everything your church does and teaches lines up with what the Word of GOD says as a whole.

#### ***Is There a Demonstration of GOD's Power?***

Is the power of GOD being displayed at your church? Does the pastor or other ministers lay hands on those who are dealing with problems and issues and pray for them? The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 4:20 that, "the Kingdom of GOD is not a matter of talk, but of power." Paul demonstrated this concept by not only teaching and preaching the gospel, but also by laying hands on the sick and praying for them so that they could be healed. By laying hands on the sick and praying for those that were ill, Paul was actively demonstrating the power of GOD. Jesus did the same thing as well to show us how to effectively minister to

people. A church's power is limited if only teaching and preaching occurs and the power of GOD is not demonstrated, therefore, you should attend a church that fully demonstrates the power of GOD by having ministers lay hands on those that they are praying for.

### ***Are The Teachings Relevant To You?***

Are the messages that are being preached relevant to you? Do the sermons and the teachings that are presented help you apply the word of GOD to your life's situations and circumstances so that you can overcome them and live with the joy and the peace that GOD has given you? Is the pastor able to explain the word of GOD to you by teaching you what it means in a way that you can understand it? If you leave the service with more questions about the pastor's message than answers, you will probably have a difficult time applying what you have heard into your personal life. For this reason, you want to make sure that the church you attend has teachings that are relevant to you, and that the church teaches you in a way that enables you to grow in your faith.

### ***Do You Have Opportunities To Use Your Spiritual Gifts?***

Are there opportunities for you to use your spiritual gifts, talents, and abilities at your church? Do you have the opportunity to usher, to sing, to use audio visual equipment, to minister, to teach, to play music, or to volunteer in other areas? Granted, you may not be able to immediately join the church and then walk right into any of these positions, but over the course of time there should be opportunities that are available to you to use your gifts and talents. Remember to keep in mind that it is extremely important for us to, "fan into flame our gift from GOD," so when deciding which church to attend, try to find one that will afford you with the opportunity to get involved by allowing you to use your gifts, talents, and abilities.

### ***Do You Understand The Vision of the Church?***

Do you know what the vision of your church is? Do you understand the church's overall mission? What direction is the church heading towards in the future? Check to see what the vision of the church is and what direction it is headed in, because if there is no vision, or if it is a poorly defined vision, it means that the church is not focused on where it is going or what it is doing. You never want to follow a blind leader or a blind organization that does not have a clear vision, because without a clear vision, that organization will never reach its destination, nor will it have any direction or sense of purpose.

Looking at these five areas may provide you with additional information while you make the important decision of deciding which church to attend, but I want to remind you to ultimately go to the church where GOD leads you to.

### **The Universal Church- The Need for Christian Unity**

The word "church" that we find in the Bible is taken from the Greek word "ecclesia," which means "a body of believers." The "church" that is described in the Bible is not a physical structure with four walls that we enter into on Sundays; rather, it represents every Christian who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior. This means that each of us as Christians are not only solely associated or affiliated with the believers in our local church alone, but that we are all affiliated as Christians in the spiritual body of Christ. Because of this fact, whenever we hear about the sufferings and the trials of other Christians in other parts of the city, other parts of the country, and in other parts of the world, we should share in their suffering and do whatever that we can to assist them because of our affiliation and attachment to them within the universal church. This is why it is vitally important that all of us as believers remain united and compassionate towards one another.

## **CONCLUSION**

I pray that information in this chapter was useful to you and that you apply what you have learned in your personal life and begin to get involved in a local church that is helping you grow and mature spiritually. By becoming involved in a local church, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you learn how to apply the Word of GOD in your personal life, fellowship with other believers, and use your gifts and talents to impact the lives of other individuals. Amen!!!

## **UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE 101**

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone in person, over the phone, or through email, in which they interpreted what you said differently from what you actually meant? Even though you speak the same language as the person that you are communicating with and use words that they can understand, it is still very possible for that person to misinterpret what you are trying to communicate to them. While the Bible has been translated into different languages so that we can all understand the words and the terms written in it, it is still very possible to misinterpret what GOD is telling us. Such misinterpretations can have grave consequences in our life if we begin to apply them incorrectly (For instance, Jesus didn't tell you to "turn the other cheek" so that you will become a walking human punching bag).

The Bible was given to us so that GOD could speak directly to His children and establish a personal relationship with them. The Bible wasn't solely given to pastors or priests so that only they could understand the will of GOD and be charged with the task of explaining it to us. This makes each of us responsible for our own spiritual growth and development, and not solely the responsibility of those in the church. I want you to know that the Bible is described as a "sword," and with any weapon there is, if you know how to use it and handle it properly, that weapon will protect you and help you overcome your enemy. However, if you do not know how to use your weapon or how to handle it properly, you can injure yourself and possibly cause your own death. The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with weapons training so that you will discover how to correctly apply the Bible's teachings in your personal life. Enjoy!!!

### **WHY WAS THE BIBLE WRITTEN?**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 informs us that, "all scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." From this passage of scripture we learn that the purpose of the Bible is three-fold:

1. To teach us the truth
2. To correct us when we are wrong by teaching us to do what is right
3. To prepare and to equip us to do good works

### ***The Bible Teaches Us the Truth***

One of the functions of the Bible is that it teaches us the truth concerning a wide variety of subjects. Beginning in the book of Genesis, the Bible teaches us the truth concerning the creation of the Earth, and the creation of mankind (this is where we learn that humans did not evolve apes as some people believe). Progressing forward, the Bible teaches us about GOD's relationship and salvation of His chosen people, the nation of Israel. The remainder of the Old Testament teaches us about the blessings that Israel received for obeying GOD's laws, and the curses that they received for disobeying them.

In the New Testament, we are presented with the truth about Jesus, and we discover His identity as the "Messiah" and as the "Son of GOD." In the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), we discover the truth concerning Jesus' ministry; His characteristics, His miracles, His teachings, His commandments, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension into Heaven, we are taught about the Holy Spirit and the spreading of the gospel through the efforts of GOD's people. In the epistles which are located after the book of Acts, we learn about the gift of salvation that GOD is offering to His people, we discover the righteous lifestyle that He desires for us to live as His children, and we encounter the truth about the consequences that are associated with continuing to live a life of sin. Finally, the book of Revelation teaches us the truth about what is going to occur during the end times, including the glorious reward to be

received by those who remained faithful to GOD, the punishment awaiting those who continued in disobedience to GOD's commandments, and GOD's ultimate triumph over evil, over death, and over Satan. In this manner, the Bible presents us with truth for us to govern our lives by as believers.

### ***The Bible Corrects Us When We Are Wrong By Teaching Us What Is Right***

Because of our sinful nature, we are predisposed towards making decisions that are in opposition and in rebellion to GOD's will for our lives. Satan continually presents us with temptations that are designed to appeal to our sinful nature (lust, greed, revenge, etc) with the intention of convincing us to make a decision to engage in some form of sinful behavior that will result in our downfall, our ruin, and our misery. With this in mind, the Bible presents us with GOD's teachings that show us the right way to live in order to save us from experiencing the negative consequences associated with sin. For example:

\*When we are in the wrong by deciding to hold on to feelings of hatred and bitterness towards those that have offended us, the Bible teaches us in Colossians 3:13 to do what is right when it states, "make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."

\*When we are in the wrong by deciding to take revenge on those who have angered us, the Bible teaches us in Romans 12:17-21 to do what is right when it states, "do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

\*When we are in the wrong by engaging in sexual immorality; pre-marital sex and adultery, the Bible teaches us in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 to do what is right when it declares that we should, "run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body."

\*When we are in the wrong by exhibiting self-pride, and by expressing an attitude of arrogance that influences us to separate ourselves from other people, the Bible teaches us in Romans 12:16 to do what is right when it proclaims, "live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

\*When we are in the wrong by not displaying compassion, sympathy, kindness, and generosity towards those that are in need, the Bible teaches us in Matthew 7:12 to do what is right when it states that we should, "do to others whatever you would like them to do to you."

These are just a few examples of how the Bible corrects us when we are wrong by teaching us the right thing to do. As a result of living according to GOD's teachings and instructions, we can avoid experiencing the negative consequences associated with sin that will lead to our downfall, our ruin, and our misery.

### ***The Bible Prepares and Equips Us to Do Good Works***

Ephesians 2:10 informs us that, “we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” The good works that GOD has prepared for us to do consist of any act of love demonstrated towards others to uplift and to strengthen them. These include any acts of compassion, generosity, charity, assistance, kindness, support, service and goodwill towards those who would benefit from experiencing GOD’s love through us.

In order to prepare us to perform these good works, the Bible provides us with GOD’s teachings for us to apply in our personal life so that we will begin to develop the characteristics of Jesus Christ (love, compassion, generosity, kindness, sympathy, humility, patience, self-control, etc), while also cleansing ourselves of the sinful characteristics (selfishness, hatred, lust, pride, greed, jealousy, etc) that will hinder us from accomplishing these good works. In this way, the Bible prepares us and equips us to do good works by enabling us to develop Christ-like character.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE**

The first point I want to make in regards to helping you obtain a correct understanding of the Bible is that you cannot accurately interpret the meaning of certain scriptures using your own logic, thought-process, intellect, understanding, and reasoning. Even though the Bible is written in a language that we can understand, because we do not think like GOD thinks, our pattern of thought and reasoning differs greatly from His. In Isaiah 55:8-9, GOD tells us that, “my thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”

If two people think differently, it is very hard for them to communicate effectively to one another (this problem frequently occurs between husbands and wives). This is why it becomes difficult for us to properly interpret some of the things that GOD says to us in the Bible when we read it on our own. For this reason, GOD has given us the Holy Spirit whom Jesus describes in the book of John as being “a counselor who will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you,” and as “the Spirit of Truth who will guide us into all truth.”

The Apostle Paul wrote about how the Holy Spirit gives us revelation and understanding in the book of 1 Corinthians 2:9-14 which states, “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And we have received God’s Spirit (not the world’s spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.”

The Pharisees, whom were the religious leaders during Jesus’ ministry here on Earth, were knowledgeable about all of the prophecies and written laws that were written down and recorded in the past. However, because they did not have the Holy Spirit, they took these laws and interpreted them in such a way that it distorted and twisted GOD’s laws and commandments. As a result, they transformed Christianity from being an intimate and close relationship with GOD, into a religion full of traditions, rituals, and a strict observation of the law, which caused the people to be weighed down by feelings of guilt and condemnation.

When Jesus began His ministry, He started to explain what a true relationship with GOD is like from those same writings and laws that the Pharisees adhered to. However, the Pharisees, and even His own



disciples, had a very difficult time understanding what He spoke about because they did not have the Holy Spirit at that time. This is why Nicodemus, a religious teacher, could not understand what it meant to be “born again,” and why the disciples couldn’t understand what Jesus meant when He said that they must “eat His flesh and drink His blood” in order to have eternal life. But when the disciples received the Holy Spirit on The Day of Pentecost, they began to understand the significance and the meaning of the things that Jesus said and did while He was with them here on Earth. It was only when His disciples received the Holy Spirit that they began to understand who Jesus truly was, and the significance of His sacrifice on the cross for our sins.

Because you have become a child of GOD by placing your faith in Jesus Christ, you now have access to the same Holy Spirit that brought understanding and revelation to Jesus’ disciples; all you have to do is ask Him for His help. With this in mind, before every time we begin to read the Bible and study the word of GOD, we should pray to GOD and ask Him to fill us with the Holy Spirit, and to give us understanding and revelation of what we are about to read so that we can interpret it correctly and apply it into our life.

### **SELECTING THE PROPER BIBLE TRANSLATION**

The first Bible I was given after receiving salvation was a King James Version translation of the Bible. I remember taking it home with me and trying to read it, and then becoming extremely frustrated because I could not understand what I was reading. I began to think to myself that I was going to have a hard time getting to know GOD and understanding how to live if this is what I had to read. Then someone introduced to me the New International Version of the Bible, and after reading a few chapters, I wasn’t frustrated, and I could actually understand what I was reading.

Selecting the correct Bible translation plays a major role in the difference between being able to understand what you read, and being frustrated and unable to comprehend what the scriptures are saying. While I still use the New International Version primarily, I also use the New Living Translation and the Amplified Bible. I currently own various study Bibles that explain certain scriptures on the side of the page, which are great also. I would like to suggest that you find a translation of the Bible that you are comfortable with so that you can grasp a better understanding of the meaning behind the scriptures that you read.

### **IDENTIFYING THE BACKGROUND OF SCRIPTURES**

No comedian starts a joke with the punch-line. Instead, he begins by setting the frame and the background for the joke by identifying who is involved, where it takes place, and when certain things happen. Then as the comedian delivers the punch-line, it causes you to laugh because you understand the background of the joke leading up to it. Similarly, when you research the frame and the background of a scripture (who’s involved, where it takes place, when it was written), you are able to understand the meaning of the scripture and what GOD is trying to tell you, and you see how to apply what you are reading into your personal life the correct way. In order to understand the background of the scriptures that you are going to read, it is important to research the following things:

\*Who is the author, who wrote the passage? (Hint: the answer is frequently the name of the book, such as Mathew or Mark, or the author identifies himself in the book)

\*Why did the author write this scripture? What message or point was he trying to make?

\*Who is the audience in the book, who was the scripture addressed to and written for?

\*When was the scripture written? What was the historical and cultural background of that period of time?

The answers to these types of questions can be found in certain study Bibles, Biblical encyclopedias, and other resources associated with the Bible.

## **BIBLICAL RESOURCES TO USE WHEN STUDYING THE BIBLE**

### ***Dictionaries***

Not being able to define the words that we read in a passage is a major obstacle that prevents most of us from understanding and correctly interpreting the scriptures. Because we cannot clearly define the words, we cannot clearly identify and determine the meaning of the passage that we are reading. To this end, a dictionary is one of the most valuable resources to us as we study the Bible. A dictionary can be used to look up the words that we cannot clearly define, and it gives us a clear definition of the words that we are reading. When you can properly define and understand every word in a verse of scripture, you will be able to completely understand the point that the verse of scripture is trying to make.

### ***Encyclopedias***

Another helpful Biblical resource is an encyclopedia. An encyclopedia, particularly one that deals with biblical history, gives us insight into the culture, the setting, the background, and the historical events that occurred during the time in which the scriptures were written. Most often, this is information that we would not be familiar with. By understanding the culture of a particular time when a scripture was written, along with the setting, the background, and the history surrounding it, you can look at the bigger picture and obtain a better understanding of a particular book and passage of scripture in the Bible.

### ***Biblical Commentaries***

Additionally, Biblical commentaries that go into detail about the interpretation of a verse of scripture are also a very helpful tool if you are just beginning to read the Bible. These commentaries are a great starting point if you encounter a particular verse or passage that you do not understand, and they may possibly shed some light and assist you in understanding what you have read. There are commentaries that are very broad and cover either one or both of the Testaments, and there are commentaries that are very specific and focus on certain books of the Bible. For any verse of scripture that you may have trouble understanding, a commentary is a great resource for you to turn to for insight.

### ***Concordances***

Finally, for those moments when we want to study a particular topic within the Bible, such as grace, righteousness, or faith, we can use a Biblical concordance to locate every scripture in the Bible that mentions each of these words. This will enable you to obtain a better understanding of certain words by researching how it has been used in multiple contexts throughout the Bible.

## **HOW TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE (PERFORMING EXEGESIS)**

After you have done all these things:

- Prayed and asked for the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the truth and meaning behind what you are reading...
- Selected the Bible and the translation that you are going to use...

- Obtained Biblical resources to help you study...
- And researched the background of the scriptures that you are going to read...

It is now time to start digging into the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 informs us of the intention of scripture when it states that, “all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” So as you read a particular verse of scripture, you should be mentally asking yourself these questions: “What is GOD trying to tell me in this scripture,” and “How can I properly apply it to my life to live how He wants me to live?” There are a few methods that we can use that will help us correctly interpret what we are reading. These include:

**\*Historical Criticism**- Researching the history, the culture, and the society of the time in which the scripture was written is very helpful, and it will enable you to better understand certain events (feasts, festivals, celebrations, etc.). For example, when you study Jewish culture, it will begin to make sense to you why the Pharisees were upset with Jesus for doing certain things on the Sabbath. When you know the history and the culture during the time that a particular scripture was written, it helps you better understand the message within it as well.

**\*Grammatical Analysis**- Researching the various meanings and definitions of the words contained in the scripture will provide you with a better understanding of a scripture’s message. For example, the Bible tells us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” By performing a grammatical analysis by looking up the word “fear,” you’ll discover that to “fear” GOD means to respect Him and to have an appreciation for what He has done in your life, and that having this type of “fear” leads to the development of wisdom in your life.

**\*Canonical Analysis**- Researching other areas in the Bible that are associated with the scripture that you are reading is very beneficial. You’ll find that many scriptures often support one another by relaying the same message to us. Often times certain messages or themes are repeated by authors to drive home a certain point to their audience.

### **UNDERSTANDING COMES THROUGH APPLYING WHAT YOU READ**

Military training taught me how to use an M-16 and an M-9 in a classroom setting, but it wasn’t until I was actually in the field and on the firing range that I truly understood how to handle and use my weapon properly. If I wrote to you explaining how to use a complicated piece of electrical equipment, you wouldn’t understand most of what I would be trying to say unless you actually had the equipment in your hands. But if I sat down with you and let you become actively involved in the training by allowing you to put your hands on the equipment, you would be able to better understand what I was teaching you.

Understanding the Bible is very similar to these examples. It is only when you begin applying the lessons in the Bible taught to us by GOD that you truly begin to understand what GOD is teaching you. For example, I truly didn’t understand GOD’s unconditional love towards me and towards others until I started applying the scripture in which He commands us to love others unconditionally. It was through this application that I gained a revelation of how much GOD loves me despite my faults, my flaws, and my shortcomings. So I would like to encourage you to apply the scriptures that you are read into your personal life, by doing so, you will allow GOD to begin to show you their true meaning.

## **Obstacles That Can Prevent You from Maintaining Your Faith in GOD's Word**

The parable of the Sower warns us about certain circumstances that will prevent us from maintaining our faith and our belief in GOD's word. I want to address each of these situations individually so that you can see how each of these circumstances can potentially prevent us from maintaining our faith and our belief in GOD's word.

“While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:”A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” *Luke 8:4-8*

### ***Having a Hard Heart***

As Jesus indicates later on in the explanation of this parable, the “seed” that He refers to represents GOD's word. The various places where the “seed” is being sown is representative of our various heart conditions that determine whether or not we will be receptive to GOD's word. When GOD's word fell on the path, it was trampled on and the birds of the air ate it up. The path in this parable represents a hardened surface, and this verse of scripture is referring to a person who possesses a hard heart. Hebrews 3:13 informs us that sins' deceitfulness can cause us to harden our hearts towards GOD and influence us to become disobedient towards His will; leading us to willingly choose to separate ourselves from Him. The hardened heart that sin produces in our life causes us to become cynical, distrustful, sarcastic, and unsentimental towards GOD's teachings.

We must be careful not to cherish, derive pleasure from, or take delight in the acts of our sinful nature described in Galatians 5:19-21 (sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, etc.) so much so that it causes us to harden our hearts to GOD's teachings and instructions. If we do allow our sin to harden our hearts towards GOD, Satan will immediately steal the word of GOD from us and it will not produce the fruit (the results) that GOD desires to see in our life, which consists of us developing Christ-like character, and performing good deeds and good works.

### ***Not Having a Firm Foundation***

The second circumstance presented by Jesus that prevents us from maintaining our faith in GOD's word is representative of seed falling on shallow soil. Shallow soil is representative of an unstable foundation that will not be able to withstand adverse and unpleasant conditions. In this sense, if our faith is shallow, it will collapse whenever we experience difficult times in our life. It is important to note that once we receive salvation, the level of our faith is just in the beginning stages; we must continually feed ourselves spiritually over the course of our life so that we grow spiritually and mature in our faith. If at any point this growth process ceases because of our unwillingness to read GOD's word, or because we choose to neglect to spend time in prayer, then we become extremely vulnerable whenever we encounter adversity of other hard times because we don't have a firm foundation of faith.

Just as a marriage depends on the couple establishing a firm foundation of love through intimacy in order to endure through the trials and the difficulties that they experience throughout their relationship, our spiritual walk depends on us spending intimate time with GOD through study, prayer, and worship in order

to develop a firm foundation of faith that will enable us to persevere through the challenges and the obstacles that we face as children of GOD.

### ***Being Consumed By the Cares of This World***

The final circumstance presented by Jesus that prevents us from maintaining our faith in GOD's word is symbolic of plants being choked out and consumed by thorns. As it relates to us, we as individuals become overwhelmed and "consumed" by the things that we devote our full attention to, and what we allow ourselves to continually dwell on. Jesus uses thorns in this parable to refer to the things that consume us as individuals so that we are not able to focus, concentrate, and remain motivated to continue to grow spiritually. What are some of the things that thorns symbolize in this scripture? Jesus identifies the thorns that consume us and prevent us from producing fruit as representing the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things."

How does each of these "thorns" consume us and prevent us from producing fruit? To illustrate how the worries of this life consume us, I want to mention the example of Peter while he was walking on water. As long as Peter kept his attention and his focus *on* Jesus while he was walking on water, he was able to remain upright and continue to move forward toward his goal of reaching Jesus. However, as soon as Peter took his attention *off* of Jesus and began focusing on the winds and the waves, he became terrified and afraid, causing him to fall. The winds and the waves represent the hardship and the adversity that we encounter throughout the course of our life. If we allow the trials and the troubles that we face to consume us to the point that we begin to take our focus off of Jesus and His word, then we will undoubtedly fall and fail to maintain our faith in GOD's word.

Jesus also identifies that the lure of wealth can potentially consume us as well. How so? Jesus states in Matthew 6:24 that, "no one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Paul describes the consuming effect of greed in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6: 9-10 by stating that, "people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows." For these reasons, we cannot allow ourselves to become consumed by worries or by greed, because if we begin to devote our attention and our focus solely to these things, we will fail to grow spiritually, we will not be able to consistently obey GOD's teachings, and we will not be able to maintain our faith in GOD's word.

As Jesus identifies in the parable of the Sower, there are three circumstances that can prevent us from maintaining our faith in GOD's word. We as Christians must be cautious not to allow the pleasure and the deceit of sin to cause us to harden our hearts towards GOD's instructions. Also, we must continually develop our faith by reading GOD's word so that it doesn't collapse when we encounter pressure or adversity. Finally, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be consumed from other things that will distract us from keeping our focus on GOD and His word. If we do these things, we will be able to maintain our faith in GOD's word, develop Christ-like character, and fulfill His purpose for our life.

## **OTHER TIPS CONCERNING READING AND STUDYING THE BIBLE**

### ***Where Do I Begin?***

I know one question that many new Christians have when they first begin to read the Bible, and that question is "Where do I begin?" Unlike most books where the obvious starting point is the beginning, I would recommend starting in the book of Matthew, which is the first book of the New Testament, and then

progressing through the rest of the New Testament. After reading the entire New Testament, then I would recommend starting at the beginning of the Bible with the book of Genesis. This way you will be able to obtain a firm understanding of the gospel, and be able to truly appreciate what Jesus did for us on the cross.

### ***Be Free From Distractions/ Be Mentally Alert***

I recommend that when you do begin to read and study the Bible that you do so without any distractions going on around you (TV, radio, etc). This will allow you to be able to clearly hear the voice of GOD speaking to you as you read. Also, make sure that you are alert and awake before you begin to read the Bible, because it is highly likely that you will end up falling asleep if you try to read while you are tired.

### ***The Bible Will Enhance Your Prayer Life***

When you read the Bible, you will discover many promises that GOD makes to you now that you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior. Whenever you encounter any of these promises, you should begin to pray that those promises be fulfilled in your life (such as that He will deliver you from trouble, provide for you when you are in need, heal you when you are sick, give you wisdom and guidance when making tough decisions, etc).

Jesus proclaims in John 15:7-8 that, “if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” Our prayers become more effective when GOD’s teachings remain in us by influencing the way that we think, speak, and act. Reading the Bible informs us of GOD’s will, and what He desires for us to pray for, and by discovering GOD’s will, it motivates us to pray so that we can experience the abundant life that GOD has promised to give to us.

### ***Faith Is Important***

It is extremely important that we combine our faith to the scriptures that we read and begin to believe and act upon what we are reading. Otherwise, reading the Bible does us no good, nor does it produce any positive results or make any positive changes in our life. Hebrews 4:2 states that, “for we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”

I want you to know that reading the Bible benefits you only when you believe and act upon what you have read. If you do not believe and act upon GOD’s teachings in the Bible, then it is similar to having a key to your dream car but refusing to put it into the ignition; you will never experience the thrill or the excitement that you know is available to you. But when you do put your faith into what the Bible says and begin to apply its teachings into your personal life, then you will reap tremendous rewards and begin to see your life change for the better.

## **CONCLUSION**

Being able to understand the Bible will help your spiritual growth and maturity tremendously. I believe that the information contained in this chapter will greatly improve your ability to understand the Bible, and it will enable you to obtain a correct interpretation of the scriptures that you read. With this understanding, you will be able to have a more intimate and closer connection with GOD; fulfill His purpose for your life, and successfully accomplish the goals and dreams that GOD has placed on your heart for you to achieve, causing you to truly be A.L.I.V.E in your discipleship. Amen!

## FAITH 101

*“It's faith in something and enthusiasm for something that makes a life worth living.” –Oliver Holmes*

What would cause a man to leave his country and his friends to go to a place that he has never been to, only because of a promise that he was given that he would be blessed if he did? What would cause a young man, without armor and without a sharp weapon, to challenge a fully armored giant with a razor sharp sword to a battle to the death? What is it that would cause a man to take a chance to walk on water, despite being ridiculed and facing the objections of others? What would cause a woman who has been suffering for twelve long years to tirelessly push through a crowd just so that she could touch the hem of Jesus' garment? What would cause four men to cut a hole through a roof to let down their paralyzed friend so that he could come face to face with Jesus and be healed?

What was it that caused me to leave a job with guaranteed financial security and medical benefits in the military in order to pursue a career doing what I love to do; strictly because I wanted to use my gifts and my talents to have an impact on the lives of others and to serve GOD? What is it that causes people to sometimes act irrational and to do illogical things in the eyes of others because they've been given direction by their Heavenly Father? I'll tell you what it is, and it my friend is called “FAITH!” Faith plays a vital role in your growth and progress as a Christian. The development of your faith as a Christian will determine whether or not you will be able to fulfill GOD's purpose for your life, and accomplish your goals and dreams. This chapter is dedicated to helping you obtain a clear understanding of what faith is, how faith is acquired, how we are supposed apply faith in our personal life, how faith benefits us, and how our faith is developed. Enjoy!

## WHAT IS FAITH?

*“Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.” - Oswald Chambers*

Faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as simply, “the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; and the assurance about things we cannot see.” Let me help you understand what faith is by tying its definition to a life situation. You believe without hesitating that when you sit down in a chair, that it will be able to hold you up without causing you to fall. As a result of your confidence in the chair's ability to keep you upright, you act on your belief by sitting down on it. You may also be confident that when you turn your key in the ignition of your car, that it will start up properly without any problems, and as a result you will act on your belief by turning your key in the ignition in order to start it (this is unless of course you drive a hootie, in which case you never know what to expect when you start your car).

Faith is simply having confidence that what you believe will happen, actually will. When you have faith that something in particular is going to happen as a result of your actions, you do it without hesitation and without second guessing it (you've probably never second-guessed yourself before you've sat down in a chair). With this in mind, faith is absolutely essential to our spiritual growth as Christians. In the Bible, GOD gives us some amazing promises for our life, along with teachings and instructions to ensure that we are able to see these promises fulfilled. Our faith as Christians is our confidence that these promises from GOD will be fulfilled in our life, and it is our assurance in GOD's ability to follow through on His promises even if we don't see them happening right away.

The Bible informs in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that we should, “live by faith, not by sight.” As Christians, our words, our actions, our thoughts, our mood, our peace, and our joy should never be based on the circumstances and the situations that we presently see ourselves in, rather, our words, our actions, our thoughts, our mood, our peace, and our joy should be based solely on our faith in GOD's promises to us, and

by basing these things on our faith and not on what we see at the current time in our life, we can always experience the peace and the joy that GOD has given to us.

Hebrews 11:6 indicates that it pleases GOD when we have the type of faith where we live our life being confident in GOD's promises to us. In what ways do we demonstrate that we have placed our faith in GOD's promises? Here is a quick example. Psalm 55:22 states that if you give your cares and your burdens to the LORD through prayer, that He will sustain you, support you, and provide you with what you need to keep going in life despite what may be trying to prevent you from moving forward. If you had faith in this promise, you would actually do what this scripture says and take your burdens and problems to GOD through prayer, and then you would be able to be at peace because you are confident that He is helping you even though you have not seen what He has done to help you overcome your problems as of yet. This would be an example of having faith in the promises of GOD.

On the other hand, if you did not have faith in this promise, then you would not take your problems to GOD through prayer because you wouldn't expect him to do anything about them. Instead, you would be on your own trying to solve and fix all of your own problems, and you would be dealing with life's obstacles and challenges by yourself. Another instance of not having faith in this promise would be to take your problems to GOD through prayer, and then not having confidence that He will sustain you, and then begin to worry and become afraid that those problems will not be resolved, especially if you do not see your problems being resolved as fast as you would like them to be. Can you see the difference between having faith in GOD's promises and not having faith? Can you see how not having faith in GOD's word will prevent you from experiencing peace and joy in your life whenever you encounter adversity?

### **HOW DOES HAVING FAITH BENEFIT US?**

*"Fear can keep us up all night long, but faith makes one fine pillow."*

There are many situations, circumstances, and events that have or will occur in your life that will cause you to worry, to be afraid, to be nervous, to be anxious, and to be troubled. There are also various burdens that we can potentially carry such as guilt; anger, low self-esteem, grief, disappointment, hopelessness, and depression. Furthermore, there is a strong possibility that you will experience trials and tribulations that will challenge you and require you to be strong and wise. If that is not enough, you have an enemy who goes by the name of Satan who wants to steal, kill, and destroy your dreams, your inheritance as a child of GOD, your purpose, and your eternal destiny. So you can see that you will encounter a lot of things in your life that are going to be too tough for you to deal with on your own, and too hard for you to handle by yourself (If you think that you can handle all of this on your own, trust me, you can't).

With all this in mind, wouldn't it be great if you could face these life situations, circumstances, and events with confidence that you will make it through them successfully? Wouldn't it be great if you cast off those burdens that you carry of depression and guilt that are weighing you down tremendously? Wouldn't it be great if you could face the trials and the tribulations in your life that challenge you with boldness? Wouldn't it also be great if you could overcome your enemy, Satan, and prevent him from destroying the life that GOD has given you? I want you to know that all these great things are available to you, and they are available to you through your faith in GOD and in His promises to us in His word.

Faith in GOD's promises gives you confidence in tough situations because GOD has promised to deliver you from your troubles. Faith in the word of GOD teaches us that we no longer have to carry those burdens of negative emotions, and that GOD is willing to lift them off of us if we are willing to let them go. Faith in GOD provides us with the strength and the wisdom that we need to rise to the occasion when we face challenges, trials, and tribulations. Even more, faith in the word of GOD enables us to resist and overcome our enemy. Isn't faith great? Are you beginning to see how it can change your life for the better?



## **HOW CAN WE APPLY FAITH IN OUR PERSONAL LIFE?**

*“You block your dream when you allow your fear to grow bigger than your faith.” - Mary Manin Morrissey*

As Jesus was describing to His followers the advantages of having faith and what it can be used for, He proclaims in Matthew 17 verse 20, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” When I first read this scripture after getting saved, I immediately began to think to myself “WOW!!! My faith can move mountains,” and I wanted to go to the closest mountain that I could find to try this out.

However, Jesus is not implying to us that our faith can move physical mountains, but instead, He is teaching us that if we have faith in GOD and do not doubt in His promises to us, then the obstacles, the challenges, the hindrances, the set-backs, and the hurdles that we face in life cannot stand in our way and prevent us from accomplishing the goals that GOD has placed on our heart for us to achieve. For this reason, after telling us that our faith can move “mountains,” Jesus also informs us that “nothing will be impossible for you!” As a believer in GOD, it is not the “mountains” that stand in your way between accomplishing your goals and your dreams; it is your unbelief and your unwillingness to trust GOD that is holding you back. So are you going to continue to allow your lack of faith to stop you from doing what GOD has called you to do, or are you going to start believing in GOD’s promises and trusting Him so that you can fulfill His purpose for your life?

## **HOW DO WE ACQUIRE FAITH?**

*“So faith comes from hearing that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.” – The Apostle Paul (Romans 10:17)*

Faith comes to us:

- \*When we begin to read or listen to what is written in the Bible
- \*When we understand what it is saying to us
- \*When we know how to apply what we have heard or read from the Bible into our personal life.

If someone were to hand me a piece of equipment that I was unfamiliar with, and they did not show me how to use it or explain to me what it was used for, I would probably end up throwing that piece of equipment away because I did not see how it could be useful to me. However, if that person showed me what the piece of equipment was used for and how it should be used, I could begin to see the value that the piece of equipment possessed, and instead of throwing it away and discarding it, I would hold on to it and cherish it because it was useful.

The Bible is similar to this piece of equipment; if we do not understand what we are reading and we are unable to determine how it relates to our life, it becomes useless to us altogether. On the other hand, when we begin to get an understanding of its message and learn how to apply what we read into our personal life, we begin to see value in studying the Word of GOD. The Bible then lays the foundation of our faith concerning what we believe, and it determines how we act, think, speak, and respond to life’s situations. For this reason, it is extremely important that you set-aside time and dedicate yourself to studying the word of GOD, because faith comes to you as you begin to understand who you are as a child of GOD; GOD’s grace and provision for you, and how to use your gifts and talents to fulfill GOD’s purpose for your life.

## **HOW DO WE CAUSE OUR FAITH TO GROW AND MATURE?**

*“As your faith is strengthened you will find that there is no longer the need to have a sense of control, that things will flow as they will, and that you will flow with them, to your great delight and benefit.” Emmanuel Teney*

Our Heavenly Father has a very distinct way of causing our faith to grow and mature, and it is important that we know the methods that He uses so that we do not get discouraged in the process.

### ***Our Faith Becomes Genuine By Taking Us Through the Fire***

We can understand how our faith grows, how it becomes improved, how it becomes effective, and how it becomes authentic by looking at the process by which a precious metal, such as gold, is refined so that it becomes more valuable. When gold is exposed to fire and to other forms of extreme temperatures caused by immense heat, the impure and worthless aspects of the gold are separated, leaving only the purified form of gold that is highly valued. Similarly, your faith is refined when you go through the “fire” and face intense levels of adversity; such as when you encounter situations that make you feel like you are under a tremendous amount of pressure, and also when you experience circumstances, challenges, difficulties, and hardships that can make you sweat. In other words, your faith begins to grow, to improve, to mature, and become effective and authentic when you encounter tough situations and difficult circumstances which are designed to allow GOD to prove to you that you can have confidence in His ability to bring you through the difficulties that you are experiencing.

The Bible describes this process in the book of 1 Peter 1 verses 6-7 when it states, “though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Most people do not enjoy experiencing intense adversity, tough situations, and difficult circumstances, and I can honestly admit that I am one of those people. However, the Bible informs us that these trials and tribulations are necessary in order for our faith to grow, to improve, to become effective, and to be proved as being genuine and authentic so that GOD can receive glory and praise as a result of successfully helping us through our uncomfortable experiences in life.

The most uncomfortable experience in my life occurred while I was deployed to Iraq. While located in Baghdad, I was in an extremely hostile environment that constantly came under attack. During this deployment, I hated my situation and the problems that I was dealing with, and I continually asked GOD, “why do I have to go through this?” After returning home from that deployment, I learned a valuable lesson which taught me that my life is ultimately in GOD’s hands, and that He is faithful to His promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and that He will protect us and deliver us in our times of trouble. The way that GOD choose to teach me this lesson was to take me through the “fire” of being in a warzone environment, which although being uncomfortable at the time, I am now extremely grateful that I went through because it increased my faith and my confidence in GOD tremendously. Whenever we face financial concerns, illnesses, obstacles, hardships, persecution, difficulty, or other problems and issues in our life, those are simply opportunities that GOD uses to refine our faith. As our faith is refined as believers, we become more and more confident when it comes time for us to place our trust in GOD in the future.

### ***Developing Perseverance***

Another valuable lesson that I have learned is that the more you encounter difficulties and problems that test your faith, the stronger your faith becomes. For this reason, the Bible teaches us in the book of James chapter 1 verses 2-4 to, “consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

I want you to know that the trials that we face are a test of our faith, which is our confidence in the word of GOD and our assurance that GOD will fulfill His promises to us. The testing of our faith develops perseverance in us. Let me explain how this happens. If you've never ran in a long distance marathon and for someone reason you decide that you want to train to participate in one, you wouldn't go out and try to run 8 miles your first day of training. That would be insane! It would be better for you to start out training by running a manageable distance so that you can gradually increase your stamina and your ability to persevere through the grueling and strenuous activity. The more instances that you test your stamina in training, the better you become at persevering through the workout by overcoming the burn and the pain that you may feel that often causes you to stop, to quit, and to give up.

The adversity and the problems that you face are representative of the spiritual training that enables you to persevere through tougher challenges that you will face later on in life. When you begin your spiritual journey, your faith only possesses the stamina, the endurance, and the perseverance to make it through difficult situations for a short amount of time without giving up or turning back. For this reason, GOD begins to train us by testing our faith with various challenges and trials which He helps us through. The more that our faith is tested, the more stamina that we acquire, then we are able to endure and persevere through the difficulties that we face in life without stopping, without quitting, and without giving up. As we continue to experience life's trials, our faith continually grows and matures to the point that we are able to run marathons spiritually by persevering through even more difficult problems on the road towards achieving the goals and the dreams that GOD has placed on our heart to accomplish.

### **HOW DOES FAITH HELP US TO OVERCOME SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS?**

#### ***Faith Enables Us to Resist Temptations***

Jesus describes Satan in the book of John 10:10 as "a thief that has come to steal, kill, and destroy." The things that Satan comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy are our faith, our inheritance as GOD's children, our goals and dreams, and our fulfillment of GOD's purpose for our life. The Apostle Peter provides us with a clear blueprint of how to resist Satan in 1 Peter 5:8-9 when he writes, "be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

The way that we can resist Satan and prevent him from accomplishing his mission to ruin and to destroy our life is by "standing firm in the faith." Standing firm in the faith means that you are not able to be persuaded to stop believing what the word of GOD says, nor can you be influenced to give up your hope in GOD's promises to you. One method that Satan uses to accomplish his mission to cause our destruction is by presenting us with temptations that cause us to sin and fall out of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. I want you to know that any temptation that Satan presents you with is intended to test your faith and your belief in the goodness of GOD. For example, when Satan tempts you to steal, it is a temptation to get you to doubt the goodness of GOD and your faith in Him that He will provide for all of your needs. In order to resist any of the temptations that Satan presents us with, we have to be able to stand firm in our faith and our belief in what GOD has promised us in the Bible, which is that "He shall supply all of our needs," "He will never leave us or forsake us," "He will heal us from all of our diseases," "He will answer our prayers," "He will deliver us from our troubles," and that "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ever ask, think, or imagine."

When you stand firm in the faith and begin to trust that GOD will fulfill His promises to you, you will be able to effectively resist Satan's temptations and prevent him from devouring and destroying your life by influencing you to commit sin. This is why the Bible tells us in the book of Isaiah chapter 7 verse 9 that,

“if you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” So when you encounter a temptation or any other attack from Satan, just keep on standing firm in your confidence in GOD’s promises to you.

### ***Our Faith Is Our Shield***

The Apostle Paul teaches us in the book of Ephesians chapter 6 that as GOD’s children, our war, our fight, our struggles, and our conflicts are not with other people, but instead they are with our enemy, Satan. Paul informs us that in this war, physical weapons such as guns, knives, and grenades are of no use to us. In order to fight this spiritual war effectively so that we are victorious, we need to put on, “the whole armor of GOD.” As Christians, our faith happens to be a valuable and important piece of this armor.

Ephesians 6:16 describes the use of our faith as a piece of our spiritual armor when we are instructed to, “take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” Our faith serves as a shield that protects us by extinguishing the flaming arrows of the evil one, Satan. What are the flaming arrows that Satan shoots at us that we need our faith to protect us from? In this spiritual war, the method that Satan uses to attack us is through introducing discouraging and negative thoughts, ideas, suggestions, or temptations in order to control the way that we act, speak, think, and behave. Satan attacks us with negative thoughts in order to encourage us to separate ourselves from our relationship with our Heavenly Father; to give up on our hopes and dreams, to actively commit sin, to disrupt the peace, the joy, and the excitement, that GOD has given us, and to prevent us from fulfilling GOD’s purpose for our life.

Our faith, which is our belief in the word of GOD and the promises that GOD has made to us, extinguishes these flaming arrows and discouraging thoughts by putting an end to their ability to have a negative impact on our life. For example, Satan might have shot a flaming arrow at you by placing the idea in your mind that you will never be successful in life; that you are worthless, and that you will never amount to anything good. If that flaming arrow (that thought) is able to penetrate your mind and spread like a wildfire, then you will accept what Satan has told you about yourself and never press to move forward in your life and make something positive of it. However, if you are actively holding and using your shield of faith, as soon as Satan shoots that flaming arrow, it won’t be able to have an effect because you will believe what the word of GOD says about you, which is that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, and that you are more than a conqueror.

I want you to know that Satan can attack us at any moment in our life with negative and discouraging thoughts, so we always need to be carrying our shield of faith because our life and our future is at stake, and we cannot afford to let our guard down even for a split-second. I pray that you never allow yourself to get caught off guard by not holding on to your faith, your confidence, and your assurance in the word of GOD and the promises that He has made to us. 1 John chapter 5 verses 4-5 encourages us by letting us know that, “every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.” Amen!!!

### **DO WE NEED TO PUT INTO PRACTICE WHAT WE READ?**

Allow me to answer that questions with 3 words; “Yes,” “Yes,” and “Definitely Yes!” Okay, so maybe I had to use four words, but I wanted you to get the point. Simply believing what the Bible says without putting it into practice will not benefit you at all. If you do not believe and act upon GOD’s promises to you in the Bible, then it is similar to having a key to your dream car but not putting it into the ignition; you will never experience the excitement or the joy that you know is available to you.

The book of James teaches us that, “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” We as Christians must apply what we believe into our personal life, because if we choose not to

apply what we believe, we fall into the trap of becoming hypocritical. To illustrate this point, the book of James gives us the following example; “suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” From this passage we discover that believing what the word of GOD says without applying it to the way that we live our life, makes having faith of no use to us. When you do not apply what the Bible teaches into your life, your living faith becomes dead and ineffective because you are not using it and applying it. By not applying what you read in the Bible, you are preventing yourself from experiencing the full benefits of being a child of GOD. So what I want to ask you is this...Is your faith alive, or have you allowed it to become dead because you have chosen to stop applying the Word of GOD in your life?

### **WHAT QUALITIES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH FAITH?**

*“Faith isn't faith until it's all you're holding on to”*

#### ***We Need Patience Along With Having Faith***

We should all strive to possess all of the qualities of the fruit of the spirit which are described in Galatians chapter 5, and there are two in particular that I believe are very essential when it comes to having faith. Those two qualities are “patience” and “love.” Let’s start with patience.

In the book of Hebrews chapter 6, the author explains to his audience how to inherit the promises of GOD just as others have done in the past. In verse 12 he tells us that, “we do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” The author recognized that patience is a very important quality to possess along with having faith in GOD’s word. These two qualities are inseparable and must always be joined together in your life as a Christian.

I want you to know that you cannot have patience without faith, because then you will begin to lose hope, get discouraged, and start worrying and doubting that GOD will come through for you. Likewise, you cannot have faith without patience, because then you will begin to become anxious and discontent whenever things are not happening as fast as you would like them to. This is why the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 8 to wait patiently for the things that we are hoping to receive.

Those who received the things that GOD promised to them, such as Abraham with his son, had to wait patiently for what they were promised, and this same principle applies to us as well. The great thing to know is that GOD’s promises to us will be fulfilled, and as we wait patiently for what we have asked to receive, our patience will not be in vain. Whenever we are waiting to receive something that GOD has promised us or that we have asked for in prayer, when we have received it, we will know that it was well worth the wait!!!

#### ***We Need Love Along With Having Faith***

The second quality that is essential to making our faith effective is the quality of love. Paul greatly understood the need for having unconditional love along with faith, and in describing how important these two qualities are to each other, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:2 that, “if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” The development of unconditional love in our heart towards others is very important as we progress in the development of our faith.

If we know the Bible front to back but refuse to show GOD’s love to others, we miss the whole point of having faith in the first place, which is to perform good deeds that will uplift and strengthen others, and to fulfill GOD’s purpose for our life. Even Satan knows the Bible, but what differentiates us from him as

Christians is that we are able to express Godly love towards others through our good works. For this reason we must always ensure that the qualities of faith and love are walking hand in hand in your life.

### **SHOULD I SHARE MY FAITH WITH OTHERS?**

*“Take the first step in faith. You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step” – Martin Luther King Jr.*

After Jesus’ resurrection, He gave us instructions on what exactly He wanted us to do, and those instructions are found in the book of Matthew chapter 28 verses 19-20 in which He commands us to, “go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I want you to know that in order to carry out these instructions of making new disciples; we must be able and willing to share our faith and our belief in the word of God with others. This way they too will begin to believe in what the Bible says; obtain eternal life, and begin to experience the love and the power of GOD for themselves. As believers, our Christian life should be focused on our mission to share our faith with others. However, we often neglect to give this mission the top priority that it deserves. Proverbs 11:30 tells us that, “the person who wins souls is wise,” yet in order to win souls we must actively share our faith by extending the love of our Heavenly Father to others. So are you actively sharing your faith with others?

### **ADDITIONAL POINTS CONCERNING FAITH**

*“Faith is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted in spite of your changing moods” - C.S. Lewis*

### ***Applying the Word of GOD in Our Life***

If we are simply studying the Bible and not applying what we learn, then we are not benefitting from the time, the effort, and the energy that we are spending to read it. You will only begin to see results and benefits when you begin to combine what you have read with your faith, and start acting upon what you believe. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 4:1-2 that, “therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”

This passage describes two types of people. The first category of people are those who heard the gospel; didn’t believe what it said, didn’t act on it, and therefore didn’t receive the promises of GOD. The second category of people are those who heard the gospel; believed it, acted on it, and received the promises of GOD. The difference between those who received the promises of GOD and those who did not was the fact that the second category of people acted on their faith in what GOD promised to them. If we are to receive the promises of GOD as well (success in our endeavors, victory over our obstacles, a positive change in lifestyle, etc), we cannot simply read the Bible and then store it away in the back of our mind and think that GOD will bless us. In contrast, we must begin to combine our faith with what we have read and begin to act on it, and then we will receive the promises of GOD and begin to experience the abundant life that GOD has given to us.

### ***The Importance of Self Examination***

As we continue to grow spiritually, it is extremely important to constantly examine ourselves to ensure that we are always living by faith, and that we still remain confident in GOD’s promises and are assured that He will fulfill them in our life. The Apostle Paul instructs us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to, “examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?”

By consistently examining ourselves in this way, we can identify if there is anything in our life that is disrupting the peace and the joy that GOD has given us by causing us to become worried, nervous, anxious, fearful, or troubled. If we identify anything in our life that is causing us to experience these negative emotions, we can then take those things and lift them up to GOD through prayer. During these circumstances, we should spend additional time reading the word of GOD and spending time with our Heavenly Father so that our faith can continue to grow and become solid.

### ***Fight The Good Fight Of Faith***

Finally, as we begin to fulfill GOD's plan and GOD's purpose for our life, we should expect to encounter a fight with our enemy, Satan, who desires to prevent us from being productive and effective as Christians. We should never lose focus of the fact that we are in a spiritual war with an enemy who wants to separate us from our relationship with our Heavenly Father; destroy our faith and our confidence in the word of GOD, prevent our success in accomplishing our goals and dreams, and hinder us from fulfilling GOD's purpose for our life.

For this reason, the Bible states in 1 Timothy 6:12 that we are to, "fight the good fight of the faith." Satan continually attacks us by presenting us with challenging circumstances, difficult situations, trials and tribulations, and negative thoughts which are intended to discourage us from continuing to follow Jesus, and to sidetrack and distract us from accomplishing the things that GOD wants us to accomplish. With this in mind, we as Christians must continually fight by vigorously opposing and resisting Satan through keeping constant communication with our Heavenly Father through prayer, and by maintaining our faith and our confidence in the promises that GOD has made to us despite Satan's attempts to cause us to doubt them.

I want you to notice that we should never back down from the challenges that Satan presents us with, nor should we ever isolate ourselves by going into hiding whenever we face difficulties and hardship, rather, it is during this time that we should be determined more than ever to fight back because our life, our future, our goals, our dreams, and the opportunity to continue to fulfill GOD's purpose for our life are at stake. The good news is that whenever we engage in this fight, we are guaranteed to overcome our enemy and his attacks as long as we do not quit or surrender. Because GOD has guaranteed us our victory, this fight is called "The good fight of faith." So I want to encourage you as a brother in Christ to keep on fighting the good fight of faith!!!

### **CONCLUSION**

*"Faith is putting all your eggs in God's basket, then counting your blessings before they hatch."* - Ramona C. Carroll

Faith plays a vital role in the process of our spiritual growth and development. In order to maintain the peace and the joy that GOD has given to us, we must always base our attitudes, our emotions, and our behavior on GOD's promises to us rather than the current situation that we may have encountered in our life. Our faith shields our mind from the attacks of our enemy, Satan, who seeks to place negative thoughts in our mind with the intention to discourage us. Furthermore, faith in GOD's promises gives us the assurance that we need to overcome the challenges and the difficulties that we may experience, and the confidence to press towards accomplishing our goals and dreams. By continuing to develop and maintain a firm foundation of faith, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you walk in close relationship with GOD, and fulfill His purpose for your life. Amen!!!

## PRAYER 101

*To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.* – Martin Luther King Jr.

*“Of all the duties enjoined by Christianity none is more essential and yet more neglected than prayer.”*-François Fénelon

Imagine that you are on a small boat out at sea, and while you are out in the middle of the ocean, you encounter a fierce storm which causes your boat to flip over and turn completely upside down. As you desperately hang on for dear life, you spot a large vessel approaching. As it approaches your location, you notice that you are not able to simply climb up the large vessel to safety. Instead, you recognize that you need something that will connect you with the large vessel so that you can be transferred from your current position where you are in danger, to a safe place on the large vessel. Then you see the captain of the large vessel throwing you a “lifeline,” and when you take hold of it, it lifts you out of your current position where you are just barely hanging on for dear life, into a place of comfort, security, and peace where you are able to finally relax and be refreshed.

The “lifeline” in this example is symbolic of what prayer does for us as Christians. Prayer is what connects us to our Heavenly Father. When we encounter “storms” in our life which cause us to struggle to the point where it feels like we are just barely hanging on to our joy and our peace of mind, prayer enables us to receive the support and the assistance that we need from GOD. Prayer is our lifeline to GOD, and it is extremely important and valuable to all of us as Christians because it has been guaranteed to us that we are going to experience “storms” in our life.

Unfortunately, often times we neglect to pray during times of trouble, and by neglecting to pray we are refusing to utilize the lifeline to GOD that is available to us whenever we are in distress. As a result, we become easily overwhelmed whenever we encounter “storms,” such as financial shortfalls, illnesses, trials and tribulations, difficult situations, problems, relationship issues, adversity, opposition, temptations, and other things that can cause us to become frustrated and discouraged. I want you to know that GOD desires for you to communicate with Him through prayer, and that through your prayers you are allowing GOD the opportunity to display His power in your life. The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with a clear understand of what prayer is; to explain the power behind it and the effectiveness of it, and to encourage you as a child of GOD to begin to make prayer a regular part of your everyday life. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRAYER?**

There are five common types of prayer, these include but are not limited to:

#### ***Prayer of Adoration***

A prayer of adoration is a prayer to GOD in which we give praise to Him for who He is. Our Heavenly Father desires for us to express our heart-felt love towards Him in words through prayer. When we encounter or appreciate GOD’s love, mercy, kindness, compassion, and grace towards us, it motivates us to want to communicate to Him how much we admire who He is. When you appreciate GOD for being a savior, a deliverer, a provider, a protector, a counselor, and a healer in your personal life, it inspires you to want to tell GOD how much you value your personal relationship with Him.

An example of a prayer of adoration is found in Psalm 63, in which David prays: “O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. I lie



awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely. *Psalms 63:1-8*

### ***Prayer of Confession and Repentance***

A prayer of confession and repentance is a prayer to GOD in which we confess our sins to Him, and repent by asking for forgiveness and turning away from our sinful behavior. Confession is the act of acknowledging our sins to GOD. In this prayer we ask GOD to identify those areas of our life that need cleansing, and then we allow Him to cleanse us in those areas. Our Heavenly Father does not desire for us to confess our sins to Him so that He can condemn us or punish us, this is not the case at all, rather, GOD desires for us to confess our sins to Him so that He can forgive us; restore our broken relationship with Him, and provide His assistance to help us turn away from our sins. If GOD convicts us in our heart and in our conscience of any wrongdoing by bringing it to our attention, He does so not with the intention of causing us to feel guilty, but to encourage us to run towards Him so that He can restore our relationship by offering us His grace and His mercy. When we recognize that we have sinned against GOD, it should motivate us to want to pray for forgiveness and allow GOD the opportunity to wrap His loving arms around us.

In Psalm 51, David prays a prayer of repentance when he states: “Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just. For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there. Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. Don’t keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don’t take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you. Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness. Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.” *Psalms 51: 1-15*

### ***Prayer of Petition***

A prayer of petition is a prayer to GOD in which we make direct requests to Him. In this prayer we recognize our total dependence upon GOD for all of our needs and desires. Our Heavenly Father desires for us to make requests to Him, and He welcomes us to ask for the desires of our heart. Whenever a need arises in your life, whether it is for finances, for deliverance, for assistance, for guidance, for healing, for direction, for success, for wisdom, for protection, or for strength, we should immediately present those requests to GOD through prayer. After we have made our requests to GOD through prayer, He instructs us to believe by faith that He will provide us with what we have asked for.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches His disciples a prayer of petition when He states: “Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.” *Matthew 6:9-13*

### ***Prayer of Thanksgiving***

A prayer of thanksgiving is a prayer to GOD in which we recognize Him as the source of all our provision and blessings. Our Heavenly Father desires for us to express our heart-felt gratitude for what He has

provided to us. When we receive any good thing in our life; whether it is an answered prayer, a promotion, healing, needed finances, guidance, victory over adversity, success, deliverance from sin, etc., it motivates us to want to communicate to Him how much we appreciate what He has blessed us with. When we recognize the wonderful gifts that GOD provides to us, it inspires us to thank Him as a sign of our appreciation for what He has done. We as believers should never take GOD's blessings for granted, nor should we ever become too busy in our day to day life to stop and to thank GOD for what He has done in our life.

In Psalm 100, David encourages us to give thanks to GOD when he proclaims: "Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." *Psalm 100: 1-5*

### ***Prayer of Intercession***

A prayer of intercession is a prayer to GOD in which we make requests to Him on behalf of other people. Often times, we may not be able to provide the direct assistance that is needed, or cause the change that they desire to see occur in their life. Even more, we may encounter people who have given up hope, or whose faith may be wavering during a particular difficult time in their life. In moments like these, we can pray for GOD to assist them in ways that only He can. Our Heavenly Father teaches us that as Christians, we should be compassionately involved in the lives of others by lifting them up in prayer. Whenever we encounter someone in need of healing, deliverance, wisdom, guidance, finances, strength, GOD's love, or anything else, we should take that opportunity to lift them up in prayer by making requests to GOD on their behalf. I'll address this form of prayer more specifically in a few paragraphs.

An example of the effects of intercessory prayer can be found in Exodus 32. In this passage of scripture, the Lord is angry with His people for worshipping an idol, and He plans to destroy them. Moses then begins to pray a prayer of intercession for the people, and GOD relents and refrains from destroying them in His wrath:

"Then the LORD said, "I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are. Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation." But Moses tried to pacify the LORD his God. "O LORD!" he said. "Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand? Why let the Egyptians say, 'Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth'? Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people! Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. And I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.'" So the LORD changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people." *Exodus 32:9-14*

## **HOW DO I PRAY? WHAT CAN I PRAY FOR?**

*"Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life" - Jonathan Edwards*

A common question that is frequently asked is; "How do you pray?" I want you to know that prayer is simply a conversation between you and GOD in which you thank Him for what He has done in your life, and present Him with your petitions and requests. You do not have to refer to GOD by a specific title in order to get a specific response, nor do you have to perform any rituals in order to receive what you are

asking for. Prayer is simply a personal conversation between you and your Heavenly Father. In the book of Matthew chapter 6, Jesus taught His followers about prayer when he said to them:

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.” *Matthew 6:5-13*

The Bible indicates to us that prayer is not a form of outward entertainment that we use in religious settings to impress others with our vast vocabulary and impressive phrases, rather, we pray because we have an earnest desire to receive GOD’s assistance in our life. From this passage we gain insight into certain things that Jesus indicates as being permissible to pray for, these include:

**\*Provision for our needs:** “Give us today the food we need”

**\*Forgiveness for our sins:** “and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.”

**\*Strength to resist and overcome temptations:** “And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.”

Furthermore, Jesus also teaches us what we can pray for in John 15:7 when He proclaims to us that, “if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” So what does it mean exactly for us to “remain in Him” and for His words to “remain in us?” To “remain in GOD” is symbolic of continuing to obey His commands so that we live according to His will for our life. His words “remaining in us” is symbolic of us basing our thoughts, our words, our emotions, our attitudes, and our actions on His teachings and His wisdom that is found in the Bible. Jesus will fulfill His promise to grant us whatever we wish only when we “remain in Him,” and continue to allow His words to “remain in us.” You can ask for whatever you wish at anytime, but only when you are obedient to GOD’s teachings and allow His word to remain in you will you receive what you have asked for.

Having GOD’s word in you also makes you aware of His promises to you concerning the circumstances and the situations that you will face in life. Knowing these promises also provides you with insight into what GOD desires for you to ask Him for. These include:

**\*Healing:** “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” *1 Peter 2:24*

**\*Deliverance:** “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all” *Psalms 34:19*

**\*Your Desires:** “Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.” *Psalms 37:4*

**\*Strength:** “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They

will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” *Isaiah 40:29-31*

**\*Prosperity & Success:** “Study this Book of Instruction (GOD’s commands) continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.” *Joshua 1:8*

**\*Grace & Favor:** “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” *Psalms 84:11*

**\*Wisdom:** “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” *James 1:5*

**\*Protection:** “For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection....If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.” *Psalms 91:3-4, 9-11.*

By studying the word of GOD and allowing it to remain in you by continually reminding yourself of what you have read, you will discover GOD’s promises to you which you can pray for GOD to fulfill in your life.

### **HOW DOES PRAYER HELP US IN OUR PERSONAL LIFE?**

I want to share with you a few benefits that we experience as Christians as a result of prayer.

#### ***Prayer Allows You To Be Free From Anxiety***

*Those who do not believe do not pray. This is a good functional definition of faith. Faith prays, unbelief does not. -John A. Hardon*

The Bible addresses this aspect of prayer in many areas. The scripture that I want to concentrate on is Philippians 4:5-7 which states:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” *Philippians 4:5-7*

Prayer is our lifeline to GOD which helps us move from a situation that we are struggling in, into a place of comfort, of security, and of peace. With that in mind, the Apostle Paul proclaims, “do not be anxious about anything, but to present our requests to GOD.” To be anxious about something means to become nervous about it, worried, concerned, uneasy, restless, and fearful. As a child of GOD, we no longer have to experience these negative emotions because once we cast our lifeline to our Heavenly Father through prayer, we can have comfort, security, and peace because we know that GOD is on the other end of our prayer (our lifeline), and we are confident that He is able and willing to help pull us out of our troubling situation.

What is there to be anxious or nervous about after you’ve prayed to GOD and asked him for finances to meet your needs? What is there to be anxious or worried about after you’ve prayed to GOD and asked him to heal you from your illness? What is there to be anxious or uneasy about after you’ve prayed for GOD

to deliver you out of a difficult situation? What is there to be anxious or fearful about after you've prayed for GOD to help you overcome the adversity and the challenges that you are currently facing? The answer to all of these questions is "nothing at all." **Your anxiety ends where your faith in GOD begins.** Choose today to believe and be confident in GOD's ability and willingness to respond to your prayers, and you will never again have to suffer from the negative effects of anxiety or worry. Amen!!!

***Prayer Provides Us With GOD's Peace***

*Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life - Jonathan Edwards*

Whenever we cast our lifeline by praying to GOD about our difficulties and our tough times, He gives us something in return that is extremely valuable. This scripture states in Philippians 4:5-7 that when we present our requests to GOD, He gives us His peace, which guards our heart and our minds. So as we pray about our circumstances, GOD gives us peace in exchange for our anxiety and fear. The peace that GOD gives to us comes from us knowing that He has heard our requests, and from having confidence that He will answer our prayers. Anxiety, nervousness, worry, apprehension, and fear can never again ruin your ability to enjoy the life that GOD has given you once you have the peace of GOD, which comes from having confidence that GOD will answer your prayer requests.

Having the peace of GOD is extremely important, and it is very beneficial to us because it guards our heart and mind from the feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry that disturb the peace in our heart and mind that GOD has given us. If you ever begin to become worried or afraid about something after you've already prayed about it, pause for a moment, and then begin to remind yourself that GOD has answered your prayer and will resolve your problems, and then continue to live your life in peace with confidence that GOD will provide you with the assistance that you need.

**GOD ENCOURAGES US TO MAKE REQUESTS THROUGH PRAYER**

*Wishing will never be a substitute for prayer -Ed Cole*

Jesus provided us with some very comforting news concerning why we should be confident in knowing that our prayers will be answered by our Heavenly Father. Here are some of the statements that Jesus made concerning the level of certainty that we should have that our prayers will be answered by GOD:

\*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. *Matthew 21:22*

\*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. *John 15:7*

\*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. *Mark 11:24*

\*So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. *Luke 11:8-10*

\*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. *John 14:12-14*

From these scriptures, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that if what we ask for does not contradict Jesus' teachings, and if what we ask for will bring glory to our Heavenly Father, that we will receive what we ask for in prayer. If you really believed that your next prayer would definitely be answered, what would you ask for from GOD? The only thing that is preventing you from receiving it in your life is the fact that you haven't asked for it yet through prayer.

### **PRAYER PRODUCES A TESTIMONY IN OUR LIFE**

*One can believe intellectually in the efficacy of prayer and never do any praying. -Catherine Marshall*

How can we bring glory to GOD through our prayers? The way that we bring glory to GOD is through our personal testimony (your story and life experiences), which is when we tell others about the way that GOD helped us in our troubling circumstances and situations. Your personal testimony will then encourage other people who are going through similar circumstances to put their trust and faith in GOD as well, and as GOD helps them during their difficult times, they will desire to want to get to know GOD for themselves.

When you ask GOD to help you overcome the challenges in your life, He answers your prayer because it will bring Him glory when you give your testimony to others about the way that He has helped you in your time of despair. GOD uses our prayer requests to produce a testimony in our life so that we can reach out and share our faith with others. For example, if GOD helped you during a financial crisis in your life, you can share that testimony with someone else who is going through a financial crisis as well, and your testimony will encourage that person to want to put their faith and trust in GOD as well. Whenever we experience adversity or tough times in our personal life, we can still have peace, joy, and confidence because we know that GOD is simply using this situation to produce a testimony in our life that we can share with others.

### **THE POWER AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR PRAYERS**

*When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops studying the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy. -Corrie Ten Boom*

The book of James proclaims in chapter 5 verse 13, "is any one of you in trouble? He should pray." The reason why a person in trouble should pray is found in verse 16, which tells us that, "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." To say that something has "power," from which the word "powerful" comes from, is to say that it has the ability and the capacity to accomplish what it wants to do.

So by describing our prayers as being powerful and effective, the Bible is telling us that our prayers have the ability and the capacity to effectively accomplish and bring about what we want to see happen in our life. The reason why many people do not pray in times of trouble, or only choose to pray after they've done everything that they can think of to do themselves to fix their situation on their own, is because they do not truly believe that their prayers will produce any results for them. We often hesitate to pray when we believe that our prayers will not be effective at all in accomplishing what we need to happen. But when you know that your prayers are powerful and effective, you will begin to pray immediately when faced with trouble, and you will begin to make prayer an important priority in your personal life, which is vitally important to our spiritual growth and the process of our discipleship. For this reason, the Bible encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to, "pray without ceasing."

### **WHY DO WE PRAY "IN THE NAME OF JESUS?"**

Whenever the President of the United States attaches his name to a bill and signs it, that bill then becomes law, and by his authority that law will now be enforced. In the military, whenever a general or a

high ranking officer wanted to issue an order for the people under his command to follow, they would sign their name on the document, and because that document had their name and their signature on it, it gave the order the necessary authority to be enforced.

From these two examples we discover that when someone in a position of authority attaches their name to something, that it has to be enforced and put into effect. In the book of John chapter 16, Jesus teaches His followers in verses 23-24 that, “my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” By telling us that we can pray and ask for things from our Heavenly Father “in his name,” Jesus is letting us know that by the authority that He possesses (which is the supreme authority over everything), that He will enforce what we have asked for so that it will be put into effect in our life.

So when we pray “in Jesus’ name” for healing, Jesus will enforce and put into effect the healing that we have asked for by His authority. When we pray “in Jesus’ name” for finances and resources to meet our needs, Jesus will enforce and put into effect the provision that we need by His authority. When we pray “in Jesus’ name” for GOD’s help during times of trouble, Jesus will enforce and put into effect the deliverance and the assistance that we have asked for by His authority. I want you to know that Jesus only enforces and puts into effect those things in our life that are in accordance with GOD’s will for our life, and as you discover what GOD’s will is (abundant life, health, prosperity, wisdom, freedom from sin, peace, joy, success, etc), you can begin to pray “in Jesus’ name” for those things, and by Jesus’ authority He will enforce and put into effect what you have asked for. Amen!!!

### **WHAT CAN PREVENT OUR PRAYERS FROM BEING ANSWERED?**

There are three main obstacles that can prevent your prayers from being answered that I would like to discuss with you, these include:

\*Disobedience to GOD’s Commands

\*Unforgiveness

\*Asking With Impure Motives

#### **1. DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD’S COMMANDS**

*We must alter our lives in order to alter our hearts, for it is impossible to live one way and pray another. -William Law*

In the book of Jeremiah chapter 11, the Bible describes a situation in which GOD’s people have turned away from Him and have started to follow and worship other idols. Because of this, the Israelites were no longer continuing to live according to GOD’s commandments and His instructions. Furthermore, the Israelites even began to deliberately engage in evil and wicked behavior that they were specifically warned that they should not become involved in. As a result of their disobedience, GOD responds by telling His people that He will no longer answer their prayers because they have refused to repent and to turn away from their sins. GOD states in Jeremiah 11:13-15:

“Look now, people of Judah; you have as many gods as you have towns. You have as many altars of shame—altars for burning incense to your god Baal—as there are streets in Jerusalem. “Pray no more for these people, Jeremiah. Do not weep or pray for them, for I will not listen to them when they cry out to me in

distress. “What right do my beloved people have to come to my Temple, when they have done so many immoral things? Can their vows and sacrifices prevent their destruction? They actually rejoice in doing evil!”

This passage of scripture along with many others in the Bible informs us that our disobedience to GOD and our decision to live a sinful life prevents us from receiving from GOD what we have asked for through prayer. However, if you choose to repent for your sins; if you choose to ask GOD for forgiveness, and if you begin to live according to His teachings, then you will once again put yourself in position to receive what you have asked for through prayer. I urge you as a brother in Christ not to allow your disobedience to GOD to prevent you from receiving the help and the assistance that you need from your Heavenly Father.

## **2. BEING UNWILLING TO FORGIVE OTHERS**

In the book of Matthew 5:23-25, Jesus teaches His followers that, “if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

To be “reconciled” with someone means to end a conflict between you and another person, and it means to put your relationship with that person back on friendly term. In this passage, Jesus teaches us that before we approach GOD to offer Him something, that we should first try to be reconciled and make restitution with those who are angry and resentful towards us because of something we have done wrong to them. We are also instructed that we should attempt to be reconciled with those whom we are angry and resentful towards because of something that they have done wrong to us.

The way that we become reconciled with those who have something against us is by making restitution and by asking for forgiveness, and the way that we become reconciled with those who we have something against is by forgiving them. If we are reconciled with those whom we know, then our gifts and our prayers that we offer to GOD will be acceptable and pleasing to Him. But if we are not reconciled with those whom we know because we refuse to forgive people or to ask for forgiveness, then our gifts and our prayers that we offer to GOD will not be accepted. I urge you as a brother in Christ to not allow unforgiveness to prevent you from receiving what you have asked for through prayer.

## **3. ASKING WITH IMPURE MOTIVES**

The Bible addresses this last reason as to what can hinder us from receiving what we have asked for in prayer, and that is when we ask with impure motives. James 4:1-3 explains:

“What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.”

From this scripture we discover that if we limit our prayers to asking only for things that will give us pleasure and sensual gratification, we will not receive what we are asking for. This passage identifies that many of our prayer requests are a result of an evil desire within us. On frequent occasions we ask for things in prayer because we are greedy for material possessions, because we are jealous and envious of other people’s possessions, or because we simply want to brag and boast about the material possessions that we have asked for. Whenever we ask for something from GOD through prayer out of an impure motive, or because of an evil desire, GOD is able to recognize it because He knows our heart, and He responds by not granting us with what we have requested. I urge you as a brother in Christ to not allow jealousy, greed, or



any other impure motives to prevent you from receiving what you have asked for through prayer, but to make sure that your heart is right and free from impure motives at all times when you make your requests to GOD.

### **INTERCESSORY PRAYER**

*The Church has not yet touched the fringe of the possibilities of intercessory prayer. Her largest victories will be witnessed when individual Christians everywhere come to recognize their priesthood unto God and day by day give themselves unto prayer. -John R. Mott*

*Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons; but they are helpless against our prayers. -J. Sidlow Baxter*

*Rich is the person who has a praying friend. -Janice Hughes*

The Bible teaches us to not only pray for ourselves, but to pray for others as well. This is what we call “intercessory prayer.” Intercessory prayer is the act of praying to GOD on behalf of other people, regardless of whether they know GOD for themselves or not. The Bible provides us with instructions in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 1-4 concerning intercessory prayer when it states:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

There are specific people whom the Bible identifies that we should intercede for, these include:

#### ***Praying For Those In Authority***

*Notice, we never pray for folks we gossip about, and we never gossip about the folk for whom we pray! For prayer is a great deterrent. -Leonard Ravenhill*

Praying for others opens up the opportunity for GOD to have a direct impact in their life, so that He can draw that person into a closer connection with Him. We are specifically taught in this passage to pray for those in positions of authority, such as the leaders in our government, in our states, in our communities, in our education systems, in our military, and on our jobs so that GOD can give them the wisdom to make the right choices. As a result, we as GOD’s children reap the benefit of being governed and led by individuals who are applying GOD’s wisdom and following His direction when making important decisions. Nowhere does the Bible instruct us to criticize or to ridicule those that are in authority over us, rather, we as Christians have a responsibility to pray for the well-being of our leaders, and for GOD to grant them wisdom and good judgment as they make their decisions.

#### ***Praying For Our Enemies***

*God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede. - Oswald Chambers*

*There is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him. -William Law*

Not only does the Bible instruct us to pray for those in authority, but we are also specifically instructed to pray for our enemies; which includes those who have mistreated us, offended us, and who have caused us harm. A few examples of these instructions are found in the following scriptures:

\*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. *Luke 6:27-29*

\*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. *Matthew 5:43*

\* Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. *Romans 12:14*

\*Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. *1 Peter 3:9*

In our present-day society, it is very common to find people taking revenge on those that have caused them some type of pain, and we have become accustomed to seeing people settling scores by paying back others for the things that they have done. However, this is not the example that the Bible teaches us to follow. Instead, The Bible instructs us to pray for our enemies; to pray for those who have mistreated us, to pray for those who have persecuted us, and to bless them as well.

Notice that we as Christians are never instructed to pray for bad things to happen to someone, or to pray for their ruin, their downfall, or even for them to die, rather, GOD wants us to demonstrate His unconditional love by extending it to others, including our enemies. It is through our extension of His love, and through our prayers for the blessings of our enemies, that GOD is able to truly touch their heart and begin to pull those people closer to Him. When you begin to pray for the blessings and the well-being of those who have hurt you or upset you, it helps you to overcome the anger that you may have by replacing your bitterness with GOD's kindness. As a result of praying for our enemies to be blessed by GOD, GOD in turn blesses us for our obedience to His word. I urge you as a brother in Christ not to take revenge on others that have hurt you, offended you, or harmed you in any way, but to instead begin to lift them up in prayer, and by doing this, you will inherit a blessing from GOD as well.

### **PRAYER HELPS US OVERCOME TEMPTATIONS**

*A lot of kneeling will keep you in good standing – Author Unknown*

Jesus gives us another important reason as to why we should pray, and that is found in the book of Mark chapter 14 verse 38 when He told His followers to, “watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” The reason that Jesus is instructing His followers in this scripture to watch and to pray is because Jesus knew the challenges and the temptations that they were about to face. Jesus told them to pray so that they could be spiritually prepared to overcome the temptations that they were about to encounter. Because we as GOD's children face numerous temptations on a daily basis which Satan uses to influence us to commit sin, we should constantly be in prayer so that we can draw from GOD's strength in order to resist them.

If we are not connected with GOD through prayer, than the likelihood of us giving into these temptations is very high. However, when we are actively connected with GOD through prayer, and by spending time with Him by studying His Word, we can overcome these temptations because of the wisdom and the strength that He gives us to resist them. When you are connected to GOD through prayer, it enables you to remain focused on His purpose for your life, so when Satan uses temptations to distract you and to influence you to go off course, he is unsuccessful. Your ability to overcome temptation is dependent upon your commitment to prayer. Because prayer enables us to be spiritually prepared to overcome temptation, it is a vitally important aspect of our spiritual growth, and it should be given a high priority in our personal life.

## **HOW DOES PRAYER HELP US TO ACCOMPLISH OUR GOALS AND DREAMS?**

*It is for us to pray not for tasks equal to our powers, but for powers equal to our tasks, to go forward with a great desire forever beating at the door of our hearts as we travel toward our distant goal. - Helen Keller*

*I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it. - John Wesley*

The Bible informs us in Ephesians 2:10 that, “we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” In order to complete those good works that GOD has created us to do, and to accomplish our goals and dreams, it is going to take resources, skills, money, wisdom, help from others, and divine assistance from GOD himself. 2 Corinthians 9:8 informs us that, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” GOD is able to provide the resources, the skills, the money, the wisdom, the help, and the assistance that we need in order to fulfill and complete the goals, the dreams, and the visions that GOD has placed on our hearts for us to accomplish and achieve. However, in order to obtain these things we must constantly and consistently be in prayer.

If we choose not to pray while pursuing our goals and dreams, we do not allow GOD the opportunity to get involved in the process and provide His assistance. As a result, we are left alone to our own abilities, skills, and logic to solve the problems that we encounter, and to overcome the obstacles that we face. This is why many people fail and do not successfully accomplish their goals and dreams. On the other hand, when we spend time in prayer while we are pursuing our goals and dreams, we allow GOD the opportunity to release His resources, His favor, His wisdom, and His divine assistance into our life. I want to encourage you not to allow your refusal to pray to prohibit you from accomplishing your goals and dreams, but to instead make sure that you devote time to prayer so that you can receive GOD's assistance which will enable you to be successful.

## **THE BENEFITS OF PRAYING EARLY IN THE MORNING**

While there is not specific time during the day that we are required to pray, I've found that praying first thing in the morning is particularly beneficial to us as believers. Jesus himself would get up early in the morning to set-aside time which was specifically dedicated to prayer. The book of Mark chapter 1 verse 35 tells us that, “very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”

When we wake up early in the morning to pray, it provides us with an excellent opportunity to spend time with GOD and to communicate and fellowship with Him while being free from the things that can distract us. As individuals, some of us have very busy lives. We juggle family, careers, education, and other responsibilities all throughout the course of the day. Because we have so many things on our plate at one time, we often neglect what should be most important, which is spending time with our Heavenly Father.

By waking up early in the morning before you go to work; before the kids wake up, before your classes start, and before any other responsibility requires your attention, this time that you spend with your Heavenly Father will allow Him to pour His spirit, His love, His wisdom, His peace, and His joy into your life before you start your day. It allows you the opportunity to cast any burdens or concerns that you may be carrying onto Him so that you do not have to carry them throughout the day, and it puts you into a position where you can obtain His guidance and His direction for the course of your life. Jesus had a very powerful and effective ministry while He was here on Earth, yet He recognized the necessity of spending quality time with His Heavenly Father in prayer. I urge you as a brother in Christ not to neglect what is absolutely necessary in the process of your spiritual growth, which is spending time alone with GOD in prayer.

### **HOW PRAYER HELPED THOSE IN THE BIBLE**

*“Those who know God the best are the richest and most powerful in prayer. Little acquaintance with God, and strangeness and coldness to Him, make prayer a rare and feeble thing.” -E. M. Bounds*

Many effective and successful people in the Bible knew how to use this lifeline of prayer, and it benefited them tremendously. Abraham and his wife prayed for a child after being childless for many years, and as a result she became pregnant with Isaac. Moses prayed for the people of Israel for GOD to have mercy on them, and He did. Solomon prayer for wisdom, and the Lord not only made him an extremely wise man, but he also blessed him with incredible wealth.

Hezekiah prayed for an extension of his life after receiving news that he would soon die, and GOD added 15 additional years to his life. Nehemiah prayed for favor in the sight of his king, and he was able to receive from the king exactly what he asked for. Jonah prayed while he was trapped within a big fish, and the Lord granted him his freedom. Finally, Paul and Silas prayed while they were being kept in prison, and GOD shook the foundations of the prison to set them free. GOD has demonstrated His ability to answer prayers in the past, so that you can put your trust and confidence in Him to answer your prayer requests in the future.

### **CONCLUSION**

*It is necessary to rouse the heart to pray, otherwise it will become quite dry. The attributes of prayer must be: love of God, sincerity, and simplicity. -John of Kronstadt*

Prayer maintains our connection with our Heavenly Father, and it is our lifeline to Him which pulls us out of our troubling situation, into a position of comfort, security, and well-being. Whenever we go to GOD in prayer about our concerns and our problems, He gives us His peace in exchange for our nervousness, our fear, and our anxiety. We can have confidence that our prayers will be answered because we know that our prayers are powerful and effective. Praying for others is also important as well, as it allows GOD to make an impact in their lives and to draw them closer to Him.

Through prayer we receive the wisdom and the strength that we need to resist the temptations that are presented to us by Satan. Furthermore, devoting time to prayer will enable GOD to help us successfully achieve our goals and dreams. By making prayer a priority in your personal life, you will begin to experience a tremendous amount of spiritual growth, enabling you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you fulfill GOD's purpose for your life. Amen!!!

## **GRACE 101**

Imagine what your life would be like without GOD's grace? Imagine knowing that there is no possibility for you to recover and overcome any sickness or disease that you encounter. Imagine how discouraging that would be. Imagine a life in which no matter how hard you worked, that your efforts, your time, your sweat, and your labor would be unsuccessful and unfruitful. Imagine how frustrating that would be. Imagine being overwhelmed by life's problems and challenges on a consistent basis. Imagine how worrisome that would be. Imagine not having a source of peace or joy, and instead experiencing nothing but chaos and fear. Imagine how afraid you would be. Imagine what your life would have been like if you had not encountered the love of GOD and you continued to live a sin-filled life that would lead to your destruction, your downfall, and your ruin. Imagine the shame, the embarrassment, and the disgrace you would reap from the sin that you would be involved in. Imagine knowing that when you pass away from this life, that you will spend eternity in a place where you will be eternally tormented and tortured. Imagine the anxiety that you would have knowing that there was no way to escape this inevitable end.

With all this in mind, you can be thankful that you do not have to experience any of these negative situations that you've just imagined because of GOD's grace. There is a popular song that we like to sing in church called "Amazing Grace," but many people sing that song not actually realizing what grace is, nor do they understand what's so amazing about it. The purpose of this chapter is to give you insight into what grace is, how it affects us, how we benefit from it, and how it is an important aspect of our spiritual growth and development. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS GRACE?**

*I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. -  
Anne Lamott*

Grace is defined as the infinite love, mercy, favor, protection, blessings, and goodwill shown to us by God that has been given to us for free, without us being able to do anything to deserve it or earn it. It is because of GOD's grace towards us that He continues to love us unconditionally despite our faults, flaws, and mistakes. It is because of GOD's grace that we receive mercy and forgiveness for our sins. It is through GOD's grace that we receive His favor and His acts of kindness and generosity towards us. It is because of GOD's grace that we receive protection in the midst of trials and danger. It is through GOD's grace that we receive blessings and gifts from our Heavenly Father. Aren't you glad that GOD is gracious towards us?

### **HOW DO WE OBTAIN GRACE FROM GOD?**

*Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too.*

When I was a young child and I wanted things from my parents, I would be on my best behavior and do everything I knew that I should be doing. I would behave exactly how they wanted me to behave in order to persuade them to give me what I asked for. I would clean up around the house; I would start paying attention in class to get good grades, and I would even be kind to my little sister who constantly got on my nerves. Sometimes this change in behavior worked, sometimes it didn't. I've noticed that often times we mistakenly carry this same type of mindset of believing that if we do enough good things and be on our best behavior, GOD will bless us, give us His grace, and offer us eternal life. But this is not how we obtain GOD's grace.

Ephesians chapter 2:8 informs us that grace is, "a gift from GOD." As with any gift that is given to you, the only thing that you have to do in order to obtain the gift is to receive it. GOD's grace is available to anyone who is willing to accept and receive the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as atonement and

payment for their sins. However, instead of receiving grace as a gift, we sometimes fall into the belief that we have to earn GOD's blessings and salvation by being on our best behavior and doing enough good things to deserve it.

The Apostle Paul passionately taught about this subject, and many of his teachings were directed toward clarifying that grace, righteousness, and salvation are all gifts from GOD, not something that can be earned by human effort. In Galatians 2:21, Paul writes, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we no longer had to perfectly follow and abide by GOD's law without making any mistakes in order to obtain right standing with GOD, and to receive His favor and His blessings. None of us are capable of following GOD's law completely without ever stumbling at some point. Our inability to completely follow GOD's law disqualified us from being able to receive eternal life, and it caused a separation in our relationship with Him. However, through the death of Jesus Christ, we now have access to eternal life, and we now have a repaired relationship with GOD by the grace that He has given to us despite our inability to completely follow His law.

Yet despite this gift of grace that was given to us through Jesus Christ, many people still are attempting to earn grace and salvation by working to obtain it instead of simply asking for it and receiving it. When you feel that you have to live life mistake-free in order to receive GOD's grace, it causes you to feel extremely guilty and discouraged whenever you commit a sin. Afterwards, feelings of condemnation will begin to set in and you will gradually find yourself losing your peace and joy. This is not the type of lifestyle that GOD created you to live, rather, He intended for you to simply receive His grace instead of feeling that you had to do enough good things to obtain it.

During His prayer to GOD, the prophet Jonah states that, "those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." GOD's grace is available to those who have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as atonement and payment for their sins, yet if you refuse to accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross because of your unbelief, you will forfeit and be deprived of the grace, the love, the favor, the blessings, the mercy, and the eternal life that could be yours. I pray that you do not forfeit and reject GOD's grace by rejecting Jesus Christ, but that you instead accept the gift of grace that GOD is offering to you.

### **HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE? HOW DOES GOD'S GRACE BENEFIT US?**

We experience GOD's grace in numerous ways, and the grace that He gives to us benefits us tremendously. Here are a few ways that we experience the grace of GOD, and how GOD's grace benefits us:

#### ***Forgiveness For Our Sins***

Hebrews 4:15-16 informs us that, "we do not have a high priest (Jesus Christ) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." This passage lets us know that Jesus understands the challenges that we face; the temptations that we are presented with, and the struggles that we experience, and He sympathizes with us as humans. In other words, Jesus is able and willing to extend mercy and compassion towards us because He can relate to the struggles that we have when it comes to resisting temptation. Because Jesus is able to relate to us in this way, He readily offers mercy and grace whenever we ask for our sins to be forgiven.

The 16<sup>th</sup> verse in Hebrews chapter 4 proclaims that we can approach GOD through prayer boldly and with confidence without fear of being rejected, punished, or disowned whenever we ask for forgiveness,

which is often what prevents us from asking for forgiveness from GOD in the first place. I remember growing up that I would often hesitate when it came to confessing a mistake that I made to my parents because I was afraid of the punishment that I would receive in return. Most of us carry this same mindset when it comes to confessing our mistakes to GOD, so instead of boldly asking for forgiveness immediately after making a mistake, we become hesitant and instead choose to separate ourselves from GOD because we feel guilty for the sins that we have committed. However, GOD wants you to boldly ask for forgiveness immediately after you make a mistake, so that you can immediately be reconciled back into a close relationship with Him and continue to move forward towards fulfilling His purpose for your life.

As an act of forgiving our sins whenever we ask Him for forgiveness, not only does GOD restore our relationship with Him, but He also forgets the sin that we have committed by casting it away from His memory. While describing the new covenant and the new agreement between GOD and mankind, GOD proclaims in Jeremiah 31:34, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." By forgiving our sins, GOD no longer holds them against us, nor does He remember them. Just think about this....every mistake and every sin you have ever committed is erased from GOD's memory once you ask Him to forgive you for it!

Our Heavenly Father chooses to offer us His love and His grace whenever we make mistakes rather than punishing us and condemning us. For this reason, I want to encourage you to boldly ask GOD for forgiveness immediately after you make a mistake or fall into sin, so that you can immediately be reconciled to Him and once again experience His love, His joy, His peace, and His grace. Ephesians 1:7 assures us that, "in him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." One of the ways that we experience GOD's grace is by receiving forgiveness for our sins whenever we ask for it.

### ***Provision For What We Need To Accomplish Our Dreams And Achieve Our Goals***

The Bible informs us in Ephesians 2:10 that, "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." In order to complete those good works that GOD has created us to do, it is going to take resources, skills, money, wisdom, help from others, and divine assistance from GOD himself. For this reason, 2 Corinthians 9:8 informs us that, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

Through GOD's grace we receive the resources; the skills, the finances, the wisdom, the help, and the assistance that we need in order to accomplish the goals, the dreams, and the visions that GOD has placed on our hearts for us to achieve. Often times when GOD gives us an idea, a plan, or a dream, we immediately begin to hesitate because we first look at what it is going to take in order to accomplish it. It is during this time that our enemy, Satan, will begin to flood our minds with negative thoughts that cause fear and worry, such as; "you are not good enough to do something," "you are not going to have the resources you need to finish it," etc.

However, when you know that GOD's grace is with you, it erases that fear of failure that will stop you from moving forward, and it enables you to pursue those ideas, those plans, and the goals that GOD has given to you to accomplish. So why aren't you pursuing your goals, your dreams, and your passion now that you know that GOD's grace is with you? GO FOR IT!!! We as Christians experience the grace of GOD by receiving what we need to achieve the goals and dreams that GOD has placed on our heart for us to accomplish.

### *Deliverance And Victory*

1 Peter 5: 8-10 cautions us to, “be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” I want you to know that being a child of GOD does not exempt you or prevent you from going through painful experiences in your life. King David experienced a painful experience when he temporarily lost his kingdom; Paul experienced a painful situation by being imprisoned and threatened, and Jesus experienced an even more painful situation by being beaten and nailed to a cross. However, one of the benefits of GOD’s grace is that after we’ve suffered a little while as a result of our painful experiences, GOD himself will deliver us from our troubles by restoring us, and by making us strong once again.

Our Heavenly Father uses the painful experiences in our life to increase our level of faith in Him, and to develop perseverance and endurance within us. Through the grace of GOD we are able to come out victorious over the trials that we go through in which we have had to endure hardship and adversity for certain periods of time. David attested to this truth when he wrote in Psalms 30:5 that, “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning,” and in Psalms 71:20 that, “you have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth.” GOD’s grace assures us that no painful experience will last forever, and that we as Christians will at one point triumphantly overcome every negative or troubling situation that we face. This is why the Bible describes us as, “more than conquerors through GOD” in Romans chapter 8 verse 37. Another way that we experience the grace of GOD is by being delivered from the troubles and the adversity that we face.

### *An Abundant Life That Is Rich And Satisfying*

Jesus tells us plainly in John 10:10 that, “He has come to give us life, and that life that He has come to give us is a life of abundance (a rich and satisfying life).” An abundant life consists of a life that overflows with blessings and goodness; a life that is full of activity and achievement, and a life which lacks no good thing. The abundant life that we have been given is about *quality*, not necessarily about *quantity*. This life consists of a life-long process of learning, practicing, growing, developing, and striving. Put another way, we experience the rich and satisfying life that Jesus has given us through His grace by maintaining a close relationship with our Heavenly Father, and by applying His wisdom and His teachings into our lives. For instance, we experience a rich and satisfying life when we:

- \*are able to enjoy and experience quality relationships and marriages by exhibiting unconditional love
- \*experience joy & peace because GOD provides for us, supports us, and delivers us in tough times
- \*use our gifts and talents to successfully accomplish our GOD-given goals, dreams, and visions
- \*are able to let go of feelings of anger, resentment, and bitterness towards other people by forgiving them
- \*are able to grow spiritually by possessing the characteristics of love, compassion, patience, & self-control
- \*are able to avoid living a sinful and foolish lifestyle that will contribute to our ruin and our downfall
- \*are able to become content and thankful for what we have instead of being discontent over what we don’t
- \*are able to enjoy a life that is free from fear and anxiety because we have faith in GOD
- \*experience a good level of self-esteem because we are secure in the person that GOD created us to be

As Christians, we experience the grace of GOD through His abundant blessings in our life.



### ***Spiritual Gifts and Other Talents and Abilities***

Romans 12:6-8 teaches us that, “we have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” Any gift, talent, or ability that we possess has been given to us by GOD through His grace, for the purpose of building up others and advancing His kingdom.

Ephesians 4:7-13 informs us that, “to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it....It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Whether it be using our gifts of teaching, preaching, serving, administration, singing, dancing, drawing, writing, acting, producing, using technology, working with your hands, caring for others, playing musical instruments, or even using our athletic abilities, GOD has given us these abilities to use them to do something meaningful and significant to make a positive and Godly impact on those around us for the purpose of bringing praise to our Heavenly Father.

1 Peter 4:10-11 reveals to us that, “each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” The gifts and the talents that we have are GOD's gift to us through His grace, and it pleases Him when we use our gifts and talents to bring Him praise and glory. We as Christians experience the grace of GOD in our life by being blessed with gifts, talents, and abilities for the purpose of bringing praise to our Heavenly Father.

### ***Encouragement And Comfort***

In the book of 2 Thessalonians, Paul writes to his audience to encourage them to continue to live according to GOD's word. In chapter 2 verses 16-17, he writes to them stating, “now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.” As a Christian who is living for GOD and applying His teachings into their life, you will without a doubt encounter persecution, adversity, opposition, insults, and ridicule by others that can cause you to become discouraged, disheartened, and even depressed.

For this reason, GOD, through His grace, comforts us and encourages us to keep living the right way, to keep making the right choices, and to keep doing the right things. Our Heavenly Father uses many different methods to encourage us; whether it is speaking to us through a preached message, using another person to reach out to us, and sometimes even speaking to us directly through His Spirit. Through GOD's grace, we receive encouragement and comfort as we continue to mature spiritually and grow in our relationship and connection with our Heavenly Father.

### ***GOD's Power In Our Weakness***

As Paul is describing a situation in his life in which he was suffering, he writes saying that he asked GOD repeatedly to remove his suffering from him. Rather than removing the things in his life that were causing Paul to suffer, GOD responds by telling Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9 that, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." What does this scripture mean to you and me? To be

“weak,” means to be in a position where you are unable to help yourself; provide for yourself, heal yourself, and solve your own problems. In life, there are many times when certain things occur which we are unable to control or resolve on our own, which causes us to feel “weak.”

However, it is during these “weak” moments in our life when GOD demonstrates His grace and His power by helping us when we are in trouble, providing for us when we are in need, healing us when we are sick, and resolving the problems that we encounter in our life that are too tough for us to handle on our own. Being “weak” increases our dependence on GOD, and because of His grace, GOD uses these opportunities to come through for us by demonstrating His power in our life. This is why Paul went on to proclaim that “I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” So the next time you begin to feel “weak” because of something that you are going through, you can still have peace and joy because GOD will use that situation to show you His strength by applying His grace and His power in your life. Amen!!!

### **HOW IS GRACE ASSOCIATED WITH OUR SALVATION?**

The Bible teaches us in the book of Romans that, “the wages of sin is death,” and that, “all of us have fallen short of GOD’s glorious standard.” With this in mind, we all deserve to be condemned to death because of the sins that we have committed. However, through GOD’s grace, we have been offered the gift of salvation and eternal life. The following scriptures address our fallen state and the steps that GOD took because of His grace to redeem us so that we could inherit eternal life:

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.” *Titus 3: 3-8*

“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” *Ephesians 2:1-10*

These two passages of scripture explain to us that we were all headed for judgment and punishment for the many sins that we have committed, but rather than letting us continue down this path of certain death, GOD stepped in because of His grace by sending His son Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that we could be redeemed. Jesus’ death on the cross also afforded us the opportunity to be able to receive salvation and eternal life. Salvation and eternal life are only obtainable by receiving them as a gift; not by working to earn them by doing enough good things in life. Romans 3:24 explains that we, “are justified freely by his grace

through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Justification, salvation, and eternal life are all things that came to us freely because of GOD’s grace, not because of anything that we have done to deserve them.

In the book of Acts chapter 15:10-12, Paul warns people about trying to work to earn salvation when he states, “Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” The yoke that Paul is describing is the requirement to follow GOD’s laws completely, which no man can do without faltering or making a mistake at one point or the other. This is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:29 to, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” We find rest for our souls by no longer feeling as if we need to perform enough good works or live mistake free in order to enter into Heaven.

Paul was a man who truly knew about the grace of GOD. His life was a reflection of how GOD extends His grace to us as Christians. Paul was like most of us in that his past was full of sin, ignorance, and disobedience towards GOD’s teachings and instructions. Paul approved the executions of Christians, he imprisoned them, and he threatened to kill anyone who said that they were a follower of Jesus Christ. Yet instead of punishing Paul because of his sins and his transgressions, GOD extended His grace to him and called him to do something great with His life by preaching the gospel throughout Asia. Paul used His personal experience to illustrate to us just how much grace GOD has, and how patient and forgiving GOD is towards us when he writes in 1 Timothy 1:12-16:

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”

So regardless of what you have done in the past, regardless of the mistakes that you’ve made, and even despite the sin that you’ve committed, rather than punishing you for what you have done, GOD is extending His grace towards you by offering you the gift of salvation so that He can use you to fulfill His purpose for your life, just like He did with Paul. Now it is up to you whether or not you will make the decision to receive this gift of salvation. Will you do that today?

### **HOW SHOULD WE LIVE OUR LIFE BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN GRACE?**

*Grace isn't a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It's a way to live. – Jackie Windspear*

When GOD offered us His grace, He offered it to us with the intention that it would produce certain results in our life. Below are a couple of examples of results that GOD desires to see in our lives as a result of receiving His grace.

#### ***Becoming A Hard Worker For GOD***

Whenever I read Paul’s story in 1 Corinthians 15 about how he began to live his life because of the grace that was given to him by GOD, it motivates me to want to work as hard as I can to serve the Lord and live a life that is pleasing to Him. As he is describing his own life, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10 that, “I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

These are absolutely powerful words written by Paul. Paul proclaims that the grace that was given to him by GOD, which he recognized as a gift that he didn't deserve, caused him to want to work harder than others by using his gifts tirelessly, and to begin serving GOD fearlessly by preaching the gospel in spite of being threatened with persecution. There is something about knowing that your life was headed for ruin and destruction, and then realizing that GOD wants to give you a second chance to make something positive and good out of your life, that will cause you to want to work hard to make the most of this second opportunity.

Paul seized the 2<sup>nd</sup> chance opportunity that GOD was giving him through His grace by doing something meaningful with his life by serving GOD, and this is what we should do as well because GOD has given us a second chance through His grace to do something positive and meaningful with our life. Let me ask you this...are you making the most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chance opportunity that GOD has given you through His grace, or are you simply wasting your opportunity away by not actively serving GOD by using your gifts?

### ***Don't Receive His Grace In Vain***

We find a good example through studying the life of the Apostle Paul of how we should respond and live because of the grace that GOD has given to us, but there are also many other bad examples in the Bible and warnings that are given to us to encourage us not to let the grace of GOD go to waste in our life. In 2 Corinthians 6:1-3, Paul writes, "as God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain." GOD gives us His grace so that we can fulfill His purpose for our life by accomplishing the things that He wants us to accomplish, which will result in other people coming into a relationship with Him. To receive GOD's grace in vain, which Paul warns us not to do, signifies that the grace that GOD has given to us did not produce the intended or desired result in our life. What are some examples of how we can receive GOD's grace in vain?

\*We receive GOD's grace in vain by becoming complacent and lazy while working towards accomplishing the vision and the goals that GOD has given to us to accomplish.

\*We receive GOD's grace in vain when we allow ourselves to be distracted by issues, concerns, and temptations that are intended to knock us off track in life.

\*We receive GOD's grace in vain by not using our gifts and talents to do something positive and uplifting, and instead choosing to use them to promote immorality.

I pray that you do not receive the grace of GOD in vain, but that you begin to take hold of GOD's grace and produce fruit that will build up others, and advance the Kingdom of GOD.

### ***Grace Is Not A License To Commit Sin***

Not only do people receive GOD's grace in vain by not using it to fulfill GOD's purpose for their life, but some people have even used GOD's grace as a crutch, as a safety net, and as a license to continue to live a sin-filled life. Jude 1:4-5 warns us that, "some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." GOD's grace does not give us a free pass to continue to live immoral lives, and if you believe that it does, you'll be in for an unpleasant surprise when you face judgment.

For those who believed that they could continue to keep on sinning after receiving GOD's grace, Paul wrote Galatians 6:7-8 to give them the following warning; "do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction;

the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” If we engage in immoral behavior, we will suffer the consequences of our actions (whatever they may be including unplanned pregnancies, STDs, loss of finances, destroyed relationships, prison time, etc). Likewise, if we engage in good behavior, we will be rewarded by our Heavenly Father. Paul reminds us that we have been set free from sin, and that we should no longer continue to live in bondage and slavery to something that we have been set free from by the grace of GOD. Romans 6:1 proclaims, “should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?”

Romans chapter 6 verses 12-18 teaches us the relationship between grace and our sin when it states:

“Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace. Well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.”

From these scriptures we discover that even though we have been given grace by GOD, that we do not have His permission to sin freely and without care. 1 Peter 1 instructs you to, “prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” As we set our hopes fully on GOD’s grace that He has given to us now, and the grace that He will give us when He judges the world, we should begin to no longer follow the evil and sinful desires (such as lust, pride, greed, violence, and revenge) inside of us that we used to give into before we knew GOD. The grace of GOD teaches us that we should begin to live holy, and not repeatedly give into the temptations that we face.

### ***Not Becoming Prideful Or Arrogant***

In numerous occurrences throughout the Bible, we discover that, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” This scripture cautions us not to become prideful or arrogant because of the grace that GOD has given to us. We as Christians should never allow pride to cause us to begin to look down on others, or to begin to treat others as if they were inferior to us. To those of us who remain humble, modest, and respectful towards others, GOD bestows His grace to us by forgiving our sins, providing for our needs, offering His protection, and by delivering us from our troubles. I urge you as a brother in Christ to live a life of humility that is free from self-centered pride, and by doing so you will be able to continually experience the grace of GOD in your personal life.

### ***Graceful Speech***

The Bible teaches us in Colossians 4:6 to, “let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Often times in our conversations with other people we gossip or use words that are disrespectful, rude, harsh, and even full of hate. However as Christians, our words and our conversations should reflect the grace of GOD, meaning that our conversations should be full of love, mercy, favor, blessings, and goodwill towards those that we are speaking to in order to build them up and to support them. I want to encourage you to begin to monitor the words that you speak to

ensure that they carry the characteristics of grace (love, good-will, compassion) towards the person that you are speaking to.

### ***Grace In Generosity***

2 Corinthians 8:7 reminds us to, “see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” Giving generously to those who are in need, regardless if they have done anything to deserve it or not, is an excellent opportunity for us to share the grace, the love, the mercy, the favor, the blessings, and the goodwill of GOD towards others, which will bring praise and glory to His name. Any act of generosity is simply an act of GOD’s grace being transferred through us to another individual. Therefore, we should continually be generous to those who are in need, and by doing so, we are spreading the grace of GOD to those who are in need of it.

Because we now receive GOD’s grace, we should begin to work hard using our gifts and talents serving GOD, and not letting them go to waste. We should begin to live holy lives that are free from immorality and sinful acts, while being careful not to demonstrate a prideful or arrogant attitude towards others because of our relationship with GOD. We should also begin to speak gracefully to others reflecting the love and the grace that GOD has given to us, while also being gracious in our generosity to those who are in need. This is how we as Christians should begin to live now that we have received the grace of GOD in our life.

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that you found the information on this chapter to be useful, and that you begin to live your life knowing how GOD’s grace affects you, and how you should respond and live your life because it has been given to you freely. By applying this information in your personal life, you will continue to mature spiritually, accomplish your goals and dreams, and grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father, enabling you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship. Amen!!!

## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE 101

*We come to love not by finding a perfect person, but by learning to see an imperfect person perfectly. -Anonymous*

A famous singer named Tina Turner had a hit song in the 1980s titled "What's love got to do with it?" In this song, she expresses her frustration with love, and even begins to discount its value and worth by dismissing it as simply "a second hand emotion." In the society and the culture that we live in now, the worth and the value of love is still being dismissed and discounted today, and we have even begun to abandon love altogether while replacing it with hate, anger, and hostility towards one another.

We as Christians are commanded by GOD to love each other, and it is this love that is an extremely important aspect of our spiritual growth and maturity. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question of "what's love got to do with it?" in regards to our discipleship as followers of Christ. We will also discover what love truly is; the way that GOD expresses His love to us, how we should express our love to Him, and how we should express love to others. My prayer is that with this chapter will provide you with a new understanding of what love truly is, and that you will begin to apply it in your everyday life. Enjoy!!!

### What Is Love?

#### What Is The Type Of Love That GOD Has Towards Us?

#### What Is The Type Of Love That GOD Wants Us To Have Towards Others?

*I have often heard, "I love God but just don't like His people." This may sound glib, but as John explained, this is a basic deception as we do not really love God unless we also love His people. The Scriptures also go to great lengths to explain that love is not to be based on whether people are lovable or not. --Rick Joyner*

In order to discover what Godly love truly is, we must look into the Greek definition of the word "love." There are four different words for love in the Greek language, the first three are:

**Philia love**-A friendship, companionship, comradeship type of love between close friends that aren't related by blood...

**Storge love**- A family oriented type of love that we have for those people that we are related to...

**Eros love**- An erotic type of love that is superficial, which is only based on physical attraction alone (I want to warn you never to marry someone based only on this type of love)...

The final form of love is the type of love that GOD has towards us, which He desires for us to express towards others. This type of love is called "Agape" love.

**Agape love**- A type of love that is unconditional and not based on the treatment received from the other person. This love sees past the faults, the flaws, and the mistakes of others to continually love them. It is the type of love that is continually expressed based upon a person's determination to love others regardless of how they feel emotionally. This love enables us to readily forgive others, and it keeps no record of wrongs.

If you have ever wondered why or how GOD could still love you even after you've made so many mistakes in your life, the reason is because He loves you with an agape type of love which sees past your faults, your flaws, and your mistakes, and still loves you for who you are. The agape type of love is the love that our Heavenly Father has for us, and it is also the love that He desires for us to have towards others.

1 Corinthians 13 verses 4-7 describe agape love by stating that, "love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never

gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”

Are you patient with the people that you know, or do you become easily irritated, annoyed, and upset with those around you because of their actions? Are you kind to the people that you come into contact with, or are you mean, spiteful, and harsh towards certain people that you dislike? Do you become jealous or envious of other people because of their success or their wealth? Are you arrogant and prideful to the point where you look down on people or choose not to associate with them because of their lack of money and possessions, or because they come from a different social background or culture that you feel is inferior to yours? Finally, are you carrying any grudges by holding on to the actions and the words of others that have hurt you, offended you, or disappointed you?

If you can answer "yes" to any of these questions, that means that you have a lot of room to grow when it comes to loving people the way that GOD desires for us to love them. In order to love someone with the agape form of love, we cannot base our love for another person on what they can do for us, what they have done for us, their social status, how they look, how they treat us in return, or how we feel at that given moment. As we grow and mature as Christians, this is the type of love that GOD wants us to develop and apply in our life.

### **HOW DO WE DEVELOP AGAPE LOVE IN OUR HEART?**

*Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love him.* - C. S. Lewis

Have you ever tried to love someone the agape way before? It probably only lasted a short amount of time. The reason this happens is because we simply cannot love people the way that GOD wants us to love them without His help. It's impossible, and it is too hard for us to maintain for a long period of time on our own. So how do we obtain and develop the agape type of love? Here's how:

The Bible informs us in Galatians chapter 5 verse 22-23 that, “The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: (agape) love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” In order to love people with the agape type of love that is unconditional; that is kind, patient, forgiving, and not self-seeking, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit which we receive when we accept the gift of salvation by placing our trust and our faith in Jesus Christ. When we begin to spend time with our Heavenly Father through prayer and through reading His word and applying it in our life, the Holy Spirit begins to work in our heart to give us the very qualities, characteristics, and nature of GOD. 2 Timothy 1:7 tells us that, "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline."

As we continue to establish a deeper relationship and stronger connection with our Heavenly Father by spending time with Him in prayer and through reading His word, we begin to take on His nature which allows us to be able to love people unconditionally by being patient with them, by forgiving them, and by being kind towards them. So if you are having problems loving people with an agape love, I would like to encourage you to begin spending more time with your Heavenly Father through prayer and through reading His word so that you can begin to develop His nature and characteristics.

### **HOW HAS GOD EXPRESSED HIS LOVE TOWARDS US?**

*To say that God loves me is a familiar notion indeed, but to pursue, know and experience His love is a rare preoccupation.* - Dana Candler

### ***GOD Expressed His Love to Us Through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ***



In what ways does GOD express His love towards us as His children? The book of John chapter 15 verse 13 explains to us that the greatest way to show someone how much you truly love them is to lay down your life so that they can live, and this is exactly how our Heavenly Father chose to express His love to us. GOD has shown us the greatest extent of love possible by sending His son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and lay down His life so that our relationship with GOD could be restored, and so that our sins could be forgiven.

Rather than just telling us how much He loved us, GOD showed us how much He loved us through His actions (because actions always speak louder than words). Here are some Biblical scriptures that address how much GOD loves us by sending Jesus Christ to die for our sins in order to express the extent of the love that He has for us:

\*For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. *John 3:16*

\*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. *Titus 3:3-7*

\*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. *1 John 4:9-10*

\*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. *Romans 5:8*

### ***GOD Expresses His Love to Us Through Showing Us Compassion***

As of right now, I have three young children whom I love tremendously. Whenever I hear or see my children crying for something, I try to do whatever I can to help them. The way that I express my love towards my children is by being compassionate towards their need for my help. If I did not love my children, their cries for help would not affect me, and I would continue to let them suffer or go without what they need at that time. Yet because I love my children, I am compassionate towards them when they cry out to me. Likewise, our Heavenly Father expresses His love towards us by being compassionate towards us whenever we need Him. Here are some scriptures that address how GOD expresses His love towards us through His compassion:

\*The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. The wind blows, and we are gone as though we had never been here. But the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children's children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments! *Psalms 103:8-18*

\*Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." *Lamentations 3:21-23*

\*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. *Psalms 145:18-20*

### ***GOD Expresses His Love to Us Through Discipline***

Because of the enormous amount of love that I have for my children, one of my deepest desires is to see them become the person that GOD has called them to be; to reach their full potential, and to see them become successful and productive in life. Because I am their father and because I love them tremendously, I will discipline them, correct them, and rebuke them when they do something wrong in order to ensure that they stay on the right path (I know that it may not seem like love to them when they are being disciplined, but if they only knew that I was doing for their sake, they would appreciate it).

If I did not love my children, I would not care what they did or how they lived, and I most certainly would not discipline them when they were wrong. However, because I do love my children, I discipline them so that they do not go off track. GOD, who is our Heavenly Father, also shows His love for us by disciplining us when we are wrong in order to prevent us from staying on the wrong path that will lead to our destruction and our downfall. The following scriptures describe how GOD demonstrates His love for us by disciplining us:

\*And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" *Hebrews 12:5-7*

\*My child, don't reject the Lord's discipline, and don't be upset when he corrects you. For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights. *Proverbs 3:11-13*

\*Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them. *Proverbs 13:24*

### ***GOD Expresses His Love By Responding To Our Requests, Wishes, and Prayers***

If I have the means to provide it to them, whenever my children ask me for something (like for example, a new toy), I will try to buy it for them because I love them, and my love for them causes me to want to give them gifts and other good things. If I did not love my kids, I would withhold my resources (money) from them and neglect their desires and wishes altogether. Yet because I love my children, I try to express my love to them by responding to their requests, their wishes, and their desires.

Similarly, our Heavenly Father grants our requests, our wishes, and our desires when we ask Him because He loves us as well. Because GOD has great riches and wealth, He always has the means to provide for us. As long as we are not asking for things with impure motives (greed, competition, etc), and as long as what we are asking for is in His will for us to have, then He will give it to us at the appropriate time that He wants us to have it. Here are some scriptures that address how GOD expresses His love to us by granting our requests, our wishes, and our desires that we ask for through prayer:

\*Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You parents, if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him? *Matthew 7:7-11*

\*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? *Romans 8:32*

\*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. *John 15:7-8*

### ***GOD Expresses His Love Towards Us by Protecting us, Providing for Us, and by Helping Us***

As a father to my young children, it is my responsibility to protect them, provide for them, and to help them when they encounter challenges or problems that are too big for them to handle on their own. This is another way that I show my love to my children. So too, our Heavenly Father protects us, provides for us, and helps us whenever we encounter challenges and problems that are too big for us to handle on our own (Isn't it great having a Heavenly Father?). The following scriptures address how GOD expresses His love to us by protecting us, providing for us, and helping us in our time of need:

\*"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. *Psalms 91:14-15*

\*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever. *Psalms 23:1-6*

\*I look up to the mountains, does my help come from there? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth! He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps. The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever. *Psalms 121:1-4*

### ***GOD Expresses His Love Towards Us By Continuing To Love Us During Hard Times***

One way to truly measure whether or not someone loves you is if they stick by you and continue to love you during the difficult times in your life. When we get married, we promise to remain with our spouse "for better or for worse." Unfortunately, when the "for worse" times appear, many marriages end in divorce because there is a lack of true love. However, our Heavenly Father expresses His love towards us by showing us His love during the hard times, through the difficulties, and through the challenges that we face by helping us get through them. The Apostle Paul wrote about the way that GOD shows us His love during these difficult times in Romans 8:35-39 when he states:

"Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow, not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below? Indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Romans 8:35-39*

So how does GOD express His love towards us? GOD has expressed His love towards us by:

- Sending His son Jesus Christ to lay down His life and die for our sins so that our relationship with Him could be restored, and so that we can experience eternal life as supposed to being condemned...
- Being compassionate towards us when we cry out and pray to Him...
- Disciplining us to keep us on the right path in life...
- Granting our requests, our wishes, and our desires when we pray...
- Protecting us, providing for us, by helping us in our times of distress, and by....
- Helping us to overcome the difficulties that we face in life.

*ISN'T GOD'S LOVE GREAT?*

### **HOW DO WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE TO GOD?**

When my wife and I were newlyweds, I would try to express my love to her by giving her gifts and by complimenting her with sweet words. While she appreciated these things, she told me that the way that she really wanted me to express my love to her was by helping her around the house with the chores. My wife would try to express her love to me through her service and by buying nice things for me, but I told her that the way that I really wanted her to express her love was by spending quality time with me.

I learned through this experience that it is possible to love someone, but to not express that love in a way that the other person wants to receive it. We all have a tendency to want to express our love to others the same way that we want to be loved, but this is not always effective. With this in mind, how do we express our love to GOD in the way that He wants to receive it from us?

### ***We Express Our Love To GOD Through Our Obedience To His Teachings And Commandments***

On repeated occasions, Jesus explained to His followers that if they truly loved Him, they would obey His teachings. It is easy to love someone in ways that are convenient to you, and it doesn't take much effort to express your love in ways that do not require a lot of sacrifice on your behalf, but the true testament of your love for someone is if you love them by doing things that are inconvenient to you, and that require a sacrifice on your part to do something that you may not want to do.

As Christians, we sometimes try to show our love to GOD in every other way besides obeying His commands; we sing praises to Him, we worship Him, we dance, we shout, we wear crosses around our necks, we profess our love to Him with our words, etc, but the way that He determines if we truly love Him

is through our obedience to what He asks us to do. Here are some scriptures from the Bible that explain to us that we should express our love to GOD by being obedient to His teachings:

\*Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. *John 14:21*

\*Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. *John 14:23-24*

\*If you love me, you will obey what I command. *John 14:15*

\*We know we love God's children if we love God and obey his commandments. Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. *1 John 5:2-4*

\*I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! *John 15:9-11*

I want to encourage you to express your love to GOD by being obedient to His teachings and His instructions.

### ***We Express Our Love To GOD By Living For Him***

In 1st Corinthians chapter 13, one of the descriptions given concerning love is that it is not "self-seeking." In other words, love is not selfish, self-centered, self-absorbed, and it is not focused on our own interests and desires. Another way that GOD wants us to express our love to Him is by living for Him, which would be to put His interests and His desires ahead of our own interests and desires. Living for GOD also consists of putting His commands and His teachings ahead of following the desires of our flesh, and it consists of serving and pursuing after Him as supposed to serving and pursuing after idols (people or things we worship) or money (being greedy for wealth).

Once again, many people neglect expressing their love to GOD by living for Him because it is inconvenient to them, and because it requires sacrifice on their behalf, but the true testament of your love for someone is if you love them by doing things that are inconvenient to you, and that require sacrifice on your part to do something that you may not want to do. These scriptures address how we should express our love to GOD by living for Him:

\*Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. *2 Corinthians 5:13-15*

\*Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. *1 Corinthians 6:18-20*

\*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God. You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless

people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols. Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. But remember that they will have to face God, who will judge everyone, both the living and the dead. *1 Peter 4:1-5*

I want to encourage you to begin to express your love towards GOD by living for Him as supposed to living to satisfy sinful desires.

### ***We Express Our Love To GOD Through Praising, Worshipping, And Glorifying Him***

As Jesus was making His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem prior to being crucified, the people began to joyfully praise Him in loud voices for the things that He had done. When the religious leaders of that time, the Pharisees, told Jesus to rebuke and correct His followers for praising Him, Jesus replied by saying; "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

On a separate occasion, children began to praise Jesus for the wonderful things that He had done while He was in a certain area. The Pharisees quickly became upset because of the praise that Jesus was receiving. In response to the anger of the Pharisees concerning the praise that was being given to Him, Jesus exclaims, "have you never read, from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?" From these two scriptures we see that GOD desires for us to praise and worship Him. We can express our love to our Heavenly Father through praising, worshipping, and being thankful for what GOD has done for us. Here are some scriptures that address praising and worshipping GOD:

\*"Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." *Psalms 100:3-5*

\*"Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him." *Psalms 33:1*

\*"I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving." *Psalms 69:30*

\*"Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds." *1 Chronicles 16:9*

\*"Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." *Psalms 63:3*

I want to encourage you to begin to express your love towards GOD by thanking Him for what He has done in your life, and by praising and worshipping Him for who He is.

### ***We Express Our Love To GOD By Loving Him Completely***

Often times in relationships we tend to hold back a part of ourselves because we do not fully trust the other person, or because we do not know them that well. By doing this we do not completely love that person with everything inside of us. Furthermore, we do not express our love to them in every way that we possibly can and desire to. Unfortunately for whatever reason, we as Christians do not express our love to GOD completely because we choose to hold back certain parts of ourselves from Him.

I want you to know that our Heavenly Father desires for you to love Him completely. When a religious teacher asked Jesus; "what is the most important commandment?" Jesus responded to His question in Mark chapter 12 verse 30 by telling us how GOD desires for us to love Him, and that is to, "love the Lord

your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.” This is how much GOD wants us to love Him, and in expressing our love to GOD, we should not hold anything back from Him.

So how does GOD want us to express our love towards Him? GOD desires for us to express our love to Him by:

\*Obeying His teaching and commands...

\*Living for Him by putting His desires ahead of our own...

\*Praising Him, worshipping Him, by glorifying Him, by thanking Him...

\*And by not holding back any part of ourselves from Him by loving Him with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and with all of our strength.

### **HOW DO WE EXPRESS GODLY LOVE TO OTHERS?**

In the book of John chapter 13 verse 34, Jesus commanded us as His followers to, "love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." One of the distinctive characteristics and qualities that a Christian should possess is the agape love of GOD towards others. It is this agape love that we express towards others that will unmistakably, unquestionably, and indisputably identify us as Christians and as true disciples of Jesus Christ (not our crosses that we wear around our necks, not our clothes that we wear with Jesus' name on it, and not our bumper stickers that we put on our car, etc.). So in what ways can you express this agape type of Godly love to others?

#### ***We Express Godly Love To Others By Serving Them***

Today we live in a society and in a culture in which we love being served and being waited on, yet we despise serving others and waiting on them. With this in mind, Jesus performed an extraordinary act in the book of John 13 by serving His followers when He washed the feet of His disciples. After finishing washing their feet, Jesus teaches His disciples to love others by serving them. The passage states:

“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.” Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” *John 13:12-17*

One of the greatest ways to express Godly love to others is by serving them, by assisting them, and by doing what we can to promote their well-being. Here are some other scriptures that instruct us to serve others:

\*For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. *Galatians 5:13*

\*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. *1 Peter 4:10-11*

I want to encourage you to begin to express your love towards others by serving them.

### ***We Express Godly Love To Others By Forgiving Them***

1st Corinthians chapter 13 describes agape love as being patient, which is the ability to endure the provocations and the things that people do that cause you to become angry without becoming annoyed or upset. One of the ways that God expresses His love towards us is by being patient with us and by forgiving us of our sins and mistakes. Likewise, the way that we express agape love towards others is by forgiving them when they do or say things that hurt us, that offend us, that upset us, and that disappoint us. Where our emotions will tempt us to hold on to our feelings of anger and bitterness towards people that have offended us, our agape love for them influence us to forgive them regardless if they have asked for forgiveness or not. Here are some scriptures that address forgiving others as an expression of love:

\*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. *Colossians 3:12-14*

\*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. *1 Peter 4:8*

\*He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. *Proverbs 17:9*

\*Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs. *Proverbs 10:12*

I want to encourage you to begin to express your love towards others by offering them forgiveness whenever they offend you, hurt you, or disappoint you.

### ***We Express Godly Love To Others By Treating Everyone As Our Equal And Not Showing Favoritism***

In today's society, people are treated and regarded differently by others based on their race, ethnicity, social status, position, level of education, political status, sex, and even religious beliefs. These prejudices have led to the societal ills of racism, sexism, discrimination, and even hate crimes and other forms of harassment. However, this is not the attitude that GOD wants us to harbor in our heart.

Our Heavenly Father desires for us to treat each other equally; regardless of race, ethnicity, social status, level of education, position, political status, sex, or religious belief. The book of James addresses this issue in chapter 2 when it gives the following illustration:

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" *James 2:1-4*

The book of James continues by stating in verses 7 through 9 that:

"Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law."



From these scriptures we find that loving others with the agape type of Godly love means treating everyone equally without showing partiality or favoritism to one group of people over the other. I want to encourage you to begin to express your love towards others by not displaying favoritism towards one group of people over the other.

***We Express Godly Love To Others By Being Kind, Respectful, Compassionate, Sympathetic, Supportive, And Peaceful***

1st Corinthians 13 continues its description of the agape form of Godly love by stating that, "love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude." The way that we express Godly love to others is by being kind to them. Furthermore, when this scripture says that love is not proud and that is not rude, this passage is stating that love is respectful, compassionate, sympathetic and supportive towards others. Here are some scriptures that address how we should express Godly love towards others by being kind to them:

\*Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. *1 Peter 3:8*

\*Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. *1 Peter 2:17*

\*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. *Ephesians 4:2-3*

\*Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. *1 Thessalonians 5:15*

I want to encourage you to begin to express your love towards others by being kind, respectful, compassionate, sympathetic, and supportive towards them.

***We Express Godly Love To Others By Loving Our Enemies And Those Who Oppose Us Just As We Love Those Who Are Favorable Towards Us***

While it is very common in our society to hate our enemies and those who have caused us harm, suffering, and other forms of anger, Jesus instructs us to love those people and to pray for them instead of despising them in our hearts and in our mind. A true sign of a Christian's spiritual maturity is their ability to love their enemies, because in order to do so, you must truly spend a lot of time fellowshiping with GOD through prayer and through reading His word in order to display His nature, His qualities, and His characteristics in your life in this way. Here are some scriptures that address expressing Godly love towards others by loving our enemies:

\*But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. *Luke 6:27-28*

\*Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. *Luke 6:35-36*

\*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those

who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. *Romans 12:14-21*

### **HOW DOES APPLYING GODLY LOVE TOWARDS OTHERS BENEFIT US?**

When you live a life in which you are actively expressing agape love towards GOD and towards others, you begin to place yourself in a position to receive GOD's blessings and favor. How does GOD bless us for doing this? The answer is found in the book of Proverbs chapter 21 verse 21 when it proclaims, "he who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor."

What does it mean to find life, prosperity, and honor? Allow me to explain...

\***Life** - to find life when you are expressing agape love means to find a purpose for living. Finding life means finding vitality, which is the ability to have a joyous approach to life's situations and activities. This is what you receive in return for living a life of agape love towards others.

\***Prosperity**- to find prosperity when you are expressing agape love means to put yourself in a position where you can be successful, where you can do well and be well, and where you can grow in vigor and in health.

\***Honor**- to find honor when you are expressing agape love means that you will be respected and admired. It means that you will always have a sense of personal dignity. It means that you will be given a good name, and carry a good reputation in the eyes of others.

Do these rewards of finding life, prosperity, and honor motivate you to live a life of agape love? If so, I would like to encourage you to begin applying this Godly type of agape love in your personal life.

### **SCRIPTURES ON THE TOPIC OF LOVE**

Here are some other scriptures found in the Bible that address the subject of love:

\*You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. *1 Peter 1:22*

\*If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him. And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. *1 John 3:17-23*

\*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love,

following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. *Ephesians 5:1-2*

\*Do everything in love. *1 Corinthians 16:14*

\*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. *1 Corinthians 13:1-3*

\*Owe nothing to anyone except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet." These and other such commandments are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law. *Romans 13: 8-10*

\*Love must be sincere. *Romans 12:9*

\*Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. *1 John 2:9-11*

\*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. *1 John 4:7-12*

\*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. *1 John 4:16-21*

\*This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. *1 John 3:10-13*

\*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? *1 John 3:14-17*

## **CONCLUSION**

I pray that you found this chapter to be informative, and that you begin to apply this information in your personal life by beginning to love GOD and love others with the agape type of love. In this way, you will truly begin to be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you grow and mature spiritually, and you will be on your way towards becoming the person that GOD has called you to be while fulfilling His purpose for your life. Amen!!!

## FORGIVENESS 101

*When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free. - Catherine Ponder*

One of my favorite movies that I still enjoy watching over and over is Spider Man 3. I enjoyed this movie for many reasons; the special effects, the characters, the action, etc. However, what I enjoyed most about this movie is the message that is contained within the plot of the story. Peter Parker, who for those of you who don't know is the superhero Spider Man, has an uncle who is murdered by an ex criminal. Driven by his anger and grief over the death of his uncle, Peter begins to search tirelessly for the murderer in order to take revenge on him. When he finally discovers the identity of the killer, Peter pursues him and almost kills him during an intense fight. As the movie progresses, Peter talks with his aunt who teaches him that taking revenge is not something that his uncle would have wanted him to do, and that killing the murderer would not bring his uncle back to life.

After reflecting on these words and struggling within himself as to whether or not to still take revenge, Peter chooses to forgive the man who has murdered his uncle, and as a result, he is finally able to have peace on the inside of his heart. This movie did an excellent job illustrating to us what forgiveness is, why we should forgive others, and how holding on to bitterness and anger negatively affects us as individuals.

Forgiveness is an important aspect of our spiritual growth, development, and maturity as Christians. Our willingness and our capacity to forgive others will go a long way in determining how far in life we will be able to go. Because of some people's unwillingness to forgive, I've personally seen many of their dreams go unfulfilled, their goals unachieved, friendships lost, families separated, marriages dissolved, and their life almost ruined completely. My desire is not to see any of these things happen to you, but in order to do so, you must be willing to forgive those who have hurt you, offended you, or disappointed you. This chapter is dedicated to providing you with information on the subject of forgiveness; what it is, and how to apply it in our personal life so that we can grow and mature spiritually. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS FORGIVENESS? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE SOMEONE?**

To forgive someone means:

**\*To release somebody from blame or criticism for a mistake or wrongdoing**

**\*To overlook someone's offenses that caused you anger or harm**

**\*To put aside any grudges, and to renounce any resentment, bitterness, or other negative feelings towards someone, and to waive your desire to see them punished or suffer penalty**

**\*To extend mercy to someone**

**\*To relieve someone from having to pay back a debt that they owe**

I personally like to define forgiveness as an opportunity to demonstrate the power of the love of GOD. Forgiving others is something that we do because we have determined in our mind that we will offer forgiveness to those who offend us. Our decision to offer forgiveness can never be based on our emotions or how we "feel" at a certain time ( if that was the case, we would never forgive anybody!). In the next paragraphs I will go in depth and explain each of these aspects of forgiveness.

## **BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS ON FORGIVENESS**

Our Heavenly Father commands us to forgive those who have hurt us, offended us, or disappointed us, and our act of forgiving others pleases Him. Here are some scriptures from within the Bible in which GOD teach us to forgive others:

\*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. *Colossians 3:12-13*

\*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. *Ephesians 4:31-32*

\*If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. *Matthew 6:14-15*

These are some passages found within the Bible in which GOD teaches us to forgive others. As you can see, it is a commandment that is repeatedly addressed in order to stress just how important it is that we apply forgiveness in our personal life.

### **HOW DO WE BECOME ABLE TO FORGIVE OTHERS?**

*Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit. - Peter Ustinov.*

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 13, the Bible informs us that the love that GOD has for us, and the love that He wants us to demonstrate towards others, is the type of love (Agape love) that is patient (able to tolerate annoyance and able to overlook offenses), and that keeps no record of the wrongs committed by others (it doesn't hold grudges). This type of love is unconditional; it is not based on our emotions and how we "feel," and it not expressed based on how other people treat us or respond to us. In order to truly be able to forgive those who have upset you or caused you harm, you must first possess this type of love in your heart. The problem that we encounter is that in our sinful nature, we are incapable of loving people this way. We instead become impatient, quick-tempered, easily annoyed, irritated, and resentful towards people when they offend us, insult us, upset us, hurt us, or disappoint us.

The good news is that when we accept Jesus Christ into our life as our personal Lord and Savior, GOD then places His Holy Spirit within us, who begins to transform our sinful nature and characteristics into GOD-like characteristics as we take on His nature. One of the results of receiving the Holy Spirit as a believer is that He produces this Godly type of love in our heart that we need in order to offer forgiveness. Is forgiving others something that is extremely difficult and challenging for you to do? Are you having trouble forgiving those that have hurt you in your past? If so, I would like to encourage you to spend time with your Heavenly Father in prayer and by studying the Bible and applying GOD's teachings into your personal life. By doing so, you will continue to allow the Holy Spirit to transform your heart and replace your sinful nature with GOD's holy and loving nature, which will enable you to forgive those people whom you need to forgive.

### **HOW DO I APPLY FORGIVENESS IN MY PERSONAL LIFE?**

*True forgiveness is not an action after the fact, it is an attitude with which you enter each moment. – David Ridge*

Many of us know that GOD wants us to forgive others, and we know that it is something that we *should* do, but the challenging part comes when we have to apply it in our life. In order to live a life where

we are able to offer forgiveness, we must make up our mind to be determined to forgive people when they offend us, and to not change our mind regardless of the circumstances and situations that we encounter (because a double minded person is unstable in all that they do). Let's take a look at the definition of forgiveness to see how we can apply forgiveness into our personal life.

***Forgiving people by withholding blame and criticism for their mistakes or offenses against you***

To blame someone means to consider that person responsible for something wrong or unfortunate that has happened in your life. By placing blame and responsibility on others, and even on yourself for that matter, it influences you to direct your anger, hatred, and bitterness towards that person as well as yourself, instead of directing GOD's love towards them. For this reason it is important for us to forgive others so that we continually obey Jesus' commandment to, "love our enemies," and to, "bless those who persecute us."

I want you to know that we become misguided and in error when we place blame on any human being for any misfortune in our life. The Bible teaches us in Ephesians chapter 6 that as Christians, "we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." In other words, we are in a spiritual fight and our struggle is not with people, but with our enemy, Satan, who works to influence people to cause us harm and misery. With this in mind, we should direct our anger towards Satan instead of the person who has caused us harm.

Here is an example to illustrate this point. If you were to get into an accident where another vehicle hits you from behind while you are driving on a highway, you wouldn't hold the other vehicle responsible for the accident and direct your anger and frustrations towards the car. That would be silly! Rather, the person that you would hold responsible is the individual that was behind the wheel influencing the movement of the car. The problem that we have in our life is that we commonly take out our frustrations and our anger on the vehicles (the people) that Satan influences, manipulates, and controls to cause us to become angry or hurt, because we did not know that Satan influenced them to act that way towards us.

We frequently get so caught up being hostile towards other people and causing conflict with them (which Satan laughs at), when we should instead be hostile towards Satan who is ultimately the one who has attacked us by causing us harm. When you take the blame and the responsibility for any harm or misfortune in your life off of other people and off of yourself, it helps you to be able to truly forgive them and continue to love them as well. Romans 14:13 states, "let us no more criticize and blame and pass judgment on one another." I pray that you take the blame off of other people for any negative event that has occurred in your life, and that you now choose to forgive them while recognizing that Satan was responsible for that action.

***Forgiving people by overlooking their offenses and covering them up***

*There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love. – Bryant McGill*

To cover up and overlook someone's offenses means to forgive that person by choosing to disregard or ignore their shortcomings, their faults, and their mistakes. The Bible instructs us to do this on numerous occasions, and here are a few examples of scriptures that address this aspect of forgiveness:

\*A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. *Proverbs 19:11*

\*He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter (brings it up again) separates close friends. *Proverbs 17:9*

\*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. /  
*Peter 4:8*

In order for us to be able to overlook the offenses of others, we must have something available in order to cover them up. This is where having unconditional love is absolutely essential in regards to being able to forgive others, because only unconditional love is able to cover up their mistakes in our heart and in our mind.

Without unconditional love, the things that people have said and done to you that caused you to become angry or hurt will continually be exposed in your heart and in your mind, allowing those negative feelings of pain, bitterness, and resentment to remain for a long period of time. On the other hand, when you possess the unconditional love of GOD in your heart, it covers up those offenses and mistakes and allows you to overlook them because you are focused on loving that person because GOD, whom you love and live to please, created them. To this end, the Bible warns us in 1 John 4:20-21 that, "if anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

I pray that you begin to forgive people by overlooking the offenses of others and covering up their mistakes with GOD's unconditional love.

***Forgiving People by setting aside personal grudges; resentment, and negative feelings towards someone, and your desire to see them punished or penalized***

A grudge is defined as a feeling of resentment and ill will towards someone often lasting for long periods of time. Whenever we want to identify that a grudge exists between two people, we say that these people are "holding" grudges against each other. I want you to pay attention to the word "holding" as it relates to a grudge. Notice that in order for a grudge to exist between two people, it figuratively has to be "held." Holding something means that you are lifting it and supporting it in some way using the different parts of your body. At any given moment, you can let go of an object that you are holding and be released from the strain, the burden, and the weight that the object is placing on you, but by choosing to hold on to the object, you are choosing to support it so that the weight and the strain of the object remains on you, which causes you to become fatigued and worn down. This example illustrates how grudges continue to exist in our lives. We choose to continue to support them and to hold on to those negative feelings instead of simply letting them go so that we can be released from the strain and the weight of carrying them.

Truly forgiving someone is restoring a relationship between you and another person to the place that it was prior to when an offense occurred. If you truly forgive someone for something that they have done to you, then you will no longer seek revenge on them, nor will you become obsessed with ensuring that they are punished for what they have done. In no way does seeking punishment and demanding retribution from others reflect the love that GOD wants us to have towards them. Our Heavenly Father does not still continuously seek to punish us or make us pay for our mistakes after He has forgiven us, nor should we do the same to others. I pray that you begin to exercise forgiveness by letting go of any grudges that you may be carrying, and by surrendering your desire to see other people punished or suffer a penalty for their mistakes.

***Forgiving people by extending mercy to the people who have hurt you or angered you***

To forgive someone by extending them mercy means to continue to be kind to them despite their mistakes and their offenses towards you. Often times we say with our mouth that we forgive someone, but



our actions do not display the kindness and the mercy that is necessary to cause the person to truly feel and believe that they have been forgiven. This is not true forgiveness.

Imagine if GOD withheld the full extent of His blessings, His favor, His love, and His kindness from us after He's forgiven us for our mistakes? Would you truly feel that you were forgiven, or would you feel that He was still angry with you about what you have done? Rather, because GOD continues to extend His kindness to us after He's forgiven us for our mistakes, we too should continue to extend and show kindness to others after we've forgiven them for their mistakes as well. I pray that you begin to show kindness to those whom you've forgiven without continuing to be spiteful, vindictive, and mean towards them.

### ***Forgiving people by relieving them of the debt that they owe to you***

One of the definitions of the word debt is, "an obligation to someone for something." When someone upsets us, angers us, or disappoints us, we immediately feel as if they owe us an apology or an explanation, and we require something in return from them to pay us back for what they did to us. Therefore we go days, weeks, months, and even years without speaking to certain people because they never apologized; because they never explained to us why they did what they did, and because they never gave us something in return for the mistakes that they made. Siblings go for years without re-establishing their relationship because one person was waiting for an apology; friendships are ruined because instead of forgiving one another they instead choose to blackmail each other, marriages can be ruined because one member is trying so hard to make up for a mistake that they made years ago.

An important aspect of forgiveness is that it releases the person who has harmed you from owing you an apology; it releases them from owing you an explanation, and it releases them from having to give you something in return to pay you back for the mistakes that they made. As a result of our forgiveness, we are able to maintain our relationship with people without separating ourselves from them because we feel that they still owe us something. I pray that you begin to forgive those whom you have separated yourself from because you feel that they owe you something for the mistakes that they have made towards you.

### **WHO DO I HAVE TO FORGIVE?**

In our society, we tend to be very selective when it comes to choosing who we will and will not forgive. We even set certain criteria when making our decision as to whether or not we are going to forgive someone. We'll forgive someone whom we get into a heated argument with, and even someone who unknowingly cuts in front of us in line, but we won't forgive people who have stolen from us, abused us, cheated on us, or who even may be responsible for the death of someone that we know.

Our Heavenly Father does not want us to be selective in whom we choose to forgive. GOD's commandments to forgive others do not carry any clauses or exceptions to be made for certain people who have done certain terrible things to us, rather, we are commanded to forgive all people, regardless of who they are and what they've done, just as our Heavenly Father forgives us no matter what we do, or who we are as well.

### **HOW MANY TIMES DO WE HAVE TO FORGIVE OTHERS?**

Peter asked this very common question to Jesus, and I believe that he was looking for an answer that would allow him at some point to stop from having to forgive someone over and over again. Our sinful nature within us wants to give into the temptation to hold on to any feelings of bitterness that will influence us to take revenge on those who offend us or hurt us. Knowing this, Jesus responds to Peter's question in an interesting fashion. Matthew chapter 18 states; "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many

times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."

I'm pretty good in math, and I can tell you that seventy times seven equals 490 ( $70 \times 7 = 490$ ). Surely GOD does not want us to keep track of how many times people need our forgiveness so that on the 491<sup>st</sup> time we can remain angry at them. Keeping track of their offenses would not reflect the unconditional love which the Bible says does not, "keep any record of wrongs." By giving Peter this answer, Jesus was teaching Peter that you should continue to forgive someone even past the point that you reach when you feel like you should not have to keep forgiving them. To illustrate His message, Jesus tells Peter a parable to explain to Him that because GOD has forgiven us for what we have done, and because He continues to forgive us for the mistakes that we make, that we should continue to extend grace, mercy, and forgiveness to others as well because it is being extended to us by GOD. So whenever we reach a point with people where we have decided to stop forgiving someone, we should remember that GOD has never reached that point with us, and then continue to extend forgiveness to others because GOD continues to extend forgiveness to us.

### ***Forgiving Your Own Family***

I believe that it is easier to forgive a stranger that we do not know, whom we've never met previously, and with whom we do not have a relationship with, than it is to forgive our family members whom we know intimately, whom we constantly come into contact with, and with whom we have a relationship that has been built over several years. The level of our patience with our family members tends to be much shorter than the level of our patience with strangers. I know that our enemy, Satan, particularly works to destroy the stability and the unity within our family.

Because of his attacks, children remain bitter towards each other and towards their parents, spouses are not able to consistently show and express their love to each other, and divorces occur which can split a family altogether. As GOD's children, we must particularly be mindful to always extend forgiveness to the members in our own family in order for your family to remain united and intact, even though it may be harder or more challenging for you to do.

### **HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU'VE TRULY FORGIVEN SOMEONE?**

*You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.* – Lewis B. Smedes

Here are a few tests that you can conduct on yourself to determine if you have truly forgiven someone in your life that has hurt you, disappointed you, or caused you to become upset.

### ***Can You Repay Them Good For Their Evil?***

While Jesus was giving His followers instructions as to how He wanted them to live so that their life would please GOD, He teaches us in Luke 6:27-28 to, "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." The problem that most of us encounter when we try to obey this commandment is that we cannot apply it in our life unless we have truly forgiven the person who hates us, who curses us, and who mistreats us. Without forgiving them, we will continue to hate those who hate us (the reason why conflicts and wars never truly end), we will continue to curse those who curse us, and we will continue to mistreat those who mistreat us.

I want you to know that it is through forgiveness that we are able to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who mistreat us, thereby enabling us to obey Jesus' teaching. This is one way that you know if you've truly forgiven someone, and that is if you can obey Jesus' teaching

in Luke 6:27-28 to love your enemy, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.

### ***Do You Still Dwell On What Was Done To You?***

The Bible teaches us in Proverbs 17:9 in the New Living Translation that, “love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.” If you are constantly dwelling on what someone has done wrong to you by thinking about it over and over again, or if you keep reminiscing about their mistakes by continually reminding that person of what they’ve done to you, then I want you to know that you have not truly forgiven them. One indicative factor that you can use to identify if you have truly forgiven someone is if you no longer dwell or continually think about what they have done to you for long periods of time.

True forgiveness has taken place when you no longer throw what someone did to you back into their face by reminding them of what they have done. When you are able to refrain from occupying your mind with someone else’s mistakes, and when you are able to avoid bringing up to someone what they did to you by reminding them of their faults and shortcomings, then you will know that you have truly forgiven them.

### ***Are You Still Experiencing The Peace and the Joy that GOD Has Given To You?***

As a Christian, GOD has given you His peace and His joy, and we must ensure that these two qualities are always prevalent and present in our life. However, when the mistakes of others cause us to become angry and to carry resentment to the point that we are no longer experiencing the peace and the joy that GOD has given us, it means that we have not truly forgiven others for what they have done. When you’ve truly forgiven others for their mistakes, you will know it because GOD’s peace and His joy will continue to reign supreme in your heart and in your mind.

These are three measuring sticks to use in your life to be able to determine if you have truly forgiven someone; if you can repay them good for their evil, if you no longer dwell and constantly think about what they have done to you, and if you still possess the peace and the joy that GOD has given to you.

## **HOW DOES FORGIVING OTHERS BENEFIT YOU?**

There are numerous benefits associated with your willingness and your ability to offer forgiveness to others. Here they are....

### ***Forgiveness Sets You Free***

*To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.*” - Lewis B. Smedes

When you stubbornly refuse to forgive others, and when you make the decision to not let go of the feelings of anger, of bitterness, and resentment that causes you to hold a grudge because you were offended or harmed in some way by another person, you are choosing to remain imprisoned and in bondage to these negative emotions. For this very reason, you will be prevented from being able to live a life that is free from the emotional weight, emotional burden, and the emotional baggage that comes along with choosing to truly forgive those who have hurt you. Our Heavenly Father did not create you to carry this emotional weight, nor does He desire for you to continue to carry the anger and the bitterness that is associated with your refusal to forgive. Forgiving others benefits us by allowing us to be free from the negative emotions (hatred, bitterness, resentment, pain) that weigh us down and have an unhealthy affect on our life.

There are plenty of biblical examples in which forgiveness alleviated emotional burdens and negative feelings that we can learn from. Joseph would have continued to carry emotional burdens and baggage if he

had not chosen to forgive his brothers for selling him into slavery. David would have continued to carry emotional burdens and baggage if he had not chosen to forgive Saul for pursuing him in order to take his life. I can tell you personally that I enjoy the freedom that comes from not being weighed down by emotional burdens, and because I cherish this freedom so much, I have made the decision to forgive those who have said or done something that requires me to forgive them.

When you realize that your emotional and psychological freedom is at stake, it motivates you to want to forgive others so that you can maintain your freedom from negative emotions and other emotional baggage. Are going to make the choice today to be free from the negative emotions that you are experiencing in your life right now by choosing to forgive those who have angered you or caused you harm?

### ***Forgiveness Leads to Healing***

*When a deep injury is done us, we never recover until we forgive. It starts the healing process in our lives - Alan Paton*

Have you gone through an experience in which you were emotionally, physically, mentally, sexually, or psychologically abused or mistreated, and you still can feel those scars, those wounds, and those injuries on the inside or on the outside of you? In order to begin the healing process in your life, you must first forgive the person that inflicted those scars and those wounds. Often times we try to deal with the symptoms of these wounds and scars by simply covering them up (which is called putting on a front to disguise or conceal the real issue), or we refuse to accept that we even have scars and wounds at all (which is called living in denial). I want you to know that the only way to get to the root of these wounds and these scars in order to begin the process of true healing; we must first forgive the person who has caused them (including ourselves sometimes).

By choosing *not* to forgive others that have hurt you, you will never experience true peace, true contentment, true joy, and true satisfaction in your personal life. While you may indeed experience a temporary form of these emotions, you will never experience these emotions on the continuing and permanent basis that GOD designed you to because you will still have scars and wounds on the inside of you. However, when you make the choice to forgive, you allow GOD the opportunity to heal and to mend the areas of your life that were negatively affected by your traumatic experiences.

### **WHAT CONSEQUENCES DO WE FACE FOR CHOOSING NOT TO FORGIVE?**

Just as choosing to forgive others is extremely beneficial to you, choosing not to forgive others can be extremely detrimental. Here are a few examples of how choosing not to forgive others can negatively affect our lives....

#### ***Forgive Or Relive***

You have two choices when someone upsets you, causes you to become angry, harms you, hurts you, or disappoints you, and that is either to forgive their actions and continue to express GOD's love towards them while remaining in His peace and joy, or you can relive those harmful actions by continuing to subject yourself to the anger, the torment, the pain, the bitterness, the agony, and the misery you experienced when the event occurred every time you think about it in your mind.

The choice is yours today to make, so which one will you choose? Will you choose today to begin to forgive the mistakes and the offenses of others, or will you choose today to continue to re-live the negative feelings and emotions that remain because you are not willing to let them go by forgiving the person who hurt you, offended you, or disappointed you.

### ***GOD Won't Forgive You***

While teaching His followers about the importance of forgiveness, Jesus teaches them in Matthew 6:15 that if they, “do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Another consequence of choosing not to forgive others is that GOD does not in return forgive us for our sins.

If we are unwilling to extend mercy, grace, and forgiveness to those who sin against us, we are not able to receive the same mercy, grace, and forgiveness from our Heavenly Father. With the mercy, grace, and forgiveness from GOD that you need at stake in your life, you should be careful to always make sure that you forgive those who have upset you or have caused you any form of harm.

### ***Your Prayers Will Go Unanswered***

Jesus told His Disciples in Matthew 5:23-24 that, “if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” An altar is a place that is representative of being in the presence of GOD, and one of the things that we offer to GOD while we are in His presence is our prayers to Him.

This scripture informs us that before we offer our prayers to GOD, that we should do whatever we can to be reconciled with someone who has negative feelings towards us because of what we have done by asking for forgiveness, and we should do whatever is necessary to be reconciled with someone whom we have negative feelings towards because of their mistakes by forgiving them. The reason that Jesus tells us to do this is because the answer to our prayers is on the line and at stake. Many people may wonder why GOD is not answering their prayers, and one of the reasons could be the fact that they have not asked for forgiveness from someone that they have angered or hurt, or because they have chosen not to forgive someone that has hurt them or angered them as well.

If you truly desire to see your prayers answered, and if you value receiving what you have prayed for, then you must live a life of forgiveness. There simply is no way around this truth. I pray that you begin to live a life of forgiveness so that your prayers will not be hindered or prevented from being answered in any way.

### **HOW DOES GOD DEMONSTRATE AND APPLY FORGIVENESS TOWARDS US?**

*"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him" – King David (Psalms 32)*

When I first gave my life to GOD, I had no idea of what it meant when people would tell me that GOD would forgive me for my sins if I asked Him for forgiveness. Because I truly did not understand GOD's forgiveness, I would feel as if GOD and I were still at odds even after I asked Him to forgive me. Furthermore, I fell into the trap of feeling guilty and believing that I had to do enough good things to make up for the bad things that I had done in my life (this is called legalism). As a result of feeling as if GOD stopped loving me, and as a result of feeling as if He was extremely angry with me because of a mistake that I made, there were many times that I chose to separate myself from my connection with my Heavenly Father by no longer going to church, reading the Bible, and praying (have you ever done this?).

I still come into contact with people to this day who think the same way that I used to think concerning GOD's forgiveness, and for that reason they have chosen to separate themselves from their connection and relationship with GOD by no longer attending church, no longer studying the Bible, and by

no longer praying to Him. However, when you have a correct understanding of what it means to receive GOD's forgiveness, you will no longer fall into the trap of choosing to separate yourself from your relationship and connection with GOD because of your mistakes. Instead, you will be running to get closer to Him because He is waiting for you with open arms of love and mercy. What does it mean when GOD has forgiven you for your sins? Let's look at the definition of forgiveness to see how GOD applies it to us:

**\*GOD releases us from all blame and criticism for our mistakes and sins** (GOD does not criticize you over and over because of what you have done)

**\*GOD overlooks our sins and mistakes and casts them out of His sight so that He is not reminded of them.** (By forgiving our sins, GOD no longer holds them against us, nor does He remember them. Every mistake and every sin you have ever committed is erased from GOD's memory once you ask Him to forgive you for it.)

- Isaiah 43:25 states: "I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again."

**\*GOD no longer holds a grudge against us, nor does he hold any resentment, bitterness, anger, or any other negative feelings towards us at all.**

-Micah 7:18 states, "where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of his special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing unfailing love."

**\*GOD does not desire to condemn us, punish us, or penalize us for our sins and mistakes.**

-Romans 8:1 tells us that "there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."

**\*GOD continues to extend His grace, His mercy, and His kindness towards us despite our sins and the mistakes that we have made.**

-Hebrews 4:16 tells us to, "come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."

-Isaiah 55:7 proclaims, "let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously."

- Lamentations 3:22 tells us that, "It is because of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

-Finally, Psalms 106:1 teaches us that we should, "give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever."

**\*GOD has relieved us of the debt that we owe to Him because of our sins.**

When people in the world say that they have forgiven you, they often treat you differently and hold grudges toward you despite their claim that they forgave you. Because of this, we often relate this type of forgiveness to the way that we think that GOD forgives us, which is incorrect. I pray that you no longer associate GOD's forgiveness with the way that other people offer forgiveness (which is only with words and

not with actions), and that you begin to apply the correct definition of forgiveness into your relationship with GOD.

### **HOW DO WE RECEIVE FORGIVENESS FROM GOD FOR OUR SINS?**

*You can't undo anything you've already done, but you can face up to it. You can tell the truth. You can seek forgiveness. And then let God do the rest.*

I want you to know that as long as you live in your human body, there will be at least a few instances in which you will make mistakes and commit sin. Nobody is absolutely perfect (except Jesus Christ), and the Bible informs us in 1 John 1:8 that, “if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,” and also in Romans 3:23 that, “everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” Because of this, there will come a time when you will need to ask GOD to forgive you for something. The Bible does not leave us in the dark concerning how to ask for forgiveness, rather, it plainly tells us how to receive the forgiveness from GOD that we seek.

1 John 1:9 states that, “if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” To confess your sins to GOD means to admit to Him that you have done something wrong. Often times we attempt to hide our sins by trying to conceal them and cover them up as if GOD did not know what we did (this is what got Adam and Eve in trouble). Instead of trying to hide our sins by covering them up, we should confess them to GOD.

I’ve found that the reason why most of us do not want to confess our sins to GOD is because we are afraid that He is going to punish us when we confess our mistakes to Him. However, GOD desires to extend His love, His grace, and His mercy to us in these situations, and because He extends love instead of anger and punishment, we do not have to hesitate confessing our sins and mistakes to Him.

The confession of your sins to GOD only needs to be done between you and Him, and it does not need to take place in the presence of another person or religious leader. As a result of confessing our sins to GOD, He responds by forgiving us completely in the ways that we spoke about previously, and He also restores us into a position of right-standing with Him as well. The forgiveness that you seek from GOD can be obtained by simply confessing your mistakes to Him.

### **CONCLUSION**

*We achieve inner health only through forgiveness - the forgiveness not only of others but also of ourselves – Joshua Loth*

I pray that you have found the information in this page to be insightful, informative, and useful in your personal relationship and connection with GOD. My desire is that you begin to live a life of love in which you forgive those who hurt you, offend you, or disappoint you. By applying this information, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship process, and you will be well on your way towards growing and maturing spiritually; towards establishing a closer connection with your Heavenly Father, towards becoming the person that He has called you to be, towards fulfilling His purpose and His plan for your life, and towards successfully achieving the goals and the dreams that He has placed on your heart for you to accomplish. Amen!!!

## **WISDOM 101**

*“Too many wish to be happy before becoming wise.” - Susanne Curchod Necker*

It is common for us as humans to cherish valuable things. It is natural for us to stop at nothing to pursue and chase after the things that we value the most. We cherish highly valuable cars, houses, electronics, clothing, furniture and jewelry, and as a result we work endlessly and tirelessly to acquire them. Our Heavenly Father knows about our desire to acquire valuable things, and He created us to relish and appreciate things that have value. The problem that we've encountered in our present day society and culture, is that we have begun to cherish and value certain things more than the one thing that GOD wants us to cherish and to chase after the most, which is wisdom.

The Bible tells us how much more valuable wisdom is in comparison to the other material possessions that we now cherish in Proverbs 8:11 when it states that, “wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with it.” So if wisdom is much more precious and more valuable than all of these other things (cars, houses, electronics, clothing, furniture, jewelry), then why aren't we working endlessly and tirelessly to grow wise and to pursue wisdom? Why do people work hard in their careers just so that they can acquire material possessions that they value, but then not work just as hard or even harder in their personal time to gain wisdom, which the Bible says will preserve our life and help us prosper? If obtaining wisdom is as valuable as GOD says it is, then why aren't many of us devoting much of our time, our energy, and our resources to obtain it like we do everything else?

The reason for this I believe, is that we do not have a true understanding of what wisdom is; how having wisdom benefits us, or how to obtain it. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, wisdom plays a very essential role as you continue to grow and mature spiritually, and your dedication towards obtaining wisdom can go a long way in determining the amount of success that you have, and the amount of enjoyment you experience in your life. The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with Biblical information concerning what wisdom is; how we apply it, how we obtain it, and how having it benefits us in our life. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS WISDOM?**

*“Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.” - Charles H. Spurgeon*

Wisdom is defined as the ability to make sensible, rational, and reasonable decisions based on your personal knowledge of GOD's teachings in the Bible. In other words, wisdom is simply living your life according to the word of GOD and His will for your life. I want you to know that the life that you are living right now is a sum total of all the decisions and choices that you have ever made. In most of the choices that you have made in your life, you had the opportunity to base which decision you were going to make on whether you were going choose to do what GOD would want you to do (making a wise decision), or choose to do what your sinful nature and your flesh wanted to do (making a foolish decision).

I want you to know that wisdom should be applied to both the major and significant decisions that we make in life, as well as the everyday routine decisions that we sometimes make unconsciously. In order to improve our life for the better, we must first begin to start making wise decisions and wise choices instead of foolish ones.



## **HOW DO I OBTAIN WISDOM?**

*“He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers” - King Solomon (Proverbs 19:8)*

Psalm 19:7 teaches us that, “the instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul.” The way that we gain wisdom is simply by learning what GOD is teaching us in the Bible, and then taking what we have learned and applying it into personal life. In order to learn what GOD is teaching us in the Bible, we must begin to study it carefully and diligently.

The result of studying the Bible and understanding what His instructions are to us, is that as we begin to understand what GOD teaches us through His word, it begins to revive our soul. Our soul represents our emotions, our feelings, and our thoughts. Without wisdom, these areas of our life (our emotions, our feelings, and our thoughts) are weak, fragile, and extremely vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. When our soul has become vulnerable because we are not actively living by our faith in GOD’s word, it causes our emotions to be on edge and unstable, our feelings to be depressing and miserable, and our thoughts to be infected with worry and fear. On the other hand, with the wisdom that we gain by learning GOD’s instructions and living by our faith in GOD’s word, these three areas of our life become revived; our emotions become pleasant and stable, our feelings become joyful and peaceful, and our thoughts are filled with hope, optimism, and great expectation of what is to come in the future. If you feel that your soul (your emotions, your feelings, your thoughts) needs revival, than I would like to encourage you to begin to acquire wisdom by studying the Bible to learn GOD’s instructions, and then to begin to apply them into your personal life.

### ***Wisdom Comes When We Surround Ourselves With Other People That Are Wise***

*“The next best thing to being wise oneself is to live in a circle of those who are” – C.S. Lewis*

The Bible tells us how to increase in even more wisdom. The book of Proverbs chapter 13 verse 20 proclaims that, “he who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.” By surrounding ourselves with other people who are applying the word of GOD in their life, their obedience to GOD’s word encourages us to grow in wisdom as well. Their influence on us causes us to grow in wisdom when we develop their habits and follow their positive example.

However, when we surround ourselves with fools who are not living according to GOD’s commandments, it leads to our downfall because their foolish behavior encourages us to behave foolishly as well. I want you to know that who you associate and surround yourself with will determine whether or not you will grow in wisdom, or if you will begin to fall into a pattern of foolish behavior that will result in your downfall. So I want to ask you this question, “Who are you associating yourself with?”

### ***Wisdom Comes When We Realize How Short Life Really Is***

In Psalms 90:12, King David asks GOD to teach him how to grow in wisdom by helping him realize that his life is short. Many of us live as if seeing tomorrow and next year is promised to us, and for this reason we procrastinate by putting off many of the things that we know we should be doing now. However, by doing this we are acting extremely foolishly.

If you knew that you were going to be judged for your actions within a year, and if you knew that you would have to give an account for everything that you have said and done within that short amount of time, you would be doing everything that you could right now to get your life in order so that it would be pleasing and acceptable to GOD. You would immediately begin to live wisely by living holy, resisting temptations, and spending more time with GOD through prayer and studying His word.

With this in mind, we should always have the mindset that our life here on Earth is short, and that the time that we do have left should be spent doing things that would please our Heavenly Father. By living this way, it will encourage us to make wise decisions that are based on GOD's teachings as supposed to making foolish decisions. I pray that you continually remind yourself that life here on Earth is short, and that you begin to live wisely with the time that you have left in preparation for the day that you will have to stand before GOD and give an account for how you lived your life.

### ***Wisdom Comes By Accepting Correction***

*"All men make mistakes, but only wise men learn from their mistakes." - Winston Churchill*

The Bible also informs us in the book of Proverbs chapter 15 verse 31 that, "he who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise." From this scripture we discover that accepting correction and discipline from those who have a relationship with GOD, who are mature, and who have our best interest in mind leads to us becoming wiser.

A foolish person will reject correction and discipline because they often believe that they have everything figured out. This form of pride causes a person to desire to stay ignorant about certain things. For this reason, a foolish person will choose to remain as they are in their sinful condition instead of changing their life for the better. However, it is extremely necessary for those of us who desire to be wise to accept correction, to accept a rebuke, and to accept discipline instead of rejecting it, because without these things our life can get off track. Even though accepting correction and discipline from others may not feel good to us, or be a pleasant experience that we will enjoy, it is necessary for us to do so because it is for our benefit. By accepting correction we learn valuable lessons about life that fools reject, enabling us to grow and increase in wisdom.

### **HOW DO I APPLY WISDOM IN MY PERSONAL LIFE?**

*"He that never changes his opinions, never corrects his mistakes, will never be wiser on the morrow than he is today." - Tryon Edwards*

When you are faced with a choice or a decision, the majority of the time it is an opportunity for you to apply wisdom in your personal life by choosing to do what GOD would want you to do. Wisdom should also be applied in our life whenever we are faced with temptations that try to influence us to commit sin by acting foolishly. Here are a few examples of how you can apply wisdom into your personal life:

- \* We apply wisdom by seeking GOD's direction through prayer instead of leaning and relying on your own understanding and logic when making decisions
- \*We apply wisdom by forgiving people and overlooking their offenses instead of holding on to feelings of bitterness and resentment towards them
- \*We apply wisdom by exercising self control and by choosing not to surrender to the desires of our sinful nature
- \* We apply wisdom by not being greedy for material possessions and by instead storing up treasures for ourselves in Heaven by being generous and compassionate towards others
- \*We apply wisdom by restraining our anger instead of letting it loose completely on the people who have made us upset
- \*We apply wisdom by loving people unconditionally despite their flaws, faults, and shortcomings

- \*We apply wisdom by not showing favoritism, and by treating all people fairly and equally
- \*We apply wisdom by remaining humble in all circumstances regardless of our position in life and by not becoming prideful, arrogant, and thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to
- \*We apply wisdom by not getting into unnecessary debt, and by being good stewards over the finances that GOD has blessed us with
- \*We apply wisdom by promoting peace instead of hostility and conflict towards our enemies
- \*We apply wisdom by making the most out of the opportunities that GOD has given us and by not becoming lazy or complacent
- \*We apply wisdom by being kind and compassionate to the poor and to those who are in need instead of simply ignoring them whenever we see them struggling
- \* We apply wisdom by not succumbing to the peer pressure that we encounter and the negative influences of those that we know, and instead continue to stand firm in our morals and values
- \*We apply wisdom by taking care of our bodies and by monitoring what we consume (whether it be food, drink, alcohol, or drugs) to ensure that we only consume and take in those things that are good and beneficial to us, and by abstaining from the things that are harmful and have the potential to be addictive
- \*We apply wisdom by resisting temptation, which if we fell into, would lead to our downfall, our ruin, and our destruction
- \*We apply wisdom by being patient in every area of our life and by not becoming overly anxious and nervous while we are waiting for certain things to happen in our life
- \*We apply wisdom by tithing and by not withholding our resources from our Heavenly Father
- \* We apply wisdom by having faith in the promises of GOD and by not worrying or doubting that our Heavenly Father will actually fulfill them in our life
- \* We apply wisdom by living our life as if GOD was watching over us, and by seeking to please Him with our thoughts, our words, and our actions
- \* We apply wisdom by being content with what we currently have and where we currently are in life, and by not becoming unhappy or discouraged because we choose to focus more on what we don't have or on the fact that we may not be where we want to be at this stage in our life
- \*We apply wisdom by abstaining from sexually immorality, adultery, and fornication that causes us to sin against our own body
- \*We apply wisdom by immediately asking GOD to forgive us when we make mistakes instead of running from Him
- \*We apply wisdom by treating others how we would like to be treated

These are just a few examples of how we can apply wisdom into our personal lives, and I encourage you to start applying these examples in yours.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING WISE?**

*“If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you” – King Solomon (Proverbs 9:12)*

There are plenty of benefits that you will experience as a result of using wisdom when making decisions and choices, here are a few of them that I would like to share with you.

#### ***Being Able To Endure Through Storms***

As Jesus was teaching His followers about the benefits of becoming wise and the advantages that they will have by applying wisdom in their life, He tells them the following parable found in Matthew 7:24-27 which states:

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

In this passage, a wise person is described as someone who listens to Jesus teachings and applies them into their life. As a result of being wise, the house that they build is built on a solid rock. The house in this scripture is symbolic of any area of your life, your marriage, your finances, your career, your health, your emotional stability, your spiritual growth, etc. When storms come, which are symbolic of any problem, challenge, obstacle, or hardship that can damage and ruin any area of your life, they are unable to have a negative impact because your house is built on solid rock through your application of GOD’s word in that area. For example, by applying GOD’s teachings into your life:

\*No issue or problem will be able to completely destroy your marriage when you are using wisdom by applying GOD’s definition of love (1 Corinthians 13) into your relationship.

\*No economic downturn or recession will be able to completely ruin your financial situation when you are using wisdom by applying GOD’s word to how you spend money by staying out of debt if possible, and by being generous to GOD and to those that are in need.

\*You will be able to avoid certain diseases and illness that can completely destroy your health when you are using wisdom by applying GOD’s teachings to what you allow yourself to take into your body (unhealthy food, drugs, alcohol, etc).

\*You will be able to be emotionally stable, and have great control over your emotions when you are using wisdom by applying GOD’s word to your life and having faith that He will sustain you when you cast your cares on Him through prayer (this prevents you from having anxiety, worry, and fear).

\*Finally, you will be able to continue to grow spiritually and fulfill GOD’s purpose for your life when you are using wisdom by applying GOD’s teachings to resist Satan’s temptations and to overcome his attacks.

Do you see the advantages of gaining wisdom and applying it in your life?

On the other hand, if you chose not to apply the word of GOD to your life when you make decisions and choices, then the same issues, problems, hardships, and challenges that a wise person can overcome will completely damage, destroy, and ruin every area of your life. For example, by not applying GOD's teachings in your life:

- \*Your marriage could potentially be headed towards a divorce
- \*You would begin to find yourself in debt or struggling to make ends meet
- \*Your health would begin to rapidly decline
- \*You would begin to experience an abundant amount of negative emotions that will rob you of the peace and the joy that GOD has given you
- \*Finally, you will find yourself having a hard time progressing and maturing spiritually in your relationship with your Heavenly Father.

All this can happen if you do not use wisdom by living according to GOD's teachings. I pray that you begin to live wisely so that your "house" will be able to withstand and overcome the storms and the problems that you encounter and not collapse under the pressure. Here are some other examples of the advantages and the benefits of being wise:

### ***Eternal Life***

When we make wise decisions by applying GOD's teachings to our life, the Bible informs us in Proverbs 15:24 that, "the path of life leads upward (towards Heaven) for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave (Hell)."

### ***Avoiding Danger***

Wisdom helps you avoid danger by keeping you from traveling down the wrong path in life. Proverbs 14:16 teaches us that, "the wise are cautious and avoid danger; fools plunge ahead with reckless confidence."

### ***Prosperity And Joy***

Proverbs 16:20 states that, "(a wise person) those who listen to instruction will prosper; those who trust the Lord will be joyful." Your success and your joy are dependent on your willingness to apply GOD's teachings in your life.

### ***Power And Strength***

Proverbs 24:5 tell us that, "a wise man has great power and a man of knowledge increases strength." Power is defined as the authority to act or to do something. As a wise person, you will be able to utilize your GOD-given authority to advance the Kingdom of GOD, and to fulfill the goals and the dreams that He has given to you to accomplish.

### ***Overcoming Deception, Deceit, and Dishonesty From Others***

Proverbs 2:12 explains that, "wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse."

Aren't these all great benefits that show us how valuable wisdom truly is, and how much we should begin to pursue after it? These are all great reasons that should motivate us to use wisdom when we are making choices by basing our decisions on GOD's teachings.

### **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES CONCERNING WISDOM**

"Wise are they who have learned these truths: Trouble is temporary. Time is tonic. Tribulation is a test tube." - William Arthur Ward

Here are some additional scriptures found in the Bible that are on the topic of wisdom:

\*Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. *Ecclesiastes 7:12*

\*Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. *Proverbs 23:4*

\*A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control. *Proverbs 29:11*

\*A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. *Proverbs 19:11*

\*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise. *Proverbs 11:30*

\*The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. *Proverbs 12:15*

\*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. *James 3:17*

### **CONCLUSION**

*"I do not think much of a man who is not wiser today than he was yesterday."* - Abraham Lincoln

I pray that you have found this information about wisdom to be insightful, beneficial, and relevant to you, and that you begin to make wise choices by basing your decisions on GOD's teachings. By applying wisdom in your personal life, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship by continuing to grow spiritually; establishing a closer connection with your Heavenly Father, developing Christ-like character and qualities, fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life, and successfully accomplishing the goals and the dreams that GOD has placed on your heart for you to achieve. Amen!!!

## **RIGHTEOUSNESS 101**

When I was growing up, I used to admire and look up to people who were powerful; who were respected, who were rich, and who were influential. I would wonder what it would be like to be on their good side, and to have them lend me their help and assistance so that I could become successful and prosperous as well. I remember wishing that those people that I respected would give me guidance, insight, and wisdom so that I could follow their footsteps and get on the right path towards achieving my similar goals and dreams.

As a Christian, you are able to receive this help, this assistance, this guidance, and this support from the most powerful, the most respected, the most wealthy, and the most influential being alive; your Heavenly Father. GOD's help and assistance is available to you as His child because once you accepted Jesus Christ into your life, you took on His righteousness and were placed in a position of right-standing with GOD enabling you and Him to be on good terms. To be on good terms with someone indicates that the two of you are not enemies, and that the two of you are now good friends. To illustrate this point, James 2:23 explains to us that, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith. He was even called the friend of God."

Being able to understand the righteousness that GOD has given you will provide you with a better appreciation of what Jesus did for you on the cross, and it will give you a better understanding of how GOD relates to you now that you and Him are on good terms. This page is dedicated to answering the fundamental questions that you may have about righteousness, and to providing you with information and knowledge for you to apply in your spiritual life to help you grow and mature. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?**

Righteousness, or to be made righteous, is defined as being in a position of right standing with GOD. To be made righteous means that you have been justified by GOD, and that He has declared you to be innocent of any wrong doing. A person who is righteous is someone who is living their life in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to GOD. It is important to know that our righteousness (our good relationship with GOD, and our justification of being declared innocent of any wrongdoing) is not dependent solely on our ability to follow all of GOD's commands and teachings; rather, our willingness to live according to GOD's standards and instructions is a *result* of our righteousness, not the *source* of our righteousness.

The source of our righteousness is Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless life on Earth and died on the cross for our sins. Because Jesus lived a sinless life, GOD judged Him as being righteous. When we place our faith in Jesus and accept Him into our life as our Lord and our Savior, we inherit His righteousness and His sinless life in GOD's sight. As a result of inheriting Jesus' righteousness, we are placed in a position of good standing with GOD in our relationship with Him; we are judged to be innocent of any wrongdoing, and GOD pronounces that the way that we lead our life is pleasing and acceptable to Him.

### **HOW DO I BECOME RIGHTEOUS?**

To become righteous, we must place our faith in Jesus Christ and believe that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and we must also believe that GOD raised Him from the dead. Romans 10:9 teaches us that, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved."

The Bible also explains to us in Romans 3:22-23 that, “we are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Because of our sin and immorality, we fall short of the standard that GOD has set for us to live by. For this reason, there was nothing that we can do (good works, good deeds, etc) to be placed in a position of right standing with GOD. Isaiah 64:6 illustrates this point by proclaiming that, “all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

In order to judge the way that we live our life to be acceptable to Him so that we would not be condemned to hell for our sins, and in order to make us eligible to be in right standing with Him, GOD sent His son Jesus Christ to pay the debt that we owe because of our sins, and to suffer the punishment of death on the cross that we deserve in our place. 2 Corinthians 5:21 explains that, “God made him who had no sin (Jesus Christ) to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

In spite of knowing that we can only be placed in right standing with GOD by placing our faith in Jesus Christ alone, we sometimes mistakenly believe that we can be put on good terms with GOD by completely observing His laws and following all of GOD’s teachings. We do this because we believe in error that we can do enough good things and perform enough good deeds to *deserve* or feel *worthy* enough to be on good terms with GOD. The Apostle Paul identified this problem in Romans 10:3 in which he writes; “for they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God’s way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law.”

Whenever we feel that we have to completely follow all of GOD’s commandments in order to be on good terms with Him, it causes us to feel extremely guilty, distant, and separated from GOD whenever we make a mistake by committing a sin. However, I want you to know that your Heavenly Father did not create you to adopt these types of feelings because of your sins. The Bible provides us with numerous scriptures warning us against believing that we will be placed on good terms and in a position of right-standing with GOD based on our ability to follow His commandments and our performance of good deeds:

\*For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. *Romans 3:20-22*

\*Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law. *Galatians 2:16*

\*And all who depend on the Law [who are seeking to be justified by obedience to the Law of rituals] are under a curse and doomed to disappointment and destruction, for it is written in the Scriptures, Cursed be everyone who does not continue to abide by all the precepts and commands written in the Book of the Law and to practice them. ...Now it is evident that no person is justified (declared righteous and brought into right standing with God) through the Law, for the Scripture says, The man in right standing with God shall live by and out of faith and he who through and by faith is declared righteous and in right standing with God shall live. *Galatians 3:10-11*



\*When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: “Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of sin. *Romans 4:4-8*”

These passages of scripture make it abundantly clear that our righteousness, our being in right-standing with GOD and experiencing the privilege of having GOD’s approval and acceptance, is not based on our observance of the law and our ability to strictly follow all of GOD’s commands, rather, our righteousness is solely based on our belief and our faith in Jesus Christ. Placing your faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to be made righteous, and to enjoy the benefits and privileges of living on good terms (as friends) with GOD.

Jesus explains in Matthew 5:20 that, “unless your righteousness (your uprightness and your right standing with God) is more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Pharisees based their righteousness on their ability to completely observe the law, and Jesus tells us that this type of righteousness is insufficient to make it into Heaven. None of us will be able to say to GOD on judgment day that we went through life without making any bad choices or decisions.

The way that we as Christians surpass this type of self-righteousness that does not depend on our own ability to live mistake-free, is by placing our faith in Jesus Christ, in which we accept the righteousness (the good relationship with GOD, and the justification of being declared innocent of any wrongdoing) that He has given us through the perfect life that He lived while on Earth. This is the only righteousness that qualifies us to be able to enter into Heaven.

### **HOW SHOULD WE LIVE NOW THAT WE HAVE BEEN MADE RIGHTEOUS?**

As a result of being made righteous, we should be committed to living for GOD in every area of our life. When Jesus died on the cross so that we could be made righteous, He offered us His righteousness with this instruction in Matthew 5:48, “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus offers us His righteousness not so that we could abuse it by returning to a life of sin after we have received it, not at all! Jesus offered us His righteousness so that we would begin to follow His example of abstaining from sin, and by living a holy life that reflects His characteristics and qualities.

It would be foolish for us as Christians to believe that because we have been made righteous through our faith in Jesus Christ and not by following GOD’s commands, that this means that we no longer have to live according to His teachings and His guidelines. Paul addressed this issue of people choosing to live a sin-filled life after being made righteous in the book of Romans chapter 6 verses 15-18 when he wrote, “well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.”

Righteous living consists of abiding by GOD’s commandments, and applying His wisdom in our personal life by separating ourselves from sin and immorality. As we begin to live according to the word of GOD, we will receive GOD’s blessings and favor in our life. Here is some of the guidance that the Bible provides us which gives us insight as to how a righteous person should live:

\*Galatians 5:16-26 teaches us that we should; “let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the Law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.

\*Romans 6:12-14 gives us the following instructions: “Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.”

\*James 1:19-21 informs us that we must all: “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.”

\*1 Timothy 6:10-11 warns us that, “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. But you... are a child of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.”

\*Ephesians 4:21-32 teaches us that: “Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”

\*Colossians 3:5-16 encourages us to: “Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don’t lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or

uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father."

\*Finally, 2 Peter: 5-11 teaches us that in order to live righteously and grow spiritually, that you must: "make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins. So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away. Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

These are just some of the guidelines that the Bible provides us to teach us how to live a righteous lifestyle, and as we begin to apply these scriptures and teachings in our personal life, our lifestyle becomes pleasing to GOD and acceptable in His sight. If at any point we make a mistake by committing sin, the Bible teaches us in 1 John 1:9 that, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." As we confess our sins to GOD and ask Him to forgive us, He purifies us and cleanses us from anything that separates us from being on good terms with Him.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING RIGHTEOUS?**

There are numerous benefits for us who have accepted GOD's righteousness, and who continue to live righteously in accordance with His instructions and teachings. These benefits include:

#### ***Answered Prayers***

\*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. *James 5:16*

\*For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous (those who are upright and in right standing with God), and His ears are attentive to their prayer. *1 Peter 3:12*

\*The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous (the upright, in right standing with Him). *Proverbs 15:29*

#### ***Deliverance In Times of Trouble***

\*When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their distress and troubles. The Lord is close to those who are of a broken heart and saves such as are crushed with sorrow for sin and are humbly and thoroughly penitent. Many evils confront the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. *Psalms 34:17- 20*

\*He brought me forth also into a large place; He was delivering me because He was pleased with me and delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness (my conscious integrity and sincerity with Him); according to the cleanness of my hands has He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God. *Psalm 18:19-21*

\*But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord; He is their Refuge and secure Stronghold in the time of trouble. And the Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they trust and take refuge in Him. *Psalm 37:39-40*

\*The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked gets into it instead. *Proverbs 11:8*

### ***GOD's Help, Assistance, Support, Aid***

\*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. *Psalm 55:22*

\*For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. *Proverbs 24:16*

\*The steps of a [righteous] man are directed and established by the Lord when He delights in his way. Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord grasps his hand in support and upholds him. I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken or their seed begging bread. *Psalm 37:23-25*

\*The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. *Proverbs 10:3*

\*No [actual] evil, misfortune, or calamity shall come upon the righteous, but the wicked shall be filled with evil, misfortune, and calamity. *Proverbs 12:21*

### ***GOD's Blessings***

\*The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. *Proverbs 3:33*

\*The righteous man walks in his integrity; blessed (happy, fortunate, and enviable) are his children after him. *Proverbs 20:7*

\*The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree [be long-lived, stately, upright, useful, and fruitful]; they shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon [majestic, stable, durable, and incorruptible]. *Psalm 92:12*

\*Blessings are upon the head of the righteous (the upright, in right standing with God) but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence. *Proverbs 10:6*

\*The thing a wicked man fears shall come upon him, but the desire of the [uncompromisingly] righteous shall be granted. *Proverbs 10:24*

\*Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. *Proverbs 11:28*

\*The righteous eats to his own satisfaction, but the stomach of the wicked is in want. *Proverbs 13:25*

\*In the house of the righteous is great [priceless] treasure, but with the income of the wicked is trouble and vexation. *Proverbs 15:6*

\*A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous. *Proverbs 13:22*

### ***GOD's Favor***

\*For surely, O LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield. *Psalms 5:12*

As a Christian, the benefits that you receive for accepting GOD's righteousness are answered prayer, deliverance, GOD's assistance, GOD blessings, and being able to experience His favor in your life. Doesn't this motivate you to want to live righteously?

## **THE CONSEQUENCES OF LIVING UNRIGHTEOUSLY (Immorality)**

### ***Ignorance Is Not An Excuse***

I honestly feel that most of us do not understand the consequences of the unrighteous, sinful, and wicked actions that we commit, and so therefore we continue to commit sin over and over again. However, if we were aware of the consequences of these sinful actions, it could possibly convince us to change the way that we act, think, and live our life. The Apostle Paul wrote numerous passages of scripture addressing the consequences of living a wicked and unrighteous lifestyle. In the book of Romans chapter 1, Paul explains to us that no one can claim ignorance as an excuse to live a life of unrighteousness and wickedness, and then he describes some of the unrighteous characteristics and attitudes toward GOD when he wrote:

“But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning, and they disobey their parents. They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.” *Romans chapter 1:18-32*

I want to point out again that none of us can claim ignorance as an excuse as to why we are not living according to how GOD wants us to live, rather, we will all be held responsible and accountable for our behavior to GOD on judgment day.

### ***Suffering GOD's Wrath on the Day Of Judgment***

In response to those who choose to continue to live in opposition to the way that GOD teaches us to live, the Bible states that those people will encounter GOD's wrath on the Day of Judgment. Romans chapter 2:8 informs us that, "He will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil."

Jesus taught His followers a parable to illustrate what will happen to those who continue to do evil, and it is found in Matthew 13:24-30, with His explanation of the parable being found in verses 36-43:

"Here is another story Jesus told: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. "The farmer's workers went to him and said, 'Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?'"

"An enemy has done this!" the farmer exclaimed. "Should we pull out the weeds?" they asked. "No," he replied, "you'll uproot the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn."

"Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, "Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field." Jesus replied, "The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels." Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his

Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!"

### ***Exclusion From The Kingdom Of GOD***

Another consequence of living a sinful and immoral lifestyle is the consequence of being excluded from associating and inheriting the Kingdom of GOD. 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 9-10 states, "do you not know that the unrighteous and the wrongdoers will not inherit or have any share in the kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God."

The Kingdom of GOD represents our fellowship with GOD; our connection to Him, and His power, His authority, His rule, and His influence in our life. As a result of being righteous and living a righteous lifestyle, we have access to GOD's help, His assistance, His favor, His blessings, His wisdom, His prosperity, His protection, His guidance, and His deliverance from our troubles. However, by choosing to continue to live in unrighteousness and not according to GOD's instructions, you are separating yourself from these benefits, privileges, advantages, and blessings that come from being within the Kingdom of GOD.

### *Other Calamities*

Finally, here are some additional consequences found within the book of Proverbs that accompany a sinful and unrighteous lifestyle:

\*[GOD] knows what is going on in the homes of the wicked; he will bring disaster on them. *Proverbs 21:12*

\*The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again. But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked. *Proverbs 24:16*

\*The violence of the wicked sweeps them away, because they refuse to do what is just. *Proverbs 21:7*

\*The wicked are crushed by disaster, but the godly have a refuge when they die. *Proverbs 14:32*

\*The godly eat to their hearts' content, but the belly of the wicked goes hungry. *Proverbs 13:25*

\*The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the godly will flourish. *Proverbs 14:11*

\*No harm comes to the godly, but the wicked have their fill of trouble. *Proverbs 12:21*

\*The wicked die and disappear, but the family of the godly stands firm. *Proverbs 12:7*

\*Wickedness never brings stability, but the godly have deep roots. *Proverbs 12:3*

\*The fears of the wicked will be fulfilled; the hopes of the godly will be granted. *Proverbs 10:24*

\*When the storms of life come, the wicked are whirled away, but the godly have a lasting foundation. *Proverbs 10:25*

\*Fear of the Lord lengthens one's life, but the years of the wicked are cut short. *Proverbs 10:27*

\*The Lord will not let the godly go hungry, but he refuses to satisfy the craving of the wicked. *Proverbs 10:3*

My earnest prayer is that after you've read these consequences of living a sinful, wicked, and unrighteous lifestyle, that you will begin to turn away from this lifestyle, draw closer to GOD, and begin to live a life of righteousness as you enter into the Kingdom of GOD. As a reminder, the Bible informs us in 1 John 1:9 that, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." If you are willing to confess your sins to GOD and ask Him for forgiveness, He will purify you, cleanse you, and accept you into His Kingdom. Are you willing to do this today?

### **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES CONCERNING RIGHTEOUSNESS**

#### *Do You Have a Hunger To Become Righteous?*

Matthew 5:6 proclaims; "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." The word "blessed" means to be prosperous, to be joyful, and to be successful. The word "hunger," means to have a strong yearning, a deep longing, and an intense craving for something that you desire. The word "righteousness" means to be morally right, and to be in right standing and on good terms with GOD. By examining the definitions of these words, this verse is telling us that when we have a strong and intense

desire to be on good terms with GOD, we will experience prosperity and happiness, and we will be able to successfully accomplish all of our goals and dreams.

What I want to ask you today is; “How hungry are you for the benefits that come from living for GOD?” How much do you crave and desire being with your Heavenly Father? I want you to know that hunger is what drives athletes to push themselves in the weight room to become stronger and faster. Hunger is what drives students to study more to excel in school. Hunger is what drives people to practice to become better at using their talents and abilities. I'm asking you today....How hungry are you (how much do you desire) for a close relationship with Jesus Christ? How hungry are you for the gifts of the Holy Spirit? How hungry are you to see your life change for the better? How hungry are you (how much do you desire) to fulfill the plans and the purpose that GOD has for your life? How hungry are you to see people get saved and born again into the kingdom of GOD? How hungry are you for wisdom, for knowledge, and for understanding? How hungry are you (how much do you desire) to finally be able to experience true peace and true joy in your life? I ask you how hungry are you for (how much do you desire) these things, because it's the amount of hunger that you have that determines how much you will be satisfied.

If you are hungry for these things, than spend time reading the Bible and praying, and Jesus will satisfy your hunger for closeness with Him; He will satisfy your desire for the opportunity to use your gifts and talents, He will satisfy your desire for peace, joy, and wisdom, and He will satisfy your desire for the plans and the purpose that He has for your life to be fulfilled, and for you to achieve your goals and dreams. I want you to know that these are all things that GOD has for you; He just wants to see how hungry you are for them. As your brother in Christ, I pray that you never reach a point where you lose your hunger ( lose your desire ) for a close relationship with Jesus, because if you are no longer hungry, then you will no longer seek any nourishment that comes from being fed spiritually ( by reading GOD's word and through prayer ), and where there is no nourishment, there is no growth, and as a Christian you should never get to the point where you are no longer growing into becoming the person that GOD has called you to be, or no longer growing in your relationship with Jesus.

Hunger is what causes a discomfort in your body because you have desires that have yet to be met (this is what we call “hunger pains.”). In other words, because you have given up all hope of ever achieving your goals, of having your wishes fulfilled, and of seeing your dreams come true, it is causing you to suffer from unhappiness, discouragement, and even depression. But as a child of GOD, you no longer have to suffer from hunger pains anymore, because GOD is able to fulfill your desires to the point where you are truly satisfied and content. So how hungry are you?

### ***Understanding Righteousness Is Vital In Overcoming Negative Thoughts Concerning Our Relationship With GOD***

Ephesians 6:13-14 teaches us that GOD's righteousness is a vital part of our spiritual armor that we use to resist the attacks of our enemy, Satan. In this passage, we are told to, “put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.”

Why is Righteousness listed as a part of our armor to defend ourselves against Satan? Satan often influences Christians to feel guilty whenever we make mistakes; he tries to cause us to feel as if GOD is not pleased with us, he tries to convince us that GOD no longer loves us and is still angry with us because of the things that we have done wrong, and he attempts to persuade us that we are going to be punished for our sins by being condemned to hell. If at any time Satan is able to cause us to think this way, we will begin to separate ourselves from our relationship with GOD, and no longer pursue the goals and dreams that He has placed on our heart for us to achieve.



In order to combat these attacks on our mind so that we don't separate ourselves from our relationship with our Heavenly Father, we must have a correct understanding of what righteousness is. We also need to understand how we were made to be righteous, and we must always know that we stand on favorable terms in our relationship with GOD as a result of the righteousness that we have received by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. Even more, we must always remember that GOD has judged us to be innocent of any wrongdoing, and that our life is pleasing and acceptable to Him. When we have a solid grasp of the fact that we are righteous in GOD's sight, it enables us to be able to stand up against the negative thoughts and feelings that we encounter whenever we make a mistake by committing sin.

### ***Seeking Righteousness Should Be Our #1 Priority***

As Jesus was teaching His followers not to devote their time to worrying about the concerns of this life, He teaches us what we *should* devote our time to, and in Matthew 6:33 Jesus proclaims; "seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." To seek the kingdom of God is to study the word of GOD to discover how to live a life that pleasing to your Heavenly Father, and then to apply what you discover into your personal life, and as a result, He will always meet your needs.

In this scripture, Jesus is telling us not to worry about how our needs are going to be met, and He inform us that GOD already knows what are needs are. Jesus then teaches us to seek GOD's kingdom by developing a relationship with him and living righteously *first*, and as we do this, everything that we need will be given to us. As humans, we often have the tendency to worry about how our needs are going to be met; we worry about our financial situation, we worry about illnesses, we worry about finding a mate, and we worry about finding a job, but GOD already knows what we need and desire. Jesus instructs us to seek GOD's kingdom *first*, and then all these things will be given to us according to GOD's will.

Frequently we fall into the habit of seeking our desires from GOD without ever seeking a relationship with him, which indicates that our priorities are in the wrong place. GOD wants you to put him first in your life, and by doing this he will provide those things to you that you need; He will provide for you financially, He will provide healing, He will provide a good mate for you, and He will provide a good job for you when you seek to develop a relationship with him first by reading his word, by communicating with Him through prayer, and by worshipping Him. I want to encourage you to begin to place establishing a relationship with GOD and living righteously as your #1 priority in life, and He will respond by meeting your needs.

### ***Persecutions And Blessings For Living A Righteous Life***

Jesus Christ serves as our example of how to live a righteous life, and although He was completely blameless and righteous, He still encountered opposition, ridicule, threats, suffering, and persecution. Likewise, do not be surprised when you begin to encounter and experiences these same things when you begin to live a righteous lifestyle as a Christian. However, Jesus wants us to know that we will receive a reward whenever we encounter persecution or hardship for being righteous. Matthew 5:10 teaches us that, "blessed and happy and enviably fortunate and spiritually prosperous are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (for being and doing right), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

### ***Righteousness Should Not Be Used To Impress Others, But to Please GOD***

Jesus warns us in Matthew 6:1 not to do righteous deeds in order to receive praise and recognition from others, but to do them so that our Heavenly Father will be pleased with us. This scripture warns us to, "be careful not to do righteous things in front of men so they can see what you are doing. Otherwise, you won't have a reward with your Father in heaven." The motive behind our prayers, our service to others, our

preaching or teaching, our fasting, and our generous acts should never be to gain recognition or praise from other people, instead, every good deed that we do should be done out of love for other people for the purpose of bringing praise and glory to our Heavenly Father.

### ***GOD's Discipline Leads To Righteousness***

As GOD's children, whenever we willingly choose to step outside of His will and the righteous life that He has called us to live, our Heavenly Father disciplines us to correct our behavior. Rather than allowing us to continue to go in a direction that will lead to our downfall, destruction, and ruin, GOD disciplines us for the purpose of bringing us back to living a righteous lifestyle. Hebrews 12:10-11 informs us that, "our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way."

Our Heavenly Father disciplines us by placing us in humbling circumstances and situations in which we rediscover our total dependence on GOD. It is through these tough situations and periods of adversity that GOD begins to draw us into a closer relationship with Him. If you are experiencing a particularly difficult time in your life right now, GOD may be trying to grab your attention to help you take the right steps to get your life back on the right track.

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that this chapter provided you with a better understanding on the topic of righteousness, and that you recognize that you have been made righteous not by your own good works and behavior, but by placing your faith in Jesus Christ. As a result of being made righteous, you have been placed into a position where you experience the privileges of being in right standing and on good terms with GOD. Also, GOD now judges you as being innocent of any wrong doing, allowing you to possess eternal life and to escape from being condemned to hell. Furthermore, GOD now pronounces the way that you lead your life as being pleasing and acceptable to Him. I want to encourage you to begin to apply what you have learned into your personal life by living righteously, which will enable you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you continue to grow spiritually and fulfill GOD's purpose for your life. Amen!!!

## HOLINESS 101

I have many clothes in my closet that I can choose from on any given day. Some of my clothes throughout the years have been exposed to a lot of mess, dirt, food stains, and other impurities. As a result, those clothes have become faded, torn, and less appealing. However, I have other clothes in my closet that I make sure that I do not expose to mess. These are the clothes that I make sure I do not get any food stains on and that I do not allow to get mixed up with other impurities. As a result, these clothes still look as good as they did when I first bought them.

Similar to these clothes, we as GOD's children decide whether or not we will expose ourselves to contaminants and to other things that will cause us to become impure (such as secular music, immoral shows and movies, drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc.). If we do, then our lives become less appealing and pleasing to GOD, and it causes His presence and His glory to fade in our life. But if we choose not to expose ourselves to mess, to contaminants, and to things that will cause us to be impure (such as secular music, immoral shows, and movies, drugs, alcohol, pornography etc.), our lives will reflect GOD's holiness, and His presence and His glory will be clearly apparent in our life.

My prayer for you as your brother in Christ is that you make the decision to not expose yourself to things that can cause you to be impure, but that you rather choose to remain holy and free from things that can contaminate your spiritual purity. The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand what holiness is; why you should live holy, how to become holy, and the benefits of living a life of holiness. Enjoy!

### **WHAT IS HOLINESS? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HOLY?**

*"This and this alone, is Christianity, a universal holiness in every part of life, a heavenly wisdom in all our actions, not conforming to the spirit and temper of the world but turning all worldly enjoyments into means of piety and devotion to God." – William Law*

To be holy is defined as: to be devoted to GOD by being free from sin; pure in heart, guiltless, perfect, flawless, blameless, and righteous. To live holy indicates that we are separate from the world and this society, and that we do not conform; do not agree, and do not abide by its thoughts, attitudes, ideas, philosophies, teachings, and influences that contradict GOD's teachings. From the day that you were born to the day of your death, you are constantly being bombarded with worldly influences that attempt to sway you to begin to act, to speak, to behave, and to think contrary to the word of GOD and how He desires for you to live. For this reason, the Bible proclaims in Romans 12:2; "do not copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

The people that we encounter throughout the course of our life often carry a worldly mentality, so we must be careful about choosing who will associate with; who we become friends with, and who we will allow to influence our life. With this in mind, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 proclaims to us, "don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever?"

### **HOW DO WE BECOME HOLY?**

(The Gospel of Jesus Christ)

*"God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ." – The Apostle Peter (1 Peter 1:2)*

The very first point I want to make in regards to the topic of holiness is that if we could make ourselves holy without any outside help, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die on the cross. No matter how hard we try to completely follow all of GOD's commandments, the Bible explains in Romans 3:23 that, "everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." In fact, the Bible also explains this point even further by telling us in 1 John 1:10 that, "if we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts." Because we all have committed sin and fallen short of GOD's standard, the source and the origin of our holiness cannot come from within ourselves or from anything that we do. No matter how good of a person you are, and regardless of how many good deeds you perform, you still cannot enter into Heaven and obtain eternal life without GOD's help.

In order to make us holy, GOD sent His son Jesus Christ to die on the cross, and it is through His death that we receive atonement and forgiveness for our sins. With our sins being atoned for, we as believers qualify to inherit salvation, and eternal life. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 10:10 that, "God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time." It is because of Jesus' death on the cross that we as Christians are made holy in GOD's sight. When we accept the gift of salvation by placing our faith in Jesus Christ, we also accept His life as the source and the origin of our holiness as well. As a result, we as GOD's children are holy in GOD's sight despite our personal flaws, shortcomings, and mistakes.

Colossians 1:21-22 proclaims that, "you were his (GOD's) enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault." This is why we call the gospel "the good news," and the reason it is labeled as good news is due to the fact that even though we were disqualified from being holy and from receiving eternal life because of our sins, our Heavenly Father is giving us the opportunity to receive salvation; to receive eternal life, and to be made holy if we accept and believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### ***The Holy Spirit Empowers Us To Live Holy Lives***

1 Corinthians 1:30 teaches us that, "Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin." Once we have accepted the gift of salvation, GOD desires for us to begin to live a holy life that is pure and free from sin. 2 Timothy 1:9 explains to us that, "God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus." I want you to remember that none of us can live holy by ourselves without any outside help because of our sinful nature. Our sinful nature is what continually influences us to act, to think, and to speak in ways that are displeasing to GOD. For this reason, when we accept the gift of salvation, GOD places His Holy Spirit within us, who then begins to work inside of our heart to replace our sinful nature, qualities, attributes, and characteristics, with GOD's holy nature, qualities, attributes, and characteristics.

Recognizing our inability to live holy on our own, GOD provided us with His Holy Spirit to empower us to be able to live according to His will. 2 Peter 1:3-4 informs us that, "by His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires." The "divine power" that the Bible is referring to in this scripture that makes it possible for us to live a holy and Godly life is the Holy Spirit, which we were given when we received GOD's gift of salvation. As we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and to manage our lives according to GOD's word, it enables us to obtain and to acquire GOD's holy

and divine nature, and to escape and turn away from the things in the world that can corrupt us and cause us to become spiritually impure (pride, lust, unforgiveness, foolishness, greed, jealousy, idolatry, etc).

Our sinful nature contributed to us living a sinful life by influencing us to engage in “sexual immorality; impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. (Galatians 5:19-21). The Holy Spirit begins to work inside of us to replace these types of sinful characteristics with GOD’s characteristics which enable us to live a holy life. These holy characteristics consist of; “love; joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The more time that we spend with GOD by studying the Bible, applying His teachings, and communicating with Him through prayer, the more the Holy Spirit is able to work inside of us to produce the qualities and characteristics of GOD in our life, which enables us to live holy.

2 Timothy 2:20-21 explains that, “in a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” By choosing to turn away from our sinful characteristics and qualities (articles of wood and clay) by allowing the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from them, the only thing remaining within us will be GOD’s characteristics and qualities (articles of gold and silver) that enable us to live holy, and to accomplish the goals, the dreams, and the vision that He has given to us to achieve. We will not be able to fulfill GOD’s plan for our lives and accomplish our goals and dreams if we do not allow GOD to cleanse us of our sinful characteristics. This point is very important to understand. Now that you know that whether or not you fulfill GOD’s purpose for your life is dependent on you allowing Him to cleanse you from your sinful nature, will you make the choice today to start spending time studying His word, applying His teachings, and communicating with Him through prayer to allow Him to do so?

Regarding the differences between our sinful characteristics produced by our sinful nature, and our Godly characteristics produced by the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 4:21-32 gives us the following instructions:

“Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” *Ephesians 4:21-32*

As the Holy Spirit works inside of us to transform our sinful nature into GOD’s nature, we as Christians should begin to display and exhibit the Godly characteristics that we have received through the Holy Spirit by living a holy life. The reason why we choose to resist sinful temptations in order to live a holy life is to show our Heavenly Father that we appreciate the gift of eternal life and salvation that He has given to us. Romans 12: 1-2 proclaims, “Brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.”

1 Peter 1:12-16 instructs us to, “think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.” The way that we begin to live a holy life is by applying GOD’s teachings and wisdom that is found in the Bible into our personal life. Living holy consists of loving other people unconditionally, serving others, and resisting the temptations that we face that influence us to commit sin. Romans 6:19 states that; “previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy.”

As we strive to live holy, righteous, and free from falling into temptations, if at any point we make a mistake or commit a sin, GOD tells us in 1 John 1:9 that, “if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” By repenting and asking GOD to forgive our sins and mistakes, our Heavenly Father responds by forgiving us and by cleansing us from all wickedness. As a result, once we ask for forgiveness from GOD and receive it, we are once again made holy (perfect, guiltless, blameless, free from sin) and righteous in GOD’s sight. So what are some examples of how we can apply the word of GOD in our life to live holy? Let’s look at the answer to this question in next section.

### **HOW DO WE LIVE A HOLY LIFE?**

*“No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he should be.” - A.W. Tozer*

In order to begin to live a holy life, we must learn how GOD desires us to live by studying the Bible to discover how He wants us to respond to temptations and to life’s circumstances. After discovering how GOD wants us to respond to life’s situations, we then can apply what we learn into our everyday life in order to live holy. Here are a few examples of living a life of holiness:

***To live holy means to be patient with people and to forgive them for their mistakes, while the world influences you to retaliate and take revenge on those who offend you...***

\*“Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” *Colossians 3:11-13*

***To live holy means to be humble in all circumstances, while the world influences you to be prideful, arrogant, and to have a big ego...***

\*“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” *James 4:6*

***To live holy means to abstain from sexual sins such as pre-marital sex, fornication, and adultery, while the world influences you to be sexually immoral and promiscuous...***

\*“God’s will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor— not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways. Never harm or cheat a Christian brother in this matter by violating his wife for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives.” *1 Thessalonians 4:3-7*

\*“Don’t you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! And don’t you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “the two are united into one.” But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.” *1 Corinthians 6:15-20*

***To live holy means to monitor the words that you speak to ensure that you are only speaking life and blessings; words that benefit and edify those that hear them, while the world influences you to speak rashly, recklessly, abusively, and to speak curses and death over your life and the lives of others...***

\*“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. *Ephesians 4:29*

\*“The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.” *Proverbs 18:21*

***To live holy means to not desire other people’s belongings, while the world influences you to be jealous and envious of others and to covet other people’s possessions***

\*“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.” *Galatians 5:25-26*

\*“You must not covet (desire) your neighbor’s house. You must not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.” *Exodus 20:17*

***To live holy means to live a life of integrity and truthfulness, while the world influences you to be deceitful, dishonest, unethical, and corrupt in order to take advantage of others and to get ahead in life***

\*“So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.” *1 Peter 2:1*

***To live holy means to be compassionate and generous towards the poor, while the world influences you to be inconsiderate towards those that are in need while being stingy with our resources***

\*“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.” *1 John 3:16-19*

\*“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.” *James 2:14-17*

***To live holy means to live as a servant to others, while the world teaches you to be selfish, self-interested, and self-centered***

\*“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.” *1 Peter 4:10*

***To live holy means to promote peace as much as possible between you and your enemies, while the world teaches you to use violence and hostility to resolve your conflicts with those who oppose you***

\*“Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.” *Hebrews 12:14-15*

\*“Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD.” *Romans 12:17-19*

\*“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.” *Matthew 5:9*

***To live holy means to be content with what you have, while the world teaches you to be greedy by influencing you to think that what you have is never enough, and that you always need something new or something better***

\*“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” *Hebrews 13:5*

These are just a few examples of what it means to be holy, and I pray that you begin to apply these examples in your personal life. Also, remember that as you strive to live holy, righteous, and free from falling into temptations, if at any point you make a mistake or commit a sin, GOD tells us in 1 John 1:9 that, “if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” By repenting and asking GOD to forgive you for your sins and mistakes, our Heavenly Father responds by forgiving you and by cleansing you from all wickedness. As a result, once you ask for forgiveness from GOD and receive it, you are once again made holy (perfect, guiltless, blameless, free from sin) and righteous in GOD’s sight.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF LIVING A HOLY LIFE?**

The first benefit of being made holy and living a holy life is relational. When we were living in sin; unholy, and disqualified from receiving eternal life, we were enemies with GOD. But now that we have accepted Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we are now a cherished member of GOD’s family. GOD now becomes our loving Heavenly Father, and Jesus becomes our compassionate brother. Hebrew 2:11 describes our new relationship with GOD this way by stating; “so now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.” Being a part of GOD’s family carries with it tremendous benefits. Let’s take a look at them:

#### **Provision and Supply** Jehovah-Jireh - Provider

We have a Heavenly Father who is able and willing to provide for us. Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD’s family, we are provided for by having our needs met.

\*“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.



Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”  
*Matthew 6:31-33*

\*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 4:19*

**Health and Well-Being** Jehovah-Rophe - Healer

We have a Heavenly Father who is able and willing to cure all illnesses, and to heal us from every form of disease (cancer, diabetes, HIV, etc.). Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD’s family, we have access to GOD’s healing power in our life.

\*He (Jesus) was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. *Isaiah 53:5*

**Protection and Refuge** Jehovah-Machsi - Lord my Refuge

We have a Heavenly Father who is able and willing to protect us from all of the dangers and the threats that we encounter. Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD’s family, we receive protection in times of danger.

\*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection. Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day. Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday. Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you. Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished. If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. They will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone. You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! The LORD says, “I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation. *Psalms 91*

**Deliverance In Times of Trouble** Jehovah-Mephalti - Lord my Deliverer

We have a Heavenly Father who is able to deliver us, rescue us, and save us from the difficult circumstances and situations that we encounter. Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD’s family, we receive deliverance in times of trouble.

\*The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. *Psalms 34:17*

\*A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all. *Psalms 34:19*

**Prosperity and Success**

We have a Heavenly Father who possesses infinite wealth and riches, and who is able to grant us favor and success in our endeavors. Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD’s family, we are able to prosper in every area of our life.

\*How joyful are those who fear the LORD—all who follow his ways! You will enjoy the fruit of your labor. How joyful and prosperous you will be! *Psalms 128:1-2*

\*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. *Jeremiah 29:11*

\*Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. *Proverbs 16:3*

### **Guidance and Direction**

We have a Heavenly Father who has infinite wisdom, and who offers to lead us, guide us, and direct us in life. Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD's family, we receive guidance and direction throughout the course of our life.

\*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. *Psalms 32:8*

### **Answered Prayer Requests**

We have a Heavenly Father who is able to respond to and grant the requests that we ask of Him through prayer. Because we have been made holy, live a holy life, and are a member of GOD's family, we receive answers to our prayer requests according to GOD's will.

\*Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. *Matthew 7:7-11*

\*"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." *John 15:7-8*

\*"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." *Mark 11:24*

These are just a few of the examples of the benefits that are available to us now that we have become a member of GOD's family. Aren't you glad that you are a part of it?

## **CONCLUSION**

I pray that the information contained in this chapter assisted you in being able to understand what holiness is; how to live holy, and the benefits associated with living a holy life. By applying the information on this chapter into your personal life, it will cause you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship, and you will be able to continue to grow and mature spiritually; develop a closer relationship and connection with your Heavenly Father, fulfill His purpose for your life, and successfully accomplish the goals and the dreams that He has placed on your heart for you to achieve. Amen!!!

## **POWER AND AUTHORITY 101**

*"The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any" – Alice Walker*

In my first four years as an enlisted member in the military, I was what they called "junior enlisted." At these ranks I did not possess any authority, rather, I was subject to the power and the authority of the people who were higher ranking than me. This meant that I had to follow their orders in order to avoid punishment, and that I had to serve them because of the low position that I was in. In the fifth year of my military career, I became a non-commissioned officer (a staff sergeant), and with this new rank came power and authority. I was now the person in charge; I was now the person enforcing the rules and regulations, I now controlled certain aspects of my military career. Instead of only being influenced, I now influenced others.

One thing that I learned from my experience in the military is that when you do not have any power and authority, your career can be very unpleasant. However, when you do have power and authority; when you are in control, and when you are able to influence the environment around you, then your career is much more enjoyable and pleasant. I want you to know that before you came to Christ, you did not have any power or any authority over your life. As a result, you were under the influence of Satan and your sinful nature, and he did whatever he could to make your life as un-enjoyable and unpleasant as possible, as he is still trying to do right now by creating problems, turmoil, and chaos within it.

The great news is that when you gave your life to Christ, He gave you power and authority so that you were no longer under the control of your sinful nature, or under Satan's influence. So now instead of living a life of turmoil and chaos, you have been given power and authority that when you exercise, will grant you a life of peace and joy. Instead of living a life in bondage to sin, you have been given power and authority that when you exercise, will grant you a life of holiness free from the control of sin. Instead of living a life in which obstacles block your path from moving forward or reaching higher in life, you have been given power and authority that when you exercise, will put you on a highway towards achieving the goals and the dreams that GOD has placed on your heart for you to accomplish.

Far too many Christians are not experiencing the abundant and blessed life that Jesus came to give to us, and the reason that we are not experiencing this abundant life is because we are not exercising the power and the authority that we have received from our Heavenly Father. The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand the power and the authority that Jesus has given to you as a child of GOD, and to explain to you how to exercise it and apply it in your personal life so that you can experience the benefits of it. Enjoy!!!

## **POWER AND AUTHORITY IN CHRISTIANITY**

*"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."- The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 4:20)*

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about Christianity? Do you begin to think about following specific rules and commandments? Is it tradition that you first think about? Are church services and preachers the first things that come to your mind? Do you associate being a Christian with being weak, defenseless and vulnerable in life? Over the course of many years we have begun to reduce what Christianity truly consists of, and we have mischaracterized the definition of what a true Christian is. We have limited Christianity and being a Christian by putting it inside of a box and believing that it only consists of following a set a rules (don't do this, don't do that), and performing rituals and traditions that do not bring us any closer to GOD. As a result, Christianity no longer seems appealing or of interest to those both outside of it, and also from within.

When Paul wrote these words found in 1 Corinthians 4:20 saying that the kingdom of GOD, "is not a matter of talk but of power," he was teaching us that Christianity is more than just simply following a set

rules and performing meaningless rituals and traditions. Paul is teaching us that there is more to being a Christian than what we tend to limit it to be, and that there is more to explore outside of the box that we try to keep Christianity within.

### **PAUL WAS SAYING THAT THERE IS POWER IN CHRISTIANITY, AND THAT BEING A CHRISTIAN MEANT THAT YOU WERE POWERFUL!!!!**

This scripture tells us that the Kingdom of GOD is not a matter of talk, but of POWER. What is power? Power is defined as the ability, the strength, and the capacity to do something," and as "authority." The thing that separates Christianity from all other religions in the world is that it possesses power inside of it; power to create change in our individual lives and in our corporate society, power to help and assist us, power to provide, power to heal diseases, power to overcome trials, power to grant victory in life's battles, power for success, power for prosperity, and power for deliverance from troubles.

When Jesus was physically here on Earth, He didn't spend all of His time traveling from town to town giving people rules to follow. Jesus did not only preach and speak to people to encourage them and inspire them while they were in trouble (anybody could have done that). The religious leaders, the Pharisees, taught the people that they had to closely follow GOD's law and abide by all of the rituals and traditions in order to get close to Him. As a result, the people were not experiencing the power and the love of GOD, and instead of developing a closer and deeper relationship with their Heavenly Father, they felt distant and far from Him because of the guilt that they experienced as a result of their sins.

As Jesus arrives on the scene, He does something different from what the Pharisees were doing that was much more effective. Jesus began to demonstrate the power of GOD by casting out demons; healing the sick, and performing other miracles. When people came into contact with Jesus and the power that He was displaying, they began to follow Him because they now believed that He truly was sent from GOD. This teaches us that when people get a revelation and an understanding of what true Christianity is, and not the set of rules and traditions of legalism that people have turned Christianity into, they will begin to see value and worth in giving their life to GOD and living for him. Displaying the power of GOD in the lives of others enables us to become effective evangelists.

Even Paul spoke about the importance of demonstrating GOD's power while teaching others about Christianity when He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 that, "when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true..." Paul further addressed the topic of power in Christianity in 1 Corinthians 2:4-6 by proclaiming, "my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." These scriptures provide biblical support to the fact that there is power in the Christian faith.

### **HOW DO WE APPLY THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY IN OUR PERSONAL LIFE?**

*"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father." - John (John 14:12)*

When Jesus died on the cross and ascended into Heaven, that didn't mean that all of the power of Christianity left with Him as well, not at all. Rather, because Jesus ascended into Heaven, we as Christians that are living here on Earth should still be doing the same things that He did and even greater things as well. Here is how we display and apply the power of Christianity in our personal life.

### ***Overcoming Satan***

*“When you doubt your power, you give power to your doubt”*

In Luke 10:18-19, Jesus teaches His followers; "look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them." In this passage of scripture, Jesus teaches us that He has given us authority over all of the power of the enemy, who is Satan. By giving us authority over Satan, we as Christians now have the power to act on GOD's behalf by enforcing His will and what He desires to happen here on Earth, and we also have been given power to give Satan orders and instructions.

When you see the power of Satan working in your life or in the life of someone you know, because you as a Christian have power over him, you have the authority to order him to leave and depart through prayer. The Bible tells us in James 5:16 that "the prayer of a righteous man (or woman) is powerful and effective." When we pray "in the name of Jesus," we are exercising the authority that He has given us in order to enforce the will and the desires of GOD here on Earth. So what is GOD's will and His desire for us here on Earth? It is GOD's will and His desire for you to be free from anything that is influencing you to sin, and that has taken over control of your life. It is GOD's will for you to be healthy and to not perish or suffer from diseases. It is GOD's will for you to be provided for and to have the basic necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter). It is GOD's will for you to overcome the trials and tribulations that are preventing you from moving forward towards fulfilling His plan for your life.

Any time we experience the power of Satan in our life or in the lives of others, we place our hands on that person and exercise the power that GOD has given us by praying "in Jesus' name and authority," and ordering Satan to depart and to leave. By doing this you are restricting Satan's power and preventing his attacks from ruining your life and the lives of others. This is the power that we possess as Christians that has been given to us by GOD, and it is this authority that we have that enables us to live a life of peace and joy that is free from any stronghold that seeks to continually cause us to commit sin and ruin our life.

### ***Crushing Heads***

The second part of Luke 10:18-19 informs us that we as Christian can, "walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them." The "snakes" and the "scorpions" that Jesus is referring to are not the physical reptiles that are found in the desert. Rather, a "snake" is symbolic of someone under the influence of Satan who seeks to betray you and deceive you. A "scorpion" is symbolic of someone under the influence of Satan who seeks to cause you harm and to injure you. In your lifetime, you are going to encounter many "snakes" (deceitful people) and many "scorpions"(people who want to cause you harm). However, as a Christian and as a child of GOD, you do not need to be afraid of the "snakes" and the "scorpions" that you encounter in life. Jesus has told us that He has given us power and authority to "crush" these "snakes" and "scorpions," meaning that we have the power to resist them, to stop them, and to prevent them from successfully carrying out their plans of deceiving us and harming us.

So any time that we come into contact with any "snakes" or "scorpions," we can exercise the power that GOD has given us by praying "in Jesus' name and authority," and then ordering that their attacks and their plans will be unsuccessful by opening up our mouth and proclaiming it with our words. If you do not exercise this authority and the power that GOD has given you, you will continue to go through life being deceived, fooled, misled, and being harmed and abused. However, if you do exercise this authority and the power that GOD has given you through prayer, than you will be able to avoid being deceived, fooled, and misled, and you will be able to bring the harm and the abuse in your life to an end.

### ***Demolishing Strongholds***

The Bible makes it clear that we as GOD's children are at war with our enemy, Satan. For this reason, the Bible gives us the following instructions in Ephesians 6:10-12; "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."

In this war with Satan, we will not be able to fight or achieve victory using worldly weapons (such as guns, bombs, or grenades). Rather, in order to win victory in this spiritual war, we must begin to use spiritual weapons, which prayer is a part of. 2 Corinthians 10:4 tells us that, "the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." This scripture informs us that the divine power that we have been given by GOD is able to demolish strongholds. A stronghold is defined as, "an area of our life that Satan is occupying and is entrenched within that prevents us from experiencing peace and joy, and from living free from bondage to sin or other forms of immorality."

We allow Satan to establish strongholds in our life whenever we repeatedly yield or become involved in certain sinful activities. For example, if you continuously drink or use drugs, Satan can establish a stronghold in that area of your life and it will become extremely difficult for you to be able to give up using these vices, causing you to either become an alcoholic or a drug addict. Other strongholds include fornication, pornography, greed, discontentment, jealousy, unforgiveness, anger and rage, bitterness, guilt, and even gluttony. These strongholds have ruined the lives of many people, and have prevented them from moving forward in life while successfully achieving their goals and dreams.

The power that we have been given as Christians enables us to demolish, to destroy, and to tear down these strongholds in our life so that they do not destroy us by ruining our lives. We exercise this power through prayer when we ask GOD to remove these strongholds from our life; when we draw into a closer relationship and connection with our Heavenly Father, and when we allow The Holy Spirit to work inside of us to change our sinful nature into a Godly one. No other source or religion is able to demolish the strongholds in your life; it is only through the power of GOD alone that this is possible. So if you recognize any strongholds in your life that are disrupting your peace and joy, and that are continually causing you to commit sin and ruining your life, I want to encourage you to exercise the power that GOD has given you through prayer so that they can be demolished.

### ***Moving Mountains***

In Matthew 21:21-22, Jesus teaches His followers; "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." A "mountain" represents something that you encounter in your life that is impeding or blocking your path and preventing you from fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life. Certain "mountains" consist of the challenges, the obstacles, and the hurdles that we encounter.

If you do not pray about these circumstances and these situations, these "mountains" can permanently prohibit you from fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life, and hinder you from accomplishing the goals and the dreams that He has placed on your heart for you to achieve. However, if you do pray about these circumstances and situations, then nothing will be able to stop or hinder you from fulfilling GOD's purpose for your life, and from accomplishing the goals and the dreams that He has placed on your heart for you to achieve. So I urge you as a brother in Christ to no longer allow any mountains to remain in your way, but to begin to move forward by asking GOD to remove them through prayer.

### ***Agreement In Prayer***

In Matthew 18:19, Jesus teaches His followers that, "if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." One of the reasons that GOD has given us His authority is so that we can enforce His will and carry out what He desires to happen here on Earth. In this scripture, Jesus teaches us that when two of us agree in prayer about what we are asking for from GOD in order to enforce His will on Earth, then it will be done for us.

If someone needs healing, find another person that will agree with you that GOD will heal them, and then begin to pray about it and allow GOD to display His power in the situation. If someone is in need of help or assistance, find another person that will agree with you that GOD will deliver them, and then begin to pray about it and allow GOD to display His power in the situation. If someone is in need of finances, find another person that will agree with you that GOD will provide for them, and then begin to pray about it and allow GOD to display His power in the situation.

I want to encourage you to find and become associated with a prayer partner who will agree with you whenever there is a need, so that when something occurs in someone's life which requires GOD's help, the two of you can come into agreement and pray. As a result, those things that you pray for will be done by our Heavenly Father.

### ***Fulfilling The Great Commission***

After Jesus rose from the grave and reappeared to His disciples, He gave them direction and guidance as to what He desired for all of His followers to do (which is what we call: "The Great Commission"). The Great Commission still applies to us as believers today, and it is found in Matthew 28:18-20 and it states; "Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In order to successfully fulfill The Great Commission, we must not only teach and preach to people, but we must also begin to exercise the power that GOD has given us by using our authority through prayer to carry out the will of GOD here on Earth. We as Christians exercise this authority by laying our hands and praying for those who are in need of GOD's power and love in their life. As GOD begins to display His power in their life, those people will begin to place their faith in GOD and will desire to establish their own personal relationship with Him. By demonstrating the power of GOD through prayer, we can successfully fulfill The Great Commission.

### **HOW DOES GOD DISPLAY HIS POWER IN OUR LIFE?**

*"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19and his incomparably great power for us who believe." Ephesians 1:18-20*

### ***The Holy Spirit***

When we accepted Jesus Christ into our life as our personal Lord and Savior, GOD placed The Holy Spirit within us. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul describes to us the qualities of The Holy Spirit by stating; "for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." To be "timid" means to lack courage, self-assurance, and confidence. Paul indicates that these are not the qualities and

characteristics that GOD has given to us; rather, The Holy Spirit that GOD has placed inside of us is a spirit of POWER!

It is the Holy Spirit within us that gives us the ability, the strength, and the capacity to overcome life's challenges, problems, obstacles, and opposition that we face, and it is He who works inside of us to change our lives for the better by creating within us the characteristics and the attributes of GOD (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, compassion, self-control, etc). When you know that this is the type of Spirit that lives inside of you, it causes you to be confident whenever you face problems instead of being afraid, and it causes you to be bold whenever you encounter challenges instead acting cowardice.

When you know that The Holy Spirit is inside of you (which He is), you no longer have to worry when you face opposition or go through trials and tribulations, because The Holy Spirit that is within you has the power to help you overcome them. For this reason, no matter what you may be going through, you can always have peace and joy because the power of GOD resides within you. The way that GOD displays His power in our life is by giving us The Holy Spirit.

### **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY IS *NOT* IN EFFECT IN OUR LIVES?**

#### ***Dismissing The Leading of The Holy Spirit***

While compiling a letter to a young disciple named Timothy, Paul writes to explain to him what it will be like in the last days, which we are living in now. In his description of what the last days will be like, Paul proclaims:

"You should know this Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!" *2 Timothy 3:1-5*

Included in the list of people that Paul warns Timothy to stay away from are those who act religious, but have rejected the power that could truly transform their lives for the better, which comes from The Holy Spirit. Jesus describes The Holy Spirit within us in John 14:26 as, "The Counselor." We often describe The Holy Spirit as our inner conscience that tells us the right thing to do in a situation, and who warns us to avoid things that could get us into trouble or cause us to sin. When we choose not to listen to and obey The Holy Spirit (our inner conscience), we reject and prevent His power from operating in our life. When we willingly choose to engage in sinful behavior despite His warnings not to, we no longer experience GOD's power working in our life, we no longer experience His presence, and we become disconnected from Him.

When Paul refers to people who have a form of godliness but who deny its power, he is referring to people who profess to be Christians, even those who perform religious activities such as going to church, but still reject GOD's power from operating in their life because they choose not to follow the guidance of The Holy Spirit. When we decide to go the opposite direction of where The Holy Spirit is leading us, we become unsuccessful, unfruitful, and unproductive in our life. When this occurs, you begin to feel bored, discontent, and unfulfilled spiritually. On the other hand, when you allow The Holy Spirit to lead you and to guide you, you begin to experience the power of GOD in your life. When this occurs, you'll become successful, fruitful, and productive. It is only when we truly begin to follow The Holy Spirit that we become fulfilled spiritually in our Christian walk.



As we follow the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives, Christianity becomes full of excitement and enthusiasm because we are pursuing our goals and dreams to fulfill GOD's purpose for our life. This is why the Bible teaches us in Galatians 5:25 that, "since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." So I want to encourage you to begin to follow the guidance of The Holy Spirit in your life, then you will begin to experience the power of GOD and the benefits associated with it.

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that this chapter provided you with a better understanding of the power of Christianity; how we can exercise it in our life, and what can keep us from experiencing it. I pray that you begin to apply this information concerning power and authority into your personal life by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you throughout the course of your life. By doing so, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you continue to mature spiritually; grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father, fulfill His purpose for your life, and successfully accomplish the dreams and the goals that He has placed on your heart for you to achieve. Amen!!!

## **PATIENCE 101**

*“You must first have a lot of patience to learn to have patience.”*

In today’s society and culture, we want what we want when we want it, and we always want what we want right now (How’s that for a tongue-twister!). We get ourselves into debt by using our credit cards to buy things earlier than we can afford them. We spend so much money eating out instead of patiently waiting to get home and cook. It is this “I want what I want when I want it,” attitude that gets us into so much trouble as Christians.

Our desire to be in a relationship with someone is so intense, that we choose to settle for just anybody and not the person that GOD wants us to be with. We allow our feelings of loneliness to cause us to become impatient for a mate, and we do not afford our Heavenly Father the opportunity to fully prepare us for marriage. We often become impatient when it comes to seeing our hopes and our dreams fulfilled, so we step outside of GOD’s will and direction to try to accomplish them quicker on our own.

When we become anxious and restless while waiting on GOD to deliver us from our difficult circumstances and challenging situations, it causes us to become worried, discouraged, and fearful, when instead if we were patient we would continue to remain in the peace and the joy that GOD has given us. We also quickly become upset and frustrated with others (particularly with our spouses and children) when they do things that annoy us and irritate us, when instead if we were patient with them we would not allow their behavior to cause us to become so easily disturbed. With this in mind, patience is a key component to our spiritual growth as believers, and it plays a significant role in determining whether or not we are able to fulfill GOD’s purpose for our life, and accomplish our goals and dreams. The purpose of this chapter is to teach you about patience; what it is, and the ways you should apply it in your personal life so that it will help you tremendously in your discipleship process as you grow and mature spiritually. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS PATIENCE?**

*“Patience is not passive; on the contrary, it is active; it is concentrated strength” - Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton*

When the Bible says that we as Christians need to develop patience, we need to have a clear understanding of what the word “patience” means so that we know how to apply it to our life. There are many definitions for the word “patience,” which include:

- \*The ability to persevere calmly when faced with difficult situations that cause unhappiness, distress, sadness, pain, suffering, and misery without complaining
- \*The act or power of remaining at peace while waiting for something that you hope for to happen
- \*Restraint from retaliating and taking revenge on others, from demanding what is due, or from voicing disapproval
- \* The ability not to act impulsively in the heat of a moment, but to be able to consider the consequences before you speak and act while you are angry, upset, disappointed, frustrated, and hurt
- \*The willingness to bear and tolerate the annoyance and insults of others without becoming unsettled and disturbed
- \*To remain firm in your purpose that GOD has given you, and to remain firm in your loyalty to Him despite encountering opposition, difficulty, or adversity

Patience is also frequently described as: steadiness, endurance, perseverance, persistence, tolerance, long-suffering, contentment, and calmness. In the next section we will look at why GOD wants us to have patience by looking at these multiple definitions and discovering how they apply in our Christian life.

### **WHY DO I NEED TO HAVE PATIENCE? HOW CAN I APPLY PATIENCE IN MY LIFE?**

Here is how we can apply patience into our personal life as it relates to its definition so that we can grow spiritually.

***The ability to persevere calmly when faced with difficult situations that cause unhappiness, distress, sadness, pain, suffering, and misery without complaining***

*“Patience is waiting. Not passively waiting. That is laziness. But to keep going when the going is hard and slow - that is patience.”*

A point that Jesus makes amazingly clear to all of us as Christians is found in John 16:33 which states that, “in this life you will have trouble, trials, and sorrows.” Regardless of how spiritual you are, and regardless of how close you are to GOD, you will not be able to escape trouble (Jesus certainly didn’t). However, GOD has also promised that He will, “deliver us from our troubles,” “sustain us when we cast our cares on Him,” and, “never leave us or forsake us.”

These are promises from GOD that He will not break, and because of this fact we can have faith that GOD will assist us and help us overcome the obstacles that we face, and also resolve our problems. However, in the process of waiting to see what GOD has done to help us during our times of trouble, it is our doubt and our sinful nature that causes us to become unhappy, distressed, and miserable during this period of time while we are waiting. For this reason, we need to have patience, which is the ability to persevere and remain calm when faced with difficulties without complaining, so that we do not allow any feelings of unhappiness, distress, or misery to rob us of the joy and the peace that GOD has given us.

King David knew firsthand what it was like to experience trouble, trials, and sorrows. He had to run for his life while he was hunted by an army trying to capture and kill him. As he went through this experience, he prayed to GOD for His help, and afterwards he was able to escape his captors and remain alive, eventually even becoming king over the very army that was pursuing him. At the end of this experience, he writes in Psalms 40 about the results of having patience when he proclaims, “I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God.”

David knew that GOD would “lift him out of despair,” and “set his feet on solid ground,” however, he had to wait patiently for it to happen without complaining, without losing his faith, and without losing his peace and joy while he was going through this difficult period of time. As he continued to wait patiently for GOD to deliver him from his troubles and despair, he eventually experienced the results that he desired. So too, when we are patient while waiting to receive what we have prayed for by faith, we experience the results that we desire, and we receive an answer to our prayer requests. For this reason, the Bible instructs us in Romans 12:12 to be, “joyful in hope, patient in affliction (trials, difficulties, troubles), and faithful in prayer.” I urge you as a brother in Christ to be patient when you face difficult times, and not to allow any negative feelings (despair, discouragement, unhappiness, anxiety, worry, etc) to cause you to lose your faith, or to rob you of the peace and the joy that GOD has given you while waiting patiently to see the answer to your prayers.

***The act or power of remaining calm and content without complaining while waiting for something that you hope for to happen***

*“The principle part of faith is patience” – George MacDonald*

Abraham strongly desired to have a child, and he asked GOD to grant him this desire. Abraham received a promise from GOD that he and his wife, Sarah, were going to have a child (although at the time they were very old and past the point in their life where people normally had children). Instead of patiently waiting for the fulfillment of GOD's promise, they became impatient and decided to take matters into their own hands by doing something that GOD did not tell them to do (Have you ever tried to take matters into your own hands because you were impatient with allowing GOD to handle the situation?).

I have been guilty of being impatient while I was waiting for GOD to respond to one of my requests as well. There came a time in my life when I wanted to settle down and start a family, and I had a strong desire for a wife that I could share my life with; raise children with, and minister with as well. So I prayed and asked for GOD to send me the woman that He wanted me to marry, which I knew would be my heart's desire. During the course of time while I was waiting, I started to become extremely impatient. I became anxious, restless, and overly eager for this prayer to be answered. I lost my happiness; I lost focus on what GOD wanted me to be doing at that time in my life, and I even began to feel depressed. This lasted for over 4-5 years, during which I rarely felt joyful or at peace.

When I finally met the woman that I would eventually marry, I felt GOD tell me in my heart that because of my impatience, I lost focus of what I was standing in faith for when I prayed, and that my joy and my peace shouldn't have been based on what I was missing at the time. Rather, I should have based my peace and my joy on knowing that I would eventually receive what I believed GOD would provide for me. Looking back, I now realize that I could have continued to have joy and peace and remain focused on preparing myself to receive what I had prayed for, instead of being miserable and depressed. This experience has taught me that when I pray for something, I need to have patience while I am waiting to receive what I have asked for from GOD, and to continue to enjoy my life and live it to the fullest while not becoming overly anxious and concerned about when I am going to receive what I asked for.

GOD teaches us to, “ask and it will be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” If you truly have faith and truly believe in this promise from GOD, then you will be able to be patient as you wait to receive what you have asked for in prayer. However, it is our unbelief; our doubt, our fear, and our worry that causes us to become impatient. Romans 8:24-25 teaches us that, “if we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.” My prayer is that you do not allow doubt and unbelief in GOD's promises to cause you to become impatient and distressed, and that you hold on to your faith in GOD at *all times* so that you can continue to live in peace and joy as you wait patiently for what you have asked for.

***Restraint from retaliating and taking revenge on others***

*“Forgive, forget. Bear with the faults of others as you would have them bear with yours. Be patient and understanding. Life is too short to be vengeful or malicious.” - Phillip Brooks*

All of us are presented with the temptation to retaliate and to take revenge on others whenever they cause us to become angry, upset, hurt, or disappointed. People insult us and offend us; cars cut in front of us unexpectedly, loved ones forget important dates, job opportunities and promotions are stolen from us by co-workers, etc. Any of these instances provide wonderful opportunities for us to retaliate and to exact some form of revenge on others. However, GOD teaches us to be patient in these situations, and to not repay evil for evil or insult for insult.

For so long many of us have allowed our flesh and our sinful nature to influence us into taking revenge on others, but GOD desires that we show restraint and self-control in this area of our life. In order to do this, we need to have patience. The Bible instructs us in Romans 12:18-20 to, “do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD. Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

Having patience teaches us that we should allow GOD to fight for us and to act on our behalf rather than allowing ourselves to fall into the temptation of sin by taking revenge on others. Furthermore, Psalm 37:7-9 states that we should, “be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don’t worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper— it only leads to harm. For the wicked will be destroyed, but those who trust in the LORD will possess the land.” This scripture informs us that we do not need to worry ourselves with what other people have done against us, and that we should not allow these things to cause us to become so angry that we commit sin ourselves, but to rather wait patiently for GOD to act, and when we allow GOD to act on our behalf, He administers justice in regards to the situation. I pray that you no longer allow your emotions to influence you to take revenge on other people, but that you begin to exercise patience by continuing to express Godly love towards them while GOD works on your behalf to bring about justice.

***The ability not to act impulsively in the heat of a moment, but to be able to consider the consequences before you speak and act while you are angry, upset, disappointed, frustrated, and hurt***

*“Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.” - Robert H. Schuller*

Do you often find yourself saying things in the heat of the moment while you are angry or hurt that you do not mean, and end up regretting the words that you spoke as a result of it? Have you ever done something that was irrational, illogical, and just plain stupid because you were upset or frustrated? Have you been in a situation where you allowed your lust to control you and influence you to commit sin by having pre-marital sex, or by committing adultery because you were in the heat of a moment? We hear countless stories on the news that involve people committing crimes; injuring themselves or others, and even taking their own life in the heat of a moment in which they were angry, furious, hurt, or disappointed.

There will be many circumstances and situations that will arise in our life that can cause us to experience unwanted emotions of anger or disappointment. As soon as we begin to experience these negative emotions, Satan begins to tempt us to commit sin by placing negative thoughts, suggestions, and ideas in our mind that if acted upon, will damage our relationships with others; prevent us from accomplishing our dreams and our goals, and that may even ruin our ability to be a witness to others about Jesus Christ by destroying our character, integrity, and reputation in their eyes.

It is extremely important to recognize whenever we are highly emotional (such as when we are in heated arguments, or when we hear particularly bad or discouraging news), and then take the time to carefully consider the consequences of the next words that we speak or actions that we take before we speak and act. In order to do this, we must have patience. Patience allows us to keep our mind focused on our relationship with GOD at all times, and it enables us to respond to life’s situations in accordance with how GOD wants us to, instead of responding to life’s situations based on how we feel at that time.

The Bible teaches us in James 1:19-20 that, “everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” Proverbs

14:29 states that; “people with understanding (patience) are able to control their anger, but people with a hot tempter are always doing foolish things.” Far too many people have ruined their lives by allowing Satan to influence them to act in the heat of a moment in which they were angry or hurt. For this reason, I pray that you begin to exercise patience when you are in the heat of a highly emotional moment by stopping to consider the consequences of your actions before you act or speak, this way you will be able to respond to life’s circumstances and situations in accordance with GOD’s word.

***The willingness to bear and tolerate the annoyance and insults of others without becoming unsettled and disturbed***

*“If you are tempted to lose patience with your fellowman; stop and think how patient God has been with you.”*

Are there certain people that just tick you off? Are you quick to point out the flaws and the things that other people do that bother you and cause you to become upset? Do you find yourself having a low-level of tolerance with some of the people that you know? If so, what you are lacking is patience. Patience is the ability to tolerate other people by being able to recognize their differences and their uniqueness, and still be able to love them and accept them for who they are. In order to be patient with people in this way, we must have the love of GOD inside of us to give out to others. This is why the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13 describes love as being patient.

You cannot have patience with people without love, and you cannot truly love without being able to demonstrate patience. These two qualities co-exist and are never separate from each other. Ephesians 4: 2-3 teaches us to, “always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.” If we do not have the love that GOD has for us in our heart, we develop a short-temper with people that we know, and it causes us to become easily annoyed and irritated by their actions. On the other hand, when we are patient with each other, we can endure through their faults and their flaws because of the love that we have for them. I pray that you begin to exercise patience with the people that you know as you begin to live a life in which you reflect GOD’s love to others.

***Remaining firm in your purpose that GOD has given you, and remaining firm in your loyalty to Him despite encountering opposition, difficulty, or adversity***

*“Patience is the key to contentment”*

Imagine hearing that all of what you own has been stolen and taken away by thieves, and that not only did you lose all of your possessions, but that your children were also killed as well. Imagine being imprisoned for no other reason except for the fact that you have faith in Jesus Christ, and being brutally beaten as a result of your beliefs. Imagine what it would be like to be thrown into a fiery furnace because you have chosen to remain loyal to GOD, instead of choosing to serve and to worship other people or idols. Now imagine what it would be like to know that you were going to be mocked and tortured, and to also know that you were going to die the worst way possible by being nailed to a cross.

These are all real examples found in the Bible in which the patience of certain people was tested to see if they would remain firm in their loyalty to GOD, even in the face of opposition, difficulty, hardship, and adversity. Job lost his possessions and his children; yet he didn’t blame GOD or curse him (even though his wife suggested that he should). Paul was imprisoned and brutally beaten; yet he became even more dedicated and determined to serve GOD by preaching the gospel. The three Hebrew boys were threatened with certain death by being thrown into a fiery furnace if they did not worship an idol, but their faith did not waver because they were scared or afraid of being punished. Jesus Christ, who when He arrived in the Garden of Gethsemane realized what was about to happen to Him in on His way to the cross, choose to pray to His Heavenly Father saying “not my will, but your will be done,” instead of choosing to live for Himself and preserve His own life.

We may never endure the tests of faith that people in the Bible experienced, but these examples teach us that as Christians, we will suffer some form of persecution and suffering for what we believe in, and when we encounter it, we must continue to demonstrate patience by remaining loyal to GOD despite facing adversity, opposition, or challenging circumstances. The bible addresses this type of patience in James 5:10-11 while acknowledging the patience of Job when it states; “for examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy.” Hebrews 12:1-3 teaches us how we can draw strength from Jesus’ example when we encounter adversity when we are told to, “run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won’t become weary and give up.”

Satan constantly tempts us to see if we will remain loyal to GOD, and for this reason we must learn how to be patient so that we do not get so caught up in what we are going through that we begin to turn away from our Heavenly Father. Satan uses our discontentment, our unhappiness with our present situation, and our fear to cause us to give up our hope and our faith in our Heavenly Father, but patience enables us to be content where we are, and it reminds us that by continuing to stand and remain in faith, that GOD will deliver us from our troubles and turn our present situation into an enjoyable one.

In Revelations 2:10, the Bible speaks to encourage Christians to remain patient in the face of persecution and suffering when it states; “Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you..... But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.” So the next time that you encounter adversity; such as experiencing financial difficulties, suffering from an illness, loss of a loved one, or even when you encounter ridicule and insults from others because of your beliefs, are you going to show patience by remaining loyal to GOD while you are dealing with these issues, or are you going to become impatient and set-aside your relationship with your Heavenly Father? I urge you as a brother in Christ to never turn your back on GOD because of adversity, but to remain patient and steadfast in your loyalty to Him, and He will respond by showing you how much He loves you and cares for you.

### **HOW DO WE BECOME PATIENT? HOW DO WE DEVELOP PATIENCE?**

*“Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself.” - St. Francis de Sales*

I want you to know that you cannot become patient on your own; rather, it is a quality and a characteristic that GOD gives to us through His Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23, patience is listed as one of the qualities and characteristics that the Holy Spirit produces in our life. So in order to become patient, we must allow GOD to enter into our heart and transform us from the inside. I know that you may not like this next part, but GOD then uses difficult experiences where we encounter adversity in our life to develop our patience.

James 1:2-4 teaches us that, “when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” Romans 5:3 informs us that, “we can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance (patience). And endurance (patience) develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.” From these two scriptures we discover that when we encounter difficult circumstances and troubling situations in our life, that GOD is simply using them to develop our patience,

our faith, and our confidence in Him (remember that you cannot have patience without having faith and confidence as well).

Now if you know that GOD is simply using the difficulties that you experience as an opportunity to develop patience within you, and to also build your confidence and your faith in Him, you can rest assured that He will deliver you out of the trial that you are experiencing when He is finished using that trial to develop your patience and your faith (this is why we are not always immediately delivered from our troubles as soon as we pray for help; GOD often is using these troubles to build us up and to shape and mold our character). I read a quote recently that I completely agreed with which stated; “God’s way of answering the Christian’s prayer for more patience, experience, hope and love often is to put him into the furnace of affliction.” I want you to know that you have to be patient with yourself as you are developing patience. It is not a quality or characteristic that appears overnight, rather, it is a life-long process that we undertake in order to develop the amount of patience that GOD desires for us to have.

Finally, GOD reveals to us that we can draw hope from the biblical examples of others who exhibited patience and experienced positive results. By reading about these examples, it will encourage us also to continue to be patient while we are placing our faith in GOD to help us when we are experiencing difficult times. Romans 15:4 teaches us that, “everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” With this in mind, we should continuously look to the Bible to find encouragement from the experiences of others whenever we are waiting patiently for something to happen in our life.

### **ARE THERE CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES THAT I WILL NEED TO BE PARTICULARLY PATIENT IN?**

*“There are three secrets to managing. The first secret is have patience. The second is be patient. And the third most important secret is patience.” – Chuck Tanner*

Here are a few circumstances in which you will definitely need to be particularly patient in:

*\*With your spouse in marriage*

*\*As a parent to the children in your family*

*\*In ministry*

#### ***Patience In Marriage***

Marriage will always test your patience, and it will definitely show you how much you’ve progressed in this area, and how much further you still have to go to develop the amount of patience that GOD has with you. Because you and your spouse are two completely different individuals, and because the two of you will not always think alike or agree on every issue, there is a possibility that your spouse’s differences can easily annoy you or cause you to become upset (for example, your spouse bites their nails or doesn’t always clean up after making a mess). Your spouse may intentionally or unintentionally do or say something that will cause you to become upset, angry, or hurt. Furthermore, simple disagreements have the capability of always turning into heated arguments in which both of you become very emotional (for example, arguing over finances).

Patience teaches us that we cannot change our spouse, no matter how hard we try to do it with words and with other methods. Instead, we have to exercise patience by continuing to lift them up in prayer and waiting for GOD to finish the good work that He has begun in their life. If you do not learn how to become



patient in these circumstances, you will find yourself taking your frustrations and your anger out on your spouse, and your marriage probably won't last long at all. However, if you do develop patience in the area of marriage, you will truly be able to enjoy something that is absolutely amazing. You do not have to wait for your partner to become patient first before you become patient with them; rather, you be the one to take the necessary steps to be the first one to exhibit patience in your marriage, and then your partner will be influenced to adopt the same behavior.

### ***Patience In Parenting***

Raising children is one of the greatest privileges that our Heavenly Father gives to us. However, if you lack patience with your children, then in some situations parenting can become extremely hectic and stressful. In the early years while your children are infants and toddlers, patience will be needed as you try to help your children develop, grow, and learn. Children at this age demand a lot of your time and your attention, and you will have to make significant sacrifices in regards to your sleeping habits, and in regards to the hobbies that you like to do in your free time.

As your children advance into their teenage years, your children may be making decisions that you do not agree with. At this stage, they may reject your advice and your suggestions because they think they have everything already figured out. Furthermore, teenagers begin to encounter temptations (drugs use, alcohol, pre-marital sex, etc...) at this stage in their life; despite your best efforts of trying to shield them and protect them from these temptations. In all of this parenting, with young children all the way up to when they become teenagers and beyond, your patience will be tested on a regular and consistent basis. You will be required to be able to nurture, to teach, and to discipline your children with wisdom and love in the proper way.

If you have patience as a parent, then the struggles and the ups and downs of parenting will not become overly burdensome. On the other hand, if you lack patience, parenting can become overwhelming, and I've seen firsthand many instances in which mothers and fathers left their families and their children because they did not have the amount of patience that it takes to raise their kids. As a result there are plenty of broken homes; there are children today growing up with only one parent, or that were given up for adoption and transferred into foster homes. I urge you as a brother in Christ to continually ask GOD to give you the patience, the love, and the wisdom that you need in order to fulfill the instructions given to us as parents in Proverbs 22:6 which states that we should, "train up your children in the way that they should go, so that when they get older, they will not depart from it." By demonstrating patience with our children, our children will be able to experience GOD's love and GOD's patience through us, and also see a good example of how they should parent their children when they grow older.

### ***Patience In Ministry***

When outlining the qualities and characteristics that are necessary to be an elder and a minister of a church, the Bible identifies in the book of Titus chapter 1 verses 6-7 the need for patience in ministry by stating; "An elder (minister) must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. For an elder must live a blameless life. *He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered (impatient)*; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money."

Why would the Bible mention that an elder must not be *quick-tempered or impatient*? The reason is because ministry will try and test your patience in numerous ways, and you must always be able to respond and react to situations and circumstances in a way that serves as a Godly example for others to follow. As a minister (specifically as a pastor), you must be patient in many areas of ministry:

\*You must be patient with the process in which GOD prepares you to step into the role that He has prepared for you (Jesus waited 30 years before He began to minister).

\*You must be patient with people whom you've counseled and taught as you wait to see them grow spiritually and change for the better.

\*You must be patient when dealing with people who choose to remain disobedient and to not respond and receive the word of GOD which you have planted in their heart.

\*You must be patient as you encounter opposition and persecution from others who seek to destroy what you are building with the help of GOD (read about Nehemiah).

\*You must be patient as you wait for GOD to provide you with the finances necessary to carry out what GOD has placed on your heart to do.

\*Finally, you must be patient as you wait to see the manifestation of the vision and the achievement of your goals that GOD has given to you to accomplish (you also must be patient while waiting for GOD to send you people who will help you accomplish them as well).

Your lack of patience in any of these areas can lead to turmoil, chaos, and strife not only on the inside of you, but it also can spill over into the lives of the people who are affected by your ministry as well. For these reasons, those who minister must be able to exhibit an extraordinary amount of patience as they serve GOD's people.

Because Satan does not want you to be successful in ministry by helping others establish a close connection and relationship with GOD, he will do everything that he can to ensure that you face as much adversity as possible. With this in mind, as a minister you must be able to stand your ground and maintain your faith in your Heavenly Father. Paul addressed this in the book of 2 Timothy 2:10 when he wrote about his determination and patience in preaching the gospel when he proclaimed; "Therefore I am ready to persevere and stand my ground with patience and endure everything for the sake of the GOD's chosen people, so that they too may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with the reward of eternal glory."

If GOD has called you to serve as a pastor or as a teacher, the Bible states in 2 Timothy 4:2 that we should; "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with *great patience* and careful instruction." In order to be a teacher in any capacity, whether it is as an elementary school teacher, college professor, or minister, you must supplement your teaching with patience, because people may not always immediately understand or apply what you are teaching them. Otherwise, you will find yourself becoming frustrated with the very people that you have been entrusted to instruct. These are three areas (in marriage, in parenting, in ministry) that specifically require you to have patience.

### **IS GOD PATIENT WITH US? HOW HAS GOD DISPLAYED HIS PATIENCE TOWARDS US?**

1 John 4:10 tells us that GOD LOVES US, and because GOD loves us, it means that He is patient with us as well. One way that GOD demonstrates His patience with us is by forgiving our sins and our mistakes instead of punishing us as we deserved to be punished (which would cost us our life). If GOD were not patient with us in this way, we would never have been given the opportunity to receive salvation, rather, 2 Peter 3:15 informs us that, "the Lord's patience gives people time to be saved."

The Apostle Paul recognized that GOD is extremely patient with us so that we have opportunity to enter into a relationship with Him. Paul was guilty of persecuting Christians; throwing them in prison, and

even giving his approval for their death. However, rather than killing Paul for the mistakes that he made and the sins that he committed, GOD choose to reveal himself to Paul; to love him, and to use him to preach and to minister to others (GOD does this for us as well). With this in mind, Paul wrote the following scripture in 1 Timothy 1:16 proclaiming that, “God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.”

Finally, through His patience and long-suffering, we are repeatedly given the opportunity to leave our life of sin that is contributing to our downfall and our demise, in order to begin to live according to the way that GOD desires for us to live so that we can experience the abundant life that He has given to us. People often times will abuse GOD’s patience and long-suffering and continue to live a life of sin because they think that GOD will always forgive them, which is a very foolish thing to do because the Bible warns us in Galatians 6:7-8; “Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.”

By continuing to be patient with us when we acted in ignorance and rebellion to His commands and to His teachings, GOD provided us with an opportunity to get to know who He is, and to begin to live a life that is pleasing to Him as well. Romans 2:4 asks us; “Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?” Furthermore, 2 Peter 3:9-11 addresses GOD’s patience when it states; “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” GOD demonstrates His patience towards us by forgiving us of our mistakes instead of punishing us, therefore giving us the opportunity to receive salvation and to turn away from living a life of sin. Aren’t you glad that GOD was patient with you?

### **WHAT ARE SOME OTHER SCRIPTURES THAT TALK ABOUT PATIENCE?**

*“Patience can’t be acquired overnight. It is just like building up a muscle. Every day you need to work on it.” - Eknath Easwaran*

Here are some additional scriptures that address the subject of patience:

- \*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. *Colossians 3:12*
- \* Make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. *2 Peter 1:5-7*
- \*And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. *1 Thessalonians 5:14*
- \* So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God’s will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. *Hebrews 10:35-37*

## **CONCLUSION**

I pray that the information in this chapter was a blessing to you, and that you begin to apply what you have read by demonstrating patience in every area of your personal life. By doing so, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you continue to grow and mature spiritually; accomplish your goals and dreams, overcome negative emotions such as worry and depression, resist temptations, and establish a closer connection and relationship with GOD as He uses you to fulfill His purpose for your life. Amen!!!

## HUMILITY 101

*“What makes humility so desirable is the marvelous thing it does to us; it creates in us a capacity for the closest possible intimacy with God” – Monica Baldwin*

I have to admit that as a man, coming to Christ and learning that I would have to become humble was a difficult pill for me to swallow. For years I had built my reputation and my ego by being proud and arrogant, whether it is in sports or anything else that I was involved in. Humility wasn't exactly something that I immediately prayed and asked for, but as I've grown closer to GOD and developed a deeper understanding of His word, I've come to realize that humility and being humble is not what I thought it was originally.

\*We often associate being humble with weakness, but with humility comes great strength.

\*We often associate being humble with being afraid and suffering from fear, but with humility comes great boldness and confidence.

\*We often associate being humble with being walked on, stepped on, and trampled over, but with humility comes great respect and honor.

\*We often associate being humble with allowing yourself to be taken advantage of or to be made a fool, but with humility comes great wisdom and discernment.

\*We often associate being humble with being poor and poverty, but with humility comes great wealth and prosperity.

\*We often associate being humble with being degraded and suffering disgrace, but with humility comes great dignity.

I believe the reason why many people shun a life of humility is because there is a lot of negative stigma attached to it, but when you get an accurate understanding of what being humble truly is, you will begin to desire this characteristic and quality that enables us to grow and mature spiritually. The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand what humility is; how to apply it in your life, and the benefits associated with being humble. Enjoy!!!

### **What is Humility?**

*“Humility is pride in God” - Austin O'Malley*

*“Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real” – Thomas Merton*

Humility is defined as the quality or state of being humble and meek in spirit; to be free from pride or arrogance, and the absence of vanity, narcissism, conceit, and a big ego. Humility at its essence is a realization that you are totally dependent on GOD in every area of your life (for provision, health, safety, guidance, etc.), and that you are incapable of doing anything good without GOD working inside of you. Furthermore, humility is the understanding that everything good that you receive, and every goal that you achieve is because of His grace, not because of your own power, your own intelligence, or your own good luck.

A humble person is someone who submits to GOD's will; is not self-reliant, and who has a soft heart which doesn't resist GOD, but allows Him to mold and to shape them into His image by developing His characteristics in their life. These qualities of humility may be very hard for many people to accept, and it is

a major stumbling block that prevents them from accepting salvation. It is common for an individual to believe that deep down inside they are a good person. Because of this reason, an individual will not see their need to accept Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for their sins, specifically because they do not believe that they are evil at all. Even more commonly, a person will reject their need for Jesus on the basis that there is more "good" inside of them than there is "evil," and that this qualifies them to be able to enter into Heaven.

Humility teaches us that without the grace of GOD we are very evil and wicked, and that there is nothing that we can do to deserve to enter into Heaven. Therefore, we are extremely grateful for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross because He did for us what we could not do for ourselves, which is provide atonement for our sins so that we can once again be on good terms (be friends) with GOD. As a result of our humility, GOD continues to show grace towards us by forgiving us for our sins, but He opposes those who are self-righteous by judging and punishing them according to His standards. In Luke chapter 18:9-14, Jesus illustrates how a self-righteous person thinks and acts by teaching us the following parable:

### **Self-Righteous person**

"Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'"

### **Humble person**

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.'" I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

It is easy for us as individuals to believe that our success, our accomplishments, and even our victories in life are due to our own power, wisdom, strength, ability, and hard work. Because of this, we praise ourselves and seek all of the glory and honor for what we have done. Humility teaches us that our success, our accomplishments, and our victories in life are because of GOD's favor and grace, and for this reason we give GOD praise, glory, and honor for what He has done in our life. As a result of our humility, GOD continues to grant us success, accomplishments, and victories, but He opposes those who do not give Him glory and praise by taking them off of the pedestal that they have put themselves on, and then humbling them by allowing them to experience hardship.

Daniel chapter 4:28-32 provides us with an example of a time where GOD humbled a proud man by taking him through a period of adversity, and this example concerning King Nebuchadnezzar states:

"All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

Most individuals find it easier to place more of their trust in another person; in their own riches, and in their own wisdom than to place their trust in GOD and His promises. Because of this, they do not go to GOD in prayer asking Him for His guidance, for healing, for provision, or for His assistance. Instead, they rely solely on doctors, lawyers, their bank account, psychics, or shrinks to help them whenever they encounter problems. Humility teaches us that GOD is the *only* one that we should be dependent upon whenever we encounter problems in our life, and to place our faith, our hope, and our trust exclusively in Him.

As a result of our humility, GOD continues to deliver us from our troubles, and He assists us during the trials and the tribulations that we encounter. On the other hand, GOD opposes those who are dependent on themselves and on others by allowing them to experience disappointment for not placing their trust in Him. In 2 Chronicles 16:12-13, we read about the story of a King named Asa who sought only the help of physicians when he became ill. As a result of not praying to be healed by GOD, Asa died from his illness. The story states; “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa developed a serious foot disease. Yet even with the severity of his disease, he did not seek the LORD’s help but turned only to his physicians. So he died in the forty-first year of his reign.” (I am not advocating neglecting going to the doctor, I am saying that along with any professional medical attention that we receive, we should also pray and ask GOD for healing as well.)

Finally, Jesus teaches us about living a life of humility in Matthew 18:3-5 when He proclaims; “I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” Just as a little child is humble by being totally reliant and dependent upon their parents for provision, for protection, for love, and for guidance, so too, GOD wants us to remain humble by being totally reliant and dependent upon Him for provision, for protection, for love, and for guidance as well. I encourage you as a brother in Christ to begin to live in humility, and to not become self-righteous by thinking that your good deeds are good enough to win favor with GOD. I pray also that you do not become proud by thinking that your own effort and power produced your success, and that you do not act foolishly by placing your trust in man and in other people instead of placing your trust and your faith in GOD.

### **HOW DO WE LIVE IN HUMILITY?**

*“Pride slays thanksgiving but an humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grow. A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves.” - Henry Ward Beecher*

*“True humility is intelligent self respect which keeps us from thinking too highly or too meanly of ourselves. It makes us modest by reminding us how far we have come short of what we can be.” - Ralph W. Sockman*

Philippians 2:5-9 teaches us that, “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.” The way that we live a life of humility is by following the example that Jesus set for us when He physically lived here on Earth. Instead of constantly being served, Jesus was a servant to others. Instead of criticizing people for their sins, He drew them closer to Him and showered them with love. Instead of acting independent from His Heavenly Father, He relied on Him to sustain Him in every area of His life. Here are a few other examples of how can live a life of humility:

1. Proud people exhibit independency from GOD because they feel that they are self-sufficient, but we as children of GOD apply humility by recognizing our need for GOD.

2. Proud people are self-righteous, they think highly of themselves and look down on others, but we as Christians apply humility by always thinking the best of others, and esteeming them higher than ourselves.
3. Proud people focus on the failures of others and can readily point out another person's faults, but we as children of GOD apply humility by being more conscious of our own spiritual needs and flaws rather than the shortcomings of others.
4. Proud people are critical of others, but we as Christians apply humility by being compassionate, and by overlooking the deficiencies and the offenses of others which will allow us to easily forgive because we have been forgiven by GOD.
5. Proud people have a desire to always be served, but we as children of GOD apply humility by having the desire to want to serve others.
6. Proud people have a craving for being praised and honored, but we as Christians apply humility by seeking how we can promote others and bring praise to our Heavenly Father through our accomplishments.
7. Proud people wait for others to ask for forgiveness when a misunderstanding occurs, but we as children of GOD apply humility by taking the initiative to make things right.
8. Proud people get defensive when they are corrected, but we as Christians apply humility by being open and receptive when we are corrected, rebuked, and shown that we are wrong in our actions.
9. Proud people try to cover up their own sins, mistakes, and faults, but we as Children of GOD apply humility by being transparent with GOD and with other believers by revealing our mistakes, our struggles, and our weaknesses.
10. Proud people are blind to the true condition of their heart, and always compare themselves favorably to others, but we as Christians apply humility by recognizing the true condition of our heart, and we always compare ourselves to Jesus rather than to others.

Here are some additional scriptures that teach us how to apply humility in our life:

\*Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. *Ephesians 4:2*

\*Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. *Philippians 2:3-4*

\*Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it. *1 Peter 3:8-9*

\*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. *Colossians 3:12-13*



\*Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone. *Titus 3:1-2*

\*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. *Romans 12:15-17*

I want to challenge you today to examine your heart to see if there are any areas in your life where pride is present, and then to repent of it and turn away from it by living in humility.

### **HOW DO WE BECOME HUMBLE?**

*"The more a person analyzes his inner self, the more insignificant he seems to himself. This is the first lesson of wisdom. Let us be humble, and we will become wise. Let us know our weakness, and it will give us power."* - William Ellery Channing

*"Life is a long lesson in humility."* - James Matthew Barrie

Because our sinful nature is full of pride, arrogance, and self-reliance, in order to become humble we must obtain outside help. This help comes from asking GOD to come into our heart, and then allowing Him to work in our life to develop humility, and to transform our nature from a sinful one to a Godly one. As God begins to work in our life, we then encounter trials, tribulations, and circumstances that cause us to become "broken." We reach the point of being "broken," when:

\*We are faced with such tremendous adversity that it causes us to realize that we can no longer be independent of GOD by being self-sufficient, and that we must rely on Him and Him alone for provision, health, assistance, guidance, and success.

\*We recognize our sinful nature and our need for GOD's grace...

\*We realize that every person is equally important in GOD's eyes, and...

\*We understand that we no longer have any reason to carry pride or arrogance in our heart.

Once we are "broken," GOD then begins to restore us and mold us by placing His nature, His strength, His wisdom, and His qualities (love, humility, compassion, etc.) on the inside of us. Then as the process is completed, He delivers us from the adversity and the tough situations that we are facing, and begins to use us to fulfill His purpose for our life. You may be going through an experience in which you feel "broken" and "humbled" because of the problems that you have encountered. Don't worry, GOD still has your life in His hands in this situation, and He is using this experience to begin to mold you by placing His nature and His qualities inside of you so that He can use you to fulfill His purpose for your life. Through this process, GOD is developing your faith, your trust, your confidence, and your reliance on Him.

I want to share with you an example of how the nation of Israel went through the process of being humbled, which was very unpleasant at the time. However, when the process was completed, they received tremendous blessings and entered into the land that GOD promised to them where they could live comfortably. So too, when we endure through the process of being humbled, we also receive the blessings of GOD as well whenever we come out of it. Let's look at the example illustrated in Deuteronomy 8:1-10:

### ***The Humbling Process* (Verses 1-5)**

“Be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today. Then you will live and multiply, and you will enter and occupy the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors. Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. For all these forty years your clothes didn’t wear out, and your feet didn’t blister or swell. Think about it: Just as a parent disciplines a child, the LORD your God disciplines you for your own good.”

### ***The Reward* (Verses 6-10)**

“So obey the commands of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and fearing him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land of flowing streams and pools of water, with fountains and springs that gush out in the valleys and hills. It is a land of wheat and barley; of grapevines, fig trees, and pomegranates; of olive oil and honey. It is a land where food is plentiful and nothing is lacking. It is a land where iron is as common as stone, and copper is abundant in the hills. When you have eaten your fill, be sure to praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.”

This scripture illustrates how the nation of Israel was humbled in the wilderness by not having access to certain things that they took for granted, and that allowed them to live comfortably (shelter, choice foods, fine clothes, etc.). GOD took the nation of Israel through this process to develop their character, and to teach them that they could rely on Him to provide for their basic needs (food, water, shelter, protection, guidance, etc). When the Israelites successfully completed their humbling process that took place in the wilderness, they received the tremendous blessings that GOD had promised to them when they came out of Egypt. I pray that you endure and remain faithful and loyal to GOD during the humbling process that He takes you through in your life, because once the process has been completed, you will receive the reward of His blessings on your life.

### **HOW DOES GOD REWARD US FOR BEING HUMBLE?**

*“He who is humble is confident and wise. He who brags is insecure and lacking.” - Lisa Edmondson*

*“Humility makes great men twice honorable” - Benjamin Franklin*

I want to provide you with a few benefits that we receive as a result of living a life of humility:

#### **We Receive Wealth, Honor, Life**

\* True humility and fear of the LORD leads to riches, honor, and long life. *Proverbs 22:4*

#### **We Receive Guidance, Instruction, Wisdom**

\*He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. *Psalms 25:9*

\*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. *Proverbs 11:2*

#### **We Receive Help In Times Of Adversity, Deliverance From Our Troubles**

\*You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. *Psalms 18:27*

\*You rescue the humble, but your eyes watch the proud and humiliate them. *2 Samuel 22:28*

\*The LORD supports the humble, but he brings the wicked down into the dust. *Psalm 147:6*

**We Receive GOD's Grace (His love, His mercy, His favor, His Blessings, His Goodwill)**

\* God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. *James 4:5-7*

\* He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. *Proverbs 3:34*

**We Receive Forgiveness For Our Sins and Restoration**

\*At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. 2

*Chronicles 7:13-15*

**We Are Exalted, Promoted, And Lifted Up By GOD To Higher Positions**

\*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. *James 4:10*

\*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. *1 Peter 5:6*

**We Receive Answers To Our Prayers**

In the book of Daniel chapter 10, Daniel is told by angel that as a result of living a life of humility, that GOD has heard and has answered his prayers.

“Just then a hand touched me and lifted me, still trembling, to my hands and knees. And the man said to me, “Daniel, you are very precious to God, so listen carefully to what I have to say to you. Stand up, for I have been sent to you.” When he said this to me, I stood up, still trembling. Then he said, “Don’t be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. *Daniel 10:10-12*

**We Receive Salvation**

\*For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. *Psalm 149:4*

After reading about all of the benefits that you receive when you live in humility, doesn't it cause you to want to become a humble person?

**WHY IS HUMILITY NEEDED WHEN YOU BEGIN TO SERVE GOD?**

*“I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble”- Helen Keller*

*“To become truly great, one has to stand with people, not above them.” - Charles de Montesquieu*

Our human nature influences us to want to be recognized, praised, and honored for anything that we do; regardless if it is good or bad. When we give our life to GOD, this desire doesn't immediately go away. As a result, many people begin to seek and desire positions of honor in ministry, such as being a pastor, without desiring or being willing to complete duties that do not bring them honor and praise, such as cleaning toilets, serving food, or vacuuming the church. However, GOD teaches us in Proverbs 15:33 and Proverbs 18:12 that, “humility comes before honor.” Often times we think that we will be able to immediately step right in and take positions of authority in ministry, but GOD first wants to mold us and shape us by having us work with all of our heart doing small things that may go unrecognized by others in order to develop our character.

You would not expect to start at the top of a company you've just been hired to work for, rather, by remaining humble and doing your best at the position that you start at, you would expect to be promoted to upper management positions. GOD illustrated how this point relates to ministry by humbling those who would later go on to do great things. King David, one of the most powerful and successful kings in the Bible, was humbled by working as a shepherd boy before he was given a position of authority and of honor as King of Israel. Likewise, we too must be patient as GOD humbles us and develops our character in order to prepare us for what He has called us to do, and only then we will be exalted and given a position of honor. So if right now you are in a humble position doing things that may go unrecognized by others, don't become discouraged about it, rather, you should be rejoicing and content where you are right now because you know that later on GOD is going to exalt you to the place that He intends for you to be.

### **WHAT IS FALSE HUMILITY?**

*"They are proud in humility; proud in that they are not proud."* - Robert Burton

*"The proud man can learn humility, but he will be proud of it"* - Mignon McLaughlin

False humility is defined as: "the act of depreciating, devaluing, and reducing the level of your devotion to GOD, your morality, your gifts, your talents, your achievements, and your accomplishments for the sake of receiving praise from another person by impressing them with how humble you are." False humility occurs when we claim to be less than who we are, and we do less than what we are capable of doing, so that others we think more of us.

At its essence, false humility is an attempt to manipulate people by going out of your way to convince them how humble you are. If you are truly a humble person, then your humility will become evident without you having to go above and beyond to try and prove that you possess this quality. GOD knows our hearts, so we do not need to make an extra effort to prove to Him how humble we are, neither should we be trying to impress other people as well by attempting to prove how humble we are to them.

The Bible warns us about false humility in Colossians 2:20-23 when it states; "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!'"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." The Apostle Paul wrote this passage of scripture to explain to us that false humility does not help us grow spiritually, nor does it draw us closer to GOD or cause us to obtain more of His favor. I want you to know that you can be proud of your accomplishments without being boastful, and without depreciating them as well. You can be proud of your talents, your skills, and your abilities without being arrogant, and without dismissing them as well. You can be proud of your relationship and your devotion to GOD without being conceited, and without diminishing your connection and relationship with Him as well.

The enemy, Satan, uses false humility to get us to devalue and depreciate the gifts and the abilities that GOD has given us, and through false humility, he convinces us not to use our gifts and talents to the fullest extent possible. Rather, as a child of GOD, we should recognize the value of the gifts that GOD has given us and not dismiss the things that we do in ministry as if they were insignificant or not important.

When I played basketball in high school, whenever we had a game at the other team's school, I wouldn't walk into the gym shy, afraid, or timid. Not at all! I would walk into the gym poised because I was confident in my abilities. I would then go out onto the court and play my hardest to win the game. As Christians, we are in this world but not of this world, and there are many places that we go in which Satan's

kingdom of darkness is operating (whether it be on your job, your school, etc.) which I refer to as “the other team’s gym.” Whenever we come into these places, instead of being timid, afraid, and shy because of false humility, we should instead enter into these places with boldness, with confidence, and with assurance because we know that GOD is in us and with us, and because we know that His authority and His power grants us victory over any hardship, challenge, or obstacle that we face. As a child of GOD, you can be humble and still have confidence because of who GOD created you to be, and because of His power that operates in your life!

### **CONCLUSION**

*“The whole course of human history may depend on a change of heart in one solitary and even humble individual - for it is in the solitary mind and soul of the individual that the battle between good and evil is waged and ultimately won or lost.” -*

M. Scott Peck

I pray that the information in this chapter provides you with a better understanding of what humility is, and how you should live your life being humble. By applying this teaching in your personal life; you will continue to mature spiritually, grow in your relationship with GOD, successfully accomplish your goals and dreams, and fulfill His purpose for your life, causing you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship. Amen!!!

## PRAISE AND WORSHIP 101

When I first starting dating my wife, I had an opportunity to get to know her for who she really is. It was during this time that I found out that she had numerous qualities and characteristics that were admirable. On top of that, I also discovered that she had a heart that was kind, compassionate, and loving, along with a sweet and gentle spirit. The more that I received a revelation of who she was, and the more that she continued to do little things for me that I enjoyed tremendously as a sign of her love for me, the more I began to admire her, adore her, and appreciate her for who she is.

Because I admired and adored my wife, I began to praise her in many different ways on a very frequent basis. I would tell her how much I appreciated her; I would let her know how good she made me feel, and I would express to her how much I enjoyed being with her and around her, I would let her know that I was thankful for the things that she did for me, and I would even sing to her from time to time (even though singing is not on my list of talents and abilities). As a result of praising my wife on a regular basis (which I am proud to say that I still do to this day), my wife and I entered into a deeper relationship, and we have been able to get to know each other more intimately.

As Christians, when you really get to know GOD for He truly is, and as you begin to get a revelation and an understanding of the things that your Heavenly Father has done for you in the past; what He is doing for you in the present, and what He will do for you in the future, it causes you to begin to adore Him, admire Him, and to appreciate Him for who He is and the things that He has done in your life (if you can't think of anything He has done for you, just remember that He woke you up this morning so that you could live another day). As a result, we begin to express our adoration, admiration, and appreciation of our Heavenly Father by praising Him and worshipping Him. When we praise and worship GOD, it allows us to enter into an intimate relationship with Him, and we are able to establish a stronger and deeper connection with our Heavenly Father as well. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT GOD GREATLY DESIRES YOUR PRAISE AND WORSHIP OF HIM (I cannot stress this point enough.)

Praise and Worship are both a vital part of your spiritual growth and maturity. The purpose of this chapter is to provide you with knowledge about what praise and worship is; the difference between praise and worship, and what both praise and worship consist of. I pray that you apply this information in your personal life and begin to praise and worship GOD in your own personal and heart-felt way. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS PRAISE? HOW DO WE PRAISE GOD?**

*“Let us constantly and at all times offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that thankfully acknowledge and confess and glorify His name.” The Apostle Paul (Hebrews 13:15)*

Praise is the act of expressing your approval, your appreciation, your admiration, your commendation, and your thankfulness to someone. For example, we praise athletes that we support by cheering for them during sporting events. We also praise singers, musicians, actors, and speakers by applauding their performances. So how do we praise GOD and express our approval, appreciation, admiration, commendation, and thankfulness to our Heavenly Father? Here are seven of the many Hebrew words found in the Bible that have been translated into the English word “praise,” which show us how we can praise GOD:

\***Zamar** – We can praise GOD using musical instruments

\***Tehillah**-We can praise GOD by singing songs and hymns expressing how much we love, adore, and appreciate Him

\***Todah**- We can praise GOD by extending our hands as we express our thankfulness to Him

\***Shabach**- We can praise GOD by using our voice to shout loudly about how much we love Him, adore Him, honor Him, and appreciate Him.

\***Barak**- We can praise GOD by kneeling and bowing down as an act of honoring and reverencing Him as we express to Him how much we love Him, adore Him, and appreciate the things that He has done for us

\***Yadah**- We can praise GOD by lifting our hands to revere Him and honor Him

\***Hallal**- We can praise God through dancing (as David did), and through using bodily movements that express our love, adoration, and admiration of GOD.

From the definition of these Hebrew words, we discover the many ways that we can give praise to our Heavenly Father. I encourage you to not limit the expression of your praise to GOD to only one form, but to utilize all of these forms to express your love, admiration, and appreciation to your Heavenly Father.

It is important also to note that our praise and our worship that we give to GOD must come from our heart. In other words, our praise and worship must involve our emotions, and it must be done with passion and sincerity. Often times in church our praise becomes a ritual that we perform, or something that we do routinely at certain parts of the service. Because of this, our praise to GOD is something that we engage in absent-mindedly and without focus. We sing only when we are told to sing, we clap only when we are told to clap, while all the time our heart is not into what we are doing. This results in our praise and worship *not* being genuine, authentic, and real. GOD addresses this type of mindless and emotionless praise and worship in the book of Isaiah 29:13 when it states; “The Lord says: These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.” I urge you as a brother in Christ, that when you praise and worship GOD, that you put your heart into it, and that you do it with passion and sincerity. Only then will your praise and worship please GOD because it is real, genuine, authentic, and from the heart.

### **WHAT IS WORSHIP? HOW DO WE WORSHIP GOD?**

*“Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.”* The Apostle Paul (Romans 12:1)

Worship is the act of giving reverence, honor, and respect to someone through your service to them. Worship consists of serving GOD through the way that we live, and it involves every area and every aspect of our life. Worship is our way of telling GOD how much He is worth to us. Worship truly occurs when we give to God what He deserves from us because He is GOD. With this in mind, here are the various ways that we worship GOD:

\*We worship GOD when we praise Him using the various methods previously discussed to express our love, admiration, and adoration to GOD

\*We worship GOD when we study the Bible to discover His will for our life and how He wants us to live, and then applying it

\* We worship GOD by being obedient to His teachings, His instructions, and by using Godly wisdom when we make our decisions and choices

- \*We worship GOD by resisting Satan's temptations that cause us to sin and step outside of GOD's will for our life
- \*We worship GOD by sharing who He is with others through evangelism and other forms of ministry (fulfilling The Great Commission)
- \*We worship GOD with our finances through giving Him tithes and offerings
- \*We worship GOD when we pray to Him and allow Him to get involved in our life by responding to our requests
- \*We worship GOD by taking Holy Communion
- \*We worship GOD when we bow down, lay prostrate, and honor Him for who He is
- \*We worship GOD by serving others, and by being compassionate and generous to those who are in need
- \*We worship GOD through our baptism
- \*We Worship GOD by keeping our thoughts pure, our words pure, and our actions pure
- \*We worship GOD by the way that we treat our spouses and our children with love and respect
- \*We worship GOD by working with all of our heart in everything that we do as if we were working for the Lord, and not for man (Colossians 3:23)
- \*We worship GOD by loving our neighbors as we love ourselves, and by being compassionate towards them as well (Matthew 22:39)
- \*We worship GOD by loving Him with all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our soul, and with all of our strength (Matthew 22:37)

All of these are some of the numerous ways that we worship our Heavenly Father. As you can see, worship consists of serving GOD through the way that we live, and it involves every area and every aspect of our life.

### **WHY SHOULD WE PRAISE AND WORSHIP GOD?**

When I was in the military, whenever a high ranking officer entered into a room, we all were commanded to stand up as a sign of respect and honor. Whenever a high ranking general attended a formal gathering or presented a speech, we were commanded to stand during their arrival and departure, and a song was played that paid tribute to them. Whenever we encountered a higher ranking officer outside of a building, it is our custom to salute them and to greet them when they pass by. If all of this honor and respect is given to military officers because of their rank, their position, and their authority, how much more should we be doing to show how much we respect and honor the GOD that we serve who is the supreme authority over all of the universe?

The way that we show our love, our respect, and how much we honor God is through our praise and our worship of Him. Psalm 29:2 says that we should, "honor the LORD for the glory of his name. Worship



the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.” When we praise and worship GOD, we give Him the glory that He earnestly seeks and desires from us as His children.

Here are some scriptures in the Bible that teach us that we should praise and worship GOD:

\*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. *Psalms 100:1-3*

\*Praise the LORD! Yes, give praise, O servants of the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD now and forever. Everywhere—from east to west—praise the name of the LORD. For the LORD is high above the nations; his glory is higher than the heavens. Who can be compared with the LORD our God, who is enthroned on high? He stoops to look down on heaven and on earth. He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, even the princes of his own people! He gives the childless woman a family, making her a happy mother. Praise the LORD! *Psalms 113:1-9*

\*Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. *Psalm 95:6-7*

### **WHEN SHOULD WE PRAISE AND WORSHIP GOD?**

Praise and worship is not something that you participate in only for 15 minutes every Sunday of the week during church services. Does GOD only deserve to be admired, loved, respected, honored, and adored for this short amount of time? Rather, praising and worshipping GOD is something that should be happening on a very frequent basis as a result of your personal relationship with your Heavenly Father. King David was a man after God’s own heart, and after reading through the book of Psalms, it becomes evident that praise and worship of GOD occurred on a frequent and consistent basis in his life, as it should also be occurring on a frequent and consistent basis in our lives as well.

There were some specific circumstances and situations that caused David to begin to praise and worship GOD, and it was during these times that he needed to draw closer to GOD because of the adversity that He was facing, or because he wanted to specifically express his thankfulness, his admiration, and his appreciation for something that GOD had done in his life. Here are some of these examples of specific periods in our life that can motivate us to praise and worship GOD:

\*When facing opposition (this is definitely the time to praise GOD) /Psalm 7

\*When in distress, misery, and danger / Psalm 18

\*When GOD has answered your prayer and delivered you from trouble/ Psalm 28, Psalm 66

\*When you are feeling discouraged, disheartened, and depressed /Psalm 42

\*When asking for forgiveness and repenting for your sins /Psalm 51

\*When you think about GOD’s love for you and His faithfulness towards you /Psalm 57, Psalm 63

\*To express your thankfulness to GOD / Psalm 100

These are just few of the numerous times in our life that motivate us as Christians to begin to praise and worship our Heavenly Father.

### **WARNINGS AGAINST PRAISING AND WORSHIPPING IDOLS OR OTHER FALSE gods**

In the beginning of this chapter, I told you about how I would praise my wife while I was dating her in many different ways. If at any time I choose to praise another woman during the course of our relationship and our marriage, my wife would become extremely upset, and there would be consequences and repercussions that I would have to face as a result of my actions. Similarly, when we choose to give other people, other things, and other idols our praise and our worship instead of our Heavenly Father, it causes GOD to become extremely jealous and angry, and there are negative consequences and repercussions that we have to face as a result of our actions.

The Bible directly warns us about worshipping false idols or other religious beings in Exodus 34:14 when it states; “You must worship no other gods, for the LORD, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you.” An idol or a false god, is symbolic of any person or anything that we worship and serve as a god, and anything that we place our faith and trust into to perform the functions that GOD performs in our life, which is to provide for us, protect us, to give us peace and joy, to give us wisdom, to guide us, to forgive us of our sins, and to answer our prayers. The Bible is full of warnings against worshipping false idols and other so-called gods, and it paints a clear picture of the consequences that GOD’s people faced for worshipping them. Here are a few examples of these types of passages in the Bible warning us about worshipping idols:

\* You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below. And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven. *Deuteronomy 4:15-19*

\* If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God. *Deuteronomy 8:19-20*

\* So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul— then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD’s anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. *Deuteronomy 11:13-17*

From these scriptures we see a few of GOD’s warnings to His people in which He commands us not to worship any false gods or idols in His place. I pray that you only give your praise and your worship to the one true GOD who is your Heavenly Father, and who provides for you, protects you, gives you wisdom, guides you, forgives you of your sins, blesses you, delivers you, and who answers your prayers.

## **OTHER INSIGHTS CONCERNING PRAISE AND WORSHIP**

### ***Worshipping GOD In Spirit And In Truth***

John 4:24 teaches us that, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." By instructing us to worship GOD in spirit and in truth, Jesus is teaching us that worship is not limited to a physical location or a structure, nor is it only performed during the time when priests would offer animal sacrifices during the Old Testament times. Jesus is now telling us how to truly worship GOD, and that is to worship GOD in spirit and in truth.

To worship GOD in "spirit" means to worship Him and serve Him according to the way that GOD desires to be worshipped. GOD desires us to worship Him with all of our heart and soul involved; with the right attitude, and with the right purpose in our mind. We do this by reverencing Him, honoring Him, and glorifying Him with our life and with our praise. To worship GOD in "truth" means to serve GOD by living our life according to His teachings, instructions, commandments, and not according to the way that our flesh and our sinful nature influences us to live. This is how we worship GOD in a way that pleases our Heavenly Father.

### ***The Devil Wants To Stop You From Worshipping GOD***

All throughout the Bible there are written accounts of instances where GOD's people are tempted to stop worshipping GOD. The three Hebrew boys in the book of Daniel were threatened with death because they worshipped GOD instead of bowing down to a statue made of gold. The devil also tempted Jesus to begin to worship him in exchange for power and authority. This lets us know that whenever we begin to worship GOD, we will encounter opposition, discouragement, and circumstances that are intended to cause us to lose focus of our relationship with our Heavenly Father. However, we must always resist the temptations and the distractions that come that attempt to cause us to stop worshipping GOD, and as we continue to praise and worship GOD regardless of the troubling circumstances and difficult situations that we encounter, we can be assured that GOD will deliver us and help us in our time of need.

## **CONCLUSION**

I pray that you have found the information on this chapter to be useful, and that begin to apply this knowledge in your personal life as you praise and worship GOD in a way that pleases Him; which is in spirit, in truth, and from your heart. By praising and worshipping your Heavenly Father, you will continue to draw closer into a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him, causing you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship. Amen!!!

### COMPASSION 101

*“It is lack of love for ourselves that inhibits our compassion toward others. If we make friends with ourselves, then there is no obstacle to opening our hearts and minds to others.”*

Imagine that on your way home from work or school, you see a man being robbed on the street by a group of thieves. The man is absolutely helpless and defenseless as he lies there brutally beaten, injured, and unconscious. The thieves then take all of the man’s possessions; his car keys, his wallet, his money, his jewelry, his clothes, and his identification, and they leave the man with absolutely nothing left. After the thieves flee the scene of the crime, you see a man wearing a doctor’s coat arrive. You begin to think to yourself; “Surely the doctor will help the victim and provide the man with the medical attention that he needs.” The doctor looks at the victim, sees that he’s been robbed and beaten, and then decides that he is too preoccupied with other things that require his attention. So he leaves the man unattended without assisting him at all.

A few minutes after the doctor leaves, you see a person wearing a religious robe and collar arrive. You begin to think to yourself; “Surely the preacher will help the victim and make sure that the man receives the care that he needs to get back to health.” The preacher looks at the victim, sees that he is injured and has been robbed of all of his possessions, and then decides that it would be too inconvenient for him to help because he is too busy doing other things. So he leaves the man hanging on to his life by a thin thread without assisting him in any way.

You’ve now seen two people pass by this victim, and the man’s condition is getting worse as each minute passes. You look around, and you decide that since these two people did not assist the victim, that nobody else would help him either. At this point you have an important decision to make. Do you turn your back on the victim like the others did? Do you act as if you didn’t see anything happen at all? Do you choose not to get involved by making up an excuse? Do you dismiss the suffering that you see the victim is experiencing? Or do you decide to actively help the man by getting him the medical attention he needs, providing him with something to eat so that he can regain his strength, and do whatever else is necessary to help him get back on his feet?

This example is similar to the parable that Jesus told to His disciples to explain to them what compassion truly is in Luke chapter 10. In this story, two different religious people come across a man who was robbed and beaten, but did not display compassion by stopping and offering any assistance. Yet it was an unreligious person (a Samaritan) who was the one that displayed GOD’s love by being compassionate towards the victim and attending to his needs. The next time that you encounter someone who is in need or who is suffering, are you going to pass by them without offering them any assistance, or are you going to display the love of GOD by being compassionate and helpful towards those who are in need? Compassion plays a crucial role in our spiritual walk as believers, and GOD desires for us to display this characteristic frequently. We should only be pursuing those goals and dreams that give us the opportunity to display compassion in the lives of others. The purpose of this chapter is to explain what compassion is; how we apply it in our life, the benefits we receive by being compassionate towards others, and the ways that GOD is compassionate towards us. Enjoy.

### WHAT IS COMPASSION?

*“Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else’s skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.” - Frederick Buechner*

Compassion is defined as the quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it. I like to define compassion as simply “love in action.” Compassion is the physical

demonstration of the love that GOD has for someone being expressed through us. Compassion is what causes the love of GOD inside of us to want to reach out to those who are suffering and are in need. In the heart of the word “compassion,” we find the word “passion,” which is an intense emotion that consists of strong enthusiasm for something. Since passion is an integral part of the compassion that we have for others, we should intensely desire to help those we see in need, we should feel compelled to do what we can to alleviate their suffering, and we should be enthusiastic about doing it (instead of being grumpy or ill-tempered because we had to go out of our way to help someone.)

As Christians, we find examples of what compassion truly is by studying the life of Jesus. The Bible states that because of Jesus’ compassion, He healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead, forgave sinners, became a servant to others, guided the lost, and even laid down His life so that we can be saved from our sins. The reason that Jesus showed compassion to all of these people is because He felt sympathetic towards them, and because He was genuinely concerned about the well-fare of those that He came into contact with. Instead of turning His back to those who were suffering, the love of GOD that was inside of Jesus compelled Him to want to do something about their suffering and their misery, which He did. (Aren’t you glad that GOD is compassionate towards us?)

Likewise, instead of turning our backs on people that are suffering and are in need, we too should display the love of GOD inside by becoming genuinely concerned about the well-being of others, and then deciding to do something about it by being compassionate to their needs. The compassion that we display spurred on by the love of GOD inside of us is what distinguishes us as Christians from those who do not have the love of GOD inside of them. Those who do not have the love of GOD inside of them are selfish and only focused on themselves, and it is compassion that makes us as believers distinct from those who do not know GOD, and who do not live according to His word.

Any trial that someone goes through that causes them to become worried; any difficult situation that someone experiences that causes grief or fear, any disaster (such as Hurricane Katrina or the Earthquake in Haiti) that strikes and leaves people suffering and without basic necessities, is an opportunity for us as Christians to be compassionate towards others. We display our compassion by comforting those who are suffering, and by providing for those who are in need. This is one purpose that GOD wants us to fulfill in our life, and that is to be compassionate towards all of our brothers, our sisters, and our neighbors (every person that we meet) here on Earth.

### **HOW DO WE DISPLAY COMPASSION TOWARDS OTHERS?**

*“By compassion we make others’ misery our own, and so, by relieving them, we relieve ourselves also”* Thomas Browne, Sr

Here are a few examples of how we display compassion towards others.

#### ***Compassion Requires Action***

In order to explain to you how we should display compassion towards others, I want to first show you two examples in the Bible of when compassion is not shown. Take a look at these two scriptures:

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” *James 2:14-17*

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” *1 John 3:17-18*

From these two scriptures we discover that compassion is not something that is verbal, or that is expressed solely with our mouth (i.e. wishing someone well), rather, compassion is expressed when we put the love of GOD into action by providing for those that are in need, and comforting those who are suffering. The book of James even describes our faith as being dead, useless, and of no value if we as Christians do not display the love of GOD by being compassionate towards others in an active way.

The example in 1 John instructs us to not only display the love of GOD inside of us solely with words, but with actions as well. We as Christians often use prayer as a way of side-stepping our responsibility of being compassionate by becoming directly involved in a situation. As a result, we frequently tell people that we will “pray for them” thinking that what we are doing is religious, when in fact GOD put that person in our path for us to directly be a blessing to them by becoming involved in their life. I pray that you do not miss an opportunity to display the love of GOD by not showing someone compassion when the occasion arises, but that instead you become personally involved in their life to provide them with the help that they need.

### ***Reciprocating GOD’s Comfort To Others***

2 Corinthians 1:2-4 states; “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” The reason that GOD comforts us in our troubles is so that we can comfort others with the same comfort that GOD has given to us. If GOD has delivered you, helped you, or brought you out of a particularly negative situation or addiction (such as poverty, incarceration, alcoholism, drug use, depression, abusive relationships, mental illness, a medical complication, homosexuality, debt, pornography, trauma caused by warzone experiences, etc), GOD wants you to then help and encourage those who are in the same situation that GOD brought you out of and delivered you from. It is for this reason we receive comfort from GOD, and that is to provide comfort and support to others who are going through similar experiences in their life.

So in what ways has GOD comforted you in your life by bringing you out of a negative or difficult situation? In what way can you use the comfort and the help that you received from GOD to comfort and to help those who are experiencing the same issues and problems? Once you have an answer to these questions, begin to be compassionate towards those who are in need of your encouragement and support.

### ***Treating Those in Need As We Would Treat Jesus***

Jesus also taught His followers about the importance of compassion, and how we will be judged according to it in the book of Matthew 25:31-46 when He states:

### **The Reward Of Those Who Are Compassionate**

“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep (Believers) at his right hand and the goats (Non-Believers) at his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was

naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’ “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’

### **The Punishment Of Those Who Are Not Compassionate**

“Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ “And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”

In this passage, Jesus is teaching us that whenever we display the love of GOD by being compassionate towards others, that what we do for them, we are in fact doing for Jesus as well. When we feed and clothe the poor; when we show hospitality to those that are lonely, when we console those who are grieving over lost loved ones, and when we comfort and visit those who are isolated in the hospital or in prison, we are in fact serving GOD as well. Because we as Christians love Jesus with all of our heart, our mind, our soul, and our strength, the next time you encounter someone who is hurting, struggling, worrying, or in need, picture that person as being Jesus Christ in the flesh, and then do for that person what you would do for Him. This is the level of compassion that GOD wants for us to have towards others. As a result of being compassionate towards others, we receive GOD’s blessings on our life.

### ***Compassion Through Forgiveness***

*“The value of compassion cannot be over-emphasized. Anyone can criticize. It takes a true believer to be compassionate. No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands.”* Arthur H. Stainback

As I stated earlier, compassion is what distinguishes us as Christians from those who do not possess the love of GOD in their hearts. When we encounter someone who is in need, who is suffering, who is hurting, or who is going through a difficult time, we sometimes fall into the temptation of being critical of that person by blaming them for the condition that they are in. This is a characteristic of our sinful nature, which is to criticize and condemn people for their mistakes by making them feel guilty for what they have done, and to ridicule them for even being in the situation in the first place. For example, we criticize and blame single mothers for having sex outside of marriage; we criticize and blame people who got themselves into debt by spending more than they can afford to spend, we criticize and blame people for not finishing school and completing their education so that they can get a decent job, we criticize and blame people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol for taking a hit or a sip in the first place.

However, I want you to know that it is not GOD’s will for us to criticize and to blame people for the circumstances that they are in, rather, He desires for us to forgive them, and to be compassionate towards them by displaying the love of GOD, and by becoming directly involved in their life to help them improve their situation. Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to, “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” I want to encourage you as a brother in Christ to be compassionate to those who need to be comforted, and to not criticize and shame the people who have fallen into trouble.

### ***Compassion Among Christians***

*“The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.” -Thomas Merton*

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12:12, Paul begins to describe the spiritual body of Christ by writing; “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.” Within this description, Paul identifies every individual who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as an important member within this body. Each member (you) possesses a spiritual gift (teaching, serving, etc) that helps the body operate and function in order to carry out GOD’s will here on Earth, just as your physical body parts (your eyes, hands, legs etc) help your physical body operate and function as a whole. Paul then explains why compassion is important within the spiritual body that consists of every Christian believer in the world today.

If one of your physical body parts becomes injured or experiences pain, your whole body suffers and experiences pain as well. As a result, you will use your other body parts to do whatever is possible to alleviate the pain and suffering (i.e. using your hand to massage a sore in your neck). Likewise, when an individual who is a part of the spiritual body of Christ is suffering or in pain, we (every Christian believer) should be compassionate towards them and provide them with any comfort that we can. The problem is that this form of compassion is rarely exhibited. It seems that we have stopped sympathizing with others because we no longer take a deep and intimate interest in the lives of our Christian brothers and sisters. As a result, there is not very much unity among Christians today, and as a body we are operating at less than full strength because so many of us are suffering without any support. Because of this, we are not as effective as we could be in reaching out to those who do not know GOD and spreading the gospel to them. This is why Paul wrote in verse 26 that, “if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it.”

If we truly began to share in the sufferings of the other members in the Body of Christ, then we would be compassionate towards each other, which would lead to healing and restoration. If we as Christians would begin to be compassionate towards each other, we would become more effective at reaching out to those who do not know GOD by spreading the gospel to the whole world. I pray that as a Christian you begin to be compassionate towards your brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ (especially within your local church), so that we can become more effective as disciples by growing spiritually, and successfully carry out The Great Commission through spreading the gospel to unbelievers.

### **HOW DOES GOD EXPRESS COMPASSION TOWARDS US?**

*“Man may dismiss compassion from his heart, but God never will” - William Cowper*

One of my personal favorite passages of scripture to quote is found in Lamentations 3:21-23, and it states; “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” So how does GOD express His compassion towards us? GOD displays His compassion in our life by not allowing us to be consumed. Let me explain.....

To be “consumed” means to be “totally absorbed in something, or to be destroyed completely.” Some of the things that Satan causes to occur in our life that attempt to consume us include worry; fear, depression, anxiety, financial difficulties, stress, health issues, hostile threats, danger, hardship, challenging situations, etc. If we become totally absorbed into devoting our time, our energy, our thoughts, and our feelings into these negative emotions or difficulties, we will not be able to enjoy our life, we will not be able to experience peace and joy, we will not be able to focus on our relationship with GOD, nor will we be able to focus on what He has called us to do in life. These are all devices that Satan uses to cause us to lose hope.



But it is because of GOD's great love for us, that we are not consumed (totally absorbed or completely destroyed)...

\*Because of GOD's great love for us, He provides us with healing so that we are not consumed by our health issues or medical complications that can cause our body to become totally absorbed by pain and misery.

\*Because of GOD's great love for us, He allows us to cast our cares and our burdens on Him so that we do not become totally absorbed by stress, worry, fear, anxiety, and depression which can cause us not to enjoy life, and to get off track concerning our relationship with GOD and His purpose for us.

\*Because of GOD's great love for us, He provides for us in our time of need so that we are not consumed by the things that we are lacking, such as food so that we do not starve, and clothes so that we can keep warm.

\* Because of GOD's great love for us, He forgives us when we make mistakes instead of punishing us so that we are not consumed with guilt and condemnation.

\*Finally, because of GOD's great love for us, He protects us when we are in danger so that we are not consumed and totally destroyed by the enemies that we are facing and the threats that they are carrying out against us.

Aren't you glad that GOD loves you greatly, and that because of His compassion for you, He will not allow you to be consumed?

Psalms 103 gives us other examples of how GOD is compassionate towards us, and I would like to point them out to you. This scripture proclaims:

\*<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-

\* <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins (God displays His compassion towards us by forgiving us of our sins and not condemning us)

\*and heals all your diseases, (GOD displays His compassion towards us by healing our bodies from sickness and disease)

\*<sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion (GOD displays His compassion towards us by withholding punishment from us by not sentencing us to Hell, and by giving us salvation and eternal life)

\*<sup>5</sup>who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (GOD displays His compassion towards us by answering our prayer requests and by granting us the desires of our heart)

\*<sup>6</sup>The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. (GOD displays His compassion towards us by granting us justice whenever we have been wronged or mistreated)

\*<sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: <sup>8</sup>The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children, so the

LORD has compassion on those who fear him (GOD displays His compassion towards us by loving us as a father loves His child, and by fulfilling the role of a Heavenly Father in our life.)

From this Psalm we discover that GOD shows His compassion towards us through forgiveness, though healing, by offering us eternal life, by answering our prayer requests, by granting us the desires of our heart, by granting us justice, and by assuming the role of a father in our life.

### **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES ON THE SUBJECT OF COMPASSION**

Here are some other scriptures that address the subject of compassion:

\*Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. *1 Peter 3:8-9*

\*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. *Colossians 3:12-13*

\*And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.' *Zechariah 7:8-10*

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that this chapter provided you with a better understanding of what compassion is, and our responsibility as Christians to demonstrate it to others. I pray also that you begin to apply this information concerning compassion into your personal life, and by doing so, you will continue to mature spiritually, grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father, fulfill His purpose for your life, and successfully accomplish the dreams and the goals that He has placed on your heart for you to achieve, causing you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship. Amen!!!

## GENEROSITY 101

*“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” – Winston Churchill*

I enjoy watching my two young toddlers interacting with each other. They both like to get into things, they both like to make each other laugh, and they both enjoy participating in games. However, there is one circumstance that causes my children to not play well together. This situation causes my children to begin to scream at one another, and to start to fight. This circumstance occurs whenever it comes time for them to share something. Because of their immaturity at this young age, my children are only able to focus on themselves; they are only interested in taking things and holding on to them so that no one can take it away from them, and so that nobody else can benefit or enjoy what they have worked hard to obtain.

I realize that this mindset and philosophy is not only present in young children, but in teenagers and grown adults as well. Because of our immaturity, we want to hold on to the money and the resources that we have earned so that nobody else can benefit from what we have worked so hard to obtain. As a result, we become stingy, tightfisted, and miserly. Even worse, we choose to willingly spend what we have earned on material possessions that fade, become worn, and break down within a year or two, but we refuse to willingly spend what we have earned to help someone in need, and to make a positive impact in their life that will last forever.

I want you to know that our Heavenly Father doesn't desire for us to go through life being unwilling to share what we have. Instead, GOD desires for us to mature and to put away this childish mindset by loving one another in an unselfish manner, which we do by supporting and serving others in any way that we can through our generosity. For this reason, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:11; “When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.” Some of the worst people to ever be around are those who are stingy and unwilling to share what they have, but some of the best people to be around are those who are generous with their time, their money, and their resources to assist others and to make them comfortable. It is these people who possess the characteristic of generosity that effectively witness to others and display the love of Christ, which in turn encourages others to establish a relationship with GOD.

Imagine how effective Jesus would have been in witnessing and ministering to others if He was not generous. What if Jesus choose to be stingy by not feeding those 4,000 plus people who hadn't eaten for a long time because they chose rather to listen to Him speak; a miracle would have never occurred. What if Jesus chose to be stingy with His healing power and withheld it from those who traveled great distances to be cured from their diseases; people would have lost faith in Him. Imagine if Jesus was stingy with His time and was unwilling to teach His disciples about the Kingdom of GOD; the church would have never grown and the gospel would have never spread. Jesus was abundantly generous with all that He possessed, and He desires for us to be generous towards others as well. The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand what generosity is; how we can display generosity in our personal life, the benefits that we receive because we are generous, and how GOD displays His generosity in our life. Enjoy!!

### **WHAT IS GENEROSITY? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GENEROUS?**

*“What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.” – Albert Pike*

To be generous means to be willing to give money, help, or time freely to another individual, often in large quantity or amount. As GOD was giving instructions to His people as to how He wants them to live, He informs them in Deuteronomy 15:11 that, “there will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.” I want you to know that as long as you live here on Earth, you will encounter people who will be in need, and who

could greatly benefit from a generous amount of your time, your help, your resources, and even your finances. Most of these people often go ignored, dismissed, rejected, and abandoned. Some of these people in need of your generosity include troubled kids and adults in need of mentoring; the homeless in need of shelter, a recovering drug addict or alcoholic in need of support, the poor in need of food and clothing, the hospitalized in need of companionship, a struggling family member in need of your assistance, a person grieving because of a lost loved one, or a distressed individual in need of a shoulder to lean on and cry.

In today's society and culture, the needs of these individuals often go overlooked and neglected because they turn to people who do not have the love of GOD inside of them. However, whenever we as Christians encounter people in need of love or support, GOD desires for us to display His love and His compassion by being generous towards them. It is this love, this compassion, and this generosity that we show to others that distinguishes us as Christians from those who do not follow or believe in GOD. By our generosity, we are able to serve as the "Light of the World" as we draw people closer to our Heavenly Father and effectively build and advance the kingdom of GOD here on Earth.

### **HOW DO WE APPLY GENEROSITY IN OUR PERSONAL LIFE?**

*"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; **if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously...**" – The Apostle Paul (Romans 12:6-8)*

Here are a few examples of how we apply generosity in our personal life.

#### ***Checking The Attitude of our Heart***

*"Generosity consists not of the sum given, but the manner in which it is bestowed"*

The most important thing to keep in mind concerning generosity is that it must be done out of a loving heart, and with a good attitude. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:3 that, "if I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." Our sinful nature and our stingy mindset cause us to have a bitter attitude towards giving and being generous to those that are in need. We've also unknowingly developed a "love for money" that has created within us an emotional attachment to our finances. Just as we would hate to see someone that we love leave us and walk out of our life, we are unable to become generous towards others because we hate to see our money leave us as well. This is why the Bible says in Hebrews 13:5 to, "keep your lives free from the love of money."

As a result of our emotional attachment to money, we are reluctant to give to charities, to the church, and to other people who are in need. In the few instances that we do give, we do so grudgingly while resenting the recipient of our gift. My wife can tell the difference between when I do something for her out of love, and when I do something grudgingly because I did not want to do it in the first place. The spiteful attitude in my heart is always reflected in my outward behavior. Any act or expression of love that is given reluctantly does not produce the intended effect on people because they truly do not feel the love of GOD through the generous act.

Before we give generously to anybody in need, we must ensure that our heart is in the right place, and that we are giving out of love and not with any impure motive (such as to win favor, impress others, or to receive something in return from them later on). The Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that, "God loves a person who gives cheerfully." In other words, GOD is pleased when we give gladly, willingly, joyfully, enthusiastically, and with pleasure. It is when we give cheerfully that GOD is pleased with our actions, and blesses us in return. I want to encourage you to make sure that when you give, that you are giving with a loving heart, a pure motive, and a cheerful attitude.

### ***Knowing The Source of Your Seed***

*“There never was any heart truly great and generous, that was not also tender and compassionate”- Robert Frost*

In the book of 2 Corinthians, Paul is requesting for the members of a church that he founded to be generous in order to meet the needs of those that are struggling and poor. As he writes this letter, Paul explains why GOD wants us to be generous, and how GOD puts us into a position to be generous in the first place. 2 Corinthians 9:10-12 states; “For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.”

By teaching us that GOD provides “seed” for the farmer, Paul is explaining that GOD is the source of the “seed” that the farmer uses to plant into the ground. What is harvested or reaped as a result of this seed being planted is a fruit or a vegetable that is able to satisfy those that are hungry, and those that are in need. The “seed” that we plant into the lives of those that are in need of GOD’s love and support can be symbolic of money, of time, and of any other resource that we have which we can use to help others. Because GOD is the source of our “seed” and not us ourselves, we do not have to worry about running out of that “seed” as long as we continue to plant it by being generous towards others as GOD directs us to be. Our Heavenly Father then replenishes our “seed” (finances, resources, etc), so that we can continue to plant it where He desires us to by being generous and displaying His love and His compassion towards those that are in need.

Often times, the reason that we hesitate to be generous towards others when GOD tells us to is because we are afraid of exhausting and completely running out of “seed” (finances, resources, etc). However, when you understand that GOD is the source of your “seed”, you do not have to worry about running out of it because GOD will replenish what you have given with even more than what you gave out to help others.

### ***You Were Made Prosperous to be Generous***

*“Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.”*  
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

There is a passage of scripture in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 that provides us with the reason why GOD prospers us as His children and allows us to become wealthy. Verse 11 in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 states that, “you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous.” From this scripture we discover that GOD makes us rich in every way (financially, resourcefully, etc) so that we can always be generous towards others that are in need.”

A common mistake that we make is hoarding or storing up as much of the money that we earn so that we can be generous towards ourselves, and this is not how GOD wants us to use the money that He blesses us with, nor is it the reason that He gave it to us either. Rather, GOD prospers us, grants us success, blesses the works of our hands, and enables us to become wealthy so that we can be generous to those that are in need. GOD did not bless us as Christians with the intention for us to hold on to what He has given us only for ourselves, instead, GOD blesses us so that we in turn can display the love of GOD by blessing others generously. I pray that you begin to use the wealth, the prosperity, and the success that GOD has given to you to be generous towards others, even more so than being generous towards yourself.

### ***Be Determined***

*“Lose yourself in generous service and every day can be a most unusual day, a triumphant day, an abundantly rewarding day!” - William Arthur Ward*

Our generosity is not something that we should base solely on how we *feel* at the moment. Often times our feelings of fear, worry, or reluctance will override our desire to be generous, and as a result, we are not generous towards other people that are in need. We also encounter various negative influences that are designed by Satan to prevent us from being generous (feeling taken advantage of, the discouragement of others, etc). Rather, you must make up in your mind that you will be determined to be generous towards those whom GOD sends to you that are in need. The Bible teaches us in Isaiah 32:8 that, “generous people plan to do what is generous, and they stand firm in their generosity.” I urge you as a brother in Christ to be determined in your mind to be generous towards others, and to stand firm in your generosity even as you encounter negative influences or ideas that attempt to persuade you to do otherwise.

### ***Your Generosity Brings Praise To GOD***

*“To be rich in admiration and free from envy, to rejoice greatly in the good of others, to love with such generosity of heart that your love is still a dear possession in absence or unkindness - these are the gifts which money cannot buy” - Robert Louis Stevenson*

Finally, 2 Corinthians 9:12 explains to us the purpose and the result of our generosity by stating; “two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God.” Our Heavenly Father created us so that we can bring praise and glory to Him through our good works. One of the ways that we bring praise to our Heavenly Father is through being generous to those who are in need. This scripture says that our generosity results in “people joyfully expressing their thanks to GOD,” which is a form of praise being given to Him.

If through our generosity a hungry person that is without food is fed so that they no longer have to experience hunger pains, they will more than likely thank us for what we have done for them, at which point we can let them know how much GOD loves them and wants to establish a relationship with them as well. When that person realizes that it was because of GOD that you helped them, then they will be thankful to Him and desire to know more about Him (this is a form of evangelism). This same example applies to a situation in which through our generosity someone else’s needs are met, whether it be a need for support; companionship, comfort, mentorship, love, encouragement, assistance, resources, finances, time, or anything else. So I want to encourage you to be generous towards others, and the results of your actions will lead to our Heavenly Father receiving praise.

### **HOW DOES BEING GENEROUS TO OTHERS BENEFIT US?**

*“Really big people are, above everything else, courteous, considerate and generous - not just to some people in some circumstances - but to everyone all the time.” - Thomas J. Watson*

Our obedience to GOD in the area of generosity produces great blessings not only for us, but for our family as well. Here are a few examples of scriptures that inform us of the blessings that we receive because of our generosity:

\*A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. *Proverbs 11:25*

\*The merciful, kind, and generous man benefits himself [for his deeds return to bless him], but he who is cruel and callous [to the wants of others] brings on himself retribution. *Proverbs 11:17*

\*I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed. *Psalms 37:25-26*

\*Praise the LORD! How joyful are those who fear the LORD and delight in obeying his commands. Their children will be successful everywhere; an entire generation of godly people will be blessed. They themselves will be wealthy, and their good deeds will last forever. Light shines in the darkness for the godly. They are generous, compassionate, and righteous. Good comes to those who lend money generously and conduct their business fairly. Such people will not be overcome by evil. Those who are righteous will be long remembered. They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the LORD to care for them. They are confident and fearless and can face their foes triumphantly. They share freely and give generously to those in need. Their good deeds will be remembered forever. They will have influence and honor. *Psalms 112:1-9*

\*A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor. *Proverbs 22:9*

From these scriptures we discover that a generous person will truly be blessed in an amazing way.

### **HOW IS GOD GENEROUS TOWARDS US?**

*"We all have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him" – The Apostle Paul (Romans 10:12)*

There are two scriptures found in the book of Psalms that were brought to my mind as I was thinking about the answer to this question, and they adequately express how generous GOD is towards us, and how He displays His generosity in our life. These scriptures are:

\*Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry, **but those who trust in the Lord will lack no good thing.**  
*Psalms 34:10*

And...

\*For the Lord God is our sun and our shield. He gives us grace and glory. **The Lord will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.** *Psalms 84:11*

So how does GOD display His generosity towards? GOD is generous towards us by not withholding any good thing from us. So what are the good things that He gives to us? Here is a list of a few of them:

- \*Salvation
- \*Eternal life
- \*Mercy
- \*Unconditional love
- \*Forgiveness
- \*Prosperity
- \*Health
- \*Wisdom
- \*The desires of our heart
- \*Success
- \*Strength
- \*Blessings
- \*Peace
- \*Joy
- \*Answered prayers
- \*A prudent and wise marriage partner (Proverbs 19:14)

The generosity that you extend towards another person in need puts you in position to receive GOD's blessings whenever you are in need of GOD's generosity in your life. These are just a few of the good things that GOD does not withhold from us because of His generosity. We experience each of these things in our personal life because GOD chooses to be generous towards us. Aren't you glad that you have a Heavenly Father who is generous towards you?

### **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES ON GENEROSITY**

Here are some other scriptures that focus on the subject of being generous:

- \*Do not forget or neglect or refuse to extend hospitality to strangers [in the brotherhood--being friendly, cordial, and gracious, sharing the comforts of your home and doing your part generously], for through it some have entertained angels without knowing it. *Hebrews 13:2*
- \*He who by charging excessive interest and who by unjust efforts to get gain increases his material possession gathers it for him [to spend] who is kind and generous to the poor. *Proverbs 28:8*
- \*Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." *2 Corinthians 9:5-7*
- \*Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life. *1 Timothy 6:17-19*
- \*Do not forget or neglect to do kindness and good, to be generous and distribute and contribute to the needy [of the church as embodiment and proof of fellowship], for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. *Hebrews 13:16*
- \*There are those who [generously] scatter abroad, and yet increase more; there are those who withhold more than is fitting or what is justly due, but it results only in want. *Proverbs 11:24*
- \*The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously. *Psalms 37:21*

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that this chapter provided you with a better understanding of what generosity is, and why you should demonstrate it in your personal life towards others. I pray that you begin to apply this information concerning generosity every day, and by doing so, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you continue to mature spiritually, grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father, fulfill His purpose for your life, and successfully accomplish the dreams and the goals that He has placed on your heart for you to achieve. Amen!!!



## **EVANGELISM 101**

*"If your Gospel isn't touching others, it hasn't touched you!" -Curry R. Blake*

When you arrive at your permanent duty station as a soldier in the military, you immediately begin to undergo extensive training to become competent at your technical job. On top of this on-the-job training, you also become involved in war-zone scenarios called “base exercises” in order to become comfortable handling weapons, providing security, and preparing for the threat of chemical attacks. The purpose of this training and these exercises are to prepare you for the times that you will be deployed to a war zone environment, in which you would often encounter hostility, and even come under attack from the enemy.

As a Christian, one of the roles of your local church is to prepare you as a soldier in the army of the Lord so that you can be an effective witness outside of the church; in the streets, in the prisons, in the malls, at your job, in your school, in your home, and even in foreign countries. For some reason, after receiving training and knowledge from the word of GOD, some Christians and other church members choose to only use what they have learned in the local church. This is not what GOD intended for us to do.

GOD wants us to take the training that we have received, the information and the wisdom that we have learned, and the love that we have developed in our heart out into our community, and even to the entire world, so that we can reach out to those who do not know GOD and introduce them to our Heavenly Father. This is what we call “evangelism,” and it is the term that is used to describe the process of sharing your faith with other people. The purpose of this chapter is to explain what evangelism is, and to give you some tips and some suggestions as to how you can reach out to others and introduce them to GOD. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS EVANGELISM?**

*I don't know how your theology works, but if Jesus has a choice between stained glass windows and feeding starving kids in Haiti, I have a feeling he'd choose the starving kids in Haiti.--Tony Campolo*

Evangelism is the process of sharing news or information about something in order to convince someone to accept it and believe it. As Christians, our main goal is to share the news of the gospel, which is the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we can be forgiven for our sins and be placed on good terms with GOD, and that He is now offering us the gift of salvation and eternal life if we choose to accept it.

Through evangelism and sharing the good news of the gospel, other people who do not know who GOD is are introduced to Him and given the opportunity to accept and receive the gift of salvation. Even more, those who are struggling with challenging circumstances or foolish behavior are also presented with a way to obtain the help that they desperately need through a personal relationship with GOD. As more people receive the gift of salvation and grow spiritually, the bigger the body of Christ becomes, and the larger the kingdom of GOD can expand, enabling us as Christians to be able to have more of an influence and impact in this world in a positive way.

### **HOW CAN WE SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH OTHERS?**

*“Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us daily.” -- Sally Koch*

I want to share with you 5 ways that you can effectively evangelize and share the gospel with those who do not know GOD.

### ***Through Your Example***

Your life speaks louder than your words ever will. You can preach to someone over and over that they should change their life for the better, but it is you as a Christian who they often look at to determine whether or not they should make any changes in their personal life. People examine us as Christians to see the fruit (the product) of our lives to determine whether or not Christianity is something that they want to get involved in. This is why it is extremely important for you to set a good example to them through the way that you live. When people see that you are acting according to what you believe, and that you are experiencing the blessings and the favor of GOD on your life as a product of your Godly lifestyle, then people will begin to become interested in knowing how you became the way that you are. For example:

\*When people who know you as a Christian see that you truly have peace and joy even when you are experiencing tremendous amounts of pressure and adversity that would normally cause other people to begin to stress out, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

\*When people who know you as a Christian see that you are stepping out on faith and successfully accomplishing your goals and dreams while other people are quitting and giving up without even trying, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

\*When people who know you as a Christian see that the bond of your family is strong despite experiencing the issues that normally causes other families to fall apart, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

\*When people who know you as a Christian see that you consistently make wise decisions that have positive consequences and good results associated with them, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

\* When people who know you as a Christian see that you are kind and compassionate towards others while most people are inconsiderate of others, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

\*When people who know you as a Christian see that you treat all people equally with love and respect as supposed to displaying partiality and favoritism towards others, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

\*When people who know you as a Christian see that your marriage is still intact and full of love despite experiencing the problems that normally causes other spouses to divorce, it will cause them to become curious about who GOD is, and how He can help them in this area.

The example that you are setting for other people goes a lot further than any of your words could ever travel, but if you are a hypocrite in any way (going to clubs, sleeping around, using drugs and alcohol, lashing out in anger, committing other sins, etc), people will take notice and will begin to distance themselves from you and from GOD as much as possible. So I want to encourage you to live a life that could serve as a great example of how a Christian should live to those who do not know GOD, and through the example that you set, people will begin to become curious about who GOD is and how He can help them.

### ***Through Demonstrating The Power Of GOD***

One of the most powerful ways that you can evangelize is simply by praying for someone who is in need of GOD's help. When we pray for someone who is experiencing difficulties, you are allowing GOD the

opportunity to become directly involved in that person's life by helping them in their time of trouble. For example:

\*By praying for a person who has encountered an illness, you allow GOD the opportunity to display His power in this person's life by healing them of their sickness. This first-hand experience of GOD's power will influence the person to want to get to know GOD personally for themselves.

\*By praying for a person who is struggling financial and is unable to make ends meet, you allow GOD the opportunity to display His power in this person's life by providing for their needs. This first-hand experience of GOD's power will influence the person to want to get to know GOD personally for themselves.

\*By praying for a person who has encountered difficult circumstances and tough situations, you allow GOD the opportunity to display His power in this person's life by delivering them from their troubles. This first-hand experience of GOD's power will influence the person to want to get to know GOD personally for themselves.

\*By praying for a person who needs help making a very difficult decision, you allow GOD the opportunity to display His power in this person's life by guiding them into the decision that will be most advantageous to them. This first-hand experience of GOD's power will influence the person to want to get to know GOD personally for themselves.

When a person experiences GOD working in their life first-hand to bring them out of a troubling situation or a difficult circumstance, that person will know without a shadow of a doubt that GOD is real, and they will want to establish a close relationship with Him for themselves. When this occurs, you have a wonderful opportunity to begin to share the gospel with them, and to offer them the opportunity to accept the gift of salvation. This is how by demonstrating the power of GOD by praying for someone, you can effectively perform evangelism and spread the gospel to others.

### ***Through Your Testimony***

Sometimes a testimony or a story of how someone else overcame what you are going through is the most comfortable news to hear when you are experiencing a difficult time. A person who is chasing their dream would receive a tremendous amount of encouragement from hearing a story about how another person overcame the same obstacles that they are presently encountering on their way to success.

Is someone that you know going through a tough time or dealing with a difficult situation that GOD has helped you overcome in your past? This would be a wonderful opportunity to share with that person how GOD helped you, and to let them know that the same GOD who helped you is the same GOD that desires to help them if they are willing to put their trust and their faith in Him. People are willing to try just about anything if they know that it has worked in the past, and we as Christians know the One who has a very extensive track record in which He has proven over and over again that He is able to get people out of trouble, while also helping them to overcome their issues.

As you begin to share your personal story with a person in need of comfort and support, it will show that individual that you are talking to that you can relate to them and their difficult circumstance. Once you show someone that you can relate to them, they will begin to open up to you and become receptive to the advice that you have to give to them. As a result, you can begin to share the gospel with them, and provide them with the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ into their life and receive the gift of salvation. This is how your testimony and your witness about what GOD has done in your life can be used to evangelize and spread the gospel to others.

### ***Through Your Compassion***

Our world is full of hurting people who are suffering, discouraged, distressed, and in pain. Often times these people who are hurting have no one to turn to, and when they do turn to someone for comfort they often go searching for it in the wrong places. When people make mistakes or find themselves in bad situations, more often than not they are made to feel guilty or embarrassed for the position that they are in. As a Christian who possesses the love of GOD inside of them, when you begin to display the love of GOD by sympathizing with someone who is hurting, by comforting them, and by doing whatever you can to help them in their time of need, that hurting individual then begins to feel the love of GOD, and they are made aware of the fact that GOD still cares about them and forgives them for all of their sins.

When people feel the love of GOD when they are hurting, and when they realize that GOD still cares about them even though others have abandoned them, it causes that person to want to establish a close relationship with their Heavenly Father. When this occurs, you have a wonderful opportunity to begin to share the gospel with them, and to offer them the opportunity to accept the gift of salvation. This is how your compassion towards someone who is hurting or in distress can be used to evangelize and spread the gospel to others.

### ***Through Your Generosity***

We often come into contact with people that are in need on a regular basis. Certain individuals may be in need of money, of assistance, of support, of resources, of guidance, and of your time. In our society, most people are tight-fisted and stingy with their resources and are unwilling to help those that are in need. As a Christian, when you are generous towards those that are in need, you are allowing GOD to supply what that person is lacking through you. These individuals are often appreciative of any generous act that you may perform towards them, and when they begin to express their thankfulness to you, you can then tell that person to instead begin to thank and praise GOD for what has happened, because it was through Him that you were able to supply their need.

The Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 that, “God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.” When a person’s needs are met by GOD through you, it causes that person to want to establish a close relationship with their Heavenly Father. When this occurs, you have a wonderful opportunity to begin to share the gospel with them, and to offer them the opportunity to accept the gift of salvation. This is how your generosity towards someone who is in need can be used to evangelize and spread the gospel to others.

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that this information was useful to you, and that you begin to apply it in your personal life by evangelizing through the example that you set, through your testimony, through your prayers for someone, through your compassion, and through your generosity. By doing so, you will truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship as you carry out The Great Commission given to us by Jesus, and continue to advance and build the Kingdom of GOD here on Earth. Amen!!!

## **FASTING 101**

Have you ever earnestly sought GOD's guidance and wisdom when faced with a difficult decision that you had to make? Have you ever truly desired deliverance from a tough situation or a challenging circumstance and hardship? Have you ever been extremely determined to hear GOD's answer to you in response to one of your prayers? Have you ever had a strong desire to intercede for another person so that GOD would help that person that was in need of support in only a way that He could help them? Have you ever had a longing and a craving to draw closer to GOD through worship, prayer, study of His word, and by crucifying your flesh so that you could truly live by the spirit and be able to resist sinful temptations? Have you ever wanted GOD to reveal to you the meaning of a particular scripture in the Bible, and to show you how it applies to your life? Have you ever had a yearning for GOD to be with you as you ministered to others, whether it was through preaching, teaching, singing, evangelism, etc?

If you have ever wanted any of these things to happen in your life as a follower of Christ, then I would like to introduce you to the biblical principle of fasting. Fasting plays a vital role in your spiritual growth and development. However, despite its immense level of importance, fasting is often an overlooked and neglected aspect in the lives of many Christians. I believe that there are two reasons why many Christians choose not to fast.

The first reason why I believe many Christians choose not to fast is because we as believers lack "spiritual hunger," which is a craving for righteousness and for the things of GOD, which prevents us from ever being truly satisfied and fulfilled in our spiritual journey and walk. (Matthew 5:6). The second reason I believe many Christians choose not to fast is because they have never been taught about it, nor have they had anyone ever explain to them what the spiritual principle of fasting exactly is. For this reason I wrote this chapter, and I hope that it will answer many of your questions regarding fasting, and also encourage you to begin to apply it in your personal life as you continue to grow and mature as a Christian. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS FASTING?**

Fasting is the practice of abstaining from food, drink, and other secular distractions in order to focus on fellowshiping with GOD and drawing closer to your Heavenly Father through prayer, crucifying your flesh (exercising self-control over our sinful desires), studying His word, and worship. Now that I've told you what fasting is, I want to tell you what fasting is not. Fasting is not simply skipping meals or choosing not to eat for a certain amount of time (that's called extreme dieting). In order for a fast to be effective, powerful, and fruitful (producing results), we must incorporate prayer, self-denial and restraint, studying GOD's word, and worship along with denying ourselves food and secular entertainment ( such as secular music, secular t.v. shows, secular movies, etc).

### **WHY SHOULD WE FAST? HOW DOES FASTING BENEFIT US?**

Fasting enables you to draw closer to GOD while entering into His presence. It is during this time in GOD's presence that you will receive...

- \* GOD's guidance and wisdom when faced with a difficult decision or choice
- \* Deliverance from a tough situation or a challenging circumstance and hardship
- \* The ability to distinctly hear GOD's answer to you in response to one of your prayers

- \*A closer relationship with your Heavenly Father as you become more dependent upon Him through the denial of what your body and your flesh desires
- \* Revelation of GOD's word and a true understanding of its meaning so that you can apply it correctly into your life
- \*GOD's divine assistance as you minister to others in various ways

These are all benefits that you will receive as a result of your decision to fast, and as you can see, these benefits can have a tremendously positive effect on your personal life, and your spiritual growth.

### **HOW DO I FAST THE CORRECT WAY?**

There are many different types of fasts that a person can embark on, such as:

- \*Abstaining from all food and only consuming water or 100% juice
- \*Only eating fruits and vegetables (This is called "The Daniel Fast") and drinking 100% juice or water
- \*Abstaining from only meat
- \*Abstaining from food and drink altogether
- \*Abstaining from secular entertainment (television, movies, video games, internet, etc) in order to concentrate on prayer, studying the word, and worshipping GOD.

The type of fast that you participate in is solely dependent on what GOD places on your heart for you to do. The amount of time that you remain on the fast, whether it is half a day, a whole day, a week, a month, or longer is also solely dependent on what GOD places on your heart for you to do as well. Regardless of the type of fast that you undertake, and regardless of how long you choose to fast, keep in mind that it is extremely important to dedicate this time to prayer, to denying yourself from embracing sinful desires, to studying GOD's word, and to worship.

During almost any type of fast, it is common to feel weak during the first couple of days as your body responds to the lack of food that it normally receives. It would not be wise during this time to engage in any heavy lifting, or strenuous activity. Also, once you have finished fasting, it is very tempting to overload yourself on all of the food that you missed while you were fasting (I know you missed those steaks and those cheeseburgers), but this will have a negative impact on the overall well-being of your body. Instead, begin to take food in gradual portions so that it can be properly digested.

### **WHEN SHOULD WE FAST?**

I want you to know that fasting is not a ritual, nor is it something that is done out of tradition, or out of obligation. Fasting is based purely on your personal relationship with GOD, and it should be done only when you truly and sincerely want to draw closer to Him. Whenever you truly have a desire to receive any of these things in your life (GOD's guidance, deliverance, a closer relationship and connection with GOD, revelation and understanding of His word, and His Divine assistance in ministry), you should begin to fast. In response, GOD will satisfy your spiritual hunger and desire for these things to occur in your life. I want to show you some Biblical examples of when other people in the Bible fasted, and what they fasted for....

### ***Choosing To Fast When Seeking GOD's Help, Assistance, and Protection***

\*Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. *2 Chronicles 20:2-4*

\*And there by the Ahava Canal, I gave orders for all of us to fast and humble ourselves before our God. We prayed that he would give us a safe journey and protect us, our children, and our goods as we traveled. For I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to accompany us and protect us from enemies along the way. After all, we had told the king, "Our God's hand of protection is on all who worship him, but his fierce anger rages against those who abandon him. *Ezra 8: 21-22*

### ***Choosing To Fast To Repent For Sins, and to Rededicate Oneself to GOD***

\*On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. *Nehemiah 9:1-3*

\*Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you." This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all. On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow. When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes... Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city: "No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all. People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us." When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened. *Jonah 3:1-10*

### ***Choosing To Fast To Intercede on the Behalf of Others for Their Well-Being***

\*In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. *Daniel 9:1-3*

### ***Choosing To Fast To Draw Closer To GOD in Times of Grief and Mourning***

\*Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. *2 Samuel 1:11-13*

### ***Choosing To Fast When Encountering Opposition And During Times of Trouble***

\*When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn; when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. Those who sit at the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards. But I pray to you, O LORD, in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation. Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters... Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. Come near and rescue me; redeem me because of my foes. *Psalms 69:10-17*

### ***Choosing To Fast When in Need of GOD's Favor***

\*Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. *Esther 4:15-17*

### ***Choosing To Fast In Order To Resist Temptations and Satan's Attacks***

\*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. *Matthew 4:1-2*

### ***Choosing To Fast While Ministering Or In Preparation For Ministry***

\*In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. *Acts 13:1-3*

\*They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. *Acts 14:21-23*

## **ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES CONCERNING FASTING**

### ***True Fasting (Fasting and Being Obedient to GOD's Word)***

In the book of Isaiah we learn that GOD's people had been fasting, but they were neglecting to follow the instructions that He had given them concerning the way that they should be living their life. As a result, GOD was not pleased with them and He did not respond to their fasting. This is what GOD said to His people in the book of Isaiah:

"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do



as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard." *Isaiah 58:1-8*

It is important to know that we as Christians cannot begin to fast and expect to receive results if we continue to be disobedient to GOD *during and after* the fast, if we were disobedient to Him before we started it. Fasting causes us to examine ourselves on a daily basis, regardless if we are fasting that day or not, to ensure that we are in GOD's will and living according to His Word. Only when we live according to GOD's teachings will we be able to experience the benefits and the results of fasting. If you are not continuing to apply GOD's word to your life, then you are simply wasting your time by deciding to go on a fast.

### ***A Warning About Fasting To Impress Others***

Throughout the course of time people began to fast for the sole purpose of showing others how religious they were, as supposed to fasting to draw closer to GOD. Jesus viewed the actions of these people as being strictly in error, and He gave His followers the following instructions so that they would avoid participating in the same form of erroneous behavior:

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." *Matthew 6:16-18*

For those who live their life constantly seeking praise and admiration from other people for their religious behavior, fasting can turn into something that is done for other reasons besides wanting to grow spiritually. Those who fast for the purpose of seeking to gain recognition, praise, and credit from others will only receive those things that they are seeking from people, but they will not receive approval, praise, or any fruitful results from GOD for their actions. If you choose to fast only to win praise or acclaim from other people, it will not help you to grow spiritually, nor will it cause you to draw closer in your relationship with your Heavenly Father. I urge you to fast only with pure and right motives, and not out of a desire to gain recognition or approval from your peers.

### **PERSONAL TESTIMONY ABOUT FASTING**

I would like to share with you my personal testimony in regards to fasting, and how it has helped me in my life. There were two times that I recently fasted in order to hear GOD's voice concerning some important decisions that I had to make. As my final military enlistment date was approaching, I had a very significant decision on my hands, especially since this decision would not only affect me, but my family as well. I desired to know if GOD wanted me to continue my successful career in the military, or if He wanted me to separate from the military and go in a different direction. I decided to go on a fast in which I abstained from all meat until I distinctly heard from GOD which direction He wanted me to go. After about 3-4 weeks of fasting, I was talking to my wife over the phone (I was deployed in Iraq, she was in the United States), and I distinctly heard GOD tell me that He wanted me to separate from the military. When I received His

answer, I rejoiced and celebrated because He responded to my fast, and because I now knew the next step to take as far as my career was concerned.

Another time that I recently fasted occurred shortly thereafter. Even though I knew that GOD wanted me to separate from the military, I still had to find a job so that I could support my family. Because the economy was in very bad shape in the final months of 2008, many people ridiculed the decision that I was making to leave the military, and during that time I really had to stand firm on my faith in GOD and what He told me that He wanted me to do. I had been filling out resumes and applying for jobs throughout the entire city I was in, but to no avail. With less than a month left until I separated from the military, I decided to go on a fast, abstaining from meat, until GOD led me to the job that He wanted me in and I was hired. After about 2-3 weeks of fasting, a Human Resources assistant of a Fortune 500 company called me to interview for a job over the phone. 2 phone interviews later, I was invited to a face to face interview the day after I was supposed to separate from the military.

At this point I was starting to feel anxious about my job situation, but I continued to lift my concerns up to GOD through prayer, and He continually gave me peace about the situation while reminding me that He was still with me. The day after I was out of the military, I went to the face to face interview with my employer, and once the interview was completed, I was offered the job. I was extremely excited and grateful to GOD for responding to my fast and my obedience to Him. Since I have separated from the military, I've been blessed with a higher salary, a beautiful home, new friends, and the opportunity to get involved in a church that allows me to truly use my gifts, talents, and abilities. This is my personal testimony that fasting does work, and I encourage you to apply to your life as well.

### **CONCLUSION**

As your brother in Christ, I pray that this chapter was successful in explaining the spiritual discipline of fasting, and that you will begin to apply this knowledge in your personal life so that you can grow in your relationship with GOD, and receive His divine assistance in every area of your life. By applying the principle of fasting in your Christian walk, it will empower you to truly A.L.I.V.E in your discipleship. Amen!!!

## TITHING 101

I want you to imagine how you would feel if you found out that someone whom you were close to was stealing from you? Imagine finding out that someone you loved tremendously is taking from you what belongs to you? Imagine the pain that you would feel if you knew that the people that you would be willing to die for were robbing you, but at the same time professing they loved you. This is the scenario that is taking place in the book of Malachi between GOD and His people, and this is what GOD says to them:

"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' 'Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. 'But you ask, 'How do we rob you? 'In tithes and offerings.'" You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty. *Malachi 3:6-12*

In this passage, GOD begins to present His case to the people whom He loves. The Israelites (GOD's people) during this time had turned their back on GOD by neglecting Him, and by not following the laws that He gave them to live by. But instead of turning His back and neglecting them in return, GOD passionately asks His people to return to Him. When the people ask GOD how they can return to Him, GOD begins to address the subject of tithes and offerings.

GOD informs His people that they have been robbing Him and unjustly withholding from Him what He has instructed His people to give to Him. GOD says that because they have been robbing Him by withholding from Him their tithes, they now have been placed under a curse. To be under a curse means to experience a life filled with ill fortune, misery, and adversity. God is telling His people in this scripture that their difficulties, their suffering, and their troubles are a direct result of them withholding their tithes from Him. I want you to know that this principle is still true today, and when we neglect to give our tithes to GOD, we become increasingly vulnerable to experiencing hardships in our life.

GOD instructs His people to bring the entire amount of their tithe into the storehouse (which is now symbolic for the local church) for one reason, and that reason is so that food may be available for others. In other words, God is instructing His people to bring their tithes to the local church, so that those who were in need would be able to obtain the assistance and the provision that they needed. Furthermore, GOD proclaims to His people the reward that they will receive as a result of tithing, and how it will be beneficial to them if they choose to obey this instruction. Notice that nothing GOD instructs us to do is without benefit to us. GOD challenges His people (He practically dares them) to tithe and to test Him to see if their life doesn't noticeably improve for the better after they begin to tithe consistently. I want you to know that GOD is issuing this same challenge to you today as well.

GOD makes two promises to His people if they begin to tithe. The first promise that He makes to us is that He will, "open the floodgates of Heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have enough room to receive it." When you begin to tithe consistently, and when you continue to live inside the will of GOD by applying His teachings to your life, instead of feeling like you have to chase after His blessings, GOD's blessings begin to chase after you. If you've ever experienced a flood or seen one occur on television, you'll notice that the speed at which this large amount of water travels overwhelms entire communities and cities. So when GOD opens up the floodgates of Heaven in response to your obedience in tithing, the blessings that He pours into your life are so numerous and happen so frequently that they begin to

overwhelm you. I can honestly tell you that it is a wonderful thing to be overwhelmed by the goodness of GOD, and to experience the abundant life that Jesus came to give us.

The second promise that GOD makes to us if we begin to tithe, He will, “prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit.” I know that you may be thinking; “I’m not a farmer, so what good is this promise to me,” but I want to show you why this promise is significant to you. A farmer’s crops represented his source of income and wealth, and when pests began to devour these crops, they were in fact devouring and eating into His source of income and prosperity. The things in your life that seem to be devouring and eating into your income which prevent you from being prosperous are symbolic to the “pests” in this scripture. GOD tells us that He will stop these “pests” from preventing us from truly prospering financially.

Even more, in this second promise we are also told that the vines in our fields will not cast or throw away their “fruit.” “Fruit” is symbolic of a successful product of our effort, labor, and hard work. When the people were not tithing, all of their effort and labor was “fruitless,” because they never saw the results that they desired to see as a result of their hard work. However, when GOD tells us that “our vines will no longer cast off their fruit,” He is informing us that all of our effort, our labor, and hard work in life will begin to produce the results that we desire to see. It is extremely frustrating to work hard at something and never see any progress, improvement, or success, but this curse will be lifted once you consistently begin to tithe.

As we continually tithe, and as we continually see the fulfillment of these two promises in our life as result of it, GOD informs us that our land will be delightful, and that other people can’t help but to take notice of it. When GOD blesses us as a result of tithing, the blessings that He pours into our life are substantial enough to draw the attention of others, and they begin to see the positive results of our obedience to GOD’s instruction for us to tithe. The purpose of this chapter is to explain to you exactly what tithing is, where it occurs in the Bible, and how it is beneficial to us in our process of spiritual growth. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS TITHING?**

In the book of Leviticus chapter 27 verse 30, we find GOD’s instruction to us commanding us to tithe when it states:

“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” *Leviticus 27:30*

The word “tithe” is defined as “one-tenth” of something. In order to determine how much “a tenth” is of any dollar amount, you simply move the decimal point to the right one time. For example, a tenth of \$1.00 is 10 cents; a tenth of \$10.00 is \$1.00, a tenth of \$100.00 is \$10.00, and a tenth of \$1,000.00 is \$100.00. This scripture instructs GOD’s people to give one-tenth of all of our income and resources because it belongs to GOD. Likewise, one-tenth of the money that we bring in from our paychecks, and from our other sources of income, belongs to GOD as well. Most often, many people who are presented with this information want to reject it or neglect it. I’ve found that we as Christians are more than willing to trust GOD and allow Him to enter into almost every area of our life, but we are far less willing to tithe because we have become emotionally attached to our money, causing us to be hesitant and extremely reluctant to give it to GOD.

Many Christians struggle in the area of tithing for various reasons. I want you to know that the principle of tithing is not intended to take from you what you have earned; GOD is not trying to place His “tax” on what you make. The principle of tithing is not simply to get you to give up a portion of the money that you have made, rather, tithing was instituted by GOD to support the ministry of GOD here on Earth, and as a result, you will be blessed for your obedience as I explained earlier.

The reason why I believe people refuse to tithe and have such a hard time applying this principle in their life is because of their lack of faith, and because of their unbelief and doubt that GOD will fulfill what He promised He would do for us if we did tithe. If we really believed that GOD would open the floodgates of Heaven and pour out so many blessings on our lives that we will not be able to contain it all for ourselves, then we would have no problem tithing at all, and we wouldn't hesitate when it comes to doing it. Instead, because we do not really believe and trust that GOD will fulfill His promise to us when we tithe, we choose to hold on to that one-tenth of income because we think that we can make better use of that money by saving it, or by spending it elsewhere. As a result of holding on to our tithe we become extremely vulnerable to experiencing hardship and trouble in our life. I urge you as a brother in Christ to trust that GOD will fulfill His promises to you when you tithe, because when you do so, GOD responds to your obedience and your faith. My earnest desire is to see GOD's children live in abundance and without struggle, and our obedience to GOD in the area of tithing plays a big part in seeing this vision come to pass.

### **WHERE IS THE PRINCIPLE OF TITHING FOUND IN THE BIBLE?**

Abraham, who is also referred to as "A Friend of GOD," "The Father of Faith," and as "The Father of Many Nations," applied the principle of tithing in his life which provided us with an example to follow. The example below occurs in the book of Genesis chapter 14 immediately after GOD blesses Abraham so that he was able to win a battle that he fought:

"After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." *Genesis 14: 17-20*

In this passage, Abraham is greeted by a high priest (which is similar to a pastor) who blesses him, and after he receives the blessing, Abraham gives the priest a tithe, which is a tenth of the money and the resources that he acquired. Abraham recognized that it was GOD who allowed Him to be successful, and that it was GOD who granted him the victory in the battle that he just fought, and as a result, Abraham gave the Lord a tenth of what he acquired and gained as a result of this victory.

Had Abraham believed that his army was successful as a result of something that he did, he would have took the credit, the praise, and the glory for himself and not choose to give a portion of what he gained to the Lord. By neglecting to pay tithes to GOD, you are in essence taking the credit, the praise, and the glory for your successes, your prosperity, and your accomplishments for yourself. However, because Abraham understood that his success and triumph was because due solely to GOD's grace and favor, he gave the Lord a tenth of what was given to him by GOD. Likewise, because we know that what we have received in life has been given to us as a result of GOD's grace, His favor, His blessings, and His support, we as Christians continue to follow Abraham's example of tithing to the Lord.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who came to Earth preaching about the kingdom of GOD, confirmed and verified that tithing is still applicable as a part of the New Covenant that we have entered into with GOD. While teaching His followers that they should not refrain from paying taxes to the Government, Jesus also teaches that we should not refrain from tithing to our Heavenly Father in the book of Luke chapter 20 verses 20-26 when He states:

"Watching for their opportunity, the leaders sent spies pretending to be honest men. They tried to get Jesus to say something that could be reported to the Roman governor so he would arrest Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you speak and teach what is right and are not influenced by what others think. You teach the

way of God truthfully. Now tell us—is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” He saw through their trickery and said, “Show me a Roman coin. Whose picture and title are stamped on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. “Well then,” he said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.” So they failed to trap him by what he said in front of the people. Instead, they were amazed by his answer, and they became silent.” *Luke 20:20-26*

Jesus also teaches us that while tithing is important, it does not mean that we can neglect living according to the Godly teachings and Godly wisdom that is found in the Bible. Rather, we must continue to tithe; we must continue to live according to the word of GOD, and we must continue to live a Godly life by living for Him. Jesus spoke against the people who tithed, but were not obedient and loyal to GOD in the book of Luke chapter 11 verse 42 when He says:

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone." *Luke 11:42*

In this scripture, Jesus asserts that we should all continue to pay our tithes to GOD, while also promoting justice, fairness, and equality to all of GOD’s people as we continue to love our Heavenly Father. We as Christians must not neglect showing love to GOD and to His people because we feel that we have fulfilled our obligations to GOD because we tithe, or vice –versa. Yet, by doing both; tithing and loving GOD and each other unconditionally, we can continue to move forward in our spiritual development, allowing us to fulfill GOD’s purpose for our life.

### ***GIVE CAREFUL THOUGHT TO YOUR WAYS***

Finally, there is one more instance in the Bible where GOD addresses His displeasure with His people because of their refusal to tithe, and from this passage we can see the negative results that were produced as a result of their disobedience. This passage occurs in the book of Haggai chapter 1, and it states:

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.' Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands." *Haggai 1: 2- 11*

In this passage, GOD challenges His people to “give careful thought to their ways,” and to reflect on how they were living their life. GOD asks His people; “is it time for you to be living in paneled houses while my house is in ruin?” A paneled house during that period of time was a luxurious house, and it required a lot of time, money, energy, and resources to be invested into it in order to keep it properly maintained.

I want you to notice that GOD doesn't take offense to His people living in luxury, in fact, He actually takes pleasure when we prosper as His children (Psalm 35:27). However, GOD does take offense to the fact that His people were neglecting His house (the modern day church) because they had now become prosperous. Because the Israelites were withholding their time, their money, their energy, and their resources from His house (the church), it was in ruin and in bad condition. GOD withheld His blessings and His favor from His people because His people were withholding their time and their money from His house (the church), and as a result, the people were no longer as successful, as efficient, as productive, as content, as satisfied, or as prosperous as they had been before.

So instead of GOD opening up the floodgates of Heaven and pouring out so many blessings upon them that they could not contain it for themselves, the people had to endure a drought; a shortage of resources, unmet expectations, unfruitful labor, and a life of poverty because they withheld their time, their energy, their resources, and their tithes and offerings from GOD's house (the church). I urge you as a brother in Christ to "give careful thought to your ways" in regards to tithing, because it can be the difference between success and failure; prosperity and poverty, and blessings and curses.

### **CONCLUSION**

By applying the principle of tithing in your personal life; it will help you become successful in doing what GOD has called you to do, it will help you accomplish the goals and the dreams that GOD has placed on your heart for you to accomplish, and it will help you to continue to grow spiritually, allowing you to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in your discipleship. Amen!!!

## **BAPTISM 101**

In today's society, we perform numerous ceremonies, rituals, events, and functions that are designed to celebrate and publicly acknowledge an individual's decision to make an important choice in their life. For example, we throw lavish weddings where we invite all of our friends and our family to celebrate our life-long commitment to our soon to be spouse. In the military, we would frequently hold enlistment ceremonies to publicly acknowledge a soldier's decision to continue to honorably serve their country.

A water baptism, similar to the wedding ceremonies that we attend and the enlistment ceremonies that we organize, is an opportunity to celebrate and to publicly display to others our decision to accept GOD into our life; to live for Him, and to receive the gift of salvation. This chapter is dedicated to increasing your understanding of water baptisms, and to possibly answer any questions that you may have about this subject. Enjoy!!!!

### **WHAT IS BAPTISM? WHY SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?**

The word "baptize" is used to describe the process of someone being immersed into something. Our immersion into water symbolizes the death and the burial of our sinful nature that caused us to be under the control of sin. Our emergence from the water symbolizes that we have been given a new life that is free from the bondage of sin, and it signifies that we will live our new life in obedience to God's commands and teachings. I want to point out that a water baptism *is not* a requirement that we must fulfill in order to be saved and enter into Heaven; rather, a water baptism is simply a public and outward expression of our loyalty and commitment to Jesus Christ.

In the Book of Matthew chapter 28, Jesus instructs His followers to; "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." This verse indicates to us that Jesus desires for His followers to be baptized into the *name* of; "The Father, The Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Why is it significant for us to be baptized into this name? A name is what distinguishes a person from other people and other things, and it is also used to identify who an individual is as well. So by being baptized, "in the name of The Father, The Son, and of the Holy Spirit," we are publicly distinguishing ourselves as belonging to GOD, and we are expressing that we identify ourselves as being connected and set apart for Him.

Upon getting married, a woman often takes on the last name of her husband. By taking the last name of her husband, she is distinguishing herself as being joined together with him through marriage, and she is identifying that she has set herself apart from other men in order to be faithful to him. Likewise, when we as believers are baptized, we are proclaiming that we have been joined together with GOD, and that we have set ourselves apart to be loyal and faithful to Him by the way that we live our life. Being baptized is an opportunity to publically display your decision to be committed to GOD, and to express that you are unashamed of your relationship and your connection with your Heavenly Father.

### **STEPS TO BAPTISM**

There are three steps leading up to a water baptism that I want to identify and discuss, these include:

- **STEP#1:** Repentance
- **STEP#2:** Confession/Salvation (The Baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs)
- **STEP #3** Immersion/Water Baptism (Public Expression of one's faith)



## ***Step #1: Repentance***

Repentance is a common theme in the Bible that is closely associated with Baptism. In Mark chapter 1, the Bible identifies that while he was in the desert, John the Baptist preached a message of repentance to all people, and those who repented were baptized to show that they had turned to God to be forgiven for their sins. On the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2: 38-39, Peter proclaims while preaching to a crowd; “Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. *Then* you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.”

Why does God require us to repent before we receive salvation? What does it mean to repent? To “repent” means to recognize your wrongdoings; feel sorrowful and remorseful for your past sins, and to change your sinful ways and habits. Repentance occurs when we measure our lifestyle against God’s perfect and holy law, and recognize that we deserve the wrath of God because we fall short of His standards in many areas (often because of our pride, our lust, our anger, our jealousy, our selfishness, our greed, our foolishness, our inability to resist sinful temptations, and because we have put other people or possessions before God in our personal lives).

This first step of repentance is essential to our salvation as believers, and we cannot bypass it, jump over it, sidestep it, avoid it, or get around it if we truly desire to inherit eternal life. ***We must have a change of heart in regard to our sins in order to be saved.*** God sent His Son Jesus to the Earth to save us from our sins, but if our hearts are not changed in regards to our attitude towards sin, then our thoughts, our words, and our actions will not change either, so instead of being saved from our sins, we will begin to tolerate them and accept them without seeking to change for the better. Those who profess to be Christians without repenting for their sins will never truly seek to change their sinful habits, which will prevent them from experiencing the abundant life that comes from following God’s commands and applying His teachings into their personal lives.

The Bible provides us with a wonderful example in John chapter 4 which teaches us that a person must repent of their sins *prior* to receiving salvation. In John chapter 4, Jesus is speaking with a Samaritan woman who is about to draw water from a well. Jesus asks this woman for a drink of water, but she hesitates to do so because of their cultural differences (Jesus was a Jew, the woman was a Samaritan). In response, Jesus informs this woman that if she knew who she was speaking to, she would ask Him for the *living water* (The Holy Spirit) which would grant her eternal life, and satisfy the deepest “thirst” of her soul so that she would never be thirsty again. The woman, whom believed that Jesus was referring to actual water in the literal sense, requests this living water from Jesus. At this point she did not recognize that the living water that Jesus was referring to was the Holy Spirit, and that the thirst that would be quenched would not be her physical thirst, but rather the thirst of her soul, which is our deepest desire for love, companionship, comfort, and closeness with God.

Before providing this woman with the Holy Spirit and the gift of salvation and eternal life, Jesus begins to identify the sinful aspects of this woman’s life that she needs to repent for and turn away from. Jesus explains to the woman that she is now currently living with a man who is not her husband (which contrary to what our society teaches is a sin, because it almost always leads to pre-marital sex). I want you to notice that before Jesus provided the woman with salvation and eternal life, He *first* revealed to her that she needed to repent for her sinful ways by having a change of heart regarding her current sinful lifestyle, and by discontinuing her continued participation in those sinful activities. **If we desire to receive the gift of salvation and eternal life, it is first going to require that we repent by having a change of heart regarding our current sinful lifestyle, and by breaking away from our sinful habits with the help of God.**

## **STEP#2: Confession/Salvation** (The Baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs)

Confession is the next step in the process leading up to water baptism after we have repented for our sins. Why is a confession necessary? The Bible proclaims in Romans 10:9-10; “If you *confess* with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you *confess* and are saved.” Through our confession we profess what we believe to be true; we announce whom we have become devoted to, and we declare what we have begun to place our trust and our faith in. After repenting for our sins, and confessing that Jesus is “Lord” over our life, we receive the wonderful gift of salvation and eternal life.

What is the significance of confessing that Jesus is “Lord” over our life? “Lord” is a title that is given to someone who possess tremendous power, authority, and influence over us, and whom we are identifying as our master and our ruler. By confessing that Jesus is “Lord” over our life, we are affirming:

- \*That we have placed ourselves under Jesus’ governing power...
- \*That we follow Jesus’ leadership instead of our own guidance...
- \*That we allow God to have final authority over our decisions and actions instead of our own desires.... and..
- \* That we submit to God’s will over our own personal preferences...

It is important to note that we *cannot* receive the free gift of salvation and eternal life without confessing that Jesus is “Lord” of our life, and then living in such a way that accurately reflects what we have confessed to be true. Our belief that Jesus is “Lord” and that God raised Him from the dead should bring about a positive change in our attitude, our behavior, and our lifestyle. How can Jesus truly be “Lord” over our life if we still follow our own guidance, our own desires, and our own personal preferences that often contradict and oppose God’s will for us? At first we may struggle living according to God’s commandments and following His leadership once we become saved, but as we continue to grow spiritually by reading the Bible to discover His will for our life and by praying to God to ask Him for His strength and assistance, we will be able to live a life that reflects the Christ-like characteristics of love, peace, joy, compassion, kindness, patience, and self-control, and fulfill God’s purpose by using our gifts and talents to help edify and improve the lives of others (remember that this is a life-long process that does not occur overnight after being saved).

Once we have repented for our sins; confessed Jesus as Lord over our life, and believed that God raised Him from the dead, we are saved by receiving God’s gift of salvation and eternal life. What does it mean to be saved? What is the significance of receiving salvation? Being saved means:

- \*We are saved and rescued from God’s wrath on judgment day, and from living a sinful life that would lead to our ruin, our downfall, and our destruction
- \*We are delivered and set free from fear, sin, guilt for past sins, darkness and wickedness, troubles and distress, and from eternal separation from God through death
- \*We receive God’s protection from seen and unseen dangers, threats, and enemies
- \*We receive God’s healing from sickness, disease, and illness

\*Our relationship with God is reconciled, and we are restored into a position of right-standing with Him (which allows God to call us His friend)

\*We receive God's blessings and favor, which enables us to live a satisfied, content, and fulfilling life

### ***What is the Baptism of the Spirit?***

Upon accepting the gift of salvation, the Bible proclaims that God places within us His Holy Spirit, which enables us to live Godly lives. Receiving the Holy Spirit upon being saved is referred to as; "The Baptism of the Spirit." The Bible teaches us in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that, "The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one *body* by one *Spirit*, and we all share the same *Spirit*."

The "Body" that Paul mentions in this scripture is the Body of Christ, which consists of every Christian that has accepted Jesus Christ into their life as their Lord and Savior. Being baptized into the Body of Christ indicates that our Christian journey should not be an individualistic journey in which we focus only on ourselves and our own self-interests, but a corporate journey in which we associate with other believers; share each other's burdens, and look out for each other's best interests. It is a common temptation to isolate ourselves as Christians from other believers by not spending time with them; by not sharing our resources with them, by not holding ourselves accountable to them, by rejecting their wisdom and their correction, and by becoming self-reliant and self-dependant. My brothers and sisters, this is not the type of Christian walk that God desires for us.

God desires for us, however, to enjoy our Christian journey in a corporate sense, as we live and function in unity with other Christian believers. The Bible teaches us to be generous towards others with our time and resources, to look out for each other's best interests above our own, to be compassionate when others are suffering, and to be accountable to each other so that we do not give in to the temptation to backslide into sin. By fellowshiping (i.e. hanging out) with other Christians, we are able to be there to encourage one another when we encounter adversity, and serve as each other's shoulder to lean on when we experience difficult times. As we associate with other believers, we are able to "sharpen" one another as iron sharpens iron by being a positive influence in each other's lives. Finally, when we combine our spiritual gifts with those from other believers, we become a great deal more effective in ministry. Our Christian journey is much more satisfactory and fulfilling when we live it in a corporate sense, as supposed to isolating ourselves from other believers by only looking out for our own selfish interests.

Along with the "body" that Paul mentions 1 Corinthians 12:13, he also indicates that we have been baptized (immersed) into one spirit. The "Spirit" that Paul is referring to is The Holy Spirit, which is the same Spirit and Godly influence that resides in all other Christians as well. When we received salvation by giving our life to GOD, we were immersed (baptized) into The Holy Spirit. Allow me to explain how this benefits us....

### ***Benefit #1: Our Salvation is Secure and Guaranteed***

The Bible teaches us on multiple occasions that when we receive The Holy Spirit, our salvation is secure and cannot be lost. In other words, we are guaranteed to enter into Heaven after giving our life to GOD; despite our flaws, our mistakes, and our imperfections. Here are a few scriptures that I would like to share with you...

### ***Ephesians 1: 13-14***

“And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.” “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”

### ***2 Corinthians 5: 4-5*** (NIV Translation and NLT Translation)

“For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” “While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.”

### ***2 Corinthians 1:21-22*** (NIV Translation and NLT Translation)

“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” “It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.”

From these three passages of scripture we discover that one of the benefits of being baptized into The Holy Spirit is that it secures our salvation, and it guarantees our entrance into Heaven to spend eternity with our Heavenly Father.

### ***Benefit #2: We Have Freedom From Sin***

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 states; “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” This scripture proclaims to us that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Now that we have received the Spirit of the Lord (The Holy Spirit) on the inside of us as believers, freedom now resides in us as well. Freedom from what you may ask. . . . . The freedom that we have been given is freedom from a sin-filled life caused by our sinful nature which was leading us towards our downfall, our demise, and our destruction.

The Holy Spirit works within us to transform our nature, our attributes, and our characteristics from evil and sinful, to holy and Godly. With this in mind, the Bible teaches us that we should now live according to the way that GOD desires us to live under the guidance of The Holy Spirit, as supposed to continuing to live according to our sinful nature. Galatians 5: 16-24 proclaims:

“Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear:

sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."

The Bible's statement that we should allow the Holy Spirit to guide our lives is the key to experiencing a satisfying and fulfilling life as a Christian. How so? The reason why most Christians do not experience a fulfilling and satisfying Christian walk is because they do not allow the Holy Spirit to direct their lives (instead they prefer to do their own thing). Imagine how much more effective we would be as a body of believers if we followed God's guidance and allowed him to prepare us and equip us so that we accomplished our God-given goals and dreams, and fulfilled His purpose for our lives.

The Christian life is a life that is filled with enthusiasm, with passion, and with excitement as we use our spiritual gifts to do something positive that we are passionate about. The truth is that many of us do not experience the enthusiasm and the abundant life that Jesus came to give to us because we rebel against God by not following His instructions and commandments, and as a result, our Christian walk has become boring and mundane. God is not the one we should blame for this occurring; instead, we have to take responsibility for not getting the most out of our Christian journey because we refuse to follow God's guidance.

When we begin living our life according to the way that the Holy Spirit directs us to live, our lifestyle becomes free from sin and pleasing to GOD. Romans 6:20-23 explains; "Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."

Why is freedom from sin a significant benefit to us as Christians? Being bound to sin will prevent you from accomplishing your God-given goals and dreams, and it will hinder you from fulfilling God's purpose for your life by using your gifts, talents, and abilities to the best of your ability to do something positive, significant, and meaningful. The Bible proclaims in Romans 6:23 that, "the wages (the result) of sin is death." Despite what the media or our culture is currently promoting in our society, living a sinful lifestyle will result in none other than your ruin, your downfall, and your demise. If you desire to be productive and effective as a Christian disciple, you **must** be free from sin, and the Holy Spirit grants you this freedom. So why do we still continue to sin if we have the power to be free from it? We fall into sin when we allow our personal will and selfish desires that oppose God's teachings to influence our choices and actions, instead of following the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the direction that He is leading us in.

God provided us with His Holy Spirit to set us free from sin so that we can be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. As we listen to the Holy Spirit's instructions and follow His guidance, our sinful nature, which contributed to our sins of sexual immorality; impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, and selfish ambition, is replaced by God's holy nature, which allows us to develop the righteous characteristics of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. From these passages we discover that one of the benefits of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the ability to live a life that is free from sin.

### ***Benefit #3: We Receive Spiritual Gifts***

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, the Bible teaches us that when we receive The Holy Spirit upon accepting the gift of salvation, we also receive spiritual gifts that help us fulfill God's purpose and plan for our lives. This passage proclaims; "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have."

Romans 12: 6-8 lists some additional spiritual gifts when it states; "In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly."

When we receive The Holy Spirit, we also receive spiritual gifts that GOD intends for us to use to serve Him and to serve others as well. These passages identify certain spiritual gifts as being:

- \*Teaching and giving wise advice
- \*Special knowledge and understanding of the Bible
- \*The gift of faith that enables us to believe in God to a great extent
- \*Healing power
- \*The ability to perform miracles
- \*The ability to prophesy through GOD revealing future events to us
- \*The ability to discern what is true from what is false
- \*The ability to speak in tongues
- \*Having a desire to serve others in various ways
- \*Having a desire to encourage other people who need support and inspiration
- \*Having a desire to give generously whenever you notice someone in need
- \*Possessing strong leadership abilities
- \*Having the ability to exhibit kindness and compassion to those who are suffering

From these passages we discover that one of the benefits of being baptized into The Holy Spirit is that we receive spiritual gifts that we can use to serve others, and to bring glory to GOD.

### ***Benefit #4: We Are Able To Correctly Understand the Bible***

It is simply impossible for us to accurately interpret the meaning of most scriptures in the Bible on our own. Our logic, our thought-process, our intellect, our understanding, our opinions, and our reasoning are shaped by our past experiences in life, and they cause us to be extremely subjective regarding the way that we interpret things, and how we determine what we believe to be true. Even though the Bible is written in a

language that we can all understand, because we do not think like God thinks, our pattern of thought and our method of reasoning differ greatly from His. In Isaiah 55:8-9, GOD declares; “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”

If two people think differently, it is very hard for them to communicate effectively to one another. For this reason, it becomes extremely difficult for us to correctly understand the message behind some of the things that GOD says to us in the Bible, especially when we try to interpret the meaning of the scriptures using our own logic and rationale. For this reason, GOD has given us The Holy Spirit whom Jesus describes in the book of John as being, “a counselor who will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you,” and as, “the Spirit of Truth who will guide us into all truth.”

The Apostle Paul explains that The Holy Spirit gives us revelation and understanding of the Bible in 1 Corinthians 2:9-14. This passage of scripture states; “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” But it was to us that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God’s deep secrets. No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit, and no one can know God’s thoughts except God’s own Spirit. And we have received God’s Spirit so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.”

Unbelievers without the Holy Spirit simply cannot understand the truths and the wisdom contained within God’s word. To them, the Bible is nothing but a compilation of foolish stories and irrelevant teachings. As a child of God, however, you have access to God’s Holy Spirit, and when you pray and ask God to help you accurately interpret what you read in the Bible, you will be able to obtain valuable wisdom that will help you tremendously throughout the course of your Christian journey. In Acts chapter eight, the Bible illustrates the difficulty that an individual experienced when trying to understand the Bible without possessing the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:29-39 provides the details of this encounter between one of Jesus’ disciples named Philip, and a eunuch (a royal servant) from the country of Ethiopia:

“The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.” Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” “You can,” Philip answered, “if you believe with all your heart.” And the eunuch replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.”

In this passage, the Eunuch was in the process of reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, but he did not understand who the prophecy was referring to in that particular passage, nor was he able to obtain

the truth contained within the scriptures. Philip asks the man if he is able to understand what he is reading, and in response, the Eunuch proclaims that he simply cannot understand the scriptures that he is reading without someone instructing or teaching him. The Eunuch was unable to receive a revelation of the true meaning behind what he was reading because he did not have the Holy Spirit. Philip, who had received The Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, begins to explain to the eunuch the true meaning of this passage of scripture, and he reveals the significance of this prophecy by identifying that it is referring to Jesus Christ.

When the Eunuch is taught that the Old Testament passage that he read is referring to Jesus Christ, he instantly develops faith by believing and confession that Jesus is the Son of God. After this confession of his belief in Jesus, Philip baptizes the Eunuch in water, and the Eunuch leaves rejoicing and celebrating because he has received eternal life, and entered into a new relationship with God. I want to point out that it is our responsibility as Christians who possess the Holy Spirit to teach those who are unable to understand the Bible, and by doing so, it will increase their faith in God, and possibly lead to their salvation and eternal life.

Through our baptism in the Holy Spirit, we as Christians are able to receive a revelation of the “hidden” and “secret” truths contained within God’s word. Why is this necessary? Often, Jesus would use parables and stories to “hide” the true meaning of His teachings so that only believers could understand them. In order to understand the true meaning of the parables, the prophecies, and the symbolic language contained within the scriptures, we need to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit in order to understand the significance behind what we are reading. The Holy Spirit enlightens us by clarifying and explains to us the truths contained in the scriptures so that we can accurately apply the wisdom that we have obtained into our own personal lives. Another benefit that we receive as a result of being baptized in The Holy Spirit is that we are able to obtain a sound understanding of the word of God.

#### ***Benefit #5: The Holy Spirit Helps Us In Our Weakness***

In Romans 8:26-27, the Bible teaches us another benefit that we receive as a result of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. This passage of scriptures explains; “The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”

Throughout the course of our Christian walk, there will be numerous instances where we will need God’s help; His guidance, and His assistance because we are unable to directly control certain aspects of our life, or resolve our problems and issues. Our “weakness,” which the Bible mentions in Romans 8:26, stems from our inability to overcome the adversity and the challenges that we face on our own. In some of the difficult circumstances that we face, we will be able to clearly articulate and express to God our requests and our desires. In other troubling situations, however, we may find ourselves at a loss for words when we attempt to pray to God. There are some occasions where we will not know how to express what we want from God (or what to pray for altogether), all we will know is that we need God to become directly involved in our life to help us in a way that only He can.

This passage of scripture serves as a source of encouragement for us as believers, and it assures us that we have somebody praying for us and pleading for us to God on our behalf. Whenever we encounter a tough period of time that causes us to experience a heavy burden of pain, frustration, fear, anxiety, despair, worry, or depression on our life, the Holy Spirit begins to pray to God the Father on our behalf. As the Holy Spirit prays for us during this time, God’s will is carried out in our lives, which brings us deliverance from our troubles, and enables us to overcome the obstacles and the challenges that we are facing. When we begin to feel discouraged because of the trials and the tribulations that we have encountered, we can find comfort



in knowing that the Holy Spirit within us is praying to God the Father on our behalf, and we can find hope by remembering that God has not left us or abandoned us.

Being baptized in The Holy Spirit once we receive the gift of salvation benefits us tremendously as believers. By providing us with the Holy Spirit, God is guaranteeing us that our salvation is secure, and He is assuring us that we have received eternal life. As believers, we now are able to be free from the harmful and negative consequences that we experience as a result of living a sinful lifestyle, because the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to overcome the sinful temptations that we encounter, and He enables us to develop and exhibit the Christ-like characteristics of love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, and self-control.

Through the Holy Spirit, God provides us with unique spiritual gifts for the purpose of enriching the lives of others in various ways. While we are unable to accurately interpret and understand the Bible using our own logic and reason, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the correct meaning and the relevant truths contained within the scriptures in the Bible so that we can apply it appropriately into our everyday lives. Finally, in our moments of weakness and despair, the Holy Spirit is there for us to pray on our behalf to God the Father, thus enabling the will of God to be carried out in our life. These are the benefits that we receive as a result of being baptized into the Holy Spirit once we receive the gift of salvation. Aren't you glad that you have been baptized into the Holy Spirit?

### ***STEP #3 Immersion/Water Baptism***

After you have repented for your sins and confessed that Jesus is Lord of your life, you are now ready to undergo a water baptism as an outward expression of your inward decision to commit your life to God. In order for the water baptism to have any symbolic meaning or significance, you must *first* have repented of your sins, and confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord. Without accepting Jesus as Lord of your life and receiving The Holy Spirit, an individual will simply enter into the water as a “dry person,” and come out from the water as a “wet person.”

The water baptism symbolizes the death and the burial of your sinful nature, and your emergence as a new man (or woman) that is free from the bondage of sin through the power of the Holy Spirit. If a person is baptized without receiving the gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit, the symbolism of the water baptism is lost completely. For this reason, it is not necessary (or biblically correct) to baptize infants and young children who do not understand what it means to repent for their sins; to confess Jesus as their Lord, and what it means to accept the gift of salvation.

### **HOW IS A BAPTISM PERFORMED? WHAT DOES BAPTISM SYMBOLIZE?**

Baptisms are often performed by pastors or other ministers within a local church, and they can also be performed by other Christians as well. The water baptism will take place in an area where you will be able to be fully immersed into water; this could be near a tub, or a natural body of water such as a lake. The person facilitating the baptism will ask you if you repented for your sins, and if you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that GOD raised Him from the dead. After answering this question, the facilitator will announce that you are being baptized in the name of “The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit,” and he (or she) will immerse you into the water by dipping you into it completely for a short amount of time, and then bring you up out of the water. So what is so significant and symbolic of being immersed into water? The Bible explains in Romans 6:3-11:

“When we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death. For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as

he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.”

Our immersion into water symbolizes the death and the burial of our sinful nature that caused us to be under the control of sin. Our emergence from the water symbolizes that we have been given a new life, and it indicates that we will live this new life completely for the glory of GOD. Does this mean that you will no longer struggle with sin or give into temptations, not at all! Through baptism we are illustrating the death and the burial of our sinful nature and characteristics that caused us to live as slaves under the control of our sinful desires (lust, greed, pride, anger, anxiety, etc.), and our resurrection and new life where we have the nature and characteristics of GOD (love, joy, peace, self-control) which allows us to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

### **WHEN SHOULD I GET BAPTIZED?**

When I first met the woman whom I am now married to, we started dating early on to get to know each other better, and to build our relationship with one another. During this time, we were not joined together in any way, shape, or form. We were not joined together emotionally, financially, sexually, or spiritually for that matter. Due to the fact that we were not joined together in any of these ways, the woman that I was dating was not obligated to take my last name to distinguish herself as being set apart for me, nor did she desire to do so at this point either. Through our marriage, however, we became joined together emotionally, financially, sexually, and spiritually. It was this new level of commitment in marriage that I entered into with my wife that caused her to want to take my last name, which distinguishes her as my wife, and identifies that she has been set apart for me.

As individuals, many of us went through, or are going through, a period where we are deciding whether or not to totally commit to GOD. We are essentially “dating” Him to see if we truly want to develop and establish a life-long relationship. During this period of time, you probably would not feel compelled to be baptized because you have yet to give your life completely to your Heavenly Father. When you do decide to join together with GOD, and when you do decide to completely commit your life to Him and to trust Him in every aspect of your life, you would then desire to want to distinguish yourself as belonging to your Heavenly Father.

It is at the point when you have decided to completely commit to GOD that you would desire to identify that you are setting yourself apart to be faithful to Him by the way that you live your life. It is at this moment when you have decided to accept GOD into your life that you should be baptized. There is no required waiting period that you have to endure, nor do you have to completely clean up every area of your life in order to qualify for baptism, all that is necessary to be baptized is for you to repent for your sins, confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that GOD raised Him from the dead.

### **CONCLUSION**

I pray that this information has greatly increased your understanding of both the water baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian who has decided to commit their life to Jesus but have never been baptized, I want to encourage you to publicly distinguish yourself as belonging to GOD by undergoing a water baptism. Amen!!!

## **COMMUNION 101**

While attending college you are presented with the opportunity to join and participate in various clubs and organizations. The purpose of each of these clubs and organizations is to unite and connect people with mutual interests, common goals, and similar beliefs, views, and values. As a result of joining these clubs and fellowshiping with the members within the association, you would begin to develop life-long relationships in which you could expect to receive the help, the support, and the assistance of the other members, just as you would help, support, and assist them because of the bond that you now share. This is an illustrating of what communion is.

When we take communion with GOD, we are acknowledging that we have mutual interests, common goals, and similar beliefs, views, and values with our Heavenly Father. Through communion, we also receive GOD's help, support, and assistance as a result of our relationship and connection to Him. For this reason, communion is a very important part of our spiritual life. However, many Christians neglect taking communion because they are not aware of what it is, or because they misunderstand it all together. This chapter is dedicated to giving you an overview of what communion is, and to answer some general questions about this subject. I pray that you find this information to be useful, and that you will begin to apply it in your personal life. Enjoy!!!

### **WHAT IS COMMUNION?**

Communion is the fellowship of two or more people that share common interests, goals, and beliefs. As stated previously, when we take communion with GOD, we are acknowledging that we have mutual interests, common goals, and similar beliefs, views, and values with our Heavenly Father. Through communion we also receive GOD's help, support, and assistance as a result of our relationship and connection to Him.

### **WHY DO WE TAKE COMMUNION? WHERE DID IT ORIGINATE?**

Communion originates from the last meal that Jesus participated in with His disciples prior to His death on the cross. This meal is recorded in the book of Luke 22:14-20, and it states:

“When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. *Luke 22:14-20*

When Jesus participated in communion with His followers, He was establishing a New Covenant and agreement between GOD and mankind. This New Covenant is better, and differs greatly from the Old Covenant and agreement between GOD and mankind, which we were unable to maintain because of our sins. Here are the differences between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant:

\*Under the Old Covenant, we receive salvation and obtain right standing with GOD based on our ability to follow the law without sinning (which only Jesus was able to do). Under the New Covenant, we receive the gift of salvation and the gift of eternal life through GOD's grace, and we are placed in a position to receive underserved privileges and benefits because we now are in right-standing with GOD.

\*Under the Old Covenant, we receive forgiveness for our sins and mistakes by sacrificing animals to GOD (which could turn out to be very expensive and costly if you continually sinned). Under the New Covenant, we receive forgiveness for our sins whenever we confess them to GOD and ask Him to forgive us. The blood of Jesus Christ pays the debt that we owe to GOD because of our transgressions, and it spares us from receiving punishment and from being condemnation to hell.

\*Under the Old Covenant, it was very difficult to follow GOD's commands because we had to follow the law completely through our own efforts and limited strength. Under the New Covenant, GOD has written His commandments on our hearts and in our minds by giving us the Holy Spirit, which enables us to live according to GOD's commandments because we now have His nature. This is why we are able to become close to our Heavenly Father and have a personal relationship and connection with Him.

### ***Communion Helps Us Never Forget About Our Bond With GOD***

There are certain steps that we take in order to remind ourselves of things that we may casually forget throughout the course of a day, a month, or a year. For instance, we set calendar reminders on our technological devices (i.e. phones, computers, etc.) to remind us of important events and appointments. This ensures that we are able to remind ourselves in the future about something that we are aware of right now, that we may forget later on.

There are some very important facts and truths that a Christian should never lose sight off, nor should they ever forget. For this reason, it is very beneficial in our spiritual walk to take communion on a regular basis, because by doing so, it reminds us of the benefits that we receive as a result of the New Covenant that has been established between GOD and man. These truths reaffirm our acceptance of salvation and eternal life, while casting out any fear of condemnation or punishment as a result of our past sins. Communion helps us reestablish in our mind that GOD loves us and that we are covered in His grace, which prevents us from living in guilt.

Even more, communion reiterates that we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. To "redeem" something, means to make it acceptable or pleasant in spite of its negative qualities or aspects; to pay off its outstanding debt, and to fulfill a pledge or promise towards it. By reminding ourselves that we have been "redeemed," we are remembering that we are acceptable and pleasant in GOD's sight despite our weaknesses and shortcomings; that the debt of our sins has been paid by Jesus so that we can be placed on good terms with GOD, and that GOD will continue to fulfill His promises to us that our contained in His word. We as Christians need to constantly remind ourselves that we have been "redeemed" on a daily basis, this way Satan will not be able to flood our minds with negative thoughts that cause us to feel worthless, guilty, ashamed, and hopeless.

When we remind ourselves of whom Jesus is and what He did for us on the cross by sacrificing His life to pay for our sins, it causes us to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior over our life, and to appreciate what He did for us on the cross. When you begin to meditate on Jesus' love which He displayed to you by dying for your sins, and when you begin to appreciate His sacrifice for you, it causes you to want to display your love towards Him. Jesus tells us how we are to display our love towards Him when He proclaims in John 14:23 that, "if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." Communion is an opportunity to remind ourselves of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; our New Covenant with GOD, and that we should be living a life that is pleasing and acceptable to GOD.

## **HOW DO WE TAKE COMMUNION THE CORRECT WAY?**

Before you take communion, the Bible teaches us in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 that, “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.”

For this reason, before we take communion we must examine ourselves to see if there is any sin, immorality, or wickedness in our life that we need to confess to GOD and ask Him for forgiveness for, and that we also need to *immediately* turn away from. We also need to let go of any anger, hostility, bitterness, or ill feelings that we are holding on to towards other people as well during this time.

After examining ourselves, we take a piece of bread or cracker (it doesn't have to be a special type of bread or cracker), and a small cup of grape juice or wine (it doesn't have to be a special type of grape juice or wine either), and we pray over them by asking GOD to bless the piece of bread or the cracker to be symbolic of the body of Jesus Christ, and to bless the grape juice or the wine to be symbolic of the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for our sins.

It is during this time that we can begin to remind ourselves of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins; our New Covenant with GOD, and that our life should be devoted to our Heavenly Father. Then we eat the bread or cracker, and then drink the grape juice or wine. This is an example of one correct way that you can properly take communion.

## **WHAT ARE SOME MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNION?**

### ***Communion Is Not Simply A Ritual or a Tradition That We Only Perform At Church***

In recent history, communion has become reduced to something that is performed solely as a ritual. Because of this, most Christians only take communion once a month at church (if we happen to come to church the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month). However, taking communion with GOD is not something that He intended to occur only once a month, rather, it was something that He intended to occur on a regular basis within the confounds of your home, and with other believers as well. Tradition influences us to think that fellowshiping with GOD by taking communion should only take place at church once a month, but when you have a personal relationship and connection with GOD, it causes you to want to fellowship with Him frequently.

Let me ask you this question....You wouldn't want to spend only a few minutes with someone that you love just one day out of a month would you? Yet this is exactly what we are doing when we participate in communion the traditional way (once a month). I bet that if it were possible, you would want to spend time with the person that you love on a daily basis, and this is the type of relationship and connection your Heavenly Father desires to have with you. I want to encourage you to begin to take communion and fellowship with GOD on a regular basis as supposed to only a few days out of the year.

## **WHAT ARE SOME ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES CONCERNING THE SUBJECT OF COMMUNION?**

In the book of John chapter 6, Jesus teaches His followers that He is, “The Bread of Life,” and that it is necessary for them to eat of His flesh and to drink of His blood through communion in order to have eternal life. This scripture states:

“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.” Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” they asked. So Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.” *John 6:47-58*

When we eat the bread or cracker and drink the grape juice or wine during communion, we are inviting the GOD who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and who created the Heavens and the Earth to live inside of us and to demonstrate His power in our life. His power working inside of us gives us the ability to overcome life’s trials and tribulations, negative emotions, harmful addictions, past hurts and disappointments, and other challenges that we face, while also granting us success, health, prosperity, and wisdom. Aren’t you glad that GOD lives inside of you!!!!

## **CONCLUSION**

Communion is an important component in our spiritual walk that enables us to truly be A.L.I.V.E. in our discipleship. By having communion with our Heavenly Father on a frequent basis, we can continue to mature spiritually as we grow in our relationship and connection with GOD; reach our full potential, fulfill His purpose for our life, and as we successfully accomplish the goals and the dreams that GOD has placed on our heart for us to accomplish. Amen!!!

## **WOULD YOU LIKE TO ACCEPT JESUS INTO YOUR LIFE?**

This question might be something that you've heard over the course of your life, and after you've heard it you've responded by repeatedly rejecting the offer. Or this might be the first time that you've heard this question ever in your life. Either way, I would like to personally offer you the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ into your life as your personal Lord and Savior. Accepting Him into your life is a pre-requisite and a condition that must be met in order to truly become A.L.I.V.E.

I want you to know that GOD is not interested in simply placing rules and regulations on you to follow, nor is He interested in stopping you from enjoying your life. Rather, GOD wants to take your life; your gifts, your talents, and your abilities, and use them to do something exciting, significant, and meaningful that will have a tremendous impact on other people. If this journey sounds interesting to you, if the idea of making a positive impact on the lives of others appeals to you, and if you absolutely do not want to miss the opportunity to live a life that actually means something and that counts for something as supposed to just wasting your time as you pass through life, I would like to invite you to accept GOD's gift of salvation. Here's how:

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." *Romans 10:9*

You don't have to perform a religious ritual in order to accept Jesus into your life; giving your life to GOD is not like joining a club where you have to pay dues first in order to become a member, neither do you have to get your life right before you come to GOD. Instead, all you have to do to accept Jesus Christ into your life is repent for your sins by turning away from them, confess that Jesus is Lord, and also believe that GOD raised Him from the dead by living your life in a way that reflects your belief in Jesus, and your obedience to His teachings. Just by doing this you will be saved, which enables you to possess eternal life. From then on GOD will begin to prepare you for the journey that you are about to start on, and then walk with you side by side as you overcome the obstacles and the challenges that you face on the road towards fulfilling your purpose, accomplishing your goals, and reaching your destiny. The choice is yours to make... Why don't you give GOD a chance to show you who He truly is, and to express to you how much He loves you and cares about you?

### **About The Author**

Aaron Sams is currently pursuing a Master's of Christian Ministry Degree from Wayland Baptist University. Aaron has been involved in prison outreach ministries, homeless outreach ministries, and he also has taught bible study courses laying the foundation of the Christian faith. Aaron served six years in the United States Air Force, answering His nation's call after the tragic events of 9/11. During this enlistment, he deployed to both Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. After successfully fulfilling his military obligation and earning a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Occupational Education, Aaron relocated to San Antonio Texas where he now works for a Fortune 500 company. Presently, Aaron serves as a youth pastor in his local church where he teaches and preaches. Born in 1984 as an Air Force military brat, Aaron has had the opportunity to live on the east coast, in the Midwest, in the south, and even abroad in the country of Turkey. Aaron is now married to his lovely wife, Sarafia Sams, and is the proud parent of three children, Angel, Isaiah, and soon to be born Micah Sams.



