

Inward Spiritual Development

To learn we must remain a student open to new understanding, even when it does not agree with our current understanding.
Think objectively, search deeply, and test all things.

Inward Spiritual Development	1
The Inward Authority	3
Getting Right With God	11
Seeking First	11
Defining God	13
Knowing God	17
Christian Behavior	18
Hope	19
Good and Evil	20
Seek not comfort, but God	22
God's Righteousness	25
Personal Story with developing truth	25
Sense God	26
Truth can be challenging	28
Resistance & struggle happens	31
Resist and replace	32
Those who...	40
Humble attitude	42
Spirit of Truth	44
Cleanse our Conscience and Purify our Hearts	48
Identify Evil Within Ourselves	49
Introspection	51
Daily prompts, restarts, & plans	55
Make visible our thoughts	58
Identify favoritism, partiality, preferences	61

New Action	64
Identifying Fear	67
Thought Action	70
Confession	71
Repent	74
Restitution	76
Learn from God	79
Developing Senses	80
Good Samaritan	89
God has instructions	90
Yoke with Christ	94
We learn by doing	96
Willing to learn by experience	98
Truth	99
Embrace Humility	102
Perseverance and Endurance	105
Helping others	107
Choosing thoughts	109
Turn and Follow God	110
Strength with Trust/Faith	110
Make the list, set the goals, take the actions	111
Setting our minds	113
Seeking a Righteous Perspective	117
All heart, mind, strength, & soul	121
God's Character together	124
Guarding Grace	125
God is ...	125
Educational Variety	129
Passive learning vs. Active learning	133
Webb's depth of knowledge	134
Marry's room	137
Piaget Constructivism assimilation, accommodation, disequilibrium	137

Cognitive Dissonance	138
Thought Replacement	138
Rule of Inertia & Psychological Momentum	139
The Greatest Plan	140
Examples of plans	140
Plan Requirements	141
#1 Clear Measurable Objectives	141
#2 Understood Purpose for the Plan - The why	142
#3 Daily or improved frequency	142
#4. Correctly	143
#5 Build, grow, develop, and increase	144
#6 Peaceful Pace - We pace ourselves with peace and love	144
Example - Making a cake	145
Scientific method	146

The Inward Authority

Scripture uses mostly NKJV

Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Having been through 12 step programs for roughly 10 years and undergone drastic changes in my life I was unimpressed with my first church experiences. I was accustomed to speaking sincere truth about fear, self-centeredness, pride, and anger. During meetings, side track conversations about the world and its ways were inappropriate. Accountability was fluid. We were to stick with spiritual development at personal levels sharing from our own experience. Those who did not serve were not part of the solution. Conflict & correction was part of the journey.

Romans 16:18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

As I tried to share openly and honestly about my experience, even with leaders, I would consistently get a confused look with awkward silence on their end. They seemed to be stuck not knowing how to interact at such an honest and sincere level. The question stirred in my brain how such a mass of influential spiritual and Bible followers could be so untrained in going deep into themselves about their own spirit and souls. It simply did not make sense to me.

Many in the church had not hit the low point I reached and persevered over decades of spiritual adjustments to grow with God's goodness. They had not endured the pursuit of spiritual good despite the loss of material and prestigious gains.

I sought God to be saved, not after I die, but in the present. I was spiritually dead and empty when I came to God and then again three years later after I left God in my heart and mind to pursue school and selfish ambitions. I found that peace and love within my mind and heart are contingent upon the development and participation of it with my mind and heart. Do I love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. I believe God is serious about that statement and not one to put off from my thoughts and actions.

When I first came to God through a 12 step program I was full of evil and hate. There is an old saying in some meetings, "Church is for those who are afraid of going to hell and recovery is for those who are there trying to find a way out." When this is said there is often laughter. The laughing is the personal identifying with the statement.

(So I sought God and over time experienced the filling of my soul, a cleansing of my conscience, and a purifying of my heart. I know the good of God through experience. And it's been experience repeated over decades. I've listened to what could be 1000 people sharing their experience which validated my own. The problem we all seem to struggle with is a lack of commitment to carry out God's will from within our hearts and minds. We often simply choose to give very little of ourselves toward God.)

Discussions of structure change and uncomfortable talk at church was often avoided. Anger is often hidden. Many Christians seem to be afraid of anger and repress it. How can we learn to manage anger if we don't dig down deep into it, experience it, and fail with it? There is a Biblical process for this involving confession, humbling of ourselves, making restitution, and seeing

how to love our enemies. Forgiveness and mercy are to be practiced and discussed, not once a year from the podium, but daily and regularly in groups or spiritual family members. Anger and hurt happens all the time brought about by pride, fear, selfish ambition, and idolatry (not God character).

If I said in a church small group that I had been thinking selfishly and not so much about doing God's will today people may ask why that would be such a problem. "We can't be perfect," I would often hear. Yet I am accustomed to groups who understand selfish thinking to be a serious problem. They would go deeper and ask for more details, confession, correction, and prayer for help to continue in correction.

In my 12 step experience confession, self-examination, repentance, making restitution, and helping others to do the same is expected and a norm. (Expected as a norm, but 12 steppers also often fall way short of the goal.) When I came to church I was confused and felt alone. No one seemed to be repenting (turning their minds and actions to God). People were fake, hiding, avoiding truth, insincere, etc. Mentors had yet to confess their sins and repent. If I shared frustration people would walk away or try to change the subject. I needed truth, justice, perseverance, endurance, steadfastness, diligence, and long-suffering. I didn't want to just hear about Jesus, I wanted to see people stand firm in the truth as Jesus did. But I couldn't find it.

In church I heard pastors tell the masses to go out and speak the word of God without even checking to see if the masses understood it correctly. There seemed to be little follow up from the teachings to see the students are understanding it right. What kind of teacher teaches like this? Jesus questioned everyone. Jesus taught by demonstration. Jesus' disciples taught by demonstration.

I was told to, "carry the message, not the mess." Speaking the word of God is to know God by experience, not just recitation of words. Robots can do that. Surely a Christian is to be much more than an audiobook. The love of God is not just smiling, hugging, and opening doors. The love of God is to sit with others along their spiritual journey telling them how they are making spiritual mistakes. The love of God is to care for another's soul instead of worrying what they might think about me. Jesus wasn't about seeing how many people he could win. Jesus spoke with truth that got people to throw rocks at him. I've yet to see truth spoken like that in church, but I've seen it in 12 step meetings.

I think it's only fair to point out 12 step meetings often function at the level of newer participants. Working with others outside of the meetings, before, after, and between the meetings is where the real growth occurs, but only a few do it. One on one deep honest conversations about the spiritual process is the goal, but many will not choose to do it.

Ultimately we all have to face dying to our old ways whether it is addiction or another form of idolatry. Anything we think of with higher importance than God is idolatry. If we put God in the back ground of our minds to focus on a test, job interview, video games, relationships, fear, pride, money, then we experience idolatry. We ought to get honest and real about the frequency at which this is occurring within us and around us while accepting the necessary Godly solutions. We need to gradually end our way of doing things and begin applying God's ways more.

The failures and fears within the process is a necessary ongoing part of growth. We can speak about these and find our spiritual solutions. Few meeting participants engage in regular discussions as just described. It's quite challenging and uncomfortable. So growth in 12 step programs can appear limited to those who are actively working the steps with others outside the meetings. There is much to be said about this, but I must digress.

Active spiritual growth is a freely given investment into each other for the good of God. It moves at the level of sincere truth, willingness to follow new developmental structure, and the humility to experience uncomfortable good development. We must see the sin within ourselves and how to replace it with the good of God. We cannot go in a direction we do not understand or see.

Christians who want to grow spiritually will need to learn to accept controversial discussions and approach them with a humble and flexible mindset and a willingness to own their own misunderstandings and wrongdoings. We all sin and have ungodly character so we must become willing to own that and discuss spiritual solutions to it.

If we do not own our mistakes and make corrections then how can we change? Changing places, jobs, marriages, and hobbies are outside changes and have little to do with the spirit. Our inward condition needs to change.

When I began reading the Bible, I saw how some of my experiences related closely to it. I was still a broken and sinful man slowly growing more toward the solution, God's goodness. I knew through my experiences that church could be improved and the people in it could be much closer with God, if only they would choose God (truth, mercy, peace, compassion, impartiality, patience, humility, forgiveness, etc.) more than themselves (selfish pride, selfish ambition, selfish fear, vanity, lust, etc.). But how could I help? What could I do? What could I say and who would listen? I'm just a broken man who can see some things others couldn't see. How could I help others experience the invisible and intangible things I understand? It's like saying there is a ghost in the room and everyone ignoring me. Yet there is a Holy ghost and there is a way to sense it, if we listen correctly and long enough.

I tried and tried in conversations and in groups for years. The more I tried the more confused and helpless I felt. It seemed the structure needed to change to guide others to hear what I was trying to say. But nobody seems to be willing to make significant structure changes. (search online: conformity, herd mentality, group think) People practice more what they see other people do than what people say to do. There's the old saying, "do as I say, not as I do."

It was around 2008 after spending two years going through Romans in a small group when 'The Great Commandment' stood out to me. Jesus was prioritizing this simple command. Jesus was asked what the greatest command was and Christ responded to "Love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your strength, and all your soul."

What does greatest and first mean? Many people might hear this statement by Moses and Christ and then move on to another verse or idea in the Bible without seeing how they can actively live it out. Ignoring this command, not seeking to improve towards it, might be like ignoring Jesus. Are we going to ignore, postpone, or minimize the necessity of obeying God, especially with the most important command? Most of the people I have done studies with seem to evade applying this instruction increasingly into their hearts, minds, and souls.

James seems to try to reach people about this in 2:18-19
"But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”

If we truly believe then our practices and character will be trained like our teacher more and more and we will become a different person.

Matthew 7:20 “Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

John 15:4 “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

The truth is we can grow in love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We can do it. We just convince ourselves otherwise because we rely more upon our own ideas than God’s. We fit in with the crowd and do what others do. That’s neither what Jesus taught, nor what the Bible says to do.

Moses and Jesus were teachers explaining how followers ought to live. What does it mean to claim to be a follower of a teacher and not do what the teacher says? Will we listen to the instructions, learn exactly how to do it, and then apply to our lives? Maybe it’s not that important to others, but it is to me.

I know through personal experience the weight of recognizing this point (great commandment).

In my first two years of recovery I built a close connection with the spirit and learned much about love, peace, patience, mercy, forgiveness, truth, humility, service, unity, and justice. I found a new way of life. I was, at times, content in terrible conditions. The key was an active mindset of improving a conscious relationship with God being ready to do God’s will each day while paying close attention to spiritual sensations. I trusted and relied upon God more than anything else (greatest). Thy will be done was active in my attitudes and beliefs.

As I attended school my priorities slowly began to change. I got a room at the University of Arizona in the cheapest dorm on campus. It was a wing of the football stadium. Yes, I lived in the football stadium for 10 months. My previous experience of quiet time, convenient privacy where I could meditate, a support group two blocks away that met daily, and supportive friends was going to drastically change.

I remember standing on the fire escape having a cigarette, amazed that I was actually enrolled with a University. Me, who in high school was diagnosed emotionally handicapped and placed in special education classes, now at a University. A man sober from addiction who was unemployable, at a University? God's ways were undoubtably doing great things in my life. Yet school and this new setting was about to distract me from my reliance upon God.

People were everywhere on campus all the time. I could not find privacy for meditation and meetings were inconvenient. The dorm room was one room without doors or barriers shared by another ungodly person. I found myself hiding in a phone booth in the dorm, trying to get some privacy to pray. It was in a common area in the hallway. I soon stopped mediation and prayer.

Absent from prayer, meditation, supportive coaching toward humility, and my God seeking community, I began to grow in self-centeredness and lose sight of God's goodness. A year later, still sober, I was desperate, lonely, and broken. I was angry and depressed. I had reached out again for help with 12 step meetings. I got another sponsor who did two things that helped me return to God's grace (grace is received). This sponsor said, "God has to be number one, always, more important than relationships or jobs." I understood what he was saying because I used to have that kind of faith. I had to restructure my daily priorities and accept God as my God. The other thing this sponsor did was demonstrate that instruction. He was sincere, available 24/7 and he demonstrated great honesty, humility, and compassion. He demonstrated his message.

I knew exactly what he was talking about, making God the highest priority in my goals and my thoughts each and every day. I understood through my experience how that was key to transformation. All my Inward Authority was to be run through a focus upon doing God's will. I was to give my all for this cause, imperfectly, but yet perfecting.

After rededicating my mind, heart, soul, and strength to God for just a short while, again, my world changed. My attitude, goals, purpose, heart, mind, and soul increased in faith, peace, service, truth, and love. This second time experiencing God reliance and the good it brings improved my faith about the process. It validated and proved my previous experience. It provided increased evidence that applying my mind, heart, and soul to love God's ways, path, and righteousness would bear great fruit in this life, here and now, in myself and others. God is good.

(And this all happened 6 years before I was to go to church and read the Bible. It came from following a developmental structure with others. There had been no singing or communion. Although we did have BBQ's, camp outs, and poker nights. We were a fellowship of broken people seeking spiritual repair through trusting in spiritual principles. We needed God.)

Romans 11:23 "And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

Making restitution and correcting harm done can purify hearts and cleanse consciences. When there is a wrong done it can stir up resentment, shame, fear, distrust, and many other ungodly spiritual calamities. Making restitution can be the humbling of self to submit to God's good of offering corrective action and attitude.

In 1994 I had just began seeking reunification with God when I felt the shame of cheating on an exam at a University. I felt as though I needed to admit my fault. Fearful thoughts of being kicked out of school came to me. Yet I placed my trust in God and went to the instructors and admitted I cheated. I did not get kicked out. One instructor simply told me not to do it again and the other had compassion for me. My faith increased, not because of results, but because of my demonstration and trust in action. This of course was nothing compared to Abraham.

So about ten years later when I read the Commandment of God to "love God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength" I knew in detail and personal experience what was going on there. I knew the powerful benefits behind aligning my Inward Authority with God. I understood how such reliance and trust can shape my soul and faith. Yet how was I going to help other Christians who did not have these experiences to understand? I went to the Bible with God to seek solutions.

The first thing I needed to learn was how the Bible described God, heart, mind, soul, strength, and love. So I did a thorough concordance search to read and understand each of these terms. I read all the verses on love to learn the pattern or manner of which love is used. I did the same with heart, mind, soul, strength and many other transformative linking vocabulary terms. I looked at the differences between Hebrew and Greek definitions. Hebrew's definition of heart I found included the mind, essentially it was our Inward Authority. That's where I came up with the name. Love God with all our Inward Authority. To me, it was the key to being with God. Am I giving God my all? What is going on with my Inward Authority right now?

Sin is to miss the mark. Starting a day without setting my Inward Authority to be with God would miss the mark. If I start my day setting my thoughts on how to live out God's ways I can improve my chances to hit the mark. To succeed in building a close relationship with God, everyday I need to see how I can love God with all my Inward Authority. Shifting my thoughts away from self-gratification and toward God can be challenging. To be right with God is to be righteous. We can improve in righteousness if we prioritize God and act accordingly. Without action little change can happen. Are we willing and ready for a new way of life with God?

Getting Right With God

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Seeking First

Dedication, commitment, dying to self, and giving our 'all' is needed to resist all the little nudges and temptations we can face as we pursue new ways of thinking and acting. Daily diligence and effort to evaluate and discern what God wants us to do is the most difficult part of the journey. Resting upon our laurels, moving with auto-pilot, and settling into complacency will all sabotage our development. Let's look at some things Jesus said.

Matthew 5:20 "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Luke 9:59-62 “Then He said to another, “Follow Me.”

But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.”

But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

Matthew 10:37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

We are to choose sides. If we are to be with God, then we are to be with others who are seeking the same thing with the same faith.

Jesus is making it pretty clear family, career, and money is no excuse. Being too busy means to stop being too busy. We are either to love God or we are to love something else. If we continue what we do with little growth with God then God is not our first priority and we are not seeking first the kingdom of heaven.

A church staff member that goes by the clock with service to God may be serving the clock. Are we guided by the spirit or formalities? Surely the can cooperate, but if we are making God our highest priority we are painstakingly discerning to ensure God’s good is done at the expense of our worldly employer. If our jobs come before God, then our jobs are our God. We must get clear about this with ourselves. We must be truthful and impartial about the facts. Do we love and serve God’s good above all else?

Most of the time and perhaps even all of our experiences will be to the benefit of all those around us through our trusting, serving, and development of

God's good. If we indeed put ourselves at the mercy of training diligently in God's character we will become more honest, patient, peaceful, just, compassionate, merciful, and forgiving people. Most jobs and careers would benefit greatly from such character. Most families would be blessed with such a change. So sacrifices made to develop such character pays off in the long run. The family and work will receive dividends for such character development.

We must practice using our minds to see how we can think more in the manner of how Christ thought. Are we making God within our minds and hearts the way Jesus did? Yet to bring understanding inward we will certainly need to practice outward Biblical instructions. (More info on how to do this will come later, but for now, begin thinking about thinking)

There is an emphasis in the Bible of dying and being born again, renewal, and changed. There is also a repeated description of differences; difference between spirit and flesh, things of the world and the spirit, and people who obey God and those who do not. (more on this later as well)

Matthew 12:46-50 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You."

But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

Jesus is sharing how those who "does the will of" God is God's family. All this to say, if we seek out to make doing God's will more from our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and indeed increasingly develop such attitude and character within ourselves, we can become more with God.

Defining God

Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.

Character traits of God are clearly described within the Bible and remain consistent throughout the Bible.

The Godly Character trait and spiritual quality of peace is to be developed. This is one example of a character to seek, pursue, and practice.

Jesus is the Prince of peace. Isaiah 9:6

The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace Romans 14:17

God has called us to peace. 1 Corinthians 7:15

God is the Author of peace. 1 Corinthians 14:33

1 Peter 3 quotes Psalm 34:14 “all of you”

1 Peter 3:11 “Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.”

We are not only to seek peace (think about and search to find peace), but also to pursue it (go after and get or achieve). Peace is to become a regular goal and a top priority within all that we do.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Grace to you and peace from God is used as an introduction to multiple Biblical writings. The Apostles carried peace out to others in words and actions.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

We can develop such character with effort, seeking, abiding, following, relying, turning, focusing, being mindful, encouraging, meditating, talking, practicing, teaching, and demonstrating them. We ought to make active engagement with such character traits our highest priority. We ought to guard against getting distracted by others who don't. Staying committed and focussed is key.

I first learned to guard against fear, anger, dishonesty, and self-centeredness. I was told to trust God, to let go and let God. All I knew about God at that time was that God was good. I used the acronym G.O.D. or good orderly direction. The Bible says in many places that God is good, so it fit. Yet defining good is another issue. What I believe to be good may not be good to

someone else. I needed more clarity on how to define God. The way I viewed and understood God was different than the way others viewed and understood God.

“Be of one mind” Romans 12:16 2 Corinthians 13:11 Philippians 2:2 1 Peter 3:8 Revelation 17:17

How can we be of one mind with different opinions about God? The variances of differences are so vast, even in the same church, that divides exist. We all ought to become more in agreement with who God is, how the Bible describes God instead of the teacher/pastor, what God is about, and what God’s will might look like.

Of course we all are different and express the way we do things differently, but we can become so much more efficient with clarity about God’s ways, righteousness, and purpose. We can easily develop our minds and hearts more with God’s character traits. This book is to help guide some of the steps into aligning our minds and hearts more with one mind to do what the Bible says to do. Perhaps this is why Jesus narrowed it down to one command... to love God with our whole being and life.

The Bible describes God with character traits of love, peace, patience, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, truth, and justice. To seek such things with our hearts, minds, and strength is to have them continuously within our consciousness. If we do not have God right in our thinking we may not be correctly seeking God. Being correct inwardly about God’s true identity and purpose is more important than going through motions and acting the part.

Matthew 23:25-28 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

We understand this point best by becoming experienced in it. If we have never had mercy, have always been impatient, practiced deception, avoided

feelings, we may be unable to experience God inwardly with our senses. We may be out of touch with sensing spiritual good, purity, with a clean conscience. We may have learned to resist and deny such sensations by being hurt and wronged.

I've worked around middle school students for 13 years thus far and also served students in youth groups for roughly 10 years. Kids do not feel safe sharing their hearts with each other. There is an understanding that kids will poke at each other, put each other down, and create shame for being sensitive. This is a spiritual crisis for youth groups. If kids can't be safe in church with their hearts where can they be safe? Sarcasm at other people's expense ought to be broken down in teachings to see how it can create divisions, distrust, agitation, resentment, fear, and retaliation. Ask 10 children if they enjoy being made fun of and get a picture of how it affects love, compassion, truth, etc.

Many of us are greatly concerned with how other people see us. Our fear of what other people might think can influence and control our choices. We must let go of that fear or concern and make serving God more important through faith in God's goodness. We must get more acquainted with God's love through study and experience. We will need to open our hearts to listen, care, and help others. We will also need to let others in to help us. One that has never experienced love may have trouble receiving it. Many in fact have been hurt by their perception of love and block it out for protective purposes. But we are now seeking God's help that has everything to do with love.

One important point for safety. We ought to discern carefully in how we love others. Inviting some random homeless person into our house probably isn't a wise choice. Even the good samaritan parable used an inn. It would be best to perhaps consult with others before taking new action and risk.

Matthew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

Using a mentor or guide through the process of developing love, compassion, mercy, etc. is great way to begin this life-long journey.

God's love, the true definition of love, is a love that does not seek to produce hurt, but peace. God's love does not lie and is not self-seeking. God's love is

patient and not pushy. God's love does demand things in return, except what is good. God's love is forgiving and merciful. God's love is just. See also 1 Cor. 13.

The process of growing more into the goodness of God is affected by how well our minds and hearts participate in aligning with God. We need to accept God's ways enough so that we are responding to them increasingly as Christ, not perfectly like Christ, but with gradual progressive improvements toward that perfection.

2 Corinthians 7:1 "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Knowing God

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

We must put to test our definition of God and take action upon it. Just like riding a bike, cooking, putting on makeup, throwing a football, or any other skill we must experience our inward senses more and more. To learn to type or play the guitar our fine motor skills need to be practiced correctly and learn through trial and error how to respond to the physical elements. We can't just read about it and know how to do it. We ought regularly and persistently practice God's ways to learn from them and gain wisdom.

The sensation of Grace comes through God's elements, truth, principles, and character that exist in the experiences of love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, truth, and justice/impartiality. Such intimate engagement relationally can bring about profound spiritual experiences. The more we do this, the quicker we can grow with God. We ought to be keeping our thoughts aligned with God's goodness while growing with introspection (thinking about our thinking). We must further develop our inward sensing and understanding of our hearts and minds to move them in correction. We ought to be Christians in correction.

Struggle is part of the process. Public speaking is one of the most feared experiences. We are going to be engaging with others differently with more truth and sincerity. Fear and resistance can come upon us as we continue to perfect God's good. Yet we ought to keep our focus upon God to keep our aim with God and off what other people think about us. Growing with God over time will improve our relationships. We might decide to change some relationships that may be corruptive and then create new relationships that are more in line with God's ways. All this will help us to define and know God better.

Christian Behavior

We ought to read, know, practice, train, live, and grow this kind of instruction from our hearts and minds to learn the good that comes from it. This ought to be practiced, taught, and demonstrated by all Christians as it is written and teachers ought to share from their own experience in doing it. The expectations we set ought to match the Bible's. We are imperfect people seeking perfection.

Matthew 5:48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

"Behave like a Christian"

Romans 12:9-21 NKJV

"Instructions for Christian Living"

Ephesians 4:17-32 NIV

"The Christians walk"

Ephesians 4:17 - 32 NASB

"What the Christians are to do"

Philippians 4:1-9 NCV, NET

Colossians 4:2-6 NCV

"Christian Order"

1 Corinthians 11:1-22 NASB

"Christian Conduct"
1 Thessalonians 5:12 - 28 NASB

"Growth in Christian Virtue"
2 Peter 1:1-15 NASB

Hope

The Inward Authority process aligns with the Bible, recovery programs, and science (test all things). It provides much more detail on the transformational experience. Such detail can be a bit intimidating and overwhelming. Yet, like the many things we learn to do in life, it grows easier in small bites and simple steps taken over time.

Developing God's goodness can provide release from fear, anxiety, frustration, addiction, impulsive habits, stress, unhealthy obsessions, poor choices, and so much more. It can improve relationships, careers, health, debt, and spirit. It's a choice that can be vastly different from what we are used to which can illicit fear and discomfort. It can be difficult to chose action that seems uncomfortable even if it will help us. We ought to have enough faith in God to trust God's ways more than fearing the discomfort. If we can make this choice and take action with perseverance we may grow and develop great comfort, peace, love, and fulfillment deep within our souls.

Twelve Step programs use a process which involves self-examination for character defects, confession, praying for removal of defects, and correction of harm done to others. This process does exactly that and provides detail on how to replace such defects with grace, goodness, and righteousness. This is an inward attitude adjustment of heart, mind, and spirit which can shape and condition our souls if we accept God's good within our hearts and minds long enough to let it develop.

Living for God is not stepping up for fleeting experiences a couple hours a week. It is dedication, effort, focus, time, and scheduling. It is with reminders, prompts, meetings, conversations, questions, research, introspection, prayer, reflection, and meditation. It is slowing down and giving much more attention to all things spiritual. It is within our reach and within in anyone's reach who wants it enough to give themselves over to the process.

Those of us who have gone through the purification process and have made restitution humbly and sincerely have had an experience beyond words that reshapes our understanding about the world and the meaning of life. We have learned forgiveness and have experienced a cleansing of our conscience. We understand at much deeper level how our behavior has affected others and how the correction of our behavior also affects others. We gain a new understanding of peace and mercy. This is yet the beginning of so much more awareness to be learned in regards to the invisible kingdom of heaven that is understandable through living more and more by God's character, goodness, righteousness, and grace.

Learning how to discern relationship interaction upon spiritual principles takes much time and new action. Through some trial and error, consultation with others, and Biblical understanding we can greatly improve our spiritual activity.

As we let ourselves change and grow to be more like God as Jesus does and describes in John 15 we can become quite different. There is often a sense of resistance to this process that we must learn to let go. If we can let go of who we are now little by little and take new action of who God wants us to be little by little we can greatly improve our spiritual way of life and experience a sense of fulfillment beyond words.

There is a lot to learn, but instead of getting caught up with how much we can learn and change we ought to only focus upon what we can learn and do right now. As long as we keep right now with God we give ourselves over to the one that can do all things possible. Let's continue to give God our right now.

Good and Evil

In NKJV Romans 12:9 under the title "Behave like a Christian" it says "Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good." If we are going to "Behave like a Christian" then we need to understand correctly what to cling to and what to abhor. God is good. If we cling to God's character, ways, and path then we cling to good. Evil is that which can separate us from God's good, if we choose it. Good and evil is always present with us and around us and we are responsible to what we choose. Many times, such choices are not easy. Or they are easy, but difficult to do because of confusion, our desires, and what

other people might think. We make our decisions based upon things that are not with God, idolatry.

We can be focused upon the negative or focused upon the positive of things in life. We ought to be aware of both, but focused upon how we can add to God's good. Living within God's grace is the answer and living outside of it is the problem.

In Twelve Step Programs people are to seek a spiritual awakening through committing to God and doing God's will (the steps). Self-centeredness is one of the main problems in addictions. Moving from self-centeredness to God centeredness is the goal.

People in recovery will go through a "house cleaning," the removal of character defects/evil; dishonesty, self-centeredness, resentment, and fear. These character defects are examples of the evil we ought to "Abhor." Other examples of self-centeredness includes vanity, idolatry, lust, greed, and envy. Repentance is to let go of such things, identify them when they are present (bring light), and then seek its opposite. Example, impatience - patience, lies - truth, hate/resentment - forgiveness, anxiousness - peace, etc.

Simply removing a character defect does not automatically incorporate a virtue. We will need to seek out the good, put it into practice, and then improve upon it over time.

We ought to love God which essentially is to "Cling to what is good." If we are not clinging to God's good more and more what would that say about our love for God? God's character is good and we ought to grow our understanding with that character every day. We ought to practice and experience that character, explore the consequences, and teach it to others.

One great way to learn what the Bible says about good and evil is to do a concordance search of each and read the verses while recognizing patterns. There is an old saying, "hate the sin, not the sinner." Such thinking understands that people have good and evil in them. The evil within us is to be abhorred while the good within us is to be grasped. We ought to love the good that is in each and every one of us more and more.

We ought to realize the evil desires and thoughts within us are not 'us.' Repetitive thinking comes from many sources which we can get caught

within our minds. Ever get a song stuck in your head and just want it gone, but it won't go away? This is where we find new thinking or a new song to replace the other. Instead of telling our brains to stop something we tell it how to do something, do something good. We give it new instructions and action upon the new instructions builds it much stronger into our being.

One successful method for recovery/transformation is to get out of self, own thinking, and go help someone else. As we get busy helping someone else we can invite productive sensations that can help our state of mind. This ought to be done with compassion and sincerity or at least seeking to have it.

The way to combat evil thinking is to get active with good behavior. Good behavior is to help someone else who needs help. The best way may be to interact with someone who is humble and broken that has needs. Simply providing companionship to someone who feels lonely can go along way. Ask questions, get to know people, share and listen from the heart and be available to God's good. Doing this regularly is half the journey. The other half of course is to abstain from participation with evil thinking. This can begin with simple reductions. The more we have developed evil within us, the more it can take to have it washed clean.

Most testimonies I have heard, including my own, there are days that are great and there are days with struggle. Quiet time with God, meditating upon God's good, and sharing the fear, frustration, etc. with others can help a lot. This has been validated by many people with 20 + years experience in spiritual development. It's Biblical and it agrees with various studies.

Romans 11:23 "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

I know what it is like to fall away from seeking God and going God's will. Leaving my pursuance of God and seeking after career, school, and self gratification I ended up lonely, angry, envious, fearful, resentful, and depressed. I was offered direction back to God and I accepted it. I sought God again and found grace in abundance. For me, this method is not theory, it is a reliable and predictable fact.

Seek not comfort, but God

Evil does not mean discomfort and good does not mean comfort. Both good and evil can provide either comfort or discomfort. Being real, sincere, genuine, and truthful with love can be uncomfortable at work, school, etc. So we ought to resist seeking comfort. If we seek comfort we may end up following evil. Instead, we seek the will of God, learn from the experience, see how to improve, and let God bring the comfort or discomfort. Chances are if we are placing God's goodness more and more within our minds and hearts we will find ourselves over time comfortable beyond words.

Proverbs 12:1 NKJV Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid.

Stupid is a word that has become stigmatized which means it has been used in a derogatory or evil way enough for people to view it as socially inappropriate. Yet there it is in the Bible. Are we going to condemn, judge, or fear God's word because society has taught us it is inappropriate? Who then is our teacher? What does Jesus do? As we read the following verses let's recall within our minds that Jesus does all things out of love to build peace.

Matthew 13:15 "For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed"

Matthew 15:16 So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding?"

Acts 28:27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed,

Stupid defined:

lacking ordinary quickness and keenness of mind; dull

<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/stupid>

When a Christian does not seek to grow and improve themselves to be like Christ, wouldn't that be lacking keenest of mind? I guess we need to define what a Christian really is since there may be some variances in understanding.

"Behave like a Christian"

Romans 12:9-21 NKJV

"Instructions for Christian Living"

Ephesians 4:17-32 NIV

"The Christians walk"

Ephesians 4:17 - 32 NASB

"What the Christians are to do"

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We are instructed to humble ourselves. This is a spiritual blessing, to stop thinking we 'know' what's right, and to realize more and more the limitations within our knowledge. A student cannot learn if the student does not listen long enough to take to heart the teaching and then begin to practice it. And then to practice it with evaluation of the experience to improve upon it. Doing this would be just the beginning.

Luke 14:11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

We ought to pray for humility and to open our minds to realize we have learned evil practices and have habits motivated by evil. We can change from following our old ways to seeking new Godly ways. Each day we must choose to do it and apply new effort to make it happen.

God's Righteousness

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

We CAN develop righteousness of the Spirit. God's free gift is available to us to tap into, participate with, and utilize within our hearts and minds if we choose to accept and receive it. Yet we can't have life our way & God's way unless our way is God's way. So life as we know it must change for righteous development to occur.

We ought to grow in God's righteousness if want to be in the kingdom of heaven. We must understand this key point to the bottom of our hearts and keep it within our consciousness at all times. It needs to be personalized. Remember, we are to seek first the kingdom of God.

Personal Story with developing truth

There was and still is so much beyond my awareness that I am still learning truth today, if I am seeking it and willing to see it. My mind can quickly ignore or block information contrary to my beliefs and preferences.

(Cognitive Bias) Some methods of denying truth sneak in automatically, like blame. Evading ownership of my feelings and thoughts (fear, anger, impatience, intolerance) which come mostly from my perception and beliefs could be the leading cause of my spiritual discord. I must each day seek to understand where I am amiss with God's righteousness and how I can correct my thinking.

One of the first Godly character traits I began to practice in 1991 was truth. I believed I was honest with others already, brutally honest. I was walking to a meeting, (no car or money), when someone from the meeting saw me and offered me a ride. I accepted. Then the guy asked me how I was doing. Truth in everything right? I asked the guy, "do you really want to know?" He said, "Yes." So I laid it out pretty thick, how life was difficult (nice version here).

I've learned through experience how speaking truth can quickly reveal who is real and who isn't. People who don't know how to be real will avoid such conversations like the plague. And those who are seeking to be real will be at

the least, curious. One of the best ways to recruit relationships that go deeper is to speak deeper and watch for the curious eyes of others. Then get their contact info and connect.

One night working graveyard shift at a convenience store (college money) a man came in wanting a cup for some water. The man was disheveled and seemed like a trouble maker so I said I didn't have any cups to give out. As soon as he left the store I realized I had lied and I had made a spiritual error with my choice. He came back in the store with a cup he got from the trash outside. I humbly apologized for lying to the man and gave him some water with a clean cup. This is one example of many struggles to stay in God's truth. Self examination and being watchful of my actions to see where I am in error is necessary to make corrections. Correction is a key part of spiritual purifying and cleaning.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

If I continue in lies and deceit, it will eat away at my soul. It would start with a slight sense of guilt which I would excuse in my mind with rationalization. Making excuses why it's okay to live outside of God's grace is a common practice, or so it seems. I've heard many people share how comfortable they are with their spiritual condition, because it's better than it used to be. "At least I'm sober" people would say. And that is a very good thing... for someone in their first year. There is an old saying, "what do you get when you sober up a horse thief? A horse thief." The point is the recovery material clearly lays out a process of improving our character. Not improving my character is to return to self-seeking and my main problem.

I decided to see how just how well I actually could experience God's goodness. This meant I needed to go deeper than the group. I needed to go further than the group. Having been around for many years I learned from the group about as much as I could. Relying on the group is a form of passive learning. I felt I needed to understand a richer sense of righteousness with God. I needed to get more active and less passive in my learning.

Sense God

Coming clean (identifying emotional truth and discussing it) is what helps to purify my heart and cleanse my conscience. It is so important to listen closely

to spiritual senses of shame, joy, love and righteousness. These are spiritual sensations that can guide us to God.

Shame is the feeling or sensation I get when I hurt the Kingdom of God or move away from it. When I lie, cheat, steal, obey anger or pride, etc., such choices create spiritual discord that damages spiritual good. Shame tells me I am doing something wrong. However, there is a false shame that can exist (believing I did something wrong when I did not). An error in belief can produce shame.

(Example) Sometimes I arrive late to church, lately it has been quite often. I wonder what other people might think about that. Once in a while I get feeling of guilt or shame about it, but then I go to God, ask for God's help to do God's will, do it, and then the shame goes away. Or I think how I had been creating material the past two hours and realize I had been with God. There is no shame in doing God's will no matter how much other people might insist upon it. Other people don't know my heart, thoughts, or actions, unless that sit down with me and learn. If I help someone and come late to church, I don't believe I need to apologize or feel bad. If I feel bad simply because someone else thinks I should, that is false shame. That is self-condemnation. If a group condemns me for my choices that is on them, but if I accept the groups condemnation, that is on me. This is why God and my faith in God must be higher than my faith in the group. Making church or groups our God is a serious problem. (learn about conformity, group think, and Milgram's Obedience study).

Lying even white lies can be a slippery slope. Taking a step to lie for someone can lead to more lies which can easily grow. I was recently married and at home when the phone rang, my wife says "If it's for me, tell them I'm not here." I told her I would not lie. She got mad at me. I didn't want her to be mad at me, but my spiritual condition was more important than her liking me. I was responsible for me to stay true with God.

(I heard once that if someone would lie for you they would lie to you.)

I heard a story once that went something like this:

A man was climbing down a mountain when he came upon a snake. The snake said to the man, "sir, will you help carry me to bottom of the mountain?" The man confused looked at the snake and said, "you are a snake

and you will bite me.” The snake responded, “but I won’t bite you, you are helping me down the mountain.” This made sense to the man so he decided to help the snake. It all went well until they got down to the bottom of the mountain where the snake bit him. The man was furious. “why did you bite me! You said you wouldn’t bite me!” At which the snake replied, “I am a snake.”

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.”

We ought to discern carefully using our senses. Although we want to help others, we ought to discern their readiness. Are they humble? Are they seeking to grow with God? Is what we are doing safe and good? Is it going to grow God’s goodness? We must be aware and not fool ourselves about the deceit within the world and our groups. It exists and we ought to speak about it in our spiritual circles. 2 Peter 2, the whole chapter is dedicated to this point. We ought to test everything, especially our leaders. The Bible is clear about this, but group think, conformity, and other guiding forces interfere with our ‘comfort’ in challenging the system. We each are individually responsible to God for what we choose to do or not do. (Learn the Bystander Effect)

Truth can be challenging

I learned a lot about myself, the process of seeking God and doing God’s will, trying to speak the truth in all things. It’s not easy. Just as lying can be a developed skill, speaking the truth with compassion has been a developing skill for me. I had to learn many social skills of tact and courtesy while staying true to God. I spoke the truth boldly many times when others avoided it, but the truth I spoke still lacked patience, love, and peace. It was more with impatience, anger, and fear.

Being right with God feeds my soul, cleanses my conscience, and purifies my heart, but many people may not like it. I’ve been dishonest many times throughout this journey. I have signed forms with incorrect dates. I have agreed to terms I did not read. I have told people they look good when I didn’t even think about how they looked.

Much of conversation these days involves very little thinking. Videos we watch lately have actors respond instantly to questions. I've noticed that when someone asks me if I want to meet with them or come to their party and I pause they will respond before I can answer with, "you don't have to come if you don't want to" thinking that the pause was disinterest. Really though, I was just thinking about my plans and interests. It's as though I need to talk while I think to create a sense of comfort for the other person. Maybe I'll start saying, "I'm thinking."

Spiritual freedom comes through continuous choices of seeking God's peace and taking action to grow with it. For me, God's righteousness is the grace that saves. Are we seeking God's peace and patience?

The world is often impatient and low in tolerance. Many people want things fast and do not want to wait. I have found myself worrying about what other people think about my driving. I follow many rules of the road. There is a place I frequently drive where cars merge into one lane from two. I allow one car in ahead me and will battle to block aggressive cars from trying to sneak in. Really though, they are not cars, they are people. Sometimes this battle robs me of peace. The situation can be stressful based upon my mind.

My belief, goal, expectation, of only one car merging and me wrestling against pushy people can stir up things in my heart, mind, and soul if I am not careful. I find myself praying after these encounters for peace, forgiveness, and mercy. I need to let go of any continued thinking about such things and let God control the other driver. Riding close behind them, driving super slow, or slamming my breaks is not God's will, as I understand it.

I must watch carefully my attitude to go to God in prayer for help to seek peace and pursue it. I also need continuous retraining on how to handle situations with more love and grace. I must see the truth within my own thoughts about everything so I am not lead further into corruption. I must see the truth in my sensations, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and actions every day. Some solitude, mediation, and sharing with others can help a great deal in discovering my inward condition.

Matthew 25:46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (choice)

We will choose whether to apply ourselves more to learn God's goodness or not. Our choices will be key in our spiritual development.

John 7:24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (sensation & discernment)

Righteous judgement comes from experiencing God's righteousness and strengthening senses to understand it. I was one of those kids who couldn't sit still. I would often act before I thought. I would think I know what to do when I didn't. I made many mistakes because I acted too quickly. When I began slowing down, intentionally each day as a goal, I gained new experience and understanding of the good in it. There are many things like this that cannot be understood down to our core without actual experience. There are also levels of experience that can intensify and grow. Reading and listening is insufficient to grow in God's character. We must act upon, evaluate, discuss, and repeat it.

Acts 10:37 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

To work righteousness we ought to understand what it is and to serve God with improvement. We can grow as we serve in truth, patience, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, generosity, justice, peace, and love. We ought to grow in this daily with all our heart, all our mind, and all our strength.

These traits of God work together, not individually. If I am truthful without love or patience I can do it incorrectly. I found it best to evaluate myself for all the character traits as I seek to grow with God. Growth is the focus, not perfection.

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (not perfect, but press on)

Romans 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Sinning is to miss the mark, but if we are moving purposefully toward the mark, then we are no longer sinning. Freedom from sin is to seek God and God's righteousness. If we seek selfish - ambition and our own way then we

are not seeking God's righteousness. Again, it is about progressing and improving, not achieving perfection.

Romans 8:10 And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Ephesians 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

1 Timothy 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

The goal is to pursue, become slaves to, and establish God's righteousness, within our hearts, minds, attitudes, and actions more and more each day. Let us do so with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all our soul.

Resistance & struggle happens

Since we will be doing something new, unfamiliar and different, our bodies and minds may resist. Those of us who are trained to hurry and then seek to practice patience may find a battle within ourselves to maintain status quo. It's like trying to write with a non-dominate hand. It feels awkward and perhaps even a waste of time. It's easier to do things the way we understand how to do them. The mind may come up with reasons. This is a natural response to change and retraining.

Training or learning how to do something is so much easier than retraining. Once we have learned and practiced a way of doing things, we can't unlearn it. Our old learning will seek to take over. Retraining requires a focus on how to do it different and a focus on not doing it the way we are trained. We must be ready for battle to deny contrary mental messages. The mind will seek to follow what it is trained to do as we try to learn a new way. Retraining will always require some restraint from previous training and a continued steady focus on the new training.

I became accustomed to life on the street. Walking home at 4AM or hitchhiking in central Phoenix were regular activities in my teenage years. I never trusted anyone and always watched my back. This went on for about 6 years.

When I moved to another part of town I realized things were different. People were smiling, would say please and thank you, and dressed much nicer. No more people sleeping on benches or graffiti. It was nice, like being on vacation, but after a while I felt as though I did not belong. It did not feel right or I did not feel right. Yet I knew this was a change I needed to let happen and adjust. This is one example of many transformation experiences I have and am experiencing. It takes strength, God's strength within, to continue going in a direction my mind and body sees as out of place to become a different person than I know how to be.

Some questions and doubt about this training may develop, yet it's highly important to avoid contempt prior to investigation. Let's review the great commandment which Christ emphasizes. "Love God with all your heart, all you mind, all your strength, and all your soul (life)."
(Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27)

In other words, we ought to Love God with 'all' our inward authority. To give 'our all' towards anything requires more focus, diligence, effort, action, and productivity. Those who are unwilling to give their 'all' will be unlikely to maintain the training of God's will. Why else would this 'all' message be repeated and restated three times in the greatest commandment? It is necessary and serves a purpose.

Resist and replace

Giving our all will be required to resist our old ways and persist in new Godly ways. Our automatic responses have been hard wired and ingrained into our normal behavior and exist below our consciousness much of the time. We will need to learn to recognize our thoughts, choices, and actions which prompt our behavior in order for us to create change. This takes a conscious effort requiring retraining.

Creating a new habit can take 4 to 6 weeks, but forgetting what we have experienced might not happen. Once we learn how to ride a bicycle it becomes difficult to forget it. Our minds and bodies become used to doing

things we practice over time. Our old habits are programmed within us and are triggered to act. These are impulses which prompt us toward a specific action. Evil which we have practiced will be prompted and we will need to resist the prompts and triggers. Then we can take action to replace evil thought statements with a new, good, and righteous thought. Prayer and Godly character activity ought to become more our focus and direction.

Evil which we have practiced can stain our soul. It can become so involved within us we can feel as if we are evil. But this is not the case. We feel shame because we live outside of God's good design. In some cases we may have been boldly resisting God. Good spiritual feelings of fulfillment and peace will not develop from living apart from God's ways.

We will require humility to give ourselves over the care of God's good. We will need to slowly shed our evil activity and practice Godly good. We will need to humble ourselves each day to God's grace and choose to be within it.

The feelings of harm we may have done toward ourselves, others, or God ought to be forgiven as we now seek to cling to what is good. "Let go and let God" is a commonly used phrase in recovery. Forgiveness, mercy, compassion, love, truth, peace, and justice ought to be our new goals which we seek with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Shame and guilt can be healthy if it teaches us to stay away from certain spiritually harmful activity. Yet if we shame and hurt ourselves with self-condemning thought statements it reduces our ability to grow with God. We ought to let go of such thought actions. Beating ourselves within our minds can be a form of evil. It too can become a habit which we will need to resist.

Forgiveness is not limited to other people, it includes ourselves. Forgiveness is an attitude we use everywhere to all people. We must give up condemnation or seeking to hurt anyone, including ourselves.

We can replace evil thoughts with good ones. Scripture is full of such things.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Matthew 19:26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Seek first God's Righteousness

Seeking first means we bring into our consciousness God's Righteousness as soon as we begin our day. We start each day with prayer and meditation. We humble ourselves to accept God's gift of grace into our attitude. It's important we accept our imperfections with God's will and continue with patience. Seeking first is taking an attitude of "no matter what" to pursue it. Just like other trainings, we need regular continued practice. If we fall off the bike, we get back on. We keep getting on to learn more. Instead of seeing our imperfections through the lens of condemnation, we look at our imperfections to guide us toward correction. Our goal is to simply aim for progress in the direction of correction and self evaluate to ensure we are progressing.

"Watch your thoughts, they become words;
watch your words, they become actions;
watch your actions, they become habits;
watch your habits, they become character;
watch your character, for it becomes your destiny."
FRANK OUTLAW

Development of skills require frequent regular repetition and practice. We must apply ourselves daily to seek the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. It's a different way of thinking and responding to life. To grow patience and peace within us we will need to practice waiting. We can let other people move ahead of us as we drive and in while standing in lines. We must slow down our reactions to move more peacefully. Most of us will need to wake up earlier and maybe leave later to reduce hurry. Our schedule may need some tweaks to grow with God. Planning will be required. God is worth it, if God the God of peace is our God.

James 1:14 NKJV But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

The description above exemplifies how sin is developed. It begins with an idea and then the idea is entertained within the mind (anticipation). As the idea is entertained within the mind, temptation grows until the urge becomes so intense it is followed out. When the idea is followed out it is experienced with sensation that was anticipated for the reward. Sometimes it's not as good as anticipated.

When we experience gratification from sin it feels euphoric. It is a pleasant physical experience from the body that produces a physical sense of comfort. Our bodies were made to have these experiences. If we place a higher value upon these experiences than being right with God's good we will set ourselves up to pursue them over and over again. Such pursuits can often lead us down the path of spiritual, relational, emotional, mental, and physical destruction. Our minds develop many ways deceive ourselves to repeat the process hoping for the gratification experience while blocking out awareness of its destructive ways.

We can also seek ways to protect ourselves from disappointment. It can be easy to leave social situations for fear of others disapproving of us. Many socially helpful places can feel uncomfortable to attend. We can keep others from knowing us to seemingly protect ourselves from being used or betrayed. We may find ourselves isolating or withdrawing more and more from social activities. This too is a path leading to spiritual destruction.

Our minds can become developed to avoid sincerity and love or to pursue self gratification. Then when we read how God wants us to do otherwise we may feel confused. We may be stuck wondering how we can do what God wants us to do when our minds are so designed to do otherwise.

Romans 7

Paul undergoes this confusion. Remember, Paul wrote this roughly 2000 years ago. Since this writing there has been new technology to explain what he is going through. We may not understand it fully, but we can clear up some of the picture. Evil exist within us all. Some examples of evil are resentment, idolatry, lies, vanity, arrogance, selfish-ambition, and lust. Most of us have pursued evil through repetition and time to where it is automatic. For us to seek and pursue God's Righteousness will require self-restraint and doing God's will.

Romans 7:14 NKJV For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

There are two points being made here. One is concerning the law which was made to govern sin. The law is made to regulate law breakers. Those who seek to follow the law are governed by sin or apply sin management. Sin management is the continued guarding against doing wrong with low attentiveness toward building Godly good.

My wife and I were meeting with a pastor and the pastor was sharing how if we both grow closer to God we grow closer together. He used a triangle analogy where we were at two separate points at the bottom of the triangle. If we grow toward the top point together (where God is) then we grow closer. What occurred to me as he was describing growing closer to God is that I wasn't seeking to grow with God. Instead, I was guarding against mostly resentment, fear, and dishonesty. To me, that was spiritual maintenance.

This reawakening shifted my thinking. What I realized was that I had been focused on not doing wrong. By avoiding doing wrong or hurting others I believed I was doing right. Yet this is not living by God's instructions. God wants good to grow. If grace saves and we are to be stewards of it, then our stewardship of that grace brings salvation.

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

I have witnessed people I have mentored along the way grow peace and love within them where there used to be darkness, anger, and hate. This change

came through switching reliance from self and own understanding to God and understanding what is good and spiritual right through experience.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

My own understanding was developed to regulate the sin that is in the world. If someone does evil to me, I learned to hurt them to keep them away. I learned revenge was a benefit and it felt pleasing to do it. I practiced returning evil with evil. I used anger to ward off evil doers. But this practice, although it worked to keep evil doers at bay, was destroying my heart, mind, and soul.

Romans 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

Psalms 37:27 Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore.

I have been seeking to grow in understanding of good through active learning. I pray most days for guidance into love, peace, mercy, generosity, compassion, and sincerity to practice it and watch closely what happens as a result. I am on an exploration to find God’s good treasure here today. I find it here and there through such experiences, but it does not last. I must continue to practice this good God has instructed to experience it more and more.

Page 129 Alcoholics Anonymous “Father feels he has struck something better than gold... he has barely scratched a limitless lode which will pay dividends only if he mines it for the rest of his life and insists upon giving away the entire product.”

1 Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

We are called to do good, not because of a law, but because of the spirit. Through doing good and learning to sense what is spiritual we can grow in understanding a knowledge of good and the spiritual effects within it. As we experience sincere love with truth and peace we can gain spiritual understanding that is beyond words. We can learn to walk closer with God with our spiritual senses and grow our experience within God's kingdom here and now.

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Matthew 9:13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Matthew 12:7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Sacrifice was an activity done like giving gifts on holidays. The intention of giving gifts on holidays is supposed to be expressing care and bringing joy. I have found myself buying presents and giving gifts because I am supposed to and don't want others to think evil of me for being empty handed.

There seems to be competition with gift giving or shame with receiving gifts. Yet the whole gift giving experience is an excellent example of how we are to give gifts of grace. We are to give to others our hearts, peace, and love which comes from God. This peace and love with compassion and mercy are spiritual gifts that grow spiritual good.

If we provide acts of mercy without our hearts feeling it we may do good for others, but we still miss the mark, sin. It is to be done with love. Read 1 Corinthians 13. And if we continue to provide Godly good without love such action can grow and become common place. Then what we have are many people going through motions and keeping up appearances. Sound familiar?

We must remember the original sense and purpose for rituals and practice like giving gifts. We ought to give gifts with love and compassion thinking more of the other's spirit for God's good in them. If we go and have sincere mercy helping others in their need, face to face, much spiritual experience can happen. We ought to be present and attentive to our fears, resistance, vulnerability, love, compassion, empathy, and all things spiritual as we do it.

Read Luke 10:25-37 and imagine yourself first being the one who helps and then being the one who is helped. This can provide a sense of mercy. Let us always remember the last phrase at the end of this story... “Go and do likewise.”

We ought to be sincere, honest, real, and genuine with each other. We ought to build relationships and empathetic connection. Intimacy with Godly good can feed souls. God is love and we ought to give and receive love each day. We give it and we let others give it to us. Love is not proud. We must seek humility.

Referring back to Romans 7 I can relate to what Paul is describing. There have been many times in my marriage where I wanted to be a nice guy to my wife, but there was an ingrained developed way of handling conflict that was not nice. I wanted to be gentle and patient, but I could not. I had not learned how to respond that way yet. Instead, I was harsh. The good I wanted to do, I could not do it. Instead the evil I did not want to do, that I did. It was what I knew how to do at the time.

Years later, through much practice with Godly good, I have become that much gentler person I wanted to be. I'm not harsh like I used to be. Although that understanding still exists within me and can rear its ugliness from time to time.

Now the good I want to do, I can do it, if I am humbly seeking God. And the evil I don't want to do does not happen.

Jesus and the disciples bring this to life in their writings and activities. It's not the outward customs and rituals that produce God's will, but the changed hearts and minds toward God's righteousness.

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

We are to live by the Spirit, not the letter. The letter is a guide to do spiritual things to learn how to sense the Spirit and obey it.

Those who...

Authors in the Bible differentiate between those who take inward action and those who don't. The ones who do take inward action may receive a reward; comfort, fulfillment, the kingdom of heaven, blessed, and mercy. Also, authors describe some other consequences for "those who" do evil.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 1:50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Authors in the Bible use this phrase, "those who," to differentiate between people who obey God and those who do not. Those who... means the people who do what it is the author is describing will get what the author is discussing. It may imply as well that those who don't will not get what the author is discussing.

Matthew 13:41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,

Mark 10:24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

Trusting in riches. If God said, "pray each day, seek peace, forgiveness, and love within your minds and hearts and you will experience joy," how would you respond? Would you do it? Then imagine if your employer said, "pray each day, seek peace, forgiveness, and love within your hearts and minds while on the clock at work and you will get a big raise." Would you be more likely to respond with the directions if it meant riches, fame, power, or longer life?

If my employer pays me to do something I do it. It's my job. There are some limits of course. Yet regards to basic activities that do not harm or exploit others I pretty much do what the employer says and I try to do it well. But when God says to love God with all my heart, all my soul, and all my strength for some reason it doesn't carry with it the same urgency as my employer. I know I can get fired, but do I believe there are consequences to my inactivity with serving God? I do believe that today, but only to the extent of my experiences. If I had more experience with Godly good, I might do more Godly good, because I would better understand the good that comes from it.

This has been the case for me as I have traveled deeper in understanding the benefits of practicing God's goodness. When I am nicer toward others, others are generally nicer toward me, but I must not do it to seek such results. I must practice love and kindness for the principle of it while not neglecting the other principles of truth and impartiality. If I lie with my kindness it muddies the water and contaminates the good.

Below are more verses warning us not to do certain things....

Romans 1:29-32 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, [p]unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

1 Timothy 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

Hebrews 10:36-39 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (after you have done the will of God, like Abraham)

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (afterward it yields)

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Jude 1:5 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

Titus 1:15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.

My faith grows from seeing. Seeing is believing. Taking the action shows me what comes.

Luke 7:47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

Matthew 18:34-35 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Jesus teaches, but are we really understanding? Are we seeking to understand the teaching of Jesus by doing what Jesus says? If we do not take some action and practice some of what Jesus says, more and more, wouldn't that make us disobedient?

1 Peter 2:7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,”

Let's not reject the foundation of a good life... the cornerstone.

Humble attitude

1 Peter 5:5 Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

Since we are to love God (peace, patience, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, truth, justice, love, and generosity) with all our inward authority and worship God, then we are to bow down to these character traits in service and attitude with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul if we are to correctly align ourselves with Biblical descriptions of how best to respond with God.

Selfish pride is such a stumbling block toward spiritual growth. Most the time I have humbled myself has been like taking the trash cans out in the rain. I realize it has to be done, but I don't want to do it. I humbled myself to join a group. I humbled myself to ask for help. I humbled myself to take new action that went against my beliefs. I humbled myself to pray. I've switched carriers to grow spiritually.

Godly activity seems to always begin with humility.

Mark 10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Luke 14:11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

I slowly learned to seek God for direction. God has the best direction and advice, but I first needed to understand God's ways through experience to get an understanding of what God wants.

Proverbs 15:32 He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

We can choose to avoid God's instruction, which will hurt us, or gradually give ourselves over to God righteousness within our hearts, minds, and souls.

When we want to lie or use false flattery we will need to humble ourselves and find another way that is more truthful.

A new a guy once who had purchase sunglasses with some trees on the lenses. My other friends were having fun with him and lead him on about how great they were while they laughed behind his back. I had to tell him the truth about what I thought. It was humbling, because I didn't want the conflict from him or my friends. I just wanted to do what was right. He believed the others and not me. At least I tried.

I learned that lying to others to make them feel good is to deceive them. It may seem like a good thing, but deception is not a character described in the Bible as a good thing. There are exceptions to every rule which is why we need to understand the Spirit. What is the Spiritually right thing to do.

Each of us will see the Spiritually right thing to do a bit differently. We each will need to decide on our own. God seems pretty clear about humbling ourselves.

Humbling ourselves for God's purposes is to give ourselves more and more into God's ways in a progressive manner, yet always imperfectly. We are fallible people, so perfection is not the goal. We are in the process of being perfected while never achieving perfection. Starting each day with a humble and sincere prayer for God's direction and strength can help set our minds and hearts in the right direction.

Psalm 149:4 For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.

Spirit of Truth

John 14:17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

I was three years sober and had drifted away from seeking God. I went away to college and worked part time. My energy moved from spiritual things toward making it through school. I was disconnected from spiritually good things and instead my mind was filled with negativity while my heart was deeply hurt. I couldn't see the truth that my actions were leading me into misery. I blamed my past and felt victimized by my experiences growing up. The pain became so great, I reached again for help, and it was there.

I went to a meeting where a man with 9 months sober was shedding tears of joy. He was a bearded man with tattoos. I could tell he wasn't naive about hard times. Yet here he was full of joy. I wanted what he had. I was three years sober and he had 9 months, but still he was tapped into something I wasn't. He could see truth I couldn't. I desperately needed guidance.

I asked this man to be my sponsor and he agreed. We sat down and talked. He kept things simple. He said something that went straight through me. "God has to be more important than anything else. More important than a career or girlfriend." As he was saying this I recalled when I lived by such faith and had amazing results from living by such faith. This one point meant everything to my spiritual condition then and today. Everything improved as my spiritual attitude with God grew.

I had great fear of trusting in God again, but I did it anyway. I had doubt, but I did it anyway. I understood the process since I had done it before. It didn't take long at all before I was back into living more with God's goodness and experiencing results.

The Spirit of truth is truth with love, peace, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, justice, and generosity. It's truth that grows spiritually good things. Before I sat down with this man I had been focused upon truth that led myself into anger and depression. My mind was filled with condemning thoughts as was the music I chose to play into my ears. I watched dark movies. The material going through my brain was destroying my life.

I realized I was to commit to shift my mind, heart, soul, and strength to seek God's will. I prayed for peace and to be free from my old ways of thinking. I began attending groups regularly and made commitments to serve. I reinvested my time and energy to do more Godly good.

Of course there were good results. I was living a completely different life. Although I had the same job, school, and crappy apartment, I was different. The truth I was following was different. The truth about who I was, was different. I was now about God's truth instead of destructive truth. Yet without my changing, committing myself, and taking difficult steps to be in this new truth, nothing would have changed.

To understand this fully we will need to participate actively, progressively, and experientially with long-suffering and endurance God's collective character traits. We will need persistent introspection and collaboration about such experiences to further deepen our understanding about God's spirit and truth. The invisible and intangible spirit of God is not easily defined through superficial means. A child does not really understand the meaning of "the stove is hot" until the child touches the hot stove. We cannot really understand the grace of God until we have submersed ourselves within it.

We ought to ensure our thoughts, exploration, and daily goals are set toward the invisible and intangible spiritual kingdom of God. Are we worshiping (falling down in reverence of) the Holy Spirit of God that exists within us?

1 John 4:6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

We ought to maintain a constant discernment between the “spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” In the beginning we will need much learning about each to be able to accurately discern them. Learning the consequences of deception, lies, manipulation, exploitation, love, peace, mercy, and forgiveness will help us in our ability to discern. We ought to seek a deeper understanding of God’s good. Knowing that good and the good it brings will surely help against our pursuing the spirit of error.

Romans 12:16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

When our ideas, thoughts, habits, customs, personalities, or attitudes conflict with God’s righteousness we ought to humble ourselves and give into God’s grace. Seeking the kingdom of God involves much correction within ourselves. If we say we seek God yet persist in evil, we may be self-deceived. Self-deception can be so deeply rooted we would not even be able to identify it. We must look long at truth which conflicts with our understanding. We must become trained with our mind’s self-deceptive tendencies to better understand how to recognize them. (See [Choice Empowerment](#))

Our own pride can get in the way of doing what is right with God and sensing the spirit of truth. Our self-seeking methods can interfere with “seeking first the kingdom of God.” God must be first within our priorities for us to seek God first.

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

Pride is valued in many areas of the world, yet with God it is a conflicting problem with spiritual development. We find strength in grace which is meek and humble. Our persistence, endurance, and long-suffering in God’s

righteousness can give us strength, joy, and grace. To sense the spirit of truth we ought to seek a humble attitude within our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

Identify, Confess, & Correct

Thoughts, beliefs, and actions which can hurt, hinder, and even destroy our souls:

Fear/Worry
Resentment/Anger (any irritation)
Selfishness (Pride, greed, lust,
vanity, etc.)
Dishonesty
See [Character Examination](#) packet

Confess

(Admit wrongs to our self, God, and another person as they occur.
These are wrongs done to anyone including ourselves.)

Repent

(Apply God's Character for correction and restoration, turn away from sin and toward God. Being clean and pure comes through righteousness.)

Restitution

(Correct wrongs done to self and others while seeking to restore and heal spiritual hurt wherever it may exist)

Practicing spiritual correction over time provides healing to many.
We teach others by demonstration of God's Character and sharing our

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Money, gold, expensive toys, fancy clothes are not to be loved. This focus upon money and material can distract our minds from seeking God's good. It can lead our hearts and spirit away from righteousness and into idolatry or

greed. Advertisers which exist everywhere direct us toward envy. We ought to ensure our first love is for God and not something or someone else.

I have mentored others who begin getting their life back in order and growing with God who find themselves getting promoted and able to make more money. They then grow their efforts toward such opportunities while decreasing efforts toward God. It's predictable that their life will improve financially and then suffer spiritually. Some relapse and others live a sober life feeling alone, empty, or dead inside. They get stuck, as they were while in their addiction, and seldom pursue God with desperation and diligence.

Luke 12:33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.

Luke 16:13 “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

Much of the world revolves around money and material things. God's righteousness does not. We ought to learn discernment to ensure our hearts and minds do not sacrifice our love for God as we acquire money and material things. Our resources used correctly ought to be used for development of God's kingdom.

Cleanse our Conscience and Purify our Hearts

1 Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,

Each day I try to set my mind upon God's goodness because I know if I can begin there the rest of the day can be far more enjoyable. When I set my

mind seek and do God's will I become a vessel for good things to happen. My mind is a receiver of so much information, but then needs to discern that information, and finally decide on how to act with the information. All this can happen in seconds. And sometimes, the actions taken can create harm. Words are said, anger is expressed, and lies may be told. The hurting of others often times ends up hurting me more even when the other person hurt me first and probably deserved it. This shame hurts the conscience, the heart, the soul, and the kingdom of heaven.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Although I cannot change the past, I can change the now with my choices. I can't undue what has been done, but I can do a humble confession of wrongs and take action to help those I may have hurt. There is a degree of cleansing that can occur when I take restorative action. When I sincerely love others, grace is usually there.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

We can read countless books on doing good, many of us have, yet without purifying our hearts, cleansing our conscience, and restoring souls through God's Character/Grace we can remain unchanged. The way to know God is to love God, and to do so with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength. God's truth and love can be unattractive when we are enslaved to sin. Correction of our misaligned beliefs and attitudes is essential to grow spiritually. How are we moving into correction? What attitudes and behaviors are we giving God for renewal?

1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Identify Evil Within Ourselves

Evil is typically not the word we want to hear when we think about ourselves. Some people may even struggle to accept they have anything evil at all. Yet, all sin is evil and who can say they are without sin?

In my pursuit of God I was instructed to examine myself for character defects. I new I wasn't perfect, but I was unaware of my defects. Having never thought like that before, I didn't know how to begin. I could easily point out how other people were wrong, but in a different way. I did not have a vocabulary ready in my mind to describe character defects. I needed to develop such a vocabulary.

To live by Biblical instructions we will need to grasp the understandings of the Bible particularly [good](#) and [evil](#). Condoning reactions or habits of anger, faultfinding, blaming, lying, isolation, fear, self-seeking, love of money, vanity, lust, etc. is to live contrary to how the Bible's authors describes growing with God. We will need to choose correction and act upon that choice in order to change. As we cooperate with God we can be changed through God. We can make gradual changes to improve our alignment with grace, if we choose to accept that grace into our hearts and minds.

It will be beneficial to gain understanding if we read and discuss Biblical information on [good](#) and [evil](#) to better discern what is spiritually [good](#) and [evil](#). When we communicate our understanding we first need to organize our understanding into language to have it make sense for others. This increased organization of our understanding helps us to understand it better. Teaching others teaches ourselves first, if we are living by our teaching.

We must enter this process with humility and teachability. We must take the position of a student ready to learn every day. We ought to guard ourselves from personal bias. Self-deception exists and to deny its existence is to encourage it. We can discover and learn much more as we grow wiser through our own spiritual development.

Romans 12:9 NKJV Behave Like a Christian

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”

If I am going to say I'm a Christian then I need to make sure I am doing more of what the Bibles says Christians are to do. Otherwise I am a liar and continuing to condone a lack of productivity with becoming more aligned with the Bible's instructions would make me self-deceived. I need to examine myself to see that I am growing in alignment with how the Bible describes Christian action and behavior.

Read [Galatians 6](#)

Introspection

I've always had an ability to introspect and think deeper. When I was in 3rd grade I started playing chess. In 4th grade I remember looking at another kid trying to understand how that kid was another living being like me. I realized I thought things through a bit more than my friends. I would think deeply about how hypocritical society was and feel angry. This led into many rebellious choices.

At 15 years of age I learned meditation in martial arts and how to focus my thoughts to help myself for safety and defense. In college I learned more meditation, self awareness, and psychology. In recovery I practiced these and more to grow and improve my ability.

Practice is necessary. Practice over time with reflection seeking to learn can create an opportunity for improvement. Our ability to examine ourselves can grow through practice of evaluation and increased attention toward our thinking.

Discerning wrong and right/good and evil can improve as we continue to test ourselves and our beliefs to see how well they agree with the Bible's descriptions. To discover our views on right and wrong/good and evil we will need to develop the skill of introspection. Our learned views can guide and direct us. The more we understand God's perfect love the more we may become empowered to move into it. The more we adjust our thoughts and actions into God's love the better we can understand and desire it. Such experiences with grace can promote further change.

Many of us may not know how to slow down our thinking enough to perceive our thought messages. It may be overwhelming. It can take time to wait for our racing minds to calm. Imagine spinning a top on a table and then waiting for it to stop. As we wait it can slow down. This can be true with our thinking. If we wait long enough, which may take repetition and practice, and as we wait, think about our thinking (form of meditation), over time through patience and perseverance we will often sense and increased ability to identify our thoughts and feel more calm.

As we practice moving slower our minds can begin to think slower. If everything is flying around at 100 miles per hour it can be challenging to identify our thoughts. Yet as we slow our physical responses and actions our

minds can begin to slow as well. This can be quite uncomfortable in the beginning, but there are many great spiritual rewards to benefit from with developing this skill.

2 Corinthians 10:5 ...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Romans 13:14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

"Introspection is the examination of one's own conscious thoughts and feelings."

"Introspection can determine any number of mental states including: sensory, bodily, cognitive, emotional and so forth"

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Introspection>

a reflective looking inward:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/introspection>

Also known as experimental self-observation, Wundt's technique involved training people to carefully and objectively as possible analyze the content of their own thoughts.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-introspection-2795252>

Introspection

- Examination, observation, record taking, learning our thoughts/choices and how they affect us.

Personal Story

Chain reaction: One day I was driving home and everything was great. Somehow I began thinking about baseball. I played baseball as a kid for nine years. I thought about my performance and how I kept getting better. Then I thought about how I stopped playing. I thought about my bad choices during that time of my life that led up to me not playing baseball anymore. Then I wondered how things might have been different if I kept playing. Next thing I know I'm upset thinking about how life just wasn't fair to me.

I was beginning to feel emotionally sad and frustrated and entering a blaming mentality. I quickly realized this, shook my head as if shaking my head would erase the thoughts, and then sought God's will. How does God want me to

view this scenario. I'm to view this scenario with love, forgiveness, truth, mercy, compassion, and with justice. I made my choices. Most importantly, I make my choices right now. I set my thoughts to see what good I can become involved with now.

Without introspection and self evaluation I would not be capable of making such corrections. I would continue down the path of 'poor me.' I would indulge in self-pity and grow more emotionally depressed. I have done this many times over the years and see it as a fact. My train of thinking affects my emotional well being. My choices can also affect others.

Introspection is increasing our awareness of what thoughts are going on behind the scenes. When we can identify the chain reactions of our thoughts and how they affect our feelings, attitudes, and choices we can become empowered to make adjustments to improve their affects. Continued learning about Godly solutions, how to align ourselves more with God, is like owning new tools that can help us improve our lives.

“There is a direct linkage among self-examination, meditation, and prayer. Taken separately, these practices can bring much relief and benefit. But when they are logically related and interwoven, the result is an unshakable foundation for life. Now and then we may be granted a glimpse of that ultimate reality which is God’s kingdom. And we will be comforted and assured that our own destiny in that realm will be secure for so long as we try, however falteringly, to find and do the will of our own Creator.”

Page 98 Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

“So we had to get down to causes and conditions. Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth... If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.”

Alcoholics Anonymous page 64

As we learn our thought messages, patterns, triggers, and their affects we can choose to replace them and change the reaction. The more we practice introspection the more we we can identify our chain of thoughts and make adjustments to improve our mental, emotional, and spiritual conditions.

Taking responsibility to direct our thought life means we will be proactive in our thought choices. It's easy to become accustomed to "who we are" and dismiss our ability to be different, change, or improve. **Fixed mindsets** use thoughts like "I can't" or "we've tried and it didn't work" which results in giving up or resisting new possible solutions. Let's agree to own these thoughts and be willing to replace them with new ones like, "maybe I can" or "let's try another way."

There are deep rooted and engrained thought patterns that are not easily redirected or turned off. Yet with persistence, self-discipline, endurance, and training, we can improve our ability to focus our thoughts toward God and away from evil.

Personal story (short version)

Around 2007 I saw in the Bible 'greatest commandment.' It emphasized loving God with our inward being. I evaluated myself and realized I was far from this idea.

Matthew 22:37-38 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment."

I decided I was going to give myself over to train and grow with this command. I began by getting up in the mornings and setting my mind with God. I went to the Bible to learn from the Bible. With concordance searches I went through every verse in the Bible on love, heart, mind, soul, and strength. I looked at how the Bible defined God so I could be as precise as possible to understand God's idea of love. 1 Corinthians 13 is a great description.

I realized I was failing badly with love. I avoided love. I was guarded, distrusting, over-protective, and constantly skeptical. I was in a hostile environment growing up and developed a hardened heart as a result. Compassion, kindness, gentleness, and love were things I believed to be a vulnerability and a weakness. Why would I let others in my heart where they could hurt me? This made no sense to my thinking. Yet, there it was in the Bible. Very clear instructions. Do I believe the scripture or not.

I was unsure. Yet, I needed to know. So I decided to test it. I began making different choices about how I interacted with others. I began practicing empathy, patience, compassion, and mercy. Over time, I saw results, good results. This was mind boggling.

I kept praying for guidance to be more compassionate and patient. I began praying for humility. As I prayed for such things I would prompt myself throughout the day to carry within my heart and mind such character and attitude. I believe to love God is to live by Godly character. To worship and serve God is to do what God wills me to do. At first I doubted, then through experience I saw, and seeing is believing.

Belief means action. If we say we believe and do not apply action, we may be self-deceived.

James 2:19-22 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

If we say we believe, but do not seek to correct our disobedient ways, are we following our belief? Looking inward to discover our thought messages we can learn a lot about what messages prompt and guide us. With continued practice of introspection we can improve our ability to evaluate and change our prompting thought messages. We will be able to correct thoughts which prompt us toward destructive ways and make decisions that can bring us more toward patience, peace, forgiveness, mercy, love, compassion, truth, justice, and generosity. But we will need to continue the practice of introspection.

Daily prompts, restarts, & plans

Daily prompts

We can choose how to begin our day with what messages we choose to set within our minds. We can pray, meditate, or read spiritual material, but we must take it to heart and carry it with us in attitude as we move forward. We will need messages ready to read, hear, and reflect upon. We can write down messages, create signs, and/or use notes. We can place them by a mirror,

near the bed, in our vehicle, or somewhere else that can help us see and reflect upon it. When we see our reminder we can read it slowly and keep it within our minds to see the good in it. Such practices can slowly build powerful thought messages that can gradually reshape the way we think, our mental attitude.

Once we develop a regular daily pattern of focused meditation upon God's good character traits, we can begin to improve our likelihood of experiencing them. Getting started at the beginning of our day with a solution focused attitude places us in a much better position to take such action.

Perhaps we wake up with a bad attitude already sabotaging our day. We may be in such poor shape we find ourselves stuck and completely resistant to do good. "God help me" can sometimes be a powerful prayer that lowers our resistance enough to see God's goodness.

Restarts

Many of us get busy in our day with various distractions. Keeping our practice with introspection can empower us to see when we get off balance, become angry, fearful, anxious, hurried, worrisome, or pessimistic. At any point in the day we can choose to slow down, take a break, and seek peace. Perhaps this may be difficult at work or school, but we will have moments in between or afterwards where it will be possible, if we choose to do it. It may get in the way of other things, yet for good reasons. We can reflect upon Godly messages, grace, and beauty. This can help empower us to regain a solution focused direction and attitude.

Plans

Remember the saying, "those who fail to plan, plan to fail" Winston Churchill. If we do not have a plan to grow in Godly character then we probably won't. A plan is necessary to keep ourselves on track. In order for us to develop a new way of thinking about anything will require frequent repetition. Also, we will need to be present with our hearts and the Spirit of God.

There is a saying around some meetings "you can't change sick thinking with sick thinking." This means our understanding alone is insufficient to grow with God. We will need to orient our minds and hearts with God to grow with God. This is not something we can easily conjure up with our own thinking.

Early on I was introduced to the prayer St. Francis. I don't typically do things, just to do them or because everyone else is doing it. I try to understand the purpose within the activities. When I read the prayer of St. Francis I was introducing my mind to something it did not understand. I was asking to be an "instrument of peace," "to bring love," and "to bring joy." This was a request to God, to help me do these things.

Reading this prayer the first time just brought confusion. I understood these were good things to do, but I wasn't the vessel for such activities. I was a mess. I was quick to anger and slow to trust. I was harsh and over protective. I had thick boundaries. My prayer that was repeated subconsciously probably went something like this.

Prayer of St. Selfishness

"Lord, Let me be a vessel of letting everyone know how wrong they are, that where there is intimacy or sincerity, I may bring sarcasm, that where there is generosity, I may get free stuff, that where there is trust, I can exploit others for my benefit, that where there is peace, I can do things for shock value, and where there is patience, I may move ahead and be first, Let me seek to get as much as I can for me and have fun. For it is by taking that one gets, it is by thinking of me first, that I am taken care of, and it is by keeping everyone out that I am protected."

The prayer above that was at the subconscious level was my plan. It wasn't a written plan, it was a plan I learned to follow that was ingrained in my being. So when I began reading the prayer of St. Francis I had two plans going on. There was the plan ingrained within me and a new one I knew very little about. The one I knew very little about would be difficult to act upon for various reasons, but I chose to do it anyway.

To follow a new plan I know little about, while rejecting the old contrary plan, required self-control, a diligent focus, and new action. These new actions of peace, forgiveness, mercy, and love were necessary for me to have any success. I needed to practice these things daily over a long period of time to get it ingrained within my being. And along the way I began to experience a new spiritual reality.

Everyday we ought to set our minds toward our plan which we develop that has clear obtainable objectives. As we pursue our plan we may encounter

fears, resistance, frustrations, or doubt. Such temporary hurdles are part of the journey for us to find solutions and gain skills to overcome them. If our hurdle is fear, then prompting ourselves with faith focused prayers and thoughts can help. If our hurdle is resentment, then we can pray for forgiveness and mercy. We have many hurdles tripping us up as we get going. As our thoughts go to fear, impatient, or resentment we can change our thinking from problem focusing toward solutions. The spiritual solutions will be in the direction of faith, peace, love, mercy, forgiveness, patience, truth, impartiality, compassion, and generosity. Let's just take it one hurdle at a time, hence the saying, "one day at a time."

Journey not a destination

This is not a class we take for a year and then we are done. This is a learning process to put into practice for life. After a while though what seems like work will become more automatic. As we practice these solutions more and more over time they can become ingrained within us. This new action can slowly feel more normal.

Thoughts practiced, believed, and used regularly over time often become part of who we are until we decide to change them. That said, we will need to be self aware (know our thoughts) to ensure we do not wander away by distractions (our thoughts guiding us elsewhere). Such wandering can begin with positive goals, more income, and end with a lost spiritual connection. God will need to continue to be our top priority.

The practice of mentoring others freely to improve our spiritual awareness and experiences ought to become part of our daily lives. The regular application of God's love, truth, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, justice, patience, peace, and generosity is a powerful, amazing, and grace filled way of life. As we take new Godly action, practice Godly character more and more in new and different ways, we can evaluate and learn from our new experiences. Each day it is up to us to choose God.

Make visible our thoughts

It would be best to first write down what we believe to be good and evil. We ought to examine ourselves, our thoughts, to see that we are thinking with the good heart and mind. Are God's ways and virtues what we seek and

practice? Why or why not? Investigation into this will be required in order to grow.

The Bible is full of examples of what is good and evil. Since we each have access to the Spirit we ought to listen closely to the Spirit as we read the Bible for spiritual truth. We can learn to see ourselves and life differently if we can open our minds and hearts to accept God's truth. The good and evil within the Bible can be validated by the Spirit within us revealing our incorrect understandings. This is a very personal journey and to avoid getting personal will be to deny ourselves this inward spiritual truth.

When I read how God valued love and peace and at the same time became aware how I was not in such love and peace, I realized I needed to change. I accepted this information and committed to let God work through me. I committed to spend more time thinking and praying for love and peace. Then I began seeing how I could put into practice new action that could build more love and peace. Through repeating such action more and more over time I experienced more love and peace within my heart, mind, soul, and relationships.

If by chance we are clueless and have developed within us a mindset which blocks us against accepting and taking responsibility for our choices and attitudes, then we ought to seek out guidance toward humility and learn to rigorously follow simple continued structure that can illuminate our self deceptive tendencies. We will need to surround ourselves with others who can point out corrective truth and we will need to listen and own our misunderstandings. We will need to see our misunderstandings and correct them. We cannot improve if we are unwilling to see how we can improve. Unless we can see where we are mistaken, we will not be able to move into correction.

We can begin discovering spiritual growth opportunities by asking those around us how we may have wronged or hurt them while evaluating closely our own inward responses throughout the entire process. We may become defensive, as this is a normal response to criticism, but it can come from pride or fear which is spiritually destructive. Humility and faith in God must become our new way of life. We are to become less and God is to become more.

God is the solution and we are the problem. This is not a new idea. Our inward structure sometimes can be so guarded against accepting our wrongs we can become irrational and unwilling. Sometimes learning how irrational we are may be the first step to open our minds to see more truth. The bottom line is that we must give into the process of looking at ourselves and accepting correction. If we believe in God and worship God then giving ourselves over to God's good will be a natural result. Yet there seems to be many people who claim to believe and worship who want to live life the way they chose outside of God's grace. The differences lie in the fruit that is produced.

Matthew 7:20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Yet how can we identify fruit we do not have. We must first experience deeper truth, love, peace, mercy, compassion, impartiality, forgiveness, etc. We can only identify at the level we experience. To identify people who follow God deeper we must step into grace deeper.

We must agree on some basic Godly Character traits to help us navigate together and stay on a similar path toward unity and having a similar mindset. Understanding through the experience of God's Character traits we can better discern right and wrong. Since God's Character traits are spiritually

Character Correction Chart

<u>Probable Wrongs</u>	<u>God's Character Traits</u>
Hate	Love
Don't care	Compassion
No Mercy	Mercy
Resentment	Forgiveness
Anxiety, restless, chaotic	Peace
Rushed, hurried, intolerant	Patience
Superficial, material, worldly	Spirit
Lies, manipulation, exploitation	Truth
Selfish ambition, cheating, stealing,	Justice (impartiality, fairness)
Miserly	Generosity

right then its opposites are often times spiritually wrong. We can look for what is oppositional to God's Character to help us see our wrongs. See the Character Correction Chart.

Identify favoritism, partiality, preferences

Within us lies a set of unique beliefs based upon our personal experiences. We each have developed habits which we rely upon consciously or subconsciously to navigate our decisions and choices. We develop traditions, customs, rituals, and manners which we get used to, comfortable with, and dependent upon. We expect them, anticipate them, and can be easily upset if they get canceled or changed. These can easily lead us toward favoritism, bias, and idolatry.

Someone who is left handed will favor left handed devices. Someone who speaks english will prefer the english language. When we get accustomed to a form of sin, which can involve rituals, we may rely, expect, prefer, favor, and look forward to our participation in them. Our thoughts can lose sight of God's will and character. We can selfishly be hoping to participate in our self-deceived self-gratification in sinful activities and thinking. We can often times "want it our way." We can get in the habit of seeking out our own ways of making ourselves feel good because we know best. We can become resistant to trying new things. This resistance can keep us from developing Godly good.

When I take action to amend wrongs I have done to others it is never easy. I always feel uncomfortable and every time there is a level of humility and sincerity being offered by me to the other person I do not want to experience. Yet that kind of action, in my experience changes the relationship. It certainly changes it in me and seems to change it in others. A sense of respect is often given back, because I have offered Godly sincerity to them. They glimpse something they probably rarely and perhaps have never encountered. I demonstrate love and care for their soul. I am showing our spiritual life is more important than pride and self-gratification. There is a lot of spiritual good in such action.

Godly sincerity is getting real to do what is best for helping God's kingdom. Sometimes traditions and rules can get in the way. This may be why Jesus helped others on the Sabbath. Traditions are often created with good

purposes, but we must always be attentive to God and the Holy Spirit above any rules or traditions. Love, truth, peace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, impartiality, and generosity working together ought to be placed with higher importance than traditions or anyone's expectation, wants, etc. Coming to church with a bad attitude rushing the family probably isn't what God desires. It's important to check who we are trying to please, people or God.

Another look at James 1:14-15

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. NKJV

We each have preferences within us that almost instinctively move us into judgements and rationalizations in favor of such preferences. Unfortunately, some of these preferences are spiritually unhealthy. And when we have trained ourselves over and over to perform rituals our bodies will urge us toward repetition of it, to keep doing it. If we do not do it, it will feel very awkward and perhaps even wrong. Our minds can tell us it is wrong to do Godly good.

Just like our outward rituals our inward thoughts and attitudes can become customary to practice excuses, avoidance, complaining, blaming, hurry, fear, dishonesty, or anger. Many of us may be inclined to move quickly or say things that are not true. It is essential that we choose to not let our habits, preferences, and leanings control us away from God's Character.

If we are in the habit of lying and God is truth then we must begin to speak more truth. If we are in the habit of moving fast and God is peace and patience, then we ought to slow down. We are to take action to grow God's goodness. We must choose to let God's Character be in us and part of us as we live our lives. Our preferences, wants, and favoritism can be leading us out of God's goodness. Instead of half truths or white lies, we ought to speak the truth plainly. We do it because it is the spiritually right thing to do and as we do it we set ourselves in a position to see the good in it.

We must agree to begin letting go of our worldly ways and seek the development of God's Character. We must begin to recognize our attitudes, thoughts, habits, and beliefs that are out of alignment with God's Character and begin taking action into correction. Our instruction is to align ourselves more and more with God's Character traits, since it is God's Character/Grace that will provide the healing and restoration.

We can evaluate ourselves and our relationship interactions. Here are some sample questions to evaluate dishonesty: Have we lied to avoid conflict, used false flattery for encouragement, or manipulated conversations for comfort? Do we practice exaggerations or minimizing situations? Did we lie for some selfish gain? Have we lost trust or hurt our own integrity due to our dishonesty? Are others upset, resentful, distrusting, or disappointed due to our lies? Does our yes mean yes and our no mean no? Are we clear or do we throw out subtle hints?

Here are some sample evaluation questions of being hasty: Have we been hasty with others cutting conversations short, interrupting people, or finishing their sentences? Are we quick to speak and slow to listen? Do we value our pace more importantly than others? Do we become angry, impatient, or frustrated when we have to slow down or when we do not get things as fast as we want? How do we feel when we have to wait? Do we see others as too slow? If others are slow do we think less of them or more of ourselves? Are we better because we are faster? What does God think?

These are some example ideas which we ought to deeply reflect upon daily. We ought to meditate on God's Character; what it is, how to practice it, what good it brings to others, and how it helps our souls. Correction of our own thoughts and attitudes into being with God's grace and goodness is the goal.

As we search for our own faults, wrongs, and imperfections we may find ourselves defending our preferences, attitude, or behavior. Such defensiveness can seem to come automatically without conscious effort. We can instinctively deny accusations, avoid facing our wrongs, and quit the process of correction with believable reasons or justifications. This is a dangerous fact for many of us. We must always go to God to see what God wants through God's character for God's truth. Human beings are plagued with many false beliefs outside of Godly good.

Throughout my time in 12 step meetings, bible studies, and group therapy there has always existed limitations to the instruction and experience. All these groups had limitations on how much truth, sincerity, love, justice, and peace there was to be experienced within them. Groups are limited by time, by participants abilities or willingness, by its structure topics, etc. Rarely will there be a collaborative effort to help someone process an understanding deeper. These groups are about a quick share with a topic. And more often

than not, people speak to sound smart more than to humble themselves for a deeper understanding. Groups can often only go as deep as the newest person can go. (To better understand limitations read Choice Empowerment)

I have worked with children for 14 years so far. Children come up with many ways to avoid compliance. An obstinate child will do exactly what is said in a way that is very wrong; say don't run in the hallway - they start to skip, say sit down - they sit on the floor instead of the chair, or say be quiet - the next time you ask them a question they won't answer. Adults can do the same thing. They can say they attend, read, serve, and believe, and yet in their hearts, minds, and attitudes be far away from Godly character.

When a child hurts someone we might have them apologize for the harm done. At times children can apologize insincerely at which we tell them to say it nicely, but then we may be just teaching them how to be fake. Being fake has become so frequent in some places it is socially awkward to have sincerity and speak the truth. We ought to slow down with God's peace and have sincere conversations with each other, especially youth, about Godly compassion and mercy. These conversations can help ourselves understand it better. The conversation itself ought to have humble sincere truth with love. That alone will bring Godly good.

Facing and correcting our misaligned development will require personal sacrifice of our maladapted ways toward new ones. Humble sincere truth is required. This is the process of trial and error to see how God's ways are right. As we move our thoughts and actions into alignment with God and explore what happens there we can learn from the experience. We must learn to deny our self interests for the sake of growing in God's interests. Our sinful rituals and traditions must be gradually let go and God's Character traits or principles must be practiced as replacements with repetition and frequency to establish itself within our new identity.

New Action

Progress with God is the goal. To progress is to improve. If we are to progress and improve that means we will need to become more aligned with God within our hearts, minds, and attitudes. Like increasing weights at the gym we will need to increase the amount of effort, time, focus, and attention to align our inward parts. Yet we must desire it. We are to love God and that means love who God is and God's ways.

When I first began this spiritual journey I was instructed to follow a simple plan to help me stay focused upon God. I was to pray each morning for God to guide me and help me to do God's will. At night I was to thank God for helping me stay sober. This simple task is one I struggled with and can still struggle with. The task isn't difficult, it's the convincing myself to do it, to want to do it. There is a humbling of self that is required to do this task with honesty and sincerity. Humbling myself is the difficult part. Getting with God has to become more important than whatever else I would rather do.

I have sponsored/mentored a number of people and all of them have struggled with adopting a simple plan of new action to align themselves closer to God. It is normal to resist change.

We may experience an **Ambiguity Effect**. We can't immediately understand the benefits that will come from seeking God, we just have to trust the new action will lead to something. Let's discover what is there with sincere honest action. Let's trust God that there is something much better. Let's not fear being different. Let's see what grace can bring as we participate in it. Let's continue to let go of old ways of thinking and develop new Godly ways of thinking. Let's understand through experience God's goodness.

Obedience with God's Character and embracing change will often provide a feeling of a new identity. This is a very good thing. We will be applying new and different behavior and associating with new and different people in new and different ways. We will be seeing and sensing the world differently. People will often respond to us differently. As we participate in new character we are creating new character that will shape how others view and respond to us. It will be normal to feel different with a new identity that is evolving. We were created in God's image, drifted away from that image, and now are called to grow, seek, learn, train, and improve in God's image. We are essentially to come back to God. Humility is essential.

Every day we must seek God's ways (new understanding) to replace our selfish ways (old understanding). We must make the choice of improving with God. Over time as we purify our hearts we can learn more and more of God's Goodness and Grace. We can slowly develop new preferences with God's ways.

We can go back and forth with good days and not so good days. When denial and avoidance comes, it can conjure up fear, pride, resentment, many forms of selfishness/self preservation, and dishonesty. We may rationalize and justify ideas to keep ourselves from choosing Godly correction. Every day we ought to carefully examine our thinking and attitude to see that it is moving toward God and God's Character or we can easily be tricked back into our previously developed spiritually destructive ways. Procrastination, delay, avoiding or skipping days, with this personal spiritual responsibility can be detrimental toward our spiritual growth. We can lose momentum in our progression and gain momentum with sin. If we are not growing with God we are moving in the direction of sin. Our condition does not pause. We are either seeking God or not. To not seek God is sin. Sin is to miss the mark.

Each day we ought to get our thoughts focused upon God's Character and identify prompting thoughts toward misalignment. At first it will require extra effort, but if we can continue doing it consistently, it gets easier and can become a habit. As we learn to recognize error and better understand correction, we can improve our discernment abilities and become empowered to make more righteous choices.

When I am seeking to build peace. I must try to understand peace more. Am I doing things that can bring peace to myself and others. This is a spiritual activity that involves a pure heart and clean conscience. God's peace involves a pure heart and a clean conscience. There are many ways to run and hide from problems that can create a sense of comfort or euphoria. Running and hiding is not the action I see described in the Bible. If anything, I am to run to God with faith and trust. God doesn't run and hide. God faces, reveals truth, and patiently perseveres with good. The more I can face truth with patience and perseverance the more Godly good I can experience.

As our discernment improves, we can learn to sense spiritual wrongs and God's Goodness while building our inward ability to quickly address old destructive patterns and make corrections more quickly and smoothly. We can learn to look forward to the experience of God's Peace and Love. We can learn to see more our gains with God and less our loss of sin. As we learn to experience love more and more we can build new rituals, customs, and traditions, with sincerity, truth, compassion, justice, mercy, forgiveness, peace, and generosity.

We ought to pursue the experience of all of God's character traits working together within us and outwardly toward others.

Identifying Fear

Fear exist in all of us. Fear is necessary for survival. We ought to fear things that can harm us to help keep us safe. We live in a dangerous world where things can happen at any time so it is good to have a sense of fear. But sometimes fear can become dominating within our thoughts. We can become obsessively fearful and worry about things we have no control over whatsoever.

We ought to fear God, but with reverence and awe. God is what can save us from wrath and unnecessary punishment if we can trust in God's ways. Yet much of our punishment may be largely traced to our choices, choices out of God's grace. Fearing God, being afraid of God, would be like a criminal who is seeking to do wrong and is afraid of the police because they will be caught. This is not how the spiritual system of consequences work. Our running or hiding from God is what creates punishment for ourselves. Our choices create the punishment. God forgives, saves, and heals.

Let's look at it this way. If a doctor says "come to me and take my medicine or you will die." But you believe the doctor is out to get you because he said you will die so you do not go to the doctor and die from your own illness. It's kinda like that. Forget the 'turn or burn' theology which focuses upon punishment. Instead, see that there is a solution, love. See more of God's love and less of wrath. Embrace love. There, often lies the struggle which this book is about. Let's struggle to grow our hearts, minds, souls, and strength toward love.

There are many types of phobias. ([list of phobias](#))

We can identify our fears which influence and can control our choices in order to find the error in them. Many fears are simply irrational or beyond our control.

A good book to read about the physiological effects of fear is "Why Zebras don't get ulcers." Zebras tend not to worry about traffic, grades, bills, or jobs. They tend to only fear the lions.

Choosing to relive fearful thoughts about things we have no control over places our minds, hearts, souls, and bodies in harm's way. Fear floods our bodies with chemicals that can hurt us over time. Habitual fear may create disorders. Many of us can, often with help, learn to make thought replacements to help us move out of fear and into faith.

When I first came to God I was full of fear. I feared the police, because I did some things that were illegal. I feared rejection, because of my pride. I feared people, because I had been lied to, exploited, and abused. I chose to spend time with people who chose evil which set me up for a lot of hurt. I feared my family, because I did many wrongs and they thought less of me. I feared lines because I was impatient. I feared feelings because when I had them I was mistreated or rejected by others.

We all have fear, but to live with God is about slowly increasing our mental responses to run more by faith and less by fear. We must gradually learn to replace our fearful thinking toward God reliance and trust.

I trusted God to participate in groups. I trusted to get a sponsor. I trusted to practice prayer, examine myself for evil choices and fear, make restitution for harm done, confession, meditation, continued study, helping others, service positions, and so many other things. Living with God became seeking changes within my heart, mind, soul, and strength to better serve God.

When I had a fearful thought I was to recognize it and in my mind take it to God and then see what a Godly response to it might be. Then, of course, act upon that response.

Most of our anger stems from a perceived threat of some variety which has to do with fear. Fear delay, fear of betrayal, fear of losing money or not having enough, fear of losing _____ (fill in the blank), fear death, fear of missing out, fear of being disliked, and we can add an almost endless list of identified phobias.

Within our minds it is crucial we evaluate the messages we tell ourselves and insure we are not self-condemning. Using punishment to do good is not God's design. Instead, we humble ourselves toward forgiveness and mercy. We are not evil people trying to do good, we are sick people seeking good medicine. Is it good to beat ourselves up for getting sick? Does that help us get healthy? If we do wrong we ought to seek correction. Some of us can become so

focused on how wrong we are that we completely miss seeing how to do right. Let's put down our fault finding glasses and pick up our solution finding glasses. The quicker we can get thinking about the solution the faster we can get into it and experience the good within it.

Resentment and anger ought to be removed from our thinking. Instead of focusing and reliving within our minds over and over evil events, we can shift our thinking toward God's good ways of Love, Mercy, Forgiveness, Peace, etc. and how we can participate in it. We can accept responsibility of our holding on to evil thoughts and chose to seek God's Grace. As we set our minds and hearts toward love and peace we can let the evil fade away while continuing to hold steady our focus upon God's good. We can understand this more as we put it into practice. It's tougher to think resentfully when we are humbly practicing acts of mercy. We ought to pray for mercy and forgiveness knowing we can accept it into our hearts and minds simply by choice.

Selfishness occurs when we place our plans, ideas, preferences, expectations, and entitlements ahead of God's. Who is really in charge? Are we really fully relying upon God? When we insist things go the way we think they should go, aren't we playing God. Perhaps God has a better plan? It's healthy to consider we can be wrong, because we are. Avoiding seeing our wrongs can greatly interfere with correction. Again, we ought to shift our thinking to trust and rely upon God's Character and how we can put it into action in every situation. If we become impatient, unloving, or manipulative, then we are moving away from God's grace.

Evil has to do with dishonesty. Manipulation, exaggeration, distortion of truth, half-truths, and white lies are dishonest and evil most of the time. To avoid legalism about 'never' lying let's just agree to only lie in contexts where God has affirmed it to be good. I believe such a search would be like straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.

How we speak the truth ought to be done with love and patience toward peace. We ought to be just and bold, but also gentle and kind. It took me many years to improve patience and compassion. I have shared truth with love many times and others were hurt. And a lot of the time I blamed them for their hurt, because I still did not understand the power of love and gentleness.

We ought to speak uncomfortable truth and sometimes people will get hurt no matter how much love or gentleness comes with it. Fearing hurting others is not how we are to base decisions. Speaking the truth in love is how we base our decisions. We are not fear conflict. Within conflict lies the process of transformation. We cannot transform without some experience of conflict.

Proverbs 25: 15 “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.”

There is a lot of power behind speaking the truth with patient perseverance, love, gentleness, and sincerity. Yet only those who practice it will know and understand this truth.

Thought Action

We ought to take time each day in the morning and at night to reveal and identify our attitudes and beliefs to search for good and how to grow in it. In the morning we ought to set our minds and hearts to seek God and to sense God. We ought to stay alert to our inward behavior to assess and discern what thoughts are guiding us. When we notice a thought pattern prompting us away from God’s goodness we ought to write it down and learn to recognize patterns.

We all have certain patterns of thought which guide us toward certain behaviors. In idolatry, we can engage in anticipation of our obsession. We may spend more time thinking about it. This is one example of pattern thinking. Another example is noticing how certain times of the day or when around certain people a recurring thought develops. We may notice our moods being affected with similar patterns.

I noticed that telling kids at school what to do didn’t work. Students would be cranky and then I would lay down rules to try to stop the attitudes and then they would develop new ways to be annoying. It was a loop that kept playing itself. I was always told, “If nothing changes, nothing changes.” I thought I was changing things by giving new rules, but really it was part of an old pattern. It was the way I was trying to manage that needed to change.

So I thought about God and realized what might be needed was love. This was very different. I began asking the students what they wanted and communicating with them more. They became less annoying. As I respected

them more, they respected me more. Having students say Mr. or Mrs., be quiet, follow rules act. does not earn respect. Seeking to care for them in the learning environment earns respect. The more I disconnect connect, the more they disconnect. I must be the first one to humble myself and do the right thing to help entice the other to do the same. When we sincerely respect each other and stop defending against each other, much good can happen. This has so far proven to work with the kids and my marriage over the past decade. It not only works, but as I keep growing with God in character and attitude, so do my relationships. It works and it continues to improve.

This process is about continuing beyond goals. As I achieve goals toward peace, love, sincerity, truth, mercy etc. I need to see how I can continue to grow more and keep at it. I seek to stay challenged in my spiritual journey. I must continue to recognize patterns of thinking and behaving that could use some tweaks toward improvement with Godly good.

We can recognize when we are fearful, resentful, self-centered, or dishonest. Then we can see how we can seek God, have mercy, forgive, serve others in love, and speak the truth. We can be clear about these things to keep us spiritually active and productive.

Most of us will have plenty of items to write down. For many of us, it can be overwhelming. It can be overwhelming to see our wrongs. We all have wrongs in different ways. Let's begin seeing how we can step into righteous thinking and acting. Let's shift our minds from our wrongs into our participation with the righteousness of God. With each small righteous step into God's grace we can participate in building something spiritually good.

Our self-resentment or resentment toward others can shift our attitude away from God. Resentment can lower our motivation to seek God and has to do with unhealthy fear. Let's turn that over and shift our thoughts into faith and trust with God's Character. And if it takes all day, which is often not the case, then so be it. All day shifting our thoughts towards God can be a very good thing to do. As thoughts develop to avoid seeking Godly good we can meditate on them to see what might be going on there. Introspection is essential to create real inward change.

Confession

Learn, Experience, Persevere, & Endure

Thoughts, beliefs, and actions which heal, restore,
and enrich our souls:

Love
Compassion
Mercy
Forgiveness
Peace
Patience
Spirit
Truth
Justice (impartiality, fairness)
Generosity

Learn & Experience God's Character

(We seek, act, listen, observe, reflect, meditate, pray, sense, feel,
and communicate with God's Spirit continually.)

Persevere & Stand Firm

Having a new experiential understanding of God's Character we
resist our habitual ways and strive to continue in it.

Endure a New Identity

We are renewed in thought, attitude, heart, and soul. Adapting to a
new experiences and understandings enduring many changes.

Progress not perfection

We only compare ourselves with ourselves. We continuously
evaluate ourselves to see how we are growing in God's Character,
Righteousness, Goodness, and Grace.

Many of us have done things that have brought uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. We all have made some bad choices. No one is perfect. There are many different ways to respond to the inward uncomfortable effects from our bad choices. We can medicate with mind altering substances to try to treat the discomfort, distract ourselves with goals and tasks to keep our minds busy and away from the guilt/shame, or even build up a system of denial and

lies to convince ourselves it wasn't our fault. None of these choices address and fix the problem. The Bible provides a solution. We ought to confess our bad choices to an understanding spiritual guide (discussion, reveal, bring to light) and then repent (grow with God).

Prayer, meditation, discussion, and reading to learn more about vanity, fear, grudges, anger, idolatry, exploitation, lies, lust and other forms of spiritual evil can help us as we begin writing down all that divides us from God's goodness. Anger, fear, selfish-ambition, and grudges can create sense of defensiveness around others and the Holy Spirit within us. If we are following guidance from fear we may be resisting God's love. When in doubt, it may be best just to write it down and share it to see what God reveals.

The details of what happened may not be as important as the spiritual effects of what happened. We ought to keep our focus with God's goodness and how we can learn from the spiritual error so we may better tend to spiritual corrective action. The goal is spiritual healing and restoration within ourselves and others. Of course we will also need to fix and replace material that was taken, damaged, or lost. Through our repentance we will take action to make right our wrongs.

Confession involves forgiveness and letting go of grudges to seek and pursue peace. We must learn to forgive ourselves and others for mistakes no matter how evil they were. Confession is admitting truth about ourselves we may not want to acknowledge or others to know. We can grow in truth as we do this. We can grow in being genuine and sincere. We can be real perhaps for the first time.

We can confess our wrongs by sharing them with ourselves, another person, and God. This is a spiritual task involving mind, heart, and soul. We are sharing our wrongs with the full intent of correcting them which also involves repentance and restitution.

When a confession is done correctly it is done with a humble, sincere, and honest attitude, admitting what we did was wrong or hurtful. If we do not believe it was wrong then we may be simply speaking empty words devoid of spiritual value. Our hearts and minds both must be involved in order to sense and learn how good and evil partakes within us and others by our choices. If we are hardhearted, walled up, stiff necked, and insensitive we may block out

the hoped for heart and spirit centered end result of forgiveness, love, and peace. Forgiveness is a spiritual sensation, experience, and belief.

My first attempt at this process was with someone who was guiding me through the motions of sharing my wrongs. I was not empathetic and nor was I guided to be empathetic. Empathy came later through making amends. The first lesson in confession was seeing and owning my wrongs.

When we are ready to confess, we ought to choose to do it with someone who understands this process and has done it themselves. We ought to remember our goal is to admit and share our wrongs. It would be best to meet with someone who has a fair understanding of forgiveness and mercy. Our goal is to accept our wrongs and improve in God's Righteousness, so being with someone who can better guide us in that direction can be quite helpful.

Like any other learning, we ought to take time in the confession process. We ought to sit in it patiently listening to our hearts and think about what we have learned and sensed in the experience. It may be of high value to write about the experience sharing our thoughts and feelings. We may want to keep what we have written in a safe place for future reflection as we learn more about spiritual values on our journey.

Confusion, fear, vulnerability, uncertainty can be part of the process. As we continue experiencing God's Ways and Character we will, through evaluation, reflection, and examination, learn more and more about God's kingdom present within and around us.

Repent

Here is a story that provides an example of how to identify, confess, and correct spiritual wrongs.

"I was at work finding fault with other workers and management. I was becoming angry and hurt by the irresponsibility and unprofessionalism. I focussed on the little details how other people were doing things wrong. I was growing intolerant, impatient, and angry. My anger began to negatively affect my relationships and my sanity. I was quite unsettled and the severity of my disposition brought fear. I felt I was losing control. I went to God and began seeking God's will. I realized God was patient and I was not. God was forgiving and I was holding grudges. God was merciful and I was inwardly

wanting others to hurt. I blamed them for my suffering when it was me and my expectations, wants, and entitlements that set me up for disappointment. I believed people were supposed to behave and act a certain way and thought my anger would somehow teach them. Well, it didn't. It just made my life worse. It not only made my life worse, but it made the work atmosphere more uncomfortable.

My character was way out of line with God's will. I reached out to a support group and discussed my struggles (confession) and to get a new focus with God. I met with a mentor to get some ideas on how to better connect with God. I learned about God's Character traits and how I could better practice them throughout my day.

I needed to begin making changes in my thinking and in my attitude. I began setting my thoughts each morning upon God's love and peace. I prayed for strength to become more merciful, patient, and forgiving. As I practiced this new focus and attitude I became more merciful and less angry. As I imagined in my mind peaceful thoughts and attitude, I became more patient and helpful toward others. I practiced thought statements which helped to guide me to slow down and use words that better aligned with God's Character traits. I stopped looking at how wrong others were and instead focused on how I could help them spiritually.

I learned to recognize when my thoughts were focused on fear, resentment, or selfishness, and to shift them toward God's Character. I realized that whatever problem I believed existed, the solution for me was to set my heart, mind, and strength in the direction of God's Character. Humbly praying for help toward such things has been the beginning of spiritual wisdom.

As a result, my relationships improved, my attitude improved, and I became far more productive at work. I also became more willing to speak more gently toward changes at work which seemed to help everyone. I began to enjoy my job more and more. My home life improved and I felt closer to God. Stress had dropped significantly and I could think more clearly. The more I aligned with God's Character the better my life became."

Repenting is turning to God. If we are to obey God's key commandment then we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This action involves spiritual correction. Once we have identified our wrongs we can begin participation toward corrective action. To turn from and turn towards

means we are to cease participation in one thing and begin participating in another. Instead of lying we speak the truth, instead of harboring resentments we forgive, instead of not caring we have compassion, instead of being hasty and pushy we become patient, etc. Repentance is not just stopping something, it is building Godly good. If we are not building Godly good, we may not be repenting.

In order to repent we must change our thought attitudes. Our minds conjure up many different reasons to justify our attitudes and actions. We ought to begin practicing turning away from justifying spiritual destruction and finding justification for God's Character. We need more thoughts to support our participation into God's Character. Instead of thinking sabotaging thoughts, "I'll do it tomorrow," "I can't," or "nobody else is doing it," we can think to ourselves encouraging thoughts, "I'll can do it now," "I can," or "I can be the one who begins which can help everyone." If we are to serve God like all servants of God have done, then we are to do as God wants us to do. Not perfectly, yet with improvements.

There are many thought strategies that can help. Here are some common expressions used in recovery; "One day at a time," "easy does it," "first things first," and "keep it simple." We all benefit from motivation and encouragement. We ought to encourage ourselves more and more into God's Goodness, Righteousness, Character, and Grace. Repentance involves change. We ought to examine ourselves to ensure we are changing with God.

Restitution

I had profound experiences making restitution for harm I did to others. In recovery, I experienced certain coincidences that I believe were set up by God. The odds of them happening the way they did are simply ridiculous. It's like going on a winning streak with the lottery just as your filing for bankruptcy. I have heard these coincidences called 'coinciGod's.'

There is one story that really helped shape my spiritual awakening. In the amends process I was to make a list of those I had hurt. There was a girl I wanted to put on the list but had not seen her in years and had no way of contacting her, so I did not write her name down.

A week later I was on a 10 mile bus ride heading home. About 5 miles into it a girl gets on the bus and it looked a lot like that same girl I did not put on my list. I felt frozen and wondered if God was doing something. I was still uncertain about God at the time. I thought this was a great opportunity to make amends. I thought about getting up and going to her to see if it was her, but then I noticed the other people on the bus and became fearful of the possible looks and negative reactions I could get. So I made a private deal with God. In my head I told God that if He would have her get off at the same stop I get off then I would approach her. Five miles later at my stop she got off.

Now, how would I, an introvert, talk with her? I sucked at engaging people. I avoid people. I just asked her if she went to 'school name' school and she said yes. She avoided eye contact. The light at the crosswalk turned and she quickly began walking away from me. I felt humiliated and rejected. I felt angry. I decided to stop this nonsense and walked the other way.

But then as I was in the middle of a crosswalk on a busy street it hit me, that I made an agreement with God. I stopped frozen realizing I was going to ignore something I believed God set up for me to do. I made a deal with God. Am I going to do it? Is this what those people mean by "God is everything, or God is nothing?" Would I ever see this girl again? This was big. I humbled myself and turned back after her. This turning was repentance. I turned from what I wanted to do out of spite and anger to do what God wanted me to do with humility and servitude. I went over to her and told her who I was, then she remembered. I apologized for my behavior and she forgave me. She was actually pretty nice about the whole thing.

This process of humbling myself to do what is right when everything in me tells me not to is repentance. Because there is so many ungodly developed beliefs and attitudes within me, doing Godly acts feels wrong and quite uncomfortable. Yet afterwards, when I do Godly good, I receive grace, peace, and love. There is great spiritual power in living more aligned with God's goodness. The power is peace, love, belonging, truth, just, merciful, and giving. It's not the actions, but the spiritual way, attitude, and sensation within the actions. We must pay close attention to our senses to sense God's good within the actions. How does it affect hearts, minds, and souls?

Restoring spiritual damage is extremely healthy for the spiritual kingdom. Spiritual damage can develop quickly and easily, sometimes without our

awareness of it. We can be surrounded by others who are deeply hurt and not even notice. It is paramount that we seek to participate with God's goodness in our hearts, minds, and attitudes.

We ought to assess carefully what we have done that hurt others. We ought to be thorough each day to learn and discover more about ourselves which can illuminate wrongs we have done. When we become aware of wrongs we have done we can write them down and think of how to bring restoration. If we have broken something we can replace it. If we have stolen money we can pay it back, if even a little at a time through a repayment system. If we are uncertain of the amount, it's better to pay more than pay less.

Often times there are scenarios where the person harmed may have passed away or the item is irreplaceable. We may not know how to locate someone. There may be other ways. Consultation, prayer, reflection, and meditation can help.

The ought to keep in mind the process of restoration is to create spiritual good. We have hurt the spiritual kingdom and our path is to restore it. When we create distrust by our dishonesty we must then pursue ways of creating trust through honesty. When we steal and deplete others from material we must then give to others material needs. It is essential that we are bringing to the spiritual kingdom more goodness each day.

A living amends is one that involves a continuance of helping others. We can do much good for the kingdom of God beyond restoring damage we have done. We can learn through doing such good we are improving our own spiritual condition.

Making people happy or feel good is nice, but it is not the goal. We can seek to correct our wrongs, fix things we have broken, and pay money back while others still choosing to hold grudges and be angry. We serve God and live by God's principles and some people may need more time to work through their own hurt, struggles, and pain. We are to focus on our process in serving God and know that our doing so is good. We can trust that God will make things right in God's time and in God's ways.

We have before us an opportunity to cleanse our conscience, purify our heart, and bring peace. As we practice God's Character not only do we benefit, but everyone benefits. The peace we experience inward by our engagement of

God's Character can produce a good spiritual affect in those who receive and/or witness it. There is a ripple effect in our thoughts, attitudes, choices, and actions. We can choose to affect others with discord or harmony. What we do today will certainly shape our tomorrow.

Through our restoration process we ought to at first reflect upon and experience humility. The lowering of our pride, ideas, wants, and selfish ways can open the door to God's purpose, ways, and grace. Our love of God's character and ways to heal and restore spiritual damage through various forms of restorative actions can bring with it a new confidence, faith, peace, and joy. It can reduce fear, shame, anger, and selfish ambition. We will gain much insight into the spiritual world within and around us making us more efficient with God's Character. This can develop through our participation, practice, and experience.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." NKJV

The process of developing a new attitude with new character requires our steady thinking and regular participation with it. We must also have our hearts increasingly invested toward the experience with a willingness to endure discomfort through change.

Mark 12:30 "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment." NKJV

Learn from God

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

Luke 6:40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.

Imagine growing up in a church or religious system where children would review, witness, and experience countless stories about 'our' faith, confession,

repentance, restitution, generosity, fear, and anger with sincerity, authenticity, love, peace, and truth. Imagine the learning and depth the children would receive. There would be tears, hugs, and increased trust. Children would become spiritual contributors to the kingdom of God as they ought to be. There would be hurt, conflict, fear, and confusion with an increased focus upon conversation and resolution. To understand the depth of this we must experience it ourselves. Without our own experience in doing these our understanding will be quite shallow.

Most learning systems involve some instruction, then an internship or practice, groups to share about the experience and learn from each other, tests and evaluations to check for understanding, and presentations of their understanding. Why wouldn't religious systems also embrace these methods that prove to work. Fear? Conflict? Loss of member? Are we seeking God with the faith of Abraham?

The Bible instructs us to act with love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, and the like which are intangible experiences and the only way to gain understanding about them is through personal experience and examination of such experiences. So we ought to make our best attempt, collaborate with others who are experienced, and then repeat over and over to grow, learn and improve our understanding. We can grow in these and experience the spiritual good in them, but we must increase our experiences.

Developing Senses

Hebrews 5:14 NKJV But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Our physical senses involve seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, etc. We can exercise our senses to improve our abilities with them. For example, there are professional food tasters. Food tasters are required to study the food they are going to taste. They need to learn to identify with their senses the sweetness in sugars, salt, and acid levels. This ability takes practice, focus, evaluation, discussion with others, training, and study.

(<https://recipes.howstuffworks.com/food-facts/food-careers/food-taster1.htm>)

Throughout the Bible is the constant topic of loving, obeying, serving, seeking, and following God. We are to grow in God's likeness. God, is not like food we digest physically. God is Spirit. God is intangible and invisible. To improve our senses of something intangible and invisible we must practice, focus, evaluate, discuss with others, train, and study God.

Logically this means we will focus on what we can do instead of what we cannot do. When Jesus says, "go and learn" (Mat. 9:13) then we ought to go and learn. When Jesus says, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37) then we ought to go and do likewise. James says, "be doers of the word" (James 1:22). We must experience Godly action paying close attention to our inward senses of love, fear, faith, peace, anger, lust, forgiveness, mercy, vanity, greed, shame, compassion, empathy, loneliness, and sadness. These senses are spiritual with physical affects. What we believe shapes both our spiritual kingdom and our physical experiences within the world.

I used to run chemical dependency groups. We would open up going around the room identifying feelings. There would often be someone who would struggle to figure out how they were feeling. Often times those who were new to the group would use unfeeling words like 'fine,' or 'good.' Many of us can live life disconnected and unplugged from our emotional experiences.

We must get focused, intentional, and diligent to go after God's goodness. Such goodness manifests itself with intangible and invisible spiritual and emotional senses. Spiritual and emotional senses must increase in our attention, experiences, study, and discussions. We ought to share regularly what spiritual food we are tasting. We ought to become professional tasters of grace, righteousness, and goodness.

Proverbs 1:5 NKJV "A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel"

I was reflecting over the past three decades of my transformation experiences and pondered the patient gradual process involved. God always moved within my life at a much slower pace than I desired. The clay was frequently complaining with the potter. Spiritual growth was occurring so subtly it could only be recognized in hindsight over time. I could see the changes I was making, but I could not immediately see the good that was happening with the changes. I had to trust or at least be willing to test to see what would happen. The testing did not take too long before I experienced results.

Some of us may want to hurry to the end where everything is wonderful. What's important to realize is we have an opportunity to experience a belief system where our thinking is trained to look for and see God's goodness in everything. When we see goodness we feel good. This state of mind or Inward Authority involves a pure heart and clean conscience to see more Good and less evil. Our attention is to sift out the evil to find the good within and around us each day. Then we can show others what we found and better reveal the good to them.

When someone points out the evil in the world we can look to find where there is cooperation, kindness, peace, forgiveness, and love. We can become more patient with gentleness and mercy. Through regular practice we can learn more and more the invisible good that can develop. We can experience and sense spiritual goodness with such outward action being expressed by our inward God reliance.

Many of us may resist that which goes against our current understanding. The resistance can grow with our focusing upon the struggle, differences, difficulties, fear, and frustration. The way to let go of the struggle is to stop looking at it.

When I experience a bite from a mosquito it can create a sense of itchiness. The more I focus on it, the more it itches. If I scratch it, it gets worse. But if I go and do something else and focus my mind elsewhere where I think less about the itchiness. The less I scratch the less I am bothered by it.

This same principle works with addiction. If my mind moves toward thinking about whatever it is I am addicted to, I need to shift my thinking toward something else. Prayer, discussion, reading, or reflection upon God's goodness and developing it within my mind and heart can be quite helpful. But if I pursue thoughts of what it is I am addicted to then I choose to increase the temptation of it.

If I am angry, sad, fearful, worrisome, or anxious I need to shift my thinking toward Godly good and away from thoughts that can exacerbate the problem. When I was three years sober I got in a routine of thinking depressing thoughts and filling my mind with negative things. I realized this years later. The content within my thought life has always greatly affected my faith and

mood. I need to take responsibility for what I fill my mind and heart with each day.

It's also important not to run away from feeling sad or afraid. Such sensations can help us become more empathetic with others and open the door for others to care for us. Keeping God in our focus as our Master who is love, peace, and Spirit ought to be our guide. As we experience losses we ought to experience a grieving process. Perhaps some frustration and sadness may develop. Our attitude toward such emotional responses ought to be with acceptance, understanding, and peace. Yet we must always exercise caution of becoming obsessed with the loss. If our thoughts move more toward the loss than God, idolatry may be present.

Each of us will experience things differently and our differences ought to be respected. Some of us will move on fast with loss and others slow. We ought to be patient with each other. The one who has moved fast may need to slow down a little while the other that is slow may need to move faster. We ought to seek to work together and not get stuck in our own ways. How we can be helpful with one another toward Godly good is the goal.

Having a lot of years with transformational experience I can lose touch with what it was like in the beginning. I can become impatient with helping others. I have within me an expectation or desire for things to move at a certain speed (my idea). This is a perception or belief is proven not to be realistic because it conflicts with reality. Things often don't move as fast as I want, hope, or expect. This unrealistic expectation sets me up for disappointment. Once again I need the Serenity Prayer to remind myself to be serene in all things and accept the pace of development in others and myself. It's not my pace, it's God's. God is the one in control, not me. I'm only the steward of grace, the grace of peace, love, and patience if I am with it. I cannot steward grace if I become impatient.

The body has limitations and the brain is part of the body. A deep sea diver needs to ascend slowly to the surface or he may experience painful physical consequences due to changing pressure. The body is highly adaptive to environments, but it adapts slowly. If we push past the limitations of the body we can create harm and in some cases death. The brain requires time and effort to learn and the learning can build upon itself if it continues with regular challenged practice. Our beliefs, learnings, and training with evil

habits do not disappear immediately, but can fade away with less use. And the good we practice more can grow.

In my spiritual destruction I had descended deep into a pit of misery. In order to get out of the pit I needed to make life altering changes. To change my heart, mind, and soul required adjustments throughout my inward parts. My attitude, habits, personality, social settings, and goals all needed to change. I needed new structure that involved spiritual training. The process began with confusion, fear, grief, and frustration. It slowly developed insight, understanding, spiritual awareness, self awareness, direction, purpose, deeper truth, courage, strength, hope, peace, faith, and so much more.

It's good to explore experiences of Godly characters within the Bible to see how God helped shape and develop them. Many of them went through terrible conditions. We can see their diligence and what they endured. We can learn how they overcame obstacles within themselves and around them. It's good to understand their devotion to God and then see how we can do likewise.

Titus 2: 11 - 14 NKJV Trained by Saving Grace

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

Although I wanted to be free from pain I had to learn to accept discomfort as part of the process toward peace. Training involves working out or exercising in ways to strengthen ability. We can become more truthful, patient, and compassionate in challenging practices to grow our ability with it. We can if we are as the Bible instructs us to be, “zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:14) There are many articles online discussing how to increase our zeal. Our zeal often can begin and end with our commitment to trust, rely, and serve God. Is God our highest priority? Are we zealous for good works? Are we seeking first the kingdom of God today? Are we loving God with our all (heart, mind, soul, & strength)?

The message in Titus 2 is that “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.” Training can be done very little or in great lengths and

still be called training. One second of meditation for one day is still meditation, yet those who do it for one second may have a completely different experience than those who do it an hour a day.

Justification and rationalization can be used to excuse our way into fooling ourselves or others that we are seeking and trusting God. This is one reason why it is important that we do not control anyone else, but ourselves. We ought to avoid telling anyone else what they ought to do. Instead, we can share our own experience and what we believe works for us. If someone wants to try it, they can. If they don't want to, they don't have to. Ultimately, the development process is between us and God. We can't make anyone grow with God. It just doesn't work that way.

Desire, curiosity, and interest can be enhanced. Many will have curiosity and desire and will want to learn more. Yet without the willingness to experience the development process, their learning will be minimal, compared to what is available through such experiences.

There are many ways we can fool ourselves into believing we are on track and developing Godly good. Everyone I have known has fooled themselves about their spiritual productivity including myself. We are all foolish and often over estimate our abilities. Reality checks and evaluations are extremely helpful. Support groups really make the difference if we are transparent and honest. A constant awareness of our bias and self deception can help. We must continue a routine process of humbling ourselves to God and seeking to sense God more and more.

It's not just about time or effort, it includes the the continued uses of all our inward parts. Are we sensing the invisible and intangible spiritual goodness of God with our hearts and minds each day?

There is training that can lead to an empty experience. We can train ourselves to know and experience very little. We can trust and believe in God very little and many who do so can still claim salvation. Claiming salvation does not always mean it is so. This is truth we ought to understand and not hide from. Paul was content in all things, yet there are many professing Christians who are quite far from being content. Saying we are saved one minute and then suffering with anxiety, resentment, discontent, fear, worries, or self-seeking the next minute may illuminate that our idea of salvation may have little to do with our current spiritual condition. God is about growing

peace and love within and around us. We are being saved when we are progressing toward peace and love.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

We must be growing experiential learning with love. Growing with God needs to involve becoming more loving with our minds and hearts. We ought to practice sensing love and learning more how to see it, practice, and talk about it.

Let's look honestly, patiently, and thoroughly at how invested Jesus, David, Moses, and all God's people were with God. Are we willing to be that invested? Do we want to be part of that team? God's team, according to scripture, trains continuously or without ceasing.

Acts 2:46 "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart"

It is easy to convince ourselves we have done well and deserve a break, a break from serving God, because sometimes it requires effort, focus, and restraint. We are moving away from our old ways and concentrating on practicing new ways. But taking a break from peace and love makes little good sense. Our pride, envy, lust, self-seeking and other forms of sin desires the break. We need to break from listening and following the practices of such sin. There is rest which we can have with God as we grow in good works. We can give up the fight of holding on to our old ways and ideas which are the reasons for the struggle.

The struggle we ought to face is around our death to self. We die to the world's ways, lusts, pride, vanity, greed, etc. This is no easy task. Our minds can prompt us toward the world's ways and we may desire its comforts. If we give into such comforts contrary to the spirit, our spirit can suffer. We can sense such spiritual suffering through experiences of shame, guilt, emptiness, separation, loneliness, and regret.

I can fall victim to the pursuit of self-gratification. I think of something that would make me feel good and do it. Making myself feel good can come in

many different forms food, sex, drugs, gambling, people pleasing, money, etc. The reward comes first and is often followed by a sense of regret, loss, emptiness, shame, guilt, fear, anger, sadness, anxiety, etc. This is not a Godly thing to do.

Then there are Godly acts that lead toward spiritual growth and fulfillment. When I add good to others with my heart and mind seeing how I can be helpful through, caring, listening, intimacy, sincerity, compassion, service, giving, encouraging, etc. I often feel peace, relief, fulfilled, love, etc. I sleep better. These acts can bring rest, help build community and belonging, and reduce stress.

The world advertises competition, self-gratification, and selfish ambition while not revealing the more obvious later consequences. We must think past our pursuits and examine the consequences afterwards. We must look forward to what our actions will produce. We must use our senses to help produce improved inward conditions. Love from within us moving outward can bring fulfillment.

Sometimes I tried to make things happen quicker due to my impatience and expectations. I was told I was putting the cart before the horse. God is the horse that pulls the cart and controls the speed. Being with grace is like getting in the cart and letting God take me on God's journey at God's speed in God's ways. Whenever I moved ahead or away from God's grace or trying to make things go my way at my speed, problems developed. Impatience, intolerance, pride, greed and the like brought frustration, relationship struggles, loneliness, and emptiness. The pain was able to prompt me to keep coming back to God, slow down, wait, and trust God more. Sometimes I would listen to the intangible message of shame and emptiness, sometimes I wouldn't. Sometimes I would look around at how my actions are affecting other people and see my actions were creating conflict. I have a choice to see that I am a producer of love and peace or a taker. Am I going to be socially and spiritually responsible with God's grace?

God's grace is love, peace, mercy, truth, purifying the heart, and cleansing the conscience. When I rely upon such things, Godly things can grow within and around me. This is a fact for me because it's been proven for decades through personal experience and 100's of stories from others. And it is something that is being witnessed by millions of people who choose to do it. We don't water a tree and then all of a sudden see fruit grow. Time and

continued watering is necessary. Waiting on the results of participating in God's grace to see the development of spiritual fruit is part of the journey. We need to care for it over time with our minds, hearts, continuance, and endurance.

"Sometimes I think it's a shame
When I get feelin' better when I'm feelin' no pain"
~ Gordon Lightfoot

When I do something that makes pain go away, I think I feel better. I don't feel good though. I think I do, but really I just don't feel the misery anymore. Not feeling the misery is much different than feeling good. Feeling less pain can bring relief from pain. It can be good to feel less pain, if it leads to what is good. Yet sometimes the path to good involves pain. Instead of giving suffering attention, fearing it or avoiding it, we ought to give God's ways more attention. What do we think about more, how to manage problems or how to manage Godly good? Our minds ought to be more attentive to Godly good, then we may have fewer problems.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

What we all need is intimate and sincere love with truth, justice, mercy, forgiveness, patience, and peace. God is love and the greatest love is to die for a friend. Are we willing to love others at the risk of our own death? Death can involve serious suffering. Think about the suffering involved with Biblical characters. Are we willing to suffer for our development with God's grace? This is necessary. We will need to chose paths that involve struggle.

Life involves hurt and loss. There is no way around it. Avoidance of feelings through drugs, sex, food, work, exercise, and other forms of medication or distraction techniques may only intensify the destruction of our inward condition. God created us for deep intimate sincere and honest relationships. This is how we are to grow and thrive. We ought to learn how to safely live more intimately with each other for spiritual growth, support, and healing.

Spiritual learning is to adapt to spiritual realities with a spiritual focus and live by spiritual principles. God's way is the way to life. Let's get to know it deeper within our hearts, minds, and souls through practice and experience. Knowing things deeper means we giver ourselves more and more toward it.

Matthew 9:13 NKJV “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

This has been mentioned before, but there is a lot within this verse to explore so it is worth another look. Are we going to “learn what this means?”

Jesus said, “go and learn.” Are we learning the meaning of Mercy? Are we seeking through deeper study and reflection about our experiences with Mercy? Mercy is a spiritual principle to live by and like all spiritual principles it is not black and white. We are not to be merciful in all situations, just as God is not merciful, in all situations. We will need to figure out where, when, how, and why to be merciful. And like other intangible traits, learning mercy may best be accomplished through trial and error. If we do not evaluate and reflect upon our experiences, we may not learn from them. Jesus says to go and learn, so let’s go and learn through participation and spiritual evaluation.

Good Samaritan

Luke 10:37 NKJV Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus lays out this great story about helping others. Just like many instructions in the Bible on how to live, God is disclosing a process to learn intangible spiritual goodness. The requirement is to sense this learning with a willingness and readiness of heart and mind.

We must humbly be willing to give and receive love and mercy. We must learn to look more at the intangible sensations of the experience than the physical more obvious senses of what we see, hear, smell, and touch. Love, compassion, and peace are realities that move deeper within our spiritual senses. We must practice perceiving beyond our first impressions. We ought to practice reading that which affects attitudes, especially our own. Love is an attitude and an action. God is love. Are we aligning our attitudes with peace, mercy, truth, etc.

Our minds must be open and willing to see what we do not currently see and to let our understanding accept and accommodate new knowledge. We must lower our defensiveness to gain uncomfortable truth. We must make corrections within our beliefs more and more to better adapt and align with

spiritual truth. Spiritual truth can make more sense as we act upon it. We need to have an objective mindset with critical analysis of spiritual realities and ourselves. Like other studies, repeating the practice over and over can help provide more experiential information about results. Collaboration with honest spiritual partners can help reveal our own bias. Two heads can work better than one. Yet we must ensure we are collaborating within an objective environment and not getting stuck in a 'Group Think,' 'herd mentality,' or a conformist scenario. We can easily end up in disagreements which we ought to accept gracefully instead of forcing our own understanding upon each other.

As we "go and do likewise," we ought to keep focused on the spiritual kingdom exploring activity within hearts, minds, and souls. We can go and do likewise to discover the intangible experiences of God. If we only intellectualize our spiritual experience we can miss the meaning and purpose of the experience, to grow love and peace. Our hearts and minds must both be present and working together. We ought to humble ourselves through our experiences. We ought to always evaluate our attitude to ensure we are inwardly following spiritual Godly principles of grace.

God has instructions

Who needs instructions? Instructions are boring and can slow down the process. I've assembled many things without instructions. Some of them went together rather smooth. Some of them didn't. But these days I read instructions and want to see some details so I can avoid mistakes. I get amazed sometimes how little instructions are offered about things. I don't always look at side effects from drugs or read the scrolling legalities before downloading an App. So sometimes I read and sometimes I don't.

I like to cook when I have time off. I'll look at a recipe and amend it to what sounds more to my liking. Yet if I try to recreate the meal without the recipe in my hand and simply try to recall what it was I find I make mistakes. I'll forget a measurement or even an ingredient. It doesn't taste the same. So when it comes to my spiritual well being, it's best to stick with the book and not rely to much on how other people interpret it. After all, they may be off by some measurement or ingredient.

I came to know God through desperation and a willingness to change my life. I was told to examine myself for anger, resentments, fear, dishonesty, and

selfishness. This is not the typical Christian orientation. Yet I found in the Bible very similar instructions and much more. When I came to church I found it difficult to strike a conversation with anyone about these instructions. Why would Bible followers avoid Bible instructions? It just blew my mind.

I've learned a few things about churches, church leaders, and church interests. Most of the churches I attended want to grow in numbers. There are systems that get involved to make church attractive. They try to make church fun with games, coffee, singles activities. Churches have specialization groups for youth, young adults, and addiction. The message I always got was to keep things simple, non-confrontational, and fun. But that's not how I found God. So what does that say about me. It says I don't fit with the system. So I go to the instructions and find I fit with the instructions.

A church is many things. I'm going to focus here on a part of the church few people seem to be willing to discuss. Church is a system that relies upon money. People generally know this part, but what few people talk about outside of elder boards are the ways churches make adjustments to get money, increase donations, and create budgets. I believe most systems create safe guards to protect against greed and fear, but yet, they creep in and affect the system.

When a pastor gives a message, in the back of the pastor's mind most likely lies the fear of pushing too far. A pastor and church needs members. I heard a pastor say one time while teaching the book of James, "If I spoke like this you would fire me." It only makes sense the Biblical teachers pick and choose how to teach based upon what people are willing to hear. This can create a serious disorientation to learning.

And then there are churches that are teaching in ways to win the crowd, make it fun, and raise spirits. These such churches lean heavy on the entertainment aspect and less on the convicting aspect. Let's look at how some marketing systems do things.

There are many drug commercials that display happy people, full of joy, from using the product, but there are no pictures displaying those who suffer side effects. This is marketing strategy is to motivate consumers to buy their product. The advertisers seem to spend a lot of time looking at the possible extreme good their product can offer while minimizing time meeting

requirements about detrimental effects. They are slow with detailed joyful pictures, pleasing sounds, and comforting words describing the good with minimal, even rushed time running through the possible death someone could face from using the product. This is manipulation of information, not giving equal time and attention to the comfortable and the uncomfortable. We could be doing the same thing if we speak heavy on being saved and minimal on what is required to be saved.

Ephesians 2 may be one the most used teachings I have heard with Christians. I've been to one local church where the congregates use it regularly. Yet not all of Ephesians 2 is used. The parts used seem to be happy feel good parts. The message often focusses on "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The teaching often spends a lot of time talking about this (free) gift and how it is not by works. We are saved by grace it says. Now it also says "through faith." Yet the teaching I have experienced rarely spends much time here about faith. There is one faith that is often highlighted and that is the faith of Abraham.

Romans 4:16 "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all"

I believe we ought to have a good teaching about what kind of faith the faith of Abraham really is and how we can accomplish it. This kind of faith makes God the highest and we seek to do God's will which creates the opportunity of transformation. Then we can understand Ephesians 2:2 "which you once walked according to the [a]course of this world" and 3 "whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh." These two verses seem to say those who are saved walk differently and conduct themselves differently. Those who are saved are different, act different, think different, and live different. Yet different like Christ. This is no subtle difference. A subtle difference may be subtle salvation. And who wants a subtle salvation. That could be like someone stranded in the ocean getting thrown a life preserver and then left there because the person wouldn't swim over and get in the boat.

This truth is important. The Bible is full of stories of people who leave God, avoid God, don't listen to God, and rebel against God. The only happy ending they get is when they humble themselves to God and do God's will. Those who rebel and ignore God's instructions suffer. Christ said this and makes it clear in John 15. Please read it slowly and stay with verses 6 and 7 long enough to get the meanings.

Jesus was a teacher of how to be with God. The Holy Spirit within us is a counselor. We have the lessons. We have been instructed and guided how and what to do. Much of the struggle we may face is to obey and follow the instructions. We may struggle to see how it fits with our understanding. It may not make sense to us. What does it mean to love Good and abhor Evil (Romans 12:9)? How do I do it at work, with friends, etc? When the instructions and guidance do not agree with our understanding, will we choose to make God's teaching our new understanding? Will we be willing to let go of our conflicting ideas, habits, practices, traditions, friends, or job to build an understanding that agrees with God. To change is to be different. We must be walking and conducting ourselves differently in a way that is fitting with God.

The way to have our understanding changed to fit with God's instructions is to do it, learn from the experiences, and then through meditation, reflection, conversation we can reorganize our ideas. Just looking and talking about the words in books will not help us see what is behind them. We have to do them to be able to witness the invisible and intangible spiritual results.

I read God's instructions about love in 1 Corinthians 13. I realized I could do so much better with my wife. I evaluated myself and found that I was participating in passive aggressive behavior and was condescending. I began practicing putting an end to such behavior. It was habitual and a struggle to stop it. I made progress. As I made progress and greatly cut back on belittling my wife (because she started it), she began to cut back on such behavior. Over time we became nicer to each other.

Growing Godly good behavior, thoughts, and attitudes is infectious just as attitudes are infectious. When someone hurts me I want to retaliate, but I am supposed to return evil with Good. It's a different way of thinking. Through practice I have witnessed others turn from evil and do good because I am doing good. It seems that, generally speaking, people respond back with what they see given to them. (See [social exchange theory](#)).

The Golden Rule to do toward others what you would want done to yourself may be alive and active within this principle. It was very hard to convince myself to, 'be the one,' who begins. I had to let go of retaliation. Yet I did not make myself a punching bag. I made it clear I was not going to participate with unfair or unhealthy discussions. I was going to leave the discussion if I was not going to be heard, put down, cut off, etc. And I did. It was not easy. Yet it was much easier than what Abraham faced. Compared to many Biblical stories what I had to do really wasn't that tough.

As we learn God's instructions for us through the Bible, we ought to ensure we are not manipulating the information by paying more attention to comfortable feel good messages while giving less attention to the action we are instructed to practice. This bias can lead us into a distorted Biblical truth. Let us see the good in God's instructions by doing them. This can enhance our Biblical understanding and take it to a new level.

Yoke with Christ

Matthew 11:29 NKJV "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

A yoke is "a wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals (such as oxen) are joined at the heads or necks for working together."

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/yoke>

If we are to do as Jesus says to do than we are to do as Jesus demonstrated. Jesus taught and demonstrated the teaching. Again, we are learning inward spiritual principles as we engage in humble intimacy. We are learning mental attitudes and heart sensitivities. We are seeking to develop practices and experiences with spiritual ways of grace. This has less to do with money, clothes, or titles, and more to do with peace, love, truth, justice, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and patience. Read John 15 and imagine being yoked to Jesus. Jesus clearly gets direction from God. Jesus is yoked to God and if we are yoked to Jesus, then we are yoked to God.

John 6:45 NKJV "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."

Anyone who is yoked with God is yoked with Jesus. God and Jesus function from the same spiritual principles, truth, and direction. We ought to all be seeking a similar mindset, to be of one mind, a mind moving in the direction of increasing spiritual truth with the same spiritual guidelines. Our experiences and understandings out to be growing similarly in righteousness.

Romans 16:17 NKJV “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”

Jesus avoided people who would not listen objectively. Those who were rebellious and resistant, Jesus walked away from. Jesus instructed the disciples to do the same.

Luke 9:5 NKJV “And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”

Page 90 of Alcoholics Anonymous “If he does not want to stop drinking, don’t waste time trying to persuade him. You may spoil a later opportunity... If there is any indication that he wants to stop, have a good talk...”

We do not argue, persuade, push, force, fight, or manipulate others to be with God. We invite others into the experience and if we are right with God in our hearts and minds our attitude will be attractive to others. If we are loving, patient, and kind interest from others can more easily be developed.

We ought to love and serve only God and out from that action God wants us to give to and encourage others. We can love and serve others with God’s grace, that is through God’s ways and principles. If we love others outside of God’s principles, it becomes a different kind of love. We ought to avoid setting expectations or goals of winning any specific people for God, because we can become fixed upon it. If it doesn’t happen, we can become irritated, hurt, and develop fear or anger. We can become obsessed with it which can lead us away from God.

Jesus and the disciples were together focused toward the same goal. The higher the quality of a focused classroom, the better the opportunity to learn. Differences and distractions can affect the learning and development. A continued focus upon one thing can bring us deeper into it.

We ought to choose our playgrounds and playthings carefully to ensure our yoke with God is encouraged, strengthened, and protected. We ought to evaluate what we are listening to, who we associate with, and what we are watching. We ought to check to ensure our structured environment supports and encourages us to a deeper experience and understanding of God's righteousness. Are there things in our structure which distract us from growing and participating in the kingdom of God?

Common goals are important. There is a reason recovering alcoholics associate with other alcoholics. They understand each other intimately. Our associations ought to be focused upon attitudes of the heart instead of customs, habits, words, clothes, cars, education, or jobs. A desire to learn and grow in Godly principles is all that is required. We ought to first test ourselves for fear, resentment, impatience, or pride, while ensuring our own growth with peace, love, sincerity, mercy, forgiveness, impartiality, truth, and patience.

We learn by doing

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. NKJV

Are we born again into a humble loving spirit of God? Spiritual learning is an inward experience. Something happens when we kneel down. The process of humbling ourselves has a direct affect upon our inward condition and attitude. With a humble attitude we can experience more effectively God's character and grace. Participation in God's loving character with sincerity requires a humble attitude. God's character and our humble attitude seem to work well together. Read the following verses and practice the humbling of self for an entire day and learn more about it through the experiences. We can learn a lot about our resistant sinful nature during this process.

Luke 14:11 "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Romans 12:16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

Proverbs 3:34 Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble.

There is an expression that is used, “you had to have been there.” This means if we were not part of the event we cannot understand it. If we are not part of the humble and loving spiritual transformation process, we cannot understand it.

Can anyone who has never given birth to a child understand the experience of it? Can anyone who has never been married understand what it is like to be married for decades? Can someone understand prison who has never been incarcerated? To understand poverty, we must experience it. To understand war we need to have been in it. To understand forgiveness we must participate in both forgiving and being forgiven. And the depth of the forgiveness can affect the depth of our experience in it.

Luke 7:47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” NKJV

There are times for books and then there are times to put the books away and begin to practice doing what they say. For our purposes, it is time to move into experiential training of our heart, mind, strength, and soul. Each day we ought to seek out deeper spiritual experiences of God’s character with others to better learn and understand the intangible nature of God’s spiritual tools God desires us to use.

Information Bias “The tendency to seek information even when it cannot affect action.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases

There are many groups that read books and discuss them. They go from book to book reading more and more. They read about experiences and build community which is good. It’s good to learn good things. Yet is it good to read how to do many good things and then not put them into practice?

The spiritual kingdom is unseen. Love, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, truth, justice, peace, and generosity all are qualities we can learn more about through engagement and practice. They are intangible qualities that require some skill to assess, sense, and understand. Our skill at sensing and

evaluating God's Character can improve with willingness, truth, humility, effort, perseverance and endurance. It's an interactive spiritual exploration.

Willing to learn by experience

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. NKJV

We may have days when we will not feel like serving and obeying God. Are we willing to persevere through trials toward God's Character, Goodness, and Grace? Are we willing to suffer as a Christian (1 Peter 4:16)? Are we willing to obey and follow God's Ways and Purposes no matter what? This may be the kind of willingness needed to understand the spiritual kingdom. Sacrifice of our old self, ideas, desires, and habits may be required.

John 5:40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

Willingness is not just agreeing to go through the motions and do what others do. The willingness required for best results spiritually is that our heart, mind, soul, and strength adjust to align and abide with God's Purpose and Character. Acting like we love is far less involved and helpful than actually loving with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all our soul.

Most of us judge ourselves by our intentions instead of our actions. We ought to begin seeking a better understanding of our inward thoughts which prompt us into our decisions. What reasoning do we use to guide us into what we do and is that reasoning in agreement with God? Are the prompting messages we follow and obey with God? We ought to be showing some improvement with God, but not perfection.

If we are willing to give it all to God, then we will put forth our best efforts with our heart, mind, soul, and strength to love God and all God's Character. We ought to evaluate our efforts. Are we giving our best?

Our belief about our willingness may be different than our actual willingness. If we believe we love God, but our efforts are low, then our beliefs may be in disagreement with reality. Many of us intend good things and then for

whatever reason our actions do not follow our intentions. And it is easy to justify our goodness by our intentions, but the truth is that intentions without action are rarely helpful at all. Let us judge ourselves by our actions, and not solely by our intentions.

1 John 4:20 “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (Read 1 Cor. 13 for info on how to love, set some goals with it)

There are no good excuses to delay, postpone, or reduce our efforts to be less than God desires. One common expression used in recovery circles is, “Are you willing to go to any length to stay sober?” Our God is what we serve and many times our God can be comfort or self-gratification. We tend to want to do things that will make us feel good and avoid things that create discomfort. We must be willing to move into spiritual transformational discomfort to grow and learn more about God’s Character.

Let’s look again at the inward character traits we ought to be remembering and continuing to struggle toward on a daily basis. We ought to resist hate and strive toward Love, away from resentment and toward Forgiveness, away from anxiety and toward Peace, away from dishonesty and toward Truth and away from selfishness and toward generosity. Redirection is a common activity. As we train more and more in our abilities to seek out and humbly participate in God’s Character we may realize that what was once new challenging experience is becoming more easy. God’s Character can become more the norm for us requiring less effort to experience. We must continue to see how we can grow and improve without decreasing our effort and diligence.

Although experiencing God requires effort and diligence to resist our sinful nature, we can be increasingly developing ourselves toward peace, love, and joy. We can move from pride to humility and from hurry to patience. As we give into God’s grace and cooperate with it, we can learn the goodness within it. That new sense of goodness can become our new spiritual motivation.

Truth

We ought to be progressively moving in the direction of deeper honesty, authenticity, and sincerity which often influences and encourages others. If

other people are not being affected by our sincerity and honest love, then it probably isn't deeper than the social norm and we will have much work yet to do. Many of us live in societies that would be confused around sincere Christ-like love. It can seem socially awkward and deviant. So we can, to some degree, gauge our demonstration and involvement with sincere love by noticing how others respond. If others are not responding differently to us, we may not be bringing anything new.

There are many situations that are socially acceptable to lie.

Linskold and Walters (1983) demonstrated a set of classifications of lie acceptability. Going from the most acceptable to the least acceptable, these are:

- Saving others from minor hurt, shame and embarrassment.
- Protecting yourself or another from punishment or disapproval for a minor failing or blunder which hurts nobody.
- Making yourself appear better than you really are or to protect some gain, acquired some time ago, to which you were not really entitled.
- Lies that could make others do something that would benefit you while, at the same time, harming themselves or causing themselves a loss.
- Lies that hurts someone else so that you can gain.

http://changingminds.org/explanations/behaviors/lying/acceptable_lies.htm

Here are two common sayings around 12 step meetings,

- “How do you know if an addict has stolen your money? They are helping you look for it.”
- “How do you know if an addict is lying? Their lips are moving?”

There is a situation noted in the Bible where a person lies and seems to gain favor from God. Rahab the prostitute by her work is already a sinner and probably is in the regular business of lying. This sinner does something to

help God's people of Israel and save them from death. According the Bible Rahab did right, "because she hid the messengers" not because she lied.

Joshua 6:17 "because she hid the messengers that we sent."

We ought to be careful how we use scripture to justify our choices. If we think to ourselves that it is good and acceptable to God for us to lie because of one example in the Bible where a liar lies to protect God's people from death, we might be fooling ourselves just a little bit. Does it seem rational to take such an extreme event and apply it to us? Does it seem rational to use one verse that seems to approve lying against 100 others that don't? The problem here seems to be our natural self-deceptive ways of convincing ourselves into sinful choices.

Shall we use Rahab's lying to save others from death as an excuse for us to lie to save others from embarrassment? Did Jesus lie like that? If we justify lies for minor injuries of pride, vanity, or greed how will we really know if we are sinning with deception? We may win points for social integrity while losing points for our souls.

Matthew NKJV 16:26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Rahab did not lie for social integrity points. She lied at the risk of her own life with the intention of saving lives. If we are to literally apply this verse to ourselves, then if we are a prostitute and have God's spies come to us we ought to protect them using any means necessary for God to let us live.

Social integrity lies do not align with God's will. They can develop from the mindset of people pleasing instead of God pleasing. Fear of conflict and unhappiness can become the motivator. Keeping the peace becomes superficial instead of spiritual. We can develop or have developed a false or fake way of life. We hide our real selves behind a wall of first impressionism, image management, and fake smiles. Social integrity can become a soul killer.

Imagine a person who is desperate, alone, depressed, and seeking help. This person hides their real feelings out of fear. Upon bringing the truth to light in a Bible study the social integrity norm has no trained response on how to

handle this outside of prayer and referral to someone in a paid credentialed position. Place this same person in a 12 step meeting and there is a greater chance for empathy. Addicts can more easily forgo social norms because they know how to do it. It is more customary to speak painful truths of themselves with each other, even strangers.

All God seeking people who are really seeking to grow in God's ways will evaluate themselves for growth in truth. We must continually be willing to sacrifice social integrity for Godly integrity and learn the difference. Do we lie for status, comfort, money, or pleasing others? Read John 8:37-47.

Integrity with God is not easy nor comfortable. Yet integrity with God supersedes comfort from winning approval from people. Spiritual integrity provides a confidence no one can harm. Being right with God is to know righteousness and receive strength that goes beyond worldly bonds. This truth spoken with patient and sincere love is powerful.

Like every form of character, we need to train and develop an understanding how to do it. There is an endless list of situations we can face to speak and think the truth. It begins with our thinking. If we can't think truthfully then we will have little chance to speak it. Much correction needs to occur with our thinking and speaking. We may have many formed responses to lie for social integrity and may feel overwhelmed at how to change it. Feeling overwhelmed is exactly where we ought to be. Building Godly integrity is the greatest change we can make and it ought to feel like a great change. Yet we will need to choose to accept the weight of it. Shall we speak the truth in God or lie?

Being positive seems like a good idea. Is lying or using false flattery positive? Is manipulating others to help or make them feel good positive? Is fear of conflict positive? This word positive seems to fulfill social comforts and we ought to go first to God for learning how to respond. What is positive to one person may not be positive to another. Being positive can be defined differently from culture to culture. We ought to seek what is positive to God and stay with that.

Embrace Humility

Pride can often be what gets in the way of asking for help, even help from God. In a world moving more and more in the direction of self-sufficiency our

minds may already have an understanding that asking others for help is wrong. The feeling of needing help may be humbling. Yet, God gives to the humble and the Bible describes humility is a very good thing. We might want to consider correcting our thoughts about being humble and learn to see it as a benefit instead of an embarrassment. If our minds are wrong and spiritually misleading us about this one central point, perhaps there are more misleading understandings within us that need correction. Asking for help can be the best starting point, but we must be willing to humbly follow the Bible's instructions without picking and choosing which ones fit our beliefs the best.

If we go to the doctor and he says to do certain exercises or sets up a diet for us to follow and we don't do it, then we are the problem. Sometimes it seems as though people ask for help, but are quick to refuse the help because they don't like it. To receive God's help, grace, we must take the receiving position of readiness.

God opposes the proud. If we try to show others how great we are or even how great God is with pride and boasting, then we are missing the mark (sinning). Sincere Love for each other can come through humble service with each other. Being humble is to take the position of a learner with an open mind and willing heart to seek the truth while owning our own faults and inadequacies. We all are imperfect and ought to see and understand our own imperfections. If we don't see them, we aren't looking.

Our mission has to do with influencing the balance of the heart, mind, and spirit. Humble communication is best done nonverbally through demonstration instead of using only words. When we approach others first with sincere truth and empathy to understand and relate with how others feel, we can bring Godly Compassion. When we embrace the attitude of God's Love within us and act upon it we position ourselves to become stewards of God's grace that can save souls.

Hear is a good prayer that has helped many.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.

Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayer_of_Saint_Francis

This prayer can be a great tool to help us grow humility, if we believe in its words and put into practice what it says. Remember that we are self-deceived. Somewhere within our thinking lies error that can benefit from correction. This prayer for example has been attributed to many as the prayer of St. Francis which has been proven inaccurate. See the link above for more information.

Whenever we are self-seeking, because self-seeking is the problem, we ought to redirect ourselves into God-seeking thoughts and actions. Receiving feedback from others can help us to learn more about ourselves. Do others see us as humble and objective or defensive and arrogant? Do our loved ones feel emotionally safe with us sharing their feelings and seek us out for comforting support? Are we humble enough to share with others our own fears and hurt feelings? These can be good questions for increasing our self awareness.

Often times learning where we are wrong can be uncomfortable. We want to be appreciated, desired, and valued and see our mistakes can create fear of losing value. Instead, we ought to realize we all have inadequacies and trust in our value with God instead of our perceived value by others. If we try to present ourselves to others with false impressions, manipulation, hiding errors and by other inauthentic and deceitful ways what value are we to God? Are we seeking to be valued by others at the sacrifice of our value to God? We must be seeking first the kingdom of God.

Perseverance and Endurance

Growth and development takes time and it ought to include the rest of our lives with our focus keeping steady upon our present day. The condition of our heart, mind, and soul will always be contingent upon what we seek, follow, obey, experience, and put into practice. Are we willing, willing for change? We ought to continuously assess our condition, watch for temptation, and seek out improvement toward God's Character.

Complacency can easily develop within our hearts and minds. After a time, which varies for each of us, we can reach a point where our thoughts will wander away from God and we will seek out something else; money, relationships, sex, sports, material things, prestige, education, career, etc. Other interest can sneak in and take us away from pursuing God like the tide in the ocean can sweep us away from the shore. We can get distracted like a dog chasing a shiny light. Before we know it we are asking ourselves where God went? Yet it was ourselves that let our thoughts drift away from persevering and pursuing God's Character and Grace.

Did we stop meditation, sincere and honest prayer, or examining ourselves for improvement in God's Character? Have we reduced our attendance at supportive groups, groups that are actively growing in God's Character? Are we spending time with others who are stagnant in their growth and blending in with their stagnation? Do we have new goals and interests drawing our attention?

The solution for our distraction is always redirection. Once we recognize we have drifted away from God we can seek again humility and willingness to trust God. Our choosing to love God ought to be a conscious choice each day with a sincere desire sense God's grace. We ought to keep a steady and focused engagement to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. It is easy to be swept away into conforming with the world as our self discipline to get right with God declines. Getting right with God involves thinking and desiring God's character traits to come to life within and around us. Our whole hearted steady inward growth of God's character and outward participation with it can produce grace experiences. The world speaks all day long to follow it. If we lose focus upon God and actively seeking God's righteousness we can be setting ourselves up to slide back into emptiness.

Resentment of groups, churches, pastors, mentors, congregations, family, and even self can sneak in with justified reasons to avoid or leave.

Resentment is not from God. It is best not to let resentment make decisions for us. If we selfishly look at how others fail or how we are not getting what we think we ought to get, such activity can take us away from God's goodness. Let us make decisions with love, peace, truth, justice, mercy, and forgiveness. Then it will be better aligned with God's will.

At times, we are all self-deceived, no one is perfect. It can be easy to judge others as stupid, lazy, hypocritical, dishonest, or falling short of perfection. If we get discouraged by others when they are selfish, dishonest, hypocritical or unwilling and decide the group, church, or friends are no longer helpful, then we may be slipping into evil thoughts from various sin. Can we claim humility and sincere love with such an attitude of judgement? We must be careful with our hearts to ensure we are not dissuaded by others who may fall short of perfection. Instead, we ought to see how we can move our inward condition into the grace of helpfulness and perhaps in the process learn more about our own impatience or intolerance.

Even our closest friends, family members, pastors, and mentors can drift away from God's Grace and Character. These situations as they come up can be challenging. Speaking for and with God's grace can involve many difficult challenges. We must continue and persevere to remain in God's Goodness no matter what the challenge we may face knowing by experience how wonderful and good it is. When others drift away or become interested elsewhere we can continue toward the grace of God that might bring them back.

Sometimes the group we are with can split or move in a different direction. It takes effort and intention not to partake in the collective expectation of others. When a group decides something is right and beneficial and we believe God wants otherwise, there can be fear of conflict, disapproval, disregard, resentment, frustration, and mistreatment to share our honest beliefs. We can face losing social status, financial gains, and friends. Will we sacrifice God's Character to fit in with a group or will we endure with God's Character? Everyday we are faced with a choice of what or who to serve. Avoiding the choice is still a choice. If we choose to follow a group then we are responsible for that choice. The solution for poor choices lies in forgiveness and repentance back into God's Character and Grace.

Some make the decision to take a break from striving with God's ways due to the perception of work involved. The effort and energy to redirect and stay the course can seem challenging and upon days of exhaustion it can be easy for thoughts to slip in and say no. We may become proud of our accomplishments with the changes in our lives and settle with reducing our efforts. We may miss some of our old activities and pursue them again. What may seem innocent on appearance can become quite dark over time. We must remind ourselves of the spiritual qualities involved with our choices and how those choices will influence the spiritual realms within and around us. How will it affect our relationships or our attitude? How will it affect our love, peace, and compassion?

It's helpful to keep our focus on what spiritual good we can gain from choosing and staying with God. Instead of viewing the loss of friends, family, job, etc. due to our improvement in God's Character we can look toward the possibility of new relationships and new spiritual family focused more on sincere love for each other.

Helping others

We ought to help others grow with God's grace through instruction and our own demonstration. Our own story of walking with God's righteousness can be convincing. Sharing our personal experience of how we have grown in God's goodness tends to draw more interest than talking about a book. It's one thing to read about love and it's another to share our experience of it.

A spirit lead reaching out to encourage another's spirit wholeheartedly with love, truth, and sincerity builds the kingdom of God. Patient discussions about God and God's ways with invitations to become more actively involved can not only save another, but help "cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:20, 1 Peter 4:8)

Helping others can teach us a lot about ourselves in our spiritual attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. Are we impatient or inconsiderate? Are we fearful or controlling? Are we patiently being with God as we help others? Is our goal love and peace? We ought to be interacting with others daily to help us grow in God's righteousness. Being with God is not a selfish transaction based upon isolation. We ought to be engaging intimately with others regularly.

As we help others we ought to realize we are stewards of God's grace. We are to serve others in righteousness and if it bears no fruit in others we ought to take satisfaction of the fruit within ourselves if we have been truthful, humble, and sincere. Our becoming a conduit of God's grace going out toward others feeds our souls. If we stop this flow outward toward others, we cease participation with grace. We are all connected by one spirit. See John 15.

We ought to ensure we do not get stuck trying to fix people. We are stewards of grace that does the fixing. We ought to avoid those who are resistant, defiant, argumentative, inflexible, or unwilling. Grace is offered, not forced. We are not to push love or truth, just offer it. When someone resists we can move on to seek out someone else. Sometimes, the pain of sin can bring the necessary humility to receive grace.

We must ensure our spiritual qualities are not harmed or reduced as we help others. We ought to keep our focus upon God as we help others. We can invite them, but if they show no interest, we then move on to someone else. We ought to remain patient while seeking peace in our discussions. It's easy to get caught up in arguments trying to protect our own understanding. We must guard against our pride and fear. God does not need our protection, we need God's. If we become impatient we ought to pause, pray, and redirect ourselves back toward grace.

1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Whether family or stranger if we set our hearts and minds insistently to "save" someone we may be putting the cart before the horse and harming our own spiritual growth. God does the saving when one is ready to receive God's grace. We cannot control others. We can be the light and the salt to help others experience or sense grace, but we cannot get them to choose. We can be stewards of that saving grace if our hearts and minds are right. One character trait of God is impartiality. If our minds become set, refusing to let go of someone or some thing, we can easily lose our focus upon God.

Instead of focusing upon the destruction others choose and obsessing about saving them, which we can't, we ought to apply our focus as stewards of grace to those who will receive it. We ought to move on. We can help others who are ready to receive and act upon grace. We ought to discern carefully to

fish where the fish are biting. We ought to remember, our participation in sharing grace feeds our own souls.

Choosing thoughts

2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

We ought to choose thoughts carefully which guide us into Godly action. Choosing our thoughts is a learning process that begins with thought awareness. With much regular practice of introspection, thought observation, and thought identification, we can begin creating and adding new thought messages that can influence our choices. These can be verses from the Bible or something else, but whatever we replace them with we ought to ensure they align with God's principles and lead us progressively closer into Godly activity.

1 Corinthians 4:6 NKJV "that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other."

We are all part of one spiritual body. Our vanity and self-centeredness could be a dangerous mental attitude. Godliness is a state of mind. When we set our thoughts upon ourselves for selfish gain we can sabotage the spiritual experience. We ought to always see how we can be helpful in our application of spiritual principles. As long as we stay long these lines we can be doing good and right.

Romans 13:10 NKJV Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love is to care for others along the lines of God's character traits; peace, patience, mercy, forgiveness, truth, justice (fairness/impartiality), and compassion. Love is not prompted by fear, anger, anxiety, worry, expectation, or self-seeking, although such evil character may be present it is not the controlling factor. Love is a gift from God we ought to give to others to help them grow toward God. Sometimes love can be uncomfortable truth. Even letting others fall, fail, and suffer from their own choices, resistance, and disobedience, can lead them to turn to God (repent).

Each day we begin with choice. Do we pray or not? Do we think about God's will or our own? Are we to seek self-gratification or to gratify the spirit? What we do will indicate our choice. There is no avoiding the choice.

Turn and Follow God

Ephesians 4:17-24 NKJV "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as [f]the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."

"No longer walk as" means we are now walking, thinking, and taking different action in a different direction. Most of us know already our actions begin within our thinking, but our actions are the mode toward real change. If we continue to make the same choices and perform the same actions over time, then we may not be participating in any significant change. There is a common saying, "insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results."

Book studies are great for knowledge, but remember, 1 corinthians 8:1 "knowledge puffs up." If our actions around others outside our book study do not grow in love then where is the spiritual value in the book study? What good is it do read the instructions and not carry them out? We ought to do what the Bible says, learn by the experience, and find the spiritual truth within it.

Strength with Trust/Faith

Philippians 4:12 NKJV "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry,

both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through [f]Christ who strengthens me.”

If I trust God and abide in God sincerely with my thoughts, prayers, desires, will, and actions, I can become more in alignment with God. As I make God my highest priority with humble submission to God’s will, grace can abound. Receiving grace can depend greatly upon our inward attitude, not decision alone. Decisions can be ranked with intensions and there are many unfulfilled good intensions resulting in emptiness. We can create good and wonderful ideas within our minds and yet not do them, which ultimately misses the mark (sin). It’s good to remember, “[the road to hell is paved with good intensions.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_road_to_hell_is_paved_with_good_intentions)” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_road_to_hell_is_paved_with_good_intentions

As we grow in grace we can learn more about grace and such learning often increases our faith. Acting upon our beliefs can provide much spiritual education. Our minds are developed to learn and our learning tends to guide us. Sometimes, our faith can be misinformed.

1 Thessalonians NKJV 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

Make the list, set the goals, take the actions

2 Corinthians NKJV 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

Examination helps to ensure things are working correctly. Our vehicles, health, relationships, and finances all need to be looked at and evaluated. If we are not giving them care and attention they can slowly move down various paths of destruction.

I once had a conversation with someone who experienced their car engine failing. I learned they did not know they needed their oil to be changed which caused the failure. She had the car for two years without changing the oil. Out of sight, out of mind can seem to work until it doesn’t. Avoiding the mechanic, doctor, dentist, etc. can grow destruction.

Our spiritual being too needs a check up. We ought to look at our beliefs, attitudes, behavior, and choices to ensure they are growing with God's ways. We ought to increase our understanding of good and evil to improve our discernment with it.

2 Timothy 3 NKJV "But know this, that in the last days [a]perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, [b]unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

2 Timothy 3:5 NKJV
And from such people turn away!

Lovers of themselves
Lovers of money
Boasters
Proud
Unloving
Unforgiving
Slanderers
Without self-control
Brutal

Blasphemers
Disobedient to parents
Unthankful
Unholy
Despisers of good
Traitors
Headstrong
Haughty
Lovers of pleasure

James 4:17 NKJV "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Once we know God's righteousness and if we then turn away from acting upon it, we choose sin. Our thoughts are continuous all day long. They prompt, guide, coach, and direct us toward action or inaction. Many thoughts exist below our awareness. In meditation, slowing down toward peace, practice of patience, and inward reflection, we can improve our ability to identify our thoughts and construct new ones. We can improve our thought awareness through regular practice.

We have a hundred thoughts go through us just to pray. We have thoughts to get up, where to pray, to sit, kneel, stand, and how we feel about it. We sense our surroundings; walls, floor, furniture, lighting, etc. We may have fears if someone hears us or do we really want to pray? What do we pray and how do we feel about the prayer? What does God think? All these thoughts can create challenges or encouragement toward us taking the action. Do we pray just say we did it without really meaning it in our heart? We ought to pay close attention to this mental process to learn about ourselves and then ponder how disciples of God responded.

2 Timothy 3:14 NKJV “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

In order to “continue in the things which you have learned” means we ought to have already been doing them. Just what is it that we are doing, teachings of Christ, that we are now going to continue in? Read all of Matthew 6 which provides much direction and many instructions from Christ and then do them. Start with one thing, do it for a while, learn from the experience, continue in it, and then add something new.

Setting our minds

Philippians 4:8 NKJV “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Sometimes I begin my day with a resistance. I don't want to write, read scripture, or think about God's interests. When this comes it can feel annoying to seek God, boring, or like a chore. Of course this is not the goal. My mind has come to a place to view and think pursuing God to be dull. Yet I must pray for help, seek humility, and focus on the spiritual realities of the consequences at hand from the choices I can make.

There is an old saying in 12 step programs, “but for the grace of God go I.” Whenever we encounter someone who is dying inside, broken, socially outcasted, or criminal we realize all we need to do is participate in our addiction and that could be us. So, for me, I need God, not just want God. So I

get up and seek God anyway, even when I know I have done really good things and deserve a break, I know that such a break would hurt my soul. I must never forget the pain and sorrow that waits around the corner. When I can recall such suffering, then I can realize the beauty and goodness I have today. Yet I must sense that suffering and the goodness to realize the extent of the goodness of grace at hand.

On days when I do not want God I often begin in solitude, quiet, looking out at my backyard, reflecting upon spiritual reality. My mind kind of settles in more with Godly things of peace and love. It moves from ideology into reflective sensational experience. I take deep breaths, slow my thoughts, and imagine loving someone with God's grace. After a few moments I often realize the good in seeking God and the resistance I had was fleeting. I know that if I give into resistance I would lose awareness of spiritual things and participate in a slow loss of spiritual fuel. Like the vine that gets disconnected from the branch, it slowly dies.

A controlled focus of thought is necessary to follow this instruction. This guidance is not something to do on occasion, but to do it each day and in everything we do. Remember, it's progressive. All we need to do is a little more this month than we did last month. A slow continued progressive development can bring much good.

In the beginning we will require some prompting to take action. Our minds will follow what they are conditioned to do. Therefore, we will need something beyond our minds for reminders and guidance. Sticky notes, signs of different kinds, and routines can prompt us. It is absolutely necessary to have a concrete plan and follow it to ensure we stay the right course. Our minds are created to engage in self-deception. We all do it daily. We are all biased, unrealistic, impractical, and irrational at times and subject to make poor choices that could lead us into spiritual destruction. We must test ourselves, examine ourselves, and hold ourselves accountable.

Setting our minds in the right direction is action. Buddy systems and regular support groups are great prompts to take righteous action. Prompts and reminders do not bring the action. Prompts and reminder inform us of the goal, but we still must choose and convince ourselves to do it.

Once we are reminded and prompted it is often best to avoid the contemplation process. We ought to shift into prayer, seeking God, and

reflection upon how God is good. Our minds are already developed to act away from grace and have convincing messages to encourage it. Our thoughts can be defensive against change and develop excuses or rationalizations to avoid our reliance upon God. Refuse our own ideas for action toward God's can feel like self denial or death to self.

We will need to move beyond intension and into action. Yet we must be prompted. We cannot leave this part to God, to remind us. God's been reminding us throughout scripture since we were created and in that scripture God has reminded us how we continue over and over to choose to neglect our part in the deal. We have a choice and we are responsible for how we love God. Do we choose to pray, mediate, forgive, have mercy, give compassion, confess, or sit on the couch alone at home watching movies or mainstream media? Are we spiritual couch potatoes or spiritual fitness freaks? Are we loving or disconnected and isolated? Our spiritual condition begins and ends with our choices and where we set our minds.

A popular rock band, Rush, wrote a song called "Free Will" and in it was, "If you choose not to decide you still have made a choice."

Each day we make many choices and most of them are going through motions we have gone through before. To grow spiritually we must insist upon making new spiritual choices that take part in new daily spiritual action. It's okay to put some things off, but to take no new or continued Godly spiritual action is to choose self-centeredness, arrogance, rebelliousness, stagnation, complacency or disobedience. Essentially we are saying, "I don't need you right now God."

We ought to choose to associate with others who seek God and to put into practice God's character. It is so incredibly important to surround ourselves around others who speak the truth and walk in it. Such people will help us from self-deception that can guide us away from spiritual productivity.

Galatians 6:3 NKJV "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves."

Haven't we all thought more of ourselves than we really are? If we haven't, then we would never be disappointed in our activity or lack there of. If we do exactly what we believe we would and could do there would be no disappointment. If we have everything we want, wouldn't we be satisfied?

Everything would be going exactly the way we thought it should be. Yet, because we do think more of ourselves, that we don't have everything we want, we are deceived and misled into spiritual malady. The more disappointed we are the more we can suffer. Resentment, fear, and anxiety all stem from disposition. We are positioned away from faith.

(There are extremes with fear and anxiety that can be deeply rooted. Extra help may be needed in such circumstances.)

Self deception happens to us all and we ought to be learning how to recognize it. Why else would we seek after spiritual destructive ways? Do we believe living contrary to God's will is great idea? No, we deceive ourselves consciously and unconsciously into choosing activities that are spiritually harmful because of self deception. The Inward Authority process provides much direction on how to continue with spiritual action and how to better recognize and correct self-deception. Deeper understanding develops with experience and practice which takes time and commitment. God wants all our heart, all our mind, all our strength, and all our soul to be set with God's ways and purpose.

When we participate in evil (See the [inwardauthority.com](http://www.inwardauthority.com) packet on evil) we hurt ourselves and the kingdom of God. We are not disappointing God for God is not deceived. God knows. We ought to view each day as an opportunity to add good to our souls beginning with our thoughts and then moving immediately into action. Remember, participating in contemplation can set us up to seek advice from a mind that is already set against taking new action. Our minds often times don't want different without some tangible reason it can understand. God is intangible and beyond our understanding.

Someone might ask, "what about the heart?" God is the heart. Remember, God is love. If we are setting our minds upon God then we ought to be thinking about love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. We ought to think about it in ways that can produce a sensation of it. We can imagine situations from our experiences that draw up remembrance of such sensations. If don't have any, then we ought to take action to get the experience. See a mentor for help with this.

Matthew 7:23 NKJV "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

If we persist in dullness of sensation then we persist to avoid God whether consciously or unconsciously.

Matthew 13:41 NKJV “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,”

We ought to examine what we are experiencing and practicing within our minds and our activities. What intangible and subjective experiences are resulting from our choices within ourselves and others?

1 John 3:10 NKJV In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

Are we growing in understanding and experience with God’s righteousness? Are we growing enough to help others understand it better? Are we helping others move into such experiences?

Seeking a Righteous Perspective

Luke 1:52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly.

The sayings “Keep it simple” and “Easy does it” have been repeated for decades amongst recovery circles. Stress can increase as our expectations increase. Remember, the “Yoke is easy.” Is God enough? Our wants and sinful desires can heap unnecessary struggle, fear, irritation, anger, anxiety, and spiritual destruction. Our problems grow as we move away from a humble perspective. Are we filling our minds with thoughts and goals toward God’s ways and principles? Humility, patience, peace, and servitude is the way of God in Christ and the disciples.

Ephesians 4:2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

Many of us may have deep rooted beliefs that we must stand up for ourselves, compete against others, and be ready to attack. We may be convicted toward a defensive stance to protect what is ours, and ready for conflict. Our minds may be situated to question everyone, to find fault, error, evil, and wrong

doing. Questioning and testing is necessary, but the attitude behind it can make a difference. Are we seeking to find fault for shaming and blaming or to see how we can help others and ourselves toward peace?

Seeking to help others toward peace can seem strange to those who have been betrayed. It's important to understand that our continued participation in anger or resentment can create more harm. Choosing to recall events which prompts us into an angry perspective negatively affects us physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. We get to choose what to focus our thinking upon and such choices will largely affect our hearts, minds, and souls. Wrath is not good.

God has a different plan. We have all been hurt in different ways and at different extremes. Adding anger does not bring peace and joy. Neither does getting seeking revenge. We can learn from our hurt, to avoid certain places or situations that is more likely to bring harm. Yet our inward reaction to hurt can greatly affect our minds, hearts, and souls. What does God want?

God's great commandment essentially says, "love me with all your inward authority in everything you do and every day." And how have we responded to God? Are we increasingly seeing how we can love God more each day? Have we created some justification to withhold our obedience? Will we focus on God to find answers? Will we pursue learning and experiencing God's ways and goodness?

Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who draw back to [a]perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

If we set our minds today to commit to a task tonight we will be more inclined to carry it out. Committing ourselves toward goals within our thoughts and beliefs can help such activity come to life. We do what we set our minds have agreed to do. Is our perspective seeking the direction of loving God more? If there is something in us, uncertainty or confusion, that blocks a commitment, then we can still talk to God about it and invite help to sort that out. We can also talk with others to learn from their experiences. We still seek Godly solutions.

Romans 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

A perspective toward solutions involves looking for ways to grow more towards the goal. A perspective towards problems will not. Sin means 'to miss the mark.' God is the mark so if our thoughts are not focused upon seeing how we can align our inward selves more with God righteousness, then we are in sin. If we are not thinking about God and God's goodness, we sin.

Isaiah 17:10 Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation, And have not been mindful of the Rock of your stronghold, Therefore you will plant pleasant plants And set out foreign seedlings;

We move in the direction of our thinking. We decide within our minds what we are going to do and such decisions begin with our pondering, reasoning, contemplating, remembering, anticipating, and planning. Our desires, wants, and hopes can direct us into action. It's paramount that we experience good thoughts and sensations of God to help us grow our desire to seek God. How we view God and our the spiritual journey will largely affect our motivation and attitude toward it.

Mark 10:18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

There are some who believe God is an angry punishing God, ready to send people to hell. "Turn or burn" some have been taught. People in some churches have been told "Your going to hell." Children have grown with this message repeated to them and they have taken it to heart. There has been and is a great deal of misunderstanding delivered to people seeking God. We must not turn a blind eye to the damage that has been done. When we meet people who have developed such a dark understanding we ought to serve them with humble compassion and love.

Semantic disagreements can occur which only hurt love and peace. We ought to be flexible with the limitations of language while persevering with the right spiritual attitude. If when we use the word God or Christ others respond in fear or anger we ought to try using another word like love, peace, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, truth, justice, ect. Guiding others toward God is to guide them toward love. If we knowingly incite anger or fear giving to the limitations of others understanding, we sin.

There are fixed mindsets and growth or open mindsets. Phobias of many kinds come about through words like snakes, bugs, sex, clowns, drugs, blood, etc. Each of us have experiences that can shape reactions toward certain words, sounds, smells, and situations. To expect that everyone must respond the same way to anything is an unrealistic expectation. Some people feel joy with the cross and sacraments while others feel fear or anger. This is a fact. And there is great diversity of God's love with both types.

The Pharisees were all about doing the right things and using the right words, but were completely missing the mark - sinning. So saying the right words and doing the right acts without the right heart is more sin than simply having the right heart.

Those who have been a victim of wrongful teachings prompting anger and anxiety toward God, please walk patiently into seeing the loving, forgiving, more truthful, and merciful side of God. Practicing prayer to forgive ourselves and seek peace can be steps toward freedom. Forgiving others over time can really help. God is about forgiveness. We must be free from the anger and fear. Any attitude that is condemning and unmerciful ought to be checked.

Unfortunately we live in a world of many distorted messages. Read 2 Peter 2.

2 Timothy NKJV 4:3-5 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Let's move on to see the good with God because overwhelmingly God is good. If we look throughout the Bible objectively at the facts of the words setting aside our own beliefs and personal bias it doesn't take long to see that God is described with many good, loving, and peaceful words. If we choose to ignore these facts then it is us who chooses to maintain the self-destructive negative false beliefs about God.

Most of us will need some relearning of Good and evil to help us see the good in God's ways. Learning requires time, effort, regular participation, and practice. Relearning requires us to spend as much time or even more upon new teaching as we did previous teaching. It can be uncomfortable to see where we are wrong and to make corrections. As we seek to see the good in

obeying God's instructions we ought to also look deep into our thoughts of evil and see what is going on there within our thinking.

Seeing the Bible's truth about good and evil is incredibly important. The more clear we can sense the evil in our choices the less likely we will convince ourselves to act upon it. The more experiences we have with Good the more we will know about it and be motivated toward it. We ought to own the spiritual consequence of our choices and hold that within our minds each day.

If we are to learn from God we must improve our alignment with God's most basic and beginning instruction, be willing to give our "all."

Mark 12:30 NKJV "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment."

All heart, mind, strength, & soul

Deuteronomy 6:6 NKJV "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Giving our all means we are exerting ourselves, struggling, and suffering to think, participate, and sense more of God's righteousness and grace. We are seeking peace and pursuing it. We are training, shaping, and developing our hearts and minds into Godliness.

Notice the action involved, the plan from God, to talk, write, think, and live these words. Jesus frames this as being the first and most important command. Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27.

Are we seeking to love God like this? How is our love with God?

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Are we willing to lay our lives down for God? Is God our friend? And isn't loving with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength great love? Read 1st Corinthians 13 - discuss together experience in growing in such things.

“It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.”
Mark Twain

To give our all means we test, examine, and challenge ourselves to strive for more humility, sincerity, love, patience, and peace. How can we have more compassion, mercy, and truth? Where can we provide more justice? We ought to be acting upon solutions to such questions.

Good and evil exists within us. Yet our choices reflect just how much Good and evil will continue to exist within us. As we grow in God's ways we increase our ability to think and act in a Good direction. Our all improves as we learn, grow, and practice Goodness within our hearts, minds, strength, and life. Our inward perspective with God can grow as we engage outwardly with sincere love.

Matthew 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Read John 15 (note verse 6) and Ezekiel 18. See how they agree.

Our all is unique to ourselves and cannot be compared to someone else's. We each come from different places in life. Our hearts and minds vary in skills, gifts, strengths, and weaknesses. So we ought to focus most importantly upon our own growth in kindness, gentleness, love, and peace. Our development of such character can affect and help others. Our patient caring, empathy, and sharing of our own developmental journey can encourage and direct others for their growth. Those who desire to grow will seek out those who know and listen.

In giving our all others can often see change in us over time. It takes time for fruit to grow, but it does grow if we are truly giving our all to God. We ought to thoroughly examine our own hearts, thoughts, attitudes, and actions to ensure we are right with God each day. We can utilize God's righteousness; peace, patience, mercy, truth, justice, and love to gently and compassionately

help others and ourselves. We “seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness.”

When our all is applied over time it

- grows us (How much have we grown?)
- challenges us (How much have we been challenged?)
- improves us (Are we getting better, stronger, more aware and confident?)
- hurts us - creates suffering (How much have we struggled or suffered?)
- develops us (How much have we been developed?)
- changes us (How much have we changed?)

Since we are all subject to self-deception we ought to help each other, speak truthfully to each other in love, discuss our growth and let others sense our hearts and hear our thoughts. We ought to bring everything into the light. God wants us to shine on a lamp stand and not hide under a bowl. Our sinful ways ought to be progressively confessed and corrected. Others who are on this journey with us can testify to our growth as they witness it, and we ought to seek out their views. We need truth, truth that encourages, whether comfortable or uncomfortable.

We can ask people who see us over time; our spouse, employer, coworkers, best friends, small groups, and children to learn what fruit they see us growing, how we have improved or not, and if we are changing. After 6 months or a year our growth ought to be evident. People we are close to ought to notice the change in us. We ought to be raising the standard of truth, justice, patience, peace, love, mercy, forgiveness, and generosity in our minds, hearts, and choices. If we are giving our all, over time, it ought to produce fruit others can see.

It takes time to learn and to develop new character. It’s like watering a tree. As we water a tree we don’t stand there looking for fruit to grow. Instead we water it, trust that it feeds and nourishes our spiritual condition, and keep focused on how we can continue in God’s righteousness, our nourishment. Grace grows as we receive it into our hearts, minds, and souls. If we receive it inwardly then we present it outwardly.

All our soul is our whole life. Giving a little here and there to God does not work. All means everything. Every part of us every day. We grow slowly into perfection, though always imperfect. We continue to raise God’s ways within

our hearts, minds and out toward others. We regularly examine ourselves to ensure God is our highest priority.

“we had to fearlessly face the proposition, that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn’t. What was our choice to be?”
Alcoholics Anonymous pg. 53

God’s Character together

Let’s imagine for a moment the possibility of being united with a group of spiritually broken people who are actively seeking healing and restoration through the development of God’s Character. The goal of the group will be to seek out God’s Character more and more. Each person will have different strengths and be at different points along their journey of perseverance and endurance. Some will be rather new on their journey with much confusion, fear, and impatience. While others will be much further down the road guiding and encouraging others to persevere and endure with sincere love and patience.

Such a group can become quite close, spiritually, as they make their spiritual development the highest aim of each day. Sincerity, Truth, Compassion, Justice, Love, and Peace practiced together in conversations, study, and prayer over time and holding true for Grace and Goodness. Having the goal of humbling themselves, eliminating pride, acknowledging their wrongs openly with forgiveness and mercy, repenting at each gathering, all to experience God’s Goodness more and more. Such an entity can evoke a wide spread of emotional experience with each other. Hearts that were once calloused will be able to sense intimacy again and mourn freely, grieving past repressed pain and spiritual harm.

In order for people to be together in Spirit they must become more unified with the mind and the heart. Secrets can lead to spiritual destruction and anything which stimulates fear of sharing secrets, like gossip, put downs, belittling, condescending communication, and even sarcasm, ought to be discouraged and corrected immediately with sensitivity toward those who are sharing.

Sharing out to focus on the process of experiencing God’s Character in mind, heart, strength, and soul. We must be actively involved in producing Godly

thoughts and actions each day. Without our active participation with God and God's righteousness we will miss the mark.

Guarding Grace

Ephesians 6:10 - 18 "Put on the whole armor of God"

Putting on the whole armor of God is to be intentional with our thoughts, attitudes, choices, and actions. We ought to further our alignment with God to build the protective spiritual equipment. We ought to walk in truth within our minds, upon our lips, and through our actions. We ought to seek righteousness. We ought to have peace and faith. We ought to listen regularly to the spirit of God. These are intentional actions to produce and grow our spiritual condition.

Psalm 141:3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

Philippians 4:7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 6:20 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—

God is ...

The following is a list describing God. We ought to objectively as possible read together these Biblical statements and find the patterns. This is a simple and brief list of what can be found within the Bible. Within us all are misunderstandings about God due to our human biased nature. We may feel uneasy about certain Biblical statements and we ought to evaluate ourselves to better understand the beliefs within us that create the uneasiness. Then we ought to pray for God to help us seek correction in our understanding while continuing our spiritual learning. Let us continue to test all things and ensure

we progress patiently more and more with God's truth, justice, forgiveness, and grace.

Deuteronomy 10:17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

2 Samuel 22:33 God is my strength and power, And He makes my way perfect.

2 Chronicles 30:9 for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him."

Ezra 8:22 "The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him."

Job 36:5 "Behold, God is mighty, but despises no one; He is mighty in strength of understanding.

Psalms 7:11 God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day.

Psalms 62:7-8 In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

Psalms 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart.

Psalms 75:7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

Psalms 84:11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.

Psalms 116:5 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.

Isaiah 12:2 Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.' "

Matthew 3:9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Matthew 22:32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 3:35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”

Luke 3:8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Luke 17:21 nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Luke 21:31 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Romans 1:17-19 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

Romans 2:3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? **5** But in accordance with your hardness and your [a]impenitent heart you are [b]treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, **6** who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: **7** eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; **8** but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness— indignation and wrath, **9** tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the [c]Greek; **10** but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **11** For there is no partiality with God.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 11:23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

1 Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 14:25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Colossians 3:6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

1 Thessalonians 2:5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness.

1 Timothy 4:8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

2 Timothy 2:9 for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Hebrews 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

1 John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

1 John 2:5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

1 John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Educational Variety

In the Spiritual Appendix of the book Alcoholics Anonymous page 567 it describes "most of our experiences" have grown spiritually by the means of an "educational variety" "because they develop slowly over a period of time."

The phrase "most of our experiences" ought to be interpreted and understood exactly as it is written. These are spiritual people who have undergone drastic life changing experiences that are equivalent to miracles. Most of them had experiences of an "educational variety." The sample size for this was around 100 people at that time. Now it is over a million. We ought to guard carefully at dismissing this study that has been proving itself true since the late 1930's. It has got the attention and respect of many spiritual leaders.

Let's think about this quote "develop slowly over a period of time." Didn't the disciples develop slowly over a period of time? Many characters in the bible grew more with God through their journey slowly over time. Isn't God about patience and peace? One famous quote from the Bible is "wait on the lord" Psalms 27:14 & 37:9. We ought to be learning, growing, seeking, following, waiting, listening, and developing slowly over time.

Just about every education system uses a plan to develop students slowly over a period of time. Professionals and the elite will invest more time and study to sharpen their skills and raise their potential. Those who want to grow with God most likely will embrace a training that requires more time, focus, and practice.

The Apostles learned from Jesus morning, day, and night. Some of them struggled with their faith standing right in front of the Christ. Failures teach us about ourselves, if we are willing to learn from them. To grow in understanding we simply need to seek out new accurate knowledge and the best way is through experience.

There is much to learn. We can develop knowledge, understanding, and experience with both Good and evil. We can learn from what we set ourselves to seek out and practice, whether it's truth or deception, vanity or humility, hurry or patience, self-seeking or compassion, faith or fear, love or hate, forgiveness or resentment, retaliation or mercy, and favoritism or impartiality. One side is with God and the other is not. We have a choice what to pursue every moment of every day. This pursuit teaches us and affects our spiritual condition.

Let's look at one way to measure our investment to learn, time. There are seven days in one week. Days are broken up simply with morning, afternoon, and night. We can even break time up hourly or by the minute. How much time do we spend learning or seeking new learning with God. How much time would we utilize to seek fulfillment of the great commandment of God using our "All?"

Many educational classes involve lectures, reading, research, writing, presenting, testing, schedules, mandated attendance, and a grade based upon percentage points. Would our learning about God increase if we learned spiritual things in a similar manner? Don't pastors go through the same style of learning in seminary schools? And don't we seek out to learn from the pastors who learn from this system?

We will understand this transformation experience at the level of our being transformed in it. Those who know how to swim have done it. Those who know how to ride a bike have done it.

1 John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

New practices, commitments, and changes require us to be different. Few people would go to school and learn without some material gain as a motivation. The gain from spiritual learning doesn't really have material gain. There's no tangible prize like money or promotion waiting at the end. God offers peace and love. So in order to commit to learning that changes us we must have some desire for more peace and love. Otherwise our efforts will most likely fall short.

It is seriously uncomfortable and confusing to obey instructions that go against our current understanding. Some of us will cling to our own understanding and refuse to let go of it. We may prefer the way we are and resist setting it aside for a while. This is a normal process. Even practicing alcoholics will drink themselves to death knowing they are doing it. Change can seem impossible, but we must be willing to humble ourselves, let go of our own misunderstanding, see how others have done it, and learn from them.

Willing to go to any length is a condition for sobriety in 12 step programs. To choose God's ways over our own is required for us to grow spiritually. We will need to replace evil (selfish ambition, anger, idolatry, etc.) with Good (Godly character).

Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

We ought to respond with Good instead of evil. If we are not seeking how to do things new and different then we will set ourselves up to repeat our preconditioned usual ways.

We all have evil (sinful choices) within us and a lot of it. Some of us can be unwilling to even examine ourselves long enough to see our own faults and or unwilling to hear it from others. It can be uncomfortable to own our wrongs,

perhaps even shameful, but we must see the truth of where we are and where we can be. We must find solutions to our self-seeking ways which requires us to acknowledge the.

James 1:23-24 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Those of us who think we are Good people and without evil (sin) are deceived. We all think and behave imperfectly. Growing in God's righteousness is the goal and as long as we are on that road we are doing good.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We have subconscious activity that can run our lives. When we first learn how to drive we need to learn basic parts of the car and how to use them; breaks, steering wheel, blinker, gas, shifting, brakes, etc. We need to learn rules of the road; signs, markings, lines, signals, speed, etc. We need to learn navigating turns, parking, and distance between cars. To many this can be an overwhelming experience and anxiety provoking. Many parents fear for their lives as they teach this to their kids. Yet at some point, this struggle and fear goes away or is for the most part greatly reduced. Those who drive a lot can drive for miles while spending time in their minds completely unaware that they are driving. It can become and automatic activity requiring very little conscious thought. We can learn God this way too.

It is crucial we become humble enough to accept both Good (God's will) and evil (not God's will) exists within us and take steps to grow our understanding of it. We must apply introspection to learn our thoughts honestly with impartiality and take responsibility for our thought choices.

Regular self examination is essential to truthfully understand our guiding thoughts and choices. In the beginning, it may be best to do such soul searching with a mentor or guide to help us see past some of our biased nature. There is another training on self-deception and the many ways it comes about. For now we will focus upon ways we learn.

Passive learning vs. Active learning

Most forms of teaching comes by means of Passive Learning

“Passive learning is a method of learning or instruction where students receive information from the instructor and internalize it, and “where the learner receives no feedback from the instructor”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passive_learning

Passive Learning is done so often most of us seek learning primarily in this manner without realizing it is the weakest form of learning. Many religions teach in this manner and have done so for centuries. Jesus on the other hand did not teach his disciples this way. Jesus had disciples follow him, live with him, and completely change their lives. He not only gave a parable of the “Good Samaritan” but he gave instruction to “do likewise.” Yet how many of us who have heard that parable have then followed the instruction of doing likewise?

Many of us like what we are familiar with and have come accustomed to, like Passive Learning. We may prefer to sit and listen instead of put new things into practice, but we must understand our learning will be little and shallow following Passive Learning methods. If we desire little and shallow spiritual growth then Passive Learning may be fitting.

In 12 step programs there is the expression “a God of your own understanding.” Let’s face it. We all have our unique way of following God. This means our interpretations of what God wants us to do are different. Each of us has our own path to journey with God. We vary in how we seek God, pray, read scripture, go to church, worship, serve, etc. Everyone claims to follow the same instruction manual and yet do things differently.

Passive learning may be dangerous when it comes to our salvation or spiritual condition. If we rely upon sermons as our way of learning God we can easily misunderstand the message. Misunderstanding God’s message is not something to overlook. This is a teaching on “life and death” Deuteronomy 30:11-20. Our learning must move into active learning for the sake of saving souls.

Imagine going to get a drivers license where all you needed to do was watch a few videos. No tests, just talks. Imagine your dentist, surgeon, firefighter,

police officer, or therapist having no tests, internships, or practices. How well would our professionals do their jobs without active learning?

Active Learning

Active learning is "a method of learning in which students are actively or experientially involved" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_learning

Passive Learners listen to Jesus and read the Bible while Active Learners do what Jesus and the Bible said to do. Our choices bring the result of what kind of learners we are.

Imagine someone wanting to learn to swim. We show a video, then a lecture, ask them if they understand, and then tell them to go and teach others how to swim. This process does not work well with anything. We do it, but it is the weakest form of teaching we can experience. Now why would we teach the single most important principles in life with the weakest possible form of learning? Probably because we have done it so long it is engrained and we fear doing anything else. We all know something is amiss with the system, but few have the faith to do different. Let's not fear different. Let's test it and see how it works.

Developing deeper spirituality takes new experiential action and learning from it. Most of us will learn a lot about ourselves as we attempt new action. The process of denying our resistance and to conform to new ways is a key spiritual understanding. We can't read ourselves into it. Like swimming, we must experience the process to adapt and adjust.

There will be resistance and self-deception. We must learn how to deal with it as it comes about. There is no side-stepping this situation. We must do what part of us will not want to do. If we are not doing things we don't want to do we may be going in a direction that will bring us evil consequences.

1 Peter 3:17 "For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

Webb's depth of knowledge

We can gauge our learning and understanding using DOK. Many educators use DOK to create curriculum. There are four levels in Webb's 'depth of

knowledge'. Each level has a brief description of action required for it. The lower the level of investment, the more shallow the depth.

We must keep in mind this system is created for education along tangible things, things we can easily see and measure together. Spiritual development deals with intangible things, things we cannot easily see and measure. So there will be some big differences. We ought to simply see and learn there are different levels of understanding indicated by our levels of cognitive participation and experience.

Level 1 Listen to understand and retain information

“The task does not require any cognitive effort beyond remembering the right response or formula. Copying, computing, defining, and recognizing are typical Level 1 tasks” <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst>

Comparatively with our spiritual development this level of investment would be showing up at meetings, attending church reading books, and listening to instruction. This all falls under passive learning.

Level 2 Define the retained information, know the differences

“must make some decisions about his or her approach. Tasks with more than one mental step, such as comparing, organizing, summarizing, predicting, and estimating,” <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst>

At this level we would be sorting out the information we have learned to see how it all works together. This level is contemplating the progressive action or instruction and our readiness to do it. We may be in the convincing process to do the 12 steps or Biblical instruction of giving ourselves to God, confession, repentance, and restitution. We are thinking what that might do for us and if we should do it.

Level 3 Introspective investigation & personalizing the experience

“must use planning and evidence, and thinking is more abstract. A task with multiple valid responses, where students must justify their choices”

At this level we are to spiritually gather the intangible evidence through new experiences. The intangible evidence will come to us through sensations. Since Good is more grey than black and white we will need a collective understanding of what Good is to improve our sense of when it appears. There is a spirit within us that can help once we have developed a habit of listening to that spirit for direction. Listening for the spirit and obeying it is in the level 3 process. In order to collect spiritual evidence we must practice walking in spiritual principles. We must practice more truth, mercy, patience, peace, compassion, love, generosity, forgiveness, and justice/impartiality. We must objectively see what happens within us and around us as we practice such character traits. We will learn as much as we give ourselves over to the experience. Learning to swim with a life jacket is one thing, but taking it off teaches us much more. Riding a bike with training wheels teaches us many things, but when we take off the training wheels we learn further and deeper.

We also ought to learn the consequences of our participation with the evil character traits of fear, resentment, self-seeking, and dishonesty. This includes the seven deadly sins of pride/vanity, envy, greed, lust, wrath, gluttony, and sloth. We ought to learn how these guide us and lead us into action so we can begin replacing them with Good.

As objectively as we can we ought to learn about our prompting thought messages. We ought to see what it is we are seeking, choosing, following, and obeying. Over time with practice and evaluation we can begin to sense how our feelings may result from what we pursue. We may also learn how our inward attitudes may impact our relationships with others and have an effect on how they respond to us.

Level 3 can be an eye opening experience if we can continue with it. We ought to feel good about reaching this level and continuing in it for we are improving our ability to grow more spiritually and empowering ourselves into taking corrective action.

Level 4 Making corrections for spiritual improvements

“require the most complex cognitive effort. Students synthesize information from multiple sources, often over an extended period of time, or transfer knowledge from one domain to solve problems in another” <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst>

Once we have gathered the information of Good and evil, understand through experience what it is, then we can begin making corrections within our prompting thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs. Now, having an informed choice over Good and evil, we can choose more wisely. We can improve our ability to recognize the difference of good and evil and choose Good. We can choose new Godly thoughts over evil ones we may have habitualized.

Marry's room

This is a knowledge argument that those who have learned information about something without any personal real life experience with it can still learn more through experience. Information learned from books, lectures, and videos is limited compared to personal experience. We may learn a lot about bikes through books, stories, and observations, but when we get on one and try to learn how to ride it the experience teaches us even more.

Piaget Constructivism assimilation, accommodation, disequilibrium

Constructivism describes how we construct learning within our minds. When a child sees for the first time a dog, the child has no idea what it is or what to think about it. We might say to the child, “dog, doggie” and repeat it with hope the child can learn it is a “dog.” The child may reach out to touch it and stare at it trying to understand it. Then when the child sees a cat the child might say, “dog, doggie” because like the dog it has four legs, a tale, and covered in hair/fur. Yet when we say, “no, cat, cat, kitty” then the child looks at us in confusion. The child may even insist saying, “dog, doggie.”

Let's break this down. When the child first learns a new thing like dog, the child creates a new categorical compartment with where to store likewise learnings. Creating a new compartment is called “accommodation” we are accommodating new knowledge. So when the child sees a cat the child instantly places the ‘cat’ in the category dog because it seems to fit. When the child is corrected that it does not fit the child naturally thinks the parent is wrong because to the child, it fits. After the child learns or becomes convinced it does not fit, the mind now needs to create a new compartment to store other cats. The feeling of confusion and creating new compartments is

referred to as disequilibrium. This is that awkward feeling of confusion when trying to figure things out, when new learning does not fit with old learning.

In our spiritual conditioning we will acquire new learning and make accommodations as well as go through awkward and uncomfortable experiences of disequilibrium as we sort it all out. It is important to understand this a normal experience within the spiritual development process. We ought to not be intimidated by it. Instead, we ought to embrace it knowing it can improve us more and more.

Cognitive Dissonance

“cognitive dissonance is the mental discomfort (psychological stress) experienced by a person who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values. This discomfort is triggered by a situation in which a person’s belief clashes with new evidence perceived by the person. When confronted with facts that contradict beliefs, ideals, and values, people will try to find a way to resolve the contradiction to reduce their discomfort.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_dissonance

As we learn more about ourselves and the errors in our ways we will experience Cognitive Dissonance. It will be uncomfortable, but it is a natural occurring experience for anyone who seeks to make corrections within themselves. Changing habits, thoughts, and beliefs will involves such discomfort.

Avoiding this discomfort and experience is to avoid development and growth. We cannot grow without engaging in cognitive dissonance. As we continue to seek peace and pursue it we can actively engage life in different and more graceful ways.

Thought Replacement

1 Chronicles 28:9 the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God. We ought to be in continuous thought with God. This begins with adding new thinking which mean we will

need to replace some old thinking with the new godly focused thoughts. This can often involve some fear and struggle to continuously give up some of our old ways for new Godly focused ways.

We ought to practice putting into our minds miniature goals toward taking action with God's character. For example, we can say a prayer requesting God to guide us to be more patient today. Next we keep within our minds the question of what being more patient would look like with each step we take. Moving slower would probably be involved, avoiding hurry, and fear of missing out might need redirection to prayer. Instead of racing around trying to control things we give ourselves over more to God's pace of peace and patience. We might need to leave earlier to fit the pace better with our schedule, but it ought to make life easier.

Thoughts to redirect and replace our thoughts that lead us into fear, anger, anxiousness, idolatry, pride, envy, lust, greed, etc. We ought to be sufficient with God and our experience with God's grace, goodness, and righteousness. We ought to be considerate toward others, but not be controlled by what they think of us. Wanting others to think highly of us can lead to problems of fear, dishonesty, manipulation, etc.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

We ought to learn to take captive our thoughts which guide us into spiritually destructive character and make them obedient to Christ (love, mercy, peace, patience, forgiveness, compassion, truth, justice, and generosity).

Rule of Inertia & Psychological Momentum

“**Inertia** is the resistance, of any physical [object](#), to any change in its [velocity](#). This includes changes to the object's [speed](#), or [direction](#) of motion.”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inertia>

If we are going to change then resistance will be involved. We will need to resist our old ways as we practice new ways. This resistance will be

necessary for a while and will decrease as our new direction becomes more stable.

Flow (Psychology)

“In [positive psychology](#), a **flow state**, also known colloquially as being in **the zone**, is the [mental state](#) of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does, and a resulting loss in one's sense of space and time.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_\(psychology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_(psychology))

We ought to give ourselves over to the engagement of God's goodness in a way that fits the definition of “Flow.” Read John 15 and see how it relates.

The Greatest Plan

Examples of plans

1. Deuteronomy 6:6-9
2. Alcoholics Anonymous Pages 86 - 88

Disobedient people will struggle with follow through. Few will be self-motivated and self-disciplined to follow structure enough for it to produce the desired results.

God is our Highest Priority - All Heart, Mind, Strength, Soul

If God is our highest priority we will think about God continuously. Since we all sin we will seek other things and reduce God as a priority, will need reminders and prompts to get us back on track. We will need support and accountability from others as well as self-discipline.

Having a plan to bring us back to God is central to growing with God. Not following a plan to bring us close to God is following or at least condoning destruction. Time will tell. If we can taste the good of God we will better

understand the taste of evil. If evil is all we ever know then we won't understand the difference. So let's taste the Good of God and learn.

Build and follow a plan correctly with God

Plan Requirements

1. Clear measurable objectives - When, where, who, what, how,
2. Why - Understood purpose - the reason for the plan. What is the plan to produce or create?
3. Daily or improved frequency - to be good or great at anything we must do it regularly.
4. Correctly - We must be correct in how we do it. Practicing incorrectly can make us efficiently incorrect. We can do it wrong really well.
5. Building, growing, developing - we ought to be challenged
6. Peaceful Pace - We pace ourselves with peace and love

We ought to develop a better understanding of God's intangible character through experience. The process will require trial and error. It will take some patience, courage, honesty, dedication, correction, and persistence to grow.

God's character applied correctly develops sincere love & peace. For many of us it can be challenging to engage with each other in sincere, honest, and compassionate conversations. Yet this is what living with God involves. That said, there may be some challenging resistance within us. We must move safely and carefully more and more into such spiritual conversations. Our fear will present itself in different ways. We ought to take note of how we convince ourselves away from God's sincere love and pray for help to have it corrected.

#1 Clear Measurable Objectives

We ought to unpack each character trait of God into more specific descriptive details. We ought to see how we can add God's patience, compassion, truth, and mercy in all our activities. We can listen more with compassion and

empathy, slow down in our responses, avoid faultfinding of other's weaknesses and learn to sincerely compliment them on their strengths speaking encouraging truth.

If we have particular struggles; sarcasm, lies, lust, fear, false flattery, selfish - ambition, resentment, etc. we can practice prayer to let these thoughts go and replace such thinking with sincere love, truth, empathy, servitude, and forgiveness. It can benefit us greatly to meet and create together such goals.

We must set aside time and effort to create these goals. If we do not, then God is not our highest priority. How can God be our highest priority if we won't put time and effort to see how we can better serve God?

#2 Understood Purpose for the Plan - The why

Knowing why we are doing things affects how we do it. If we are doing this primarily because our friends are doing it we may not be applying our best efforts. We may in fact just go through motions to say we did it. Why we do things affects the outcome of doing them. We ought to reflect upon this question to keep in mind our purpose, to learn about God and ourselves. We ought to be continuously learning about God and ourselves.

#3 Daily or improved frequency

Anything that will be our highest priority will be taking up the most time in our thinking. If we are giving our all to God then not only are we doing more each day, but throughout each day. At the days end we ought to see how we have participated with God in some challenging ways.

Regular and frequent correct practice is needed for mastery of anything. Ask a few professionals how much of their day they devote to their work in thought and practice. It can be consuming and obsessive. We can be this way with God when we see the Good behind God and the giving of ourselves over to righteous activity.

If we are just beginning in this journey it could be challenging to get ourselves to do it every other day. Let's not beat ourselves for imperfections. If we do we will forever beat ourselves, because we will never achieve

perfection. Instead, let's seek gradual improvements. Mercy and forgiveness is universal meaning we ought to apply it to ourselves too.

Meeting together with a partner is very helpful to encourage motivation, stay committed to our goals, and uncovering personal bias. Let's examine ourselves to ensure Good imperfect progress.

#4. Correctly

God's collective character must be present within our focus. If we speak truth without mercy it could be from resentment or selfish-ambition. If we love without truth it could be from fear, guilt, or shame. Are we applying God's justice/impartiality or are we showing favoritism?

Leviticus 19:15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.

God is just, impartial, objective, and staying with spiritual principles of God. God's ways do not change. It's like a law of physics, intangible physics we can't yet measure. It's like riding a bike. No one has created a physics formula for riding the bike, but yet we all know we can through trial and error. We see others do it, believe we can too, then begin our learning through experience. Yet the bike is tangible and we can see the results. With God everything is intangible so we must use and strengthen our intangible senses to measure and gauge our production.

Since we all sin, our sin will be present within our actions. We will have fear, resentment, pride, vanity, envy, etc. Yet we continue to grow with God while accepting the truth of our sin. The glass is half full and half empty.

Our goal is to make persistent gradual improvements with God's character and instead of eliminating sin, our improvements with God's character will automatically reduce sin. If we spend more time thinking and acting in alignment with God's Goodness sin subsequently decreases.

Honest sincere evaluation of ourselves is essential to stay true and correct with God's righteous ways. Speaking spiritual truth about our goals and struggles frequently with mentors or partners goes a long way to keep us real and right. Being regularly transparent with others sets us up to be known

through and through. Others will know when something is off. If we stop showing up or become superficial, others will easily take notice and will be able to help. We will feel wrong and distant. We ought to attend our support groups regularly to stay in the know and to be known.

Daily self assessments will help guide us in self awareness. Regularly reviewing our productivity in thought and action with God's character ensures we stay focused to grow with God.

#5 Build, grow, develop, and increase

Growth does not happen over night. Persistence and endurance are key. This means we struggle more and more over time with practice and participation in God's ways. We avoid getting stuck in the contemplation phase of God and instead move diligently into taking Godly action. We are active learners with God.

If we aren't feeling challenged then we probably aren't growing. Let's say we start off with a goal of giving a sincere and honest compliment to someone each day. After a couple of weeks it can begin to become easier. After a month it can become a habit, meaning we are doing it with much less effort, focus, and conscious thought. The challenge of this goal has been greatly reduced and we are now ready to raise the bar.

As our goals become accomplished, accommodated into our minds, normalized into our bodies, and struggle is reduced, we ought to set a new goal to continue our growth. God wants our all. Moses and Jesus made this very clear that we are to give our all to God. That means we ought to continue seeking God with every effort.

#6 Peaceful Pace - We pace ourselves with peace and love

Gratitude is another word for see the Good. Yet we ought to see God's Good happening in our lives and sense/know it is Good. Does it feel good? Does it bring us good feelings, peace, compassion, and joy?

Our minds can concentrate on many things which distract us from feeling good. A peaceful mind will create thinking rules to guide itself toward peace and after a while it can do it without much effort. In the book *Alcoholics*

Anonymous there are a few great points for peace, “Argument and fault-finding are to be avoided like the plague,” and “we have ceased fighting anything or anyone— even alcohol.” Pg. 98 and 84

The word accept in the Serenity Prayer is a guide toward the previous stated two points. In the prayer we are asking for serenity in order to be able to accept things. Serenity is peace and God is peace. To be with God is to be with peace.

Perspective on this principle for many spiritual reasons is essential. Each day we ought to make time to create a place for us to experience peace, preferably as we begin our day. Getting right with God in our minds and hearts each day in meditation and prayer can save not only our souls but others’ too.

How we are in our minds and hearts has an impact upon all those we are around. As we grow we may be able to impact others with gentle compassion, refresh the hearts of others, and encourage them to grow spiritually. Our demonstration of being more pure in heart and sound in mind carries with it much influence for God’s goodness.

Example - Making a cake

Ingredients

To make a cake or other dishes as well there are ingredients. If an ingredient gets left out it can affect or even ruin the whole thing. A line used in scripture “a little yeast works its way through a whole batch of dough” refers to this idea. Therefore, every ingredient must be right and with the right amount for the cake to taste good. To have the right amount of ingredients we will need to measure. It needs to be accurate.

Instructions

There will be instructions to guide the process correctly. There will be a series of steps and if we take on action in the wrong order it can mess everything up.

Context

If we are new at cooking it can be a bit overwhelming. People who don’t cook can oversimplify the process. The oven we use will cook differently than

other ovens and altitude can make a difference. The pan we cook with can affect the process. Context is always important. Sometimes we may need to use some foil on the edges to avoid burning. A good cook will watch as the cake is baked to assess for needs and adjustments.

Toothpick Test

Although we have ingredients which we have measured carefully and instructions we have followed well we still must be able to test the work to ensure it is done right. With a cake and other baked goods there is a toothpick test to ensure the middle of it is done. If we pull out the cake because the instructions say 20 minutes and its been 20 minutes we may be pulling out a cake without the center being fully cooked. This will not go well at the birthday party. Sticking the toothpick in the center of the cake all the way down and pulling it out can show us how wet the inside still may be. If it comes out dry and clean the cake is done.

Our toothpick test is the affect others sense from us. Are we affecting others with compassion, sincere love, and peace? We will easily see this over time. It's not difficult to love and care for others in a way that stands out and if we are growing with God it will stand out.

Love and peace are not experiences we entertain within ourselves and for ourselves. They are practices we ought to engage in with others. We are all joined with one spirit. Our words, attitude, and demeanor ought to be blessings and spiritual gifts and not measure by comfort. This is the finished product. Like making the cake it is a process. We may need to make a few cakes to learn how to do it well. Every great cook has made many mistakes which have helped them become better cooks, provided they learned from their mistakes and tried again.

Scientific method

“It involves careful observation, applying rigorous [skepticism](#) about what is observed, given that [cognitive assumptions](#) can distort how one interprets the [observation](#). It involves formulating [hypotheses](#), via [induction](#), based on such observations; [experimental](#) and measurement-based testing of [deductions](#) drawn from the hypotheses; and refinement (or elimination) of the hypotheses based on the experimental findings.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method

We ought to reflect upon "cognitive assumptions can distort how one interprets the observation." Are we guarding against our own distorted interpretations? No one is immune of distorted interpretations.