

Experiencing God's Character

Peace is the central goal of God. All of God's character leads to peace. Growing with God involves taking action toward resolve and healing that can bring peace.

Peace

In order to grow with God we must seek God from within our thoughts, senses, words, attitudes, and actions. We must honestly and sincerely desire to understand God more through this exploration. Since we are students of God, our hearts and minds are learning from God. God is invisible and intangible. So we are attentive to things we cannot see or hear. We are open to new spiritual sensations. Students ready to learn are those who have open minds ready to be changed.

Actions we can practice toward peace: Slowing down our thoughts and movement, patience, gentleness, resolving conflicts, waiting for God, avoiding hurry, calming the mind, reducing worry, and being in the present.

Mentally we can attach ourselves to many things and our thoughts can become preoccupied with them. To experience peace will involve the practice of letting such thoughts go. We must let go of that which is not God for that which is God. This is a process we can practice in meditation. We can meditate upon God's character while letting go of everything else.

Peace is the Biblical term, but please understand that Serenity is very similar and commonly used. So building peace will subsequently also be developing serenity.

I was introduced to 'The Serenity Prayer.' It has been instrumental to my spiritual development. I have said it thousands of times. Prayers that guide my thoughts, attitudes, and words into experiencing God's character have proven to be the most effective with my transformation. Yet I must believe in it. Belief is the beginning of faith. Prayer without belief may not be very effective. At the very least, I must be willing to believe peace can grow and that it is good to develop.

Resolving conflict is needed for peace. When I began seeking God I did not want peace. Peace seemed boring, slow, and less productive. It seemed like a waste of time.

Peace is an inward experience. I had a lot of anger. Everything in my life was changing and I did not know what to do about the intense feelings. I was trained not to cry. I was no longer medicating and my anger outbursts did not help. What was I going to do about the intense pressure inside? I was told over and over to give up control. People would tell me, "Surrender to win." I finally gave up fighting and controlling. Eventually, I grieved. I just gave in and stopped holding back my emotions. After a long cry with screaming into my pillow, it finally ended. That feeling of irritation, resentment, discontent, and hate was no longer there. It was a powerful teaching experience for me. This freedom and peace I experienced as a result of letting myself grieve revealed spiritual truth. And I wanted more of it. It's important to emphasize the fact that this experience was mandatory, yet very painful, to understand spiritual peace and freedom. Experience was the necessary key teacher.

I began to practice this grieving process. When I felt anger boiling up inside I would switch my thoughts toward grieving past experiences. There were many to choose from. A lot of terrible things happened in my life and I learned to avoid thinking about them. As I grieved I continued to get similar experiences of peace. This peace I experienced was a brand new feeling. It was so relieving not to carry so much pressure within me. When I stopped fighting and trying to control everything I got to experience this peace and freedom.

Since then I have re-experienced this many times. I know how to get there. Yet, I still lack much discipline because I keep wandering back to faultfinding, complaining, and arguing.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

We all suffer loss, hurt, and many forms of disappointment. Yet we don't all work through our hurt. Blame, shame, and avoiding conflicts can become a regular unhealthy practice. It can become our identity. It became mine. Within my mind is a solid program of thoughts structured to avoid emotional sharing or personal discussions. It's not easy doing something

when my whole belief system says otherwise. Yet this is the way to change.

The fact of the matter is God is love. We must resolve our conflicts and face our feelings in order to grow in God's love. If we shut down our senses to avoid feelings then we sabotage part of our spiritual connection with God. If we do not ponder God's character we will not be mentally with God. We cannot love God the way God wants us to with absent minds or hardened hearts. We must engage God's character both with our mind and our heart. Otherwise we will not be with God.

Let's illustrate it this way. Imagine being with someone you love, but they act as though you are not even there. They go on about their business without considering what you think or feel. Also, they rarely respond to your words or actions, as if you don't even exist. Then at night they thank you for caring and being present. Since God is always with us, and we are not always considering God, wouldn't this illustration fit? It's important to evaluate our contributions to our relationship with God. Is it a give and take relationship or more a take relationship.

Growing in peace is to grow in God's peace. Many people can have many different interpretations about peace, yet it's the Bible's and God's interpretation of peace that really matters. The only way for us to know that interpretation is to read the Bible ourselves. Bible messengers can easily construe the information. We also have the Holy Spirit who can help us. This Spirit will align with the Bible too. Our interpretations ought to fit with the Bible and the Spirit within us.

Understanding takes investigation and working out confusion. We need to ask hard question and speak uncomfortable truth. Many discussions with others pursuing peace, love, forgiveness, mercy, truth, justice, and compassion need to come about.

This process takes strength and courage. Spiritual integrity and confidence can result. Staying the course, walking the line, and persevering with God can bring many experiences of amazing grace.

Two years ago I went shopping looking for a coffee mug. I found a selection of mugs that I liked. They had different colors with various messages on them. I found one that said "Peace on earth & Joy to all."

This is a good Godly message, but didn't fit my personality. I stood there staring at this thing with one side of my brain saying "I need this" and another part saying, "Get something cooler." I realized trying to be cool wasn't the right path. I got the peace cup and since then have come to like it.

This going against the grain or swimming against the current is a constant part of change. My current developed personality wants to do what it knows how to do. I need to resist it as I practice developing a new personality with God. Every morning now while having my coffee I can look at my cup and be reminded to seek peace.

I have taken it slow, with tiny steps, and living one moment at time. And each step felt like a giant leap. I have prayed for humility, compassion, and patience for years now. Sincere honest prayers with foresight have proven to be very effective with spiritual development. What I mean by foresight is seeing within my thoughts how to act with what I am praying. I need to maintain awareness of patience and peace, how to act upon it, to help it grow within and around me.

Some days I set my mind upon some goals and forget to sense God. I can become impatient and get irritated. When this happens I know through experience what I need to do is take a break and get with God. God is light and the way to see the error in my ways is to walk into that light. Then I can see where I have reduced focus upon waiting for God and hurried after other things. I can identify my misplaced hopes and desires. I can see where I need to forgive or make restitution for my wrongs. As I walk into love and peace I can notice the fear, anger, and selfish ambition that leads me away from God. Thoughts that tell me not to slow and trust God's ways have proven to be destructive messages. Surrender to God's will and humbling of self is often the solution.

Creating a peaceful meditation can involve slowing down and setting thoughts toward what is present within and around me; what I can hear, see, smell, taste, and touch. We can investigate these senses deeper while realizing the spirit of God is there. We can pause our being for insight about ourselves and how to live more fully with God's grace. We can increase awareness within our minds and hearts for deeper understanding. We can see that God is good.

For some with high anxiety, this will require much commitment and regular practice. At first it can feel miserable like going through detox. It can take a while to witness improvement, but each time we do it, we can grow. Spiritual growth can be hard to see. Many only learn they have changed through the new and different reactions from those around them. We must trust in the experience and continue.

I think it might be helpful if I share a bit more about what I have learned through my experience, about how peace is good, helpful, and productive. Being at peace is slower and that means I can actually do things better with more focus and attention. I have fewer distractions and my relationships improve because I listen better and am more present with others.

Although the speed at which I get things done may be lower, the manner of how I get things done is improved. I am more organized and experience fewer mistakes. I communicate more clearly with others because I take more time to think about things. My attitude is more relaxed and others feel more comfortable around me. Teamwork improves.

My energy has increased because it's not wasted in anxiety and worry. I don't chase things anymore. I am better able to handle what is in front of me with confidence and calmness.

I can now practice recognizing when I am rushed and able to take deep breaths, pause, set my mind upon God's goodness, and slow down.

Here are some things I have practiced that have helped me grow spiritually with peace:

Slow down, schedule more time for God's purpose, eliminate things on my schedule to make more space for God, move slower, think deeper and more carefully.

Listening with my mind focused upon the person and how to care. Grow empathy with others. Keep my thoughts on the moment with them.

Reducing passive aggressiveness, giving up fighting others over trivial things like who's right. Placing love, mercy, and forgiveness first. Ask more questions, clarify, reduce guessing and assumptions. This decreases confusion and increases clarity in understanding.

Meditation - being still and seeking to sense God's goodness within and around me.

Reflecting on gentleness and how that can be peaceful.

Appreciating beauty around me.

Feeling the wind in my face, raindrops on my tongue, and listening to nature.

Watching children laugh and play while attempting to do the same.

Embracing moments of love and compassion. Letting others care for me.

We all can take action to learn and develop new experiences toward peace. Each day we must set our minds to look for it. One good prayer can be, "God, please help me see your goodness today. Please help me wait for your goodness and sense your peace."

I hope this has been helpful to you. I encourage you today to take action, to experience God's peace, inwardly.

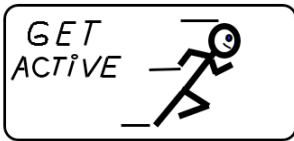
Experiencing God's Character

Mercy

My early development did not incorporate forgiveness and mercy. I developed a personality with paybacks and grudges. I had to step into a new way of thinking and acting to learn and experience forgiveness and mercy. And as I did, I began to witness grace.

Forgiveness and mercy gradually revealed to me that they work together in powerful ways. This fact continues to be proven the more I experience

God's character. Both the Bible and my trials have confirmed God's character needs love for it to be spiritually good. Look closely at 1 Corinthians 13 describing love. Verses 1 - 3 warn us that whatever we do, it must carry with it God's love, love as described in verses 4 - 7. Review this scripture and discuss it with others.



Do I practice truth without sincere love and peace?
Do I diligently grow in the character described in verses 4 - 7?

In what ways am I growing with God's mercy, forgiveness, and love?

1 John 4:8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The character component of love may be like the ingredient of sugar in a cake. Without the ingredient of sugar, it just doesn't taste good. It's not received and accepted. The whole cake will be thrown out. The same thing may happen when we speak Godly truth without love. Our whole message may be discarded. Love is absolutely essential, according to the Bible's instructions. And I admit, I have a lot of room for improvement.

When I accepted the truth about needing God's love I was very nervous, because love was not in me and I did not understand it. Yet the directions were clear. The instructions were not difficult to comprehend, just hard to accept into my being as something I needed to do.

Growing up there were moments of mercy demonstrated to me that I enjoyed. On two separate occasions when I was hitch-hiking to high school my teachers actually gave me a ride. It's nice to experience an act of kindness where someone goes out of their way to help. They did let me know they were risking their job. And I have found that is exactly the kind of mercy God desires, the kind that has an element of risk to worldly gains and worldly security. Mercy involves giving without reward, but there is a reward we cannot see, if we do it with love.

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

God's grace is a gift, a gift that is not by stewardship or duty. It is gift from the love of God and the spirit within us. The spirit of God is trying to guide us into gift giving responsiveness with full attention to love.

Matthew 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what **reward** have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

This might be a good time to pause and reflect a moment upon how we cooperate with this instruction. Here are a couple of prompting questions to consider.



In what ways are we giving to others as God would want? How are we keeping productive with growing in God's love? What results are we witnessing as we love others with God's character?

There is a spiritually right thing to do, which could be why it is called God's righteousness. Our understanding can grow as we step into God's corrective nature, God's good will. God is to be experienced for improved understanding and that means we must be living according to God's ways to gain that understanding.

Psalms 143:10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Our inward attitude and faith has everything to do with the reward of grace we can receive.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

Doing things out of spite, competition, with passive aggression or anger may get things done, but not in the way the Bible describes to get things done with God. We need an attitude of a humble servant growing with love. God's love doesn't fit with pride or vanity.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The following is an example of a prayer: Dear God, please help me take steps into this humbling process of diligent servitude with love. Help me

become more receptive to the joy you offer through giving and caring to others. Please help me with compassion, patience, and mercy, Amen.

As I began my inward journey of transformation, I was taught to serve God. I was to help others, but to help others in a way that serves God. Therefore, I was not to help others into spiritual harm. I believe some discernment is warranted when helping others. So I often investigate situations when I feel inclined to help. This has been a learning development process through trial and error. Sometimes learning how to discern comes through making mistakes and learning from them.

Whenever I am looking at how it can benefit me, I'm thinking about me, which is self-serving. And that's a problem, I'm serving myself instead of God. When I'm serving God, I'm focussing on how I can help others for their sake and the kingdom of God. It's a good feeling to help the kingdom of God and being part of that experience.

Many times I've gone to groups evaluating how being there is beneficial to me. I was taught to shift my mind toward thinking how I can help the meeting become beneficial for others. If I go to group with an attitude selfish ambitions I am in sin. To reduce sin is to grow in serving God. It's the only way.

Hosea 6:1 Come, let us return to the Lord.... 6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

We are to acknowledge God with our thoughts, desires, and attitudes. We are to serve God with our whole being. We are to imperfectly seek to grow in God's ways with diligence.

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

The great power of God through mercy can be sensed by those who have inwardly situated themselves to experience it. Resentment, fear, defensiveness, and inward denial can block receptivity of God's goodness.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Matthew 18:33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

I received forgiveness and mercy from God. But If I accept that gift and then ignored God's wishes and desires for me to go out and help others, that would not have been good. I have tried enjoying life pleasures without

giving to others and it was a miserable, empty, and lonely experience. At first it was fun, filling myself with self-flattery and buying myself things to enjoy. But it didn't take long for the enjoyment to run out.

And when I accepted the Biblical truth about loving and helping others, which I did not like, and gradually put it into practice, a whole new world opened up, and I experienced sensations that informed me. I was on the right track because inwardly it just felt right. Sensing what is spiritually right and wrong is important. Clearing up past hurts was needed to help me regain such spiritual senses. Experiencing mercy, love, and peace were needed to help me sense God's good.

In the beginning it wasn't joy I felt, it was righteousness. God's righteousness came to me through my slow development of humble loving service that often involved pushing thoughts of selfish pride aside. Developing this understanding of doing what feels Godly right has been helpful. Great joy did come, but it required diligent work with purifying my heart and cleansing my conscience.

Luke 6:36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Having no idea how to be merciful, I had much learning to do. One way to step into the spiritual responsibility and grace of God is to set my mind upon being a servant of that grace. The question which must reside continuously within my mind is how I can kindly, patiently, gently, and lovingly serve others. I must decrease thoughts regarding "what's in it for me." As I serve God it must be God's image I am to build. This could very well be a huge part of what building the kingdom of God is about.

It was strongly suggested to me, to get a "home group" and a "service commitment." That meant I was to dedicate myself to a group of people who were focused on learning how to transform. The group didn't run itself and I was to contribute. Since then I have served in many forms and ways. Here are some of the positions I have served over the years:

Coffee maker

Greeter

Secretary

Sponsor/Mentor

Treasurer

Intergroup Representative

General Service Representative

District Committee Member

Youth Group Leader

Young Adult Leader

I have washed ash trays, picked up cigarette buds, and driven strangers to groups. I went on week long retreats bunking with middle schoolers. People have very rarely recognized me for my work. But God continuously teaches me grace through my willingness to serve as long as I am receptive to sense that grace. Sometimes I forget God and get lost in thinking about myself and the world.

Grace, intrinsic reward, is exactly why I do what I do. If grace isn't there, I can see first if it has something to do with my own attitude. Searching myself for resentment, fear, and selfish ambition can quickly point to my error. Am I humble, loving, and at peace? Is blaming or faultfinding within my thinking?

I have found the amount of grace I receive has much to do with my humble loving service. The more I give to others in such a manner, the more grace I can encounter. And sometimes, without notice, I am blessed by jaw dropping, spine chilling, and mind blowing grace.

Sometimes in serving other people it can be easy to forget the goal is not about pleasing people. We are to serve God who wants us to care for other people with Godly good. If I believe I am to serve other people then I may seek to do what other people want me to do and sometimes people want me to do things that go against God's character. Pleasing people with ungodly character is not good. God is good. If it's not done with God, it's not spiritually good.

When someone is lying, cheating, exploiting, or doing something that is spiritually destructive we can respond with God's grace. God's grace is something that is from God and cooperates with God's character. We can choose to leave an impact in how we respond to others and many times this can be done non-verbally. If we are the light, we reveal what is good and what is evil with love.

God's mercy is helping others with God's truth. If someone is going to a place to learn about God, but they are full of deception, what would Jesus do? What would the disciples of Jesus do? There is a lot to learn about this which will require deep thought, many discussions, bold truth, and

thorough investigation. Being merciful sometimes is standing up against others like Jesus did. Jesus stood against the deception and empty teaching of the pharisees. (Read all of Matthew 23) This was out of mercy to the many people who followed teachings of pharisees. They did not teach with a Godly attitude. Standing against people who are misleading with gentleness, patience, and love is a very difficult thing to do. We must get ourselves right first. Our demonstration of Godly good will always be the path toward God's mercy, love, and peace.

Let's close with reflection upon this instructive teaching from Jesus from Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Forgiveness

When I first began my journey seeking God I was merciless. And that is how I perceived the world around me, merciless. Then I was informed by a mentor I needed to love people. That did not fit with my understanding. I was informed anger and resentments were destructive to me and it would be best to let it go. This was not an easy nor quick adjustment.

Love is the goal and to love I needed to forgive. I needed to forgive others, life as I know it, and myself. My memories full of torment which filled me with pain and anger. I had to change my view. The ambiance within my consciousness needed to be adjusted to let in some light and good messages about love. To bring in such thoughts within my consciousness I needed to experience this love. And for me, forgiveness was one of the beginning steps. It was one of the beginning steps to practice. Each time I would practice it, a little more light would come in. And to this day, it is still the case for me that light, good, grace, and righteousness of God come through my abiding in it. I can't create it nor control it, but I can choose to be in it.

Those who get to know me and stick around long enough to watch me change can share how I have grown toward love. I'm like the beast in "The Beauty and the Beast" learning to be a kinder and gentler man with God's goodness. Sometimes, it ain't pretty.

The Bible is persistently describing how we are to love, but with God's love. Many of us can get ideas about love in songs and movies, which are often misleading away from God's truth. We need to separate truth from

God's truth. It's God's teaching that we need to take deep into our minds, bodies, behaviors, and souls. When we love God the way the Bible describes love and God, we can access all of God's character within our hearts and minds. Love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13, can bring peace, mercy, and forgiveness leading to great joy.

This means we need to read the Bible's messages about how to behave enough to know the reasons why it says to behave like it does. We need to do what it says to get that understanding. Then we need to ponder it and discuss it with others who also participate in the same instructions. Then we can bond together through the learning. This is how Jesus taught the disciples. We can do this, if we chose to do it.

Humility is a great first step to grow with God and all of God's character. If we love God with all our heart and mind then we are willing to give our all to commit to let God's character change us as we take into our being God's good character and live it out.

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."

It's important to note the needed experience of forgiveness with love.

Sometimes it's better to come to God to serve God out of desperation and brokenness, to need God enough to experience a sense of being saved. Then it can be so much easier to depend upon God for guidance and a way of life, because it is life giving. Being with God fills my soul and I know it because of what I have done.

Forgiveness has little to do with words. Words can be one way to show forgiveness. However, these days the world can be filled with lies, false flattery, and insincere positive gestures. So we need more than words. We need genuine sincerity. Remember, non-verbal communication dominates over verbal. What we do and how we do it trumps what we say. So our inward attitude needs to get sincere and truthful about real and genuine forgiveness. We need to mean what we say and have our actions align with our words in sincere truth and love. We can move in the direction of perfection, yet imperfectly.

We need to cling more and more to God's character and less to our own. When angry thoughts come, we can redirect ourselves toward forgiveness. We can forgive any offense as we turn our will and life over to God. Forgiveness can free us from the consequences of resentment and anger.

It is not the anger that protects us, it's our choices and actions. Danger exists and evil exists. We can learn about it and make decisions to act upon to help us stay safe. We can recognize danger, discern it, and act accordingly. There is a lot of skill that can be learned here. For now, we just need to differentiate attitude from action. An angry attitude can be more about payback and hurting others than protecting ourselves. There can be more productive ways to protect ourselves than revenge or passive aggressive methods.

Romans 12:9 *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*

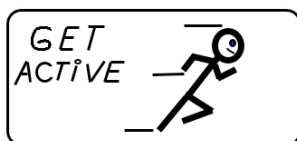
Let's sit with these instructions for a while and revisit them often, "Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good." We must grasp within our understanding and maintain within our consciousness more precisely what God's good character is in order to really "Cling" to it. If we are not studying and learning more about God's good character then we will not be able to "Cling" to it. Our attention ought to be seeking to sense and be aware of all that is spiritually evil and good.

Cling means to hold onto and not let go. If I begin each day with God, but then move onto something else, I'm not clinging to God or God's good. If I am holding on to anger then I am not being at peace with love. I need to choose.

But how can this be done. The answer takes time to understand. Patience and perseverance are needed. I needed to work through trial and error to gradually let go of my anger. I also needed to learn how to grieve the pain from my past to really let it go. And I hated grieving. The thought of crying would make me angry. But arguing against reality never brought any good results.

God is good and in order to grow in God's goodness I needed to see more precisely how the Bible says to do it.

Please review a concordance search on the words 'good' and 'evil' also available at www.inwardauthority.com & Experience Groups.



God is love, merciful, forgiving, and peace. Is that how we can be described? If Jesus is the prince of peace and we worship Jesus, wouldn't we be worshiping peace in a way that we are growing in it every day? Is peace on our radar to seek and practice?

God's character is the pathway to love and peace. Forgiveness is part of the journey to get there. Jesus was the forgiver of sins, to those who would repent. Jesus understood we all are affected by our choices and even more by each other's choices. We are all spiritually connected. Our relationships are greatly affected by how we cling to peace or anger.

I used to have a list of people I was going to get even with. I had to let that go. I was told by many different people, "resentment is like swallowing poison and waiting for the other person to die." The anger within me was destructive to myself and those around me. My anger even ruined relationships.

When I became angry, I learned to pray to God for help. This was not easy and sometimes it just didn't seem to work. I was even told to get a shoe box, put wrapping paper on it, cut a whole in the top, write my resentments down, and put it in the box. That did not work either. I even tried multiple times with the same resentment and it still didn't work. I did not believe in it. I suppose it's the faith that makes the difference. I was told to make a gratitude list and ended up resenting gratitude. I believed gratitude was a bad idea too. Again, a faith issue. But I did not quit. I followed the instructions to persevere and keep seeking God. I was told to have an open mind and be willing to be convinced.

I shared in a previous podcast about peace and how I learned to grieve anger and hurt. My life was a mess and I experienced a lot of pain, suffering, and loss. I had been deeply hurt in many ways and stuffed the pain. I learned to hide and control sadness. I learned to deny pain. And I was good at it.

It wasn't until I began to practice the grieving process that I could experience ending the anger toward others and myself. There is great spiritual healing that can take place through healthy grieving. As I did I experienced peace. And with experiencing peace, I finally understood its power and value. It was a drug free utopia. For the first time I began to experience God's goodness.

Without experiencing peace, I did not really understand it. We will all need to experience God's goodness for the inspiration to go after it as we would anything we find precious. We can learn through experience how precious God's goodness is in this life.

I needed to mentally let go of recalling things from my past used to make me angry or feel victimized. I needed to switch my thinking from being a victim of my past into a peacemaker through God's grace today.

A victim is someone who has been wounded. But with God I am healed and if I am healed I shouldn't walk around like I'm wounded. Yet we must be real, sincere, honest, and pure with it. If we are wounded, be wounded. If we are healed, be healed. We must avoid faking and pretending. It's just not right, nor God's righteousness. And grace is all about being right with God.

Jesus clinged to God. Clinging to God is to cling to love, peace, mercy, and forgiveness. That means we go after and hold tight these principles within our thoughts, choices, feelings, words, goals, and actions.

Abhor is the opposite of cling. If we abhor evil we run from it. We respond to thinking evil like its deadly. Deception, falsehood, hate, resentment, grudges, thoughts that evoke anger, getting even, revenge, and hurting others are examples of things we can run from. We can readjust our thoughts within our minds. We can avoid thinking, speaking, and acting with evil.

There are meditation practices that can be helpful to grow a new conscious awareness. Some of us may not know where to begin. We can search online using the words "meditation" and "forgiveness" to find some resources. We can sit and listen, but listening to understand what is said. The calming voices that may seem awkward can invite us into a calmer state of mind and body. Let's remember God is peace. Peace is a crucial part of God's goodness and anything within us that does not want calmness may be from evil. Let's practice setting that evil aside and letting in some of God's goodness.

I used to respond others who practiced evil in nonverbal ways. They could see I did not approve. I didn't need to say anything. My face said it. But as I continued to learned more about the subconscious roll in behavior I realized many of us do not know the evil we are doing. Some of us are just doing the best we know how. That was my case for many years. I did not know God's love. I wasn't shown God's love. I didn't believe in God's love. I was shown many evil practices and I practiced it too.

I used to blame people for their choices and actions with the idea that they had an alternative. Just because I knew of alternatives doesn't mean they knew. And just because others knew of alternate ways of living doesn't

mean I knew them. We can have a tendency of projecting onto others that they know what we know. This is self-deception. When we think things to ourselves that are not true, we are deceived by our own perceptions. We all do this, but few will carefully watch for them with critical analysis.

That probably just brought a lot of confusion and if it did, go online to wikipedia and search cognitive bias list. Take 30 minutes to really soak in what is said to understand how we all fool ourselves. Just do it, don't listen to reasoning within your thoughts on it's a waste of time to learn how we fool ourselves. Some of us right now may be thinking, "That's silly, i don't fool myself, I'm not self-deceived." But then go ask a brother, sister, wife, or long held best friend if you ever fool yourself into doing something silly. If your mind is open to learn, it can learn.

Sometimes I get frustrated, which is another word for anger, with others who are not willing to learn from me. I get in situations where I am trying to help someone I care about, but they don't share the same ambition as I do about how to handle things. They seem to resist what I believe to be the right way. They even get mad at me if I persist or push the idea. But why? I'm just trying to help. I realized, like using the shoebox with resentments, they don't believe in my methods. And the more I push my ideas, the more they don't want it. Jesus knew this about people. That is why he let people go away and did not press. Either people would accept the ideas or not. This is still true today. I need to continue to remind myself, I'm not the convincer. I'm just someone trying to share information. It's up to each of us to open our minds to be willing to learn the information and see what is true. We can't make people read the Bible and we can't make others forgive.

I sought to understand more about perceptions to see why we do what we do. Within us all exist learned reactions. We all react to things differently. And these reactions are developed largely through learning. When I was young I cried when I got hurt. As I got older, if I cried, I was mistreated by others. I learned to repress my feelings and hide them. Then when I experienced the power of healthy grieving I had to resist the learned behavior of repression. When I felt like crying, my whole being would seek to shut it down. My learning to protect myself from being mistreated by others through repressing my feelings was interfering with spiritual healthy practices. I need to relearn how to cry.

But for many years I understood crying to just be wrong. If someone came to me and tried to tell me that grieving was a good thing, I would have just laughed in their face. Kinda harsh, but that's how I was, harsh.

Only through experiencing the grieving and the good results did I understand how it was beneficial and beautiful. I just want to note that grieving is not depression thinking. My perception of grieving hurt is that it is a process of releasing pain from the past, realizing it is the past, while not seeking to relive it over and over. It is letting go of the pain and the situation. It is saying goodbye to it like a snake shedding skin. It's a cleansing process. It's like saying, "I'm done having you now in my thoughts. I don't need you anymore." It's acknowledging the pain and how evil it was one last time. Although it can return, it's this attitude of intending to let it go and be done with it that is important.

When I try to help or teach others and they don't want it, I understand now that their not wanting it has nothing to do with me. It's just where they are at. It's not right or wrong. It just is. I need to focus upon what information I can bring to help them learn about where they are and where they can be. When I become impatient, irritated, anxious, or angry, then I need to go to God and seek God's peace and love for it to grow within my mind and heart. The anger only makes things worse for everyone.

We can seek to practice inward attitudes of [Contrition](#), being [humble](#), and [supplication](#) toward God. These words can be a good Biblical concordance study. These Biblical words describe the right attitude to seek within our being.

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

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

Ephesians 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

One great self-evaluation question I can ask myself whenever I am disturbed is, "am I humbly serving God?" The answer is usually no, so the response is to go to prayer and humbly ask God for guidance and strength to act in grace. Being right is to act with God's righteousness. Forgiveness is part of God's righteousness.

More on Forgiveness & Acceptance

We can become angry at things too. Whether you we call it forgiveness or acceptance the results of such responses can lead us to being at more peace within our minds, hearts, and relationships. More peace means a clearer head and often better choices. We can give up the fight against the world around us and how things are not going our way.

Giving up the fight is not saying the things not going our way is okay. We simply choose to respond to addressing the situation with a cooler head and more poise. We become more responsible and in effect, more in control. God's peace and gentle way of handling things is just better. Remember, we use grace. We accept grace into our minds an hearts and apply it outwardly.

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.

Here is a small list of simple things I have been angry with: garbage can that does not roll the way I want, walls that get in my way, blankets that don't cooperate, traffic - the same traffic that's expected to be there every day, my line at the store moving slower than the line next to me, tangled cords, taxes, misleading commercials, internet service interruptions, my weight, a bad day golfing, the weather - too hot, cold, windy, rainy, the dentist, doctor, court system, squirrels, politics, cops, mosquitos, Corona Virus, and even God. There are always reasons to become angry, but I need to bring into my consciousness reasons for peace and love. I need to practice thinking about it long enough to have it grow into my subconsciousness. Practice makes permanent what we practice and how we practice it. To fix something that is permanent requires much effort.

I've learned that anger comes from a perceived threat. The perception comes from my thinking. My faith, belief, understanding, and thoughts develop from many choices I make from what I read, music I listen to, friends I hang out with, and movies I watch. I learn through my experiences. I get to choose the settings. I can choose differently all the things mentioned above.

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

I chose to associate with people who were changing how they responded to anger and resentment. While I was practicing new reactions I needed to watch out for situations where I would become resentful. I recall a time when I was driving and found myself behind another driver who was going below the speed limit. I became irritated. Irritated and frustrated are forms of anger. As I drove around the person with judgement I saw it was an elderly man. I realized this man was probably calm and at peace. And then I envied him. I wanted that comfort.

Life does not always go the way we plan. Conflicts can develop without notice. People do not always fulfill our expectations. Things around us also do not go the way we expect. We can seek a new ways to react to life when it doesn't go the way we want or hope. This new way to react can be with love, forgiveness, and peace if we are seeking to have it. We can accept things we cannot change and respond to surprises peacefully through practice and focus.

When something bad happens and we can't do anything about it, we can have a choice of how to respond. Even if we are doing something about whatever it is, the way we respond within our minds can either be spiritually productive or destructive. If we obsess with whatever happened with anger and revenge in our thinking, we can suffer negative consequences. God offers a free gift of grace accessed through faith - setting our minds to be with God, we can choose to let go of the anger, seek God in prayer, ask for guidance, and humbly listen with our inward senses to the spirit of love and peace.

Back to Romans 12:9 "Cling to what is good."

When I cling to anger I cling to what is evil. I become a bit antisocial. I don't really want to be around others. My patience and tolerance is lowered. I'm more stressed. I can be defensive and snappy. When angry, our bodies can undergo punishment in our hearts, blood pressure, and much more. This process of clinging to anger can be destructive physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and socially. The more we do it the more destructive it can be. Some people can be angry for years, even their entire lives.

Anger and defensiveness were once my resources. I grew up with sarcasm, revenge, passive aggressiveness, and an I'll show you attitude. When things didn't go my way I fought.

Just about everyday someone or something doesn't go the way I expect or want. Each of us needs to draw assumptions about the world around us. We need to make predictions about people and events. I assume my car will turn on, that the plumbing will work, and that I will have a reasonably safe day. Yet car batteries die, and crazy things can happen.

I once had an issue with my hot water in our kitchen. We just had a water heater replaced and I put a new faucet in our kitchen. The hot water would sometimes flow regularly and other times trickle. I took the faucet back and got another one. I let the hot water run from the valve under the sink to clear it before putting in the new faucet. The new faucet had the same issue. Frustration happened. I thought, "okay God, now what?" Patience, peace, and love within my mind and heart is always the goal. Anger won't help.

This issue did weigh on me throughout the year and a half it went on. I mean, the faucet worked, and when it acted up with trickling water my wife and I just needed to turn it on and off a few times to get it going better. I have a high tolerance. But then it started acting up more and it was irritating me and my wife enough for me to look into it more. I tried something new. Trying something new is always a good idea. I took the valve under the sink off and saw something that looked like a bubble. I got my vacuum and placed an attachment on the the pipeline coming out the wall. Out came a marble. Yeah, a marble.

This was baffling. My wife looked online and learned how some water heaters used marbles in their valves. So when we got our old water heater replaced the marble must have fell out into the hot water line. My wife also read situations where people have completely redone their water lines and torn up drywall trying to fix the problem.

One little marble can easily create turmoil for households. It doesn't take much. And this is only one of many crazy situations that can happen.

I went to God many times during this plumbing experience for peace, while at the same time brainstorming what the problem could be. I set my thoughts toward solutions. The brainstorming and trying to find a solution led me to the vacuum and resolving the problem. I enjoy puzzles and finding solutions. This requires patience, trial and error, critical thinking, and creative imagination. Letting go and trusting God means I do what God wants me to do. I apply God's resources.

A lot to times things don't make sense. I was raised to get defensive, angry, blame, belittle, and criticize when things don't make sense. We tend to do to others what was done to us. It takes commitment and strength to respond to evil with good. Now I know that responding with anger is a dangerous choice. I can choose to pause, humble myself, and pray for God's help. I can pray for calm, peace, and compassion.

We are all different. None of us has the exact same belief, faith, and understanding. And to think my ideas are right or better than others just seems silly. What is right for me is maybe not right for others. God's character is always right. And we each grow in that character in our unique ways. I have learned keeping focussed upon my participation in God's character can help me do it better. But as soon as I begin evaluating other's productivity in God's character I can decrease my productivity.

I have found that many of us think the same way. Pride and self-seeking is often celebrated in media and the work place. The lifting ourselves up above others, winning, competing, and being better goes against the Bible's instructions.

It's so common to angry when we lose and to feel less than or to boast when we win and feel better than others. The thinking we are better than others is just as bad as thinking we are less than others. This thinking can promote anger, frustration, depression, anxiety, fear, indifference, and defensiveness.

We are to humble ourselves and lift each other up. We are to think less of ourselves and more of how we can be helpful. We are to give mercy, compassion, and love.

Many assumptions exist below my awareness, like the plumbing will work and I will have water when I turn the faucet on. But what happens when it doesn't. Frustration. This expectation from that assumption that I will have a steady flow of water from my faucet doesn't get met and I get upset.

It's a common and normal response to get upset or let down with things that do not go the way we expect. But sometimes, with other people, we can get responses that can bring about deep hurt within us. And still, we must move in the direction of forgiveness to have God's peace within us.

I have been robbed and beaten in my younger days and it wasn't easy to forgive them. There are still times when I need to repeat forgiveness because my mind will move back toward resentment.

One time I was driving home and thinking about how I played baseball for nine years. Then I wondered what would have happened if I had stuck with baseball. Next thing I know my mind is shifting into blaming and resentment. I realized my thinking was shifting into a destructive manner and immediately redirected it back toward reality. This self correction in thinking is absolutely necessary to keep my mind spiritually productive. As I become aware of blaming, faultfinding, or any other counterproductive mental attitude I need to redirect it. I often use prayer. God help me from myself.

Forgiveness is a practice and an attitude. When I get with God I know I am to be God's servant. I'm not to tell God what needs to happen, I'm supposed listen and follow God. I'm not supposed tell God what I need. God knows what I need more than I do. I'm supposed to pay attention to God's will and focus upon being a part of it so that God's good can heal me. Pride and anger are not good. I need to guard against them, confess them, and humble myself.

When we are harmed by someone, it can be a good thing to remember what happened. People tend to repeat behavior. And as we remember what happened, we can remember it without resentment. The anger, hate, or grudge that can be replayed over and over within our minds is what can be destructive to us. Instead of replaying past events we can set our minds to focus upon what we can do right now with God. It's still good to remember what happened so we can learn from the events. There are people who follow evil in the world and we need to accept uncomfortable truth that exists around us. It's the inward attitude we carry that is guided by our thought behavior which can condemn us. Remember, there is a healthy shame, the feeling of being away from God. And then there is self-condemnation, the thinking we are evil or bad. Self-condemnation is a behavior that can be changed with help over time.

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

I've heard teaching about this verse which focuses upon endless forgiving. Yet that is only part of the message. I believe we need more teaching upon rebuking and discerning repentance.

I have rebuked many people. Very few head the rebuke. I have been rebuked many times. Rebukes are needed and needed regularly. We sin

every day, so why wouldn't it be needed regularly. It requires developing the skill of discernment through the regular practice of self evaluation to recognize our own sin. It's so much easier to see fault in other than in ourselves. This means a change of focus.

We need humility to pause and evaluate the rebuke experience for truth and accountability within ourselves and others. Because I get nervous about confronting others I tend to do it aggressively. I usually rebuke because I feel offended or hurt. Evaluating reactions within those rebuked and myself can help me discern how to follow up. And because hurt pride can often be the case, follow ups can be very helpful. When rebuke happens, defensiveness and shock can come about. However, after some thinking and cooling down, reasoning can be better.

I often follow up with an apology for my attitude. I do not regret nor apologize for words of the rebuke that were true and guiding in the right direction. The Bible is full of information about correction.

Proverbs 10:17 He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, But he who refuses correction goes astray.

Once we have rebuked we then will need to discern repentance. I've found that looking for a sense of remorse or healthy shame can be a good indicator of repentance. Again, discernment is a skill that is developed and unfortunately that can often go the course of trial and error. Reviewing our own experiences with remorse can help. And if our experience in remorse is limited, that might be a sign for something to practice more.

Forgiveness is being at peace. When an act is done and there is nothing we can do about it, we can learn how to be at peace with it. This can involve self-correction within our minds and attitudes. It could require conversations and brainstorming upon how to accept the new situation. Deep painful grieving may be needed. There may be great conflict within us about what happened. Hurt, tears, and anger can be part of the healing. We can trust God, that God's ways are correct and best no matter what. We can seek peace and forgiveness. We can pray of love and mercy.

God's peace is the goal. We can take on a humble attitude to serve God. We decrease resentment within our minds and hearts. We can be cautious concerning the evil that exist within and around us.

Sometimes mercy and love can seem harsh. Jesus did not heal everyone. Jesus was selective with discernment. Jesus knew some people were not ready to give themselves to God and serve God. Jesus spoke harsh truth and we ought to get real about that truth. We can read John 15 as if Jesus is speaking directly to us.

Jesus instructs his disciples. Matthew 10:14 “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.” And Luke 9:5 adds what the shaking the dust off means, “testimony against them.” This action is nonverbally communicating the town is wrong to anyone that can see them do it.

Walking in God’s character will mean living in ways other people don’t. And at times other people will not want God’s truth, even if it is offered with sincere love and peace. Because of the difference, people will may belittle and mock what we do.

Humbling ourselves is always necessary. We will need to practice thinking that shifts away from ourselves and toward God’s good. Self-righteousness and self-condemnation can interfere with God’s truth. Any form of self-deception through this process will affect the experience.

If we think about how other people are not getting it, we stop thinking about God’s good. Our thoughts can trick us to think about glorifying ourselves or how we are not good enough. Such thoughts are distractions from being with God.

Just as the self-righteous thinking inflates our pride in an exaggerated sense, self-condemnation exaggerates in the opposite way being just as incorrect and just as much a lie.

We can redirect our thoughts with prayer and seeing how we can do something for others with God’s character. Serving others in love and helping others experience love is what saves and feeds souls, even our own.

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.”

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

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

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.

It's the love we give and receive which can help and heal us from our inward suffering. We need God's love in our hearts and minds to experience spiritual good. Anyone can give and receive love and anyone can refuse it. It's a choice. Forgiveness and mercy are powerful character traits to practice that can help us into God's love.

James 5:19-20 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

As we envelop God's love within our thoughts and feelings we can then better communicate and demonstrate a love that can restore and save souls. Forgiveness and mercy are methods that work. Let's choose to set our minds and hearts upon them today.

Experiencing God's Character Truth

I always believed in the truth and believed I understood truth better than most. As I began diligently seeking God I learned there was another kind of truth I knew very little about.

We are going to discuss Biblical and Spiritual truth relating to God. This truth we cannot see or hear, but we can learn to sense through experience. Until we experience it, we may not understand it. And to understand it can take much experience.

1 Corinthians 14:20 NKJV Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

Let's look at a definition of truth.

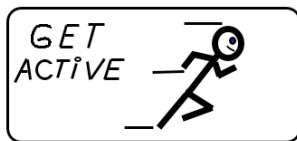
Truth is defined by wikipedia as "the property of being in accord with [fact](#) or [reality](#)."

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

I'd like to quickly point out in this definition the phrase "being in accord." This means to be in agreement with truth. It's one thing to learn the truth and it is entirely another thing to accept it into our hearts and minds and be changed by it. That's faith. We are to be in accord with God's truth.

Before I read the Bible or decided to go to church, I found God. I experienced God without the Bible and without church. I was told to pray and to put away undesirable character. I didn't know how to pray or really much at all about God. I heard God described as Good Orderly Direction. That made sense. Later in the Bible I discovered that God is literally described as 'Good.' So it was a perfect fit.

In order to deal with undesirable character and follow Good Orderly Direction I was told to examine it daily and throughout each day. To grow Godly good I needed it to be my daily goal and to take appropriate action. This process was sloppy and full of error. But as long as I kept refocussing and recommitted my mind to the task, I was able to continue to grow and mature spiritually.



Are we in agreement with God and the Bible? Are we growing in agreement with how the Bible says to live with God. Are we actively improving in this truth? Are we desiring to grow in agreement with God's ways and character? Are we willing?

In doing this for 30 years I have learned many ways we can all fall into deceptive traps. I have been focussed intensely upon understanding the reasons we deny truth and avoid reality that is part of uncomfortable positive change.

"Perception is reality" ~ Lee Atwater

One thing that is easy to learn is that we all suffer from misperceiving reality. If we didn't, magicians, advertisers, and con artists would be out of jobs. But they are not. In fact, they are in high demand.

Watch the series "Brain games" and you will learn how our minds are trained to draw very quick conclusions about many things and to trust those conclusions completely without question. We trust these quick assumptions and rarely test them. We blindly follow the flow of our instincts and quick judgements.

I just want to comment briefly on the fact we all judge reality all the time. There is unfortunately a bad vibe with the word judge, at least in the U.S.. We judge what is large, small, loud, quiet, hot, cold, fast, slow, annoying, or comforting. We all judge. We even judge the use of the word judge. This a fact.

2 Peter 2:2 NIV “Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.”

When I was about 15 years old I was walking along a very populated teenage hang out. I came by another teenager a little bit older than me who had a Bible and was trying to share it's message. I remember listening to him and coming to the conclusion he was talking about something he had heard or read but it was not coming across with faith and understanding. I realized he didn't really know what he was talking about and was just a puppet of the adults standing in the background.

Right here I sense I need to get clear about the word faith. When I use the word faith I use it thinking of Biblical characters like Paul, Noah, Joseph, and Abraham. I did not see this kid with that faith.

In my experience growing up there were people who could see and then there were fools. I was schooled in the acts of conning people through being conned. I lied, exploited, and deceived others on a regular basis for many years growing up. Perhaps this lifestyle was the catalyst to my questioning everything and having distrust.

You see, when I was listening to this kid trying to preach, he looked like a bad actor trying to perform a monologue. I felt no conviction in what he was saying. I learned how to read people who just go through motions like puppets without discernment or real understanding. Rookie sales people do this all the time following scripts.

I found that the people easiest to con are the ones who don't question things. They take things at face value. I believe God wants us to examine things carefully and with depth for real truth. I believe God wants us to know through experience what we are talking about.

To grow in truth we must improve our discernment abilities. We are limited to our own perspective. We can only know information about the world we seek to understand and can only learn by the skillset we have developed. Building skillsets takes investment and commitment. I did another podcast series on this called “Spiritual Growth Formula.”

The more we can be convinced that we misperceive things on a regular basis the more we can desire to exercise discernment and testing. It's simply accepting we are students and need to learn how to improve.

I have been married now for 20 years. I saw a Meme with a man that said, "I don't always lose things, but when I do, my wife moved it." It actually took me years to realize I was thinking this way. And she thought the same way! It took many proven misperceptions before I would start questioning myself, that maybe I misplaced it. And I'm a deep thinker pursuing truth! What does that say about others who rarely question themselves?

We all have blindspots. Literally, we all have visual blindspots. We are created with them. And when we are told we have blindspots, this new information does not fit with our understanding and we can seek to deny it. Our minds say it's not true without carefully examining for the truth. This is the normal response to information that does not agree with our understanding. We deny truth on a regular basis. If you disagree with this fact, you may be an example of it. Would you really think you perceive everything perfectly as it actually is all day long? Of course not, that would be blind arrogance. No one is perfect and we all sin. Yet our minds trick us to think we are right when many times we are wrong.

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Slow down

There is big difference between glancing, looking, and studying. God's truth and our being in accordance with it can set us free. This means we are studying truth. We are explorers of truth trying to uncover truth about ourselves, yes, ourselves. We can increase awareness about our thinking behind our choices. Since our choices respond to our beliefs they reveal our faith. To make changes in our actions we will need to make changes in our choices. And to make changes in our choices means we will need to create new options. We need new ideas. We need to learn more spiritual truth to participate in it.

My personality was originally developed with anxiety. I was restless and impatient. I would often jump into doing things before thinking much about what I was doing. I did not read instructions until I absolutely had to. This personality was based upon my choices. Learning is a choice and new action is a choice. We can develop new habits that can change our

personality. As I increased my meditation and prayers to help me grow in God's ways I became more attentive about them throughout each day and practiced them. Over much time I gradually became a different person more aligned with God's character. My personality changed through this process and continues to grow and change today.

Those who are closest to us will be able to testify to our faith because they hear it in our words and see it in our actions.

The beginning part of the journey is to slow down and ponder God's ways. We must bring into our minds God's goodness and think how we can grow in it. This is not a weekly event. Changing habits is something that needs to be consistent and daily over a long period of time. God is not a habit and being with God is not a habit, but listening to God for direction can be perhaps the best habit. It's what all the good Biblical characters did.

If we want to grow in God's truth we must be in it each day seeking to understand, experience, and sense it.

Compartmentalization

I remember in school being taught how to differentiate between fact and opinion. I watched how students would get it right in class, but then outside of class would shift away from truth. This is compartmentalization learning. We learn to practice one way of thinking and responding in one setting and another way in another setting. We believe in school or class we need to obey certain rules of thought, manners, writing, and speech. Then in other settings we follow a different set of standards and practices. We let situations define how to behave instead of one set of principles. The right or true way to act can be dependent upon what we believe to be important. God wants us to trust in God's ways and character more than fitting in with the group, class, or teacher. Jesus and the disciples demonstrated and discussed this point.

Accepting hard truth

Truth that produces change is rarely comfortable. The phrase often used is "felt convicted." I had to learn a practice of pausing and thinking deep about truth in the Bible I have not accepted into my way of life. Some investigation was needed for me to explore why I don't behave more in the manner the Bible instructs.

I needed to respond with the idea that maybe how I understand God, life, people, and myself could be wrong. Maybe there's something I don't know. This is the process of truly becoming a student or disciple. I needed to become teachable.

Read Matthew 23 for an example of Jesus speaking hard truth. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Remember, truth is "being in accord." John 15 involves Jesus describing abiding in God. It is so crucial to understand the truth we are in accord with and abiding in.



What truth are we following and obeying? What principles do we model and demonstrate privately? How would those close to us describe our character? What are we doing to grow in God's character?

Discernment

To learn how to make corrections and improve perceptions about truth I need to sharpen my discernment and investigation skills. I am baffled why many churches do not offer free classes on improving discernment of information. I needed it and I believe everyone can benefit from it. That's why I'm teaching it freely. I believe God wants us to improve our critical thinking and discernment.

To live by God's truth is to increase awareness of when we don't and try to make gradual adjustment toward improvement. If don't change we don't improve. That's a fact. That's truth. So we need to increase our time and effort looking for things to change for improvement.

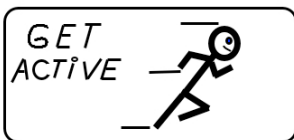
Sensing the Meta-message

We are going to discuss how Biblical instructions and Spiritual sensations work together. Since God is invisible and intangible we will need to use more senses than simple observations.

We can become trained at recognizing certain patterns of God's character. And to recognize these patterns we will need much experience with that character. The Bible is full of patterns of trusting God. We can read how people trusted God and what they went through to get there.

When I was a teenager I fell in love. It was wonderful and amazing. My devotion was solid. Then it ended and I felt miserable. I vowed not to do it again. I didn't know the girl or who she was, so the fact is, I didn't love her, I loved my idea of who she was. I loved the way I felt around her. That is the love of pleasure. And when that feeling went away I blamed her because she was not behaving the way I needed her to behave to bring those feelings. I was in love with the misperception of her.

We can love God like this too. When we are happy, God is great, and when life sucks, God is absent or mean. Perhaps we have the wrong idea on life? Life as I know it has ups and downs. God as I know God does not change. Everyday something great happens to one person and something terrible happens to another. Is one blessed and the other cursed? The point here is to think carefully how our views of God can change depending upon how we feel or where we are.



Does our view of God change when we are at church? Is it different depending upon what happens to us in life? Do you view God as distant or close in different situations? When things change, does God change or is it us?

We will need to examine reason, relationships, and feelings, seeing how they work together. We can use our spiritual experiences that we perceive which are opinions and compare them with Biblical writings for validity. Then we can share experiences we have found validated in the Bible with others to compare with their experiences. This is the method I have found to best find spiritual truth with the Bible. I read the Bible, do what it says, examine the results, and share with others to see if it fits with the them too. If it fits with my experience, the Bible, and others experience, it may be truth. It's far more likely to be truth than if I just do it myself. There's still a lot more I do than this. I see how many times it is described in the Bible and how many other people relate to the experience. Tests that are repeated over and over and prove the same result helps to prove something true.

Please learn how interpretations and assumptions can easily draw wrong conclusions about facts. Ultimately, each of us will be the judge of truth for ourselves. Our truth will be dependent upon conclusions we draw from our own senses. It's best to check our conclusions with others who will honestly challenge us.

No Partiality

NIV Leviticus 19:15 Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

NIV 1 Timothy 5:21 I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without **partiality**, and to do nothing out of favoritism.

Various books in the Bible from Old Testament to New Testament provide instructions about not showing or having partiality. But we all do it and will do it. (Please email john15@inwardauthority.com for questions)

I will share one Biblical term that can provide some questions about this and that is the use of the word ‘favor.’

“close association among favor, grace, and mercy”
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/favor/>

The Hebrew ties Favor and Grace together meaning the same thing.
<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2580.htm>

The Greek use of ‘favor’ is defined as “Kindness”
<https://biblehub.com/greek/5485.htm>

So a question that comes to me is, “How can a God that shows no partiality have favor to some and not to others?”

My answer is this. God seems to show no partiality in Judging those who seek out God’s good and those who follow evil. The consequences of each are described throughout the Bible. God gives to those who follow God’s principles and character. Favor or grace comes to those who seek to grow in God’s love, mercy, peace, compassion, forgiveness, truth, and justice.

For a list of consequences please read Deuteronomy 28.

I have found it very helpful to validate thoughts and assumptions.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 “Test all things.”

Each of us in this process will need to be humble and truthful, freely sharing our own personal views without pressures of conformity, herd mentality, or group think. (please learn about these influences and how to protect against them)

Each group can be informed about these pressures so they can identify them as they occur. Robert’s rules of order uses a principle of minority opinion report to ensure opposing views are heard. If you have questions about this please contact john15@inwardauthority.com or do some research to resolve them.

To find God’s truth we will need to explore God’s goodness and the way to do that is to increase our love with God. Since God is love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, justice, truth, and compassion we will need to go and explore these traits and learn. (See Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13 & 12:7)

To explore God’s character we will need to adjust our viewfinders, thoughts, attitudes, and actions to better participate in it. When I began I had no idea there was such a view. I did not know about God’s character. I describe this journey in other podcasts.

I recall a time in the beginning in a 12 step program and another member asked me how I was doing. I asked him, “Do you really want to know?” He said, “yes.” So I dumped on him how I was feeling. Then he said, “Thank you for being honest.” He appreciated my honesty. My honesty was a blessing. This process was very different and I was curious to learn more.

In a world where being fake can be so common we can be surprised when others get real. It can be refreshing to those seeking truth and disgusting to those seeking pleasantries.

Have you ever heard about the elephant in the room? Wikipedia defines it this way “an important or enormous topic, question, or controversial issue that is obvious or that everyone knows about but no one mentions or wants to [discuss](#) because it makes at least some of them uncomfortable”

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

Will we sacrifice comfort for truth? There are many twelve step groups supporting people who have addictions. And there are also Twelve Step groups helping others who enable addicts. There are countless self-help

books for people who make dysfunctional choices. One of the most spiritually destructive problems may be people pleasing. There is a balance of caring for others and yet staying in the truth. We need sensitivity while acknowledging real problems that exist. Jesus and the apostles revealed the elephants. And this is what seeking spiritual truth is all about beginning with our selves.

There are many warnings in the Bible about hardened hearts. Being sensitive with reason can help us gather spiritual truth.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Truth are facts. What good are facts if we do not look closely at them with concentrated effort. And to look closely at facts we need to gather them up and sit with them a while. Since each of us can perceive or sense things a bit differently it will be best to converse with each other about the facts. Through honest sharing we can test each other for correct perceptions and interpretations about facts. In order to follow the Bibles directions toward unity and having one mind we ought to focus more upon the facts we agree with and not let facts we disagree with divide us.

There is one fact each of us must learn to appreciate for any sense of objectivity. Our minds persuade us continuously to inaccurate conclusions. The more we can humbly verify our conclusions before thinking we are right the more likely we can make corrections about our misunderstandings. Those of us who believe we have no misunderstandings are likely those who do not go through this process. It's can be risky to share our thoughts because they could be wrong. The fear of being wrong has a lot to do with pride. Fear and pride are two things that should not be influencing our choices.

The Bible discusses coming into the light and being light. The light is spiritual truth. Grace is spiritual truth. We are to repent which mean turn from evil thinking, selfish ambition, vanity, idolatry, and toward God. We are to seek God. All this means we are to step into God's corrective character. We are to give ourselves over to the correction of spiritual truth.

I went through enough corrective action and inward adjustments to change everything about me. I am nothing like I used to be. There are times when I don't even know who I am anymore. So when I read scripture pointing to the fact that it is wise to make corrections I am comforted. I am

comforted that my journey is validated by the Bible. Of course the real comfort is the cleansing of conscience and purifying of the heart.

Proverbs 12:1 Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid.

Some may hear this verse and quickly want to hide it because they find it offensive, but I embrace it because it is a Biblical fact. It's not only a Biblical fact, but it is a fact of experience. It is a scientific fact. Why would anyone hate improving themselves? Correction is needed for improvement. What's evil in the verse is not the word stupid, it's the hating correction. Stupid is a result, not an action. So it is the action of avoiding and hating correction that is the problem.

God is indescribable, intangible, and invisible. We need to use our spiritual senses. The Bible describes God with intangible ways we all can sense inwardly. Love, compassion, mercy, peace, forgiveness, generous, truthful, and just. In order for us to improve our understanding about these facts we will need to place ourselves in positions to sense them and do it more and more to improve our ability.

I was told to seek God each day. Pray in the morning and at night. I was told to meditate, sit, and ask God for strength and guidance to do God's will. Yet I knew nothing about God and did not know how to pray. I was educated a little on meditation, but not prayer. I sat for many hours at night when I couldn't sleep because my anger, fear, and anxiety disturbed me greatly. It took months of persevering with confession and giving myself to God before I began to experience changes.

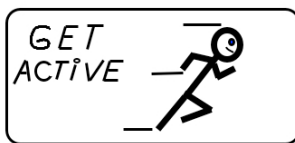
Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

A thorough concordance study on the words persevere and perseverance can bring to light much Biblical truth about God's instructions.

We will need to improve our inward attention with spiritual senses in order to gather facts about our spiritual reality. Before I sought God I was trained to keep myself safe from liars, thieves, and exploiters. Love and trust were my enemies. When I began seeking God I was told to serve and love people. I could serve, but since I did not know how to love, that part would be a work in progress and it still is today.

I was to begin cleaning up my past and my current attitude. I was to practice serving God in what I do. It's like telling a ballerina tomorrow you are going to return a kickoff in a football game. I was not trained for peace and love, and yet told to do it anyway. And unlike sports I can't pick up love like I can a ball and talk about it. It's something that takes new training. So I was like a ballerina returning kickoffs feeling like I had no idea what I was doing and lacking the skills to do it. I was impatient, intolerant, judgmental, fearful, and angry. I was praying to God all the time for help and guidance.

Meditate and collaborate on Romans 2:1-11



verse 7, what is patient continuance in doing good? How did Jesus and the disciples demonstrate it? How does self-seeking interfere with it? Verse 10: What is it to work what is good? Have you ever done a Biblical concordance search on 'Good?'

There are many facts about our Inward Authority (beliefs, experiences, and understanding) that are uncomfortable to look at. We all have thoughts that do not comply with God's goodness and character. There's a saying around meetings, "We are not bad people trying to become good, we are sick people trying to get well."

We are people who have learned how to do the best we can by the resources provided to us. Some people had better resources than others. As people seeking to move in the direction of God's character we are simply shifting our attention and efforts more and more toward a new set of spiritual resources. We are abiding little by little with a new set of spiritual tools and instructions. We are listening more and more with new senses to understand parts of ourselves that are under developed. We are trying to grow more thoughts and actions, gradually, toward Godly good..

We will need to train ourselves out of auto-pilot. We must put an end to "going through motions" and "same ol' - same ol'." Jesus taught and demonstrated a way of living with God which required being alert to what God would have us do and how to do it. To be present and aware of spiritual good is to live actively discerning between good and evil within our own prompting thoughts. We will need to learn more about God's good to see it and better produce it in our words and actions. The spiritual truth that will matter most is the truth that exists within our own perceptions and beliefs. Our faith that can save us will be dependent upon such things.

I didn't want to change my thinking or examine myself, I just ran out of better ways to improve. I was invited into a fact finding and fact facing process. The facts I was invited to examine were facts about my thoughts, attitude, choices, and actions relating to specific character traits that were spiritual in nature. To this day I still face facts about myself, because it has been proven to me for decades that doing so can help me make spiritual adjustments to grow and improve. It's still an uncomfortable experience that brings more peace and love.

Faith, which is from perception and belief, can provide access to grace that can save us. (see Ephesians 2:8)

In my early years I needed to accept facts about my resentments, manipulative ways, self-seeking, pride, dishonesty, and how I was hurting others. These were evil practices. I was invited to see where I blamed, argued, and criticized. I needed to stop yammering about faults in the world and others. Such responses were only distractions from seeing the spiritual truth within myself I needed to begin seeking God to help change. I needed to find my own spiritual mistakes and see how to make spiritual improvements. Service work and helping others has always been a necessary part of humbling myself and experience the spiritual good in helping others.

The moment I complain about others is the moment I fall victim to sinful thinking. What other people say or do has nothing to do with my relationship with God. Finding fault in others rarely helps me see how I can improve in grace. Finding how I can forgive, speak sincere truth in love, or have mercy can help me grow with God's goodness. That's the truth. I needed more active development in my mind how to practice mercy, forgiveness, peace, and love. I needed to get honest and be truthful about this saving grace that exists right now if only I set my mind toward it and acted upon it. These are the facts of my experience and what I have heard hundreds of times from other people. I need to convince myself continuously to follow God's ways and character instead of other ideas.

I believe the Bible is mostly concerned with spiritual truth. God wants us to be spiritually productive with God's ways. So we need to increase our focus, words, and actions with them. We need to do it to experience it.

In order to grow in spiritual truth I needed to stay with spiritual truth longer in my thoughts, attitudes, senses, and actions. I needed to gradually focus longer and deeper into spiritual realities of God's goodness. For more on

this please listen closely to my series on the Spiritual Growth Formula. Reflect upon it and discuss it with someone to understand it deeper.

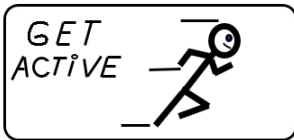
I recall a time when I felt betrayed by someone I loved. I had always responded with anger and condemnation when I was betrayed. I would bring the hammer. But instead, I humbled myself because I saw the remorse in the person and the shame. I denied my instinct of wrath and brought compassion. I embraced, hugged, and loved. I felt out of place, but I had to try more of God's ways. It was amazing. With practice and continuance my relationship was not only restored, but renewed.

As I continued to practicing compassion and seeking to sense compassion inwardly I was increasingly amazed with the results. I was surprised at how different life can be when I applied my inner world toward compassion. I think about it often and periodically step into the experience. It continues to feed my soul. And this really is the goal, the feeding of the soul. Practicing God's good character with the heart and mind feeds not only my soul, but other's souls too. And when I feed another's soul long enough, there is something spiritually amazing that transcends the relationship.

This stepping into sincere truth with emotional depth can be socially awkward. Not everyone wants to delve into sharing with heart level conversations. Many even walk around in denial continuously distracted with unhealthy habits. Yet as I present myself as someone seeking deeper connections with spiritual realities I can find others who desire the same. Those who are interested show interest. Their eyes light up and they come talk with me. When I speak sincere truth, sometimes it feeds the souls of those seeking it out.

Being in the truth sometimes will mean being in conflict with others. Jesus lived a life and spoke boldly about truth that brought intense conflict, insults, physical pain, hate, and even his own death. Religious systems at the time of Jesus hated Jesus because Jesus spoke truth, God's truth, spiritual and Biblical truth. Jesus tried to reach religious systems to change them and to increase love, but they wouldn't change and they sought desperately to shut Jesus up. The disciples also suffered.

Jesus first practiced abiding in God's truth at the cost of his own temptations. He resisted his own desires to pursue God.



What would Jesus be like if he did not resist his own desires? What would the disciples be like or Christians or even ourselves? How important was it for Jesus and Paul to resist themselves for the sake of developing God's goodness?

If we are going to grow in God's goodness then we will be replacing old parts of ourselves with new ones. We must accept this fact or truth.

We each have a testimony of our faith evident of our walk. Our words, relationships, and actions testify to our interests.

Getting to the truth requires analysis, examination, open mindedness, patience, and perseverance.

The journey I have traveled with my spiritual transformation has involved a life-long investigation into a spiritual reality that does not always agree with the world around me. In order for me to find truth I needed to do some research. Truth doesn't just come through sitting around. Truth is something to be learned. How much truth I receive depends upon how much time, effort, study, and openness I apply to understand to the process. (For more on that listen to the Spiritual Growth Formula series)

Here is a summed up bullet point version of my journey.

I experienced hate, emptiness, abuse, violence, addiction, and trauma or what can be interpreted as hell.

I reached out for help at a 12 step program.

I became willing to seek God for a new way of life.

I confessed, examined my character defects, and prayed for God to take them from me.

I reviewed my past for those I had harmed and made restitution.

I gained experience with God's grace and a faith that worked.

I gradually sought education more and God less.

I lost faith and became empty, lonely, and depressed.

I came back to God, practiced what I had done before and regained a solid faith. I experienced grace again and depression went away.

I read biographies of those who started the 12 step program and learned they were really into the Bible.

I earned a Master's degree in education and counseling.

I began going to church. I learned many who go to church did not have the experience I had. I was inspired to try to help.

I became a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor. I let those credentials expire in 2007 due to moving to another state and sensing a different spiritual direction.

I began to study the Bible.

I went to Seminary School, but felt lead in another direction.

I became convinced the greatest commandment in the Bible should receive my highest efforts.

I've been studying the Bible, life experiences, and other personal testimonies to understand this commandment and God.

I have helped others grow in understanding with this commandment and experienced very good results with those willing to face facts about themselves.

Face the truth

Facing facts about ourselves and God's Biblical truth are not easy, but is necessary to experience deeper spiritual freedom.

John 8:31-32 NIV "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Let's break these verses down into dependent pieces. And all these parts need each other for them to work

Part one: Jesus speak to a certain group, "Jews who had believed him." This note was most likely written with purpose. Now what is so special about "Jews who had believed him?" Why is that important? I know I speak one way to people who do not believe me, another way to people who do not seem have interest in me, and yet another way to those who believe me. Those who believe me tend to trust me. And they listen so much better. They tend to have more interest and desire in what I have to say. So to them, I speak I deeper truth.

Part two: Jesus uses the word “If.” This word is known as a conditional clause. That means there is something that has to happen in order to get what follows or what could follow. This is formulaic. The Bible does this in many places and in different ways. Other common formulaic expressions are “Those who” and “unless.” So when we read “Those who,” unless, or “If,” we ought to pay close attention to what needs to happen.

One example of this that seems pretty clear is

Luke 13:3 & 5 “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

This phrase is used two times. Repetition is also important. I learned in school if a teacher says something twice it is more likely to be on the exam. If a boss tells me something twice I ought to pay attention. And when Jesus says something twice, it’s probably pretty important.

Part three: Here is the condition in the formula Jesus is sharing. “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” There are different ways to evaluate “hold on to my teaching.” The parable of the sower provides some ways where the word of God or teaching is dropped like seed. Some people take it for a day and then forget about it. Some people take it in deep and long enough into their being, to change their life, schedules, time, resources, thoughts, words, attitudes and relationships. I believe “hold on to my teaching” means we live our lives continuously growing in the teaching of Jesus that is evident to those around us. The time and diligence we invest and how we do what Jesus says can indicate the kind of disciples we are.

Part three: After we have learned and practiced the teachings of Jesus, holding on to them in our minds, hearts, words, and actions, then we can know the truth. As I have shared in other podcasts, it took a while for me to grasp the spiritual truth behind living by spiritual principles; God’s character.

Countless stories testify to this fact, that how we respond to God’s instructions will affect our being. Think about how Abraham responded. Wasn’t his response indicative of his faith? What about Noah? Wasn’t how Noah responded indicative of his faith? Then there’s Jesus and the disciples. Was there a difference between the disciples and Judas? Did the way Judas responded make him different? What about how the pharisees responded. What does Jesus mean in 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.”

The fact is, our minds can interfere and block our acceptance of grace or righteousness. Our understanding can be vastly different than what God wants for us. We are each called to develop a continued conscious awareness of being with God. Yes, to live in and with God’s goodness. We have access to God’s love, peace, mercy, and forgiveness. It is dependent upon our faith. And faith is what we believe to be true. So for us to be in the truth of God is to believe in God’s ways and character, that it is good.

We will need to surrender our knowledge about how to live and accept God’s instructions to grow within our minds and hearts. At least this is what I had to do and have heard many people testify to the exact same thing. I had to surrender my ways, ideas, and understanding to accept God’s ways, ideas, and understanding that can show me spiritual truth.

Part four: Once I began living my life more according to God I gradually became more free of fear, anger, anxiety, and depression. I experienced deeper relationships, that were more personal and rich with sincere truth. I was learning to reduce playing games with passive aggression, sarcasm, condescension, arguing, blaming, and faultfinding. I was growing in honesty and discussing inward realities which increased belonging and fellowship. Life became so much more enjoyable. I felt like I could be more open, less repressed, and less controlled. I felt like being released from a containment. I experienced freedom.

Matthew 22:16 NKJV And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in **truth**; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.

In this verse Jesus is described as “true” and in the NIV says “man of integrity.” Jesus, who many of us worship, is about integrity and truth. Jesus will not reduce Godly truth for fear of how it might affect other people. Jesus struggles and suffers with rocks being thrown at him, yelled at, hated, and spit on for the sake of being true to God. Jesus speaks truth even when it will create great pain and suffering for him and his beloved disciples.

I was introduced to what is commonly expressed as “rigorous honesty” in 12 step meetings. This expression was taken from 12 step material. I was

told I needed to get real about myself, how I felt and what I thought. I needed to face facts or truth. I was told I needed to evaluate myself more than other people. Evaluating others never really helped me improve things about me. Facing facts about myself was seriously uncomfortable, strange, and life-changing. I felt like I was entering a different world, a new spiritual way of life, and a new perspective upon truth.

In Matthew 22:16 KJV Jesus is described, “You do not regard the person of men” and in the NIV “You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.”

This is crucial. This dependence upon God in a way that I am not swayed by other people can keep me centered upon spiritual truth, God’s truth, the only truth that can bring freedom. I have found I need to “Cling to good” Romans 12:9 and “fight the good fight” 1 Timothy 6:12, so that I may obtain the prize of peace, love, freedom, and joy.

The minute I begin placing my dependence upon someone or something else is when I begin to become centered upon it. My values can become swayed by that person or thing including money, pride, and vanity. And it is by character that my core being is going to be affected. My heart, mind, and soul must be toward God with the desire to grow in God’s character in order to received God’s goodness more and more.

Each day it is what I set my mind and heart to do that becomes my truth. It is what I seek to earn and how I do it that defines my character. And it is that character I live by which will either enslave me or set me free. These inward facts or truth are the spiritual realities that always exist. Today, I can increase my awareness of them and choose to participate more God’s truth.

Experience in Faith

Standing still with my family before a long wooden bench while holding a book filled with words I never use, I recall praying to just be able to sit down. People were singing, although it wasn’t pretty and there was a man in a white robe with some kind of colorful decorations at the front of crowded wooden benches. I never heard these songs anywhere else and I doubt anyone would otherwise want to hear them. I always questioned anything that didn’t quite fit. This church thing, to me, didn’t quite fit. It just

didn't make sense to me. My parents made me show up, be a person I'm not, with a lot of rules on how to dress and speak.

I follow the line of other kids I don't relate to into a room that resembles a classroom. So now I have to sit down in a school like setting with a book? Isn't this the weekend? I must be cursed. And why is everyone smiling. This isn't fun. I'd rather be playing in the dirt with cars or throwing a ball. Can't we go outside?

This was kinda how I recall going to church as a kid for a few years. I had no interest there. I had trouble sitting still. I just remember a bunch of formalities. When adults talked my mind would just go numb. I would just space off and wait for them to be done. So, I didn't learn anything and from I understand from many who did learn things, I believe I'm lucky.

I wasn't raised with conversations about anything. My parents never pulled the "your going to hell" card. I don't think they really bought into that stuff. I had to learn pretty much everything on my own.

I recall my mom praying with me at night. I learned God and heaven being something in the stars. That's all I really remember learning about God. Today I know God is within me and around me everywhere. My situation was like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz not knowing about her shoes. Her shoes were with her the whole time.

God has been within my reach this whole time, but I didn't know how to see. I was like a kid stuck in a Chinese Finger trap. I only knew the way out of something was to go away from it. In a Chinese Finger trap moving fingers away from it just makes it tighter. I had to relearn how to orient my mind, heart, attitude, and choices to experience God.

Hebrews 11:1-2 NKJV Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony.

Faith leads a person to develop a "*good* testimony." God is Good. If I rely upon God then I seek God's Good. If I love God then I love God's Good. God's Good is way different than the world's good. Please read all of Hebrews 11 for examples of *good* testimonies. Such testimonies can take a whole life time to develop. Here is my testimony.

I began a rollercoaster ride in dysfunction. I spent a lot of time at school standing outside of classrooms and in the principles office. I never gave much thought to God, the Bible, or church. I went to church a few times

after that, but just to ride my bike with a friend and climb stuff there. The church was alongside a canal. We used jump our bikes into the canal and sometimes catch crawdads. Then of course we would line the crawdads up on the edge of the canal and throw dirt clods at them trying to knock them back in. We didn't have money so we used whatever was around to create games.

In middle school my friends and I just sought out trouble. We were literally trying to see how much we could get away with. I remember one time in art class we were seeing how high we could stack metal stools before the teacher would catch us. One time I turned a glue bottle upside down to act like I was going to put glue in my friend's sister's hair, but I didn't realize the cap was screwed open until the glue came out. Another trip to the office. We got used to detention.

When my friends and I were together we would encourage each other to do evil. One time I threw a pickle slice at a friend and ended up hitting a teacher in the face. The teachers got together and made sure my friends and I were assigned different classrooms.

I recall a teacher trying to express how she cared about me and coming to the conclusion she was lying. I believed she was caring for me through the confines of her job and schedule. I get that much care anywhere. Is that really caring? I didn't think so. So I viewed adults as a bunch of liars. Since we are discussing faith we need to get down to beliefs. Faith comes through belief. I gave up on faith in good while in middle school, probably because I just didn't discover it.

Things got so much worse in high school. I learned that one of my middle school teachers actually had a list of students least likely to graduate high school and I was on it. I ran away a couple of times. I did drop out, but I went back. I was bullied and had to change schools. I was diagnosed Emotionally Handicapped and put in special education. I was suspended for drug possession. I graduated special education to regular classes just before finally graduating high-school.

I was terrible with relationships. I kept to myself a lot and wouldn't say much. Since my relationships were often focused on evil I learned not to get close. For good reasons, I didn't trust anyone.

A lot of bad stuff happened.

My mom had stopped drinking through a Twelve Step Program when I was 15 and she was a major influence upon my staying alive. I did everything

aggressive and to the limit. I had a drinking problem that led to legal issues, financial problems, and destroyed relationships. I eventually tried controlling my drinking and it just wasn't for me. I realized I had to stop or face life altering problems. By the time I was 21 years old I became convinced that I needed help.

Experience always shaped my beliefs and faith. I lost faith in people because of all the lies and betrayal I experienced. I lost faith in life because I just didn't witness anything good in it.

As I attended some meetings, I began to experience many testimonies of those who got sober following spiritual principles. This experience in listening to testimonies helped me gain hope. I feel the need to clarify that there were many testimonies that did not help my faith. Sometimes it seemed to me that people were fake and lying. Yet I experienced enough testimonies to hear some that convinced me they were telling the truth. These individuals seemed to know something I didn't, something good. I wanted to know.

I experienced work, but not just any work, work for good. I later found that the Bible would sometimes use the phrase "good works." They first said to get a sponsor, a home group, and a service commitment. It was suggested to go to 90 meetings in 90 days. The amount of information in the beginning was overwhelming. I went through the steps. I had so many questions, but instead of answers I was told to do something. I was told to do the steps. There were always solutions that required me changing. Experience is what mattered.

I didn't want to grow with God because God involved things I didn't want. I didn't want to let someone help me. I didn't want to read or examine my character. I didn't want to meditate and pray. Yet if I was going to get better, I had to commit to live a new way of life doing what I did not want to do while denying things I wanted to do. I had to become less and God's ways become more. I had to humble myself. And this has been the course for me growing with God my whole life. Growth requires a specific course of action.

I had to surrender the things I wanted to do that were not part of God's program and do something new that was part of God's program. Just getting rid of sin, evil, or bad habits does not produce anything new. It just stops something. In order to produce something new I need to add something.

Growing with God required seeking and searching. I had trouble figuring out this God thing on my own. I was told to pray, but not how or to what. They did say pray to God, but I didn't know God, so it was like praying to empty space. But I did it anyway. I did it over and over being open to learn while not really getting anything out of it. I stayed the course, persevered, and trusted the process. This may be what Martin Luther King Jr. meant when he said "faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." I didn't understand, but I was told taking the action would help me into understanding. And it proved to be true.

As I have touched on in other podcasts I went through a course of action that was more challenging than anything else in my life. I faced my thoughts, feelings, and actions with the intension of making corrections and improvements. Confession with others and repentance to a Good Orderly Direction became my mission. Nothing else mattered.

The only way to change character is apply new character.

I was convicted about a set of attitudes and beliefs I needed to let go. Realizing the way I believed was defective was unsettling. Learning that I was wrong, that my identity and personality was flawed, and that the way I understood life was incorrect, was quite disturbing. Fear and confusion developed and persisted throughout the journey into corrective action.

I slowly let go of these thoughts and attitudes through prayer and redirecting myself into God's will. I began practicing new thoughts and attitudes to help others and do right. When I later learned in the Bible about Righteousness, I knew what it was talking about. Doing what is spiritually right and good is to act with God. God is good, a universal good.

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

Being righteousness is simply living more right with God's principles and character.

Then it was time to make right my wrongs.

To change I needed to experience a death to self.

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Mark 8:34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

My God used to be physical euphoria. I wanted to party and experience euphoric sensations. I wanted to feel pleasure, because pleasure felt wonderful. It took years to realize this way of life had many downsides, and destructive consequences.

I finally experienced someone who was Good. I began to believe that maybe there was a Good God.

Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!

Since evil has to do with simple things we experience every day like, envy, vanity, pride, deception, dishonesty, controlling, manipulating, gluttony, and the like. God's good likewise has to with compassion, mercy, forgiveness, peace, love, truth, and justice. Good is doing right.

As I began this new journey to do good and make right my wrongs I encountered life altering choices. I had to change everything. I had to change how I spoke, how I handled stress, what I did for fun, how I dressed and decorated, and even my relationships. My whole life centered around getting intoxicated. Experiencing this much change was extremely stressful, confusing, emotionally challenging, and I no longer had chemicals to manage it.

To hear more about this you can listen to the podcast on "Peace."

I remember having my best friend over and realizing he was high on Marijuana. I realized he had some on him and that I could get high. I had to make a choice. I had an urge to get high, but I was on a mission. I had committed to this new way of life. I shared with him how I appreciated his friendship, but that I could no longer be around him while he was high. I never saw him again. That was a testimony to the true nature of our relationship.

One side note I believe to be of value. Many relationships are based upon convenient similarities. If I leave my work, family, or church, will anyone try to contact me? This can testify to what kind of relationships I have. But relationships go two ways. Do I reach out to contact others that have left? I have reached out to contact others, but they don't really call back. I believe this has a lot to do with fear and pride.

Back to my story. Since I had to change everything about me I had a loss of identity. This loss of identity and belonging is hard to endure. But I was seeking a new and improved belonging. I experienced endurance and perseverance for a long time building this reliance upon God. It took a year through much hurt, anger, and sadness before I finally experienced a deep sense of peace, freedom, and contentment. I had a new identity with God, and it felt good.

Life doesn't stop and temptation doesn't stop either. The world I live in does not support, encourage, and belong with God's goodness. The world I live in does much the opposite. I pursued education and money. As I set my heart and mind toward school I gradually decreased seeking God and God's good character. I associated with others who were full of selfish ambition and Godless. I fell away from seeking God's good.

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

By the world's standards, these people I associated with were not evil. They were you average college adults. They just didn't seek development of God's character. And for me, being in the habit of not relying upon God's ways as a solution is very dangerous. Relying upon my own understanding of life and how to behave is not Good.

Eventually, loneliness, emptiness, and feeling miserable with life lead me back toward the Twelves Step process. I was fortunate to experience enough pain to humble myself to seek God again and listen carefully. As my heart and mind was humbled, broken, and ready to accept whatever God would give me, I was provided help through another man.

I learned the meaning of Matthew 6:24 "No one 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."

I believe I either trust God completely or I don't. I learned giving my all to serve God makes a tremendous difference in the results. If I choose to follow the ways of others that are outside of God's good then I choose to follow sin. Remember, sin is to miss the mark and the mark is God.

This, for me, is the epitome of faith. Not my will, but God's be done. Whatever it is. When I am willing to serve God no matter what, then I am responding in good faith. This is the kind of faith that has always brought Good results. I have witnessed this for 30 years and have listened to hundreds of others verify this truth. So to me, it's just a fact of life. It's

normalized. The 12 steps that have helped millions describe it, the Bible describes it, it's verifiable through appropriate action, and people alive and with us today affirm it. I experienced it. To me, that makes it a fact.

Let's look at differentiating fact from opinion. Here are two statements.

A man is heavy. Is this fact or opinion.

A man weighs 175 pounds. Is this fact or opinion.

Remember, a fact is verifiable. We can verify weight with a scale. But how do we determine heavy? Heavy is a relative term that is defined differently from person to person. That makes it an opinion.

Is my faith going to be something that is verified or assumed to be real? Is my faith going to be an opinion that is unchecked or is it going to be tested?

I believe it is crucial to verify my understanding about God with through reason, personal experience, testing, and the Bible. I want to have an accurate faith, not a faith based upon opinion or someone else's ideas. I want my faith to be based upon fact. And facts are verifiable.

When I was told I could have a spiritual experience I was also given direction as to how to have it. I needed to do certain things to receive an experience.

When Jesus says "Blessed are those who mourn" and many other similar actions leading to consequences, I can't help but think I need to do likewise to gain an experience that can lead to understanding and results.

There are many instructions throughout the Bible on how to behave inwardly. Jesus and the disciples really emphasize the inward actions, because too often, people focus too much on the physical actions and performances.

The Bible seems to be the scale we use to verify and justify faith. But we each develop our own understanding of what it says. I have found it essential to collaborate with others

If someone claims a man to weigh 175 pounds it would be an opinion until we verify it. We would need a scale. If we do not take the action and weigh the man, it remains just an opinion. Until we verify our faith through action we will only have an opinionated faith.

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

Yet we have to choose this course of action. God won't make us do it. We will need to choose to verify our faith through doing what the Bible says.

Time and time again over the past 30 years I have experienced and witnessed results of what it is like to grow in God's character. I have also experienced results of complacency, stagnation, and coasting. When I grow with God my life improves and when I don't it suffers. God works and God is verifiable.

Following more precisely the instructions in the Bible is to step on the scale. But then we need to look at the measurement and how well we applying ourselves to the directions.

James 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

I believe we can all step up to the scale, get real about who we are, and verify our spiritual productivity. But if you're like me, you can be blocked by fear, hurt, deception, and resentment. So coming to the truth would include lowering our guard enough to test things. My pride too, can get in the way. So I often need to pray for humility to be open to correction.

We can humble ourselves and grow into this faith through orienting our hearts, minds, and actions to grow the goodness of God. We can choose to pray with sincerity each day even if it's just praying for the willingness to be sincere. But if we don't want God's good, it probably won't come. When I didn't want it, I didn't look for it. I didn't seek it. And if someone tried to help me see it I would send them away.

This process has always begun with the willingness to let God become my God. I need to seek God first, not just one time, but continuously over time. In my experience my character and identity with God is something I need to choose to build. I need to commit to a course of action. I need my mind and heart to be learning, evaluating, how to participate more in God's good ways.

Each morning I get up and reflect upon God's character and how to practice it.

For me, a good prayer goes like this, "God please help me from myself. Help me seek your goodness. Help me desire you. Rescue me from fear, anger, dishonesty, and pride. Help me correct my faulty thinking. Help me be willing. Guide me to do one new thing in your character, name, and

grace today. And help me taste the good in it. Thy will, not mine, be done. Amen.”

Here are some more topics that a Good testimony ought to include:

The Bible says...

Right Inward Attitude in Faith

Humble
Contrition
Readiness
Willing
Do Good Works
Seek to obey God’s character, principles, good, righteousness & grace
Prayerful - pray all day
Mindful - Increasingly aware of our thoughts
Calm, peaceful, patient, content, relaxed, confident
Trusting and Relying upon God above all else

Right Faith Journey

Perseverance, endurance, Long-suffering
All day, every day, all heart, all mind, all soul
Trials, Standing Firm
New Identity, changed behavior and attitude
Help others to change through God’s instructions
Training, learning, teaching, & demonstrating
Admonish, rebuke, & encourage to grow with God
Live more as the Bible says than as the world does
God’s principles before pleasing people
Truth, avoid false flattery, lies, dishonesty, manipulation

Experiencing God's Character Joy & Strength

Listen carefully to what Joy is linked with in Galatians 5:22.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

God's Joy is a fruit of the Spirit.

One form of joy comes through growing with God with increasing faith and good works. (Psalm 30:5, Matthew 25:21, 2 Corinthians 1:24) Another form of joy comes with inequity, lack of discernment, and folly. (Job 20:5, Proverbs 15:21, 21:15)

I did not grow up around joy. My home environment did not demonstrate joy. Love, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness were not aspects I experienced. I did experience some self-control though, but self-control without love is not with God.

I discovered ways to have fun. And these ways were not in line with God's good. It was all about self-gratification. Joy was a foreign unknown mystery I had yet to experience. It took about six months of experiencing transformation into God's goodness for me to be introduced to joy.

Lack of discernment and folly both involve quick judgement and poor examination of information. I live in what seems to be superficial world full of quick first impressions and hasty reactions. I believe God wants us to slow down and use our senses more thoroughly. God wants us to discern and use reason.

The Biblical term inequity is a form of ungodliness. There are many ways we can experience joy through ungodly behavior. Some examples are vanity, greed, lust, and gluttony. Then there are the deceptive ways of joy where we foolishly get excited over things without understanding. The Bible describes this as lack of discernment or folly.

I would set my hope towards the weekends where I would be able to party. I guess that's where I believed I could find joy. My God at the time was the party scene. When Friday came about my friends and I would get excited and talk about where everyone was going. This anticipation of the event was part of the joy. I didn't understand the spiritual consequences at the time. Now that I do, I see that the real joy was just the belonging and the being together. It wasn't in the stuff we were doing. The stuff we do is only something that gives us a reason to be together.

I did not discern my actions or what my actions were doing to others. I was not thinking about love, gentleness, kindness, etc. My friends like crazy, so I would get crazy. Hearing my friends laugh and be impressed by my craziness made me feel appreciated. My friends enjoyed crazy behavior. I did not question it or try to see how it was right or wrong. I could not discern because I was not taught how to discern. I could not discern because I did not experience Godliness the way Jesus and the disciples teach it. I cannot discern what I do not know.

In my recovery I was taught to examine where my thoughts are seeking for my perceived enjoyment to ensure it was an enjoyment that would be beneficial. Is it lust, gluttony, vanity, or greed? If so, the Holy Spirit and the Bible are available for help. This is often not a quick help, but a gradual corrective process involving discomfort.

The way I learned to enjoy life was not right. The things I sought after for happiness was spiritually destructive. This is not to appoint fault. I wasn't wrong for how I learned to behave and think. I was raised in a broken world by broken people. There is a guidance manual provided to us that can help us experience the right joy, the spiritually beneficial joy, God's joy. We must choose to seek it out. We must correct our thoughts and ways in simple achievable steps through practicing new righteous thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions.

I believe we need collaboration and discernment about our behavior. I'll share a quote from the Bible and then my experience.

Matthew 13:20-21 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

After about a year of much corrective action, confession, repentance, restitution, meditation, prayer, God reliance, grieving, and connecting with others about spiritual development I experienced an understanding of how to be with God. This being with God is very much a mental, emotional, spiritual cooperating process. For now, I just want to make the point I had joy with God. I was 21 years old.

Then I moved away to a college university and lived in a dorm. I gradually shifted my ways of living and sought God less. After about 6 months I was questioning the whole spiritual experience. I prayed for a sign, watched carefully, and was given one. Yet I still put living with God and by God's ways on hold.

Somewhere around my fourth year with God I was exiting an emotional pit. I had forgotten God and pursued worldly success. I had slowly and subtly overtime withered inside into a spiritual bankruptcy. It felt like the end for me. I was done. I reluctantly reached out for help and it was there. I was humbled and willing enough to accept redirection. I knew I needed to make choices to move into God's goodness and act upon it. And as I surrendered once more to God, to serve doing right, that righteous way of being, rescued my soul, again.

Being righteous is to each day choose to respond a little more with God's truth, mercy, peace, love, justice, compassion, and forgiveness within my mind, heart, soul, and strength. This cooperative action can position me to better receive the gift of grace.

Restoration comes through restorative thinking and action working together. To feel the goodness and grace of God I need to ponder it and let it become part of my thinking and feeling. I cannot cling to destructive thoughts and expect to feel much love. I need to grow forgiveness and mercy within me through action, let go of pondering hurt, and embrace peace.

When I was in my pit of emptiness I was disconnected relationally and listening to dark music. I not only listened to the dark music, but I would relate inwardly to the misery and hate the music described. I would experience the darkness and feel it. I would identify with it. This kind of thinking lead me deeper into my torment.

I need to be careful how I think and relate in spiritual terms to the world around me. This to me is the epitome of spiritual discipline.

Coming to God is to participate in right actions. To enable myself to experience joy requires me to put away actions that promote hurt. I need to perceive joyful things to experience joy. I needed to experience something I truly believe to be joyful. I needed to look at things differently and develop a vocabulary I was not used to using.

Psalm 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

I always felt irritated when others would promote positivity to me while ignoring the negative. Merely pointing to the positive without addressing evil can come across as condoning the evil. It's like ignoring it and hoping it will just go away. This is not part of God's ways.

Empathy is an important step. We all need to feel valued, connected, heard, and understood. Sure, we need direction on how to improve, but I have found direction is received better by those who understand what they are saying through experience. Real empathy comes through having been there, where the other person is inwardly.

Jesus accepted murderers and prostitutes who were ready to repent. Jesus instructed how to get with God in ways that were not easy or comfortable. Jesus and the Disciples didn't use false flattery 'Positive' words. They spoke the whole truth. Raw truth that was real. And I believe if we are with Jesus, we will speak raw truth to each other. Think about the Biblical words rebuke, encourage, and admonish.

The raw truth of the matter is that we live in a world with child abuse, broken families, prostitution, addictions, divorce, murder, exploitation, deception, war, slavery, with unspeakable violence, and commonplace insincerity. Perhaps condoning lack of discernment, inequity, and folly fuels such things. The solution involves growing discernment.

The spiritual goal is to feel fulfillment, peace, contentment, and joy. Joy with discernment and careful evaluation. Joy with acting more in righteous ways. Ignoring evil and focusing on positive things doesn't fix the

brokenness. Reading countless information to understand the evil doesn't correct it.

I had a lot of anger, hurt, and loss to transition. I was stuck in it for years not knowing I could be different. I accepted it as a way of life. This renewing of the mind, purifying the heart, and cleansing the conscience, which are all Biblical instructions, helped me to find freedom, peace, contentment, and love. I couldn't find it before because I was too busy following other senses. I was a faultfinder, blamer, complainer, excuse maker, justifier, rationalizer, grudge holder, disobedient, rebellious, stiff-necked, hard hearted, insincere, sarcastic, passive aggressive, and humorless person. Some of these I continue to struggle with, but most of it has drastically changed.

I believe grieving is something that transitions loss into acceptance and empowers us into resolve. Sometimes grieving can involve hanging on too much to the pain. I believe hanging onto the pain and believing I am a terrible broken person lead me into depression. Just as I needed to let go of my addiction behavior I needed to let go of self-condemnation. I needed to let go of cognitive character defects. I can't experience joy and peace if I am attacking myself.

It's a big deal to change everything. I needed to accept a new identity. I had a lot of loss to deal with. Coming to peace with loss is an emotional experience that just can't be skipped and I believe is necessary for joy.

Let's try to be objective and practical for a moment about self-condemnation. I have met many people who suffer from this and I realize it is habit forming. Those who do it can get trained into it. We somehow along the way adopted or accepted this type of thinking. Movies depict this where actors will slap themselves or call themselves stupid. They will talk down to themselves as a way of motivation to do better. It is using fear, anger, and pride for motivation. These are not Godly traits.

All of us practice both evil and good. One sided negative thinking is just as wrong as one sided positive thinking. The truth is the cup is both half full and half empty. We can acknowledge the truth and then see how God wants us to act upon it. If we listen to, follow, and obey God then we seek good things and practice good ways. The messages we tell ourselves needs to improve to align with God's goodness in order to experience that

goodness. We must practice forgiving and being kind to ourselves through Godly kindness. It will be unlikely to experience joy while practicing self degradation.

We can pray for help from God to open our eyes to good things.

It was just as hard giving up habitual self-condemnation as it was to give up partying. I had to learn to give and receive compliments. To this day it is a struggle within my mind to position myself to receive love and care from others. God's goodness and grace can come to me if I can accept it sincerely into my being. If someone tries to share compassion with me, I can reject it. I can change the subject. I can act like I receive it while inwardly distracting myself from the spiritual gift. Fear and disbelief can block it. I can believe it's a lie. Experiencing God's grace can require a gift giver and the gift receiver. The gift of grace, although freely available, can be ignored, rejected, and denied.

I really had no idea what good things were. I had to see it through demonstration by others to believe it existed. When I saw people helping each other for the sake of doing right and the spiritual reasons with it, then I began to believe maybe there was a God.

I had to learn to let go of thinking habits that would sabotage or block God's grace. I had to begin a practice of concentrating on God randomly each day.

Isaiah 21:11 It is a joy for the just to do justice, But destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.

Isaiah 29:19 The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, And the poor among men shall rejoice In the Holy One of Israel.

There were those who would encourage me to be grateful, but for what, that didn't make sense to me. How could I be grateful when I felt so empty, alone, and dead inside? How can I be grateful when my whole world is falling apart. I needed to open my mind toward new Godly good experiences and position myself in a way to receive it. As I suffered, learned to grieve, speak sincere truth, practiced new character inwardly and outwardly over time, I began to experience Godly good more and more. I eventually believed more and more as I witnessed such things.

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.”

I tried to do positive affirmations, but I did not believe what I was saying. I just felt like I was lying. Saying, “You’re good enough, smart enough, and dog gone it, people like you” just didn’t work for me. I needed to get back into action and participate in doing good. It is in the doing good, Godly good, that I find joy. Godly good involves forgiveness. That means both inwardly to self and outwardly to others.

As I again set out to seek God and grow in God’s ways over time I began to experience joy. There is something that happens within me when I do things that are right, I’m humble, forgiving, and open to understand new things. When I advocate for truth, peace, justice, mercy, and love I feel more spiritually connected. Yet in that process I always need to let go of pride, resentment, fear, deceptive messages, and selfish ambition.

I believe I experienced 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.”

I believe great joy comes through being in agreement with God’s good with continuance, perseverance, and endurance.

Proverbs 12:20 “Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.”

Those who promote peace. This is God’s peace. That means peace with sincere love, truth, and fairness with impartiality. I believe peace comes through resolving misunderstanding and conflict. I experience more peace as conflicts are resolved. I do not experience peace through conflict avoidance. Conflict avoidance never resolves anything.

Joy comes through an inward conditioning of faith, belief, convincing, and perceiving. I need to keep aware of how I perceive things and what messages within my mind I am accepting to be true. I had many incorrect messages leading me toward spiritual destruction. In order for me to change, those messages within my decision making center needed correction.

This process does not happen in a day, but it's best to practice it every day. In order to improve self-awareness I needed to look at myself, where I needed correction. In order to experience joy I needed to identify the attitude within my mind that interfered with joy.

Here is a simplified process I take to experience peace and joy.

1. Get my thoughts right with God's character. Trust in God's ways consciously throughout each day. Make God more important.
2. Ask God for help to stay with number one and to reduce distractions of fear, anger, anxiety, self-seeking, or deceit.
3. Participate in Godly good activity. Talk about God's ways and look for it in life. Watch for God's ways in others. Bring God's good into my consciousness. See the good in it.
4. When stuck in fear, anger, anxiety, etc. I can pray, meditate, journal, and share with others who will point me into good action. I can pray for willingness and humility.

Psalm 98:2 The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

1 John 2:29 "If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him."

Once I get right with God and bring God's good into my consciousness and see that it is good and I am a part of that good. I experience joy. I feel and believe I'm right with God. This brings fulfillment inside and the best kind of belonging.

Joy that has no sense is a joy that comes from folly. I needed to persistently go through correction that brought struggle before experiencing joy. Knowing I'm on the right path brings great joy. It's like the prodigal son story. The son accepted a right course of action with humility and servitude. And that attitude and spiritual condition is what brought the Father Joy.

John 16:22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

The daily tasks can fill my mind with things that need to get done. When I'm hurried I can forget about love, peace, and compassion. And without them, I have no joy, and I am weakened.

The world seems to care about bottom lines of money profit above all else. Education systems try to fit in character building within politics. Yet politics is more about giving the crowd what they want instead clinging to spiritual principles. I have found the best path to the best joy is to live increasingly right with God's principles, character, and righteousness.

I'm an analytic and can easily get caught up in thinking without compassion and empathy. I can focus so much upon practicality and facts that I sort out subjective spiritual information that requires the learned skill of discernment. When I omit compassion and empathy with others I begin to starve spiritually. Being absent from spiritual connection with others damages my soul and can easily rob my joy.

I know what it's like to have depression and feel stuck. I understand misery. I know what it's like to be so much in wrath that I feel like I've lost control. Although these experiences were decades ago and my journey obeying God has rescued me from such inward destruction, I remember them. And I know that hell I experienced is still a choice to have again if I chose the inward path toward it. Today, I chose God's ways that can not only rescue me from that pit of emptiness, but can also raise my soul to the sunlight of joy, if I continue in it with my thoughts, words, attitude, and actions.

I remember being just a couple years sober trying to look in a mirror and give myself positive affirmations. And I hated it. Why? Because I didn't believe the words I was saying. Belief. Belief and faith for me have proved over the years to be required for a substantial affect. And for me, seeing is believing. Years later I learned, if I spend enough time searching, I can find some things to feel good about. Sometimes though, I just didn't want to think about good things. I was stuck in anger and hurt. I was in a sense a slave to misery.

So many trials and tiny steps in trusting God has brought me out of that trap. I used to view joy as a weakness. Largely I believe because those who showed joy were attacked with sarcasm and condescension. Which is why some sarcasm and condescension can be evil. I have learned to

guard carefully with my use of it. Passive aggressive thinking and acting is has also proved to be evil.

Let's turn to good and cling to it. Let's see what joy is and how it can bring strength. Let's see what the Bible says and I will share how I believe my experience relates to it.

Joy is defined at biblehub.com as "Gladness" in both Hebrew and Greek.

Joy and strength work together in spiritual ways.

Psalm 21:1 The king shall have joy in Your strength, O Lord; And in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!

Psalm 81:1 Sing aloud to God our strength; Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

As I was saying before, I never really gave much attention to joy. It really wasn't until a few years ago when a friend and I were studying Romans 12:9 - 21. The NKJV headline got my attention because it's entitled "Behave like a Christian." So we would meet for dinner discussing one verses per week. These were clear Bible instructions and we thought it worthy of thinking deeper about it. Verse 12 refers to rejoice. These were instructions on Christian behavior. This lead me to investigate the use of 'Joy' in the Bible.

I had an understanding of joy as people who smile, laugh, be silly, easy going, and have fun. But after investigating the Bible I realized it was so much more than that. The joy in the Bible is mostly referring to the kind of joy of a new baby or seeing an old friend again. It's a joy with great affection, love, compassion, and inward connection. It's belonging and fulfillment. It's feeling right inside with I am and what I'm doing.

As a kid growing up in the 70's I began watching football. I chose the Steelers to be my team. I followed and cheered for them for decade. The 80's were kinda rough. I lived in Arizona and at that time Arizona did not have a football team in the NFL. When the Cardinals came to Arizona I was having a difficult time deciding how to prioritize my preferences. I decided steelers would be first and the Cardinals 2nd. I cheered for them both.

I had this dream of the two of them playing in the Super Bowl together. Twenty years later they did in fact play together and I went to that game. This was a dream for me. And I did feel great joy in being there and seeing it.

I have walked with men for years along the path of spiritual development and the joy. Those relationships have fed me far more than football. Games are fun and exciting, but real spiritual joy has come to me through connection and sharing personal inward truth.

A friend of mine once had a stroke. I got to be there with him in the ambulance. He was lucky to get such good and timely treatment. The next day I could see him filled with joy. He was grateful to be alive. And the things important to him were simple things I can easily forget to appreciate. Just God's creation around me. The sky, the trees, the birds, and each other.

These days each morning I get to wake up, do my stretches, get my coffee, and think about God's goodness while watching the squirrels chase each other around trees. I get to look my wife in the eyes into our soul and appreciate her. I get to watch birds bath in the fountain. I get to watch the sunsets and feed ducks. I get to feel joy.

I haven't honestly been on a real vacation in a decade. And the truth of the matter is I have learned to be on vacation where ever I am. My joy is not dependent upon material things. My joy is found in seeing the beauty in life.

I remember going to the movies, I may have mentioned it in another podcast, but I like it so I'll say it again. I'm in line for popcorn and I see these two kids glueing there hands and faces to glass casing because the giant boxes of candy were calling out to them. I became envious of their joy and excitement. I had a mindset of "I've done that," "seen that," or "been there before." In my mind I had reduced appreciation of things because have already experienced them.

I have learned by children I can choose to enjoy things I have enjoyed before. I realized children are not smarter than me and that maybe I just need get a little dumber so I can have fun. Some people drink alcohol to free themselves from their fear, worry, and pride so they can have fun. I'm

here to say it doesn't have to be that way. Humility is a wonderful gift that can do the same thing and yet be so much more enjoyable if we do it with God's goodness.

Acts 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

There is a Swedish proverb that is often quoted which reads, "Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow." This quote is <http://www.listofproverbs.com/keywords/shared/> which also lists various versions of this proverb from many different countries.

The quote is widely used. There seems to be a universal truth to this idea, that being with each other in good times and bad times just makes life easier.

Most of the population can get this idea and understand, but then there are people like me. Let me explain. I fall into a personality class from the Myers Brigs INTJ which is about 2% of the population. I'll include the closely linked INFJ to make roughly 5%. That means 95% of the world won't get me and think I'm cold hearted. It's painful to accept the world viewing me which such shallow judgement, but that's how it is.

I've watched many movies in theaters going by myself. My wife does not like movies, but I do. I realize I am not alone because I'm surrounded by people. I like to go to crowded events and watch behavior. That's fun for me. I also like going to movies alone because it is so easy to get a single seat in a great spot. And yeah, being an INTJ means I want the best seat to optimize my movie experience.

Where this pays off for me spiritually and hopefully others too, is that I want to have the most efficient spiritual relationship with God that I can. So this personality type has blessed me with the drive and ability to dig deeper than 98% of the world. It means my focus is stronger and evaluation is better. I have been locked into putting the puzzle together for over 12 years through study, collaboration, and experience.

I also want to note the probably 95% of pastors will not get me either.

There can be great joy to receive help from others and to be there to help someone else.

Colossians 1:10-11 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

“Happy, joyous, and free”

“We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free” and “But it is clear we made our own misery. God didn’t do it. Avoid then, the deliberate manufacture of misery” Pg. 133 Alcoholics Anonymous

In my early development with God before reading the Bible or going to church I learned God through seeking God directly. I was taught to pray to God for help with fear, anger, self-seeking, and dishonesty. I was taught to get out of myself, clean my character, right my wrongs, and be helpful to others. It took about a year for me to really experience the joy and freedom from accepting these ideas more fully into my beliefs and repair a lot of spiritual damage. The process was an emotional rollercoaster and quite scary. But in the end, there was joy and freedom.

Experience with 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.”

This verse describes God as love, but goes even further to say “God is love.” Then it even declares that those who do not love, do not know God. For me, when I first realized how powerful this truth was and how I struggled to love others, it was revealing things about my spiritual condition I did not want to accept.

I paused to take this meaning into my being. I thought well evaluating my love. You see, I didn’t love, but I thought of myself as spiritual, because I worked hard to obey God. I believed I was skilled at truth, justice, and

forgiveness, but I was weak in love, mercy, and compassion. I was quick to forgive people, but slow to help.

As I have shared in other podcasts, I was profoundly moved by the great commandment which prompted me into a decade of daily research and the implementation of new practices to test this idea.

1 Corinthians 13:2 and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

I paid extra close attention to this description, “nothing.” You see, I know this sensation. I know what it is like to be nothing. I understand this consequence the Bible is describing here. Yes, the Bible is full of information about consequences we will receive by our choices. My experience of nothing involved feelings of loneliness, emptiness, coldness, uncaring, and numb. Many people experience this state of being. But few of them find and follow the way out. In this series I’ve been sharing how I got out of that terrible place.

The first time another man said he loved me, I raised an eye brow in both confusion and skepticism. Why would he say that? Does he even really know me? I did not say it back because I hardly knew the man. We were part of spiritual program together, but I had a lot of baggage and trust issues. I wasn’t ready to love him.

A couple years later another man said ‘it’ to me, someone I was mentoring. This time I said ‘it’ back to avoid awkwardness. It was Christmas time, but I saw his face and knew it was sincere. I just didn’t expect it, and I did not know how to handle it. I never really thought that way.

About two years after that I was saying goodbye to another man I mentored. He was moving to another state. I saw tears. I don’t recall the words I love you, but I’ll never forget the moment. This happened again a couple more times since then. It’s a profound and beautiful experience to witness such a connection. This kind of bonding comes through helping each other grow spiritually with care, concern, and affection.

I also helped others without the use of care, concern, and affection. I helped them without heart. I uncaringly provided information for others to grow. I did not develop a connection with them and they did not last long in the journey.

I learned through trial and error that the application of love, concern, affection, care, and compassion makes a powerful difference in relationships and helping others. Inspiration comes from this. Hope comes from this. Risk is involved. Emotions get entangled. Confusion happens. But lives can be drastically changed and souls can be saved.

God provides to us this gift of love which we can embrace with our thoughts, attitudes, goals, words, and actions or not. We can practice sincere love in God's truth and goodness, or not.

I also experience another kind of "I love you" that is said as fleeting as hello and goodbye. It comes from lips of acquaintances I hardly know. I do not respond back with the same words in these cases. I don't believe they mean it and if they do mean it, if that's their way of loving, I feel sorry for them, because I believe they are missing out on a richer love experience. But that may be the only love they know.

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

When the Bible uses the words love it often implies an action. Do a concordance search using the words "because" and "love" or "those who" and "love" or "if" and "love." Then read the verses watching closely for information that ties love to some action, work, or diligence. Is it connected to character?

When I say "I love you" it's going to be more like John 15:13. I just see love as something so much more. When someone says "I love you" to me, I question how great that love is. I try to practice discernment about what other people say. Do they mean what they say? If the person never calls or tries to connect with me outside of groups or meetings, then I wonder how they really love me and how deep is that love. I just can't see myself loving someone I don't reach out to. That kind of love doesn't agree with the Biblical examples.

I don't believe it is too much to ask to become more aligned with how the Bible describes Christian behavior. First we need to clearly discuss it, then act upon it, and then discuss it some more.

Sometimes people have jumped to conclusions about me, that I'm cold. If I'm cold, how is it that I have such deep love experiences with others. No, I'm not cold, I'm just not easy. I prefer the kind of love that requires deeper conversation, persistence, with more transparency and personal investment. I am not quick to love others. I need to first get to know

people. And because they see me hesitate, they often conclude I'm not interested. And that is an error in judgment on their part.

The love that matters to me is the love that has to do with God, the love Jesus and the Disciples learned and taught. But there is a lot of love out there that has little or nothing to do with God.

2 Timothy 3:2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

I don't know about you, but I live in a world where there is corruption. It's everywhere. It's in the government, jobs, friends, 12 step meetings, and churches. It stems from some of the examples provided in the above verse. A book could be written on each one of these.

I had to do what is called a 3rd step. The description I read described how I was to rely upon God for direction in my life. It used the phrase "Completely abandon." Seeking to do this correctly required me to carefully grow self-awareness, ability to witness my governing thoughts as they are guiding me into choices, to better understand what guides my decision making.

I don't always want to get up in the morning. Some days my thoughts would guide me to get up and get moving to get ready for work. Gotta pay the bills, right. Even though part of my thinking would guide me to hit the snooze button, I trained myself to get up and get going to get to work, because I believed I needed money. I trained myself not to give attention to the thought of sleeping more or skipping work. I had faith that earning money lead to a better life and was worth the sacrifice.

Days that I was off work, I would not go to my job and hang out. I would not volunteer extra time at my job. I went there primarily to get paid. Although I liked some of the people there and some things about the job, they weren't enough to get me to go there. But if they offered bonuses or something, I would probably show up.

Many of us become accustomed to this kind of reward concept. We often understand money to be a major motivator to get people to do things. In the spiritual world, I had to commit to make God more of a motivator for action like money. Do I believe I need God, to trust and rely upon God, like I need money? I read that I had "a new employer." I understood that to mean I was to tend to God's interests as I did my employer's interests. When my boss provides me a list of duties, I do them so I can get paid. God provides a list of duties. Will I do them? Since I complete my

employer's list of duties, because I trust money, rely upon it, and believe I need it, if God is my new employer, I will respond to God's list of duties in a similar way, with the same diligence and commitment.

This is where results can help define my faith and love. You see, when I began working as a teenager I had an idea of how I was to be rewarded. That perceived reward helped me choose to go into work. If I could not perceive a reward, I would not go to work.

Similarly, with God, I perceived that taking action to grow with God could help remove the inward torment I was experiencing. Although the reward was a mystery, the results of continuing my way of life was a certainty. Continuing my way of life was misery. So I chose the mystery over misery.

It was because of the great pain that I dedicated myself to a new employer and as a result of much work I experienced rewards. And like getting my first paycheck, these spiritual rewards were reinforcing my continuance in action.

In the beginning, I had faith in the steps I took to grow with God, but not love. I did not know God nor the results of the steps. It actually wasn't until many years later that I could grow into loving God through getting to know God's righteousness, grace, and goodness. As I grew to understand it, the consequences of being in it and out of it, I began to love it. But I had to experience results from the actions. The more I submit myself to do God's ways and carefully watch how the consequences unfold, seeing the reactions from my participation and sensing the feelings from them, the more I respect the methods and love them.

God is about peace and patience. Being patient and guiding myself toward peaceful thinking is a skill that requires development. The descriptions of love from 1 Corinthians 13 likewise are skills that can be developed over time through practice. I'm actually hoping to someday be part of a church that is willing to develop a curriculum beginning with children to learn, discuss, and practice these things with the understanding that they are skills. The fruit of such practices are spiritual.

But then there is the practice without love. There are unconscious participants. I have gone through years with my development where I am going through the motions, just getting things done, but not applying myself to consciously grow with God. This was the time when I was going to groups, reading about God, even praying, and doing so without the goal

of being changed inwardly into God's goodness. These actions without building affection, compassion, and love for others seemed to block the feeding of my soul.

In order to love others. I need to be giving myself to others, my inward experiences, while identifying with their inward experiences. I need to present myself with kindness and gentleness. I need to be present, caring for others with empathy, and encouraging them to do the same. I need to invest myself in someone and persevere with them to know them deeper. As I get to know them more and they get to know me more, a spiritual bond can be created.

This involves conscious participation in each other to understand each other deeper. It's about increased self-awareness and increased other awareness emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. We can encourage each other around God's principles, to grow in them, and talk about the process.

Understanding about this process can develop over time through perseverance, humility, and much corrective God reliance.

There are learnings about God and love that are inaccurate.

Years ago my wife and I were in a book study group that was learning about love. We used a book that seemed to say we each understood love differently. And we were to do things in ways the other person wanted so they could experience love. This is not Biblical.

I believe there are two ways we can love. We can love with God's righteousness or not. This is never very clear to define at first glance. That's why discernment, testing, and communication needs to happen. Learning about how to discern love has been a life long lesson for me. It has been developed through experience, reflection, Biblical study, and much discussion with others doing the same.

We have differences and sometimes vast differences. A man paroled from a 20 year prison sentence may not see love the same way a youth pastor would. Words alone cannot explain love. We need experience to grow and understand. And we need to grow these experiences toward the examples and instructions used in the Bible.

The Box Cover

If you haven't ever put together a jig saw puzzle, you might not relate to this next metaphor. As I evaluate myself for mistakes in my thinking, words, and actions for correction, I need to go to the example solution to see how to make corrections. When putting together a jig saw puzzle, I need to look at the solution which is usually the picture on the box the puzzle came in.

The picture helps me see what the puzzle is supposed to look like. The descriptions of love in the Bible help to reveal the solution my love is supposed to be like. But I need to grow my awareness and understanding of that description or I might incorrectly create my own misinterpretation of love. A misinterpretation of love could guide me into spiritual destruction. This can hurt not only myself, but others I am close to.

In order to improve in love, I need to evaluate my belief about love, and then see how it fits with God's ways. Then I can see how I can improve it more with God's ways. Where it disagrees with God's ways, it tend not to be good. I believe each of us can benefit the most by studying the Bible and listen to the Spirit for guidance and correction in this manner.

In Luke 1:77 & 79 the Prophecy of Zacharia is shared which describes how we are to obtain the knowledge of salvation and that our feet are to be guided into the way of peace. Here are the verses.

Luke 1:77 "To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins"

79 "To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

Jesus, the prince of peace, informs us through others precisely how to love. I have found this not to be complicated to understand, but awkward and out of place. The world is not agreeable to God's ways. Lies and selfish ambition is everywhere. I need to choose each day whether I am seeking to fit in with people or fit in with God. What am I going to love more? If I am going to love God the most then I will apply my thoughts, interests, choices, and actions to be in line with God. To love God with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, and all my strength means I will wake up thinking how to serve and be with God and continue that behavior

throughout the day. I will chase after growing the way God wants for me. I will do it imperfectly, but still do it.

More on love

Now, this has been my experience and I feel compelled to share it. I'm sharing this information, not because I want some fame or fortune, but because if I don't my being is out of place. I mean I feel damaged or broken inside. My conscience testifies and my heart communicates to my soul using uncomfortable messages. The messages are not words. They are spiritual in nature that are indescribable like right and wrong. But this is another story.

If we believe the prophecy then we will seek to grow in the knowledge of salvation through the remission of sins and guide our feet in the way of peace. The path toward peace is a way, a way that is Biblical and spiritual, a way that is right and true, a way that involves perseverance and endurance, a way that is just, and a way that is sincere with compassion. We cannot hold onto our sinful ways and grow in God's love. We must become willing to let go. We can do this, if we pursue it. We can grow towards God if we seek and walk in God's directions.

Each day we have a choice. Each minute we have choice. Each word and action is prompted by choice. We can slow down and consider God's ways of love. We can progress into God's goodness today. We can forgive, even ourselves. We can humble ourselves and think about Godly good things. We can seek love with sincerity and truth. We can give love, and let others love us. We can ask for help and help others. We can choose God through action.

I used to love. I used to love many things. I loved sex, drugs, rock and roll. That was my love language. But I didn't know God's love back then. As a pleasure seeker, if you brought me something that made me feel good, then to me, you cared. I believe most of us can understand how giving someone drugs isn't love, but what if it's a car, jewelry, or flowers? The

Bible provides many clear warnings about material things and longing for them.

Luke 16:14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.

Jesus told the Pharisees you cannot love both God and money. You choose one or the other. We choose either consciously or subconsciously which is more important.

So if I am wanting to love someone, the way the Bible instructs, I need to get to know how to do it the way the Bible says to do it. I need to put aside 3rd party books and teachings of any sort, and focus upon the Bible's descriptions.

When I came to believe that God is my salvation I prioritized God. Then I got distracted and chose success. I fell back into the pit or hell. Then I chose to prioritize God again and over time with continuance was rescued again from that hell. It has been my experience that the depth of love I can experience has to do with the depth of my devotion to God's goodness, character, grace, and righteousness.

If I love money or other things and my devotion to it is so great I sacrifice connections with others; like honesty, well being, and spiritual integrity, I can wither away inside to nothing. I know I can because I have, twice. But I haven't been in that state since 1994 because I choose to do God's will.

I grew up around others who did not know love. They did what they were supposed to do, and perhaps felt love deeply, but were too controlled by fear or something to clearly share it. Pride and fear can often block love.

The sad and disappointing fact of the matter is that we lack instruction and demonstration of honest and sincere love, the way Jesus teaches us to do it. It is because of this lack of teaching that I have devoted myself to try to share my journey with love and trusting God.

We all have issues, struggles, fear, pride, hurt, experiences, and understandings that differ from others. These learnings help form our perceptions about ourselves, God, the Bible, and the world. And because we can vary so greatly in the understandings we will each have unique beliefs to untangle regarding God and love. I believe we will each need to look very closely at the Bible's descriptions and compare it with ourselves.

We will each need to see what steps we are ready and willing to apply to change ourselves transformationally, gradually, more into God's character.

My spiritual confusion will be different from others. What is spiritually best for me at this moment will be different than what is spiritual best for someone else. The spiritual journey is an individual responsibility to choose God and accept God's corrective instruction.

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

I had to go through a process of correction within my mind, heart, attitude, habits, and character. I was told to clean up my inward self. I was told to pray to God asking God to remove my defects of character. But first, I had to figure out what my defects were. I had to decide on my own. I needed to investigate and learn about defects of character. At the time, the things I believed were strengths turned out to be defects of character. I thought pride was a good thing. I thought revenge was a good thing. And I thought love was dangerous. My understanding wasn't anywhere near God's truth.

In the beginning of my corrective training, I complained to a mentor about someone else's behavior and attitude. My mentor told me, "you don't have to like them, but you have to love them." No one really ever talked with me about love before that. It was like someone telling me to jump to the moon. It was a new idea for me to love someone. I decided silently to compromise by respecting the person. The principle of love and tolerance was frequently taught, but I really only accepted the tolerance part. I just didn't witness enough people really loving each other to learn how to do it.

The first part of the process I believe to be necessary is ending the fights. If I am going to love I need to quit the fault finding, arguing, blaming, grudges, anger, and resentments. I can disagree, but when I do, I need to try to do it calmly with patience and compassion and with the goal toward peace. I need to see God's good and see how I can participate in it. So the thoughts which prompt an attitude within my head needed some reorganization. A lot of reorganization.

I have since fought off within myself habits of sarcasm, passive aggression, and revenge. When I want someone to hurt or suffer, that's a problem. Although suffering and hurt can often be the beginning of corrective action, it is not the goal. Much prayer and humility have helped.

If I am to love with God's ways I need to be free of thoughts, words, and actions that instigate defensiveness and resistance. I need to add

thoughts, words, and actions that create peace. God's compassion, mercy, and forgiveness help pave the way, but I need to choose to meditate upon them and think how to bring them to life with words and actions.

2 Corinthians 6:6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love,

This guidance I offer others, I did not receive through passive learning, sitting around groups, reading books, etc. It took me a lot of soul searching, trial and error, research, and testing to figure out how to grow in this love. I had to look deep into personal situations, analyze my participation in them, look for Biblical instructions, and take new action. I needed to correct my perceptions that affected my faith. I needed more sincere truth about how I perceive everything.

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

I want to be part of Christian group that honestly, sincerely, and truly commits themselves to continually discuss how to become Christians as the Bible describes Christian behavior. Many of you may not know that the Bible breaks down this behavior as clearly 1 Corinthians 13 describes love. I believe it is clear, we just don't think long enough about it to figure out ways to bring it to life in our thoughts, words, and actions. Our application towards it is often lacking. My application towards it was severely lacking, but in order to change, I needed to first accept the responsibility to step into God's corrective character.

I began praying daily for humility, compassion, and patience.

I was taught the phrase "progress, not perfection." In the beginning, just praying was progress. Then I joined a group and got a service commitment. I learned how to say please, thank you, you're welcome, and mean it sincerely. I discovered how to love someone and myself. When I learned as much as I could I ventured out to see how I could learn more to continue progressing.

When I have tried to connect with others about Biblical corrective action I have been told, "We can't be perfect." Jesus describes some instructions that are hard to understand without some application. I believe the instructions can be easier than what we may see at first glance. I'll need to

do a separate podcast on this. The bottom line is I needed to find a way that I could take one step toward the way of Jesus.

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

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

I have found that as I practice forgiveness, faith, compassion, patience, and peace, I think less about hurry, fear, and resentment.

In Paul's infamous description of love 1 Corinthians 13 he clearly describes this process in verse 10 "But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away."

I wish I could say I have attended a church that has a group specifically designed to teach this process, but I can't. I desired it, but the closest I could find were groups trying to get rid of bad habits. There weren't any focussed upon developing God's specific character traits.

Love is a relative principle. One time at a recovery camp out I was hanging out with some friends. There were about 500 people at this camp out. We were at a fairgrounds. There was a dance starting. We were talking and a man was mentioning how he and his wife had an open relationship. He was hoping to meet someone at the dance. I judged the man in my mind how that was lower in morals and values. I did not like him. Then, a man who looked homeless walks up to him expressing gratitude for him bringing him to the recovery camp out. I evaluated myself and realized I would not have brought a homeless man to the campout. Then I questioned my values and envied this character. This man gave more love than I did that weekend. Sure, I was obeying some rules and guidelines, but did I win anyone for God?

I first perceived this man as shallow and then saw I witnessed love. The man did not change. My understanding changed through gaining new information and the ability to discern the good.

Just as this man was not perfect, no one is perfect. Yet we all can love while we are imperfect. We each can care for someone sometimes and experience love. We will need to choose to to it.

I began to ask myself why I wouldn't bring a homeless person somewhere. Fear and the thoughts of how it would be awkward or uncomfortable were part of my learnings. What if he stole something, how would others see

me, and how confusing it would be, being in that scenario, were some of my thoughts.

What if I had the kind of understanding within myself about God as I do regarding my boss at work. If my boss tells me to do something like pick up trash I will do it. I may not like it, but I like the benefits of work. I believe I need the job for those benefits, so I need to do what the boss says.

When Jesus says to do something, do I perceive the benefits of doing it as necessary as I do the benefits from my job? My answer was 'no.' I mean, Jesus won't fire me for disobedience. When I need the benefits I can always turn to Jesus and ask for guidance. But as I thought deeper and really researched this I found that my listening and obeying God had everything to do with my perception about what I need. And as I discovered how unreliable perception is, I have learned to question it more and more.

I proposed the question, "Could I learn more if I pursued God more?" I mean, I had done some hard life changing work that brought amazing grace, but I understood I could still grow so much more. And I was curious as to what I might experience if I did. That has been my journey. And as I continue to trust more, think more, and act more with God's character, I in fact receive more grace.

Forgiveness ties into love

Luke 7:41 - 43 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

Love and Mercy work well together. Please listen to my podcast on "Experience with Mercy" to get a better understanding.

Dry run

I had a dry run for a dozen years of pursuing love. My understanding for spiritual productivity followed principles of sin management. I would focus my attention on avoiding certain things like fear, resentment, dishonesty, and self-seeking. I stayed connected in groups and had relationships. I got

married and felt a spiritual connection with my wife. We had some major differences in preferences and personality that brought about conflict. We came to a pastor for some guidance which brought about a revelation.

The pastor was sharing a triangle theory where God was at the top and we were on the sides. As we grow towards God at the top we could grow closer. I realized I was not trying to grow with God. I was trying to obtain from defects or character flaws. I was managing problems instead of growing spiritual good character.

I was a hard man. I had a hard heart. Being gentle, patient, and kind were enemies to my understanding. I had witnessed far too much evil in the world to consider caring. People turn on each other far too much. Yet I had experienced God and believed God was there. This dichotomy battled for control within my mind for years. If I care, I can get hurt. But without love, I am nothing. So I exercised great caution when choosing who to let in. Very few people met the requirements.

It wasn't until about 2008 that the gravity of love was understood. I read the greatest commandment in the Bible, realized that was the foundation, and also realized I needed to figure it out on my own to know what I means. I became convinced the church wasn't going to teach it to me and I wouldn't get it in the small groups. I hadn't witnessed anyone demonstrating it nor emphasizing it as being the most important thing. Yet there it was in the Bible, very clearly emphasized by Moses and Jesus as the most important thing to know and do. I began to accept the reality that I needed to investigate and understand this command.

I began to do two things. First, I needed to understand precisely what Moses and Jesus meant by this command. This required digging into the Bible. I chose to forgo 3rd party materials to avoid contamination of Biblical truth. I decided the Bible and spiritual experience was going to teach me the truth.

I decided to learn what the Bible means by using patterns in the Bible. The command used the words love, God, heart, soul, strength, and mind. So I did concordance searches in the Bible to study these words and see the patterns. Then I would compare those patterns to my experiences. After about five years I really began to see things more clearly.

God's character is described in the Bible as Love, merciful, forgiving, peace, truth, just or impartial, spirit, and compassion. There are some other descriptions, but I found these to be the character traits that can move me best toward solutions.

Now that I could define love a little more clearly, I needed to understand these terms and what the Bible says about them. So I did another concordance study on them. I found patterns in how they were used that could help me live more correctly with God's goodness.

After some reading I realized I needed to act. I needed to take some small achievable steps to get moving into God's righteousness. I needed to practice God's goodness more. I needed to step outside my comfort zone into God's love.

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

This verse helped motivate me. I had a lot of sin and evil within my memories and thinking.

I began making changes in my thoughts, words, attitude, and action with my wife. How can I love her more in Godly character?

Acting by invisible and intangible Godly principles to feed others with sincere love and compassion can pay great dividends in love and grace.

Matthew 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Matthew 5:44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

I have associated with and tolerated being around people where I feel extreme discomfort. To this day I have not acquired the blessing,

understanding, or skill to love my enemy. But I have befriended them and helped them. Perhaps there is love in that?

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

For more about my experience in this please listen to the podcast on "Experience with mercy."

Love involves application. It's not just a feeling. And our actions prove what we love.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Our transformation into God's goodness proves what is good and acceptable in doing God's will.

Around 2002 I was running a Substance Abuse Program for Adolescents and I would ask questions to help the kids better understand their choices, actions, and consequences. I would ask them, "who or what do you love?" The normal response would be a family member. Then I would ask them, "how do your actions show your love?" Since they were all about pleasuring themselves they realized quickly they were not really loving their family.

This is not an easy thing to explore about ourselves, but it is a giant leap into the spiritual reality. Let's think about this question, "what have I done over the past month that proves I love those who I believe I love?" And here is a good truth seeking follow up. "Does that action show the love I believe I have?"

In therapeutic circles this could be called a reality check. I'm not saying we are crazy, we are just easily fooled.

We all sin and fall short. We all have defects and room to improve. Although we have strengths we can improve upon our weaknesses through goal setting, group support, prayer, and seeking God for guidance.

There exist within us self deception that is no secret to anyone who takes the time to learn it. Check out my website www.inwardauthority.com for more on this. The truth of the matter is that few of us will look long enough to discover just how much self deception exists within us. Just as the kids deceived themselves into believing they loved their family, we all deceive ourselves about many things.

The love in the world could be improved, but are we willing to be the ones to demonstrate how to do it? Are we willing to love more how Jesus wants us to do? Will we love God in a way that our hearts, minds, actions, and diligence demonstrates it? Will we evaluate ourselves more to find the truth.

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; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

My journey with love has grown like the stock market. It's had some great improvement and some major dips. But as long as I keep finding ways to improve my character development around God's goodness, I continue to reach new growth. Corrections and adjustments are always needed.

I was taught to examine myself and look closely at my attitude and actions to see if I really am productive spiritually. My sanity, sobriety, and serenity were dependent upon my continuing to grow with God. Because of self-deception, I need to continue to examine myself and listen closely to feedback from others. I developed a skill of questioning myself and my ideas. It is good to test myself and discern carefully. For me, to grow in love, I need to continue to look at how the Bible describes it and see that I take new action to model that description.

Ephesians 3:19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

To really know something is to be able to know through experience and to improve upon that further is to be able to teach it to others. As my ability to teach love improves, so does my knowledge. I must first make sure I continue to experience it, or my teaching will miss the mark. Remember, sin means to miss the mark. Demonstration is always the best teacher.

And because of so much falsehood in the world, we ought to test the teacher or demonstrator. Feel free to test me. E-mail me questions.

I improve with love through choosing to think about God's good and accept that good into what I seek within my life. Through choosing to abide in God and act with God's good I can grow in God's righteousness, move into the grace, and experience joy. It all begins with faith, which comes from, belief, which develops from being convinced, which derives from considering, which happens through thinking.

There is what I love and then there is what I think I love. Around Thanksgiving I love pumpkin pie with whip cream. Just having it in front of me brings a sense of joy and excitement. This is not God's love. This is the anticipation of physical pleasure with taste. There are many forms of physical pleasure. The point is that during this moment and many moments like it, I'm not really thinking about God.

I become emotionally dependent upon that pie experience. If that pie does not produce the experience I want, my feelings will be hurt. If that pie does not have sugar in it, I won't eat it and I won't receive the pleasure I was seeing and hoping to experience. My reaction will not be joy.

1 Corinthians 13:6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

Love rejoices in truth, righteousness, and in agreement with God and God's character. I need to ensure that I am in accord with God's ways.

When I experience hurt feelings it is often related to things not going the way I had hoped for, anticipated it to, or expected. I need to evaluate my thoughts to see what how my hope was placed. Prayer for humility is often a good start. There is a lot to share about this, perhaps a future podcast.

I need to think about what I love. What I love is often what I hope for. Am I hoping for a pleasurable experience through world things? It is good to evaluate my thoughts. I can examine myself to see what I think about the most in both frequency and duration.

When I was about 20 years old. There was night I'll never forget. It was about 1AM. I was sitting at a bus stop. I had a 64 oz. cup of beer, cigarettes, and some pot. And I believed I had everything I needed. I felt complete. My love was centered around such things.

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

This describes why I would pursue so many unhealthy and spiritually counterproductive things. I would feel lonely, bored, tired, or empty within my soul and pursue some physical reward thinking it would satisfy that spiritual hurt.

I realize today that I need to evaluate myself to make sure I am not seeking things in life for fulfillment whether it is money, food, sex, or vanity. I can enjoy good things while keeping God's goodness in mind, relying upon it the most.

Psalm 52:3-5 3 You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You love every harmful word, you deceitful tongue! Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and pluck you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.

I know this this says God is doing something, but what I read and understand through experience is that God is more like Gravity. It is always active in my life with affects. I get to choose how I walk. So in a sense, I'm in control over consequences. In this EXAMPLE with God being like gravity, if I choose to ignore consequences and step off a cliff, Gravity will bring me down to destruction.

If God created us and evil then God also created every possible consequence from our choices. God gave us choice and the Bible gives clear direction that we are to be wise with discernment.

I am to love truth more than falsehood. Deceit is harmful. I was instructed to be honest and to be thorough in evaluating myself. I was to improve my self-awareness in my choices, attitude, and action. I was to become more responsible with my thoughts. How I perceived things had a huge impact upon my attitude, emotions, relationships, health, and spirituality.

Proverbs 21:17 Whoever loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich.

Do I eat and drink with God in mind or do it for purpose of physical pleasure?

Matthew 10:37 "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Do I love my family more than God?

When I was 21 years old and a complete mess I believe my family had lost hope in me. I mean, they hoped I would do well, but doubted it. My dad had threatened to kick me out twice. Yet I was sober and just had a major spiritual experience with God. I felt unwanted in my home while I was feeling faithful with God. I mean I knew without any doubt I was on the right path. I had experienced righteousness with God. This is by no means being perfectly right. I simply tasted the good of God through my changed direction inwardly.

Having this new faith in God and in this new direction I trusted it. It felt so right, more right than anything my family has helped me to experience. And the next time my dad threatened to kick me out I told him, “you do what you need to do and I’ll do what I need to do.” This was something I’m sure he never expected me to say. I trusted God more than the roof over my head.

It’s important to understand I had nothing. There was no bank account, car, or job. I had God and I knew inside that God was enough. That whole inside was complete. Yet to be clear, I was shaking inside because I did know what I was going to do if got kicked out. I just knew I needed to stay with God.

This faith came through me accepting a new way of life and taking a lot of new action. I had to experience God through my increased participation with God’s good.

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me.

I believe the Bible clearly dictates I must love God above all else. And I have learned I need to evaluate myself to see that I am moving in that direction. So I need to read scripture, understand it’s message better, evaluate myself to see if I am growing in that direction and set goals to improve.

John 12:43 for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Do I make choices based more upon pleasing people than God? Do I deceive others for worldly pleasures without considering what it will do to my spiritual integrity?

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

2 Timothy 3:2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

Do I apply my thoughts and resources more towards money, pride, self-love, or Godly good? To what extent have I evaluated my thinking to ensure I really know?

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

Proverbs 4:6 Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

Do I love discipline and knowledge enough to accept correction?

God's ways prompt me toward correction. I am to correct myself daily into patience, peace, love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, humility, and love.

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Experience with choices

Choices. I make choices all day long. It is a regular activity. I appreciate the line in a song by a band named Rush. The song is called "Freewill." The line I like is "If you choose not to decide You still have made a choice."

Intro music

We have system of thoughts beneath our awareness. It is referred to as our subconscious or unconscious mind. And with this developed system exists preconditioned responses to thousands of contextual situations. There have been times when I am performing some activity, like driving, where my mind goes somewhere thinking about something else. Then, after a few minutes, I get back to where I am and what I am doing wondering what I missed.

I may have driven a few miles unconsciously steering my vehicle, keeping the speed limit, and staying on the road. I may have missed a turn because I was driving without giving attention to where I was going, because my consciousness was elsewhere.

This skill of driving can be done unconsciously by those who do it a lot, because they have it built into automatic responses. Conscious choices are not existent in this situation. But imagine if you can, driving in a city with stop lights that have just changed where green means stop and red means go. Imagine how alert and cautious you would need to be to navigate the lights. You may even drive a lot slower when approaching the lights, perhaps even double checking yourself.

This change in rules with the stop lights example describes what I needed to do when I chose to begin incorporating new Godly character into my thoughts and actions. When I woke up in the morning, I had a new system, I was to seek God in my mind and heart, and if I didn't, my day could involve a spiritual accident. Anger, fear, selfish ambition, exploitation, and other forms of spiritual destruction existed within my subconsciousness ready to act. Going by automatic pilot, for me, leads to destruction.

God is present. Spiritual activity is happening all the time. God wants my mind to be engaged with God's goodness and righteousness. If I let my mind drift I will not be active with God and spiritual principles.

All day long as long as my brain is active I will be choosing either to seek God or not. And if I choose not to seek God, I still have made a choice. And choosing not to seek God can turn into a spiritual accident creating harm.

Deuteronomy 30:15-16 See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His

judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.

My choices are limited to options I have chosen to observe. In my mornings I choose to do my routine of coffee, stretches, seeking God, attentive to my wife, and creating Inward Authority materials. I limit my options. Exercise, cooking, meetings, and other stuff can come later. I do not entertain other choices during this time. I am focused and block out other things.

I choose what options to accept into my agenda. The choice of considering God's interest must always be available to all my options if I am going make God the most important.

When I mentor others I will often bring up God's interests and discuss spiritual development. I believe if I am to grow with God I need to look long enough at God's directions to understand how to take action to grow with God. If I am not observing God's directions long enough to get a gist on how to act with God, that's a problem.

I need to choose to learn the directions. As I learn the directions I learn spiritual development options. As I learn these spiritual development options I can then choose one to test and practice a few times. Then I can learn how to perform the activity better and perhaps see the good in it which can help motivate me to continue. It's helpful to see the good in following God's instructions to increase my hope and faith in it.

I need to choose to seek God in all my activity, choose to practice God's directions, choose to understand how they are good, and choose to repeat this over and over.

Please read all of John 15, slowly, thinking how it agrees with Deuteronomy 30. Please also read Ezekiel 18. See the pattern and how they compliment each other. Pray for understanding about them. Do this with others and discuss what is described.

Jesus listens and obeys God in everything and teaches us to do the same.

Leviticus 22:29 And when you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, offer it of your own free will.

Living with God is to act with God. And why I choose to act with God is crucial. My reasoning and getting that right will impact my actions and my thankfulness.

I was told I had to decide on my own to rely upon God. I had to choose for the right reasons to seek God. If I chose to go through the motions, because someone else wanted me to do it, I wouldn't be doing it with the right heart. God wants my everything to be done with love and toward building love. The commandment of God is to love God with my all. If I seek God half-heartedly I will miss the mark. Remember, sin means to miss the mark. If I try to hold on to other things within my mind and heart I may not be giving my all.

When I feel angry, I can choose to forgive. When afraid, I can choose prayer for strength. My mind has expectations about the world that sometimes do not get met. How I choose to do things will impact my spiritual performance. If I choose to speak out of anger and fear it will impact the hearts and mind of others and myself. I may hurt someone and that will have its own spiritual consequences within myself.

I continue to prompt myself to slow down. I have discovered the faster I want to do something, the more likely I will make mistakes. The more things I try to do at one time the more likely I will make mistakes. The more worries I have the less confidence I will experience.

The first choice to get control over my spiritual being is to slow down. Sometimes I even need to stop everything and get with God. I need to get with God because I forgot God. I forget to keep God and God's interests in my heart and mind.

This is not black and white nor all or nothing. I believe God's principles, laws, statutes, ways, path, goodness, righteousness, grace, Spirit, and truth all point to the same spiritual laws; love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. In order for me to receive these character traits within my heart and mind requires me to bring my being to embrace them as governing principles to my thoughts and actions.

And because I subconsciously get caught up with the world's ideas I can easily get distracted. I need to practice resetting myself with God's interests. I battle pride with the practice of humility. I battle deception with the practice of truth. I battle my misunderstanding with testing and evaluating myself for my own errors. These need to be practiced.

We all want change, but rarely will someone step forward to create it. Many of us get ideas on how things should be and then don't make it happen. I once sat with a pastor trying to explain my ideas and experience and he told me, "you try it." I realized he either couldn't understand or wouldn't. Either way, I believed my experience and understanding needed to be shared. I didn't want this responsibility, but the messages to do it kept coming. Even within my dreams. I stopped fighting and chose to accept it.

Choosing to look at God

I chose to begin reading the Bible for instructions and thinking of ways I could grow more into them. I chose, one day at a time, to wake up and think about God's ways. I chose to journal. After a while I chose to research each day. I then chose to begin acting upon the instructions.

As I read about love and made a commitment to learn about love I found I had habits that seemed to sabotage love. I used a lot of sarcasm and passive aggressiveness.

One year I chose to make a new years resolution to reduce my sarcasm. I did not chose to stop it because I knew I would fail at that. I chose to reduce it.

Another year I chose to stop practicing passive aggressiveness. I understand passive aggressiveness as getting even with others nonverbally. Or, doing something to create discomfort in someone to help them understand my limits. If someone does something annoying to me, I would then find something annoying to do to them. I might even glare at them as I do it. Silent treatment is a popular example of passive aggressiveness. There are various ways of avoidance that can be passive aggressive.

I chose to apply effort to watch for my passive aggressive thinking and plotting. But then I needed to develop another way of communicating my limits. I chose to speak the truth boldly.

I read Philippians 1:14 "and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."

If we are to have faith in God and love God with our all, then I believe we are to speak more boldly to each other in God's ways. If I do not improve speaking more boldly, seeking to do so with love, then how could I logically be claiming to follow or worship God?

One thing I have found in speaking bold truth is that sometimes, others will respond with bold truth back to me. I have been on the receiving end of much valued correction as a result of me speaking this way. Hearing corrective words, although confrontational, is part of growth. My instinct will resist the corrective words, immediately want to disagree, but with self discipline, pause, and evaluation of the words, I can examine to see if there is truth in them. And if there is truth in them it would be good for me to make adjustments.

I choose to value confrontation because confrontation can bring good change. Fear of confrontation is governed by fear instead of faith. Any followers of God who avoid confrontation would do well to confront themselves about this sin.

I do believe in choosing battles. Choosing to avoid confrontation for strategic purposes is not motivated by fear. Therefore, avoiding confrontation is not the problem. The underlying reasons for avoiding the confrontation can be the problem. Fear, pride, vanity, greed, and selfish ambition around the conflict can be problems.

I need to choose on a regular basis what underlying principle I am going to obey. Will I choose to obey fear and vanity or humility and truth? And if I choose not to evaluate myself for these underlying spiritual principles, I still have made a choice.

I cannot correctly think or speak the word if I do not read, practice, and reflect upon it. I chose to look daily and learn more about Biblical instructions on how to live with God.

Since I believed I could help others and was sincerely drawn to God and the Bible, I chose to go to Seminary school. After a couple of classes in Seminary school I decided it was not for me. I did not see how it was teaching spiritual things. In my experience, which was very little, it seemed to be heavy on studying historical facts and theories. And because I sensed God leading me to learn about spiritual things, I followed another path to learn and grow.

I had to choose between following a system developed by man or follow a spiritual system leading me another way.

Since I was saved through trusting God and following spiritual senses, I believed I needed to stay with that idea and chose to follow a path I believed made more sense to learn spiritual things.

I took a Myer's Briggs personality test and fell into the category of an INTJ. The 'N' stands for intuition. That means I seek to see how things connect and think outside of physical senses. The majority of the population falls into the 'S' or sensing category where they see data. It seems to me that this type of thinking would have a lot of trouble comprehending spiritual things. Such a manner of thinking may really struggle with prayer.

My personality is high on analytics. I seek out errors to learn how to make things better. And when I point out how things are wrong, like a mechanic, people resist. I don't like hearing when there is something wrong with my vehicle because I know there is a cost that follows. Yet, after the work is done and it drives better, I feel good about it.

Similarly, when someone points out an error in my character, attitude, or behavior, I know there will be a cost to correct it. I need to choose how to respond.

When I realized the errors within the my church experiences (this could be another podcast on its own, so I won't go into details at this time), I sensed there was vast room for improvement. I was only 30 years old, but I felt convicted to try to help.

I was seeking to find the truth in everything. I understood how skipping the middle man helped me avoid errors in learning. I chose to skip 3rd party books and other's theology because what I read seemed to be missing something.

I chose to read the Bible and learn the words from the Bible using pattern recognition while comparing them to my spiritual experiences. And when there was a pattern in the Bible that conflicted with my understanding, I chose to test it. And when I tested, I learned. And I learned the Bible's pattern about the topic was more spiritually correct. My faith in these Biblical truth has increased through this learning method. When I test Biblical truths through experience, I encounter new understanding that changes my soul for the good, if I chose to incorporate that understanding into my being. (for more on this see Jean Piaget's Assimilation vs. Accommodation)

It just didn't make sense to me to keep reading the Bible and not do what it says. Although I desperately wanted to grow more intentionally with

others, I came to the understanding that others were not ready. I had to chose to either do it alone or miss out. I chose to do it alone.

I did connect with some that were willing to grow and rely upon God more which was absolutely beautiful, but even they decided limits at which they seemed to pursue worldly things instead.

I suppose they experience what the want and then get enough. I relate to that too. I got spiritually connected and sought worldly development. Then suffered and sough God again. This cycle continued and who knows, I may do it again. This happens over many years. It is subtle.

When I choose to go to school, move to a new state, get married, or get a new job, these can be life changing events where I choose to dedicate the time I used for God toward such things. And as a consequence of reducing my application to grow with God I can lose that valued connection. And sooner or later, spiritual consequences come in and can destroy my marriage and life.

You see, with recovery groups, we need to keep going to hear about these relapses and struggles to get reminded and inspired to keep up spiritual conditioning. For an addict, when life feels dull and empty, using becomes more tempting and appealing. Spiritual work and trust in God saves souls and protects from destruction.

In my marriage I made choices all the time. Some days were better than others. I realized my habitual sarcasm and passive aggressive behavior only encouraged the same in my wife. The scientific method involves testing. The Bible says to test.

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

I believe those who refuse to test are those who don't want to learn or are afraid of seeing where they are wrong. And I understand my unwillingness to learn stems from destructive thinking. I do not want to be an example of the second part in proverbs 12:1.

I believe we need more Christians who are willing to own the error in their ways and choose to improve. Growth means correction, but we must first chose to look and see where we are wrong. If we cannot see our error we will not seek correction.

2 Corinthians 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.

I believe committing to grow with God is a difficult choice and one that could be made without really understanding what it means. We don't have to know why, we just need to choose to trust God through new action with God's instructions.

When I chose to accept this journey, the 12 steps, I had no idea what I was getting into. I chose to pray and meditate not knowing what I was doing. I chose to confess my sins without understanding consequences. I chose to right my wrongs to others because I was told it was part of the process. Fortunately, I did these things with a conscious evaluation and discernment of my thoughts and feelings. As I experienced cognitive dissonance, I continued through the struggle. I paid close attention to what was going on within me and how these actions impacted my relationships. I owned the errors in my ways and made corrections. I witnessed the reactions from others and how it was good.

In the beginning there was a lot of doing without knowing. I had to choose to do things with uncertainty. I had to choose to do things that were counterintuitive. I had to choose to speak truth where it seemed everyone else would lie. I had to choose to be authentic when surrounded by many who seemed fake. These were not easy choices.

It has made things so much easier choosing to avoid projecting into the future at what my life will be like as a result of my choosing new Godly character. Choosing to participate more with God's ways, one day at a time, has improved my life spiritually and materially. I choose to simply keep my mind focused on one thing, what does God want me to do today? How can I increase in God's spiritual good? Growing with God today is the best thing I can do. I can only control my choice for right now. Will I choose to seek God.

Thank you for listening and God bless

Choosing Inward Righteousness

I learned that harboring grudges or entertaining anger leads me down a path into spiritual and relational problems. After practicing God's character for a few years with gradual and achievable objectives I learned that God's good character builds spiritual good and relationships.

I first needed to learn how to recognize resentment and anger within my thoughts, words, and body. I needed to choose to search myself daily to

learn this process. Like all spiritual character, good or evil, there is a spectrum of quality in it that exists in variation on a continuum scale. If I am not at complete love and peace then something exists within me that is contaminating my spiritual being. This process is searching within my beliefs, habits, and character for flaws that can contaminate spiritual good. Applying perfect truth with humility is often necessary. I need to see my faults and correct them or I will end up living by them believing they are good.

Once I learned how to recognize anger I realized my anger was coming from situations where I perceived a threat. A lot of times it had to do with threats to my pride or vanity. When I live by selfish ambition my goal is to maximize me. To align myself further upon spiritual principles I need to inwardly correct his type of thinking.

There was a time in the late 90's where I was so angry I felt as though I was losing control. The next day I began a new process of praying for help to not be offended by anyone. I redirected myself away from seeing faults in others. I refused to let my mind go there. I instead focused more on my own work trying to improve it.

My theory of non-participation with faultfinding as a solution to reducing anger was proven correct. Much later after researching the Bible I realized another step toward the solution was to take steps toward forgiveness and mercy.

I am still learning how to sincerely and truthfully have forgiveness and mercy with others. My mind continues to define others in categories of good and evil, friend or foe, and either part of God's ways or not. I continue to seek out new understanding to define others where I may experience more spiritual good. This is a super complicated and tricky adventure. But I continue to make progress. Ultimately, I found it to be correct and good to choose to set my thoughts to see and encounter spiritual good each day. I find that if I can begin each day setting my thoughts to comprehend and my heart to feel God's goodness, my day goes so much better.

More on Choices

Having done this practice for decades I can say that I value feedback. I don't always like it and I can resist it, but I value it and appreciate it. I know

that I need it to see the truth. The human brain has severe limitations to accept the truth.

I remember my father having a particular focus upon being honest. So I made that a focus. I found it sometimes didn't work and I recall one time when I was honest, my father didn't believe me. I actually got the belt for speaking the truth. But that was on him and I knew that.

Seeing the truth with objectivity, separating fact from opinion, owning responsibility, and then selecting the best option despite struggles, is what I have learned to be a necessary part of renewing the mind with God.

Deuteronomy 30:15 "I have set before you today life and good, death and evil"

This reality is alive and active right here and now. Am I going to share the truth or not. Am I going to seek the truth in what God wants me to do, or not. Perhaps one of the most difficult choices is to choose to look long enough at God's truth to sense conviction to change. Will I look long enough into God's truth to see the path of change God tells me walk into to?

Here is a brief example menu of choices I choose from on a regular basis.

Will I choose to see my faults, lies, fears, and anger? Will I choose to forgive others and myself? Will I seek humility? Will I let go of worldly ideas that interfere with my spiritual well being? Will I apply enough diligence and effort to grow in sincere love and compassion? Will I be okay with letting others know who I really am? Will I choose to be defensive with fear and resentment or take action to help others while putting aside selfish ambitions?

One major point I have found in renewing the mind involves expanding my options. You see, when I reached out for help, I was kinda saying, my options aren't working. I agreed to seek out the application of a set of options beyond my understanding. I had to set aside my ideas and experience and do things that were counterintuitive.

I had to look outside myself for ideas on how to think and behave. The Bible is full of ideas about how to think and behave, but only through doing what it says can I witness and experience the spiritual good from it.

We all make choices, all day, everyday. Some of our choices are things we consider carefully and others involve unconscious programming that are so habitualized we can be completely unaware they are choices. We can

respond in ways that seem to be reflexive and without any conscious activity.

As we develop our personality we can decide what to accept and what to reject. I will use cigarette smoking for an example, but please keep in mind that behavior in general seems to me to come about in this way.

I was introduced to smoking when I was in elementary school. I coughed and gagged. My body was very clear to me that it was not good. Inhaling the smoke was very uncomfortable. It was also considered a bad thing for kids to smoke and it was illegal for kids to have cigarettes. All this information communicating to me very clearly not to smoke, but I chose to do it anyway.

I believe I just wanted to bond with my friends and test limits. I liked the rebellious look and company. Yet I did have limits. I did not get the tattoos or play chicken with a cigarette between our arms. I didn't want the permanent marks or scarring. There was some reasoning with my choices.

Staying with the cigarette illustration, what began with a very conscious activity, debating whether or not to have a cigarette, escalated over time into a psychological dependency. Over time with repeated use and encouragement from many sources I adopted smoking into my personality.

When I began smoking I was in training. I wanted to be able to smoke without coughing. And there were tricks like smoke rings and french inhale. There were smoking sections. Even at my high school there was a spot just off campus where we would go to smoke. To be a smoker gave me an identity and put me in a subculture. Belonging to this group was one of the reasons I originally chose to do it. I thought they were cool. They were cool in the movies, ads, and music.

If the tough guys in the movies, ads, and music didn't smoke, tough kids probably wouldn't smoke and then I probably wouldn't have smoked. The billion dollar advertisement business isn't getting this principle wrong. Get role models to support your products, people will want it.

Eventually, I became convinced I needed to quit smoking. I needed to choose to not smoke. I made this choice many times. I made the choice and then an hour later I was smoking.

One night working graveyard shift at a convenience store I threw my cigarette pack in the dumpster. About two hours later I was in that dumpster fishing them out and smoking again.

My mind and body was trained to smoke. Smoking was my identity. I wasn't even a heavy smoker. I was averaging about ten to fifteen a day. But once the price hit \$2.50 it was becoming too expensive. I know, that's laughable today when they are like 10 bucks.

Life was way different without cigarettes. When got breaks at work, I would smoke, and once I quit, I didn't know what to do on my breaks. I had to relearn how to behave and enjoy things.

If a cigarette averaged 10 minutes then that means I spent about 2 hours smoking every day. Just think of any activity you do 2 hours everyday and then don't do it anymore. Ever.

I majored in psychology and was taking various psychology classes during the time I was quitting smoking. I had regained my spiritual connection with God and was very focused upon my thinking. I was searching daily my thoughts for what they prompted me to do. There was a profound moment one day when I came to believe I was lying to myself and my own thinking was seeking to sabotage my goals. I recognized the thought in my mind saying, "I need a cigarette."

Within my being was a trained subconscious process to smoke. I recognized at that moment there was a war within my mind. There was a system alive and active to convince me to do something I no longer wanted to do.

Romans 7:19 - 20 For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

I don't know why I keep smoking, I don't want to smoke, I hate smoking, but I do it anyway.

Romans 7:23 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.

Just in quitting smoking I needed to battle many things. I need to live life questioning impulses. I needed to exercise a daily evaluation of everything that motivates me inwardly and outwardly.

I was accustomed to smokers. I was part of a smoker community. I had smoker status. My friends smoked. Prompting messages were not only

frequently in my mind, but in most of the places I associated. My job involved selling a lot of cigarettes.

I knew this was going to be a battle. I fought and lost that battle many times already. Yet within those fights, those attempts to quit, I learned how to win. There were successes. I made a week and then two. I came to believe that I could do it. I had already gained experience through my recovery from drugs and alcohol. I understood the process of drastic changes.

You see, making life altering choices for the better involves a serious death to self. It involves changing many things about how we think, how we behave, who we associate with, and activities we choose to do.

When I quit drinking and drugging, I stopped hanging out with others who would drink and drug. When I quit smoking, I slowly stopped spending time with others who smoked. When I stopped being single, I slowly stopped hanging out with singles.

The process of stopping sinful behavior is one thing. But I have also learned a process of developing virtuous behavior also known as righteousness.

With God there exists a group of terms which seem to me to mean the same thing in the Bible. The words righteous, good, and grace seem to all point to God's blessings. To be with God brings these blessings of righteousness, goodness, and grace.

We all hold the key to the door that we can open to experience these blessings. God gave us the key. The door at one time was open, but we closed it. We closed the door on God when we chose to do things ungodly. And like a book on the shelf that is never taken down to read and understand so to is all that behind the door we never open.

Just as I was heavily trained in smoking and needed retraining not smoke, I also needed retraining to live more virtuously. I needed retraining how to participate with childhood feelings I trained myself to repress and fear. I needed to learn sincerity, emotional truth within myself and others, how to participate with empathy and encouragement, and how to love others more in a Godly fashion. I'm seeking to learn this today. I'm seeking others who dare to chose to die to themselves in ways that sabotage such things. I'm seeking belonging with others who are willing to grow against pride, fear, vanity, and greed while embracing things that build peace, truth,

impartiality, fairness, compassion, gentleness, self-control, forgiveness, mercy, and giving.

There were many bad habits, evil habits, engrained in my thinking, and habitualized. They were unconscious. I accepted ways of handling situations that seemed effective on the street, but unacceptable at school or in the work place. Most communication was through actions.

I remember in restaurants there were smoking and non smoking sections. Looking back it seems rather crazy how commonplace smoking was. I've seen adds where doctors were treating patients while smoking. With the knowledge, customs, traditions, and popular beliefs today, these things can easily appear crazy. Yet with the knowledge, customs, tradition, and popular beliefs of that time, it was normal and expected.

I want to invite you to think about your choices as I review some examples of my own.

Reality

When reality speaks, I can chose to accept it, or live in denial. I've done both. And living a life trying to deny reality sucks. I've done and do things in my life I know are not the best for me. I like sugar and creamer with my coffee in the morning because it tastes good and I'm accustomed to it. It's not the best for me and my goals. Reality testifies to that. Reality shows that a banana or apple with oatmeal would be a much healthier choice. But instead, I choose sugar and creamer with coffee because I believe that's the right thing for me. I think about how I like it. My thoughts turn away from replacing sugar and creamer with coffee with fruit and grains. I justify my behavior ignoring what is better for me. I don't want to change.

Rationality for comfort

Rationality for my decisions explain away healthier choices all the time. Whether it's physical, emotional, relational, financial, spiritual, or educational, I can find excuses to avoid improvement and continue what I do. Usually my reasoning has something to do with comfort.

I do not journal to objectively discern an actual account of my choices, behavior, and results. Instead, I guess and assume. My guess is based upon no scientific reasoning.

I realized I was living my life with this kind of irrationality applied to my spiritual development. I earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Master's in Education. I was attending book studies weekly for years. And after a few times of reading the same thing, I began comparing what I was reading to how I was living. I realized that I was relying more upon doing what others were doing, than I was doing what the book was saying.

Like sugar and creamer in my coffee, I assumed what I was doing was enough. I assumed a book study, going to church, and going to groups was enough. Then I investigated reality and listened closely to what reality was saying. The reality of the instructions within the Bible says I had more work to do. The reality also pointed out it was going to be work no one else around me seemed to do. I had to chose to take action no one else seemed to be doing because it was the right thing to do. I could choose to fit in with the crowd or do what's right.

And not only did the crowd not seem to be doing it, when I invited them to do it, they shared with me their own assumptions and rationalizations that what they do is enough. I realized that living more in reality may be a lonely journey, but my soul prompted me to continue.

Choose to see truth

Experience with Meditation

What to think
Slowing down
self awareness
New senses
Can do it anywhere

When I was a kid I would get a lot of quiet time with meditation and reflection, but we called it detention.

As a kid, I couldn't sit still, or wouldn't. My mind tells me I couldn't, but that's not the truth, and today I'm trying to be more about the truth. I could

sit still. I just needed a justifiable reason to go through the necessary self discipline required to sit still. Because I would rarely practice sitting still, my mind was set to be actively moving.

In detention I simply removed the choice of doing anything. I believed I had to sit still and do my time. And I did. I did it to avoid further punitive measures, like meetings with parents and my fathers anger. That was good enough motivation for me to cooperate with detention.

There is an important difference between thinking “I can’t” vs. “I won’t.” When I tell myself, “I can’t” I remove from myself responsibility. When I think or say, “I won’t,” I admit responsibility. Try doing it for a while and see how it feels.

I found this poem around my 3rd year in recovery that really helped me.

The Winner’s Creed

If you think you are beaten, you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't;
If you'd like to win, but think you can't
It's almost certain, you won't.
If you think you'll lose, you're lost;
Since out in our world we find
success begins with a person's will,
It's all in your state of mind.
Life's battles don't always go
to the stronger or faster hand;
But sooner or later
the person who wins
is the one who thinks....."I CAN".

Meditation is a practice where I can learn to understand my Inward Authority. My beliefs, trainings, understandings, and perceptions guide all my activity. And much of it exists without me noticing it.

This thought or belief “I can’t” can be deceptive and a root cause of spiritual destruction. (For more on this learn about [Self-Fulfilling Prophecy](#).) This message blocks out hope and inspiration. I have found it crucial to eliminate words like this from my vocabulary in many situations. The

messages within my mind are my coaching voices. I decided to recreate my coaching voices with words that can help me change and improve.

Whenever I get a thought like this, I can evaluate myself for where I got the idea. Having never done it before is not good evidence that I can't do it. No one else doing it is not evidence that I can't do it. Creating new and better things involves doing things others don't do and testing limits. I have learned looking at facts and testing things out can prove my instinct response of "I can't" inaccurate.

The idea that I can't meditate for 30 minutes each morning and night in most cases just isn't true. It is a deceptive thought. I can make it happen. Just like with my participation with detention, I needed a justifiable reason. For me, I needed help and I was told it could help me. Then I was curious and gave myself into the experiment to see what would happen.

I have found that making drastic changes like this is the best way to grow. And if I am unwilling to accept the changes needed to make this happen, I won't grow much at all. But I needed to create a reason to forgo the necessary self-discipline. I wanted to know more about this meditation.

I was instructed to practice turning over my will to God and to do God's will. Therefore it made sense to me I was to seek a better understanding of God's will and find a way to carry it out. So in meditation that is what I sought.

Following God's instructions required me to grow more and more to give my all to God as the great command suggests. Giving a little here and little there just wasn't a good investment for me. I had to change from seeking God when I wanted God, to seeking God more as God wanted me to do it.

Within us all exists in varying ways forms of denial and self deception, even below our consciousness. Just watch the Brain Games series to learn more about this or do a search on self-deception.

In recovery meetings we get to hear people make excuses, justifications, and rationalizations all the time. "I can't," "i've tried before," "I don't have time," and "yeah, but I'm different" are some of the statements regularly heard. Sometimes, others in the room will just laugh. They laugh because they have done it themselves and realize how ridiculous it sounds.

There are some people who try and give up quickly. Willingness and commitment will be needed to develop, grow, and bring adequate change. Being dedicated to the process for long term and willing to change what we are used to doing enough to incorporate conscious investment to think and ponder who God is and anticipate more precisely the steps we can take to participate in such character. I believe this is what the Bible refers to as “Good Works.”

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

“Created in Christ Jesus to do good works” means to me that the amount of Christ in me will produce that amount of good works. If my good works are very little, that will often indicate how much of Christ is in me.

Because we all function subconsciously, and need to for many reasons, we need self evaluation and exploration upon our attitude, choices, and schedules. To improve Christ being in us will require cooperation with Jesus’ instructions. It doesn’t make sense to me to do things Jesus wouldn’t do and claim to be operating with Jesus.

As Jesus describes in John 15, I need to improve my obedience with God and God’s interests in order to produce by God’s grace good works.

And to make such changes will require new thought, new vision, new purpose, new goals, and structural change.

In order to examine myself I must slow down and ponder what I’m thinking. Journaling can really help to recall what we think. As we journal our thoughts we can also witness patterns of thoughts. This can help with increasing self awareness.

Those who meditate regularly over a long period of time can develop more calm, controlled, confidence that can speak loud and clear to others.

To get good results from meditation can require a commitment to do it daily. Just as I explained in the Podcast series Spiritual Growth Formula effort, time, and spiritual focus is needed.

My Experience

I was first introduced to meditation when I was about 15 years old. I was a student in martial arts. The instructor would always be teaching how to focus our thoughts and how they impact our ability to defend ourselves. Meditation involved a focus, conscious effort, and self-discipline. I was to set my thoughts in a direction for a specific purpose. Our thoughts had purpose.

God gives instructions: Joshua 1:8 “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Psalms 1:2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

Romans 8:5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

One command and one law. The Inward Authority process involves imperfectly perfecting the first and great commandment of God, to love God with our all and to improve our Inward Authority to be more in alignment with God’s righteousness.

God is good. To build with God, our thoughts need to build into that Goodness. There is only one Good, that is God’s good. (See Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19) The solution for me continues to be proven through experiencing growth in that Good.

When I reached out for help, one of the many instructions I had was to meditate to improve my conscious contact with God. I was newly sober, feeling lost, confused, anxious, angry, and couldn’t sleep. So I would sit in the back yard, smoking cigarettes, waiting until I got tired enough. Sometimes that would be until 1 or 2 in the morning.

After a week or so I set a chair in the middle of the yard and watched the stars. I began pondering about God. I heard someone say at a meeting, just talk to God like you would a bird on a wire. I began talking with God. It felt like I was talking with something that might be there. I had hope mixed

with uncertainty, but there was hope. I believed there was a good and right way to live.

I heard someone describe God as Good Orderly Direction. I clinged to that idea about God. Read Romans 12:9 “cling to what is good.”

Try doing a concordance study with the word Good. This is also available on the website inwardauthority.com. I have it broken down into patterns to help with understanding.

I began thinking about things that were good. These were things that normally would not enter my mind. The people, places, and situations where I lived were not incorporating much good, so it was not valuable. But now I was associating with new people, places, and situations that found value in good. I felt like a fish out of water.

I used to cling to the feelings of physical gratification through various means. I would anticipate the party or event where I would have my fun. I became attached to drugs. They were the purpose for living. I lived to party. I believe anticipation is part of meditation. The thoughts within me that are attached to something as a reward will often indicate what I treasure. God wants me to treasure God. My thoughts need refocussing.

Like Pavlov's dog salivating at the bell I would get excited on the way to the party or liquor store. I would be meditating upon the experience with using. This reaction is the same with any addiction or obsession. Whether it is food, promotion, new toys, or winning the lottery. If I place my joy and love there, it will not be with God.

I became psychologically dependent upon such things. My mind became trained to understand and believe such things would bring me joy. I would meditate upon them during school, talk about it with my friends, and even buy things like shirts and posters that would display them. (Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9) I glorified my addiction. I chose friends that did the same. There was bonding and a sense of brotherhood.

In recovery, I was told to spend time thinking about spiritual principles. This addictive way of life was all I knew. I was to read and go to meetings to get new learning. I had to begin seeking an invisible and intangible God. And the only guidance I had were a few spiritual principles; honesty, love,

service, humility, and willingness. I needed to begin practicing thinking about God's Good, spiritual Good. And for that I needed to think carefully and honestly. I practiced comparing and contrasting my ways vs. what is right, God's righteousness.

When I began meditating I would sit, wait, sit more, wait more, it was quiet, very quiet. Days would pass and this became like a ritual. Each night when everyone else was in bed and I couldn't sleep I would go out to the backyard and wait until I get tired enough.

There was a stray cat that came around. My father named him Blacky. He was black. My dad wasn't very creative. We adopted it. It looked like he had been burned. He wouldn't let anyone near him. He had trust issues.

After a few weeks Blacky warmed up to me and would get close enough to be touched. A few more weeks Blacky was sitting with me. God was teaching me right there about relationships and trust, but I didn't know it at the time. I believe God is always teaching, but it requires a focus and skill of being able to put spiritual and relational things together.

I bonded with this cat. That was not my goal, but it happened. Time and being present with the interest of safety and well being, with a desire for care, or love developed the bond. Some people don't like cats. Please don't let your prejudice blind you from the point. Incorporate your own personal preferences to find understanding.

I was told when I began my spiritual journey to look for the similarities, not the differences. This is due to the faultfinding nature of defiant thinking. Reorienting the mind to see God's good seems to me to be a requirement for each person to receive restructuring. There is a cooperative process from each of us that requires conscious effort. Merely reading words or following programs without changing how we perceive things may make change very difficult.

I would meditate upon nature, animals, stars, biology with wonder and questions. I was curious about life. I enjoyed testing things and examining what makes things work. When I read stories, I sometimes imagined what it would be like for me in that situation.

Blacky trusting me brought me new information about life. I had been a destructive person. Trust in relationships is a part of life. Trust is created through action demonstrated over time. I evaluated myself. I taught people not to trust me through my actions and words. My first trusting relationship was with a cat late at night as the city slept.

This relationship with Blacky is a great example. I needed to show up and be present on a regular basis and demonstrate safe behavior. This new relationship required both of us to show up and be present. If Blacky didn't show up, then what good would my showing up be?

Over the years when I am seeking God with my all I am more likely to experience spiritual things. When I am focussed upon other things I am less likely to experience spiritual things. People told me, "you find what you're looking for." It's my part in this spiritual relationship to listen and follow spiritual good instructions. Consistency, repetition, and persevering will affect the quantity and quality of my spiritual experience. This too with meditation.

Thinking Godly Good

In meditation I was to put away thoughts that were not Good and put in thoughts that were Good. There existed within me a consistent cognitive dissonance. I had a focused effort to see what was not Good and replace new thoughts with what is Good. When I was in fear I would switch my thought process to invite God to help me be strong. When angry I would pray for peace and forgiveness. 2 Corinthians 10:5 became a regular experience for transformation to occur.

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.

My mind was filled with a lot of understandings that were inconsistent with Godly good. Most of who I was and how I lived was based upon destructive teaching and examples. The principles I had learned, don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel, were no longer my goal. I was beginning to accept a new way of living that would involve all my attention, all my senses, with great effort and diligence. I was beginning a new constant

journey to press toward God's ways while setting aside my own. My attention toward this restructuring needed to be persistent.

Learning to calm down

I meditated in places that were quiet and alone, not because God is more present there, but because it reduced distractions in my mind. I had attention deficit issues. Although I didn't know it at the time, within me existed much fear, anger, and anxiety.

So when I would meditate I would seek out a place where no one could see me.

Most meditation experiences involve calm, quiet, and stillness. For those who never do it, this will be very different. It takes some time to get accustomed to it. I liked the outdoors. I can do it indoors, but it works better for me outside.

When I meditate I stop moving. I stop working or seeking to produce both physically and mentally. I relax. This may take a while, perhaps even weeks. Getting a coach to learn how to relax might help. Sometimes we just need to sit for a while to let ourselves gradually slow down within our minds.

One metaphor I like to use is a spinning top. Imagine spinning something like a top. Thoughts of impatience, anger, blame, worry, fear, and faultfinding can produce anxious thoughts. Anxiousness creates unsettling reactions within our mind and body. In the beginning, meditation can be a practice of letting go of such thoughts while thinking about things that are good and relaxing.

Experience in gaining control over our thoughts and reactions comes gradually with each participating experience. It may come easy for some, but there are others who will resist. There are some who will try it out, hating the idea, and be very defensive through the experience. Some such individuals may subconsciously have already decided it won't work for them. And they will prove themselves correct.

Let's look at some facts about meditation. Practically every religion believes meditation is part of the path to grow spiritually. Scientific studies

have proven meditation to be a healthy and healing experience. Psychologist, medical doctors, educational systems use meditation and have found good results. Meditation is suggested to help with addictions. It has been used in prisons with good results.

I believe it is important to examine my logic for refusing to participate in things that thorough testing has proven beneficial. I have uncovered personal bias against such things. Humbling myself to test it on my own with an open mind repeatedly was the only way for me to find truth. And I needed to be careful that my personal bias didn't sabotage the experience.

Meditation doesn't have to be with folded legs, bent knees, or even sitting. I don't chant or moan. And neither do people I know. I situate myself in a position that is comfortable and if that gets uncomfortable I change it. I prompt my thoughts toward visualizing things that are good and beautiful.

I took a class when I was about 22 called "Eliminating self-defeating behavior" at a community college. In that class we experienced a guided meditation. We laid down on the floor and the instructor guided us to tense and relax every muscle from one end of our body to the other. She began with us tensing our toes and then relax. This moved to the sole of the foot, then ankle, calf, and gradually up to our foreheads.

This tensing and relaxing was guiding our minds to give attention to parts of our bodies we normally wouldn't think about. There are so many things that go on through each day where we can lose sight of what's important. Meditation upon God and God's ways can help us keep in mind what is most important. For me, there just isn't a more sound and logical idea than beginning each day setting my mind and heart to learn, grow, seek, contemplate, and experience that which rescued me from the depths of hell.

I suggest taking some time to meditate upon this.

God bless,