Into The Light



"For there is nothing hidden
which will not be revealed,
nor has anything been kept secret
but that it should come to light."

Mark 4:22, Matthew 10:26, Luke 8:17, 1 Corinthians 4:5
(NKJV)

by

Wayne R. Schmidt M.Ed.

Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:14, NKJV)

This book is for the few who are ready to go the difficult way which leads to life.

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Preface

The journey behind this book has been a life dedicated to understanding the process of growing closer to God. First, it involved experiencing a spiritual transformation through the practices of prayer, meditation, self-examination, confession, repentance, restitution, service, humbling of self, forgiveness, mercy, truth, justice, and more, resulting in healing, purifying, and cleansing. This included a steady focus upon the sensations involved.

The fact that people can grow and change in character proved to be real and achievable, resulting in spiritual freedom. My journey with God involved choices to change inwardly and outwardly. At 18 years old, I was in a special education program with poor social and reading skills. I was an addict with skills in the street. I transformed into a man with a Master's degree in education and counseling. I became a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor in the state of Arizona. (I let these licenses expire in 2007 for spiritual reasons.)

Around the year 2000, I found the Bible and went to church. I expected to find people who were spiritually wise, but I was disappointed. I was hurt by my expectations. I attended different churches hoping to find people who were wise in the will of God, but had little luck. I was confused about why the church teaching methods would be at such a low level—see Webb's "Depth of Knowledge." People taught with words instead of demonstrations. Sermons and lectures are the weakest form of teaching.

When I began sharing my experiences with Christians in doing the will of God, I experienced people changing the subject, becoming awkwardly silent, or walking away. I was inspired to better understand why. It was easy to find people theorizing, but difficult to find people transforming.

I thought maybe if I found the right scripture verses, they would hear and do them. I created a year-long study of different character building topics using concordance-style Biblical research. I did a pilot group for a few months, but it never seemed to go further than theorizing.

I researched pre-conception and found a book written for the C.I.A. It was created to help people guard against their own personal bias when doing international mediation. I found a description about a study on preconceived beliefs. It described how once people form a belief, it will

then require extra evidence to prove their belief wrong. Here's how I see it. Learning truth reveals our errors. As we are shown the right way, we subsequently learn how we are wrong, and yet still avoid correction. We must continue revealing our errors to learn the path for correction.

I researched cognitive bias and found over 100 different described types—search Cognitive Bias Codex. I researched varieties of deception; Group Think, Asch Conformity, Learned Helplessness, Milgram's Obedience, Self-fulfilling Prophecy, and more. The human brain each day is filled with faulty assumptions, misperceptions, and misunderstandings. This is a proven reality. We error in our assumptions daily and don't/won't see it.

My soul was convicted to research and create materials that might help others better experience God. The first and great commandment is the cornerstone. Then I used the Bible to learn how it described God. I found the Bible describing God with terms like: compassion, merciful, forgiving, not partial, just, true, righteous, good, loving, spirit, and more. Obviously, the great command instructs Christians to increasingly love such principles with their inward all in ways that involve corrections.

God gives us a choice to pursue good or evil, and such actions will bring their consequences—Deuteronomy 30:11-20, Ezekiel 18, John 15:5-8. I did an extensive concordance study to learn how the Bible described good and created the "Good and Evil Quick Reference" tool included in this book. Pondering these helps to set my mind upon spiritual reality.

I've practiced spiritual growth with successes and failures for over 35 years. I learned through failures and kept showing up to examine myself to see how I can better do the will of God. Testing my assumptions, perceptions, and learnings is necessary because I have a mind full of errors. This book is for the few who make spiritual mistakes and are willing to look at them long enough to find good solutions for improvement.

The magic happens during and after applying corrections. Putting on the yoke of Christ will involve inwardly doing what Christ did. Our fruit proves our faith. When my inward being is growing in the likeness of Christ, my life is better. There truly is nothing better in life than experiencing improvement with God; sincerely doing the will of God. It's a corrective process that grows love and peace inwardly and outwardly. Growing in righteousness will bring good feelings—sensations of being right.

Introduction

Luke 7:50 Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Many times in the Bible, when Jesus heals someone, the credit is given to the person’s faith. Jesus credits “your faith” for healing. It’s what we believe that forms us. Our choices and actions impact our faith. We can change the course of our faith through corrections if we believe.

This book will describe a pathway to walk better in the will of God. Of course, like any other training, we will need to go at it with self-discipline, willingness, readiness, and corrective improvements.

Moving into the light involves facing the truth about ourselves. We become ready and willing to look squarely at our inward actions for corrections. We investigate and learn new spiritual inward truth. We may learn that we’ve made bad choices which have brought harm. As we persevere down the path of good corrections, many good experiences can follow. Good fruit will develop as we better abide in the will of God. Abiding in the vine will bring inward grace that has spiritual nourishment. John 15.

This book is an attempt to speak spiritual formation truth regardless of bias, feelings, or preferences. It’s not designed to agree with mainstream thought. Its goal is to help us find spiritual facts within our faith for improvements. It’s to be direct, bold, and firm for correction in God’s good.

The proper use of the Bible will involve us changing and becoming “thoroughly equipped for every good work” 2 Timothy 3:16-17. If we are not equipped for good work, we can investigate ourselves for improvement. It’s good to humbly learn our reasons for lack of growth.

We can change. In fact, we can change a lot. Many people do. We will need to choose to do the will of God. With change, often comes struggle. We can learn how struggle is a natural part of improvement and not our enemy. A much better life can come. We can rely upon God’s good more than our own trained ideas. We can. Like all growth, this takes time, perseverance, and staying the course. Completing the course is necessary in order to be trained. All this and more will be described in this book. Read 2 Peter 1:5-9

Because The Bible Tells Me . . .

“For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them.* For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”” (Ephesians 5:8-14, NKJV)

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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. 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.” (James 1:22-25, NKJV)

“but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” (Romans 2:29, NKJV)

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.” (2 Corinthians 4:16, NKJV)

For best results:

Find the section with the “Good and evil quick reference.” Print a copy, take a picture, and keep it with you to use as a tool to compare and contrast your own thoughts, attitudes, desires, words, goals, demeanor, etc. Think about how to guide your thoughts into better alignment with God’s good. Grow your focus upon it with action and struggle. Concentrated effort involves more energy, effort, and focus. Our thoughts are to abide more in God. We can’t read ourselves into it; we must increase our inward experiences with God’s good for it to grow within us.

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Choosing Light

Points Of Light

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:5, NKJV)

Growth with God comes by doing the will of God. Until we grow new good —God's good, we cannot comprehend light nor understand the evil we practice. Our spiritual insights will remain dull. Read Matthew 13:15.

The choices we make each day with good and evil involve our heart, mind, strength, and soul. It's so vastly complex that words alone are insufficient for understanding. We must have Godly good experiences for better understanding—doing the will of God in ways that challenge us.

This book is to shine some light for inward spiritual formation. The way to know God deeper is to experience love deeper. Experiencing deeper love is to grow increasingly with the actions defined in 1 Corinthians 13. As we grow more into God's light, we will become more aware of the evil within us. See John 3:19-21, Mark 4:22, Luke 8:17, Luke 12:3, Romans 13:12, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 5:13, 1 John 2:9.

God created instructions on how to think and behave. The Bible describes how, but many will not follow the how. Being in the light is facing spiritual truth, how we are in error, and how to find the path of correction. Luke 1:79, Luke 8:16, Luke 11:36, John 11:10, John 12:46, Acts 26:18, Romans 2:19, 2 Corinthians 4:6, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:5, James 1:17, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 1:7

The light will show us corrective action. We are to walk in it. No correction means no growth. Remember Proverbs 12:1. There is an old saying, "If nothing changes, nothing changes." The Bible teaches inward change, correction, renewal, formation, and growth. Thoughts promoting or condoning no growth are not good. We must practice resisting thoughts blocking growth. This book can light a path to guide us into growth with God, but each of us will need to walk it. This book is for people who are ready to commit themselves to face personal truth, walk with correction, and move more into the light—the revealing and correcting light of God.

Choose Your God

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ ” (Matthew 4:10, NKJV)

We all serve some idea, desire, habit, principle, or belief all day, every day. We inwardly convince ourselves consciously or unconsciously where to go and what to do. These thoughts flow out from our faith. The truth is that our faith changes moment to moment. We can be one way in one moment and another the next. Growing with God involves choices to be with God.

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

We must be in the truth about who and what we serve. This means continued, thorough self-examination. Being in the light does not mean with closed eyes. The light helps us to see. We pay attention to our words, thoughts, and choices. We can each day review our actions and attitudes. We can look at where we go and with whom we choose to associate.

We do what we believe is important. We can investigate ourselves with a simple question, “Did I perform a thorough self-examination today?” If not, then it wasn’t a high enough priority. We chose other actions because we believed—convinced ourselves they were more important. Such questions can be humbling and convicting, but remember, it’s good to be humble, convicted, and to repent. We may need to remind ourselves of this truth.

Our course is to discover how to walk better with God’s good, with progressive improvements. We stay long enough with our problems to find solutions and then immediately put them into action. If God is our solution, we will search out new ways to grow in corrective action with God’s good.

We can each day repeatedly ponder questions like, “Why did I do that?”, “What was I thinking?”, “What would God have me do?”, and “How can I do that better next time?” This is a forward-thinking exercise focused on growing, reshaping, and improving our inward selves with God’s righteousness.

Trusting God

There are some great stories that illustrate the trusting experience. One is called the “Wheelbarrow Story” over Niagara Falls. Look it up online and read it. Here is a short story: A man was hiking and slipped off a ledge but was able to grab onto a branch. As he was hanging there, he yelled for help. He then heard a thundering voice saying, “Let go!” With doubt on his face, he looked at the sky and asked, “Is anyone else up there?”

Trusting God can involve us doing things we don’t want to do. It can feel risky and not make sense to us. As we trust God with new and different actions, everything can feel different. Others who know us may become perplexed by our actions because we are responding so differently.

In team-building exercises, there is an activity called a trust fall. It can be intimidating and scary to let ourselves fall and trust others to catch us. Trust can be scary. We must convince ourselves to give into the experience in order to learn from it—what it’s like.

Similarly, we must convince ourselves to grow in productivity in doing the will of God. We must practice a growth mindset willing to learn and sense spiritual teachings only available through experiences. If we honestly and sincerely give ourselves over to be God’s instrument, new spiritual lessons can guide us into an improved spiritual awareness.

There is a felt sense of moving from self-will to God’s will. There is a felt sense as we shift from proud to humble, worry to faith, hurry to calm, resentment to forgiveness, and uncaring to compassion. These actions bring affects we can learn from both inwardly and outwardly.

Confession, repentance, and restitution done thoroughly, honestly, and sincerely for growth in God’s good can cleanse our conscience and purify our heart. The more we do it and learn from the experiences, the better we can understand how they work. It’s best to practice them all.

If we can humbly continue, we can situate ourselves to learn new spiritual truth. Trust is an action, not a thought. This too with faith. We all have faith, and our actions declare what it is. Let’s reshape our faith more into trusting God. Let’s have our actions show we believe and in God’s good.

Yoke Of Christ

Learn the “Law of Reversed Effort” (Take 5 minutes, search it online).

Taking on the yoke of Christ is not about controlling—forcing ourselves to better do what Christ does. We cannot force our evil ways to be good. Instead, it’s denying our evil thoughts and learning new ones. We focus more on God’s good and keeping our thoughts there. We end the game of considering ungodly options. Because we are yoked, there are no other options. Our contrary habits and practices seek to guide us away from the yoke—relying upon God. We can do this one thought at a time.

We identify inward beliefs, one thought at a time, which prompt us into ungodly ways and reset our thought/s to trust God’s. Accepting the yoke of Christ is to give our inward all to go and do as Jesus instructs us. If we are yoked, we will decrease thinking about other things and increase attention to God for directions. We will cease questioning or arguing. We will simply do it, imperfectly. This will likely be a moment-by-moment experience. We will have successes and failures. All we need to do is more good. More good experiences decreases evil. Experience more love and peace will always be spiritually productive.

When we feel rushed or worried due to fear about missing something, we can set our mind to be with God. Whatever our fear, we can think to ourselves, “trust God and it will all work out” or “this too shall pass.” Our job is less about changing what is outside and more about forming our inside. We trust God and do good. We can use verses in the Bible and messages that help us be yoked with Christ.

When contrary thoughts lead us away from the yoke—trusting God, we can identify them and redirect our thoughts back to seeking the will of God. We can humbly pray for strength and guidance.

We must walk in the yoke long enough to experience the resulting sensations of love, freedom, and peace. These real-life experiences can carry with them real spiritual power and motivation. Experiencing the love of God and knowing how it is available here and now is a powerful awareness. The yoke is easy if we can practice redirecting our attention from contrary ideas toward trusting Christ.

Price Range

Once upon a time in a land close by, Jose bought a new car. Jose was really proud of his new car and called a friend named Susie. Susie was envious and wanted to get a car too. She said, “I want to buy a car.” Jose asked, “What kind of car do you want?” Susie responded, “What kind can I get?” Jose asked, “What’s your price range?” Susie thought about it and said, “I want something cheap, but still good.” There is an old saying, “You get out of it what you put into it.”

What price did Jesus pay? What price did Jesus teach the disciples to pay? Why don’t teachers instruct disciples similar to the way Jesus instructed disciples? What price are we paying with our time and effort?

When the whole world seems to invest a few hours a week in their walk with God, that then becomes the norm and expectation. Many do what they see others do. What if we followed Jesus more than the crowd? What if we learned more efficiently how self-examination, confession, repentance, restitution, prayer, and meditation done sincerely and honestly brought increased freedom, peace, and feeling inwardly whole?

Most people who have invested themselves in such formative ways can testify that a better spiritual experience happened as a result. Following the instructions in the Bible produces a better spiritual experience. Jesus, Moses, and many other characters in the Bible emphasize giving our inward all to God. Yet many of us develop justifications, excuses, rationalizations, assumptions, and opinions that lower investment of heart, mind, soul, and strength. Deception happens. When life gets good enough and we rest on our laurels, a sense of coasting occurs. Auto-pilot faith is easier and often agrees better with the crowd.

Here’s a good truth. People who have persevered in the process described in this book understand that giving their inward all is better. People who have not invested in said ways will say they know, but how can they? They don’t have the experience. Why would people act as if they know when they don’t? More importantly, why would we listen to them? Isn’t it best to listen to those who really know, those who have walked the walk? The cost of inward growth with God involves inward time, effort, focus, correction, and improvement. It is not doing the same thing expecting different results.

The Price Demonstrated

Jesus discipled daily. Think about the time and dedication invested. Pay close attention to the corrective language from Jesus and the Apostles. Look at the first commandment—at the word "ALL." Think about why the word "all" was used three times. What would your "all" look like with your time and effort? How well have you practiced your "all" with God?

Here are some Biblical terms to ponder: diligent, effort, night and day, train, grow, better, more, increase, perfect, and correct. Beware teachers who oversimplify being with Jesus. Learn the difference between grace and cheap grace. Learn the price Paul paid for his teachings. Can you invest more of yourself to learn and grow with God? How so or why not?

Read Luke 14:25-33.

Teachers seek out new Christians to spread the word of God, who have paid a minimal price in time and correction. It's like sending out-of-shape people to teach how to be fit. This system can easily misrepresent God's truth, and few will search themselves for how this is a problem. The truth is that we cannot teach someone a path we have not walked ourselves.

Demonstrations teach better than words. Good testimonies share and demonstrate the process of renewal. Good testimonies sincerely and truthfully describe a price paid for growth with God. Such testimonies reveal risk, fear, change in character, and rewards of new thought choices.

Wise discernment will involve continuous thinking—separating facts from opinions. We must discern our learning carefully. Many will talk the talk without walking the walk. Will we discern the difference? We must practice comparing and contrasting what Jesus demonstrated with what we practice. If we are to follow Jesus, we are then to do more as Jesus did.

Sometimes the cost of growth involves changing our associations and the people who discourage us from our growth. Many will say things like, "You're thinking too much" or "You're overcomplicating it." If we compare our thought efforts with the Bible's characters, then we will likely find we are not thinking enough. How did Jesus show the disciples to think or pray? The cost of discipleship is not cheap, because the resulting product is the greatest thing we could ever possibly experience.

Who's My Boss? Real Story.

"Each day involves a decision regarding to who or what I will seek, follow, serve, and obey. This is a moment by moment choice. It's imperative that I regularly discern this choice and observe carefully what I'm pursuing. In order for reformation of my heart, mind, soul, and strength to grow with God I will need to ensure it is improving in that direction. I will need to repeatedly enquire who or what I'm seeking, following, and obeying.

When I began this process of getting my mind set right with God I thought long about the instructions in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. It describes this process well. One line in particular caught my attention. It says, "We had a new Employer." (Alcoholics Anonymous page 63)

I tried to imagine this idea and principle of God being my boss. I had many bosses. My parents were in charge. The police were in charge. My doctor, dentist, and anyone who knew more than me about what was good for me was like a boss, teacher, mentor, or coach. My problem most the time was and is that I just didn't obey them. I would say yes and act like I agreed with them and then not follow their instructions or only the instructions I felt like following.

It's one thing to have a God, mentor, coach, etc. and another to follow their instructions. The results with my experiences are contingent upon how well I follow their instructions. If the dentist says floss and brush daily, but I only brush daily, my results will likely fall below optimization. Also, how many times I brush daily and how well I brush will impact the results.

The idea of having a new Boss got me. I understood what it was like to set aside my wants, desires, opinions, etc. for the sake of a boss and just do the job I'm told to do. I would do this for 8 hours and then it was time for me, to do what I want to do. I came up with the idea to imagine myself punching a God Time Clock each day when I would wake up. This helped me leave behind self-seeking motives and get focused upon doing the will of God. Yet my understanding of the will of God needed a lot of help.

In order to do the job better I would need more training in the will of God. After many years of research I developed the "Good and Evil Quick Reference Tool" to help me ponder how to better do the will of God. This is an easy and fast way to get focused in a good direction."

Grace Positioning

In James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 it says “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (NKJV)

Will we choose to humble ourselves or defend our pride? Consequences result—resisting or giving. We are instructed to choose good and humble ourselves. Just as consequences exist for evil—pride and good—humility, so too are consequences existing for every good and evil practice we do. We all have a conscience that is impacted by our experiences, decisions, attitudes, and actions. Many learn not to think about it. Yet it exists with effects. The more we choose inward participation with God’s good, the better we can position ourselves for grace.

“When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” (Acts 11:23, NKJV)

Grace can be seen. We can learn to see it. It develops through purpose of heart which includes the mind, attitude, and character. Then he tells them to continue in it. More verses: Acts 13:43, 14:26, and 20:32

We are not called to witness grace like tiny sparkles of light sneaking into cracks breaking the darkness of a cave. We are to move out of the cave and into the light. We follow the sparkles. We are to learn how to increase the light. Sitting around marveling at the specks will not increase it. We need to go to the cracks, poke around, and see if we can create more. We are to be like miners of grace. God does not teach stagnation. God teaches us to struggle, persevere, endure, test, examine, and discern.

“so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:21, NKJV

Sin is different than grace. Sin leads to death. Grace leads to life. These are different inward developments with consequences. Grace comes through righting ourselves more with God’s good. We have a choice, to stay in the cave, or persevere little by little into the light. Remember, going into the light will reveal the evil we practice so we can find corrections. And we must with sincere humility choose to receive God’s corrections.

Biblical Titles About Christian Behavior

The character traits and behaviors described in the verses below are for Christian formation. God gives us a choice to do good or evil. In order to do more good, we will need to set our minds, hearts, strength, and souls to grow in it. We are to practice and train in it.

Practice reading verses from the list below and note their commonalities. Think about how to grow in them. Share what you discover with others. Why? Because that's Christianity. We first do what it says, then teach it.

"Behave Like a Christian" Romans 12:9-21 NKJV

"Marks of the True Christian" Romans 12:9-21 ESV

"Instructions for Christian Living" Ephesians 4:17-32 NIV

"The Christian's Walk" Ephesians 4:17-32 NASB

"What the Christians Are to Do" Philippians 4:1-9 NET

"What the Christians Are to Do" Colossians 4:2-6 NCV

"Christian Order" 1 Corinthians 11:1-22 NASB

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

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

"Christian Liberty" Galatians 5:1-6 NKJV

If the instructions are clear, and yet we are not growing in alignment with them, we may have a faith problem. Read some of this scripture every day and pray for God's help to trust and practice it. If we can persevere in this simple process, we can likely witness our inward selves gradually shifting into compliance with God's instructions. It needs to be regular, repeated, and with a sincere desire to let them grow within us. If we can give ourselves over to be formed in these practices, our whole being can take a giant step toward spiritual formation. We can be strengthened with insight, experience, and faith.

Pondering Christian Behavior

As I read the list of Christian behavior to practice, I ponder what that behavior involves, and then bring my behavior into view to see how well it lines up. The order of this doesn't matter. What's needed is to see how well they match and how I can practice it better.

Reverse engineering is involved with this process. Once I learn my error, I can then think about how it got there. What was I thinking? What was I doing? How was I feeling? Was I hungry, angry, lonely, tired, or stressed? Was I self-seeking? Did I start the day setting my mind with God? Did I have expectations or demands that were not met? Was I chasing after something material or improved status? Where was God in my thinking?

I need to have light upon my inward thoughts and priorities. Getting clarity on my intentions and motivations can help with resetting my inward focus toward God. To learn where I am going, I need a better understanding of what I am desiring, wanting, expecting, seeking, chasing, etc. A lot of this exists below consciousness, so it requires careful attention to notice it.

I then need to set my eyes and thoughts on God's good—Christian behavior. I need to see it as a compass to follow and direction that leads me into better cooperation with building that character.

I can ponder the definition of being humble, read scripture verses about it, and think about the context within the scripture. When I read the Bible, I watch for the good and evil within the characters. Were the characters self-seeking and proud or humble and serving? Were they fake or sincere? Patterns develop to help highlight when God shows up to help and when He doesn't. It's a very different perspective to move about my day keeping attention toward spiritual reality. The more I watch for it, the more I find it.

A difficult challenge I have faced over many years is the fear of how others will react; speaking the hard truth, not following the crowd, saying no to the promotion, practicing waiting and waiting when nothing seems to happen. Yet it has happened and is happening. I've grown leaps and bounds with Christian character, and massive decreases with evil practices. Peace and love have been experienced many times with freedom from practiced evil's consequences. The peace, freedom, and knowing I'm increasing with God is by far an improved life.

Where Is My Growth?

Use the “Good & Evil quick reference” tool for the questions below.

God is a priority relative to how well we follow HIm. Everyone comes to God from a unique position. We can only know our own condition. We are to evaluate ourselves.

Which do I seek more, pride or humility? Why? Which does God want for me? What is one way I can be more humble? Am I ready to do it?

Am I willing to learn about myself? Am I willing to understand where I err and how to improve? Am I ready to talk about it?

What character am I seeking and producing? How am I affecting myself and others around me by my choices?

What character is being produced within my thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions? Is it good fruit?

Do I seek the will of God? Do I desire God in my thoughts? Do I want my character to be with God? How willing am I to do the will of God more?

Would I rather continue living as I have done or give myself over to improve in God’s righteousness? Would I rather do what I want or do the will of God?

What is my life based upon? Is it based upon money, status, and physical things? Is it based upon sincere love for others, truth, justice, sincerity, and peace? Am I ready for change in God’s good?

Where do I struggle to grow? How is my perseverance to do the will of God?

How do I schedule my time? How much is it toward growing with God?

How often and sincere do I pray with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength?

Where am I diligent in my efforts? Is it to win in competitions or to be spiritually right? Where do I challenge myself toward love and peace?

Where is my self-deception at work? How hard do I look for it? Do I know what it looks like? Do I seek to correct it?

Am I being filled from the goodness of God or drying out like a withering branch? How is my heart? What condition is it in? Is it hardened and lacking sensitivity or does it care for the nurturing of souls? Do I seek to pleasure myself or find pleasure in caring for others?

How are others experiencing my fruit? Is it bitter or sweet? Do I feel fulfilled in what I do for others?

How is my mind? Is it racing around or is it at rest? Does it worry? Is it fearful or bitter? How am I calming myself or slowing down?

And to whom do I associate? Are they seekers of good or practitioners of evil? How do I discern between the two? Do they run from questions such as these or seek them out to find answers?

What about my relationships? Do my friends walk with God in sincere truth? What is my purpose to spend time with them? Is it based upon money, physical attraction, fun, or what they can do for me? Or is it based upon the beauty of their soul, their focus with truth, and conversations promoting good?

Am I willing to make changes to be more productive in God's good?

Am I willing to struggle with God to persevere and endure? Am I willing to be different today? Am I willing to choose new and Godly different thoughts, words, and actions? Am I willing to do it with a growth mindset? Am I willing to think deeper and find answers to the questions and then return to them again? Am I willing to love God with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul, and all my strength?

When I fall short, can I try again? When I drift away, can I come back? When I skip a day, can I restart? Am I ready to imperfectly pursue growth and improvement with God's good? Do I want to know more how God's good can improve my life through my abiding in it better?

Who Steers The Boat?

We each steer our own boat. Who do you think chooses your attitude, words, actions, and character? Most of us choose what we do and how we do it. We choose our friends, music, movies, hobbies, exercise routine, food, budget, what we wear, and so much more. We also choose whether to pray, meditate, compliment, encourage, forgive, humble ourselves, and everything else good or evil. Much of it can be already trained within us and developed. We will choose to repeat it or practice new ways of thinking and behaving. We each will continue to steer our own boat.

God gave us free will. We choose how to respond. We steer our own boat. Blaming others for what we do is self-deception. When it comes to spiritual actions, we have before us a tremendous amount of ability to set or reset our minds progressively more in the direction of God's good. We are able to steer ourselves toward good, if we choose to do it. We must choose to own our inward activity.

Lighthouses helped ships stay clear of rocks. For us, steering the boat involves navigating around danger toward a safe path. The light shines on the good path and the danger. However, because of pride, fear, image management, etc. We often seek to hide our dangerous choices from the light so no one sees them. Hiding the truth can protect and grow evil.

What often happens is damage management. We wait until problems develop. We hit some rocks and then steer away until we hit more rocks and then steer away. If severe damage occurs we go to the light to get fixed only to return to the dark and resume damage management. We end up experiencing all sorts of unnecessary problems.

In order to choose God in our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions we will need to understand what that is and what it is not. We can only choose from the list of options we see and understand. If we don't think about God's good, we probably won't steer ourselves into it. We must bring into our consciousness Godly good options in order to choose them. That means we think about them long enough to do them. It's like picking up a new compass that shows the ways of good and evil. If we do not pay attention to the compass, we will likely steer our boat toward evil places.

Grafted In Again

Luke 8:13, James 1:11, 2 Peter 3:17, Romans 11:23

Within a year of cleansing my conscience and purifying my heart, I found myself yoked with God. I had begun practicing turning my anger to grief—tears, supplication, and contrition. The old ways of holding back, controlling, or repressing feelings of hurt were being more openly felt. This emotional transformation brought intense spiritual growth. I was learning inward realities I was trained to avoid. Peace and spiritual belonging grew within me. I was twenty-one years old and just beginning my adult life. I was content with God and believed God was the solution to my problems.

Family and friends pointed me toward school and career. I moved away to a university dorm and chose a major in psychology. My dorm life was not spiritual. I slowly fell away from my practices of prayer, meditation, and doing the will of God. I was distracted. It wasn't a complete falling away, but enough to experience a loss of connection with God. I fell into sin management, guarding against wrongdoing or creating problems.

The loss of connection confused me and brought doubt. I prayed for a sign. I got a sign and began to believe again. Yet I remained distracted with school, etc. A year later, I found myself working and going to school without a spiritual family supporting me. I broke down and wanted to die. Anger, depression, loneliness, and emptiness grew within me. I reached out for help. I met a man who was sincere and amazed at God's beauty. He had cleaned his conscience and purified his heart. I asked him for help.

The first thing he told me was that I had to get my priorities right. God had to be more important than a job, family, girlfriend, etc. As he was describing this priority, I remembered my experiences with God being the most important thing in my life. I remembered my dedication to sincerely doing the will of God . . . to grow in it. I remembered how it important it was to prioritize God. But knowing this would not fix my condition. I had to do it, to obey God again above all else. I had to choose God.

I began bringing God's good into all my activities. While at school and work, I examined myself for my behavior and attitude. I humbled myself. I made amends to teachers and coworkers for wrongs I had done. I found spiritual purpose again. I became grafted in again and connected to God.

Unconscious Faith

Existing within us all are unconscious thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, and faith. Learn online examples of unconscious behaviors. Unconscious behaviors are trained over time that become habits. Habits begin with choices. We choose to do them and repeat them. Over time, they become more automatic and unconscious. We can retrain or reform our old ways with new ones through the same process. We can do this with corrective action in God's good as long as we are willing and open to be inwardly changed by it. Perseverance and self-discipline are required.

We can inwardly have unconscious barriers to change. We may have beliefs that we can't change. The greater the belief, the more difficult it can be to begin the process. Will we believe? We must humbly and sincerely pray for a willing and ready mind for new corrective insights and direction.

"Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23, NKJV)

As we practice corrective improvements with God, we can encounter and see more clearly thoughts that may have previously been less noticed. Key thoughts to observe are those leading us to do things that do not abide in God. They can prompt us away from corrective actions, away from the light, or even corrective information. One thought at a time, this self-investigative process can help us raise our self-awareness and position us to make inward changes with our faith.

The goal is not to avoid, repress, or attack the thought. Instead, the goal is to seek God, the good thought, to practice and develop it. Imagine having a set of tools for a job. When the job changes, we will need new tools. We stop using the old tools and learn the new ones. We cannot remove inward trainings—old tools. They are likely permanent. But as we develop and train new tools, the old fade in the background through lack of use. We can train ourselves with new tools. We will need to practice resisting impulsive habitual inclinations to use old ones. Restraint is required.

Over time, we can improve inward awareness, spiritual insight, discernment, and the ability to better manage our good choices. Those who continue to practice new corrective choices with God's good can increase faith and experiences with saving grace.

Misguided Crowd

“You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert *justice.”* (Exodus 23:2, *NKJV)*

It’s good to listen to others’ interpretations for ideas, yet we must regularly discern the truth from deception. We must discern errors wherever they are, for corrections. It’s important to test ourselves to ensure we are following the Bible’s instructions, the way it is written.

Our groups, families, and churches are filled with errors. We must practice discerning good and evil within our social networks and groups, for corrections. We seek to stay with God even when others don’t. That’s what Jesus did. If God is our leader, we will stay with God. If we stop following God for the sake of the group, then the group is our leader. Jesus did not walk around trying to fit in with the crowd or go with the flow. The disciples and Jesus spoke God’s convicting truth to everyone. They spoke boldly and brought the revealing light. We can share our own experience with our path. It’s best to keep in mind we steer our own boat, not others. If others don’t want to follow, we must let them be. As we go into the light we will separate ourselves from those who stay in the dark.

Unconscious and misunderstood evil exists within us all. Propagandists, conspirators, and agitators exist. False teachers exist. Acting as if they don’t is like steering a ship pretending there are no rocks.

Read Mark 15:1-12. How do leaders influence crowds today? What would you do if your friends and family were following falsehood?

We must beware that instinctively humankind will unconsciously resist seeing errors in themselves, their groups, etc. Questions that bring errors into the light may bring defensiveness. People hurled insults and threw stones at Jesus. Jesus revealed uncomfortable truth that challenged the misguided crowd’s unconscious behaviors and beliefs. If we lead with God’s good boldly and rightly, we will likely face hurt feelings—conviction and opposition. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Humility, patience, sincerity, and gentleness with bold convicting truth are a powerful combination for good leadership.

Being Different

I found God through stepping into the light—facing who I am, confessing my evil practices, and learning how to better practice good. I had a spiritual awakening. This became my way of life. Nine years later, I joined a church and began to read the Bible. It was difficult to find people who practiced self-examination, confession, repentance, etc. I felt out of place.

As I attended church services, I was introduced to an inward conflict. I was not accustomed to worshiping God with singing, raising hands, communion, etc. I worshiped God through doing the will of God, improved character development, and sharing personal experience.

It seemed like I was supposed to follow the crowd—do what they do, even though it didn't feel right with me. Staying true to God for me involved nonconformity. I volunteered with youth groups at 3 different churches for 15 years. They saw I didn't sing, etc. They would ask the leaders why. The leader would just say I'm different. I was accepted, different, but accepted.

I prayed differently. I wouldn't pray for tests, physical ailments, politics, leaders, my team to win, or church to grow. Instead, I kept my prayers focused upon growing with God's good. I would pray for compassion, patience, peace, love, etc. I would pray for strength to do the will of God. Someone once suggested that I add humility. I've been praying for humility ever since. It is a Biblical and spiritual fact that humility helps the soul.

I joined a men's group where they would poke and make fun of each other. I used to practice this behavior and understood the fear, pride, and bitterness it evoked. It is destructive, unloving, prideful, antagonizing, and distracting from love and peace. I encouraged them to stop practicing sarcasm. The men grilled me. Although the men seemed to collectively agree I was right, I watched the behaviors slowly return. The man who started the group beat his chest and raised his voice at me, like I was a threat. I decided it wasn't a battle I wanted in my life, so I left the group.

I've spoken hard truths to people many times and have been on the receiving end of it. It's not comfortable, but it's usually spiritually productive. Being right with God is often being different than the crowd. I continue to learn how to be different and yet find belonging. The inward battle continues.

Be Positive?

Imagine a mind that is so situated toward staying ‘positive’ that it develops a system of thoughts to keep it focused in that direction. Whenever anything negative—uncomfortable— would become revealed, the person would quickly and smoothly turn the subject back toward something ‘positive.’ But how well are we correcting our discernment to what God describes as positive and good? (See the page, Beware the Monkeys)

Being positive with God means owning our errors. We are to sit with them long enough to find correction. We learn good and evil and what they feel like. We are to learn how practicing evil corrupts and practicing good cleanses. We can learn the effects, reflect upon them, and share about them.

Being positive with Jesus involves convicting truth. Jesus continuously convicted people. We are to lift up the broken while humbling the proud and haughty. It’s behaving in ways that bring both hope and conflict. Being positive means we speak corrective truth with demonstrations. We are to promote change, not act like everything is fine.

Practicing ways that oppose the will of God and calling it positive is deception. Self-seeking, dishonesty, false-flattery, idolatry, loving money, obeying fear or pride, harboring bitterness or resentment, and insincerity are not positive. Lying to make people happy is still lying.

Love is longsuffering. That means it’s uncomfortable for long periods of time. Positive with God will promote good fruit. “By their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:20, NKJV).

Positive — Making time to contemplate, pray, discuss, struggle with, and demonstrate God’s good with corrective growth and improvement.

Negative — Practicing evil without growth in God’s good. Condoning evil. Would Jesus lie to make people happy or avoid social awkwardness? When our reasoning does not align with God, we can change it.

Good speech — Encouraging growth with God’s good. Describing our experience growing in God’s good. Asking questions about how to practice God’s good better.

Be Rude—True Story

[I was an adult volunteer for a high school group. We were all together at a house for games and food. The host had the meal ready, the prayer was done, and we were invited to begin the procession of getting food. About 20 of us stood around in a circle motionless. No one budged. The host repeated the instructions—to get the food. Still, no one moved. So I went and got a plate and then everyone moved, and they moved fast, like a starting gun went off. (Question: Why wouldn't anyone go first?)

At this same event, there was a guy who had to leave early because he had another venue. He was to host another group at a specific time. I saw that the time for him to meet his other friends had arrived. He was with a group of people. Thinking he may have forgotten, I asked him if he was still leaving to attend his other venue. He said, "Well, I don't want to be rude." In my mind, he was being rude to people who were likely already at his place waiting outside for him. (Question: Why would he feel rude if everyone already knew he was leaving early?)]

In the first example, why wouldn't anyone go first to get the food? Perhaps because it is commonly taught that the humble go last, but if we compete to be last to demonstrate how humble we are, isn't that evil? This fear of going first, fear of what other people think, defeats the message about waiting. Isn't that still self-serving? How might the host have felt about no one going for the food? Wouldn't the host want someone to step up and begin the procession?

What about scenario two—leaving early? He said he was leaving at a certain time and then didn't for fear of present company thinking he was rude. If we say we are going to be somewhere, will we be late to save ourselves or others from social awkwardness? Why or why not?

Was Jesus worried about hurting feelings or fearful of what others might think? How did Jesus or the Apostles handle social awkwardness? During our meditation, we can bring God's good into our situations and learn. In our social situations, we can set our minds towards the will of God to walk better in it. We can rely more upon God's good than winning approval from others. Abiding better in God's ways is always better than approval from others. The point of not racing to be first is to be humble. Sometimes, going first is the act of humility. We ought to discern the difference.

Beware The Monkeys

The practice of “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” does not agree with God. In fact, it is counterproductive to Biblical instructions. Imagine a new translation of the Bible, which happens all the time, created to remove any mention of evil. The Bible would note only what is good. Faith would no longer involve risk or struggle. The Bible is pro-correction toward good. We all need correction. But will we examine ourselves to see our inward evil practices enough for correction in good? God gives us the choice.

Many are trained not to acknowledge evil within themselves. Refusing to see evil is to live like a horse with blinders. The wise monkey philosophy teaches avoidance of evil, even to the point of pretending it isn’t there. We cannot correct what we do not see.

We may be in a world today where speaking the truth about evil will get us canceled. Yet who will we serve, the world or God? Jesus and the Apostles experienced being hated to the point of death. Many of us won’t even risk our job or social status. Why? Because of our faith.

If our leaders in the church are withholding truth for fear of being canceled or arousing bitterness, then our teaching is tainted and influenced by fear or control. Strong faith involves risky action. Learn the faith of Abraham and why it is the benchmark. Let’s practice training up Abraham’s faith instead of acting like we can’t, as if it’s too much for us. Jesus shunned and accused religious teachers. He was hated, attacked, and killed. Read Matthew 23. Imagine yourself following Jesus in conflict. WWJD.

We need challenging questions about our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Avoiding them is contrary to Biblical instructions. Are we doing what the Pharisees did? When pretending is condoned or encouraged, like fake smiles and false flattery, wouldn’t that be acting like the Pharisees? How so or why not? What are ways we can improve?

Fear of struggle, hurt feelings, and scaring people exists for Godly good reasons. Discomfort teaches us. In order to grow closer to God, we are required to walk through it. Struggle is a necessary spiritual conditioning affect of growth. It teaches and strengthens. Contrition and supplication are good. Read about them in the Bible and how God responds.

Negative Effects Of Monkeys

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20, NKJV)

Self-seeking, pride, insincerity—pretending, deception—dishonesty, bitterness—resentment, and idolatry are evil. It's crucial to discern these, acknowledge them, and seek correction with God's good.

Negative effects from avoiding evil:

Code of silence — People choose not to discuss harmful things that happen. (This often involves pretending, insincerity, and lying.)

Elephant in the room — A group of people act as though a problem does not exist. They avoid discussing it out of fear of hurt feelings.

Cancel culture — People who speak the truth and try to reveal the elephant can be attacked and removed from the group.

Ostrich effect bias - bury one's head in the sand to avoid negative or uncomfortable information

We can't be perfect - People use this phrase to avoid struggle in growth.

Half truths - See only information one believes to be positive and good while not testing one's self to ensure that belief is accurate and correct.

Conformity - Fear of losing; people in our lives, social status, job, money, attendance—Some might think, "Gotta keep them coming."

Examples of good corrective teaching - Acts 18:24-28, Romans 2, 1 Corinthians 4:14-21, 1 Timothy 4:1-11, 2 Timothy 3:16, Titus 1:7-16

The purpose of seeing the evil that is present is to set goals for corrections. Of course, it's no good to look at evil and do nothing about it. Yet the process does involve a period of taking in the information. Having the awareness can build conviction—motivation for change. We won't likely feel convicted through avoiding facing the truth.

Condoning Evil

No one is without sin. Therefore, evil exists everywhere. Everyone participates in evil. When a group adapts to an evil behavior and it remains over time, it becomes normalized and expected. Changing a normalized behavior in a group requires a collective, disciplined agreement to sustain being different. It's been my experience that when groups change, some people stop going to it. I experienced a group splitting. It's a very difficult decision to grow with God or keep people from leaving. It's always best to consult God for guidance and stay with God no matter what happens. When fear of losing money, numbers, material, or status becomes an influence against obeying God, corruption has taken root.

I've always had the awkward skill of speaking uncomfortable truths. It's been a bittersweet experience. It's sort of a requirement of my friends and associates to develop a tolerance for awkward moments around me. They happen. Over the years, I've meditated and prayed about speaking truth more gently. Fear and pride affect me. I know it's uncomfortable for others, and I feel uncomfortable about it. I do it anyways.

I sometimes see good and evil where others don't. Trying to explain something I see to others that don't see it is an awkward experience. Informing others about their evil choices can hurt pride and make things even more awkward. Jesus publicly calls people out. It is awkward and yet good. It is good because condoning evil is not good. Helping to redirect others toward the will of God is good. Not being liked by others can be part of doing good. It's a choice: to be liked by people or help them with good. How can not helping people improve with God be good?

Condoning evil often involves us staying quiet. Avoiding conflict often makes things worse. It can be easy to practice distraction to not think about evil. We can create some worldly goals, do more service, or find a new hobby to take up our thought life. These are ways to condone evil. Acting as if it doesn't exist has no effect on doing the will of God. Putting our head in the sand to deprive our consciousness from experiencing spiritual reality can form an illusion that everything is okay. Out of sight, out of mind. We must be in the light of God's good and see how to grow in it.

What does God command? We are to love God with our whole being. Our thought life is to be dominated by God's good ways, how to do it.

Deceptive Discernment

Thoughts which mislead us from doing the will of God are deceptive. We all have them, but few will acknowledge them. We are to be in the light to see our deeds and deceptive thoughts. Here are some examples:

1. Conviction hurts and creates shame, which is bad. Therefore, conviction isn't good. I am to help people feel better, even if they never change or grow with God. Feeling good is most important.
2. Wait for someone to guide me, and then only follow what I like.
3. Read books and don't practice what they say to do. Just keep reading.
4. Avoid learning how to grow and develop good reasons not to. Meditate upon nothing, just let the mind wander. Listen to others, how they justify lack of growth, and learn more reasons how complacency is good. Fun time is the priority. Serving God is not fun, so it's not good.
5. Notice how others are not as smart or nice as me. Being better than others gives evidence that I'm already good and don't need growth.
6. Focus on my strengths more than weaknesses. If I focus on my strengths, I will easily see how good I am, then I won't feel the need to change or improve. Pride in my strengths is good.
7. Avoid pondering weaknesses. Seeing my wrongs can humble me. Humble is bad and pride is good. Don't be broken or needy. Never ask for help. Self-sufficiency is good. Avoid contrition and supplication.
8. Control conversations to ensure encouragement. Always redirect conversations away from conviction and back to encouragement. Keep the focus toward good feelings. Good feelings make people happy. Happy is good. Feeling bad is bad. Sadness is bad. Irritation or bitterness is bad. Never show sadness or anger, especially in the lobby. Pretending to be happy is good. Smile and win approval. False flattery makes others feel good and to like me, so that must be good.
9. Avoid uncomfortable scripture. Practice redirection and changing the subject if they come up. Then add a lot of comforting words to cover or make up for any hurt. Comfort is the goal.
10. Never be hated. If I do something that hurts feelings, regardless of whether it is right or wrong, I must do something to make them happy again. It's better to be happy than to be right with God.

Being in the light is to see good and evil, abhor evil, and cling to good.

Stigmatized Words

Words carry meanings, memories, and feelings. They can be powerfully misunderstood and even misleading in ways that evoke hurt, fear, or anger. It can be a painful experience to face our misunderstanding and continue in it with corrective actions long enough to retrain it. There exist many biblical words Christians will not hear. If they are spoken, Christians will walk away, change the subject, and even deny them. When convicting truth is revealed, some people will not accept it. They don't know how. But God does not want us to turn away and hide from uncomfortable truth. God wants corrections within us for and with His good.

My stigmatized words included trust, feel, love, gentleness, compassion, humility, mercy, and generosity, to name a few. Inwardly I was trained that such practices, although seemingly good, were not good for me. They meant weakness. Others can fear words like evil, death, corruption, deception, fake, people-pleasing, hate, repentance, confession, correction, rebuke, and the like. Most of us will have certain Biblical topics we hope to avoid. Growth in good can happen when we face our problems and walk in corrective action with it.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and meditate upon how you practice reproof and correction. If reproof and correction are a priority, then they will be welcomed. When reproof and correction become stigmatized, then they become a problem for Godly good growth. Christians are to be active participants in reproof and correction, first within themselves, and secondly outward towards others. Reproof and correction done with love, gentleness, patience, firmness, and boldness is the demonstrated way by Jesus and the Apostles. Christians are to practice doing likewise.

Yet we fear reactions. We fear not being liked or worse, hated. We fear anger, conflict, and defensiveness. But all the leaders in the Bible were hated and lived in conflict. If we choose to be like Christ, then we will choose to accept others disapproving of our choices, words, and actions.

Facing stigmatized words, symbols, and activities is necessary for corrections. If we do not reform our inward response to such triggers, we can be forever hurt and controlled by them. We can trust in the will of God more than controlling conflict and self-image. Growing in love and peace will involve inwardly coming to peace with stigmatized words.

Darkness

“Therefore, take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness.” (Luke 11:35, NKJV)

The world is full of darkness, and it will want us to cooperate with it. Walking in the light is to be a contrarian to the world and even our own dark-trained ways. Many of us are so trained in darkness that we believe it is normal and therefore correct. Walking in more truth and sincerity is different. It feels different. We can practice reminding ourselves that being different with God is good. We can become aware of our dark ways, repent, and abide more in God. Thy will, not mine, be done.

The effects of darkness can be subtle, moderate, or extreme. Our practice of evil— pride, self-seeking, deception, insincerity—pretending, anger, bitterness, idolatry, etc.—corrupts and destroys in various degrees and levels. We can feel empty inside, alone, disconnected, loveless, miserable, and the world will provide worldly ways to manage it. There are rarely practiced Biblical solutions for such conditions. Our inward condition results from our faith; beliefs, perceptions, and choices.

It can be difficult to stop doing what we are trained to do. If we choose the yoke of Christ, we choose to set aside ungodly training. We apply concentrated effort with God’s good for new training. We decrease attention to evil—darkness—and increase attention to good—light.

Jesus instructs, “take heed,” which means to be careful. That means we improve our attention with inward good and evil to discern it better. We can continue to grow our understanding. Low understanding of light and darkness develops weak discernment. Improving our discernment is the goal. Better understanding with good will better situate us to do it. When convicting truth comes, we must pay attention and learn from it.

We must place our inward perceptions and choices into the light and learn. Patience, perseverance, and endurance are part of growth. We will need to improve our practice of walking in the sandals of Jesus, or at least the apostles. We will need to increasingly give ourselves over to being the kind of person Jesus teaches us to be to understand it better. That means we practiced being different inside and out. Being Godly different will provide us different insights and understandings with God.

The Teacher Has No Fruit

Once upon a time, there was a spiritual teacher who was well known, respected, and admired. This teacher would show up on stage inside a large, beautiful building. This building was spectacular and could seat thousands of people. It was constructed carefully to enhance the wonderful sounds created from the stage. It really was a sight to see. But still, it was the teacher the people looked forward to the most.

Even though the building could seat thousands, it would still sell out, and people would stand outside and listen to the teacher through speakers. There was something magical to just be there.

The spiritual teacher had charisma, charm, and was full of flattery. His demeanor and expressions were uplifting, positive, and cheerful. He always seemed to have the right things to say.

One day, a curious young spiritual man was invited to come and hear this great spiritual teacher. This young man knew God through experience. He practiced what the Bible says to do and learned through the experience. He tested all things, was strong with introspection and critical thinking. He was a good discerner of spiritual truth. This young man, because he tested all things, decided to go and experience this great spiritual teacher.

After the service, the friends asked the young man what he thought. The young man responded, “The teacher has no fruit.” Puzzled, his friends asked for more information. The young spiritual man responded, “The teacher shared little to no personal experience with his message.” His friends quickly became defensive and turned against the young spiritual man. Though they were always learning, they were never understanding.

His friends continued to attend the beautiful building, listened to the amazing teachings, and grew very little with God. Then one day, a great controversy developed where the teacher got in trouble. The teacher stopped teaching, and his followers scattered.

The young spiritual man helped a few people enrich their understanding with God. He shared how to practice the instructions and improve with God’s good. They experienced formation with peace, love, and grace. His disciples then helped others.

Beware The Teachers

“Then they understood that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” (Matthew 16:12, NKJV) See also, Mark 8:15, 12:38; Luke 12:1, 12:15, 20:45-46; Acts 13:40, 1 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 5:15; Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:8; 2 Timothy 4:15; Hebrews 3:12; James 2:1; 2 Peter 3:17;

We are to discern teaching and doctrine. We each interpret teaching differently. We can examine ourselves and our own responses to teachings. We can respond with pride or humility, anger or forgiveness, anxiousness or peace, hope or doubt, fear or faith, etc. Peaceful conversations about our lessons are always a good idea. If we repeatedly feel bitterness after teachings, it may be good to explore ourselves deeper. Remember, our bitterness is our bitterness. It’s an inward condition.

“O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge —.” (Timothy 6:20, NKJV)

Teachers who are not clear how to better practice the will of God may not understand how to do it. Schools may not be teaching it to leaders. We ought to keep this in mind. Teachers can only teach what they know.

“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” (Ephesians 4:14, NKJV)

Experiencing the will of God ought to be our primary way of learning. Good teaching will highlight good character and how practicing it is helpful. Sharing experiences with humbling ourselves to God and doing the will of God is the goal. Sharing opinions and superficial discussions rarely helps people change. Good teachers will embrace critical thinking, questions, and check for understanding because they can often foster deeper learning. If growth isn’t happening over time, change in the teaching method might be a good idea.

Read 2 Peter 2:1-11 NKJV. Why are these verses important? What is it like to “walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority?” What might this look like today in your life?

One Word, Two Meanings

Words in the Bible can have more than one definition. Here is an example with the word “Simple.” Psalm’s use of the word “Simple” is different than Proverbs’.

Psalm

“The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.” (Psalm 116:6, NKJV)

“The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7, NKJV)

Proverbs

“How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge.” (Proverbs 1:22, NKJV)

“The simple believes every word, But the prudent considers well his steps.” (Proverbs 14:15, NKJV)

Discern it

Simple in Psalms — Do the will of God, don’t worry about anything else.

Simple in Proverbs — Avoid struggle, correction, and growth.

If someone says they “want to live a simple life,” how do we know what they mean? Psalms says simple is good, and Proverbs says it is evil. The truth is that Christians, even leaders, can behave in the Proverbs’ version while claiming it as good with the Psalm’s version.

Works

The word “works” can refer to physical effort, checking boxes, image management, etc. But it can also refer to love, peace, truth, mercy, etc. (Read Good Works). Some teachers, knowingly or unknowingly, teach only one use of the word which can create confusion.

Inward Learning Positions

Closed Mindsets

Rejecting
Believes info is irrelevant, incorrect, unwanted, unnecessary, or invalid. "This is a complete waste of my time."

Faking
Listening to be nice or socially appropriate. "Of course I'm learning, I'm here aren't I."

Indifferent
Don't really care. Talk all you want. It doesn't matter.
"Whatever"

Beginner Mindsets

Low Motivation
Interested with a desire to learn more, but to be fed the information with minimal inward investment.

Investigative
Asking questions, discussing with others, learning on own time, testing information, using multiple resources.

Connecting learnings
Putting together pieces of the puzzle. Aha moments. New inspiration & wanting more.

Trained Mindsets

Practicing/applying
Doing what it says. Trial and error. Developing skills, learning through mistakes, making corrections, gaining new abilities.

Teaching/demonstrating
Demonstrating change and growth. Producing good fruit. Explaining how …
"When I did …
I experienced …."

Creating Lessons
Real life stories, metaphors, parables, antidotes, examples, models, etc.

Mindset Continuum

Non-stick
All the info slips away. Nothing changed, because nothings changed.

Passive learning
Learn with the crowd. Follow and agree. Fit in. Wait for others to lead. Learning, but not mastering. Mainstream understanding.

Active Learning
Follow suggestions. Test ideas. Know through experience. New identity. Changed heart & mind.

Reading vs. Doing

There is a knowledge argument called “Mary’s room.” It is good to ponder the point of this argument often. Look it up and read it. Talk about it with others. There are beliefs that reading is sufficient, but God commands us to experience God’s ways. Merely reading limits growth and fails to fulfill God’s commands. We can read God’s instructions, what to do, so we can then inwardly learn from the doing of them. Experiences provide lessons.

Reading is absolutely necessary to learn the instructions of what to do. But if we don’t do what’s instructed, what good are they? It’s like reading a recipe and then not cooking. We would starve. Who wants to starve? Let’s face some truth about reading. Reading is easy. It doesn’t take much effort, risk, energy, or struggle to read. No change is needed, only attention. It’s the same thing with watching videos or listening to sermons. A dog can sit through that. People sleep through it. Does that sound like something Jesus would promote? Not likely.

Jesus gives instructions on what to do so that we would do what’s instructed and learn. Only by some form of deception would we merely marvel at the words and continue lacking in productivity. We must investigate this self-deception. We are to do the will of God so we can grow. We are to do good, increase in it, and learn from the experiences.

Is there a difference between reading about Jesus and walking with Jesus? Is there a difference between reading about fasting and fasting? What about prayer, meditation, self-examination, confession, repentance, service, forgiveness, mercy, or giving? What if we did everything Jesus teaches us to do without excuses, to learn from the experiences? Those who do what Jesus teaches will understand better what Jesus teaches.

This book is about experiencing God through active inward growth in doing God’s good. We must choose to leave the fence of inactivity and step into a new way of living with God. The world is full of churches with book studies and lectures. We are to be about personal testimonies with powerful spiritual experiences. We can teach a new path because we are walking it. If we are not walking it, we shouldn’t try to teach it. Jesus did not lower this goal for the sake of anyone’s feelings. Struggle and conflict are part of our journey. We share how we have grown, risks we have taken, sacrifices we have made, and how life is fuller and better with God.

Letter Kills

“But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” (John 5:38-40, NKJV)

Many people read, but few will inwardly abide in the instructions. “His word abiding in you” involves development of His ways through practice. Coming to Jesus is to be increasingly yoked and obedient with Jesus. Saying we believe and behaving like we don’t is error. Abiding in the word brings forth good fruit. By our fruit we are known.

Searching the Scriptures without application is insufficient. Without application with good, we will not bear good fruit. Matthew 7:15-20

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

It is easy to find ministers of words, music, and rituals, yet difficult to find leaders with good experience. Many talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk.

The letter kills when people learn it without really knowing the Spirit of it through experiences. They speak words they do not really understand to people who do not understand, unknowingly creating misunderstanding. A teacher who talks the talk but does not walk the walk will guide others to do likewise.

Having sufficiency from God is to be abiding in the vine. Read John 15. The level of sufficiency of love we get from God is the sort of love we will be able to teach. We are to be ministers of the Spirit, not of the letter, because the letter kills and the Spirit gives life. We are to know the difference. Our teaching can kill or give life depending upon our sufficiency. We are to be ministers of love, peace, truth, justice, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, generosity, gentleness, self-control, and the like. In order to minister such things, we must be trained in and able to teach them. That means we increase productivity with them. They can flow out from us to the degree we abide in them.

The Vine Feeds Us

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:1-2, NKJV)

Abiding in God is doing what Jesus teaches in ways that change and improve us. We become more filled with His love. We set our hearts and minds to improve in doing the will of God. Relying upon and trusting in God’s good, fills us inside. As we grow in sincere love and peace, our souls are filled by the spiritual sustenance from the vine.

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15:10, NKJV)

Note the word “If.” This is a clause. Our action or inaction will have an effect. Will we seek—set our inward being to “keep” the commandments? If we do, we will abide in God’s love. We are commanded to love the way Jesus taught and demonstrated. Anyone can grow and improve in this love if they set their inward being to grow in it.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12, NKJV)

“These things I command you, that you love one another.” (John 15:17, NKJV)

It is clear that we are to love and that we are to do it the way Jesus teaches and demonstrates. We are not to distort or taint such teachings through following other ideas. Careful discernment is required.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” (John 15:26, NKJV)

Inwardly we have a Spiritual teacher to guide us through sensations like love, bitterness, fear, faith, emptiness, contentment, conviction, shame, peace, slavery, and freedom. Following the Spirit’s guidance can lead us to right actions inside and out. This often develops through training and trials.

Spiritual Apathy

“A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.” (Proverbs 21:16, NKJV)

“But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:22, NKJV)

Discernment between the living and the dead is important. If we cannot discern the living from the dead, we may be suffering from spiritual apathy. Spiritual apathy develops from a lack of sincere cooperation with God’s good. It’s like being unnourished from the vine, John 15. Many can become hyper-focused upon tasks like growing income—promotions, becoming physically fit, building intelligence, and service work, but yet lacking in feeding the soul. The heart and soul become underutilized.

Many groups are created to help rescue people from problems. The group’s content can focus too highly upon problems like anger, addiction, lust, etc. Solutions ought to be discussed at least as much as problems. If God is often the stated solution, then our discussions ought to focus upon how we are growing in doing the will of God. We can share how we love our enemy, humble ourselves, repent, or confess our ungodly ways. Sin management happens. Getting rid of sin does not add good. Growing in good adds good and improves our inward spiritual condition.

The solution to spiritual apathy will involve improved sincere participation with God’s good. We must grow experience in doing the will of God and ponder the spiritual senses involved. Our minds and hearts need to exercise along God’s path, ways, statutes, principles, and values.

It may, at times, feel like a spiritual workout; to keep focused spiritually. We can pray for strength and courage to do the will of God because we know it is the right thing to do. It will be good for us and God to be doing it. Thinking differently will be choosing to develop new pathways within our brains. That means renewal and new creation. Note the Bible’s use of words like perseverance, endurance, diligence, and effort. Learn why they are used. Underutilization of such struggle in God’s good can be spiritually destructive. We can maintain spiritual dullness. We ought to struggle to grow spiritually with love and peace. Such growth involves exercises that can strengthen us spiritually. We can be stronger with God’s good.

Pursuit of Spiritual Truth

Deuteronomy 30 declares we have a choice of doing good or evil, and our choices will have resulting consequences of life or death. I've faced this fact and have chosen to practice doing good to learn the spiritual effects. My experiences in testing this biblical declaration have proven it true. I no longer doubt it, but trust in it. It's a reality today. I invite you to join me in witnessing this spiritual reality that is here and now.

It's not too difficult to witness how cooperating with evil is destructive. We can easily observe its effects within our relationships and bodies, that is, if we know how to discern it. Unfortunately, many do not know how to discern it. People in general do not study good and evil. Rarely do people discern its impacts. Instead, they settle into oversimplified assumptions. People turn away from growth opportunities for various self-deceiving reasons. This is largely an unconscious response.

I invite you to join a simple inward process of slow development to stay focused upon good and evil to better learn what they are, how they work within us, and their effects upon spiritual life. The goal is to maintain an investigative mindset to improve with good.

Those who are ready to give themselves over to such a journey will need to be ready to think and behave in new and different ways. It involves boldly learning and discerning spiritual truth about good and evil within and around us. It involves a willingness and readiness to investigate their effects each day. This inward searching of thought and sensations is an ongoing necessity for inward renewal and retraining.

Reprogramming our inward being to see and sense the spiritual true effects of good and evil will require a continued self-disciplined focus upon them. We must remember our unconscious thoughts are actively seeking to practice what they have been trained to do. Consequently, these thoughts can seek to nudge us away from new action. Retraining habitual thoughts will involve much inward sustained corrective action. That means continued new applications of new thoughts. Once new thoughts are implemented, practiced, and trained in, we can then add new ones. The more we are able to sincerely pursue new thoughts and actions with good, the better we can position ourselves to witness the life God intended for us.

Why Not Be Better?

“Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent” (Matthew 11:20, NKJV)

Why not abide more in God? The Bible says, “because they did not repent.” Not repenting has an effect. Repent means to move towards God —do the will of God. Why not do the will of God? Repentance brings good spiritual changes. No repentance could mean no growth and apathy.

Why not practice being more real, sincere, compassionate, forgiving, truthful, merciful, and fair? Why not meditate more upon good each day? Do we believe these ideas are good and right for ourselves?

Why not choose to be better with God? Review the “Levels of Deception” page in this book. Each of us can inwardly have a reason/delusion to delay improvement. Our instinct and unconscious quick reactions to our own understanding—bias can likely nudge us away from even considering this question. Few will sincerely get honest with themselves—be in the light about their spiritual choices and consequences.

Inwardly, we each have a narrative about our spiritual life. We ought to investigate it further so we can correct it. Our inward reasoning will guide us to repent or not. Either growth matters or it doesn’t. If it means something—really means something—to the point of us doing it, then we will do it. We can! As we grow in better practices, we can grow spiritually. So why not? By what reasons do we convince ourselves not to grow? Are we willing to examine our reasoning about growth with God?

Why not examine ourselves and learn the truth? Many of us can easily be following some evil deception and not even know it, because we won’t position ourselves to look and see. As soon as it gets uncomfortable, we quit. Why not reduce self-seeking, pride, bitterness, hurry, insincerity, deception, idolatry, and other forms of evil? Discuss the reasons and learn.

Why not practice learning our feelings, thoughts, and sensations? Are we repressing, minimizing, or avoiding growth? Which do we know better, togetherness or loneliness, impatience or patience, mercy or revenge, bitterness or peace, sincerity or being fake? Do we *pay attention to them?* Are we willing and ready to exercise new thoughts and experiences?

Benefits From Learning Good

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

1. Humble myself and learn my spiritual weaknesses in more detail.
2. See more truth, not just positive feel good truth, but the whole truth.
3. Stop fearing, avoiding, controlling, and hiding inward evil reality.
4. Increased awareness about the affects of evil inside and out.
5. Ability to compare and contrast good and evil for better understanding.
6. Better inward positioning to seek and do the will of God.
7. Increased ability to take captive evil thoughts and intervene with good.
8. Gain a new perspective on the affects of practiced God’s good.
9. Help others learn evil for correction and improvement with good.
10. Decreased evil experiences and improved good experiences.
11. Improved testimony, spiritual experiences, and Christian character.
12. Improved spiritual discernment and critical thinking skills.
13. Decreased fear of evil and increased faith.
14. Evil loses it’s control and power. Freedom increases.
15. Learn what to correct in thoughts and attitudes.
16. Better, faster, and easier discernment with continued training.
17. Increased understanding with the stories in the Bible.
18. Improved empathy for those who are affected by evil.
19. Decreased stigmatization with evil and see it as a common problem.
20. Better understanding with God and increased experiences with grace.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21, NKJV)

Ready to experience overcoming evil with good and improved obedience?

“For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.” (Romans 16:19, NKJV)

Ready For Light

“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12, NKJV)

Choosing “the light of life” involves setting our hearts and minds upon that life, the good life. The evil already trained within us will not want it. We must practice choosing reliance upon God instead of our trained evil ways.

Jesus teaches us to pray. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10, NKJV)

As we practice praying the way Jesus taught and demonstrated, we can evaluate ourselves to see how willing and ready we are to do more precisely what the prayer says to do. How willing and ready are we to choose the light of God and to sincerely and honestly do His will? This involves self-denial, denial of our evil trained ways. How willing and ready are we to set aside comforts, wants, desires, interests, entitlements, goals, and demands—anything blocking our improvement with God?

This is an imperfect process of progressing toward that which is perfect—God.

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” (Philippians 2:14-16, NKJV)

Comparing and contrasting good and evil can improve our understanding of the fruit they bring. We can learn the difference between darkness and light. We can choose to walk in the light. The light will teach us less where to go, but more how to go from the inside out. We can seek the light to sense good and evil for direction. We can then follow the light, one step at a time, staying with God. As we inwardly stay on the path of good, we can become better instruments of God’s good. It is God’s light, the good we accept into our hearts and minds, not our good, that saves us. But we must choose it, practice it, and keep it within us so many can be saved.

Will Of God

“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.” (Romans 12:2, NKJV)

Will we seek the comforts of the world with conformity or transform with the will of God? What we decide will be proven by our actions. As we walk more in the will of God, we can prove what is good.

“not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” (Ephesians 6:6, NKJV)

We can learn to serve Christ—doing the will of God from our hearts. We can make new choices, grow, improve, learn, and train in the will of God. We can do this with continued small and simple adjustments with our thoughts, words, and actions. We must begin with increasing attention towards good and evil for improved spiritual awareness. This means learning our missteps and how to walk in correction.

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15, NKJV)

Consequently, as we grow in righteousness—being right with God, we will prove others in error. Following righteousness when others follow unrighteousness can result in conflict. Being a bondservant of Christ is to take sides with Christ in all things. We are to stand firm with God’s good. We are to do the will of God when others don’t want it. If we persevere in our growth, others will be affected, and our relationships will often change.

We can love when others hate. We can be patient around others who hurry. We can practice truth when there is deception. We can be sincere when others are fake. We can forgive when others hold grudges.

“And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:17, NKJV)

God gives us choices to inwardly do the will of God or not. One day at a time, individually, we can choose to practice the will of God. We can choose to set our thoughts toward it and listen to our senses.

One Mind

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

The good way for a group of people to have the same mind is for their thoughts to be collectively trained toward the same thing. Good training involves far more than a weekly teaching. It involves a continued daily focus upon improving towards the goal. Study Deuteronomy 6:7-9.

Each of us is unique and has different perspectives. We see things differently. Even when we all look at the same thing, we each will have our own unique perception about what we see. Differences happen and are unavoidable. They exist and will always exist.

Being of the same mind likely means we are striving toward the same goal. Yet like runners in a race, some of us will be faster than others. We will be in different places and with different abilities. Some may sprint and rest, some walk, and others jog. The fact is that we each will move toward the same goal differently. Many of us can wander from the path and some may return. Each variation will have its own experience and understanding. Differences will always exist. We must continue to redirect our attention towards the same goal and move in its direction. We can maintain a focus upon how we each are progressing toward the same goal instead of our differences.

A group having one mind is like a team carrying a table. Each will have their own load to handle. Each will need to be careful and attentive with how the group is moving. Each will need to pace themselves with the group. They can collaborate on how to move up stairways, around corners, and getting through doorways. They must speak the truth to each other for clear understanding. If someone sees danger behind another and does not say anything, that person may fall. If someone falls, the table will not move. When a teammate gets tired and has to rest, the whole team stops. They work together for the goal. Yet our team project is not about carrying a table, it’s about correctly growing with God’s goodness from the inside out. If anyone becomes burdened by evil, the team is to sincerely help that person with compassion to encourage correction.

Becoming Willing

“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 3:5, NKJV)

This inspired word of God gives direction, but a willing mind and heart are required to obey it. God offers direction constantly towards patience, peace, and love. We must exercise cognitive effort to keep the will of God steady in our minds, words, and actions. We can choose to prioritize it and do it. Yet sometimes within us exists unwillingness. Becoming willing will then be our goal. We can practice praying for more willingness.

Inwardly, we can have stubbornness and resistance to comply with practicing patience of Christ. Our unconscious beliefs can be so set against it, even as if our whole being is screaming “No!” However, we can still baby-step this process with prayer and self-discipline.

We can begin with a time frame simple and achievable. It can be five seconds, five minutes, five hours, five days, etc. We decide upon a simple, achievable goal. We must keep coming to the light and learn our inward deeds. Spiritual improvement involves continued spiritual participation.

“But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” (John 5:40, NKJV)

Unwillingness often involves contrary understanding or training. Until we are willing to carefully observe our misguided beliefs long enough to pin down thoughts to correct, we likely will struggle to create new, improved thoughts with God. God is always teaching and often times things we don’t want to know. We must continue to open our minds and hearts for new direction and strength to do the will of God, not our own. Our own understanding can interfere with spiritual development. Forming willingness to do God’s will often requires a readiness to stop obeying our old ways and their inward prompts. We can do this one moment at a time.

“For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.” (1 Corinthians 9:17, NKJV)

Our job is to cognitively improve our hearts into peace and love. Then our productivity will be more from peace and love instead of stewardship.

Awake

“Therefore He says: “Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”” (Ephesians 5:14, NKJV)

Waking up involves a concentrated effort to observe the spiritual reality of good and evil present within and around us. It’s opening our senses. We inwardly examine our thoughts and attitudes for what character we’re seeking. We learn more about our inward deeds and the fruit they produce. We are to be awake to our productivity with good and evil.

“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” (Psalm 17:15, NKJV)

Awaking to God’s righteousness is to increasingly cooperate and participate in it. We are to grow in it, not just theorize about it. The more we improve with it, the more we can become awake in God’s likeness.

Many of us will choose the degree of alertness and vigilance to apply toward our growing in God’s likeness. Developing God’s good within our hearts, minds, souls, and strengths is satisfying. This is a fact within the Bible and within us here and now. Few will wake up to this fact and experience it. Few will choose to rigorously apply themselves to it.

“Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do,* but let us watch and be sober.” (1 Thessalonians 5:6, NKJV)

We are to watch with a learning mindset toward good and evil, objectivity, careful testing, and critical analysis. We are to perceive cautiously as though danger is near. This has nothing to do with drawing erroneous conclusions about something bad going to happen. Instead, it is focused upon the truth that if we are careless with our inward spiritual activity, we can be hurt. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 is setting the stage so that we can better situate ourselves for 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

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

We are to “always pursue what is good” for everyone! We must become more clear and less confused about the precise nature of God’s good.

Good & evil quick reference

Romans 12:9 NKJV “Behave Like a Christian”
Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

1. Truth, no partiality, heeding the word
2. Humble, serving, contrite
3. Seeking good, knowing good, abhor evil, repentance
4. Peace, love, compassion, mercy
5. Charitable deeds, lending
6. Zeal, perseverance, labor
7. Forgiveness, caring for enemies, not to burden
8. Generosity, sharing, giving
9. Building sincere love with others

1. Deceit, false lips, flattery, hypocrisy
2. Pride, arrogance, vanity
3. Seeking evil, thinking evil, avoiding good, covet, envy, rebellion, ungodliness
4. Malice, clamor, bitterness, wrath, anger
5. Not giving or helping others
6. Seeking comforts, sloth, avoiding struggle
7. Holding grudges, vengeful thinking, paybacks, doing evil, creating harm
8. Love of money, debt, oppressing
9. Withdrawing from others, keeping people out

Malice - desiring ill will or misfortune of others

Clamor - making lots of noise to agitate

Hypocrisy (hypokrisis) - playacting,
“any person who was wearing a figurative mask and pretending to be someone or something they were not”

https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/hypocrite-meaning-origin

Progression Flow Chart

Learn Good & Evil
Managing inward good & evil

Dealing with evil	Growing good
Identify, write down, & confess our own Evil thoughts, choices, & practices. Bring into the light—sincere truth.	Identify, write down, & describe our own good thoughts, choices, and practices. See the truth in our good with facts.
Learn affects of Evil in our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, & relationships.	Learn affects of Good in our thoughts, feelings, attitudes, & relationships.
Practice humility, remorse, contrition, and learn their spiritual purpose. See how they are good in helping us repent and correct our spiritual errors.	Learn good sensations through practicing; charity, helpfulness, caring, kindness, compassion, sincere love, encouragement, peace, & mercy.
Learn Good sensations through experiencing forgiveness, repentance, patience, service, choosing God's good over our own understanding, restoration of harm done, sincere love, self-denial, long-suffering, and truth.	Learn Good through; continued growth, perseverance, endurance, standing firm, teaching by demonstration, renewal of mind, new formation in Good conduct, and obeying the great commandment with improved corrective actions.
Learn what it is like to be at peace with a clean conscience and purified heart. Understand the comfort this brings. Witness values and interests change more to love and belonging.	Learn the Good sensations through helping others purify, cleanse, and improve inward conduct with Good. See how helping others helps us too.

Good Discipleship

Discipleship involves practicing teachings. This book is about learning how to better put into practice the teachings of God. Doing the practices is never the problem. It's convincing ourselves to do them that's the problem. The truth is that in order to be convinced, we must face correction and learn our errors. To see our errors, we must walk into the light and examine our deeds for errors. We must more clearly see how to do God's good.

The mindset of a disciple is to be like the teacher. That means the disciple listens to the teachings to learn how to better think and behave. The disciple practices instructions as the teacher does. A disciple of Jesus will better practice how Jesus lived.

There are ungodly and incorrect ways to think and behave. We all have them. Walking in the light is to look for them so that we can make corrections. We can always improve if we practice improvement.

The path of learning inward spiritual truth involves a definite change in thinking. We must have a shift in our focus dedicated to seek what is spiritual. Therefore, we must practice discerning between the physical and the spiritual. We must seek to sense the effects of love, both giving and receiving it. We must increase our experiential understanding of love described in 1 Corinthians 13.

We can many times reset our thoughts to seek spiritual activity throughout each day. Each spiritual trait described in the "Good and evil quick reference" can be better understood. We can meditate upon a different trait each day, inquiring what it is like in practice. We can ponder how to practice the good trait more and the evil trait less. We can bring into our minds people and events and investigate how to better practice good. Remember, a disciple practices the principles of the teacher.

As we practice new experiences, we will gain new information. When we practice good or evil, we will be situated to be able to investigate our thoughts and sensations through the process and able to witness how that response impacts others. Yet we must investigate it. Then we can reflect upon the new information and learn from it. These priceless experiences will teach us invaluable lessons. This is good discipleship.

Formative Moments

With every thought, choice, word, and deed, we are walking in formation. The blend of good and evil exists within us all. Our choices and actions inwardly and outwardly will be shaping that blend in the manner of our application with them. The more we give ourselves to seek, develop, practice, experience, and witness the reality of love, the more we can know God. Read 1 John 4.

Choosing to add improved good activity inwardly and outwardly can position us to experience good Formative Moments. These moments in time involve an inward state of being that can feel new, awkward, and uncertain. Our reality can suddenly seem to be changed. How we perceive ourselves and the world can be renewed. This new perspective is an experience shaped by God and our active inward positioning to witness it. The more our minds are open to receive the good of God, the more grace we can experience. It's a choice with self-discipline.

It's important to retain the understanding that experiencing such Formative Moments will not guarantee permanent change without continued focused growth. Improvements are key. No improvement, no Formative Moment. Also, growth with evil will also have ungodly Formative Moments.

Existing inwardly and outwardly, to experience the will of God, will reshape how and what we do. We actively evaluate what happens during our experiences. We practice inward observations of our thoughts, attitudes, interests, motives, wants, desires, and expectations. We imperfectly over time improve in doing the will of God while pondering how it is good.

Learning how it is good helps us in motivation, understanding, and teaching. Witnessing the results through our experiences often occurs during Formative Moments. When we put our trust in God's ways, witness it bring good results, even when we believed otherwise, we experience renewed understanding. Our faith can increase with such evidence.

Often times this happens in hindsight, sometimes months or even years. We can experience good things happen and then find it resulted from our cooperation with God's good. The results happen, it's just that our ability to see it hasn't yet developed. It can come immediately or gradually over time, but it always comes. Collaboration with others can help us see more.

Learn It, Think It, Do It, Feel It

Learn it

Most, if not all, behavior is learned. We often follow patterns of behavior modeled by others, and then once it is practiced over time, it becomes habitualized—unconscious. They become our personality and identity. Renewing our mind and habits will require a willingness to think differently. We make the time to learn God's good with the intention of practicing it.

Think it

We keep our minds focused on how to better practice God's good each day. We pray for strength to keep focussed upon learning good and evil and how to better apply it. We meditate and ponder God's good—how to do it better. We examine our inward selves to learn our wants, desires, distractions, expectations, demands, and assumptions. We test all things.

Do it

Our new training begins when we put it into practice. How well we practice it will train ourselves how well we can do it. How often we practice it will affect how quickly we learn it. Development of God's good will require mindfulness of our inward activity with God's good, practicing it, and resisting cooperation with evil. Old trained ways will unconsciously seek to be played out, not because we are evil or bad, but because they are well trained. We keep our focus upon how to improve with good to do it.

Feel it

Feelings happen. It's best to practice being present with them. We invest our time to learn from them. Spiritual reality involves many feelings, both comfortable and uncomfortable. Sincerity is a must. Emotional understanding is necessary. We seek growth with sincere compassion. There exists within us all a mass of mental, emotional, and spiritual unexplainable reactions. We must seek out our inward sensations for information. Being hard-hearted, stiff-necked, and callous is to miss the mark. We are to ponder our emotions, search our thoughts behind them, and seek God for direction. Ponder the experiences of being humble, contrite, supplication, and mourning. We learn why through growth.

Talk About It

Explaining our experiences forces us to learn them deeper. It often involves searching for words to describe what we witnessed. As we persevere to explain our experiences, we will likely find ourselves understanding them better. It forces us to figure it out.

Inward good consequences happen when we sincerely practice this process correctly. The correct way will involve some new learning, trial and error, confusion, and possible frustration. If we continue and find new words, illustrations, Bible verses, and stories, we will then become a much better teacher. Good teaching involves our own personal experiences.

Not talking about it

Three unspoken rules exist in dysfunctional homes: don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel. The fact of the matter is that when we practice stuffing, controlling, or hiding our feelings, we then create unknown spiritual consequences. It's like hiding spiritual truth. Minds, hearts, and souls are impacted, corrupted, and even blinded. Yet it's a common practice.

There exist personality types that cannot and will not sit still long enough to learn their inward thoughts and feelings. These types have hard-wired deep training ways to avoid the process. The internal fight to search themselves can feel like a losing battle. However, gradual training can help in making progress to learn inward thoughts and feelings. Mind and body meditations can be a helpful start. Learning body sensations: breath, pulse, etc., can then lead to the practice of searching thoughts. This is not an overnight success. It is slow and progressive with repeated persevering practices. We can practice discussing new learnings and findings, even how to sit still and show up for exercises. Training needs the practices.

Deuteronomy 6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

There is a Godly good purpose for talking about our experiences with God's good. We can teach the great commandment to the extent we have walked in it. The more we experience and teach it, the better we can help others into experiencing it.

Formation Benefits

1. Feeling right with who we are and what we do.
2. Recovery from bad habits, obsessions, and addictions.
3. Make healthier choices, learn new options, experience inward healing.
4. Decreased stress and worry.
5. Less rushed and more patient.
6. Decreased fear and increased faith. Content and confident.
7. Improved relationships with sincerity, honesty, and compassion.
8. Improved self-awareness and spiritual understanding.
9. Increased peace, calmness, and experiences with freedom.
10. Increased clarity of focus upon the present.
11. Improved financial decisions, stability, and confidence.
12. Easier to sleep and peace of mind. Clean conscience.
13. Decreased loneliness and increased belonging.
14. Improved empathy and emotional understanding.
15. Being appreciated, respected, and valued by others.
16. Feeling fulfilled and accomplished. Knowing we helped others.
17. Witnessing others being helped and experiencing the shared joy in it.
18. Experiencing what amazing grace feels like over and over again.
19. Seeing hurt relationships transformed and renewed.
20. A deeper inward relating to scriptures across the whole Bible.
21. Improved conflict management and relationship skills.
22. Increased understanding of empathy and how it is good.
23. Improved time management and utilization of resources.
24. Having purpose and goals better set to help ourselves and others.
25. Knowing love and sensing God here today.

Character-building Formula

"And not only *that,* but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4, NKJV)

Let's respectfully acknowledge the first step in this description of growth—"tribulations." How we respond to tribulations will impact how well we grow. Will we respond with perseverance to developing character? This is rarely a comfortable choice. Many will not choose to continue in the face of confusion or struggle when other seemingly less challenging choices are available. Which sounds better, do it later or tribulations?

If we are willing to give ourselves over to the path of tribulation with the response of perseverance to the point of developing character, then we can experience good results. It's helpful to maintain motivating thoughts about the peace and love waiting on the other side. We can know good with experience at a much deeper level of understanding if we persevere through tribulations. Once we experience this goodness, we can gain hope and know this process is trustworthy. We can gain courage, strength, and faith.

As we persevere with practicing new character to the point of it becoming more automatic, we can experience new responses from others, improved relationships, sensations, and feelings.

We can have life-changing experiences through our self-sacrificing adoption of God's good ways. By dying to self, owning our sin, confessing it, walking in repentance, and righting our wrongs, we can experience cleansing of our conscience and purifying of our heart. Tribulations are part of the journey, and we must persevere forward on that path to the point of new character. On the other side exists hope, peace, love, freedom, understanding, and grace.

Heed the word

"He who heeds the word wisely will find good, And whoever trusts in the Lord, happy *is* he." (Proverbs 16:20, NKJV)

Conscience

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

Our conscience can speak to us with sensations and feelings of right and wrong. We are to continually practice giving improved attention to it. We are to use our senses enough to learn from them. Investigation is required.

“Then those who heard *it,* being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.” (John 8:9, NKJV)

Feeling convicted by our conscience can be very subtle or overwhelming. It’s good to discuss these sensations with a mentor or guide. We can also meditate and pray about it. Conviction can be a helpful sensation.

“This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” (Acts 24:16, NKJV)

When we sense something off within us, we can seek God for improvement. We will likely need some sort of change or reparation. Through experience, our discernment can grow, and corrections can become much easier. This can become a way of life for peace and love.

Understanding how righting wrongs done to others with all sincerity can cleanse the conscience and purify the heart will only come to those who do it. Many believe they are doing good and miss out on how much better life can be because they believe they are already good or good enough.

“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience . . .” (2 Corinthians 1:12, NKJV)

We all experience self-deception. It’s best to test our discernment, especially with our own conscience. Self-examination is a must in order to see the truth. We are to test our perception about our spiritual condition through bringing our character into the light. We honestly and thoroughly see the truth in our thoughts and attitudes. Then we can better see the next steps to improve our conscience with God.

Daily Process

Ponder God's character traits, learn how to inwardly practice and serve them,
for they are Good.

Practice introspection identifying thoughts and feelings throughout the day.
What was I thinking and feeling? Why did I choose . . . ?
How are my thoughts with God?

Humble ourselves away from self-seeking, pride, vanity, idolatry,
or other ungodly distractions.

Meditate upon the feelings and sensations of our doing Good and evil.
Inwardly learn how Good is Good and evil is evil.

Pray for strength, courage, and direction to trust, obey, and do Good.

Identify struggles with evil, confess and discuss them, have mercy,
and walk in forgiveness. Psalm 34:14

Slow down, take it easy, practice patience, walk peacefully.

Look for opportunities to do God's good today. Be spiritually ready, observant,
and discerning. Give attention to inward sensations.

Take comfort in the Good experienced, find the joy in it,
and feel the affects of God's Good.

Empathetically and sincerely; compliment, comfort, encourage,
and support others with love and truth. Let conviction happen when necessary.

Progress, not perfection. Improve awareness of progress. Tally up the good each day.
Identify errors to better learn how to make improvements.

Teach by example, demonstration, and shared personal experiences.
Be ready to describe own progress with real life examples.

God's Collective Good

Our goal is to grow in all of God's good, the collective good. The goal is not to seek God like a buffet, partaking in what we want and neglecting what we don't. The goal is to seek all of God, even parts we like the least. If we skip out on certain aspects of God's instructions, we may miss out on some saving grace. Who knows, we might miss out on a lot of it.

1 Corinthians 13 describes how having all knowledge and faith without love leads to *nothingness*. It also breaks down into various character traits and applications of what love involves. We can take away from this teaching two important lessons: how to better understand love; and that if we do not partake in that love, our faith may amount to *nothing*.

Love described in 1 Corinthians 13 involves a list of dos and don'ts. Keep in mind that experience is needed to understand the spiritual impact of them. The continued practices of inward self-examination, critical thinking, and honest collaboration with others about our own good and evil can go a long way in building spiritual discernment. But we must sincerely, honestly, thoroughly, and humbly practice it.

Don'ts—Love is not proud, self-seeking, evil thinking, or enjoying iniquity. The practice of these can bring us to a nothingness experience.

Dos—Love is long-suffering, kind, humble, enjoying truth, patient, enduring, persevering, hopeful, and tolerant. The practice of these can bring joy, freedom, peace, fulfillment, blessings, and belonging.

We can be kind while dishonest. We can be friendly while insincere. We can be positive while self-seeking. We can be encouraging with false flattery. We can focus on the good we do while turning a blind eye to the evil we practice. We can partake in Biblical truth we find acceptable, while avoiding Biblical truth we dislike. This can be rejoicing in evil. We can then lack in long-suffering, enduring all things, and believing all things.

The point here is to shine light on the whole truth. If we practice good without correcting evil, that condoned evil will then diminish the good we practice. This is a journey towards improvement with good, forgiveness, and mercy, not self-condemnation. We learn our inward spiritual truth and set our thoughts toward the next steps to improve with love and peace.

Know Love

“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.” (1 John 4:7-8, NKJV)

If there was ever a qualifying statement, it’s this one, “He who does not love does not know God.” It’s clear and simple to understand. Jesus and Moses prioritized love. If we really believe in God, Moses, and Jesus, then we will grow in it. We will trust it. We will practice it. We will live by it. The way the Bible describes love will become our guide on how to practice it.

To the extent we love one another will affect our depth in knowing God. We must be very careful where we learn how to love one another. The correct way has nothing to do with fake smiles or false flattery. It is not shown with mere words. It is proven through good, sincere actions. Self-seeking destroys love. Love has little to do with selfish ambitions. Correct love will be from a humble, sincere, honest, and Christ-like attitude.

In order to know love and practice it better, we must sharpen our understanding of it through corrective practices. We must test our productivity. We can review our conduct with questions like: How long did I suffer with loving others? Was I kind and without envy? Was I humble or self-seeking? Was I proud? Was there endurance or perseverance? Was I sincere or pretending? Did I say yes and mean it? Was I understanding others with empathy? Did I care and feel sincere compassion?

We evaluate our inward attitude and interests. We seek improvement with our thoughts. Romans 8:5, 12:16; Philippians 3:19; Colossians 3:2

Read Matthew 5:43-48 and ponder how to practice it.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:13, NKJV)

What might it be like to have a friend lay down their life for you out of love? What might that feel like inside? How might that affect your relationship? Why is this the greatest love? How does your love measure up to this benchmark? Think about love on a continuum with laying down your life as the highest. Where would you place your love on a scale of one to ten?

The Inward Battle

Inward Action

1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 4:7, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, James 4, 1 Peter 2, Ephesians 6:10-20

By what principles do we inwardly arm ourselves with? How well do we prepare our minds and hearts with the armor of God? How are we sincere, honest, compassionate, patient, peace-bringing, loving, serving, tolerant, and generous? These are traits of good fruit we are able to produce better. Matthew 7:15, 16, 20; Philippians 1:11; Hebrews 12:11; James 3:18

As we improve our inward self-examination, we can discover evil thoughts, desires, and practices. There lies the battle. Yet we must begin to see the corrections God desires us to have, even if in merely small doses. We must intentionally identify parts of ourselves to improve. First, we identify corruptive thoughts and then learn godly good ones to practice. We practice this throughout each day to train ourselves into seeing more of God's good and how it is good as we abide in it. 2 Corinthians 10:5

We each have unconscious, trained evil responses seeking to be played out every day. Our practicing godly good can be choosing to situate ourselves in a juxtaposition or cognitive dissonance. We can experience ourselves practicing evil, even while we know it is evil. We are not evil. We are misled, misdirected, and misguided. We skip faultfinding or blaming and keep our focus on the next good thought and action. We stay with good as best we can inside and out. We imperfectly seek growth.

Condemnation of self or others is not good. We practice encouraging thoughts and words to do good. We choose to set aside our own understanding and walk better with the will of God. Proverbs 3:5

Retraining involves concentration and struggle. We must exercise critical thinking to stay the path and avoid fading away from good productivity. We can fall away. Psalm 101:3, Luke 8:13, Hebrews 6:6, Romans 11:16-25

This is not a sprint. It is long walk. We must find a pace we can keep for the long haul. It is better to slow down to a drip than to stop completely.

Blindness

There is a condition called “Inattentional Blindness.” See also, “Attentional Bias” or “Selective Attention.” If we are not watching for something, we won’t see it. An old saying is, “out of sight, out of mind.” Not focusing our minds to be active with God’s good means we won’t grow or improve in it. We can easily and unconsciously practice turning a blind eye to God and His commands.

Jesus continuously redirects people toward the heart and mind. If we follow this direction, we will give our attention as Jesus teaches to our heart and mind. We will inwardly learn, train, repent, and correct.

“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” (Matthew 15:14, NKJV)

The time we spend without attention to develop our hearts and minds to grow and improve with God’s good can likely be time spent in blindness. We can spend our entire lives blind. We can live spiritually blind and yet have money, friends, and good health.

“Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.” (Matthew 23:26, NKJV)

One contributor to Inattentional Blindness is cognitive overload or multitasking. This means we keep our minds occupied with other things. We can be always learning, but never with God. Too busy for God? How much of your cognitive load is set to do the will of God?

“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” (Matthew 13:13, NKJV)

The only way to understand what it’s like to follow Jesus is obedience. Following is doing. Do a concordance study in the Bible with the word obey and learn. Pay attention to the patterns in the verses and compare your own life to them. How important is it to stay focused and productive?

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:36, NKJV)

Levels Of Self-Deception

The following inward responses can be below the conscious level. It's good to boldly think about these behaviors long enough to help bring them into awareness. Failing to do so could be practicing levels 1-4. We are to carefully learn spiritual growth instructions until we can see clearly how to walk in them better. Choosing to avoid growth can likely fit into one of the following descriptions of self-deception. The process of getting to level 8 can take time with uncomfortable facing of inward truth. We must bring to light our inward spiritual realities each day.

1. Blindness—I don't have any deception. Just won't see it.
2. Distraction—Change the subject, redirect, brief acknowledgement followed by thinking about, talking about, or doing something else.
3. Hiding—If I acknowledge this truth, it might scare someone. I know it, but I won't talk about it, because it's bad. It's hurtful. Must protect others from this truth. Let's just stay positive and act as if everything is fine and dandy. More helping others will make up for it. Ignore the evil and just focus on what feels nice. Smile and move on. Don't make others uncomfortable, that's bad.
4. Ya but—Blaming, reasoning, excusing, and other forms of avoiding responsibility for own choices and actions. It's someone else's fault. "It can't be my fault." "I had no choice." "Everyone else is doing it."
5. Hopeless & helpless—Acknowledge evil with the idea that it's something that can't be fixed or changed. It's who I am or how I'm made.
6. Not that bad—Acknowledge evil with justifications on how it's normal and okay. No-one got hurt. I'm better now, that's good enough. Resting on laurels or comparing self to others who are worse off. Normalizing evil.
7. Faithless trials—Acknowledge it, apply action without diligent heart/mind focus. It's like taking action without paying close attention to the thoughts and feelings involved. Lack of willingness to face the hurt, pain, fear, anger, and bitterness. More outward application than inward. Mindless activities.
8. Surrender—Broken, humbled, done. Contrition and supplication. Ready to give up control, be a servant of spiritual good, and trust the process. Ready to face inward spiritual reality, confess, repent, and begin a new life. Ready to die to self, put on a new yoke, and give inward all to God. We apply diligent cognitive daily effort to protect ourselves against deception, seeking to control others—fixing and false presentations/hypocrisy.

Spiritual Attention

“For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.” (Romans 8:6, NKJV)

How we think brings consequences. Ungodly thoughts are death, and spiritually good thoughts are life. One way is in darkness, and the other is in light. This is a spiritual reality we can choose to remember or not. We can choose to pay attention to it or other things. God gives us choices and explains consequences from our choices. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20. We can choose to exercise our choices of doing good or not.

Various sources online indicate 90% of our thoughts are unconscious. Thoughts we are not aware of guide us. We must create a regular system or practice of questioning what our unconscious is telling us to do. We must examine it and test it to see if it is right with God. Since we all sin and fall short, finding something to correct ought to be easy. If not, consult a professional, loved one, or mentor to help you out. We can practice finding simple, achievable changes to make to improve with God’s will.

God instructs us to pay careful attention to our own inward spiritual responses. God gives us free will and teaches us to be careful with our choices. We are to improve discernment and reason. We are to live our lives practicing introspection. We are to grow our awareness of our thoughts and feelings. We can make introspection a more common discussion through bringing it into more of our teachings, activities, meetings, and groups. We can increase our thought awareness.

More activity with discussing and identifying our thoughts can improve our ability to notice them. We can share details of thoughts and feelings with stories in the Bible, or better yet, our own testimonies. We can highlight how better awareness of our own feelings improves our ability for empathy. We can share how our thoughts impact our feelings. We can relate to how being hard-hearted interferes with our growth towards love and peace. The better we get with noticing fear, bitterness, etc., the better we can train a protective filter for interventions.

“and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” (Ephesians 4:23, NKJV)

Attention To Love

God commands us to love and is specific about what to love. We are to love God. We are to learn how to love God's good with our inward all as much as possible. This requires inward conditioning with a focused intention to make corrections. There exists a vast amount of opportunity for us to improve with our love if we can apply ourselves to grow in it.

"But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."" (Luke 10:40-42)

Jesus values the work Mary is doing "that good part." Will we value quality time together with honest sincerity? Service is important, but love is the priority. It's easy to look around a room and find ways to clean, but how diligent are we evaluating how to love better? Service work done without love may in fact lead to nothing. (See 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

We can give God's love and peace more attention. Whatever work we do without love may be a distraction. We can practice reducing our cognitive load and the speed at which we do things to make room for love. Growing in love involves improved loving behaviors. We give our attention to the experiences of love and peace each day.

Solid Food

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

There is a difference between thinking about God and thinking with God. Our minds are to become more in sync with God's good through cognitive adjustments. Moment by moment, concentrated effort upon love is needed. We can improve our love if we seek how and act upon it.

"But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness." (1 Timothy 4:7, NKJV) Heart & Mind

Focus On Today

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34, NKJV)

Our minds can easily lose focus. It’s possible to spend all day thinking about the past or the future. Our proclivity in doing good requires focusing on today and how to better abide in God’s good right now. At the end of the day, we can recall the good we have done and enjoy it.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21, NKJV)

Focusing upon building heavenly treasures involves focusing on our inward production with God’s good. We can keep our focus on God’s good each day. If our focus becomes divided and our attention is mixed, it will impact the quality of our love. If it is insincere, routine, or practiced with little thought or effort, the quality will be lower than what we are capable of doing. Remember the commands to love Him with all our mind and heart. We can reduce the load of other things.

“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.” (Matthew 6:24, NKJV)

What we think about most will likely master us. What is most important?

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25, NKJV)

God commands us to love. Love is now our focus, interest, and goal. We are to think it, learn it, practice it, and feel it. Thoughts upon other things will not help us grow in productivity with love. Those who are successful with money but lack in love will likely be unsuccessful with God. Our master is likely what we dedicate our inward resources to learn, practice, and experience. Today we can focus more upon being productive in love.

Heart And Mind

The Bible teaches extensively about heart and mind activity. The word heart is used more in the Bible than the word love. The Hebrew word for heart includes the mind. They are not separate. One way to define the Hebrew word heart is Inward Authority. We are to practice using both our thoughts and sensations. Feelings and sensations teach us spiritual truth.

We are guided to become more discerning and wise with love and peace. We can improve our senses with compassion and empathy. Any deliberate downplaying of the heart or mind is problematic. They are connected. Avoiding or repressing feelings may be necessary at times when it can negatively affect our good. However, if it continues day after day, it can be destructive. Existing with a disconnected heart and mind can corrupt, stunt, or block our spiritual improvement.

Feelings can be repressed and thoughts can be avoided. The Bible instructs us to examine and think increasingly about the will of God and be productive with it. We can improve our discernment ability. Choosing to lack improvement in our weaker areas will be choosing to maintain weaknesses. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, ‘stop growing.’ The Bible does not teach us to take time off from God. Any justification with our lack of productivity with good is likely based upon self-deception.

We can practice seeing how our thoughts and feelings connect and influence each other. The more we learn how they influence each other, the greater our ability can be to bring in different thoughts and attitudes for changed emotional responses. Practicing this will help.

What does Jesus teach and demonstrate by His choices?

Jesus cried and mourned. Jesus was humble, gentle, and compassionate.
Jesus let others love him and care for him. Jesus loved deeply.
Jesus spoke truth nobody wanted to hear. Jesus obeyed God, not people.
Jesus did not fit into the crowds, but instead with God’s good.
Jesus discerned spiritual good and evil constantly, with adjustments.

We can improve in doing likewise if we do likewise. Each day is a good day to practice inward awareness. We can reduce our speed and load to make room in our hearts and minds to keep God there. We need God.

Perception, Beliefs, And Faith

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

What sort of messages or company are your thoughts promoting? We ought to discern our thoughts carefully to discern where they lead us. If our minds ponder evil and continue in it, then our minds will cooperate with evil, practice, grow in, and die by evil. James 1:14-15. Thought examination, confession, repentance, and correction are needed.

Jesus deals with temptation in Matthew 4:1-11. When Jesus is tempted, He redirects and speaks out loud His own thoughts. He appears to be talking to satan, but do you really think satan cares what Jesus is saying? No. Satan is only concerned with corrupting faith. Jesus stands firm with His thoughts to stay focused with God. We are to watch for such inward activity. This is a demonstration of how we can inwardly respond to temptation or misleading thoughts. James 1:13-15.

When we are tempted, we can examine and discern our thoughts to see if they are leading us toward good or evil. This action is a skill we can improve upon through continued practice. Through such practice and skill development, we can gradually improve our faith, beliefs, perceptions, motivations, and even desires. If we lack in our productivity with inward good, evil can more easily sneak into our minds and take root. We need a defense against inward corruption.

The instructions throughout the Bible tell us to apply our inward being to cooperate more with God. The Bible repeats instructions to seek, trust, follow, and increasingly obey goodness and righteousness within our own choices, thoughts, and behaviors. When we cooperate and walk in such virtues with increasing measure, we can purify our hearts and cleanse our conscience. Freedom, peace, love, and joy can increase.

The messages we choose to believe, follow, cooperate with, and practice will guide and develop our inward condition. Romans 3:12-21

The continued practices of self-examination, confession, repentance, while growing in love and peace, can renew our minds more and more with God.

Right Thinking

The Bible uses the word righteous over 500 times. Righteousness is thinking and doing right with God. Jesus says, “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.” (Matthew 5:20, NKJV)

Our thinking and doing right with God is to grow and be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees. This means there are Godly and ungodly ways to inwardly and outwardly behave. The Bible describes such ways.

As we continue to practice self-examination and growing our discernment with good and evil thoughts, we will be more empowered to correct our thoughts and shift our focus increasingly upon God’s righteousness.

“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.” (2 Corinthians 13:5, NKJV)

In the early stages of our development, we can feel intimidated by our sinfulness and distance from perfection. However, after we have begun making corrections and walking more in the will of God, we can experience improved sensations with grace. We can experience the joy in righting relationships, purifying our hearts, and cleansing our conscience. Experiencing improvement can motivate us and even increase our faith.

We are to set our minds more upon God’s righteous ways and less upon the world’s. Romans 8:5, Philippians 3:19, Colossians 3:2

Continued practice with improving righteous inward behavior can build Godly good character. Romans 5:3-4

We are to meditate upon good things and do them. Philippians 4:8-9

We are to add to our faith virtue. 2 Peter 1:5

Our faith can increase. Luke 17:5 & 2 Corinthians 10:15

God desires us to be inwardly with Him. Romans 7:22, 2 Corinthians 4:16

Meditation

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.” (1 Timothy 4:16, NKJV)

This verse clearly instructs how to set our thoughts and the purpose of doing so. Reading instructions like this and not doing what it says will be missing the mark. The Bible gives us clear directions about what to set our hearts and minds upon in meditation. Philippians 4:8,

Meditation and prayer can feel uncomfortable and be a struggle. Our physical position, how we sit, etc., is about being still. We need time giving attention to our own inward thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It really doesn’t matter how we do it. We can shift around, lie back, or whatever. The point is to increase our inward awareness and control.

The process of growth can be like going to the gym and lifting weights. If all we can do is five minutes, then we do five minutes, take a break, and repeat to strengthen our abilities. If we persevere, we can improve. This requires self-discipline, which also can improve with practice. As we grow and improve, we can learn to be more calm and inwardly attentive.

Some may experience extreme uneasiness at first. Those who are used to keeping their minds occupied, distracted, or guided with external stimulation can struggle to slow down and be still. It may be best to begin with guided meditations and gradually progress to silent, inward reflective meditations. Willingness with a growth mindset toward good is required.

Meditation has been proven to help with inward conflicts. We can only learn if we repeatedly give ourselves over to cooperate with the experience. Discussions about what we learn can further our understanding. Humble sincerity with critical thinking is necessary.

When God says to do something, it’s best to believe there is good in it—if we do it. Read about perseverance and endurance in the Bible. Explain how it is important. If we can’t explain it, we probably don’t know. Experience is needed.

“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:2, NKJV)

Prayer Priorities

If we are to abide in God as described in (John 15), then we are to pray the way Jesus taught and demonstrated. Why wouldn't we? We are to make His ways of prayer our priority. That means we prioritize praying for our inward development of doing the will of God. Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-4

If our priority is to respond better with God's good, we will pray for help to do it. We will think and talk about it. We will envision ourselves doing it. We will seek out others who practice it. We will pray for strength and willingness to do it.

Let's remember the first definition of love in 1st Corinthians 13 is long-suffering. If we love God, we will do so with long-suffering. That means we will practice self-discipline. It means we will pray when we don't want to pray, because we know it is good and right. When our minds are deceptively guiding us away from prayer, we will pray for help. Our inward struggle has much to do with a conscious or unconscious clinging to evil.

A good inward attitude with praying to God involves humble sincerity and a heart-to-heart petition for improvement. Sincere, honest prayer will bring in light. If the light reveals burden, bitterness, fear, or hurt, we pray for help with it. If we can be sincerely willing to right our wrongs and humbly invite God to lead us into corrective steps, we can likely experience inward peace or decreased struggle. We will no longer struggle with what to do. We simplify our direction to live more peacefully with doing good. That's it. Our giving into God will alleviate us from our chosen resistance.

"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak." (Matthew 26:42, NKJV)

Here are some verses to ponder and follow:

For enemies—Matthew 5:4, Luke 6:28
Repeat same prayer—Matthew 26:44
Solitary place—Mark 1:35, Mark 6:46, Luke 22:41
Belief & Forgiveness—Mark 11:24-25
Prayer & Temptation—Luke 22:40, 22:46

Read John 17 & identify ways to pray and not to pray.

Solitude

“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:2, NKJV)

During solitude, we can experience thoughts both good and evil. The way we think and perceive things during the activity will influence our experience. Thinking it’s terrible could set us up for a terrible experience. Thinking it’s wonderful could set us up for a wonderful experience. It’s what we honestly and sincerely believe, consciously or unconsciously, that will largely impact our experience. Our minds will often seek out evidence to prove our belief is right. Learn “Self-fulfilling Prophecy.” Whatever our experience, we must persevere to see and learn our thoughts. We continue to learn the truth within us.

As we position our outward selves away from distractions, we must also position our inward selves toward God’s good. Solitude for our purposes is not just solitude, being alone, or quiet. It is to help eliminate distractions and gain focus toward God. It is to come into the light to see our inward deeds. It involves introspection with thoughts and sensations. Struggle to continue in the process can be part of the experience and not a good reason to avoid it. Our self-awareness we can improve with practice.

We can investigate ourselves with questions like: why do I feel comfortable or uncomfortable? Are my thoughts factual or opinionated? What are the facts in my experience? Which of my thoughts are good? Which of my thoughts are evil? What is a good thought I can add? How can I pray for help with God? Am I willing to learn my errors? How is being humble good?

Journaling can be helpful. Writing down our thoughts and sensations helps because most of us will forget. Over time, we can learn patterns with our thoughts, attitudes, and feelings.

It’s best to avoid jumping to any quick conclusions about the solitude experience. Each day can present something different about ourselves. We all have good and bad days. This is a practice that is to be done daily. The time frame can be anywhere from minutes to hours. If done daily and sincerely, we can continue to learn more about our inward condition and how to walk better in the will of God.

Hypocrisy

Jesus emphasizes sincerity—not pretending. Read Matthew 23:25-28. Read it slowly and carefully. Jesus is pointing out falsehood in the teachers. In the NKJV, Jesus uses the words “hypocrites,” “self-indulgence,” “appear beautiful outwardly,” and “uncleanness.” Jesus uses the word hypocrisy and hypocrite often throughout Matthew 23. But what does it really mean? It means being fake, putting on a false front, or pretending. It is insincere. Jesus is criticizing plastic and inward deceptive behaviors of the teachers.

Why is this important? Pretending and being fake is ungodly and not good. It’s evil, unproductive, corruptive, and spiritually harmful. Please do a concordance study on the words hypocrite and hypocrisy. Search for the meaning of these words when Jesus used them.

If we believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, then we would respond likewise. We would heed the words. If we believe in and trust Jesus more than ourselves, other people, and worldly ways, then we will increasingly grow in obedience with sincerity. It will be a priority. Our inward behaviors (fruit) prove what we believe. We can learn how to be more sincere, put it into corrective practices, and see how it is good.

Many people walked away from Jesus because the teaching was convicting. People threw rocks, yelled, and plotted to kill Jesus. Few decided to stay. This is how it’s always been with real raw truth. Few will sincerely and honestly decide to seek, follow, and obey Jesus with life-changing good inward corrections. Why? Because getting real with who we are and the way Jesus teaches us to go involves difficult inward training. If we let go of our own understanding and trust God, we can do it.

“Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:14, NKJV)

Each day we will need to choose Jesus and His teaching more than anything else. If we can’t/won’t make that choice, our reliance will be diminished. That said, we could still grow and experience goodness; just not in the same way. Growth involves change. Not changing is being the same. Professing faith doesn’t mean we have it. Will we obey God or pretend to obey God? Our actions prove our faith and our choices.

Sincerity

The practice of sincerity can be challenging. Being fake and pretending can be normalized. Falsehood is evil. Our goal is to be honest, real, genuine, and true. Our yes is to be yes and no, no. We are to grow in productivity with truth. We practice speaking difficult truth in love. "Say what we mean, mean what we say, but not say it mean”— Unknown.

Some of us may have no clue how to be real. Regardless, we practice, struggle, and learn. We let others struggle and learn as well. We search our thoughts for deception, practice correction, and behave more truthfully. We watch our words and guide them to be honest. We seek to inwardly put an end to lies, manipulation, and other practices that support falsehood. As we practice truth over time, it can become easier.

While at work we can remind ourselves we have one boss, God. If our earthly boss instructs us toward evil, we will face a difficult choice. Our choices have their spiritual consequences. There is no simple answer to this dilemma. Prayer, consultation with others, and meditation can help a lot. If we practice this with careful self-examination, considering God’s good, we will likely grow no matter what we choose. Mistakes are part of the journey. We learn from them and how to improve.

Jesus emphasizes that those who do the will of God are family, Matthew 12:48-50. Be diligent about being inwardly real and true with our spiritual families—those who do the will of God. In our support groups we can gently encourage each other to practice more sincerity through our own demonstration and sharing. We lead by example. We can emphasize in each meeting how essential sincerity is for our own spiritual growth.

More verses on hypocrisy and sincerity

“Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:8, NKJV)

Matthew 6:5, 6:16, 7:5, 15:7, 16:3, 22:18, 23, 24:51; Romans 12:9; Galatians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 1:12, 2:17, 6:6, 8:8; Ephesians 6:5, 6:24; Philippians 1:10, 1:16, 2:20; Colossians 3:22, 1 Timothy 1:5, 4:2; James 3:17; 1 Peter 1:22, 2:1

Suffering Is A Companion 1 Peter 3:17

Suffering for doing good is to be normalized. Improvements in life often involve uncomfortable actions. Inward corrections and facing our mistakes can hurt our pride and popularity. Clinging to pride is clinging to evil. Our self-seeking ways can bring thoughts like, “but what’s in it for me,” “no one else does it,” “why me,” “but that’s my time or money,” or “do I have to?” We ought to increasingly take our thoughts to God with a willing and humble attitude, ready to submit ourselves to do God’s will.

“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.” (Mark 8:34, NKJV)

Doing the will of God will need to increasingly become our way of life. Our Godly good productivity is to increase while ungodly productivity is to decrease. That means more practice with God’s ways and less with our own. This can create a shift in our identity, which we must accept. The trained evil within us can fade away as we continue to develop more good. It’s a transformational process. It involves a dying to self, of our old ways, and growing new ways with God. It uncomfortably produces good fruit. Continuing in it can bring forth more sensations with love, joy, and peace.

“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 12:50, NKJV)

Our trained attachment to evil creates much of our suffering. The trained evil within us will seek to hold its place. We must be willing to let go of our trained evil ways. We cannot seek equally both good and evil. We must choose one above the other. We must make God’s good more important.

Suffering is not the goal. Love and peace are the goal. Merely suffering does not produce good fruit. New training in God’s good does. Suffering without production is just suffering. We must keep our focus upon growing good and doing it. Suffering is part of the experience, but we must continue with corrective actions.

In what ways did Jesus suffer for teaching the path of righteousness? How did the Apostles suffer doing the will of God? Learn how it was necessary and good. 1 Peter 4:19, Philippians 1:27

“First Thought Wrong”

“First thought wrong” is a common saying around circles of spiritual formation. It guides us to question our thoughts. It involves examining our old ways and trained responses to help improve and correct them.

New thoughts do not come from following old ways of thinking. Going through motions and running on autopilot only repeats what we are used to doing. Renewal of the mind develops from practicing new thoughts. Correction requires more energy and attention. Our unconscious responses will seek to fulfill trained thoughts and behaviors.

Many situations can trigger us towards anger, impatience, complaining, fault-finding, blaming, fear, worry, hurry, etc. It is necessary to notice and identify the thought messages involved. Then we can pray for guidance on how to slow down, move peacefully, forgive, have mercy, be patient, and practice spiritual good.

We can examine our inward situation. Were we stressed, hungry, tired, fearful, angry, hurried, worried, anxious, at peace, or calm? Who were we around and what were we doing? Did we have expectations or demands? How well were we seeking to do the will of God? How can we be better?

We have chosen to walk better in God’s good whether comfortable or uncomfortable, familiar or unfamiliar. This is a daily practice. Some days likely will be better than others. Perseverance and endurance are key to having new character formed. Over time, our faith can improve and the process becomes easier.

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

We must practice testing ourselves, our own productivity with God’s good. We can hold fast to what is good and grow in it. The “Scientific Method” involves testing. Deeper learning requires testing. We are not testing—challenging God. On the contrary, we are testing ourselves—our own understanding, productivity, thoughts, and behaviors. Remember, growing in the light exposes our deeds, to see them, so we can learn better steps. With more light, we can walk more safely with God.

Malformation

My faith was formed with many ungodly beliefs. Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel, don't ask for help are but a few malformed beliefs deeply woven into my unconsciousness. Then along came a program suggesting I do the opposite. I had to make a choice to try a new way of life with a willingness to go to any length to learn it. I chose new actions with fear and trembling.

My malformed mind was structured not to ask for help. My thoughts drove me not to do it. Yet I needed to ask someone to help me grow spiritually. I struggled with cognitive dissonance. I searched for some sort of reasoning to settle my malformed resisting beliefs. I did not want to owe anyone anything. I convinced myself it would be okay if I paid it forward by helping someone else in return. That would be my repayment plan, to help another. That worked. I was then convinced it was okay to receive help.

Everyday was like this—searching for reasons to convince myself to do many things I did not want to do. A wise man once told me, "just put your head in a corner and do what's in front of you." Others would say, "fire your manager and get a new one." But I was the manager and I was to follow a new manager—God's good principles. I can't follow what I don't know, so I had to learn God's good through study and practices.

Not too long ago, I encountered a man at work who became aggressive and yelling at me. Cognitive dissonance ensued. Was I going to fight this guy? Did I need to defend myself? As he walked toward me yelling with anger, I brought into my thinking God's ways and pondered how to carry them out. (My old ideas—fight— were still there prompting me, but I exercised my thinking upon God's good.) I wasn't spiritually strong enough to humbly care for him with compassion. I had too much fear and pride unconsciously active within my mind. I can't change my unconscious attitude, but I can consciously bring God into my attitude to help it. So I pondered how to love my enemy and concluded the best love I could do with my mixed mindset of fear, pride, and some humility was to back off and not retaliate. I maintained a sense of guarded respect and tolerance toward that man. Progress for me with loving my enemy was to not hate him or think of him in evil ways. I guided my thoughts toward some compassion and understanding. I kept him at a distance, but showed him respect and tolerance. That was the best sincere care I was able to produce. Over time, his attitude changed, and he became more friendly.

Resist

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9, NKJV)

Are you resisting, steadfast in the faith? How discerning are you with good and evil? How well do you know what to resist? Describe your vigilance? What does your faith guide you to do?

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7, NKJV)

We are to submit to God and resist evil. As we review good and evil, we can investigate ourselves for what we resist. As we practice this self-discovery, we can shine the light on some valuable spiritual truth.

“*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did,* so *do* you.” (Acts 7:51, NKJV)

Questions to ponder: What is it to resist the Holy Spirit? Is it obeying God or not obeying God? Is it resisting doing good? Is it obeying evil? Can it be unconscious or habitual? If we know the good we ought to do, but don’t do it, is that resisting the Holy Spirit? How so, or why not?

Since we all sin, that likely means we all participate, at some level or degree, in resisting God. We must learn to face the truth about our inward practices. Disciplining ourselves to studying good and evil each day can require some resistance. Sometimes we won’t want to do it.

“They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;” (2 Peter 2:15, NKJV)

We can easily convince ourselves that our choice is good and right regardless of whether or not it agrees with God’s instructions. It’s always good to test our conclusions and understanding. There is a right way and we are instructed to be in it with correction and improvement. Resisting to test ourselves is not a good idea. We must face our own spiritual truth.

I Shall Not Want

“The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1, NKJV)

It is imperative that we give our attention to this line, cooperate with it, pray for it, and learn how important it is. The Lord being our shepherd means we will go where God says to go and do what God says to do. The shepherd leads, and the sheep follow. We will not argue, fight, ignore, nor postpone. This line is the foundation for the rest of the chapter. It involves an inward position of obedience to seek, learn, and do the will of God.

The moment we begin thinking about wants and desires separate from God is the moment we wander away. Following God is to look for God’s path and how to walk in it. It’s good to pay attention to where we are going to ensure it’s good. If we don’t, we can end up lost, spiritually confused, empty, and alone. Fulfillment comes as we walk with God. God is the sustainer, purifier, and cleanser.

At any time, we can choose to humble ourselves; our wants, expectations, entitlements, and desires for redirection. We are to be clay for the potter, soft and shapable, not a brick. From the overflow of our hearts and thoughts will go our choices and actions. Will we set them to be good?

Sometimes our wants will be out of line with God. Being in the light can reveal our wants and a corrective path. We can learn our misdirection. We can pray for correction and apply new thoughts to become more inwardly compliant with God’s good. Jesus teaches and demonstrates this behavior. We are to discipline ourselves and improve our inward behaviors. We imperfectly guide our inward selves to grow with God and want it. Once we have experienced the love and joy, we will want to do it.

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10, NKJV)

“Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” (Matthew 26:42, NKJV)

“saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42, NKJV)

Goal Setting With God

Most successful people set clear goals with clear objectives. For us, our goal is to be formed more in God's likeness. Therefore, we set clear goals to grow into God's likeness and break them down into achievable objectives. These goals will involve becoming more loving, peaceful, sincere, truthful, merciful, forgiving, patient, persevering, fair, and not partial. Our goals will involve improving ourselves toward the will of God. Here are some examples.

Goal — Sincere/without hypocrisy

Objectives

1. Examine my inward reality. Identify one thought and feeling daily.
2. Evaluate my words and demeanor for sincerity whenever around others. Learn one way to become more sincere for a new objective.
3. Practice sharing real thoughts and feelings. Describe how it is good.

Goal — Seek God/not self-seeking

Objectives

1. Explain what your thoughts and feelings are inwardly seeking and wanting. Define if they are seeking self-interests or God's.
2. Explain how to think more about God's interests. Practice more of God's interests in thinking 3 times a day for 10 minutes each time.
3. Explain two ways to better do the will of God in words and deeds.

Goal — Truth/not deception

Objectives

1. Write down five ways you speak the truth and one way you are dishonest. Ask those who know you for help if you need it.
2. Describe how to correct your one dishonest way.
3. Practice making sure you mean yes when you say yes and no when you say no. Remove the idea that it is okay you can change your mind. Practice owning your commitments and following through with them.

Humble Improvement

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23, NKJV)

Improvement and growth are a choice. They are a choice in raising the bar and being more different with God. Many will not choose to grow more with God for the sake of self-preservation and comfort. Our own understanding will disagree with God’s path for us. Our minds will seek to rationalize what we do and convince us we don’t need to change or to change very little. So the path will involve obeying God more instead of our own understanding. Doubt, worry, and fear are corruptive and misleading.

The greatest commandment says to love God with our all. Yet most of us will barely give even 10% of our time and inward resources to increasingly abide in, learn about, and obey God. We will often justify easier, convenient performances as good enough. Our good enough will rarely match God’s instructions for us. We will convince ourselves it is good and feel satisfied. Our minds have an ability to fool ourselves into being comfortable with this falling short of God’s instructions. A huge part of this cognitive deception is the avoidance of self-examination and focusing on how we can improve. The Bible is full of examples about such foolishness.

“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. 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.” (James 1:23-25, NKJV)

Most of us are fools as described in James 1:23. Some of us will recoil from the idea of being a fool because of pride and self-deception. The Bible warns us about pride and how the goal is to be humble. People who follow the instructions will seek out humbling themselves and continue to grow in it. We can practice humbling ourselves each day.

“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6 & 1 Peter 5:5, NKJV)
Choosing to build pride is likely choosing to walk in resistance with God. Choosing to be humble is likely choosing to walk in agreement with God.

Stay Focused And Connected

Having a mind and heart completely devoted to God often involves an entire shift in our thought life. Yet the mind often wanders. It's imperative that we measure our own productivity. We can ask each other how we are growing and in what ways. This can help us stay focused.

We can ask, "How's your growth this week?", "Can you elaborate?", "What are your goals and objectives?" "How are you practicing more Godly good?", or "What new senses did you experience?"

We must always stay focused upon our own production with God's good with repentance. Focusing on wrongs of other people can promote bitterness. Bitterness will make us less helpful to ourselves, others, and God. When seeking to help others, we must always be watchful of our own inward condition. We focus upon cooperation with God's good and let God teach from there. We can speak the truth boldly, yet gently. Forcing and controlling often times can result in ourselves trying to take the lead. If we are humble, patient, and compassionate, our words, attitude, and demeanor will reflect it.

Maintaining a focus upon serving God with our inward all can better position us into a spiritual state of good that can have a powerful affect upon others. Being more right and doing more the right way makes us more right in what we do. Our focus upon what other people think will not be our primary concern. Our primary concern will be focusing upon being right with God, regardless of what other people think.

Since love is a huge part of what we do, we will need to focus upon how other people feel keeping in mind we do not control their feelings. Understanding how they feel can help us modify how we interact with them. This is way to complicated to explain in detail. Yet it is something we must practice focusing upon to grow and improve. Most of us appreciate it when others understand us and have a sense of compassion for what is going on in our lives. We must continue focusing upon these inward experiences with improved discernment.

We are to focus upon how we respond to others and how our responses affect others. Then we can practice modifying our responses keeping in mind God's good and how to abide in it better.

Sharing With Others

We can learn and discern thoughts and feelings of others with questions. Learning more about others can better situate us to connect and share relevant topics. If someone does not want to discuss God or spiritual formation, it's likely better to leave it alone. However, it's good to ask questions to help us discern if they are ready.

We can begin by sharing what we are learning through our own journey. If the listener seems responsive and interested, we can continue to describe what we have learned in our own experiences. We remember that God is to lead the conversation, not our own wants, ideas, fear, pride, or impatience. Patience is key and it's good to go at the pace of peace.

We can share our growth with others. We can describe with details using facts and experiences. We can share what good or evil we have practiced and results we witnessed. Personal sharing of our growth in the will of God can have a powerful effect. Sincere honesty is a must.

We can share our inward experiences as we confessed resentments, anger, or bitterness. We can share experience in humbling ourselves in doing what is right and the struggle we experienced practicing new good actions. We can share how we were convicted of new truth and ask others for suggestions. We can share about improved relationships and more peace. We can describe the good in feeling right, content, and fulfilled.

If our listener has questions or would like to share their experiences, we can wait patiently to let them talk while listening carefully to every word. There are spiritual effects when we are heard, valued, and respected. Being quiet with full attention to what they say can demonstrate a lot of good, and we can learn a lot from them.

During our interactions, we can exercise caution to ensure bitterness does not crop up within ourselves. If we are becoming judgmental, impatient, intolerant, argumentative, etc., we ought to take a deep breath and silently invite God into our hearts and minds. It's good to remind ourselves that He is in control of the situation. We keep our mind open to learn direction. It's not good to pretend we know how things are supposed to be. Humbling ourselves ought to be a continuous practice, especially when we are connecting with others for spiritual formation.

New Structure

Training and development will require a new daily structure. We will need time for meditation, prayer, discussions, pondering our next steps, self-examination, etc. We need to make it happen, and that may involve sacrifices. It's best to pray for direction and listen to our senses.

Think about the following words used in the Bible and their purpose. Perseverance, endurance, learn, train, teach, grow, practice, and correction. Our goal is progression and improvement with God's good.

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

We must remember that running on autopilot is a no-growth method. It perfects imperfection. Time, struggle, and energy are needed routinely. We must filter out contrary thoughts and focus on the Holy Spirit given to guide us. Beginning our retraining will require extra effort (learn the law of inertia). The first 30 days, if done consistently and correctly, will set us on a good path and make the process easier. But we must discipline ourselves to keep with the process. Some struggle will always be present, but restarting is always the most difficult part of the journey.

In sports, players train themselves to perform acts well. Athletes shoot for perfection, and failure is part of the experience. They miss the mark frequently. We are spiritual athletes. We train our hearts and minds to better sense the spiritual reality of God. Our inward successes can overflow outward toward others, pouring out spiritual goodness and healing. As we are filled with light, it will shine outward toward others.

We fight the good fight and run the race of doing good. If we choose to skip training, we will diminish our abilities. If we stop evaluating ourselves for progress, we can subtly and slowly become corrupted with evil.

Whether wanting to or not, we begin our day prioritizing God because it is good and right. When we struggle, we pray for help. We must always be open to our unconscious self-deception. It exists. We can pray for strength and a humble attitude to learn Godly good directions. If we have walked in it with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength with perseverance, we will know that it is good and right. Others around us will testify how it is good.

Daily Trainer

We become trained in what we practice and how well we practice it. If we train little, then we are trained little. If we train diligently, with perseverance and endurance, as the Bible instructs, then we can be trained well. If we train only when it's convenient and when we feel like it, it's likely we won't be trained well—the way the Bible teaches us. We train regardless of convenience or feeling like doing it. Diligent spiritual training is daily. These trainings are guides to build learning and spiritual discernment to empower ourselves to apply new corrective actions. Each new action and discovery can better position us for more growth and spiritual understanding.

Focused meditation part 1 - We meditate upon our thoughts to learn from them—how they operate. We search our thoughts to discover what is practiced there. We identify thoughts that are good and evil. We write down as reminders what we find and reflect upon it. We ponder new thought options—ways to think to improve with God's good.

Focused meditation part 2 - Once we have decided upon a direction to grow, we can meditate upon our anticipated interactions for the day ahead. We can review past experiences to learn how to improve. We can discern our inward attitude and outward demonstrations, both verbally and non-verbally. The focus is to always be upon Godly good solutions.

Good growth prayers - We identify a form of evil we inwardly practice. Then we identify the good we can seek to practice instead. We can pray for strength, courage, willingness, readiness, and desire to grow in it.

Example: We can select help from deception. We can pray for strength and willingness to see where we are practicing self-deception or dishonesty. We can pray for guidance to pause and apply corrective truth. We can pray for strength and courage to better practice sincere truth.

Seeking good - We watch others for the good they practice and the results that come from it. We avoid justifying complacency. We humble ourselves and seek to learn from others. We observe others who are strong where we are weak and learn from their demonstrations. We meditate upon what we learn and pray for strength to put it into practice. Then we reflect upon all our experiences to learn how to improve with God's good.

New Identity

Our goal is to increase love, peace, sincere truth, etc. We are to decrease bitterness, hurry, worry, and self-seeking. This shift in our productivity will change us. The more we give ourselves over to God's good, the more we can feel different. Others around us will likely respond differently. How we perceive the world will be different. Our goals in life will change. We will be reborn and renewed. We will develop a new identity.

The process of renewal will involve letting go of old ways. In some cases, it can include letting go of unproductive associations, places, hobbies, friends, and more. These can be difficult choices to make. Look to the stories in the Bible where good characters made drastic and challenging choices affecting their identities and lifestyles. It's part of the process.

After a while of walking renewed and different, we can experience a sense of loss. As we let go of old ways that were part of our old identity, we can experience emotional effects. Anger, confusion, sadness, and more can take place as we aim toward acceptance. These are natural and normal inward responses to life-changing events, even spiritual growth. It's helpful not to draw conclusions about these feelings, but merely to feel them and perhaps grieve. We can continue to set our minds to stay with God.

The effects of being renewed involve letting go of old unproductive ways. Will we struggle through the inward changes—spiritual detox and stay the course? Will we endure and persevere into new character? This is where the power of sincere prayer for willingness and strength can help tremendously. A humble plea to God for help can bring powerful results.

We are moving on from trust in the world's ideas—old ways— to trusting God's directions. We are setting out to discover what abiding more in God will actually be like. We leave behind self-seeking and move forward towards love and peace. We help others with God. We exit the playground of self-gratification and enter the spiritual realm of building intimacy. We leave unspiritual middle school and leap into spiritual college. This leap is a big one that can produce life-changing results. We can view this transition like a graduation ceremony. Real freedom, peace, love, and sincere relationships are at your door. We no longer consider our old ways because we are that focused upon God's. The yoke is easy once we let go of the inward struggle of giving ourselves over to it.

Measuring Growth

Spiritual development involves a lot of subjective analysis and inward activity. If we skip testing ourselves to ensure we are productively growing with God, we can easily become self-deceived. The goal is to grow and correct ourselves enough inwardly where there will be an outward measurable and notable change. Our good fruit will be noticed. The list of possibilities for measurable growth is too large for this book, but here are some examples.

Growth in peace: less hurried (going to bed and earlier, getting up earlier, taking more time to prepare for the day, driving the speed limit, talking and walking slower), letting others go first, less arguing, more calm and patient.

Growth in seeking God: meditating, pondering the will of God and how to do it better, praying for strength to do God's will, experience in serving God and sharing what it's like, obeying instructions—doing what they say.

Growth in compassion: understanding how others feel, desire to help others, taking a volunteer position, sincere acts of kindness, being more gentle, searching for opportunities to comfort others.

Growth in truth: less lying, fewer false presentations, identifying deceptive thoughts, correcting deceptive thoughts, speaking the truth even when it's awkward, better discernment, talking to a mentor about deception and truth, improved sincerity and authenticity.

Growth in forgiveness: identifying grudges, complaints, bitterness, or resentments and prayerfully seeking to find peace, learning our thoughts about it, confession, humbling ourselves to let it go, describing the peace and inward benefits of letting it go, helping others into forgiveness.

Growth in loving enemies: praying for their growth with God, applying the will of God with them, describing the results we experienced as we turned from bitterness to kindness.

Growth in perseverance: Standing firm day after day with increased productivity thinking, feeling, sensing, and responding with God's good.

Quantify Growth

Because our minds will, from time to time, trick and deceive us, we must practice self-examination regarding our productivity in doing good. We can compare and contrast the level of production of good done by characters in the Bible with ourselves to help set goals and quantify our progress.

Grace is quantified. The Bible describes grace using words like ‘more’ in James 4:6 and ‘abundance’ in Romans 5:17. We can ‘fall from grace,’ Galatians 5:4 and Hebrews 12:15. We may be experiencing tiny amounts.

Love is quantified and directional: Matthew 10:37, John 12:43, Philippians 1:9, 1 Timothy 6:10, and 2 Timothy 3:2.

Black-or-white thinking lacks thought energy, perseverance, and discernment. Quick conclusions and unchecked assumptions are our enemies. We can test them to ensure correct understanding. We must incorporate a sense of grey area thinking instead of black or white. Self-deception existing within and around us. It is easy to become misled consciously or unconsciously by bad habits, evil company, Group Think, Herd Mentality, conformity, comfort seeking, fear, and idolatry.

When assessing ourselves, we can ponder how well we are doing using a scale like a continuum. We can place ourselves on one end of the continuum and Jesus on the other. There is a goal and it’s not people.

We can practice questioning our productivity with quantifying questions.

1. How sincere, genuine, and real are we? How well do our words and behaviors match our feelings? Do we practice falsehood or pretending?
2. How kind, compassionate, and caring are we with ourselves and others? What compassionate words or thoughts do we practice?
3. How forgiving, merciful, and generous are we in our thoughts and actions? How well have we wrongs restored our wrongs to others?
4. How calm, patient, peaceful, and gentle are we in all our activities? Where are we impatient, intolerant, bitter, complaining, etc.?

Are we humble enough to ask others for help and feedback?

Visualize Good

There is a lot of evil in the world. It's easy to find it. Yet we are committing ourselves to inwardly improve our minds to participate more with God's good in ways that produce good fruit. We begin each day choosing to stand ready to act upon God's good in thoughts, words, and deeds.

We can make sure we have good footing. Matthew 7:24-27

When we fall short, offend, or hurt others, we can practice good by making right the errors of our ways. Through such experiences, we will position our inward selves to witness the good in doing it. Going against our old nature and persevering with God's good can set us up to encounter cognitive dissonance and witness oppositional thoughts seeking to sabotage our growth. We can practice disciplining our focus upon God's good as the goal with extra effort to block out contrary thoughts.

Each time grow through this process we can gain experience and understanding which will spiritually strengthen us and our faith. We will learn through experience the good in trusting and walking in the will of God. We go in the direction of our focus and follow where we look.

Sometimes our faith can get weak and doubt can be strong. Romans 14:23. 1 Timothy 2:8. James 1:6 It is normal to experience doubt and to be confused. We can keep our focus upon God's good and how it is good. We can know that our staying with good in our hearts, minds, attitudes, and actions will bring forth good fruit. We keep our focus on doing good and let God be in charge of everything else. We cannot control the world or other people. Our role is to do the will of God. God does the rest.

We are now builders of good. Whatever we have built, we look forward to the good we can add to it. Every builder makes mistakes, and then the good builder corrects them. As mistakes happen, we repair and continue to add good. 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

And if we fall away from doing good, we can always return. Romans 11:23

We are to hold tightly within our hearts and minds God's good and how we can improve in it. Romans 12:9

Inward Conditioning Process

We study the Good & Evil Quick Reference tool long and often enough to identify good to increase and evil to decrease. Each day, we can practice praying to God for various inward needs to make the changes possible. We can pray for willingness, awareness, strength, courage, perseverance, endurance, readiness, knowledge, guidance, patience, and more.

Choices have consequences. We continue investigating the character traits we have practiced to learn more about their consequences. We can meditate, reflect, and recall our experiences. As we go through our day, we give attention to our choices, watching for consequences from them.

We can explore our past choices with evil, giving attention to learn from it. We can search ourselves for thoughts and feelings of guilt, shame, or remorse. We can submit our inward parts to God for corrective guidance. We can ponder what it might feel like to be free from such hurt, knowing it can decrease as we increase our cooperation with God's good. We keep in our minds this freedom, to grow in it, as we continue with good.

Once we have decided what good to grow and evil to decrease, we put them down on paper. We can discuss our goals with others. See the below example. We can increase our learning with new experiences, study, reflect, pray, and collaborate. Remember, explaining our inward learnings helps us improve our understanding.

Good to increase	Evil to decrease	New thoughts, words, & actions.	Observations & actions
Forgive	Grudges, remembering wrongs, retaliation	Let go of condemning thoughts towards others and self. Seek peace	Condemning thoughts, add in new forgiving thoughts. Trust the forgiveness process.
Forgive	Faultfinding, blaming, justifying, defensiveness	Surrender, trust God. Breath and be calm. What good can I grow right now.	Bitterness, thoughts, and words. Am I more kind, if so, how are others responding?

Learning From Shame

"Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame." (1 Corinthians 15:34, NKJV)

Shame is not a comfortable experience, but one that is necessary to face. It is a sensation like hot or cold created to guide us. It's telling us something is amiss. If we avoid, deny, or repress our shame, we may be closing the door on the Holy Spirit's guidance. Shame is a sensation, not a conscious thought. "When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble *is* wisdom." (Proverbs 11:2, NKJV) Shame comes after we practice evil—pride. Wisdom comes after we practice good—humble.

When children misbehave and a parent catches them, their behavior is revealed. Their faces drop and guilt is experienced. They can fear negative consequences. When we are caught doing wrong, if we have any sense of integrity, we feel embarrassed, humbled, or afraid. These are good sensations. They teach us and can be powerful spiritual experiences. We must be careful to give attention to them. Many avoid, repress, hide, or deny such inward experiences. We can become angry or defensive—avoid responsibility through blaming. We can push them out of our conscience.

We must discern our responses. How we respond to the consequences of our choices and behaviors will have an effect upon our growth. Correction involves learning problems and solutions. Owning our choices and actions teaches us we can make different ones. Taking responsibility creates responsibility for growth and improvement. Shame develops through mistaken choices or beliefs away from God. God is always available to access for a better life. We can begin to improve our conscious awareness of God's good options here and now. Improved choices and actions with God can help reduce shame and build freedom.

"But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." (2 Corinthians 4:2, NKJV)

The more humbly and sincerely we face our choices and consequences for improvement, the better we are situated to walk in it.

No Condemnation

“*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1, NKJV)

Condemnation is not rebuke or exhortation. We can learn to discern the difference. We can rebuke and exhort gently with love. When we think condemning thoughts, we can pray for help and set our minds upon God’s good. We can guide our thoughts to seek and follow God’s good ways.

Whether self-condemnation or condemnation toward others, they are both evil. Below are some examples from an AI search on Google.

Self-condemning

"I am a total failure and I ruin everything I touch."

"I am the worst person I know and God can never forgive me."

"Everyone would be much better off without me."

"I always mess up; I will never change or get better."

"I am completely unlovable and broken.”

Condemning others

"They did a bad thing (rude, aggressive, challenging, mean, etc.) so they are a completely evil person."

"They are hopeless and beyond any kind of help."

"They do not deserve any grace or a second chance.”

"Look at how they failed; they are totally useless."

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” (John 3:17, NKJV)

Discernment questions: Will we love people who challenge us toward corrections or condemn and avoid them for making us feel uncomfortable? How much of our condemnation practices involves pride or self-seeking? How is seeking God, without correction, really seeking God?

Sarcasm

Being funny at someone else's expense is not good. When we put others down or point out flaws as a joke, it rarely does any good for love and peace. If we feel the need to poke and joke, perhaps it's more humble to poke at our own faults, mistakes, and foolishness. Laughing at ourselves that involves humbling ourselves is likely a better idea. Sarcasm brings down, not lifts up. Such poking and jabbing can antagonize. We are to lift each other up, not put each other down.

Sarcasm often instigates and attacks. We are to be humble, sincere, caring, and compassionate. This does not mean we are overly sensitive, easily hurt, nor pushovers. It means we are focused on growing love and peace. We are seeking deeper and more meaningful conversations with each other that are personal and caring. Sarcasm often sabotages intimacy instead of building it. Who feels loved through sarcasm?

Joking with or at each other can be bonding if all those present are okay with it. This is a big if. Many people out of pride will deny they are hurt. Why prioritize something that brings risk? Why gamble for a temporary laugh? Where did Jesus demonstrate or teach sarcasm? Our priority is to seek good. Self-deception will seek to justify and rationalize continuing ungodly behaviors.

Sarcasm can be a tradition and habitual. It can take time to relearn not to use the habit of sarcasm. As we persevere with discernment of good and evil, we can identify the true spirit behind our sarcasm. Is it about pride or self-seeking? Are we trying to get attention? Do we feel we owe a payback to someone? We ought to always be testing our behavior to see how well it promotes sincerity, truth, peace, and love.

Nonverbal Communication

We ought to always consider the messages we are sending with our facial expressions, body language, and eye contact. How we dress also plays a role. Humble and modest is a good start. Everyone's different. Opinions vary. It's not about creating a dress code. It's about raising our awareness to how others are impacted by our nonverbal communication with the readiness to make corrections. It's good to evaluate what messages we are sending.

Growing Grace

Author's experience:

(Grace is real . . . through faith. My experiences teach me that if I have a faith that keeps me unproductive in God's good, I will be inwardly situated to miss grace. In humbling myself, my attitude, my resentments—bitterness, fear, etc. while opening my faith—mind—perception—beliefs to the Spirit's direction—instruction, I can then inwardly step into a new faith experience—kingdom—realm of the Spirit. In this new experience with an open mind and heart to God, freedom from sin can happen, moment by moment. This sort of faith, centered to be God's vessel—clay, that is trusting and relying upon learning and experiencing God's good, can witness the sensation of healing grace flood in, filling the whole body. I'm referring to chills in the spine, goodness. This is a belief—faith so powerful it can move mountains, yet with a shovel. It's the sort of faith where there is no doubt. I've found that grace comes more when my mind and heart are fully set upon God's good, to look for it and walk in it. Trusting God more is to abide more in God's good. I'm not growing the grace, I'm growing in my cooperation with the grace giver.)

Grace is a spiritual experience often resulting from our inward positioning to receive it. Positioning oneself toward self-seeking, hurry, worry, or idolatry is rarely a grace-filling behavior. We are to honestly and thoroughly look at our faith, the beliefs we act upon, and note the results. If we persevere, we can easily identify patterns. We can learn that experiencing grace happens more through sincere love than without it. Avoiding spiritual facts of our faith is not a productive plan. We must reveal and learn the truth about our thoughts, choices, attitudes, and actions.

Bible verses

Matthew 17:20; Luke 19:17; Romans 4:16, 5:2, 9:32, 11:20, 12:6, 14:23; 2 Corinthians 8:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Timothy 5:12; Hebrews 11

"but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18, NKJV)

More grace comes to the humble than the proud. James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

Light For Others

These next few pages will be focused on walking “Into the Light” in a way that is good, righteous, and impactful. If our walk can be sincere, honest, humble, loving, peaceful, just, and confident, we can be good light for others. Our attitudes, words, and actions will spiritually feed others.

Just being in the presence of someone humbly and sincerely loving others as Jesus did can be impactful and powerful. Our renewal experiences with good confession, repentance, and restitution will enlighten hearts and minds of all involved. Our observations of spiritual experiences throughout our renewal process will enhance our understanding and bring wisdom.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16, NKJV)

It is essential that we continue to grow our experiences with God’s good while reflecting upon what is happening in ourselves and others. As we better understand how love and peace are more healthy, right, and good, through our experiences, we will be better situated to teach and demonstrate it. We continue to learn how to describe it to others.

We can only guide others down the path we have gone. We can only describe the path we have experienced. Experience is essential.

“But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:21, NKJV)

The light reveals deeds. The light shining from us reveals deeds. When others don’t want to see, they may seek to put out the light shining from us. When light shines on darkness, it reveals truth that seeks to be secret. Opposition can ensue inwardly and outwardly. Our good fruit will reveal fruit that is bitter. Bitterness and fear can result. Awkwardness and confusion develop. This is where persecution and attacks may occur. When a light shines in darkness, everyone looks at it. Careful discernment is necessary with our choices. These experiences are normal for light shining on darkness. The more we practice being light, the more we can encounter controversies. But this is merely the first effect of the light upon darkness. What happens next is between God and others. Our only job is to get right with God and let the light shine.

First Things First

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

Humility, sincere truth, and peace shall be our leading horses guiding us each day. We must seek these principles first and foremost and embody them within our hearts, minds, and souls. Our strength and focus shall be upon them. Our prayers shall be about them. We shall ponder them and keep them with us.

“So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:17, NKJV)

As we grow our conscious contact with the spirit of these principles and practice carrying them outward to others, our light can increase. We keep the first and great commandment of God. We continue to grow our love toward God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength.

“He said to them, “*All too* well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.” (Mark 7:9, NKJV)

Each day we must seek first God’s ways and prioritize them higher than our traditions, even if a little at a time. We remember our imperfections so that we can continue to imperfectly seek that which is perfect.

“But He said, “More than that, blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28, NKJV)

Keeping the word of God will bless us and others around us. This is a choice that involves dedication and diligence.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.” (John 8:51, NKJV)

Remember that seeing, hearing, and tasting are some of our senses. As we continue to keep God’s word within our focus and awareness, to live by, follow, and obey it, we will enhance our life and not sense death.

Inward Christianity

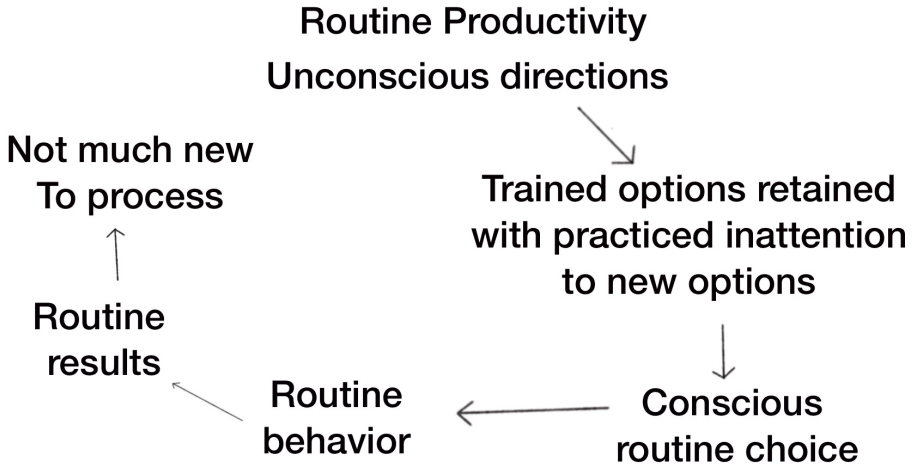
A process of increased inward cooperation with God and doing the will of God. The will of God is all inward and outward behaviors the Bible instructs us to do. We focus upon applying our heart, mind, strength, and soul for God's good. We focus on imperfectly improving with that which is perfect—God. This process is an introspective, investigative, explorative, and corrective lifestyle. Each day we can seek to be different with God.

Daily Practices

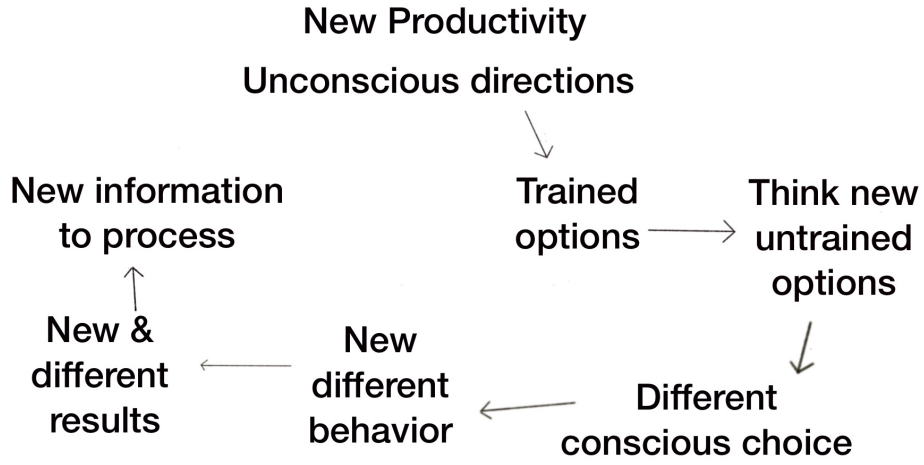
1. We decide to practice giving our inward all to grow in alignment with the first and great commandment. (all heart, all mind, all soul, and all strength)
2. We use the "Good and evil" quick reference tool to learn our inward practices. We learn evil to repent and ponder how to improve in doing the will of God.
3. We practice humble and sincere prayer for direction, strength, and growth.
4. We take responsibility for our choices. What we do reflects our choices so we give attention to our actions. Our choices bring consequences—Deuteronomy 30. Choosing good adds good. Choosing evil adds evil. (Also Ezekiel 18) We keep in mind we have conscious choices and unconscious choices.
5. We practice examining ourselves, identifying our thinking behavior, and applying corrections. Improving and correcting our conscious choices will, over time, improve and correct our unconscious choices.
6. We practice inward correction. We identify corruptive thoughts, confess them, and humbly practice God's good solutions. (repentance). We create goals for growth and share them with others. (See the page—Goal Setting With God)
7. We grow in love without hypocrisy—(being fake, pretending), clinging to what is good, and abhorring evil. (Romans 12:9)
8. We meditate and reflect upon all things spiritual to improve our doing the will of God. We meditate upon results from our experiences and sensations involved. We explore them deeper seeking to understand them better.
9. We share our experiences with and listen to learn from others. We honestly and sincerely share in as much detail as we can our growth with God's Good.
10. We seek to help others grow in these practices through sincere truth, patience, love, peace, mercy, forgiveness, justice, and compassion. We help those who are ready to begin the practices.

More Than Routine

Our unconscious thoughts direct us toward routine behaviors—repeating what we are inwardly trained to practice. Repeating God's good the same way we always do will not help us grow in it. Such behavior is routine.



Growing with God involves correcting and improving with God's good—doing the will of God. This requires a higher level of concentrated effort to seek out new and different ways to cooperate better with God's good.



God commands us to love God with our inward all. All means more than routine, auto-pilot, or going through motions.

Good Discipleship

“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.” (Matthew 28:20, NKJV)

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

“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 4:27, NKJV)

Discipleship involves practicing teachings and corrective actions. Following the instructions is easy. Convincing ourselves to do them is always the challenge. But to be convinced, we must ponder and learn our errors well enough to understand how to apply corrective solutions. We must position ourselves in the light to see our deeds and God’s good. Learn more. Read Matthew 8:18-22 and Luke 9:57-62.

Disciples of God study, ponder, meditate, pray, walk, and talk about God’s good. Their goal is to increasingly be more trained like their teacher.

The process may begin with curiosity, moving into testing, and then growing into understanding. Testing is often the necessary missing component. We must experience shifts in our focus dedicated to new spiritual experiences. Therefore, we must practice discerning between the physical and the spiritual. We must seek to sense the effects of love, both in giving and receiving it. We must increase our experiential understanding of love the way it is described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Each day we can many times reset our thinking to seek spiritual activity using the “Good and evil quick reference.” We can meditate upon a different trait each day, inquiring ways to improve with it.

We must investigate our sensations. Many of these sensations are spiritual. It’s best to practice careful critical thinking about them, making sure we are not drawing quick or erroneous conclusions. Conversations with an understanding mentor about what we find can help us unpack the information. Repetition can help us prove or disprove our assumptions. Since we test all things, we test our assumptions.

Structured Sharing

Our mission is to grow with God. When together, we ought to structure our thoughts around this goal and how to better practice it. We can share about our struggles, successes, and new understandings with good. We can share what level of self-deception we are witnessing in ourselves. We can share about how others have practiced good with us and what that was like. We humbly share our inward truth and experiences with the goal of increasing God's good.

Mission conflict

When we are in conflict with the goal of growing with God, it's best to meet with our mentor to discuss it. In groups, we keep our discussion around problems and conflicts brief always followed up with a solution. Otherwise, it can become a distraction. We guard against defensiveness. Resentment and hurt can have a way of distracting from forgiveness and Gods' good. When someone is in conflict, they can meet with someone after or before the meeting. This way the group can stay focused upon the goal. If everyone in the group is in agreement to discuss the conflict, then it may be good to discuss it together as a group. But if one does not wish to discuss it, respect that one person's wishes. If others want to have that discussion, they all can stay afterwards or set another meeting time. We are to be patient and seeking peace. This ought not to be rushed.

Find solutions

As we share about our problems— fear, resentment, self-seeking, deception, pride, and other forms of evil— we can then discuss the corrective solution we are seeking to grow. Sharing our lack of growth will seldom bring growth. We share our experiences with good.

There are sometimes fixed mindsets that get stuck upon problems. Whatever solutions we offer them, they come back with a belief that it won't work. It's rarely beneficial to pursue such fixed mindsets for discussions. Their faith is that it can't work and because of their faith, there is no solution. They must first seek a more open mind to grow. If they are not willing and ready to practice new and different good, there is little chance for new and good learning.

Catharsis

As we face our inward selves and make changes, many of us can experience deep emotions. This is natural and normal. It is good to be present with our thoughts and feelings for continued inward learning and growth. As others share and become emotional, it is imperative that we practice compassion, tolerance, and empathy. At the same time, we ought to respect the group process and step out when needed. When ready, we can return. It is good for someone spiritually mature to step out and offer support. If the help is not wanted, then respect the person's decision. Sometimes, being alone with God is best.

We are to experience our feelings. Anger, sadness, fear, and anxiety often result. It's good to be working with someone who has experience with emotional growth to help us with our hurt. As we struggle with hurt, we can identify our coexisting thoughts. Often, our thoughts influence our feelings. If we can identify deceptive thoughts promoting the hurt, we can improve our ability to find good thought corrections and improvements.

Three Phases

1. Getting Ready Phase

We each will need to become ready to give ourselves over to God's corrective good, to grow in it. Convincing will be needed. Convincing often develops through accepting spiritual truth about our thoughts, attitudes, words, and behaviors. Convicting truth about ourselves can be helpful to motivate and convince us to new choices. Humility, sincerity, honesty, courage, and willingness to face corrective truth are essential.

2. Cleansing & Repenting Phase

Being ready and convinced, we immediately take corrective action. We practice good thoughts, attitudes, words, and behaviors with continued improvement. We practice resisting evil. We pray for God's good, meditate, reflect upon, and talk about it. This becomes a steady part of our consciousness. We set our minds to do good while learning through the experiences. We imperfectly progress toward that which is perfect, one choice at a time. We examine ourselves routinely and confess our struggles. We repair harm done and right our wrongs.

But this is merely a summary of the process, for no amount of words can fully describe the ongoing phase of cleansing and repenting. This purifying and spiritually amazing experience is just that, an experience. The experience will be our teacher, and only those who have gone through it will rightly understand it. We must experience and reexperience this phase. Experienced practitioners will be best situated to demonstrate and teach.

3. Demonstrating Teacher Phase

Good teachers demonstrate with an inspiring testimony. They have transformed and walked the walk. Convicting truth is spoken, they own their errors, and confidence with the phases will be obvious. Obedience to God will be a defining point of their story. Stories of experience will be frequent with simple language, empathy, understanding, honesty, and sincerity. No need for exaggeration, dogma, or drama. Keeping it real, personal, clear, and spiritually right with God's good is the goal. God's truth will be the potter's hands forming those who are ready to hear it.

Purify And Cleanse

All to God

We evaluate our hearts and minds to see how well we are loving God with our inward all. Then we can find ways to improve, one day at a time. (Deuteronomy 6:1-8, Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27) We practice learning the “will of God” and set new goals to learn it better, through doing it. We prioritize God more through our improved choices and actions —doing more of God’s will and less of our own.

Examine yourself

Luke 11:39, Romans 2:29, Romans 7:22, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 13:5, Galatians 6:4, James 1:22-24

We study good and evil to improve our understanding about them. We practice discerning our inward thoughts and attitudes. We observe our choices, actions, and non-verbal communication. We compassionately assess how we affect others.

We discuss what we learn about ourselves with others. If we struggle toward new challenging ways to grow. We ask others close to us for feedback and ideas. We remain open-minded to learn from others’ perspectives. We read examples and listen to testimonies. We can read stories in the Bible to practice discerning where good and evil impacted the characters involved.

Confession

Through self-examination, we discover our inward bitterness, rebelliousness, self-seeking, fear, self-deception, and other forms of evil we condone, practice, or encourage. We confess wrongdoings. Once we have identified our errors—how we cling to evil, we can then become able to discuss and confess them. Acts 19:18, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

We ought to seek an inward attitude that is sincere and honest. We can also evaluate ourselves for the following:

Humble - Are we willing to see and sense errors within us? If we do not see and sense our wrongs, we will be less likely to confess, adjust, repent, correct, improve, or grow in our abiding in God's good. God offers a gift of repentance—growing in God's good. James 4:6

Contrite - We are to acknowledge our wrongs and hurtful behavior within our thoughts and sensations. Sensations can be in the form of sorrow, remorse, regret, or brokenness in spirit. These are good and right. They teach and convict us. The way out involves confession and repentance. This has nothing to do with self-condemnation or self-punishment. Contrition promotes readiness to humbly walk more toward healing. As we walk in spiritual correction better with God's good, the whole body is impacted. Psalm 34:18

Meek - Words used to describe meek are lowly and modest. We are to set our minds to sincerely practice it inwardly and outwardly. We guard against thoughts focused upon insincerity—pretending, self-seeking, self-image, money, envy, pride, etc. Matthew 5:5

Repent

Matthew 4:17, Matthew 9:13, Matthew 11:20, Mark 6:12, Luke 5:32, Luke 13:3-5, Luke 17:3-4, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, Acts 8:22, Acts 11:18, Acts 17:30, Acts 20:21, Acts 26:20, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:9-10, 2 Corinthians 12:21, 2 Timothy 2:25, Hebrews 6:1, 2 Peter 3:9,

We turn to God. This is a whole-being response with a definite change. We inwardly turn our thoughts to respond better with God. We inwardly practice, ponder, investigate, experience, and learn God's good. Proof of repentance will be having practiced a goal we have set. We will be practicing God's good. We are called to practice repentance through self-discipline and careful correction of our inward choices.

Hindsight will provide better understanding. We cannot see fruit before it is grown. The fruit of our actions can teach us good and evil. We can evaluate our productivity and learn. We can also learn through others' experiences. Experience brings the fruit, not merely thinking about it. Better results always follow the good and right action we practice.

Restore

When our sinful ways impact others with harm, we can do our part in making amends, righting wrongs, and correcting errors. We attempt to make right such damage. We examine our inward attitude to ensure we are humble, honest, and sincere. We do not rush into this. We ensure we are seeking to serve God instead of ourselves. God's love and grace can heal if we are inwardly right with it. This can have an immediate effect or take time. Regardless, we persevere to stay right and trust God. God is good.

Goal

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do,* forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." (Philippians 3:12-16, NKJV)

We are to grow and purify. James 4:8. Do concordance searches using the words pure & purify. Read the verses and look for patterns. Seek to understand it enough to be able to explain it. Then explain it to see how well you really understand it. Inwardly, we all sin. We will never be completely clean and pure from evil and its effects. Any idea that we should be perfect is based upon misunderstanding. The idea that we can improve with love and peace ought to stay with us. Growing, improving, correcting, and abiding more in God is the goal we can continue to set our minds upon each day. Our conscience is being cleansed as we walk more into the light and God's goal for us. Hebrews 9:14. Our confidence will grow through continued experiences. Hebrews 13:19. We will become content. Philippians 4:11, 1 Timothy 6:6.

May the peace and love of God always be our focus to think and sense in all situations. May it dominate who we are each day. Let us talk about it and teach through powerful experiential testimonies. Let us always share the good we witness. Grace can abound more and more as we go.

Path Of Peace

"Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9, NKJV)

Producing peace involves calming practices, slowing down, relaxing, and redirecting unnecessary thoughts promoting fear, worry, bitterness, fighting, and hurry. We practice slowing down and gaining experience with peace. We practice gentleness and patience. As we put these ideas into practice, we search for how they are good. We investigate how they help to develop the fruit of the Spirit. We examine how they nurture relationships.

There can be foolish messages seeking to sabotage peace. Prayer and meditation can be disliked or viewed as unnecessary. Messages like, "Hurry up," "this is taking too long," "FOMO," and "too slow" can sabotage peace. As we find ourselves participating in such messages, we can pause, take a breath, and invite the peace of God's to help us. We can choose to slow down and respond more calmly.

Lower Cognitive Load

Moving slower and easier can free up space to be more ready for anything that may come our way. If we maximize our load with continuous multitasking, we will be far less able to handle unexpected situations. Our ability to respond with peace will be diminished. We can leave earlier, move slower, and take more time to spiritually be with each other. We can improve our pace with peace, patience, and tolerance. When someone is confused, we can have compassion and make attempts to talk it out. When we realize life is not moving as fast as we expected, we can adjust our expectations. Patient and peaceful people are always easier to talk to and work with.

Messages That Promote Peace

We can choose new thoughts and messages: "Thy will, not mine, be done," "Be still and wait for God," "Breath." "Peace is more important." "Less of me, more of God." "Being humble is good." We can choose to practice the Serenity Prayer. We can choose to practice redirection and self-discipline toward trusting God's peace.

Corrective Truth

Perquisite: “Blind Men & The Elephant” Proverb,

Anyone can walk in truth—one side of the elephant, but the narrow road involves corrective truth—improving understanding of all sides of the elephant. Corrective truth is information revealing how we can improve. It’s not merely pointing out errors, but how to correct them. We must be willing and ready for corrective truth. Willingness and humility are required.

“does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;” (1 Corinthians 13:6, NKJV)

What good corrective truth have you done that you can rejoice in?

“Therefore, putting away lying, “*Let* each one *of you* speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another.” Ephesians 4:22, NKJV)

How are you building trustworthiness with others? Are there areas where you cover up, manipulate information for self-seeking reasons, or hide?

“and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2 Thessalonians 2:10, NKJV)

How do your thoughts, actions, and beliefs show you love the truth?

“who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4, NKJV)

Knowing we have a personal bias misleading us toward evil, we can practice investigating this truth to find it in our thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. Why? So we can learn how to correct it. We walk better in truth, not just think it. That means corrective thoughts and actions.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” (1 John 1:6, NKJV)

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” (3 John 1:4, NKJV)

Mindset of Forgiveness

Forgiveness involves an inward and outward response. Our inward responses of thoughts and attitudes are primary.

“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:35, NKJV)

“Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.” (Acts 8:22, NKJV)

Forgiveness involves letting go of grudges, seeking to get even, or remembering the wrongs in ways that stir up bitterness. This letting go involves practiced thought interventions. As we continue to improve introspection and self-awareness, we will increasingly be able to redirect our inward attitude, thoughts, and emotional consequences. We can practice prayerfully seeking God for help to forgive—grow peace. We continue to collaborate with others for improved insights.

We are to grow peace. We continue to build thoughts, words, attitudes, choices, and actions toward love and peace. This likely involves regular interventions. When confronted with inward experiences promoting bitterness, we can set our inward parts toward God. Our thoughts and words can intervene inwardly and outwardly toward love and peace.

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” (Luke 17:3, NKJV)

Luke writes, “if he repents, forgive him.” Forgiveness is not forgetting what others have done or acting like all is well. It’s not pretending, because pretending is hypocrisy and deceitful. It is not fully trusting someone without discernment or careful thought. We all need the opportunity to correct our wrongs to help bring peace. If someone still has intentions of doing wrong, we can seek to correct them toward peace. We can set aside fear and pride while humbly and gently speaking bold and sincere truth.

Since we test all things, we can test the sincerity of each other, offer help for restitution, and encourage each other toward peace, gentleness, and patience. This does not involve beating around the bush. We gently speak clear and direct truth to avoid misunderstandings.