

The Evidence

Hopefully you got to listen to the first series on the growth formula. In this series I plan to provide examples of anecdotal evidence. The thing about this anecdotal evidence is that it has been validated by many over the course of decades. And when it comes to love and grace, all we have is anecdotal. This is why I continue to encourage and guide us all to put into practice Biblical teachings so we can personally experience the evidence.

Seeing is believing, and to understand the evidence of God is to see what is invisible and intangible. We can learn to see with spiritual eyes and hear with spiritual ears. We can sharpen our spiritual senses and raise our spiritual awareness through application of the Spiritual Growth Formula.

Our level of spiritual growth equals our amount of mind, heart, diligence, spiritual focus, time, and Biblical alignment. It's about our current participation and not what we have already done.

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

The way to know God is to know love, God's love. The way to know such love, is to do it. By being love for others we can be taught about God.

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

A long time ago, before I began my spiritual journey and for many years into my spiritual journey I participated in evil. It's important to understand how the Bible describes evil which cannot be summed up into a sentence. Like all spiritual understanding, words cannot teach it, it comes through experience and searching.

Love and Mercy

Looking back at my childhood I did not see or hear much about love. I don't recall ever really experiencing sincere love. Love seemed to be an idea that people generally would glimpse, but it always seemed to be fleeting and quickly change. People would say they care, but then some time later do things that proved they don't. I would reciprocate the "I love

you” at Christmas, Valentines Day, and situations that make it customary, not really thinking much about it

So when I began my spiritual journey I was introduced to the idea of love. I recall a time when I was speaking with a sponsor/mentor complaining about someone who was rude in the group. I was expecting my mentor to affirm my attitude since I was clearly explaining how rude this person was, but instead he says to me, “you don’t have to like him, but you have to love him.” This threw me, like reaching out for a handshake and getting a slap me in the face. I tried to make sense of it, but couldn’t. I couldn’t because I did not understand love. I changed the message to something I could understand. I changed it in my mind to respect the person. I don’t have to like the person but I to respect him.

If love is the evidence of God then my life indicated to me God did not exist. I mean the evidence I witnessed that love was not real was mounting. So much betrayal, so many lies, and so much hurt. I just didn’t see God. There was one exception, a newer relationship I had with a person had a really good heart. It opened my eyes that maybe there was a God. I was finally witnessing something good in the world.

I couldn’t grasp how to love. It didn’t really make sense to me. I had never read the Bible and this was 9 years before I even picked up the Bible. I resented fake people who would say, “I love you” when they didn’t even really know me. How can they love ME, if they don’t know ME? If they don’t understand how I think and feel, how can they love me? They would love their idea of me, instead of the real me.

The “I love you” phrase would always be uncomfortable. I just wouldn’t play along, because that would be fake and deceptive or evil. A friend of mine invited me to do some volunteer work with some kids. Afterwards he dropped me off at my house and as I opened the door to get out he said, “I love you.” The thought of saying “I love you too” came to my mind, but then it wouldn’t be true, and I was to be honest. So I said, “cool” and then left.

Right around a year into my spiritual development I got into a relationship. My girlfriend was going through some serious problems and I asked a person I respected for some guidance. He asked me, “Do you love her?” I thought for a moment and said “yes.” He said, “then love her.” That was it. That was his great advice. “Love her.”

In order for me to fulfill this calling, to love, I needed to figure out what that would look like in my mind, heart, attitude, and actions. That meant investigation, time, and diligence. If I didn't think about it, set my inward being toward it, and push myself to act differently, it simply wouldn't happen.

Back to the story.

My spiritual adviser seemed to know what he was doing so I thought I would give it a try (apply the spiritual growth formula). So when my girlfriend called me up late one night from a bar crying, my instincts were wanting to hang up the phone. But instead, I chose to do this whole love thing. I'd been learning the "Prayer of St. Francis," and how to respond differently (Biblical alignment). So I told her I was coming to get her. One thing you need to understand is that I did not have a car and it was roughly midnight. I walked two miles at midnight in central phoenix to get to her and walked her another three miles home. Also, she was not good company. She was drunk.

As a result I got to experience something new. She appreciated me and was able to experience the grace of God coming through me in a gift form as I chose to serve God's ways instead of my own ideas. That was a new and different feeling. Helping someone who did not deserve to be helped provided me a new experience, understanding, and awareness of spiritual character. As my focus shifted toward what was going on within her heart and mine with compassion and sincere empathy, grace happened. If I kept my mind busy away from being emotionally present, I could have missed the spiritual experience.

There was the experience of choosing to be there for her, doing the work walking and getting there. There was the choice to focus my mind on the emotions within myself and her. There was the decision to keep my attitude toward serving God throughout this journey.

I learned the significance of being present with and for God in serving others and how powerful the effect can be when done honestly and sincerely. I learned how awkwardly and scary it is to walk into grace, because it involves dying to self, the ignoring of many signals within my thinking to do otherwise.

This spiritual evidence could only be understood through spiritual action. No one could have produced this understanding through any amount of video, words, or demonstrations. I had to do what I did to get what I got.

God is merciful

Let us look at a few verses with Mercy. Please patiently consider the phrase “those who” and what that means.

Exodus 20:6 NKJV but showing **mercy** to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Deuteronomy 5:10 NKJV but showing **mercy** to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

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

God is merciful. In my decades of Biblical and experiential research I found three crucial points about mercy. First, God is continuously wanting to give mercy in limitless amounts. God is the giver, like someone wanting to give a ball to another person.

The second point is that people can refuse or miss mercy. People are like the receiver who will need to position themselves to receive and accept it. If a ball player is thrown a ball, the receiver will need to see it, reach out for it, and take it in. If they are not looking and responding they can miss it. Sometimes, they may simply refuse to play the game of grace and chose to continue in a game of deception, resentment, fear, and other forms of sin.

Finally, mercy comes to those who seek God and obey God. God is about certain principles, character, and values. To participate in the spiritual principles of God requires the humbling of self, sincere truth, and willingness to accept God’s ways into our heart, mind, and soul. Mercy can be withheld to those who refuse to give themselves over to God’s goodness.

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

In Luke 10:25 - 37 an expert in the law asks Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus describes the parable of the Good Samaritan. But first, Jesus shares the greatest commandment. Jesus then says, “do this and you will live.” Jesus finishes the discussion about the parable with, “Go and do likewise.”

Think about these statements from Jesus. “do this and you will live.” “Go and do likewise.”

When it comes to knowing and understanding God, it has everything to do with inward condition. Our sensing the Goodness of God through experience is essential. Actions without our spiritual senses can lead us to an experience of emptiness. Reading has very little to do with experiencing love and mercy.

I learned about God through experience and reading. I read the prayer of St. Francis and then did what it said. I took into my heart, imagined how to act upon it, and put it into practice.

I received mercy when I was 21 years old by following some simple steps utilizing my heart and mind together toward spiritual action. I was lead to confess or share my resentments and talk about my fear. I was instructed to be willing to go to any length for the process. I was told to be thorough and rigorously honest. I was to examine myself for destructive character. And I was to go out and right the wrongs I had done to others. All these steps were teaching me how to humble myself, be sincere, abhor evil, and cling to what is good (See NKJV Romans 12:9).

My spiritual search (spiritual focus) for God involved much prayer, meditation, and listening to others who have had a spiritual experience share their journey. Our readings were about sharing our personal spiritual experience instead of questioning and theorizing.

We can learn and experience God's mercy through humble and sincere participation.

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

Luke 1:54 NIV He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

James 2:13 NIV because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 3:17 NIV But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Jude 1:22 NIV Be merciful to those who doubt;

Mercy is an experience, a state of mind, heart, and soul. If our thoughts feelings and actions are not improving toward this way of life, then that

would be sin. Sin is to miss the mark and the mark is to participate in God's mercy toward one another. Although I have had some profound experiences in mercy, I am still very far from where God would like me to be. I have so much room to grow in God's grace, but to do so requires an increased application of the Spiritual Growth Formula.

Truth

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

Trying to understand the meaning of unspiritual truth can lead to philosophy about worldly things. Trying to understand God's truth through book studies, while not applying new action, can miss the mark. Taking action to inwardly improve ourselves into experiencing God's truth can lead to salvation. Transforming truth comes through our experiencing the living God in our souls. We will focus on God's spiritual truth that is in us all.

When I was young, I did not understand God's ways. I was not shown God's ways. I mean people talked about God's ways, but it was not demonstrated well. God is love and peace. This truth, I did not find. Instead, I found fear, resentment, selfish ambition, and pride.

Daniel 4:7 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

I had to be broken, humbled. I had to be inwardly situated where I was ready to receive something different. I had to be convinced I needed help. I opened my mind and heart to God.

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The truth in these verses is that my abiding in following the instructions of Jesus lead me to experience freedom inwardly. The evidence I got came through experience.

God's truth is God's ways. God is good, inward good, and spiritual good. God does good that is always full of love, mercy, truth, peace, patience, forgiveness, compassion, and justice. There is another spiritual truth with

evil and its practices that can deceive us, even convince us away from God. So we ought to be careful what truth we are seeking and believing. Are we believing shame, anger, or fear? God's truth will urge us toward humbling ourselves and serving others for spiritual good. In this talk we will stay focused upon spiritual good solutions and not dwell into the corruptive nature of fear, resentment, dishonesty, selfish-ambition etc.

To find God's truth I had to commit myself to a new way of life. I got plugged into a group that had people in it who experienced spiritual truth. I committed to a program of action and did many good things I did not want to do. Doing those good things with an open mind and willing heart I got to experience evidence that changed me. I had to be shown. I had to see it to believe it. And to see God's good I needed to be vulnerable, submissive, and humbled.

To see Godly truth, the truth Jesus came to explain and demonstrate, we can fix our focus, study, time, and resources steadily and firmly upon these principles and character. Sure, God is so much more than these and cannot be fully explained, but God is certainly these and to not improve our knowledge and experience with them would be missing the mark. The goal for us has always been to improve our loving God with our whole inward being. And we ought to improve our clarity in understanding precisely how to do that.

John 18:37 "... For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" . . ."

What truth did Jesus bear and with what attitude did Jesus bear it? Jesus spoke Biblical and spiritual truth. Jesus did not dwell into politics, sports, academics, toys, or even vacations. The truth Jesus focused on was transformational, Biblical, and spiritual. He not only spoke about it, Jesus demonstrated it and guided others into it. We can do likewise, if we believe.

Jesus spoke and demonstrated to those who believe how to grow through experience; compassion, forgiveness, mercy, truth, justice, peace, and love. If Jesus is the teacher and we are the students, then we increasingly cooperate with the teachings of Jesus. We learn, improve, and grow in the teachings within our thoughts, aspirations, attitudes, and character.

We focus on participation in spiritual solutions. We are not to focus too much on what not to do, because that does not grow us into God's

goodness and grace. Instead, we steadily pursue within our minds and hearts God's ways, character, and grace. Our understanding of God can grow as we give our being or soul to God's good principles. (See John 15 & Ezekiel 18 & how they relate)

When I first accepted the instructions to be truthful I had many doubts and questions as to how I was going to do it. I mean, people lied, seemingly all the time. White lies, false flattery, exploitation, condoned hypocrisy, cover ups, cheating, stealing, and many other forms of deception. Deception exists in politics, families, school, work, church, and even ourselves. It's everywhere. Missing the mark, sin, is everywhere. But what hit me in my core was the idea that no one seemed to be doing much about it. If God was about love, then why are we so bad at loving each other? If we trust and worshiped love, then why wouldn't we be overflowing with it? So anytime someone would talk to be about God or the bible I would immediately assess them for their demonstration of truth and sincerity. I grew up with the "don't tell me, show me" mentality. I just witnessed too many fake people full of false flattery etc.

Many us find ways to adapt to all the pretending that exists in our everyday lives. We can put on a mask or public self. We become different people. This often becomes our normal. Then when we face spiritual truth in the Bible, to show sincere love, how might we react? Those of us who get hurt through trusting others with our love can learn to stop giving it. This can begin a spiritually dangerous journey into protectionism.

We can learn to keep people out. We can train ourselves to find flaws in others, red flags, or character defects that tell us not to care for them. Jesus instructed us to love our enemy. This protectionism in our thinking can stop us from experiencing the fruit in Jesus' teaching. There are boundaries we need to protect ourselves from actual harm, but not our pride. Our pride often sabotages our growth with God.

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

I got to a point in my spiritual walk where I recognized I feared what other people thought about me. I didn't like being afraid. Fear of what other people think can be condemning and controlling. This inward spiritual truth was difficult to think about, but I needed to be aware of the problem to find a solution. I heard many times people say, "what other people think is none of my business." I took that and ran with it. This was several years before I even picked up the Bible.

I became guarded and defensive. Someone would have to prove to me, show evidence through their actions, that I could trust them. I wouldn't invest in anyone unless I could see potential. I want to be perfectly clear that I still had no idea how to love people. No one ever sincerely and patiently walked with me to help me understand how to do that. I had relationships with others who would try to get close, but I wouldn't let it happen. I couldn't. I just didn't know how.

You see, in my youth my friends and I would con others into doing things for our entertainment. There were limits to what we would do. There was something in me, a sensation, that would evoke a dark and uncomfortable feeling when we went too far. That sensation was evidence telling me, it was wrong. I believe today that how I respond to these sensations is crucial to my spiritual development. Conversely, when I do great spiritual good there exists another sensation providing evidence of love, peace, and joy that feels really good. That evidence is grace. But when I was growing up, I just didn't receive the good feelings through relationships as many others had.

Psalm 12:2 They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

I learned to protect myself from other people. I learned through much evidence growing up that people would lie, exploit, cheat, and steal. I learn people were not looking out for my good. I could talk a lot about the struggles this development brought, but instead, let's press forward to the solution.

Around 2003 my wife and I were consulting a pastor. The pastor described a triangle where God was at the top and we were at the bottom. As we both would seek God moving up the triangle we could get closer. As he described this I saw how I wasn't seeking God. Instead I had been seeking sin avoidance. I had been guarding against resentment, fear, dishonesty, and self-seeking. God is love and I wasn't seeking love. This blew my mind and changed me. I had been performing sin management. I was trained at identifying character defects instead of character assets. I needed new training.

Around 2009 in a small group at a church I read Matthew 22:38 NIV "This is the first and greatest commandment." I honed in on this statement and realized it was the answer to everything. I pondered the idea that here is what many profess to be the greatest man in the greatest book

highlighting the greatest behavior, attitude, thought, and action for us to take. Yet we don't pursue it as it is written. Why?

I knew I had no idea how to do it because I didn't know how to love. Then I realized the guys in the group didn't appear to know it either. Then I questioned why the greatest command in the greatest book is so poorly practiced and demonstrated in my church experiences. I wondered why I wasn't seeing it more and more. I didn't even see classes on this command in seminary school. Why isn't it a major focus? There is nothing greater, right?

But I was taught by my spiritual guides not to drift into thinking about what other people do or do not do. I was taught to take responsibility for my own choices and actions. So the question came back to me, what was I going to do?

From that day forward I began baby stepping my way, one day at a time, gradually, into doing more of what the Bible says and as a result I experienced those good sensations that was evidence I was doing right. This good sensation through humbling myself and serving others, while placing my trust correctly with God instead of people, brought about grace into my soul. I chose vulnerability when my mind would guide me away from it. I choose kindness when I was afraid. I chose patience when I wanted hurry. I accepted this new action periodically, when I had enough courage to do it, and as a result of accepting God's ways, received more grace. This was powerful evidence. More humility, love, and peace resulted in more joy and grace.

Faith, as exemplified in the Bible, is about trusting God more important than our comforts, friends, family, and social status. Wasn't Abraham willing to kill his son? Didn't Jesus die? And what happened to Paul and the Apostles? Faith, as exemplified in the Bible is so much bigger than what many of us might experience in our religion.

I studied the greatest commandment breaking down every word. I mean I took each word, like the word love, and then read 800 verses in the Bible about love to understand God's definition of it. I wanted the Bible to define the words for me.

In my years of research on the greatest commandment I learned more about the meaning of the word "all." The word "all" in the greatest commandment, the first commandment is what's emphasized. The word all is used three times to highlight what kind of diligence we are to apply as

we love God. The word 'all' is about giving our all. It's not about perfection. Instead it's about having nothing of greater value than our seeking to align our inward being with God's ways.

Many of us can easily adjust to a faith we hear and see from other people. Since being with God is more important than anything else we are giving our inward being more and more to be with God than other people. We exist with other people enjoying God's grace together and helping others into that grace.

Being emotionally distant in relationships can keep us ineffective in our spiritual walk. And the amount of sincere empathy we experience with and from others can greatly impact our understanding about God. Let's look at a couple of verses from Jesus about how we can improve with God in love and peace.

Matthew 5:46 - 48 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Undoubtably loving God with our all automatically brings love from our inward selves out toward others. We can love those who do not like us. We can deepen our love in our words, sincerity, thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We can love more with compassion, mercy, and truth.

It just doesn't make sense to me to say I trust and worship God, but then don't cooperate with God's instructions. If God says, love me with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, then God expects me to listen, follow, and obey, but because of all the good that is there. God telling us to be humble, sincere, true, compassionate, loving and peaceful is like a parent who says "save your money," "get good grades," "say please and thank you," and "say you're sorry." We might not want to hear it, but there is great good that comes from it.

Leaving behind excuses, blaming, faultfinding, shaming, rationalizing, or justifying we can shift our thoughts towards the truth, God's truth. Are we willing to see the facts without partiality or bias. Let's think a long time and think deep about two questions. One, are we living our lives increasingly as the Bible teaches us to do, in the manner and way it teaches us to do it? And the second one is this, are we willing to commit our lives to increasingly improve our alignment with the Bible's instructions?

If you are ready to do this, then the Inward Authority program of action can help, but it requires a steady focus, commitment, and participation with the development of spiritual character.

We have within our minds God's spiritual truth. It's somewhere, maybe set aside, off in the shadows, seemingly hiding, put off, ignored, or unused. We have access to grace, but we need faith in God. Faith means belief and trust. Our belief in God ought to be a need more than a want. God saves. Through our trusting and relying upon God we can move from wrath and toward peace. If we trust in God we can thrive in God's love and mercy. If we trust God then we do God's will that can bring great results. This is what God does. God does God's good. If we do something else, then we are seeking or following something else and that something else can bring other results.

We ought to be growing in love toward what Jesus demonstrated and taught. We ought to evaluate our growth to ensure it is productive and good growth according to God's instructions. Because our minds are foolish in ways we ought to collaborate, introspect, and examine our thinking for truth and facts. Deception exists within and around us all the time.

Faith is everything. Faith in God is to know God's truth. We can seek to grow our understanding of God's truth. We can experience God's instructions through new action and experience God's truth more. For more about how to do this you can listen to the Inward Authority podcast Series on the Spiritual Growth Formula.

Testimonies

When I was ready for help and wanting change sincere honest testimonies helped, but when I was ready. Until then, no testimony could have helped me.

Verbal and written testimonies are merely signs pointing the way and few will follow them.

Let's look closely at [Luke 16:19-31](#). Read it yourselves imagining it is Jesus speaking directly with you.

In the story the rich man didn't understand until he experienced the heat. Within addiction recovery, there are stories of people reaching a 'bottom,' a place where the suffering reaches a low point. Pain and suffering has

been the motivation for many to make significant change. And because the suffering is the measurement used to take new action toward improvement, once the suffering is gone and life improves, many relapse. This damage management or sin management, involves the focus upon self instead of God. Such self-serving ideology has always been the problem. Fearing losing things, things for selfish gains, is based upon selfish ambition. This thinking is not in agreement with serving God through faith. (2 Corinthians 12:20, Galatians 5:20, Philippians 1:16)

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Instructions, the Bible is filled with them. We can switch our thoughts toward God. We can train to do God's will and experience the wonderful consequences of doing it. This is mission of Inward Authority. Simply spending a few minutes everyday with the site and podcasts will bring thoughts toward growing with God into our minds which can promote more Godly action.

If we are not ready to hear the word and commit ourselves to change, it just doesn't happen.

In [Luke 16:19-31](#).

The rich man lived amazingly well every day. There was a beggar in the man's presence desperate for help. The beggar was embraced by Abraham. The rich man was subjected to torment. Many of us chase after more money thinking it will provide us a better life, but we never understand really what it is to have a wonderful life. We misunderstand what it is to be happy and fulfilled because we keep money as the goal. In all reality, sincere love is the key to fulfillment.

The rich man in his misery pleaded to Abraham to let the beggar help him, but because the rich man never helped the beggar, Abraham would not let the beggar help him.

Next the rich man knowing through the experience of his ever present suffering wants to save those who are close to him. He desperately wants to warn his brothers. The rich man became the beggar. He pleads to Abraham to let Lazarus testify to his brothers what could happen to them. But Abraham reminds the rich man a testimony has already been provided by Moses and the prophets.

Here is a thought. Perhaps Jesus is sending us a message, that we have stories of Moses and the prophets and if we do not listen and obey them we too might suffer.

But the rich man knew his brothers were not responsive to the teachings of Moses and prophets. He then thinks that if someone rose from the dead that his brothers would listen better, because being raised from the dead is so miraculous his brothers would be more likely to obey.

Verse 31 is so powerful. “But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

Isn't this the story of Jesus, rising from the dead? And how many people really live their lives obeying Jesus? How many of us put into practice what Jesus said and how Jesus said to do it? Are we applying ourselves with diligence described by Moses, the prophets, Jesus, or God? Would we try harder if we experienced great suffering and misery?

What motivates us to grow spiritually?

Verbal and written testimonies rarely are enough to create change.

To understand why this is true required myself to undergo years of training, research, introspection, self-evaluation, self-correction and Biblical cooperation. Yes, cooperation. I didn't just read the Bible, I sought out how I could begin training to align my inward being better with it.

I was at a point where I was experiencing subtle pieces of misery. I just felt inside like something was missing. I felt like something wasn't right. And as I began taking more action upon the instructions in the Bible I felt that hole in my core begin to fill. I felt like I was stepping into a training that was right. The battle within me continues. I know this action is right and leads to fulfillment, but parts of myself push against carrying it out. I talked about this in a previous podcast, but it's worth mentioning again.

Verbal and written testimonies offer information. It just depends upon where we are inwardly, individually, and how we receive the information, no matter how it is brought.

How we listen and take in the information affects how we receive it. How we are inside; angry, lonely, prideful, fearful, doubtful, faithful, anxious, peaceful, etc. will affect how we listen to and take in information. If we listen to a testimony with an attitude of disinterest or little investment, then we have already somewhere in our minds judged the testimony as having

little value. Are we reading the Bible with the belief that it is telling us how to have a joyful and fulfilled life? Are we taking in the instructions as though they are correct and right?

Are we testing ourselves for objectivity? How we judge a message is important. And testing the information to see if it is correct is also important.

It's normal to sometimes disobey instructions from those who love us. This is how we are. Adam was given instructions by God and he still disobeyed. You can't get anymore direct than that. And how many of us hear from our doctor not to do something, but we still do it anyway. Do we exercise, eat, and sleep as medical science says is good for us? Many of us find ways to ignore truth we know is good and follow evil because we believe it's easier or will be more comfortable. Our minds tell us so, so it must be right. The problem exists within our thoughts and our choosing to believe those thoughts. If we do not address our thinking errors through testing them, experience the good truth, then we will have little chance of growth.

Imagine if we exercised, ate, and slept as the medical society prescribed. What would life be like? The thing of it is, if we haven't done it, we can't imagine it. An addict told about sobriety cannot imagine what it is like being sober. It just can't be done. Being told about what it is like to be with God cannot produce an understanding of what that is like. We have to do it to understand.

In order to experience God's goodness deeper we will need to choose to apply God's character in increasing measure despite our own selves. Our minds will seek to persuade us away from such action, because it does not understand how it is good, and we must deny our thoughts telling us not to do it.

James 2:14-17

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Similarly if we tell ourselves God is good to me, but do nothing God wants us to do, how can God's goodness grow us. God is about correcting and pruning. If our faith is not obeying God's instructions, can that faith help

us? If we had a trainer and did not do what the trainer tells us to do, how well will we be trained?

Our testimony

We can only take someone as far as you have gone. We can only teach what we know. And we can only demonstrate what we can do.

The testimony that matters is our own. Not what we say, but how we live. Remember, non-verbal communication matters most. Non-verbal communication is what our actions say; our eye contact, our facial expressions, our posture, and how well we follow through with our actions. There is much to learn about non-verbal communication. But that's another podcast which I hope to get to in the future. Trying to prioritize what to teach is not easy.

Actions speak louder than words.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of [b]human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Witnesses are a crucial piece of evidence. They have been used to prove cases for centuries. Our witnesses are Moses and the prophets as Jesus so clearly points out.

What good is a witness if we do not believe them? What good is our faith if we do not trust them? Perhaps the best teaching comes from experience.

Everyday I have a choice to live life the way I know life or to see how I can take a step deeper into God's instructions. Will I pursue peace and sincere love more or stay stagnant? Will I experience love, mercy, and forgiveness despite myself and how I see the world or not. Will I wait until things get bad enough, or empty enough to change? And what if it doesn't get bad enough to change?

One method I use is imagining myself on my death bed thinking about my choices. How would I feel about what I'm choosing today. What would I have wanted me to do? You see, when we face death there is no more chasing after material. We realize money and pride are not what bring

fulfillment. In the end we will hope to have others around us who love us. But if we do not participate in love and with love in our lives, we likely won't have it. For me, I need to be trained more with love, through practicing it.

So with that, the next podcast series will be on what God says we need to do to grow love within and around us.

More on Truth

God's truth changes us

At work I had a supervisor encourage me to say I was doing things that I wasn't. I'll leave out details so I don't indicate anyone. It was a big deal at the time and there was great fear. I chose not to do what my supervisor said to do, because I did not want to participate in the principle of lying. I had worked hard on improving toward truth and I knew this would be a big decision. I feared there would be consequences from the supervisor. I believe I may have fallen out of the circle of trust with the supervisor, but I had a relationship with something bigger and more powerful in mind.

I grew that day and felt good about staying with truth. More peace developed within me and more faith.

Ephesians 4:24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

1 John 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

3 John 1:3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.

Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The evidence for myself and hundreds of people I have heard from strongly indicates the gathering of evidence is like putting together a puzzle. The pieces don't come together by themselves. I need to search, focus, and make attempts to see what fits.

The only way to really see if something works is to put it to the test. To discover the intangible and invisible evidence offered to us we will need to make ourselves the object in the experiment. To see or experience with our inward senses God's grace we will need to make ourselves ready. If we do not abide by the conditions described we will not get the results.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Test

Psalms 7:9 Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.

1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

2 Corinthians 2:9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

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

Trials

Acts 20:19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

Few will persevere with enough humility to serve God with many tears and trials in order to do what is needed to witness the evidence.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

During the beginnings of my search for God I was in the stage of purifying my hearts and cleansing my conscience. I had confessed my wrongs, examined my character, and was in the middle of making restitution to those I had hurt. I was open to God and praying daily trying to do God's will.

I had a list of those I needed to make amends with. Upon making the list a certain person came to my mind, a girl, but I couldn't remember her name. I was 21 at the time and it had been about three years since I had scene her so I drew the conclusion that I would never see her again and had no way of contacting her and I chose to leave her off the list.

Next thing I know I am taking a bus along a ten mile route. Midway a girl gets on the bus and my heart began to race. My instincts were telling me this was the girl, but I wasn't sure. She sits toward the front of the bus about five rows ahead of me.

I pictured myself getting up and going over to her and making a fool out of myself with much shame and embarrassment. I didn't know her name and wondered if she we even recognize me. Knowing this could be a very significant and important event, I went to God. I negotiated and said something like this, "God if this is her and you want me to make approach her for and apology, have her get off at my stop." Now keep in mind my stop was five miles down the road. Part me, I'm sure, thought this could be a way out. But God had other plans.

She got off at my stop. You ever been at the crossroads? This was perhaps the most crucial crossroads of my spiritual experience. Evidently fate or God set up this meeting. I had a choice to make, as I always do. All the evidence was clear of my responsibility and I even made an agreement with God that I would do it, if by some miracle she got off at my stop.

So now we are together at a stop light, another arrangement of fate, and I've got about 15 seconds to engage her before she leaves. I'm an introvert with terrible social skills. This is not my strong area. And I do not want to do it. I'm nervous, socially stupid, and proud. Not a good combination. But am I going to trust God? I made an agreement. Perhaps my pride helped in this area. I did not want to walk away from this with a failure to the steps.

I remember what school she went to and asked her if she went there. She said yes, kinda rolled her eyes and turned her head like I was a creeper. This was very embarrassing. The light changed and she speed walked

across the street. I became angry. I felt rejected. My mind decided this was stupid. She went into a convenience store and I waited at the light to cross the street. I get half way across the street and my body just freezes. I am beside myself. The old me is 100% against having anything to do with that *%#! (expletive). I was fuming. But then there was God, the steps, and my agreement.

It was like severing a limb to turn around. But it happened. I went into that convenience store and tried to be friendly. I knew I would only have brief window to do this, so I just did it. I told her who I was and she remembered. Then I apologized for my behavior. And then a strange thing happened. She became friendly and interested. She even gave me her phone number.

This making amends and restoring damage I have done is a principle I have practiced since 1991. It requires self-examination. I need to see my errors and take responsibility for them. I need to own how I affect others with my choices and go to God for direction

The evidence I gathered through not only my journey, but listening to hundreds of others share theirs, is that this process produces spiritual experiences. The Bible describes God as compassionate, loving, merciful, and forgiving.

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

Sometimes it seems like the level of spiritual benefit has everything to do with how much I humble myself.

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

Everyone has room to grow with humility. It's always uncomfortable and a struggle. If it's not difficult, then it's probably not humility.

I received grace when I accepted a humble attitude to serve God. The real development of grace wasn't until I completed the task. It was a spiritual task that required an honest desire to sincerely right the wrong I had done. I sincerely and humbly with compassion cared for that girl. I made myself less to increase God's kingdom and her spirit. Her attitude completely changed when she witnessed me serving her. She smiled and welcomed me where before she avoided me and walked quickly away from me.

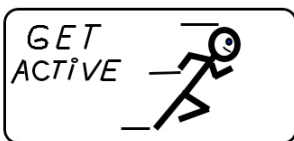
My non-verbal presentation needs to match my words when I serve God. If my heart is not present and my demeanor does not match what I'm trying to do it can seem dishonest.

Many people can have developed within them false presentation skills. It can be common for people to come to work everyday, put up a front, smile and act like they won the lottery, to please others, and seek the win of approval.

Unfortunately, this deceptive habit can create serious problems for authentic relationships. Since non-verbal communication is far more important than verbal, then we ought place far more attention to what kind of message our non-verbal cues are bringing. To understand this we will need to ask other people because it's the message they receive that is of value and not the message we think we are providing. Those can be two entirely different things.

If we want an amazing experience with God then we will need to open ourselves to an amazing experience. We must become ready for our lives to be shaken. If we remain guarded, how can grace come in? We must open our minds to new information and experiences. We must become ready for new evidence.

We must lay aside all excuses, justifications, rationalizations, reasoning, entitlements, desires, and expectations to open our minds and hearts to accept God's indescribable grace. We can't receive something we cannot fully understand until we make our minds and hearts ready to experience something we cannot understand.



Are we going to open our minds up to something beyond our belief? And are we going to allow ourselves to continue with this openness long enough to let God show us? Are we willing to let God shape us toward different interests, schedule, relationships, practices, and habits?

We must choose to make God our highest interest and priority.

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

Luke 16:13 NIV “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

There are spiritual and intellectual blockades for improvement and development. Resentment, defensiveness, fear, self-deception, can interfere with the process. It can be very helpful to own these barriers and immediately confess them with someone who understands this process. Sometimes, no one will understand. We still have the Bible and God’s spirit within our reach.

Following Bread Crumbs

I had just graduated with my B.A. in Psychology and was promoted to a store manager. After a few months I began to examine myself and my career.

I found that my passion had to do with psychology, counseling, and spirituality. I then reviewed what I was doing. I was a store manager for a 24 hour retail establishment. I examined what I was doing and projected ahead five years to what that would produce in me spiritually. Then I compared to five years of pursuing something else I would enjoy more. I made the decision to quit. My friends thought I was crazy.

I had a dream of being a counselor. I dropped out of high school, went back, got placed in special education, and graduated. I had to take zero credit classes at a community college to get to college level. It probably didn’t help that I was high during the placement exam. It took me four years to get my A.A. degree and another four to get my B.A.. My GPA was about a 2.7 and my reading comprehension skills were very poor. So getting accepted for a Master’s program wasn’t really on my radar.

I got something in the mail about for post grad education. I prayed and went to meet with a guidance counselor. My mind believed I had no chance to get into a Master’s program. I was unwilling to take tests because my reading comprehension skills were so bad.

I only met with the counselor because God might have something for me there. I had to keep my mind open to what God can do. I had to be willing to follow what I call “The Bread Crumbs.” I learned to be ready for things I believed I wasn’t ready for.

The guidance counselor was trying to sell it to me. She said I could bypass the testing and get in on a probationary status. She said I needed to maintain a 3.5 GPA for my first four classes. So then I asked, “what if I don’t?” She said I would be suspended for six months and can come back again under the probation.

I was calculating all this in my mind and proposed the worse case scenario to her. I said, “So I can take four classes, fail the probationary period, then take another four classes after six months suspension, and fail that probationary period, take another four classes after six months and compete the Master’s program?” She said, “well that’s one way you can do it.” So I signed up.

I had an arrangement with a job that would reimburse me for the classes as long as I got a ‘C’ or better. If figured this could work. For the first time in my life since being promoted out of special ed in high school (that’s another story), I applied myself to get the best grades I could. Historically I have lived by the principle of applying the least possible effort to compete a task. Who wants to waste energy or resources, right?

Anyway, I got the degree with GPA of 3.91 and I figured out on my own how to greatly improve my reading comprehension skills. I achieved something I never thought possible because I opened my mind to it and took action against my belief.

I passed a substance abuse credentialing exam and a National Counselors Exam. I earned became licensed by the board of Arizona Behavioral Health Examiners as a Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor and a Licensed Professional Counselor. I let these expire in 2007 after I moved to California in 2005. (That’s another story)

Following God sends me down roads that always lead to more love and peace, but also brings struggle and adaptation. Growing with God means continued change.

Examine yourselves

Psalm 26:2 Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart.

Lamentations 3:40 Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the Lord;

1 Corinthians 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

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

Galatians 6:4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

How do we honestly know what our character is unless we evaluate ourselves. We have today, video and audio recording capability that can easily show us what we look and sound like. Professionals use these tools to help identify how they can improve. Why wouldn't we use objective tools to reflect back the truth about our character? It's a great way to discover our non-verbal presentation. Most successful businesses use some form of surveys to gather feedback so they can improve. We can do this with our own character and spiritual development.

Personal Experience with self examination

I was first introduced to self examination in a 12 step program. I would hear people talk about it, but I did not understand the purpose of it. I did not believe I needed to do the steps, but there was something that helped these people change and I needed to see what it was.

I needed help. My life was falling apart. I was proud, angry, and fearful. I did not trust people. I associated with run aways, drug addicts, and thieves. I had very thick boundaries, was defensive, and distrusting. I was harsh and direct. My learned character helped to protect me.

When I was told to examine myself for resentments I quickly realized I resented almost everyone. I resented family, cops, friends, and teachers. It may have been easier listing those I didn't resent. I resented systems too. Getting in touch with my resentments surprised me very little. I knew I was angry and believed I had every right to be. But the next step was to look boldly and carefully at myself to see how I might be in the wrong with my attitude, words, and actions.

I had to see how my resentments affected my mind, heart, and relationships. What did having these resentments do to my attitude? How did having these resentments affect my words and choices. I was pointed to the word fear and asked to describe my experience with fear in relation to resentments. Was I afraid of hurt pride, financial security, or social status? Had I experienced jealousy? Did I fear other people seeing me as weak or unintelligent? And how did I respond to the fear in my thoughts and actions?

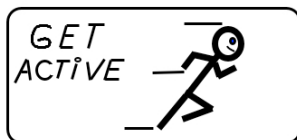
I was told to look at my character defects, but I needed to accept some instruction upon how to define character defects.

The Bible is very clear about character we ought to learn and develop. We can easily learn to develop Godly character traits. It is easy under the right conditions. The condition of our faith and trust in God. It becomes difficult when we doubt, question, or disbelieve God's instructions.

Examine and accept the instructions

We are to have love. The greatest commandment is love God with our whole being above all things including money, people, and our own life. In 1 Corinthians 13 it clearly describes we are to have love and then it clearly describes what that looks like.

It can be summed up like this. We are to develop more kindness and patience. We are to reduce envy and pride. We are not to focus on wrongs. We are to rejoice in truth and not evil. We are to hope and persevere.



How can we improve in being more patient and kind? How can reduce envy and pride? How can we cease focusing upon wrongs? What is rejoicing in truth and how can we do it more? What does it look like to increase hope and to persevere in these things?

When I first learned how my character was incorrect with God's ways I felt angry. I did not like the idea that I was wrong. My attitude and methods seemed to be producing benefits. And I wanted to immediately stop this process because it was creating doubt, confusion, and conflict inside of me. But why would I run from truth? I suppose what separated me from

others was my willingness to look at the truth, even uncomfortable truth. I wanted to know and see the truth despite myself.

I picked up the Bible in 2000 and understood what Matthew was getting at in

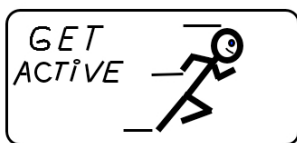
Matthew 16:24 NIV Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

I needed to deny the belief and learned habits that would urge me toward ungodly behavior. My thinking would resist pursuing patience, kindness, and truth. My thinking would desire pride and create envy. I needed to practice denial of such thinking behavior.

I needed to examine my ways, consider God’s ways, and then choose what was really going to be my God. My God is what I choose to follow in character. Was I going to be obedient to envy and pride or to patience and kindness? Was I going to increase in love or anger and fear? I needed to choose.

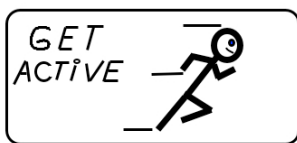
Romans 12:9 -21 NKJV Behave like a Christian

This appeared to me to be quite instructive. The title says it all. I mean, “Behave like a Christian?” How much clearer can someone be? I chose to sit down over a period of weeks with a friend to dig deep into what this means. Each week we would look at one point. For example, the first week we discussed the meaning of “Let love be without hypocrisy.” I proposed some questions and we discussed them together. Here are the questions:



What is hypocrisy? What does loving with hypocrisy look like? What does loving without hypocrisy look like? Why would this be important to God?

The second part of Romans 12:9 was “Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. I proposed the following questions:



What does abhor mean and how would we abhor something? How does the Bible define evil? How does the bible define good? How can we abhor evil? How can we cling to good and what would that look like in our thoughts and actions.

I believed if that having faith in God and the Bible meant to make God and the Bible the highest priority. And to be smart about it would be to follow the instructions to me by God and the Bible. That means I need to increase my understanding of how to do it.

Jesus lays out some instructions in Matthew chapters 5 - 7. I realized I needed to do these things in order to understand the spiritual meaning of the instructions.

It would be easy to discuss this forever since the Bible is full of these points. God gives instructions, man does them for a while and gets good things, man drifts away from instructions and suffers.

Experience and Results

I went through course of spiritual develop with prayer, meditation, character examination, seeking God for guidance, service to others, seeking sincere love and truth, and restoring wrongs I had done. Please keep in mind I was a very broken young man at 21 years of age. I had no money, car, bank account, or even a bike. I was unemployable. And my parents were on the verge of kicking me out of the house. I literally had nothing with the world to hold on to which can a be a spiritually good thing. My pride was quite low. I was broken and ready for God to have all of me.

There was one thing holding me back and it had to do with controlling me emotions. I was afraid to feel sad. I believed tough guys don't cry. Crying was weak. Showing emotions with the kind of people I associated with in my childhood would be like wounded prey around predators. I had to learn to toughen up and hold back feelings. I learned not to care. I also learned to attack and belittle others who would feel or show kindness.

There were many very difficult experiences in my life where I did not grieve. It is natural, normal, and healthy to let the grieving process happen. The only time I remember grieving was when a girl I had a crush on committed suicide and at the funeral they played stairway to heaven. A friend of mine also committed suicide, but I did not grieve over it. I was faced in sobriety with bottled up emotions and really had a difficult time with them. Anger was the outlet for hurt. Whenever I felt hurt in life it came out in anger.

This repression of grief was creating a very unhealthy condition within my mind, heart, and soul. I knew nothing about grief at the time. I only knew my insides felt like a balloon filled to capacity and I was about to pop. The first time I experienced this I relapsed. The second time I just gave up trying to control my feelings and ended up spilling me emotions all over my bed. It seemed like I cried steady for 30 to 45 minutes. And it was like silent tears either. It was a full on screaming into the pillow event. But then something amazing happened.

Everything suddenly stopped. The emotions just ran out. All that pressure within me that pushing me over the edge was gone and its place was an experience I had never felt before. I felt peace. It was a brand new experience for me. It was intangible and indescribable. It was spiritual. This surrender of control over my feelings opened my heart up and revealed a new experience. The anger within me had vanished. I actually felt okay with me. These results changed my life.

From that point forward when I felt anger boiling up within me I would find a private place I try to experience that grieving process. I had to relearn how to cry. Remember, I trained myself not to cry. I experienced a lot of grieving over the many terrible experiences I had growing up which helped me grow peace.

God has everything to do with emotions and to be with God is to be emotionally connected.

There are so many results from following God's goodness. Instead of telling a bunch of long stories I will list some of the results I witnessed in a more bullet point fashion.

Sober since 1991 only be the grace of God

Stopped smoking in 1995

Went from a high school dropout to Master's degree

Excellent credit rating throughout life, no debt

Graveyard shift at a convenience store to store manager

Started a 12 step group in 2007 that continues today

Married once and have stayed married since 2000, only by God's grace

Learned to give compliments, say please and thank you with full sincerity and truth

Have helped others find God and stay sober

Reduced passive aggressive behavior, pride, and sarcasm

Quit watching sports that would create frustrations

Practiced slowing down, patience, and being more present

Pursued compassion, empathy

The list continues to grow as I continue to see how I can improve alignment with the Bible's instructions