



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ALMIGHTY

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To all of those who have ever felt alone in their search for God, and struggled to find happiness.

To my family, and all those who have helped me get to where I am today. I would not be alive without your love, support, patience, guidance, and compassion.

To those ready to give up the fight, keep fighting!

You've got this!

-Tamara



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Foreword and Introduction

Having battled depression for a majority of my life, I have spent much of that time trying to find the secret to happiness. Just when I thought I was close to figuring it out, I would find myself in a new, painful and debilitating trial that I had to overcome, each time seemingly more difficult than the last.

At handbookforhappiness.com I share the things I have learned on my journey to happiness, and the experiences I have had along the way. My most valuable discovery has been that it is essential for each of us as individuals to be consistently growing in the following categories: mind (specifically wisdom), body, spirit, and relationships.

Discovering the existence of God for myself was a key component that has kept me going when I had nothing left to hold on to. God's influence in my life has been critical in my fight against depression, finding self worth, and creating purpose in my life. Knowing that He loves me has given me strength and perspective to keep searching, fighting, and helping others along the way.

It is my hope that in sharing my experiences, I can help others navigate the difficulties they are facing in their own lives.

1

RECEIVING YOUR OWN WITNESS

"As important as scientific research may be, the greatest quest is a search for God - to determine his reality, his personal attributes, and to secure a knowledge of the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ. It is not easy to find a perfect understanding of God. The search requires persistent effort, and there are some who never move themselves to pursue this knowledge." —Howard W. Hunter

This book is a guide to finding the truth of God and his nature for yourself rather than having to take someone else's word for it. There is no need to blindly follow. God has provided a way for us to know Him for ourselves.

There is a way to know with great certainty that God exists and that He loves you more deeply than you could ever imagine. There is one caveat, it doesn't come easily. It takes genuine desire, effort, self-reflection, and true change to get that undeniable witness. Do you really want to know if God is there? Do you really want to hear what He has to say to you? It is my experience that you won't typically get an answer if you are not willing to make a sacrifice to improve yourself. If you are ready to do the hard things necessary for true discovery of God's existence, this book is for you.

If you are doubtful about the idea of a supernatural, all-knowing

creator responsible for the earth and everything in it, I get it if it seems like an insult to your intellect to accept scripture as historical truth. There are plenty of theories out there that seem to refute the validity of many scriptural claims, so it is logical that someone would come to the conclusion that all scripture is made up and its only purpose is to control the masses.

Chances are, the Bible we have available to us today has been somewhat altered from its original text. Between the time they were written and made more widely available, I am sure that well-meaning individuals wanted to preserve and share their experiences and truth; but there were also those who likely wanted to use it to control people and manipulate them into compliance. It is my personal opinion that most scripture is rooted in real, true experience. There is a high likelihood that we are not reading and experiencing scripture in the exact way that it originally happened. I am not of the opinion that all scripture is perfect, nor are the prophets and people who wrote them. We should not expect them to perfectly reflect history or for the stories to have infallible prophets and disciples represented in them. God has only had imperfect people to work with and bring about His work, therefore, we can anticipate missteps and possible false interpretations. We can also expect our Heavenly Father to help us recognize the truth as we are actively seeking Him.

One good example of this is David (as in David and Goliath). David was considered a great prophet, king, and leader and of high favor of the Lord. But He allowed his lusts to lead him to the terrible act of sending someone to their death. We should not consider the teachings of David's youth and young adulthood to be invalidated by his future acts. We all change with the experiences we have and the choices we make. It might be more difficult for people to see past indiscretions with the idea that all scripture is perfect, prophets and apostles are infallible, and everything documented in scripture happened exactly as it was written. As I said before, God has only had imperfect people to work with in bringing about His gospel.

There are people who have done amazing things in the world, who

have also committed sins. I am not trying to make someone look bad, rather, I am trying to make a point by helping you connect with someone in more recent history. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a religious man who I believe was chosen by God to impact the hearts of humanity. He did some incredible things, moving great numbers of people into peaceful protest for rightful change. Would the fact that he was unfaithful to his wife make the things he did in this life any less valid or important? No! Dr. King started a movement to unite individuals and transform the United States into a place more willing to provide liberties to all of God's children residing in it. Nothing changes those facts.

People make mistakes, even prophets. Their actions prior to and even after their conversion are a personal choice in which God will not intervene. Their mistakes make the "faith" part of religion just that much more important. We have to trust that despite the imperfections of His prophets, He will deliver the most crucial information for our progression through them. The scriptures plainly state that the Holy Ghost dwells where liberty is present, implying that all people have agency to choose, and are susceptible to sin.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

-2 Corinthians 3:17

"Liberty" definition, Oxford Languages

noun: liberty

- 1. The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one's way of life, behavior, or political views.
- 2. The power or scope to act as one pleases.

God is not going to reveal His truths to someone who is bent on disproving his existence. You get what you look for. If you are looking to disprove His existence, you will find a way to do that. If you truly want to know God for yourself, you have to at least have a desire to "hope" that He exists. Hoping is the first step in all of this. For some, hoping in a God could be the hardest step.

There are so many people in this world who have gone through hardships. Those who have wondered; "If there is a God, and He loves his children, why does He let bad and painful things happen to the innocent, to good people who don't deserve it?" I have been in those shoes. Experiencing abuse at the hand of another, watching the people you love suffer, it all feeds into your feelings about whether God exists, and whether He actually loves you. It makes sense why someone would come to the conclusion that God is just a fairytale. I can promise you though, when you finally get to know Him, you will never want to be without Him! God truly loves you. He really does care about all of your feelings and all that has happened to lead you to becoming who you are today.

2

THE SEARCH FOR TANGIBLE FAITH

ing the Wind

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." —John 3:8

You have probably heard people compare the existence of God to the wind. Can you see the wind? No, not really. Then how do you know that it is there? There are several ways. The most noticeable way to acknowledge the wind is that you can feel it. You can feel the movement on your skin. Sometimes it pushes your hair, moves the trees, and sometimes it is so strong that it moves entire buildings! Does it move buildings every single day or just anywhere? No, certain criteria must be met for an event like that to happen.

We hear these fantastic stories about people who have had an incredible experience with God, citing an out-of-body experience, a vision, an intense feeling, or miracles. Not everyone experiences these events and this can be frustrating to the unbeliever. These events can be compared to the tornadoes and hurricanes of this life. Not everyone will experience either one of those things, but it doesn't make the existence of this kind of wind any less real. Other people have experienced the wind, and often, there is debris left in its path.

There are little evidences, little witnesses along the storm's path proving that a heavy wind has been present. Sometimes the evidence

is mounting, for example; trees and debris in places they shouldn't be, places you don't expect them to be, yet you cannot deny the damage the storm has left in its wake. You don't have to always take someone else's word for it; sometimes the evidence is right in front of you. You just have to be willing to look for it and know what you are looking for. You will discover those things a little bit later.

Just like a windstorm, you may not ever see God in the flesh or experience Him in any earth-shaking way, but if you seek Him out, if you go to the places He is most commonly found (like a storm chaser to a storm), eventually, He will show up. Eventually, you will witness Him firsthand. That witness is not going to come to you in just any circumstance or condition. You can't expect a hurricane to show up in the dry mountainous region of Utah: you have to look for one in a more damp, coastal environment like Florida or North Carolina. I am not saying that unusual and miraculous experiences never happen outside of specific parameters, but they are much less likely.

Hopefully, you are beginning to realize that God doesn't show up just anywhere. You could ask to experience an earthquake in Kansas, but you are more likely to witness a tornado. Just like there are certain circumstances in which you are likely to see a tornado or an earthquake, there are certain circumstances where God is most commonly found. Just as unlikely as seeing a hurricane in the state of Utah, there are places where you are not likely to find God. You hear that rare, chance occasion where He has shown up in less favorable circumstances, but a majority of accounts are witnessed in certain types of environments that meet a specific criteria.

THE CRITERIA FOR EXPERIENCING GOD

"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." –John 7:16-17

How can we discover the circumstances most favorable for finding God? First, you have to be looking for Him, watching for signs that He is out there. If you are not looking, you will not likely find Him. There are few examples of people just "happening upon" God. People like Saul in the New Testament who definitely wasn't looking for God (at least not in the likely ideal circumstances). Saul may have been a Pharisee, well-versed in scripture. But he was living in a way that contradicted the variables that would make an experience with God possible. What made Saul's circumstances unfavorable?

Though Saul may have been a person who regularly studied and had a deep knowledge of scripture and probably followed the Torah (Jewish Law in the Old Testament) to the letter, Saul lacked a couple of important attributes. He lacked an understanding of and love for the purpose of the law. Saul was involved in the brutal treatment and crucifixion of earlier followers of Christ. There were many others who missed the purpose of the law too. Jesus, however, made the law a little more clear and easy to understand when He simplified the commandments down to two very direct and very clear ones:

Love God and Love others. If you compare the 10 Commandments with the two primary ones that Jesus taught, it is clear that He is teaching the same concept but accentuating the purpose.

(See comparison on next page)

The Old Testament gave us specific actions that show us how to Love God and Love Others. It taught us the "How" but not the "Why." Living the law is important, but Jesus clarified that changing your heart is the core purpose of His doctrine. The point was less about the act itself and more about intention: to turn your heart, desires, and intentions toward loving and serving God and others as well as being a peacemaker. Demonstrating control over your actions and desires with the intent of benefitting God and His children, rather than self-serving choices and actions. The laws of God, if followed properly, will consider and protect the wellbeing, safety, liberty, and freedoms of all of humankind, not by force, but by choice. God does not want us to force others to be kind. The laws of God will never lead to addiction or any form of bondage or slavery, they will never eliminate the free will of another human being within the boundaries of the Laws of God.

Now that you know and understand God's laws better, we can talk more deeply about how to chase "His Storm" so that you can experience God for yourself.

The 10 Commandments WITH BRIEF EXPLANATION:

- No other Gods should be placed ahead of or in priority above God the Father, Architect of the heavens, the earth, and all of humanity.
- Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, He should be spoken of in reverence.
- Keep the Sabbath day holy, spending the day in the worship of God and in rest, avoiding laborious work and resting your body from your daily jobs and chores.
- Honor your Father and Mother, your elders-those more mature and experienced than yourself. Regard them highly and respect them and the wisdom taken from their life experiences.
- Do not Kill, otherwise interpreted as "do not murder" or unjust killing and bodily harm. (For those veterans out there, any person killed under the authority and command of the government, falls upon the shoulders of government officials, not the veteran).
- Be faithful to your spouse (do not commit adultery), maintain chastity.
- 7. Do not steal. Respect the property of others.
- Do not bear false witness (or Lie). Be honest in your dealings with other people and don't spread false information that may damage someone's reputation.
- Do not Covet (or lust) after someone else's spouse, avoid impure thoughts or desires toward someone
- Do not Covet other people's things, or long after them in a way that causes envy and desires to unlawfully acquire that item or break the law.

New Testament:

No other Gods should be placed ahead of or in priority above God. Make Him and His will a priority above all other things. Love, trust and obey Him. Put His will ahead of your own desires and understanding, despite not being able to understand the reason (yet). Like an adult with a toddler in a parking lot, God can see the dangers and consequences of your choices in advance and in a much clearer way than we are capable of seeing. God is in a position of experience and perspective that we are not privy to. His laws and commandments are in place to provide the greatest possible protection and peace for all of His children. We are here to discover that truth for ourselves, learning to trust that His ways lead to safety and happiness.

Compare 1-4 of the 10 Commandments

2. Love others as Jesus loves you. Treat others in the way you would want to be treated, like you would treat someone in your family or a close friend.

Compare 4-10 of the 10 Commandments

Effort and Relationship Building

CHASING GOD'S "STORM"

"Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me; ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"—Doctrine and Covenants 88:63

I realize that it can be difficult to "Love" someone you aren't even sure exists, so let's start with hope. Acting with hope is necessary for the process of coming to know your Heavenly Father. If I were separated from one of my children for any reason, for an extended amount of time, I would long for the day that they would develop an interest in discovering me again for themselves. If this child has no interest in knowing me, they aren't going to come looking. I don't know if this child's rediscovery of me would be as meaningful (personally) if this child felt compelled to know me rather than come looking, out of their own curiosity and desire.

When that child finally did decide to come around, I would be understanding of any apprehension or reservations they might have. I would even be okay with questions or concerns they might express, because, to them, I am new. Up to this point in their lives, they don't know much about me, and most of what they have heard has been from a source other than myself. Until they have had a chance to develop a relationship with me, they cannot know who I really am. It will take time for them to come to know what my true intent is, and what my hopes and dreams for them are. Those are all things that

come with time and continual effort to get to know each other.

It is important to look at your relationship with your Heavenly Father in a similar light. Having an occasional conversation with Him, sincere or otherwise, might bring you closer in the moment, but it is a regular effort to connect that is going to help you develop a true relationship with Him. A relationship takes effort from both sides. God is not going to force you to know Him if you're not interested. Discovering the existence of God is the development of a relationship, not a transaction.

What is a relationship and how do you develop one? A relationship is your connection with another individual and the energy each of you puts into it. The stronger you want that relationship to be, the more energy you would put into getting to know the wants and needs of the other person involved, and to fulfill them. It is a mutual effort to bring each other happiness. Relationships are built upon trust and selfless attention to one another's needs. Sometimes it involves sacrificing a more selfish activity that you enjoy to ensure peace and harmony between you and the other person.

Effort is a primary factor in building a relationship. If only one person is trying, you might learn a little about one another but it will not ensure a quick bond with that individual. You are more likely to develop a deep connection with them if you both make an effort. A relationship with God works the same way. God is not typically going to go above and beyond the efforts you are making unless you are sincerely trying to offer a consistent effort to get to know Him. It is my experience that He does want you to know Him, but He is going to move at the pace that you set. If you are eager to know Him, you will make more efforts and He will reciprocate. If you don't really care, you will try less, and He will be less obvious to you. It doesn't all come at once through a handful of prayers or conversation: you are going to have to show Him that you are willing to demonstrate a little faith. Showing even the smallest amount of trust can take a relationship to the next level. It is no different with God.

Building a Relationship

NOT JUST A TRANSACTION

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to Him, and will sup with Him, and He with me" - Revelation 3:20

In this section, I am going to introduce elements that are commonly recited among believers, but will elaborate on each of them. I will explain each element and process in more detail, so that you can get the most out of your efforts and have the highest possibility for success. The first one is scriptures.

~ Scriptures ~

One way you can get to know a person is to read about them and the experiences other people have had with them. I like to look at scripture as less of a history book and more of a series of different people's journal entries with the details about their experiences with God. By reading about other people's experiences with God, you can learn more about how He speaks to his children and begin to learn how He speaks to you. Making even a small effort to read about Him on a regular basis is an act of hope, maybe even faith. When you read about Him, the intent to understand and get to know His desires is a primary factor in having success.

You could read through any book because it was assigned to you.

One could get the general idea and probably even answer a few questions about the book, but if you have not read it with the intent to truly understand, you can often miss the deeper and more powerful messages that it contains for you. I'm sure most of us have experienced the difference between reading a book that we are truly interested in, and just reading one for a grade. If you are truly interested in a book, you will feel all of the feelings and try to understand all of the parallels. You become invested in the story, the characters, and all of the plot twists. If you are reading scriptures just because you "have to," then you are not going to get much out of them.

I realize that reading the scriptures can be incredibly boring and difficult to understand. The old language can be hard to follow, which can cause frustration and even withdrawal. If this is a struggle for you, sometimes reading a picture book series of the scriptures alongside the actual scripture can help you understand what you are reading better. I wouldn't recommend walking away from actual scripture because picture books don't typically give a full and accurate account of the intended message. They are a baseline to hold onto while trying to wrap your head around the deeper meaning of the old language. Use them together.

It is also helpful to ask your Heavenly Father in prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, for help in developing a love, interest, and deeper understanding of the scriptures. We'll dive more into prayer in the next section.

Answers don't usually come instantly but will come with some effort. The more effort you put into understanding scripture, the more you will begin to appreciate what they have to offer. You might even find yourself enjoying the messages contained in them. Reading Scriptures with the intent to understand will change your experience in wonderful ways.

I understand that portions of scripture can be difficult to push through but stick with them anyway. I like to read my scriptures with a

specific purpose in mind, highlighting and taking notes along the way. Some themes I have enjoyed focusing on are:

- Wisdom
- Promises to the righteous
- Consequences that accompany wicked choices
- The nature of God

There are so many other topics to choose from. Coming up with a specific purpose for your study can make reading much more interesting and meaningful.

~ Prayer ~

I know, everyone says "Pray and read your scriptures," and I know people who claim to have done those things and feel no closer to God. Take the details I am explaining into consideration: intent changes everything. If you are reading just to check it off of a list, or praying just to say you prayed, you probably won't progress in your relationship with your Heavenly Father. You have to actually hope to get something out of your efforts. You have to have a real desire to learn something new from your studies, and you must have a true interest in communicating with God when you pray. God knows your true intentions. He knows if you really want to know Him, or if you are just passively making an attempt because someone told you to do it. God will invest as much effort and emotion into this relationship as you do. Don't expect Him to send you miracles if you have no intention of actually getting to know Him. Relationships don't work that way.

When you pray, I would encourage you to approach Him with respect. "Dear Heavenly Father" is a good place to start. He is, after all, your creator and has blessed you with all that you have. If you are praying for the first time and are still unsure of His existence, take some time before the prayer to consider the things you would want to talk to Him about if He was in the room with you. What things would you thank Him for? What would you want Him to know about you? Why are you praying? Is it because you want to know more about

Him? Maybe you need help understanding something. Maybe you are asking for help?

Talking to God is not the same as requesting a wish from a Genie in a lamp like some people perceive. Though you hear of instances from time to time where someone claims that God has made their dreams come true, more often than not, you are not going to get exactly what you want. He always answers your prayers, but in His own time. I personally have had prayers take 20 years to be answered, but He answered them when I had enough experience and understanding to be able to receive and truly understand His answer. Sometimes the only way to get an answer to a prayer is patience, persistence in asking, and faith that God will answer when you can comprehend all of the other necessary elements.

We are like growing children. When you talk to a child about their body, you don't immediately jump into sharing the intricate workings of each body part— that would overwhelm and maybe even confuse them. You must start by teaching them the proper names for things, where they might be located on the body, their general purpose, and so on. If you were to tell a toddler how the intestines worked, they would be terribly confused. They first need to understand that what they eat eventually comes back out. They have to learn at their level of understanding. God could give you the answer to a prayer right now, but if you didn't have all of the other information surrounding the subject, you might get lost. It could be overwhelming or confusing, and you might lose interest. If you get little bits and pieces at a time, you can experience some satisfaction as you prepare to receive more. You will be more inclined to ask more questions as you become ready for greater understanding.

In addition to understanding that God answers in His own way and time, He also isn't in the business of offering handouts. If you want something from God, don't expect it to just fall into your lap. Have you ever heard the concept of teaching a man to fish rather than just giving him one? You can give a man a fish and it will feed him for a day. If you teach him to fish, you have provided a way for him to feed

himself and others for the rest of his life. Which is more valuable? The meal? Or the skill? Sure, his immediate need has been handled if you feed him, but he will need to be fed again and again. Some people are incredibly generous and willing to provide basic needs for people, but most people eventually get tired of supporting someone who is capable of feeding and taking care of themselves. God wants to feed us, but He wants us to eventually develop skills to act for ourselves. We have been created as beings who can either choose to act and make something of our lives, or just let life happen to us. On one hand, being the maker of your circumstance. On the other, a victim of any and everything we choose not to take responsibility for.

"In the grand division of all of God's creations, there are things to act and things to be acted upon. Endowed with agency, you and I are agents, and we primarily are to act and not just be acted upon." –David A. Bednar

A life full of choices, actions, failures, and successes is much more meaningful than one of a victim who has no choice. God intends for us to choose and act for ourselves, and hopefully, as we do and experience more, we will become more wise and capable of doing things on our own. We can become proficient in repeating the results we hope to achieve, over and over again. He wants us to learn from each experience, each little win, and each little failure, piece by piece until we have a perfect understanding of things.

If you go into prayer expecting a handout, know that your Heavenly Father might give you what you are asking for, but He is more likely to provide a path to reach your end goal. Sometimes you have to know what to ask for, or how to ask God for things. For example, if you need a new car, you can pray for it and He might miraculously provide one. You are more likely to get a quick response and outcome from prayer if you ask Him for directions on how to acquire the thing you are in need of. Approach God in prayer, with pen and paper in hand, ready to act upon whatever direction you might receive. Maybe the answer comes as you sit and wait patiently for a response, as an idea, a feeling, a quiet whisper. Or, the answer might come through the actions or words of another person, maybe a song or a book. Some people have

dreams giving them guidance. For others, sometimes the answer doesn't come until they are in the process of trying to make it happen themselves. The quickest answers come when you are already in motion. I personally get hung up on details and often take too long to get to work. I have missed a lot of blessings because I didn't put any of my ideas into motion. If you have more than one idea, don't spend too much time deciding which one you are going to do: just pick one and get working! Blessings, answers, and miracles will inevitably follow.

~ Church ~

Spend time with other people who are actively seeking Him. I know that going to church is not something that everyone agrees with, but spending time with others who are looking for God or already have a relationship with Him, creates an atmosphere where you can gain and develop a greater understanding and appreciation for who God is and what He has to offer you. Schedule a regular time dedicated to being around others with the intent to know God better. Go to church and engage in regular gospel discussion.

Discuss what you have learned in your own studies and experiences. Listen to and learn from others' experiences and understanding. You can learn a lot about God through other people. He will often help you recognize what messages are specifically meant for you. It is going to take some time for you to be able to sort through what is really coming from God and what isn't, but as you consistently seek Him, He will help you to recognize the difference. He will begin to communicate to you in a way that is unique to who you are and how you learn. Pay attention to those little messages, recognize them, you can even take note of them. When God sees that you are paying attention, you will begin to hear from Him more frequently.

6

ON YOUR SPIRITUAL IOURNEY

The Power of Ag

"When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth, then I beheld all the work of God."—Ecclesiastes 8:15

Without action, you cannot expect a response. To be clear, works are not the source by which you are saved, they are the way to connect with, know, and understand God. Jesus Christ saves us through grace despite all we can do.

The goal is to ACT upon the things that you learn through prayer, scripture study, and going to church. Out of all of the ways to invite an experience with God, action is the absolute most effective way to get a response. Refer back to God's two greatest commandments. Love Him and love others. I will make it even easier and suggest that in loving others, you are showing love for God. If you are having a difficult time recognizing specific actions you can take, go back to the scriptures. Much of the Old Testament (especially the first several books), is filled with guidelines that can help you decide upon actions that will move you forward (the 10 Commandments being a great start). Read through the New Testament, observe, and act as Christ did (serving others and being kind were key elements of His ministry).

Now that you have a simple outline of what is expected of you, you can sit down with pen and paper and approach this topic prayerfully.

- What actions can you take to be a more kind and loving person?
- Do you have a habit of gossiping about others?
- Trying to get even with people who have wronged you?
- Are you a habitual liar? (Maybe the person you are lying to is yourself.)

When was the last time you looked in the mirror and gave yourself a proper evaluation?

- What kind of person are you? One who shows love and kindness?
- Or are you someone who creates tension and anger?
- Are your actions self-serving?
- Or are you compassionate and charitable?

Take a deep internal look at yourself and determine common behaviors that you can improve upon to become a more kind, compassionate, and loving person. Most people have at least one thing they can improve about themselves, but if you are still struggling, you can ask God to help you see what changes you need to make. He is always willing to show us the areas in our lives we can improve upon. Wait and watch patiently for His response. If you struggle with prayer, ask someone you trust (someone that you won't lash out at for their honesty). Be willing to accept a little criticism to increase your chances of experiencing God. Ask yourself "What is something I can do to become a better, more kind person?"

Once you have a list of changes you can make, pick one. I don't want you to even think about changing more than one thing right now. Just pick one. Perhaps the easiest? Then, make a plan on how to achieve it. Come up with small and simple steps to change this behavior. If you are trying to eliminate bad behavior, come up with a good behavior to take its place. When you are trying to overcome a bad habit, if you don't fill its place with something good, it will likely be replaced with a new bad habit. Always fill the space left behind with something good.

If you are tempted to start speaking poorly about someone, maybe

the goal can be to come up with something positive to say about them. Or don't say anything at all. If you can't escape the conversation, and you can't think of something nice to say about the person, find a way to change the subject to something more positive.

These kinds of behavior changes are not easy, so don't expect to perfect something like this in a couple of days or even weeks. This is something that takes consistent effort and deliberate choices to overcome, and it could take years to feel like you have fully conquered it. Do not beat yourself up for mistakes, just commit to doing better next time. Ask forgiveness, forgive yourself, and come up with a plan on how you can better execute your goal the next time you are faced with the same situation. Then, don't forget to follow through.

Fixing a mistake, repairing a relationship, or righting a wrong will bring you closer to God faster than if you leave the victim of your unkind behavior (including yourself) out of the process all together. If a promise between you and God is all you can bring yourself to do right now, acknowledge and confess your mistake to yourself and God, ask forgiveness, make a commitment to do better and follow through with what you say you are going to do. If it is serious enough, your Heavenly Father will nudge you to make things right. This is repentance. Repentance has the ability to change your entire life and produce some of the most miraculous events you will ever experience. This is the process that opens more doors than anything else. A genuine regret, apology, and commitment to change will not only change your situation, it will change your heart and your relationship with God. It will change your relationship with the people around you as well. Don't believe me? Put it to the test and find out for yourself.

If your repentance process involves apologizing to another person, don't be discouraged if the other person involved does not respond in the way you had hoped or expected. A response from that person is not always going to turn out the way you want. It might even become more difficult before it gets better. But I promise you, if you make the effort to fix things, God will always bless you in response.

As I was approaching my late teens and becoming my own person, I struggled with severe, chronic depression. I wasn't sure if there was a God that existed, but really hoped He did. I wanted desperately to feel like I was of worth and that there was someone out there that loved me. I grew up in a loving home and had plenty of people in my life that loved and cared for me, but for some reason, I had no self worth. I also didn't believe when people told me that I was loved. I determined that if I couldn't find relief, I was going to end my life. I didn't think I had much to live for, nor would I be missed.

I took this to God with the hope that He was there. I told Him how miserable and broken I felt. I expressed my gratitude for the things that I had, but also expressed that there wasn't a lot I had to live for. I just wanted relief. I wanted to have peace and feel like there was some purpose for my life. As I knelt in silence, hoping for a response, I began to think of the things in my life that I was doing wrong; the things that were morally questionable. I realized there were mistakes that I needed to clear up and was embarrassed. I really wanted to keep it to myself. And since it was "just a thought," I shrugged it off.

Day after day, I would return to hopeful prayer with a similar plea. Day after day the same thought came back to me. It was as though I had this invisible weight hanging on my shoulder nagging me. I prayed and asked forgiveness, but it would not go away. I cried out "I'm not even hurting anyone, can't this just be between you and me?" The sense that I needed to confess my mistakes to a member of my clergy became something that seemed like a priority. I told God "I don't know if this is the Holy Ghost, but since it won't go away, I am going to assume it is from you, and though I don't want to, I will obey."

I could have continued in silence and never addressed the issue, but I couldn't help but think that there was another power involved. As persistent as this nagging thought was, I decided to address it. On my own, I could have just put it behind me and no one would have ever known. The problem was that every time I prayed, the same thought returned to me over and over again. I began to think that maybe God was speaking to me through these thoughts, and in order for me to get

Him to respond to my plea, I should repent and make things right.

I scheduled an appointment with my church leader. I was really nervous and uncomfortable, but thought "If this is really from God, and I don't take a leap of faith, I may be stuck on this forever." I went into my appointment expecting that if God really was there, and wanted me to do this, that He would just make everything right, and I wouldn't have to worry about it anymore. All I had to do was confess. Imagine how humiliated and ashamed I felt when I realized that my actions had consequences. In taking a leap of faith, I discovered this "repentance" thing wasn't going to be as easy as I had hoped. I was so upset.

Feeling humiliated and betrayed, I went home in tears. Surely a loving God wouldn't send me to repent, just so I could come out feeling worse than when I went in! I was furious, broken, and confused. I thought repentance was supposed to be a blessing! Why then, does this feel like a punishment? I locked myself in my room, and flooded my prayers with everything I was feeling. "I thought you loved me! That's what I have always been told. Have they been lying to me my whole life? Why would you betray me like that? Why would you send me to repent if I was just going to come home feeling worse? Am I a joke? If you really do exist, and you love me, why can't you just tell me? I thought you could do anything!"

What I didn't realize was that I had begun to speak and act as though God was in the room with me, despite the fact I still was unsure about whether He was real. I was exercising faith. I was acting as though I was with Him, having a real conversation, with the expectation of a response. I was no longer allowing myself to believe that He wasn't there. If God was real, I had to act as though I believed He was real.

For some strange reason, I experienced a shift. Something in me had changed. I collapsed in grief. "God, are you really there? Do you care about me like I have always been taught?" At that moment, it was as though the flood gates had opened and my whole being was filled with an overwhelming love and peace that I had never felt before.

From the top of my head to the bottom of my toes, I was filled with warmth. All of the sadness, the darkness, the emptiness, disappeared. My Heavenly Father made Himself known to me that night, and my life has never been the same.

Through an act of hopeful faith and the repentance process, I discovered that my Heavenly Father blesses positive action, even if that action or admission of guilt results in disciplinary action. It might be terrifying, and consequences for bad behavior are usually inevitable, but if you are willing to take the leap needed to make things right, you will always see blessings follow. God shows up for those who are eager to right their wrongs, and make amends.

As you are able to improve in one behavior and feel more confident in your ability to follow through, add another change to the list and start working on it. Make a routine of continually improving one small habit at a time. Don't forget that you are never too far gone to come back and start improving again. Your sins don't make you unlovable or irredeemable. Your mistakes, no matter how bad, can be made right through the blood of Christ. You are never so damaged that your Heavenly Father would reject a sincere and humble offering to commit to doing a little better and trying again. That is the beauty of of God's love and grace, whenever you are ready to pick back up again, God is willing to step in, forgive you, and provide added strength to move forward little by little. From failure to failure to eventual success. You do not have to be a perfect person or live a perfect life in order to approach God for help. He will take you as you are and add to your efforts. God just wants you to show up. By actively addressing our shortcomings and seeking improvement, we forge a deeper bond with Him, and He consistently offers His hand in our transformative journey.

7

Keflections and Frating

"Keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen" – Deuteronomy 4:9

Tracking your experiences and paying close attention to your results can often make all the difference in being able to see God and His involvement in your life. This is not something that I do perfectly, but when I take a look back at my notes from past experiences with God, I am blown away at the miracles and tender mercies that He has blessed me with.

Start by writing down one way that God has shown up for you at the end of each day. This is not always an easy task at the beginning because you don't know exactly what you are looking for. During those first few weeks, you may need to pray for some additional help in recognizing the little miracles (some people write them off as coincidences) that have taken place in the day. After several days of keeping track of these little miracles, you will begin to realize that there are so many tiny miracles happening on a consistent basis, that you can no longer consider them coincidence.

When you finally begin to recognize His hand each day, make sure to really feel and express your genuine appreciation for His tender mercies and quiet expressions of love. Recognizing your blessings brings a richness to your life that can't be achieved in any other way.

Make gratitude a regular part of your communion with your Heavenly Father. The more gratitude you express, the more blessings you will see.

God is an active participant in your life and when you begin to recognize and acknowledge Him every day, your life will change. Your eyes will be opened to a whole new realm of existence and understanding. You will want to experience Him more frequently. Your heart will change. You will change and your life will be filled with a joy you had never thought possible. A joy that will fill you with an overwhelming desire to share with others.

Remember:

- 1. Like the wind, you might not be able to see God, but it is possible to see evidences of Him if you are looking for them.
- 2. Discovering God's existence is a process, He is not going to make Himself known to you without a genuine desire to know Him, and a willingness to change yourself for the better.
- 3. Developing a relationship with, and loving God and the people around you can help create an environment the Lord can be present in.
- 4. Acting in faith by being willing to recognize your mistakes, and making a genuine effort to right your wrongs, will open windows to unexpected blessings and opportunities to know your Heavenly Father better.
- 5. Acknowledging God's hand in your life, and expressing gratitude for his tender mercies provides greater opportunity to experience them more frequently.

It is my hope that in following these steps, you will finally have the opportunity to experience your Heavenly Father for yourself and develop the peace and connection with Him that you deserve. My journey to discovering God felt complicated and frustrating. It was not an experience that came effortlessly. Personally, I prefer finding the direct path to things rather than struggling with the frustration of figuring them out on my own, but it seems that learning "the hard way"

is a battle I was destined to have.

Discovering these true methods for myself changed everything for me. My relationship with my Heavenly Father still ebbs and flows. I go through times where His hand is so clearly apparent to me, and others where I really have to look for him. The more I resent God, the more difficult it is for me to see His blessings, and easier it is for me to forget the experiences I have had with Him. On the reverse, the more I am willing to set my wants aside and submit to His teachings, the more I can see and feel His love each day.

Writing this book has been a really good reminder of what I can be doing to improve my own relationship with my Heavenly Parents, and experience their love more abundantly in my life. There is so much joy and peace that follows a desire and effort to make God a priority in your life. May God bless you in your continuing effort to find and connect with Him.

I share these things with you in the name of my beloved Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Appendix

FOR CONNECTING WITH, AND IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Book of Mormon
- Churchofjesuschrist.org
- Gospel Library App



Hey, I'm Tamara

My primary goal in sharing my experiences is to help others find the happiness that they seek. Check out handbookforhappiness.com to see what resources are available for you.





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