

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ANSWER GUIDE

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MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS **ANSWER GUIDE**

AMAZING FAQs 4 TEENS



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Contributing writers: Doug Batchelor, Janet Evert, Clarissa Fiedler, Clifford Goldstein, Tanya Huether, Anthony Lester, Christopher Lester, and Nicole Parker

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Flying high in the sky over a crowded air show as cameras rolled, a single-engine acrobatic airplane was performing a dizzying array of stunts when the unthinkable happened—the right wing completely snapped off!

Amazingly, the cameraman retained composure and continued taping as the wounded plane tumbled toward the ground. But somehow the incredible pilot, even with an entire wing gone, managed to aim the nose up and stop the death spiral—and then safely lowered the crippled plane to the ground for an extraordinary landing!

A video of this astounding aviation feat soon went viral on the Internet. Thousands inquired about the superhuman pilot. But it didn't take long for keen viewers to discover that the whole thing was a hoax done with special effects.



In a world that seems to be spinning madly toward chaos, we each long to believe something extraordinary is in control—that there is some greater power and purpose ready to save us. At the same time, we want to clearly know the truth.

Yet every day we find ourselves swimming in hyper-information and processing tons of trivia flashing by us at the speed of YouTube. But in this blizzard of spam, very little seems reliable. Almost every week the news hails new discoveries that replace knowledge we thought we knew. Is there anything solid out there you can trust?

Good question.

Do you have an answer? If you're like most people on the planet, you're not sure. In fact, you're struggling every day wondering what to do with your brief appearance in this world. You go to school and hope to pass. You go to work and hope to make ends meet. You hope to find love but wonder if you can have anything deeper than Facebook. You hope to have security yet can't go anywhere without feeling at least a little unsafe.

You might be seeking answers from your parents, friends, or on the Internet.

Unfortunately, nobody has perfect parents. Your friends are usually in the same boat as you. And the Internet can be a source of contradictions and confusion. So where can you turn to get dependable

answers to your most important questions? Where do you go to get answers for the real FAQs of life?



What about money? Relationships? Sex? Religion? Politics? What’s the point of it all?
More good questions.

The bottom line is, we all just want peace and happiness. But with all the unpredictable pain and misery in the world, is that even possible?

Good news! There is, in fact, a book—a best-selling book, no less—that has real and meaningful answers. It’s a book you can trust because it has proven, time and again, to be reliable in all that it says about our lives, our happiness, and our future.

This “interactive” workbook that you now hold in your hands explores the most important questions using this unmatched source of truth—the Bible, which has stood the test of time for over 4,000 years.

It is our hope that this short but powerful lesson book provides the answers you need to find that happiness and peace you want in your life. Welcome to the most important questions ... and the answers to them from God’s Word.





Is There Really a God?

CHAPTER ONE

“How each of us understands the meaning of life comes down to how we answer one ultimate question: Does God really exist?” —Unknown

Have you ever read Daniel Defoe’s famous tale *Robinson Crusoe*? It’s about a young man who, against his parent’s wishes, goes on a sailing adventure around the world. In the story, Crusoe eventually winds up shipwrecked and alone on a deserted island. Though his situation is tough, the resilient man learns to survive by growing food, building a shelter, and raising goats. Over the years, he even trains a pet parrot and develops skills in basket weaving, bread making, and pottery. In spite of the hardships, he eventually adjusts and, at times, even feels fairly content.

However, while making his living on the island, he believes he is utterly alone. He has good reason for that because he never sees any evidence of anyone else ... that is, until one day, he’s walking on the beach and finds—to his shock—fresh human footprints where he hasn’t walked before!

Unfortunately, these footprints turn out to be left by cannibals, but that’s another story. The point is that although Robinson hadn’t actually seen anyone, the footprints he found were powerful proof that, indeed, someone else was on the island with him.

Now here’s the most important question: *Is mankind alone in the universe?*

Is life on earth just a bizarre accident of colliding atoms—or is there some divine plan in the complicated organisms we see around us? And if there is a God behind creation, where can we turn to find the evidence of His footprints?

Jesus said, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Millions of people, across thousands of years, have recognized the compelling evidence for the existence of God found in the unique book called the Bible, which is also called Scripture or the Word of God.

We can find a lot of information about who God is and His purpose for humanity when reading the Bible, so we’ll explore all our *Most Important Questions* by using the Bible as a springboard of discovery. You will see that the footprints of God’s existence are everywhere!

As we find answers to your questions together, you’ll need to do a little detective work along the way. Look up the Bible chapter and verse references (from the New King James Bible) to fill in the blanks with the missing words. It’s easy to do, and it will change your life!

1. If God created everything, where did He come from?

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from _____ to _____, You are God” (Psalm 90:2).

Wait! Before we go too far in exploring the existence of God, perhaps it’s best to define exactly what we’re dealing with.

What is God?

Strangely, most dictionaries you’ll find have rather vague definitions of God—so to get the most precise picture possible, here is a combination of definitions from various online dictionaries, including Dictionary.com and Wikipedia:



God (noun) The one perfect, eternal, supernatural supreme being conceived as omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, originator, and ruler of the universe; the principal object of faith and worship in monotheistic religions.

God is described here as eternal. But what is eternity? To get a clearer picture, draw a straight horizontal line in the space below with an arrow pointing off each end.

Now suppose the line you’ve drawn represents eternity. If you follow the line forever in either direction, you realize that it has no beginning in the past and no ending in the future. This is how long God has been and will be around! *Infinity!*

Of course, eternity is not the easiest concept for the human mind to grasp. For example, what is the largest number you can think of? Write it down on the line below.

Just kidding!

You can’t really do it, can you? There isn’t enough space. And that’s because no matter what number you write down, you can keep adding zeros; there will always be one number higher. The process would go on forever!



The point is, unlike everything else, God didn't come from anywhere. He has always existed, and He always will.

Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (Revelation 22:13). (Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; Omega is the last.) Jesus *is* the beginning and the end. Everything else, the created universe, comes in between.

2. But how can I believe in a God I can't see?



"Now to the King eternal, immortal, _____, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever" (1 Timothy 1:17).

The Bible says that God is invisible, which means we can't see Him ... *yet*.

But so what? Like pure information—which is immaterial; that is, not made up of matter—we believe in a lot of things we can't see even though we *know* they're there.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3).

That which we see is made of things we do not see. That shouldn't be too hard to understand in our day and age, right?

At this very moment, millions of cell phone calls and radio signals are filling the air around you, each signal of sound as real as your own voice. Yet you hear none of it. Why? Unless you have the proper electronic equipment turned on and tuned in, you just aren't able hear that soundless tornado of information. Yet they are swirling in the space around you right now, as real as the nose on your face!

Keep in mind then that God and His angels have not always been invisible to us. Before mankind rebelled, humans could see and talk to God. The bad news is that sin broke our audio-video connection with Him; the good news is that He can still hear and see you.

3. What other evidence can I see that speaks for the existence of God?

“In the beginning God created the _____ and the _____” (Genesis 1:1).

Who created the heavens and the earth? God did.

Some folks don't like the idea of God, so they actually argue that the universe was created out of “nothing” by no one. The atheist author of a bestselling book wrote: “It seems impossible that you could get something from nothing, but the fact that once there was nothing but now there is a universe is evident proof that you can.” (That's what we call talking in a circle!)

What sounds more logical? “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” or “In the beginning, *no one, nowhere, with nothing* created *everyone and everything everywhere*”?

“You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:11).



The Bible is clear that creation itself proves God exists.

But that doesn't stop some people from trying to find other ways to get around His existence. One of the most famous scientists in the 20th century, Francis Crick, a Nobel Prize winner no less, believed that aliens from other planets brought life to the earth. That is the only way, this atheist believed, one could explain the incredible complexity of life found on this planet.

Yet even if you accept an alien-directed genesis, you are admitting that life on earth came from an outside intelligence with a plan. Plus, the alien theory still doesn't solve the dilemma: *Where did the aliens come from who seeded life here?* Even an idea as silly and desperate as space aliens doesn't allow one to escape from the logic of God's existence. It just moves the mystery to a far-off imaginary galaxy where it cannot be challenged scientifically.

What makes more sense for our existence? God created aliens who planted life on our world ...

or what the Bible says?

“Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3). Yes, God—not ourselves, or space aliens for that matter—is the one ”who has made us.”

4. Can I find evidence for God in the creatures He made?

“But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; and the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the _____ has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?” (Job 12:7–10).

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Job declared thousands of years ago that the existence of God can be clearly seen in the incredible diversity and beauty of the animals (12:7–10).

Indeed, look at the kaleidoscope of creatures and how incredibly complex they are. Consider how perfectly they are adapted to their environments, many through amazing symbiotic relationships. Yet we are asked to believe that all of these complex cooperative designs and interworking systems arose by chance and out of nothing!



Job also said that in God’s hand is the life of “every living thing” (12:10). This might explain why scientists, after so many years, are still at a loss to explain what life even is—much less why it works or how it arose. Moreover, you can take all the elements of a plant or animal, or even a simple cell, give them to the best scientists in the best labs, and one thing is for sure: These brilliant men and women will have no idea how to create life out of it.

That’s because life comes from God Himself, not from the matter He used to create it. “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Without God, nothing.

5. But doesn't science tell me that God doesn't exist?

“I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully _____ ; Marvelous are Your _____ , And that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:14).

King David wrote these words thousands of years before the invention of the microscope as he marveled on the incredible way humanity was made.

Contrary to popular culture, which says that science has proven God doesn't exist, the very opposite is true: Science has made the existence of God even more obvious than when this psalm was written.



For example, consider the simple cell. (Well, no one is calling it “simple” any more.) For 100 years, some scientists taught that the single cell was nothing but a crude blob of protoplasm. Today, they know it has a fantastically intricate design and staggering complexity that boggles the mind.

Believing this could happen by chance is not too different than believing you could fire a nuclear bomb onto the surface of the moon and find that the resulting settling dust formed into a fully operational Disneyland amusement park.

Likewise, just one human cell can be compared in complexity to a major city: sewers, electricity, a central government, electrical grid, roads, transportation, borders, power plants, and on and on. Think what it would take for a city to reproduce itself—cloning itself by splitting down the middle and having both halves already functioning perfectly. Impossible. Yet cells do it all the time. In fact, it's happening now in your body too!



Science has also revealed that an amazing amount of information is stored in a human cell, which has enough space to store about 3 terabytes. And other kinds of cells can store the equivalent information of 1,000 encyclopedias. Considering that the human body is made up of about 75 trillion cells, that's ... well ... *an amazing amount of information!*

And that's the result of an accident?

All this powerful evidence for the existence of God has been revealed by science. No wonder Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists of all time, wrote this about his discoveries: "O, God, I think thy thoughts after thee!"

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

Far from disproving the existence of God, science has compounded the evidence in favor of God's existence.

6. What can astronomy teach me about the existence of God?

"The _____ the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1–3).

King David could only write about what he could see with the naked eye, yet he saw the glory of God in the incredible beauty of a night sky full of stars—or in the sunrise and sunset.



Today, however, with extraordinary advances in astronomy like the powerful Hubble telescope, the heavens speak louder than ever about God's glory in ways David couldn't imagine.

Take, for instance, the size of the universe, something that we have only recently come to comprehend. At present, it's believed that the visible universe, the part we can see, is about 157,000,000,000 light years wide. That means that traveling at the speed of light—186,000 miles per *second*—you would need 157 billion *years* to traverse it.

But what's even more amazing is that scientists now speculate that the part of the universe we can see comprises only about seven percent of the entire universe! No wonder the Psalmist wrote:

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:3, 4).

That's the amazing thing: Though God is so powerful that He could create such a big universe, He still deeply loves and cares for miniscule creatures like us.

7. Can questions of right and wrong help me understand the existence of God?

“[Gentiles] show the work of the law written in their hearts, their _____ also bearing witness, and between themselves their _____ accusing or else excusing them” (Romans 2:15).

Where did human beings ever get the idea of right and wrong?

How does something made up of flesh and blood and bones have a natural sense of what is good or evil? The explanations of atheists fail to explain where we get the “inner voice” that guides us morally. Where else but from God could we get this compass?



Professor Paul Bloom of Yale University has demonstrated through careful research and tests that even babies as young as six months have a built-in moral sense of good and bad; it seems to be “bred in the bones” from birth.

This is because God is moral, and He created us to be moral. Because of sin, our conscience is somewhat crippled and we often have perverted and distorted views of good and evil. “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the heart” (Proverbs 21:2).

Two men were debating the existence of God and whether moral values were absolute or relative. The atheist insisted that humans alone decided what is right and wrong. The Christian replied, “In some cultures people are taught to love their neighbors; in others they are taught to eat them. Which do you prefer?”

The idea of doing only what you think is right and wrong is clearly condemned in the Bible—and with good reason. Many horrible things have been done through the centuries by people who, fighting their consciences, did what deep down they knew was wrong.

“Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14 RSV).

8. Can I see evidence of God in the events of history?

“So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a _____ and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders” (Deuteronomy 26:8).

Throughout history, we can see powerful evidence of divine intervention in the affairs of mankind—amazing events that cannot be written off as mere coincidences.

On July 9, 1755, during the French and Indian War, a force of 1,500 British soldiers was ambushed in the open by French and Indian fighters shooting from the woods. One by one, the marksmen shot British officers from their horses until only one officer remained.



But amazingly, as round after round was fired at him, the sole officer was not hurt. Even his horse was shot out from under him. The native warriors eventually just stared in disbelief while the young officer gathered the remaining British foot soldiers and led them to safety. That evening, the officer noticed his coat was riddled with holes—yet there was no mark on his skin.

A few days later, young lieutenant colonel George Washington wrote his brother, “By the all-powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me yet escaped unhurt, although death was leveling my companions on every side!”



Of course, the 23-year-old went on to become the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and the first president of the United States. During his years of service in the Revolutionary War, Washington was never wounded in battle. He escaped flying bullets on four other occasions and survived contracting diphtheria, malaria, tuberculosis, and smallpox. When you are guarded by the providential care of God, the Bible says, “A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you” (Psalm 91:7).

History is filled with evidence of God intervening in the affairs of mankind.

9. If God is love, why is there so much evil, pain, and suffering in the world?

“You were _____ in your ways from the day you were created, Till _____ was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:15).

This Bible passage is about Lucifer, one of God’s most powerful created beings.

Notice that it says this beautiful angel had been created “perfect.” Yet, eventually, “iniquity” was found in him. How could that be?

It’s simple: The perfect being was created with moral freedom. And, unfortunately, Lucifer, now called Satan, chose to rebel against God. He went on to recruit one third of heaven’s angels to join him. Then he led the first people, Adam and Eve, also perfect beings with free moral choice, to rebel against God too. And sin, with a great deal of Satan’s help, has caused all the pain and suffering we see in this world.



Years ago, a science fiction story was told about a man who lost his wife. Technology allowed him to create a perfect robot copy of her; it looked, talked, felt, and acted exactly as his wife had. There was no real difference, except one. He could not make the robot love him. He could make her *act* as if she loved him, but as a robot, she was incapable of real love. Love, to be love, must be freely given. In the end, the man destroyed the machine because that’s what it was—a machine, an automaton that could not truly love.

In contrast, God created us as beings who *could* love, which demands moral freedom, and the suffering we see in this world comes from the abuse of that freedom. The good news is that, through Jesus, we have the promise that one day soon all this pain and evil will end forever.

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

10. Is the devil real or just the dark side of people’s imagination?

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the _____ of the darkness of this age, against _____ of

wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The Bible teaches that we should believe in the existence of a real devil—just as we should believe in a God we can’t see.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Remember in school reading about World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Something terrible happened to many of those who survived the actual blast; that is, those who weren’t killed directly by the explosion. Many of them, within a few days, started to get sick. They were having stomach problems, headaches, bleeding gums, and worse. Soon their entire stomach functions stopped working entirely. Others suffered damage to their bone marrow. Over time, many died slow and painful deaths—all caused by the same thing.



It was radiation sickness. The invisible radiation released from the bombs was a poison that killed them. But these poor souls felt *nothing* of the radiation as it bombarded their bodies. They saw nothing, tasted nothing, heard nothing, and smelled nothing.

Likewise, though also invisible, the devil is as real as radiation. So, of course, you can believe in something evil that you don’t see or hear or taste or smell or feel.

11. How can I know that the power of God is stronger than the devil?

“He who is in you is _____ than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Simple logic tells us, and the Bible affirms, that the Creator of the universe has to be more powerful than the creation itself.

The devil knows God is stronger than he is because he knows his days are numbered. “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Revelation 12:12).



Satan is very much alive, aggressively working in our world, unleashing his wrath and anger on land and sea. Suffering, death—all the things we hate so much—came because of the fall. God didn't create these things. Rather, He created a perfect world that was ruined through the wrong choices of free moral creatures.

But neither Satan nor sin can ultimately prevail. The Bible says, “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are” (Revelation 20:10). That's how you can know that God is more powerful than the devil.

12. What is the greatest evidence that God really does care for me?

“For God so loved the world that He _____ His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

No question, the supreme evidence for God's love is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross.



This truth becomes even more remarkable when you consider just how small our little world is in contrast to the entire cosmos. This planet is like a speck of sand amid all the deserts of the world, yet God loves the people on it so much that He sent His Son to the earth to die in our place.

Jesus came to show you how much God really loves you.

“Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7, 8).

Even for a friend, most people aren't willing to give their lives. Yet even while we were living as selfish sinners, as enemies of God, Jesus died for us to give us a chance at eternal life.



God is very real. He is not just a myth that someone made up so that we would act good. Instead, He sent His own Son to show us what He is really like. Jesus came to teach us how to live and how to love one another—while also dying in our place for our sins.

But the devil is real too. Satan is the one who inspired evil men to crucify Jesus. And he wants to destroy you because he knows how much God loves you.

At the cross, we can see Satan's love of power and Jesus' power of love.

Whether you believe it or not, you choose each day to follow one of these two as your leader. However, since you now know that God will be the ultimate victor in this battle between good and evil, why not choose to follow Him? He has been waiting patiently all your life for you to come to Him.

Do you believe that you can trust your life to a loving God who was willing to suffer and die to save you? Yes / No

Are you willing to believe in Him now? _____

“If there is no God, then all that exists is time and chance acting on matter. If this is true then the difference between your thoughts and mine correspond to the difference between shaking up a bottle of Mountain Dew and a bottle of Dr. Pepper.” —Douglas Wilson



Can I Trust the Bible?

CHAPTER TWO

“A thorough understanding of the Bible is better than a college education.” —President Theodore Roosevelt

Isn't it amazing how ancient explorers could know their exact locations just by studying the sun, the moon, and the stars?

For instance, between 1768 and 1775, the famous British explorer James Cook made two voyages around the world charting the South Pacific—using nothing more than a sextant, a compass, and the heavens above for navigation.

Submarine navigation, however, was never so simple. For a time, the secret vessels had to surface frequently to get their bearings, thus exposing themselves to the enemy. But eventually, the U.S. Navy developed an internal gyroscopic navigation system. This sophisticated apparatus gave submarines their precise locations while still hidden deep beneath the dark ocean.



The advanced navigation system was fully proven in 1958 when the nuclear-powered *USS Nautilus* accomplished the “impossible,” becoming the first vessel to traverse the Arctic Ocean *under* the polar ice. The *Nautilus* traveled from the Bering Strait to Iceland via the North Pole in just four days. Because the sub was unable to surface, if the navigation system had failed during the journey, the crew of 116 would surely have been doomed.

Now here's the most important question: Can we trust the Bible as a navigation system for our lives?

In a world of constantly changing values, flooded with contradictory voices, we certainly need a dependable way to guide our lives. Over the millennia, millions have looked to the Bible as a constant, reliable compass that can help us navigate—not only through the day-to-day challenges of life, but also for making decisions that affect our eternal destinies.

1. Is the Bible really from God, or is it a bunch of fabricated fables by men?

“All Scripture is given by _____ of God” (2 Timothy 3:16).



Some time ago, a skeptic in London speaking about the Bible said it was impossible for him to believe in a book whose authority was unknown. A Christian in the audience asked him if anyone knew who actually compiled the multiplication table. “No,” the skeptic responded.

“Then, of course, you do not believe in it.”

“Oh yes,” the skeptic challenged. “I believe in it because it works so well.”

The Christian replied, “So does the Bible.”

“Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

The Bible boldly claims that even though not every part was written by talented authors, every part of it *is* inspired by God. In fact, it says, “The entirety of Your word is truth” (Psalm 119:160).

But we need to look a little deeper and check out some of the evidence before we just accept this internal claim of inspiration.



Did you know? The Bible is the only book read by all classes of people around the globe.

2. Do the prophecies in the Bible really come true?

“I am the LORD. ... Behold the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I _____ you of them” (Isaiah 42:8, 9).

You might have seen the science fiction movie *Back to the Future*, in which a high school student travels back in time and discovers that any little detail he alters while in the past changes the future of the entire world.

This film might be fantasy, but the idea is based in truth. Every action we perform in some way affects every other molecule around us. So for anyone to perfectly predict the future, even one day in advance, accurately all the time, requires ultimate power.

In the Bible, God foretells many things long before they happen and often predicts exact details millennia in the future. “I am God ... Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isaiah 46:9, 10).

When we see how these very precise predictions have come true, we recognize that the Scriptures are truly inspired by God. It also gives us confidence that the Scripture's other teachings are true as well.

Suppose a group of hikers is stranded on the wrong side of a deep canyon when sudden flooding causes a rushing river. Impossible to cross by swimming, the only way for the group to safely cross over the river is on a long, swaying bridge made of rope and rough planks. The bridge looks old and dilapidated as it hangs in mid-air high over the wild water. The nervous groups wonders whether it could support even a fly without collapsing into the raging waters below.



Eventually, the first brave soul cautiously ventures onto the bridge, lightly tip-toeing onto the first few planks. When she doesn't fall through, she then bounces on it a little to test its strength. When she finally makes it safely across, the next person is a little less nervous. And the last person, after every

one else has crossed over, is downright bold!

Why? Because the bridge, though old, has been tested and proven to be dependable.

It's the same with the Bible. It's okay to test it before you trust your life to it; however, you should determine that it's dependable *before* you come across something that really challenges your faith. So let's test it now, together, to see if we can have confidence in it. Even the Bible says, "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Let's consider some prime examples of Bible prophecies that have been strikingly fulfilled.



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- In Daniel chapters 2, 7, and 8, prophecies are made about four world empires. One was in power at the time, but the other three were yet future—some far in the future. Now, 2,500 years later, we read in our history books that the kingdom of Babylon was overthrown by the Persians, who were conquered by the Greeks, who in turn were conquered by Rome, which was itself later split into smaller kingdoms. We don't think twice about them, but these events were all prophesied in the Bible centuries in advance. It's like someone accurately predicting the next four presidents of the United States!
 - Cyrus was prophesied to be the warrior to capture Babylon (Isaiah 45:1–3). The Bible specifically named him before he was even born! And this wasn't just a horoscope with vague predictions, but a very specific prophecy of his future that came true.
 - Consider the many prophecies about Jesus' life in the Old Testament: where He would be born (Micah 5:2), where He would live as a child (Hosea 11:1), where he would later grow up (Isaiah 9:1), how His family would reject Him (Psalm 69:8), how much He'd be sold for (Zechariah 11:12), how He'd die (Psalm 22:16), where He'd be buried (Isaiah 53:9), and even what would happen to His clothes (Psalm 22:18).

These and dozens of other prophecies, studied with an honest heart, have even proven to Jews living today that Jesus is the promised Messiah. No one could know before He was born that each of these specific prophecies would happen in His life—unless a person was inspired by God.



Dr. Peter Stoner, former chairman of the departments of mathematics, astronomy, and engineering at Pasadena College, worked with 600 students for years to apply the “principle of probability” to the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming. They chose just eight prophecies and calculated that the chances of all eight being fulfilled in one man in a lifetime is: 1 in 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. What are the odds for the more than 125 prophecies of the Messiah? It couldn’t just *happen!*

- Jesus predicted in A.D. 30 that Jerusalem and the Jewish temple would be leveled to the ground (Luke 21:5, 6). In A.D. 70, it came to pass just as Jesus said it would. This prophecy alone and its accurate fulfillment convinced one Muslim that Jesus was greater than Mohammad and that the whole Bible must be true. What about you?
- Jesus predicted “the sea and waves roaring” in the last days (Luke 21:25, 26). The Indonesian tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and other disasters show that God knows the end from the beginning. We tend to be afraid of the future, but God holds the future.



- The apostle Paul accurately foretold the moral and spiritual condition of the last days: “Disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, ... headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1–5).
- “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35). You are helping to fulfill this prophecy. What would not pass away? Jesus’ words—you’ve just read them—have not passed away even 2,000 years later!

3. Is the Bible accurate when it speaks about areas of science

and health?

“God is greater than our heart, and knows _____” (1 John 3:20).



Let’s see for ourselves if the “word of the LORD is right” (Psalm 33:4).

- Three thousand years before scientists knew that the earth was suspended in space, the book of Job, the oldest in the Bible, recorded, “He hangs the earth on nothing” (Job 26:7).
- Way back in the years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah noted that the earth is round: “He who sits above the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22). In the 1400s, many people thought Columbus would sail off the edge of a flat world.
- The book of Job says that the wind has weight (28:25). Scientists now know this is true, but the Bible recorded it thousands of years ago.
- Here’s the secret to a lot of scientific questions: “By [Jesus] all things consist” (Colossians 1:17 KJV). In the Greek, the word “consist” used here literally means “hold together.” This is the likely answer to the physicists’ worrisome question, “Why doesn’t the atom fly apart?” The Bible says that the mysterious power holding it together is the Creator Himself.



- The wise man of Proverbs advises us to avoid alcoholic beverages (Proverbs 23:29–35). If this counsel were followed, more homes would be happy and prosperous—and lives would be saved. “Just one drink” has caused millions of deaths, crimes, miseries, and unrestrained

immoral behaviors.

- The Bible says, “Nor let us commit sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 10:8). God designed that there should be no sexual activity outside of marriage. Think of the unplanned babies that would never be aborted! Think of the painful breakups and heartaches that would be spared! Neither would AIDS and many other sexually transmitted diseases be a problem if this instruction were followed.

We can see easily how the practical information of the Bible is accurate. It is also extremely pertinent today when so many doubt God and are letting their faith and moral standards slip. The Bible brings safety and stability into our lives if we study it and make it the foundation for our decisions. (But we don't have to try to meet these life challenges alone; see the promises found in 1 Corinthians 15:57; Philippians 4:13; Romans 1:16.)

4. Is Bible history real history, or is it fiction?

“And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is _____ ; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (John 19:35).



Someone once said, “Bible prophecy is history written in advance.”

We've seen that Bible prophecy and the Bible's instructions about science are totally reliable. But what about its history? Let's explore and see if this aspect of the Bible is also trustworthy.

For a long time, people couldn't explain gravity. (They still have a hard time!) But did that mean there was no gravity? Of course not—every time they dropped a pencil, it fell. Nor has an apple ever soared into the air after coming loose from its branch.

So it is with the Bible. Just because we can't see *all* the archeological evidence for *all* the Bible stories doesn't mean they didn't happen. In fact, at a fast pace, archeologists have been discovering new evidence that supports Bible history. Time after time, skeptics of God's Word have to take back their accusations that Bible history is unreliable. For instance, they said the Hittite nation and King Belshazzar never existed, but archeology confirmed that they did! (See Deuteronomy 7:1; Daniel 5:1.)

Skeptics also said that the Bible record of Moses was not reliable because, they alleged, writing

and vehicles with wheels didn't exist at the time of Moses. Now they have discovered both did exist, proving again that the Bible is recording history, not writing imaginative fiction. (See Exodus 24:4; 14:25.)

Just because the people and nations the Bible speaks of are mostly dead and gone, it doesn't mean they didn't exist. "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you" (1 John 1:3).

Yes, you can trust Bible history.

Did you know? One of the greatest miracles of the Bible is its unity. Its primary theme is about when God would come to the earth as a man named Jesus.

5. What other evidence is there for the inspiration of God's Word?

"And beginning at Moses and all the _____, He expounded to them in all the _____ the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

How could 66 books written by 40 different people—with different occupations and social statuses—on three continents fit perfectly into one big harmonious volume?

Suppose you took 66 books on government written by 40 different politicians and put them all together in one volume. Would you know how to vote after reading it? Not likely!

Yet in the Bible we have kings, shepherds, judges, fishermen, priests, slaves, a doctor, and an army general all writing over a span of about 1,500 years—and yet their writings do not contradict or undermine each other. *Amazing!*



If you and a friend went to the amusement park together and then each wrote a report about what

you experienced, would your accounts be the same? No, probably not, because you have different perspectives and thoughts that affect how you remembered your experiences.

In the Bible, we might see differences in presentation because of different personalities doing the writing, *but* we still can see that the Bible fits together because “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). That makes all the difference.

If you think you’ve found a contradiction in the Bible, please write us! We’d love to explore it with you. And also remember, doctrine is not built on one Bible text. We must study all the texts in the Bible on one subject, letting each one be interpreted by the others, so we can gain a clear understanding of what God truly means.

“Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7).

When it comes to the Bible, it all fits. And that’s miraculous!

6. What do I gain by accepting the Bible as God’s inspired Word?

“I _____ more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts” (Psalm 119:100).

“You, through Your commandments, make me _____ than my enemies” (Psalm 119:98).



If we accept and study Scripture as inspired by God, we will have the answers to many complex challenges that even the most experienced and knowledgeable secular scholars will never figure out. For example:

- We don't have to wonder where we came from, what we are doing here, and where we are going. The Bible gives us peace, power, and purpose. "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11).
- We know that a worldwide flood destroyed every living thing except sea life and the people and creatures on Noah's ark (Genesis chapters 6–8). We therefore know why scientists find fossils in strange places and how the layers of rock in the Grand Canyon formed. Plus, we don't have to keep changing our dating assumptions.
- We know the time and origin for the different languages of the world—the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9).



All these and many others are things we don't necessarily have to spend our lives studying, revising, or speculating about. We can accept the Word of God, which has been proven accurate in every other area, and get on with more important pursuits. "Great peace have those who love Your law" (Psalm 119:165).



"Where should I get my education?"

Martin Luther warned, "I am afraid the universities will prove to be the great gates to hell, unless they diligently labor to explain the holy Scriptures and engrave them upon the hearts of youths. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution where men are not unceasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt." See Psalm 119:9. Go to a Christian college that emphasizes the Bible truth in all things.

7. What should I do if I have trouble believing the Bible?

“So then _____ comes by hearing, and hearing by the _____ of God” (Romans 10:17).

Reading the Bible is the best cure for doubts about it.

On December 20, 2007, scientists in Jerusalem announced they had successfully inscribed the entire Hebrew text of the Old Testament onto an area smaller than a pinhead. The nanotechnology experts at the Technion Institute said the text’s surface measures less than a hundredth of a square inch! It only took about an hour to etch the 300,000 words onto a tiny silicon surface using a device called a focused ion beam.



One prophet spoke, “Your words were found, and I ate them” (Jeremiah 15:16). Well, suppose you were to swallow this microscopic Bible. Obviously, there would be no redeeming power in doing that—indigestion maybe, but that’s it. The real miracle happens when we use our reasoning powers to consider the words of the Bible. Jeremiah really means that for this power to be experienced in our lives, we must read the Bible with prayerful, open, and hungry hearts.

Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). There is something very different about the words found in the Bible. They have a spiritual creative power unlike anything you’ve ever known. Taste and see for yourself!

8. Can the words of the Bible help me fight temptation?

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not _____ against You” (Psalm 119:11).



King David, the writer of this passage, knew something about fighting: He killed Goliath, the giant Philistine soldier.

On April 7, 1862, at the famous Civil War battle of Shiloh, Sam Houston Jr., son of the famous Texan, was struck in the back by a bullet. He was knocked to the ground—and likely would have died had it not been for his mother’s Bible, which he carried in his knapsack. Ripping through the pages, the lead ball stopped directly over the 70th Psalm: “O God: Thou art my help and my deliverer” (v. 5 KJV).

The Bible teaches that the Word of God is our best defense against Satan’s attacks. “You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word” (Psalm 119:114).

Even more amazing, Jesus fought every temptation by quoting the words of God back to the devil! “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ’You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’ ” (Luke 4:8).

Yes, the Bible can protect you from sin.

9. Does the Bible have any power to affect my personal life?

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

That’s power!

It is a mystery how God changes people’s hearts and makes them new, but it is the greatest evidence of the inspiration of the Bible. From a “son of thunder,” the disciple John was transformed to “John the beloved.”

Superstitious natives who once killed and ate missionaries have become kind Christians. Murderers, drunkards, prostitutes, liars, careless, godless people—and young people like you, struggling with the temptations of the world—have given their lives to Christ, chosen to put their will on His side, and have let Him transform them day by day.

God promises, “I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and

they shall be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 11:19, 20).

Don't you want a heart that wants to follow God?

10. But how can this new heart or new spirit happen in me?

“Oh, _____ and _____ that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!”
(Psalm 34:8).

Do you know how good a fresh strawberry pie is?

With a crispy crust and fresh, ripe strawberries straight from the garden—and some cream on top—it's absolutely delicious, don't you think?

Wait ... you don't know? Well, maybe you haven't tasted it!



It's the same with God's Word. You have to taste it for yourself to experience how wonderful it is! Then you start eating more of it as it gives you faith and trust; it will change your life forever. When you eat something, it becomes a part of you. Likewise, when you read, accept, and follow God's Word, it becomes a part of you mentally and spiritually. Your faith grows. Your mind grows. You are changed.

The Bible says, “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18 KJV). See how the Bible says we're changed to be like Christ? By looking at Him and saying, “Oh wow! He did that? That was patient, that was brave, that was loving—I want to be like that!” He will become your hero, and He will germinate the faith growing inside you. Just remember to look “to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

Did you know? It takes the average reader 52 hours and 20 minutes to read the Old Testament and 18 hours and 20 minutes to read the New Testament.



This world is a mess.

Many of our friends' lives might be a mess too. Everything around us might be changing or our support system might be falling out from under us.

But God's Word stands, and its power will not change. "The word of the LORD endures forever" (1 Peter 1:25). You can depend on it, and it will not fail you.

The reason the Bible remains an international bestseller is because it works. Though entire nations have banned it, burned it, and tried to discredit it, it has never faded away. Indeed, the Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. You can trust it.

So what do you think of the evidence? Do you choose to taste and believe in God's Word and let its power change you? Yes / No

Do you want to choose God and His Word to be your Friend and Guide?

"The book to read is not the one which thinks for you, but the one which makes you think. No book in the world equals the Bible for that." —James McCosh



How Did We Get Here?

CHAPTER THREE

“It is the job of prophets and scientists alike to proclaim the glories of God.” —Louis Agassiz

To simulate just one-hundredth of a second of the complete processing of a single nerve cell in the human eye, a supercomputer requires several minutes of processing time. The human eye has 10 million such cells constantly interacting with each other in complex ways. It would take at least 100 years of supercomputer processing to simulate what takes place in your eye many times every second.

No wonder Darwin was terrified about what the human eye meant to his hypothesis!

Imagine a man walking through the desert. He sees a large rock sticking out of the sand. “Must have been here thousands of years being shaped by the winds and sands,” he thinks to himself. He shrugs, sits on the rock, drinks from his water bottle, and then resumes his journey.

A little farther along, he comes upon a new laptop computer half-buried in the sand. The laptop, with its space age design and sophisticated technology, obviously makes him pause. Wherever it came from, it certainly wasn’t formed by the wind and sand. Someone put it there. There is no amount of time or chance that could make a computer in the middle of the desert!



Well, as we’ve already seen, the powerful human eye, controlled by the powerful human brain—which is almost 100 times faster *and* a thousand times more energy efficient than the most advanced supercomputer in the world—is vastly more complicated than a laptop.

Amazingly, some refuse to see (pardon the pun) the miraculous complexity of life as persuasive evidence for a designer creator. They think we’re all here as a result of a series of biological accidents and twists of fate. Somehow, nobody actually knows how, life not only popped up billions of years ago from an unknown concoction of chemicals, it just happened to assemble itself with the complex ability to self-perpetuate and multiply.

What a miraculous coincidence! And now, luckily, through a process of random mutations

weeded out by natural selection, this primitive life, over billions of years, evolved into all the diversity here on the earth, including human beings ... and you. Lucky you!



But is it true? And does it matter?

It totally matters. In fact, three of the most important questions we must answer to find true happiness, peace, and purpose are: Where did I come from? What am I doing here? And where am I going?

This lesson will explore these three questions by comparing the two prominent creation stories of our time and what they mean for you today. In doing so, we'll consider the scientific evidence and logical reasoning while using the Bible as a springboard of discovery.

What does the Word of God have to say about evolution? Let's find out.

1. By what means did God create the world?

“Then God _____, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).

It might be hard to comprehend, but the Bible says God is so powerful that even the utterance of His words has profound creative power.

Science seems to be supporting the Bible on this. In the program “The Elegant Universe,” *NOVA* reports that the newest research indicates that all life in the universe came from sound. “According to string theory, absolutely everything in the universe—all of the particles that make up matter and forces—is comprised of tiny vibrating fundamental strings.”



All matter created by sound waves? Interestingly, this is close to what the Bible has always said. “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33:6).

Of course, it’s still a mystery how God can speak things into existence, but scientists are equally baffled about where matter, or these original vibrations, come from. Is it so hard, then, to accept the biblical account?

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3).

2. In what other ways does the Genesis account of origins differ from evolution?

“So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their _____, and every winged bird according to its _____. And God saw that it was good. ... Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its _____: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its _____’; and it was so” (Genesis 1:21, 24).

Even the simplest reading of the Creation story reveals that everything was perfectly planned—both precise and calculated.

Nothing in the entire Genesis account of Creation gives any hint of randomness, of chance, of fits and starts, or of death. Everything was made as God planned it.

In contrast, evolution is all about accidents, randomness, chance, and death. If a creature happened to evolve something—say, a good pair of eyes—that enabled it to survive, it survived; if not, it died off and the blind species became extinct. Life on the earth was a vicious battle between creatures where only the strongest, those better adapted to their environment, remained. Death, predation, violence, famine, drought, sickness, and disease are the processes of evolution.



The Bible texts above also make it very clear that the various creatures we see on the earth were each made separate and distinct—as part of unique groups of species. Each was made by God “after their kind,” which means the birds were created distinctly as birds, the whales were made distinctly as whales, the lions distinctly as lions, and so forth. (This does not mean, however, that animals don’t change over time; they just don’t turn into other kinds of creatures.)

In contrast, evolution teaches that all life, from birds to whales to lions to humans, had a common ancestor from which, by chance and over millions of years, the various “kinds” emerged. Flying birds somehow evolved from ancient reptiles, horses from ancient fish, and humans from primitive apes—all of which originated from the first ancient cell.

3. Where did human beings really come from?

“And the LORD God formed man of the _____ of the ground, and _____ into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7).



The Bible is clear that when God created mankind, He did more than just speak us into existence. God purposefully formed humans by hand. According to Scripture, God created Adam, the first human being. Then out of Adam's body, He created a woman, Eve.

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:21, 22).

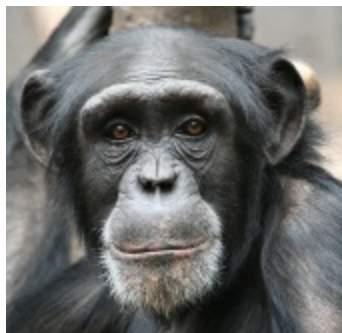


We can see that both man and woman, male and female, were direct creations of God, who made them fully grown and mature right from the start. They came with “factory-installed software“ to think, speak, and love. In fact, as soon as Eve was created, she was Adam’s wife, which shows that they were created as adults.

The important point here is that human beings are not depicted as the products of chance. More so, nothing indicates that they slowly evolved from primitive beings. The biblical view clearly opposes evolution, which teaches that humans were the eventual products of a long, tedious, and violent process. According to evolutionary theory, more conscious thought is put into painting graffiti on a bathroom wall than the design of humanity!

4. How does the Bible describe the first humans?

“So God created man in His own _____ ; in the _____ of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).



How much clearer could the Bible be?

One famous evolutionist, Richard Dawkins, called mankind a highly evolved “African ape.” What a contrast to the biblical account, which depicts people as made in God’s image. This is something very special too, as it isn’t said about any other of God’s created beings.

“This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God” (Genesis 5:1).

Man was not made in the image of apes. It’s hard to imagine any views of human origins being more in conflict than the biblical account and the Darwinian account.

5. According to the Bible, how long did the process of creation take?

“For in _____ the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).



There is a vast divide between evolution and biblical creation—a divide of literally billions of years!

The Bible is very clear about a literal six-day creation. Even scholars who reject the Genesis account concede that Moses meant a literal six days when he wrote it. And the Hebrew word used through Genesis chapter 1—“day one,” “day two,” “day three,” etc.—is a word commonly used throughout the Bible to depict a 24-hour day.

- “The ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth *day* of the month, on the mountains of

Ararat” (Genesis 8:4).

- “The children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third *day*” (Joshua 9:17).
- “The third *day* after I had given birth, this woman also gave birth” (1 Kings 3:18).

In each case above, as well as hundreds of other examples in the Old Testament, the word for “day,” meaning a 24-hour day, is the same used in the Creation account to depict how long the Lord took to create the earth and everything in it. Nothing in the texts indicates that these days were symbolic of long periods of time, or billions of years, as evolution teaches.

6. But hasn't science proved that life has existed on the earth for billions of years?



“And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the _____ of _____”
(Matthew 15:9).

It's the most commonly touted error in the secular scientific community: “Science has proved evolution true.”

The fact is, however, there is hardly a single area in the field of evolution where even hard-core evolutionists don't radically disagree on crucial points.



Take the age of the earth, for instance. While some of the science can be *interpreted* in a way that shows long ages, it is only that: an interpretation. Unlike the perishable food packages we buy at a supermarket, each with a date stamped on them, no one has found a rock or fossil that says, “Made 5 billion years ago” or “Created in a volcano 1 billion years ago.” No, in each case, geologists can

only *interpret* what they see to make conclusions that support their theory.

And what they see doesn't always agree with their theories. For example, some geologists say that the rates of soil and land erosion are way too fast for the earth to be billions of years old. As one scientist put it, "Ten North Americas could have been eroded" since about a hundred million years ago. In other words, with current rates of erosion, the United States shouldn't even be here if the earth were as old as some scientists say.

Another amazing discovery that casts huge doubts on the long age of the earth is the recent finding of soft tissue in dinosaur fossils. Yes, some highly elastic *soft* tissue—blood vessels, blood cells, and some hemoglobin protein—have been found in Tyrannosaurus Rex bones believed to be more than 65 million years old. This is clearly impossible because these kinds of tissues rapidly disintegrate.

It's like you're being told that a can of peaches left open in a hot room for three years is still fresh enough to eat! That's silly. The only logical explanation for the peaches' freshness would be that they were *not* actually left open in the room for three years.

Another problem is that the amount of radiocarbon in coal and oil is way too high for them to be tens of millions of years old, as commonly taught. Given the current rate of radiocarbon decay, it should take only 100,000 years for it to disappear. The fact that so much radiocarbon remains in them casts serious doubt on the age of oil and coal that scientists dogmatically assert.

And these are just *a few* of the major problems with the theory that the earth is as old as some scientists claim. So why do they claim it? Hold on—we'll get to that!

7. But what about the fossil record? Doesn't it reveal that evolution took place?

“And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were _____” (Genesis 7:19).

Nearly all evolutionists admit that the fossil record is a huge problem for their theory.



Even Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, conceded that the fossil record did not show the kind of slow, gradual changes that his theory requires. In his day, other scientists were some of Darwin's most outspoken critics precisely because the fossil record didn't support his theory.

Still, Darwin suggested that his dilemma would be solved over time because with more

exploration, the vast gaps in the fossil record would be uncovered.

But a century and a half later, with thousands of people around the planet scouring through thousands of fossil beds, the evidence has decidedly *not* filled in the gaps. On the contrary, the fossil record remains as problematic now as it was in Darwin's day. As one molecular biologist wrote, "Despite the tremendous increase in geological activity in every corner of the globe and despite the discovery of many strange and hitherto unknown forms, the infinitude of connecting links has still not been discovered and the fossil record is about as discontinuous as it was when Darwin was writing the *Origin [of the Species]*."



One of the greatest challenges to the theory of evolution is known as the Precambrian explosion. Representing a level supposedly 530 million years old, a vast array of life forms seems to have appeared out of nowhere; many of these forms are amazingly similar in structure to living things that exist today. The question vexing evolutionists for years is: *Where did this come from?* They call it the "explosion" because all these fossils seem to have "exploded" on to the scene all at once, with *no fossil ancestors*.

This explosion, of course, represents something that happened very quickly, which is opposite of what evolution teaches—but, of course, which fits much closer to the biblical account of creation. Darwin, aware of the fossils in Precambrian layers, was also forced to admit that they posed a serious challenge to his theory.

"Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done" (Psalm 33:8, 9).

8. If the evidence isn't as strong as some say, how does the theory survive?

"Knowing this first: that _____ will come in the last days, walking according to their

own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things _____ as they were from the beginning of creation’ (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

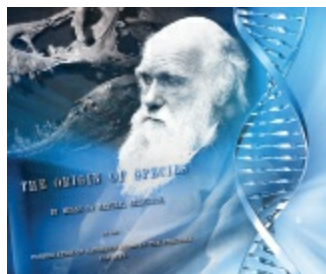
Charles Darwin was not working as a purely objective scientist without any preconceived notions. Evolution began as, and remains, a religion as much as a field of science.



For starters, Darwin did not invent the idea of evolution. In ancient Egypt some people believed that life evolved from primitive forms. Even the ancient Greeks and Romans had the same idea. Darwin simply came up with what many believed was the explanation for how it happened—a violent process of random mutations and natural selection.

Why? Well, Darwin and people like him have an idea of what they think a world created by God should be, and because it doesn't meet their theological expectations, they want something else to explain what they see.

“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1 KJV). This is the reason why millions believe in evolution. They think that if a god created the world, there shouldn't be suffering and death. And because there is suffering and death, then God couldn't have created the world—so there must be another explanation. Indeed, some scientists who don't believe in God don't even believe Darwin's story, so they have other theories for how life started—including the idea that space aliens seeded our planet with life.



Darwin wrote: “There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the [parasitic wasp] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that the cat should play with mice.” He added, “What a book a devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering,

low and horribly cruel works of nature.”

Of course, God didn't design wasps or any other creature with the intention of them killing each other. Instead, suffering and death are the results of sin, which has perverted all nature.

“Therefore, just as through one man _____ entered the world, and _____ through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).



The Bible is clear: Sin brought death, suffering, and evil into this world. We must not forget that a rampaging Satan is himself causing havoc in nature. “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath” (Revelation 12:12).

Evolution continues to thrive based on the preconceived notions that Darwin and others have about God— notions that are wrong. The conflict between Christ and Satan, the fall of humanity, and the Flood best explain why the world is the way it is today.

9. Some claim to believe in the Bible and evolution. Can these two beliefs be harmonized?

“Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops; Those who worship and swear oaths by the _____, But who also swear by _____” (Zephaniah 1:5).

It was one of the great sins in ancient Israel: the mixture of worship of the true God with the false—such as the pagan Milcom. Why? Because it honors lies that contradict Bible truth.

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

As we have already seen, everything about evolution puts it in direct conflict with biblical creation. Evolution, for instance, makes death one of the key factors in the process of life. Suffering and death are good and necessary for evolution to work.



In contrast, the Bible teaches that death is something bad, something that should never have arisen. It is also something that will one day be destroyed: “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26).

How can death be the “enemy” if God used it in His creation to make us?

The Bible is very clear that humans were once perfect but fell into evil. If evolution was how God created us, this concept makes no sense. It would mean that God used a process of violence, selfishness, pain, and dominance over the weak to create a morally flawless being who “fell” into a state of violence, selfishness, and dominance of the strong over the weak—a state from which we need to be redeemed!

Why does that sound ridiculous? Well, because it is ridiculous. “Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22). Also, look at this promise from the Bible:

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).



Will this new creation be by God's divine power in which He spoke, as revealed in Genesis, a perfect world in just six days? Or will life have to again endure the long rigors and pain of "survival of the fittest" over billions of years until a new world, one "in which righteousness dwells," finally appears (2 Peter 3:13)? That idea, too, is ridiculous.

No, evolution and the Bible cannot be harmonized.

10. If evolution were true, what would that mean for the purpose of human life?



"Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have _____ for My _____ ; I have formed him, yes, I have made him" (Isaiah 43:7).

The Bible is clear that human beings were the intentional creation of God. He created us with a purpose too. In fact, God gives our life purpose and meaning. We are here because we are meant to be here.



In contrast, evolution teaches that we are nothing but the purposeless products of pure chance. What then could our lives really mean if we weren't meant to be here?

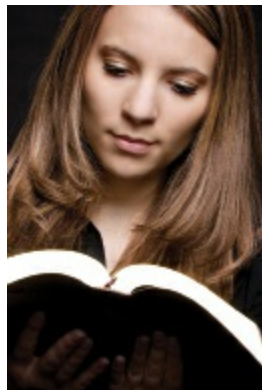
An atheist biologist wrote these famous lines describing the dilemma of those who don't believe that God created us: "Man knows at last that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe, whence which he has emerged by chance. His duty, like his fate, is written nowhere." What a different view from that presented in Scripture:



“You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

“What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:4, 5).

“I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:38, 39).



God alone can give our life purpose; evolution leaves us nothing but cold, uncaring forces that will one day take us away with the same uncaring force they used to bring us here in the first place.

Not a very happy prospect, especially in contrast to all that we are promised in God's Word.

So what do you think? Do you believe what fallible men think about creation—or do you believe what God knows about creation?

Do you choose to believe that God created you and has a purpose for you? _____

“There’s far more truth in the Book of Genesis than in the quantum theory.” —Malcolm Muggeridge



Can I Live Forever?

CHAPTER FOUR

“Man’s way leads to a hopeless end; God’s way leads to an endless hope.” —Unknown

The ancient Greeks believed that a fountain of youth was located somewhere in Africa—if they could just find it, they could stay eternally young. Alexander the Great even searched for it, but alas, he died in Babylon at the young age of 32.

In the 16th century, Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon is said to have sailed to America in part to search for the illusive fountain of youth. He never found it; instead, Indians shot him with a poison arrow and he eventually died of his wounds.

Today a new brand of “explorers” is frantically working on finding a cure for death. Scientists in California recently announced that they genetically engineered a yeast cell to live ten times longer than normal. If they could somehow transfer their techniques to humans, people could conceivably live for 800 years.



Of course, there is a huge difference between yeast cells and a human being. And even if scientists were somehow able to pull it off, the inevitable would still happen: People would eventually get sick or have an accident—and die.

It doesn't end there either! Thousands of clever entrepreneurs advertise all manner of anti-aging creams, pills, and elixirs. Consumers spend billions of dollars each year on these products hoping to look younger, feel better, and extend their lives. However, researchers in the field of aging agree there are only a handful of proven things you can do to extend your life by possibly 15 percent, and they certainly can't be bought over the Internet or found in a doctor's office.

What are these things? Exercising regularly, cutting caloric intake, avoiding animal products, and managing stress. So instead of dying at 70, you can make it to 83 ... but you still die. Is the idea of living forever just an impossible dream—a way to distract us from the unpleasant reality of death? Why is everyone born with a powerful, innate desire to live?

So here's our most important question for this lesson: Is there something out there that can actually give us eternal life?

In the Bible, God provides specific answers on how you can be part of a select group who will indeed live forever. So grab your Bible and prepare to set off on the most important quest of your life.

1. Why would God want to give me eternal life?

“For God so _____ the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have _____ life” (John 3:16).

As perishing mortals, it’s hard for us to conceive what “everlasting life” really means. The longest time period we can imagine has an end.



- A specimen of Antarctic sponge has been estimated to be 1,550 years old.
- The Icelandic quahog, a mollusk, was found to have lived around 405 years.
- In June 2006, Harriet, a Galápagos tortoise, died at the age of 175.
- Bowhead Whales can live more than 150 years.
- Parrots and swans can live to be 100.
- Sugar Puff, the world’s longest living pony, died in 2007 at age 56.

Jeanne Calment was the oldest human in modern times (with verifiable birth records). She was 122 years old when she died in 1997. But the average lifespan for most people now is between 70 and 80 years, which is what the Bible says.

“The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away“ (Psalm 90:10).

But Jesus offers us more life. Did you notice in John 3:16 who this gift is for? Read the verse again and circle the answer. Does this include you? _____



Many people have the idea that God is just waiting for them to do something wrong so that He can keep them out of heaven. But this is not the message Jesus gave. In fact, in case anyone doubted the meaning of His amazing promise, Jesus added:

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

God loves us. He loves you! That’s why He wants to be with us throughout eternity! And He cared enough to risk sending His own Son to this world to save us.

2. Why do I need “saving”? What am I saved from?

“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their _____” (Matthew 1:21).

A quick Google search shows that there are all sorts of things to be saved from. For example:



- A Fresno woman was saved from a burning house.
- Pakistan and India were saved from nuclear war.
- A tot was saved from choking.
- Patients were saved from huge hospital bills.
- A miniature water lily was saved from extinction.
- A dog adrift on ice was saved from death.

Now, God the Son came into the world for three great reasons:

- As a *Revelation*—to show us what God is like (John 14:9)
- As a *Demonstration*—to show us how to live and love each other (1 John 2:6)
- As a *Substitution*—to take the punishment of our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3).

But why do we need to be saved from sin? The Bible gives the answer in seven short words:

“For the wages of sin is _____” (Romans 6:23).

Sin is like a terminal disease. It’s painful and contagious, and it robs us of happiness. Without divine intervention, the prognosis is always eternal death.

3. What is sin?



“Whoever commits sin also commits _____, and sin is _____” (1 John 3:4).

In other words, sin is disobeying God’s law in any way, whether it is telling a lie, being rude to your parents, taking something that is not yours, or any of the other commandments. (See Exodus 20:3–17 for all Ten Commandments.)

This is not good news. Can you say you have never sinned? _____

Of course not. None of us can! We are all sinners infected with this chronic disease of rebellious selfishness.



Use a little deductive reasoning, and it becomes clear:

- Sin brings death.
- We have sinned.
- We deserve death.

THEREFORE: If we want eternal life, we must be saved from our sins.

4. But isn’t this a little extreme? What could be the problem with sinners living forever?

“Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with _____, Yes, my soul and my body! For my life is spent with grief, And my years with _____; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away” (Psalm 31:9, 10).



Tarsiers are cute lemur-like primates with huge eyes that live in the islands of Southeast Asia. Because their rainforest habitat has been steadily disappearing, zoos have tried for years to create breeding colonies in captivity. Every effort has failed. Tarsiers love their jungle freedom, so when confined they become so stressed they often injure or kill themselves.

Grief, pain, and sadness are the inevitable result of sin.

Imagine a universe in which we live enslaved under such a curse forever! There would be no escape—no relief—no peace. And if sinful people lived forever, things would only get worse and worse. We would all be miserable, eventually wishing we could die.

5. Was there always sin in the world?

“So God created man in His own _____; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

As we learned in the previous lesson, the first humans were like God!

- They were happy and holy—without sin—because He is holy (Psalm 99:9).

- They were meant to be immortal, because He is immortal (1 Timothy 1:17).

But a great evil entered the universe—the curse of sin. Satan claimed that his way was better than God’s way. God could have put a stop to the rebellion. He could have annihilated Satan immediately, but this might have created fear throughout the universe and lingering doubts about God’s fairness. So for God, the best option was to let everyone choose for themselves. The whole universe is able to see a living demonstration of God’s way—and of Satan’s way.

God explained to Adam and Eve a simple test that would prove their loyalty:

“The LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Genesis 2:16, 17).



The forbidden tree apparently seemed harmless to Eve, so she ate the fruit. She then convinced Adam to eat too. As soon as they disobeyed, they felt sensations they had never felt before: guilt, fear, shame. They actually tried to hide from God! Sin had _____ them from their Creator, just as it does with us. (Read Isaiah 59:2 for the answer.)

On that day, Adam and Eve were no longer immortal. Their bodies began to deteriorate, and eventually they died. But that was not the biggest tragedy:

“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

6. If death is everyone’s destiny, how can I be saved from sin?

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ _____ for us” (Romans 5:8).

Did Jesus ever sin? _____ (Read 1 Peter 2:22.)



Despite this, He offered His life to pay the price for our sin. He allowed wicked men to whip Him, lay Him on a cross, and pound nails into His hands and feet. He suffered agony as they lifted the cross and dropped it into its hole. He hung on the cross, naked and shamed, as a cruel mob taunted and insulted Him. He died with the sins of the world breaking His heart. Yet He did it for us—to pay for *our sins!*

But that’s not all. If He simply paid the price, we would still be sinners capable of polluting the universe. And so He offered a trade:

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the _____ of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When we make a trade, we usually want to get something better than what we give. But Jesus did the opposite. When He died, He took our sins upon Himself. We don’t have to be sinners! Instead, we can have His perfect righteousness.

This is called the *Plan of Salvation*, and it is very simple:

- When you confess your sins, God “is faithful and just to _____” you (1 John 1:9).
- When you ask, He creates in you “a _____ heart” (Psalm 51:10). In other words, He removes your old, sinful ways of thinking and feeling and replaces them with His own thoughts and feelings. This is what people often call the “new birth.”
- He then offers you His _____, which is power to keep you from sin (Titus 2:11–14).

7. Does this mean I will never die?

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall _____. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never _____’ ” (John 11:25, 26).

When we think of death, we usually think of getting old and dying. The heart stops beating, the brain stops thinking, and the body decays back into the earth. The Bible often calls death a sleep (Psalm 13:3).

Even the most righteous people will die this death, but it is nothing to fear because Jesus has promised that we will live again. We can be sure that this is possible, for He Himself was dead and came to life again.



“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Instead, the kind of death from which there is no resurrection is called the second death (Revelation 2:11). This is an eternal death. This is not what God wants for you.

“ ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ ” (Ezekiel 33:11).

The ruler of the universe is pleading with you to accept His offer of life! It seems incredible, but He truly is. The Lord appeals to our hearts through the Bible. Those little tugs you feel in your heart

are sent straight to you from God, through His Holy Spirit. God wants to save you from sin so you can live with Him forever in His eternal kingdom!

8. Why would I want to be in His kingdom?

“Eye has not _____, nor ear _____, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Have you ever looked forward to a family vacation, a special holiday, or perhaps a visit from someone you love? You know how much fun it can be to anticipate the exciting time you are going to have.

But there is a danger in dreaming about a future event. Sometimes when the experience comes, it does not fulfill our expectations and we end up being disappointed.

This is not the case when it comes to what God has planned for us. In fact, it is so wonderful that no one can even begin to imagine how wonderful it will be. Bliss, splendor, ecstasy—there are no words adequate to describe it. It will contain everything for our comfort, peace, joy, and happiness. And all through eternity, we will never run out of interesting, amazing things to do.



- *Do you like to travel?* The endless reaches of the universe will be your backyard.
- *Do you like to build?* You'll be able to design your own country home and live in it!
- *Do you like to spend time with loved ones?* You'll have all eternity to enjoy them.
- *Do you like animals?* You can make an infinite study of every branch of zoology—on the earth and beyond—and the animals will be as gentle as a lamb.
- *Do you like music?* You'll sing and play in the best celestial choir of the cosmos.
- *Do you like to eat?* You've never tasted anything like the fruit on the tree of life—a different

one every month!

Even better, there will be no trace of sin or sadness:

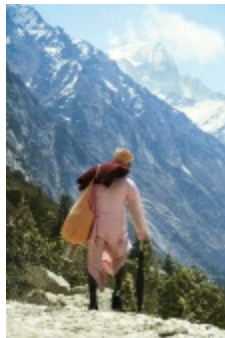
“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have _____
_____” (Revelation 21:4).



This is just the beginning of what the Bible says about what God has prepared for us. Don't you think this is worth seeking? _____

9. What's the catch? What do I have to do to earn salvation?

“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. _____, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).



Every other religion on the earth teaches that a person must do something difficult to earn salvation:

- Go on a long pilgrimage
- Sleep on the hard ground or go without food or water
- Pay a large sum of money
- Recite a certain phrase thousands of times.

The Bible says nothing about doing such things to be saved. Here's the truth of the matter:

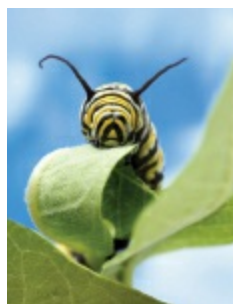


“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the _____ of God, not of _____, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

“Being justified _____ by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

Jesus came and died our death so that we could receive His life by faith. He paid for our sins, in which He took no part, so that we could receive His forgiveness as a gift. Salvation is one step in getting us ready to live in heaven.

10. What happens to me when I am saved from sin?



“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a _____ ; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Monarch caterpillars love to eat milkweed leaves. But after they are transformed into butterflies, they have no appetite for milkweed. They now look for flowers.



Likewise, after our conversion, we begin to look at our old sinful ways as repulsive. We wonder how we could have enjoyed those cheap thrills and destructive behaviors. God gives us a new heart. This is the miracle of the *new birth*.

Christ also frees us from the load of guilt and shame that goes along with a sinful life. And we can only wonder why we ever hesitated to accept His gift of salvation!

11. How can I keep the new birth experience?

“I can do all things through _____ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).



You can no more keep the new birth experience on your own than you can earn it in the first place. Your only safety is to strive to stay with Jesus every moment. Paul wrote,

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

He loved you and gave Himself for you! As you get to know Him, you cannot help but love and trust Him in return.

- You accept His death that paid for your sins.
- You accept His life, and He actually becomes part of your life. His thoughts become your thoughts; His words become your words; His actions become your actions.



You cannot save yourself, but there are three practical things you can do to grow your relationship with Jesus and stay close to Him:

- Daily study His Word, the Bible, to see what He has to say to you.
- Communicate with Him regularly and often in prayer.
- Share with others what He has done for you.

You will soon find that the time you spend with Jesus is the best part of your day. Even better, it will bring eternal rewards:



“And this is _____ life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

12. Does God really want me in His kingdom?

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. _____ desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

On February 4, 1974, 19-year-old Patricia Hearst was kidnapped from her Berkeley, California, apartment by a violent gang called the Symbionese Liberation Army. Can you imagine her father’s shock and heartache when, after he paid \$6 million for her release, she decided *to stay* with her captors? Evidently, the kidnapers brainwashed their victim into thinking she was better off with them.

Can you imagine how much more heartache our heavenly Father must feel when we neglect to accept the freedom and eternal life He offers us—especially after sending His only Son, Jesus, as the ransom for our sins?

God wants you in His kingdom. Don’t let the devil brainwash you to believe that you are better off without God.



Long ago, a young man on a quest came to Jesus. He asked Him, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). The young man might not have realized it, but he was closer then to the “fountain of life” than all scientists, explorers, and entrepreneurs put together.

The only way to eternal life is through the One who possesses the antidote for death—and that is Jesus.

God is offering you freedom from sin and eternal life. It’s your choice! Today is the

best time to make this decision. Will you accept God's gift of salvation and eternal life?

Do you accept Jesus as your Savior? _____

“The gate of salvation is set open unto all men: neither is there any other thing which keepeth us back from entering in, save only our own unbelief.” —John Calvin



“There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.” —C.S. Lewis

Bright and popular, 18-year-old Devin Moore hoped to enlist in the Air Force after high school. With no criminal record and a habit of saying “Yes, sir,” his future looked promising.

But Devin also developed a hobby that absorbed hundreds of hours of his time—playing *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, a very popular video game. The player steals cars and murders policemen by shooting them, chain sawing them, decapitating them, or setting them on fire. Devin played the game day and night for months.

Then on the night of June 7, 2003, Patrolman Arnold Strickland found Devin sleeping in a stolen car. Taken into custody, Devin was quiet and cooperative on the way to the police station. But as Officer Strickland booked him, Devin suddenly snatched the officer's handgun and shot him twice, killing him. He then bolted out the door, also shooting and killing James Crump, another policeman, and Ace Mealer, a 9-1-1 operator.



Devin then snatched the keys to a police cruiser and led a desperate chase for several hours until he was cornered in a grassy lot. “Please shoot me,” he pleaded with the officers surrounding him. “Please shoot me.”

“Life is like a video game,” Devin muttered to the police after his capture. “Everybody’s got to die sometime.”

In the murder trial, Devin pled not guilty by reason of mental defect. His attorneys presented evidence of how Devin's mind was negatively affected by the repetitive playing of *Grand Theft Auto*. The jury decided, however, that Devin was guilty as charged, and he was sentenced to death by lethal injection. The jury determined that even though the violent video game might have influenced his crimes, Devin was still ultimately responsible.

We are all who we are principally because of what we have taken into our minds over the course of our lives. When we are infants and toddlers, we don’t have much choice—but as we mature, much of who we become will be decided by what we choose to soak up through our senses.

In this lesson, we ask this most important question: How much of what we do makes us who we are? Along the way to answering that question, we'll explore how vitally important it is to make good choices regarding what we watch, read, play, and listen to.

Indeed, the answers we find can make an eternal difference.

1. Can entertainment really influence my spiritual health?

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



Everything alive is either growing or dying physically, right?

Likewise, we follow a spiritual cycle of “life unto life” or “death unto death” (2 Corinthians 2:16). So which way are you going?

By the time the average American child reaches 14, he or she will have witnessed the violent simulated deaths of more than 13,000 human beings. Pediatrician Donald Shifrin, a spokesman for the American Academy of Pediatrics, warns that young people will gain weight, smoke, be aggressive, and indulge in risky sexual behaviors from seeing years of the media glorifying junk food, cigarettes, violence, and teenage sex.



The Bible says there are two options: being conformed to this world (spiritual death, which will someday lead to eternal death) or being transformed by the renewing of our minds (spiritual life, which will someday lead to eternal life).

Our direction is determined by what we behold—the things we put in our minds through our five senses. This isn't just a religious doctrine; it's real science.

2. How does what I look at change me?

“But we all, with unveiled face, _____ as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being _____ into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).



Our minds are something like a photographic plate that absorbs the image we focus on.

But more than that, we actually *become* like what we look at. We see this principle at work in many newborn or newly hatched creatures. It's called behavioral imprinting. This phenomenal dynamic takes place when a new offspring bonds with the first animal it sees when it looks around.

This process helps to ensure that the young will not become separated from their parents, even among large flocks or herds of similar animals. Meanwhile, while they behold their parents, they start to become like them. For example, baby ducks on a farm will bond with and follow around a family dog if they do not see their real mother when they hatch. Instead of doing duck things, they'll try to be more like a dog.

King David said that those who worship idols become like what they worship. “Those who make

them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them” (Psalm 135:18).



To understand why we are like this, we must first understand how God originally designed us. God’s first purpose in creating people was to pour out His love. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Unlike He did with the other creatures, He created humans in His image (Genesis 1:27). We have the ability to enjoy intimate, intelligent fellowship with Him.

In addition, through marriage the Creator gave people the ability to procreate and multiply in their own image and to reflect and display His love to their offspring (Genesis 1:28).

Adam and Eve, however, made a poor choice. As they beheld the serpent and the forbidden fruit, they disobeyed God’s clear command. They chose to eat of the forbidden tree. This rebellious act altered their natures; instead of being motivated by love, they were now motivated by selfishness.

But not all was lost. God set out to win back human hearts by revealing His love in even deeper ways, such as on the cross of Calvary. As we behold “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” His love transforms us (John 1:29). The secret to that transformation is beholding Jesus.

3. How do I know what I should behold?

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are _____, whatever things are _____, whatever things are _____, whatever things are _____, whatever things are _____, whatever things are _____, whatever things are of _____ report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).



Here's an interesting thought: If all the TV networks today censored everything they aired on TV according to this simple verse, what would be the result?

Well, most programs would be replaced by color bars and a test tone. And if all the books, DVDs, and video games that don't pass this test were taken off the market, what would be left? We can be sure that the local bookstore would be severely downsized.

Of course, in this world—plagued by sin as it is—that's not likely to happen. So that's why God has called us to personally guard the gateway to our soul. Through His power and by using His standards, we must actively screen what goes into our hearts and minds.

At times, the devil tries to convince us that something is “mostly good,” but when you really think about it, how can something be good and yet bad at the same time? It's an oxymoron, isn't it? “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?” (James 3:11).

It is a lot like placing a few drops of cyanide poison in a cup of freshly squeezed orange juice. We might call the orange juice in the cup “good,” but how good can it be when you die after drinking it? The cyanide doesn't become good simply by being mixed in with the orange juice. Indeed, it's even more dangerous than ever because now we are more likely to ingest it than if it were in a bottle clearly labeled, “POISON!”



Let's admit it: It's pretty hard these days to find a popular movie in which all of the Ten Commandments are respected. Deception, violence, pride, and sex are regular stars in cinema. In fact, “clean movies” are not likely to become blockbusters. Most novels, movies, and TV rely on sin to make things “spicy.” That's because “the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

4. But if I can't watch, read, or even listen to anything sinful, won't life be boring?



“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more _____” (John 10:10).

God doesn't want to make our lives dry and boring—far from it.

The Bible says that God wants to do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). The surrendered Christian life is an exciting life!

Indeed, Satan's great lie to Eve was that God was withholding something good. Put into today's language, Satan said, “Eve, Jesus has come to steal your hopes, dreams, and desires.” Satan insists that earthly pleasures are better than heavenly ones. (Read Matthew 6:19–21.)



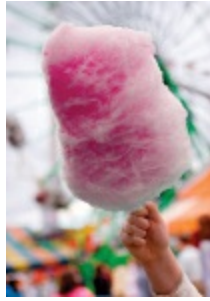
But don't believe it! “To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). God wants us to taste heavenly joy even while we are here on the earth. When Jesus asks us to surrender something, it's always because He has something better to offer in return—not because He wants to ruin your life. What kind of loving god would that be?

“The LORD will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).

The typical enjoyments of the world are like cotton candy.

It looks so big, bright, exciting, and filling. It makes us feel a quick rush of pleasure—but in the end, we're hungrier than before. It enchants us just enough to make us keep coming back, yet a little more is never quite enough. Rather than a satisfying meal, cotton candy is just a teaspoon of sugar

infused with a lot of hot air.



Imagine, then, what cotton-candy entertainment is doing to your spirit!

List some of the empty pleasures in your life that ultimately just let you down:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

5. Why is it a sin to watch someone else doing things I would never do?



“I will set nothing _____ before my eyes” (Psalm 101:3).

If we truly are created to reflect God’s image and glory, then we won’t want to be changed into the image of something sinful.

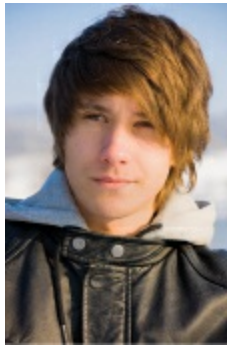
Being entertained by watching, listening to, or even imagining wickedness weakens our hatred for it—and by default impairs our ability to love the things of God. Plus, any sin that is tolerated might eventually be embraced. Ultimately, it means that we might worship these “things” more than our Creator.



The Bible also makes it clear that God condemns not just those who do wicked things, but also those who “have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:32 KJV). If you don’t do sinful acts but enjoy watching others do them or even hearing them talk about it, sin will become more attractive to you. It’s sinning by proxy—in our heart and minds, we become an accomplice to their sins.

As many can testify, when we flirt with the devil, he will take advantage of us. Someone once said, “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you planned to stay, and cost you more than you are able to pay.”

6. Does that mean if I ever think of anything bad, I’m sinning?



“But I say to you that whoever _____ at a woman to _____ for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

This does *not* mean that every fleeting bad thought drifting through our mind is a sin.

There’s a difference between being tempted and sinning. It is no sin to be *tempted*. Even Jesus was tempted, but He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15).

Sometimes wrong thoughts enter our minds, but we don’t have to keep thinking about them. It is one thing for a thought to occur—it’s quite another to accept and dwell on that thought. Martin Luther is reported to have said, “You cannot prevent birds from flying overhead, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair.”

It is certainly difficult to stop all the wrong impressions from entering your mind, but the Bible promises that God will never allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).



Even if we don't actually do certain sinful things, the Bible says that we can still be counted guilty by mentally participating in them. Deliberately taking pleasure in wrong thoughts is the first part of almost any sin. Sin is not just an action; it's an attitude. That is why salvation must involve a new heart and new mind.

Remember that you have a safeguard: The Holy Spirit can bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

7. How can I really know if something is right or wrong?



“_____ all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Is tapping your foot to a rhythmic musical beat sinful? Not necessarily.

But let's face it, some music is calculated to awaken sexual urges, movements, and thoughts. Even if we are consciously able to control ourselves from acting out at first, listening to such music weakens our resistance to sin and magnifies the devil rather than God.



There are also lots of things that are harmless in the right context but dangerous when used wrongly or taken to excess. Food, exercise, friendship, and even sex are all gifts from God that can bless us—*if* we use them the way He designed. Conversely, almost any gift of God can be perverted by using it the wrong way.

So how are we to determine if something is right or wrong? Surf the Internet? Ask a friend?

The best test for any entertainment choice is to determine if it follows the principles of God’s Word. We must listen to the Holy Spirit, because it is never safe to go by what we feel or what others think. And the better we know His Word, the easier we can answer this question.

It might be cliché now, but always ask, “What would Jesus do?” Why? Because a Christian is a follower of Christ. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).



If our hearts are right with God, we will be willing to follow Him—not because He forces us, but because we love Him and want to bring Him glory. Our prayer will be, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24 KJV).

As we surrender to God, search the Scriptures, and ask Him to guide us, He will. “In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

8. How do the pleasures of God outweigh what the world can offer me?

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will _____ thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into _____
_____’ ” (John 4:13, 14).



If you watch a movie because you feel bored and empty, you’ll likely feel just as bored and empty after the movie ends.

You might even feel less content with your life after comparing it to the fantasy situations you see on the screen! In fact, after the “high” of a party or concert, many people sink into a valley of depression that they try to cure by seeking out other temporary stimulation. Did you know that many young people commit suicide after parties?

Consider Hollywood. It’s obvious that looks, money, and unlimited entertainment do not produce contentment. Instead, our world is living proof that these things often cause a bitter harvest of addictions, painful relationships, and desperation. Worldly entertainment is like drinking salt water—the more you drink, the thirstier you are ... until one day you drink enough to die.

But there is good news!



The same God who created our hearts knows best how to satisfy them. As we turn our eyes toward Jesus and ask Him to live His life within us, He will wean our away tastes from “the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). It can take a little time for this change to occur, but you can know that God is faithful to complete the work! (See Philippians 1:6.)

Yes, drinking from the Fountain of Living Water satisfies like nothing this world can ever hope to offer you. There is no high from drugs, sensual pleasure, or the excitement of extreme sports that can compare with the genuine happiness that God offers. The joy of spending time with Jesus in prayer, study, and fellowship will bring everything else into perspective. We will become passionate about what God is passionate about: sharing His love and glorifying Him in our lives.

And helping lost people find this treasure of eternal life will bring you the greatest satisfaction. “Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

9. How do I resist my natural longing for worldly pleasures?



“Your _____ I have hidden in my _____ , That I might not sin against You!” (Psalm 119:11).

Imagine entering a banquet hall in which the table is full of every kind of rich and delicious junk food. That would be very tempting if you were hungry.

But suppose you just finished stuffing yourself at another banquet filled with scrumptious healthy food. Wouldn't it be a lot easier to turn down the tempting table of junk food?

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live” (Isaiah 55:2, 3).



God is inviting us to fill our minds and hearts with His truth, and we will find the cravings of the world lose their power over us when we do that. That's pretty extraordinary, isn't it? Imagine not being a slave to anything on this earth! (And imagine how much money you'll save by not spending it on things that can't really satisfy you.)

God wants us to take two steps in breaking this cycle of death unto death:

1. Come to Jesus and ask Him for a new heart. He has promised to do a miraculous work within us that we cannot do for ourselves. (See Ezekiel 36:26.)
2. Let go of and turn our backs on the things of the world.

This is what it takes to “put off ... the old man, which is corrupt ... And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24 KJV). Then, instead of being addicted to the things of the world, we gladly deny ourselves anything that would come between Him and us!



Cheng Guan Lim was a young college student studying engineering, but he was doing poorly in physics and math. He knew that if his studies did not improve, he would have to leave school and take the humiliating news of his failure back to his father in Singapore. Then one day Cheng just disappeared. His friends called the police, but they found no clues. Over the next four years, his family frantically tried to find what had become of their son.

Then early one morning, the pastor of Cheng's old church, where Cheng had been a janitor before he disappeared, had someone check the attic. They had been hearing some strange noises. There in the glow of their flashlights, crouched above them in the rafters, was Cheng.

Rather than face his father with his failures, Cheng lived in the dark and dusty attic for four years. During the day, he slept on padding from a pew. At night he walked around the church and helped himself to leftover food from the kitchen. When the police came he said, “I'm glad I was found.”

Don't be afraid of your failures or your heavenly Father. He will run to meet you.
(Read Luke 15:20.)



But you can also do something to stay near to God along the way. Long before scientists ever concluded that what we watch and listen to affects our behavior, the Bible was proclaiming it: “I will set before my eyes no vile thing” (Psalm 101:3 NIV).

So how can we be safe?

If we draw near to God, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). Would you like to fully surrender your life to Jesus now? You can honor this commitment, whether you made it just now or a long time ago, by choosing what kind of entertainment you accept in your life.

Will you make God the center of your life—and choose those things that are good for your spiritual life? _____

“If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer



How About My Body?

CHAPTER SIX

“If you don't find time to exercise, you'll have to find time for illness.” —Unknown

As a teenager, Jack experienced very poor health.

But it was much worse than poor health. Addicted to sugary junk food, his volatile moods frequently swung between suicidal and homicidal. His murderous intentions were mostly directed at his older brother, whom he once nearly killed with an ax. Short and skinny and suffering from acne, Jack was also bullied without mercy by his schoolmates.

When Jack was 15, his mother made him accompany her to hear nutritionist Paul Bragg speak on diet, health, and exercise. At the conclusion of his talk, Bragg performed back flips across the stage that punctuated the truths of his speech. It was a life-changing experience for Jack, who gave up junk food and focused himself on better exercise habits. The transformation was so complete that by the time Jack graduated from high school, he was offered several athletic scholarships. However, Jack passed up a lucrative future in sports to dedicate his life to teaching others how to care for their bodies.



Today, he's the wildly popular health and nutritional expert known as “The Godfather of Fitness”—Jack LaLanne!

Along with his wife of 50 years, Jack promotes a vegetarian diet and blames overly processed foods for many of today's health problems. And if you're wondering, Jack has always practiced what he preaches—at age 95, he still exercises two hours a day!

Even though Jack is a millionaire many times over, he almost always wears a simple jumpsuit. His motto is: “Be happy you are alive! Get up in the morning and say, ‘Thank God, I'm here again.’” In 1984, when he was 70, Jack fought strong winds and currents as he swam 1.5 miles while towing 70 boats with 70 people from the Queensway Bay Bridge in the Long Beach Harbor to the Queen Mary. He did this all while handcuffed and shackled! Talk about proving your point!



Indeed, the human body is a miraculous thing. King David said, “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). With proper self-discipline and maintenance, our biological temples can provide us about 80 years of quality service, but if we neglect proper care, total happiness will elude us.

The fact is, we experience all of our lives in our bodies. That’s why our most important question for this lesson is: How does God recommend we feed, clothe, and treat our bodies to experience abundant life?

Well, let’s find out ...

Strong and Healthy

In the world of sports nutrition a carefully chosen diet and proper rest are necessities in the elite training of Olympic athletes. The kind of food eaten, the portion sizes, and the timing for meals all make a definite impact that could mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Likewise, what you put into your body can directly affect your mental clarity, moods, longevity, and—yes—even your grades!

1. Does it really matter to God what I eat?



“And God said, ‘See, I have given you every _____ that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose _____ yields seed; to you it shall be for food’ ”
(Genesis 1:29).



God’s original diet planned for humans was plant-based: fruits, grains, and nuts. Vegetables were added after Adam and Eve sinned (Genesis 3:17, 18). More than 1,600 years passed before God permitted meat eating—after the Flood, when vegetation had been destroyed worldwide and eating animals became necessary for human survival.

But perhaps you’re wondering how these vegetarians, Noah and his family, knew which animals were safe to eat. Well, interestingly, before the animals even entered the ark, God made a distinction. He commanded Noah:

“You shall take with you _____ each of every _____ animal, a male and his female; _____ each of animals that are _____, a male and his female” (Genesis 7:2).

So seven clean animals versus two unclean animals—just by sheer numbers, it was easy to tell. But why just two unclean animals? Because humans would not be eating them, else the unclean animals would go extinct!

Later, God helped His people clarify a simple method to determine between clean and unclean creatures. Clean (edible) creatures have the following characteristics:

Animals:	Cloven/split hooves and chew the cud (Leviticus 11:2, 3)
Marine Life:	Fins and scales (Leviticus 11:9)
Birds:	Any bird except birds-of-prey, scavengers, and non-vegetarians (Leviticus 11:13–19)
Insects:	Wings, four legs, and can jump (Leviticus 11:21, 22)



Several years ago, the U.S. Navy invested considerable time and resources developing a marine survival guide. Their goal was to produce a detailed list of the edible sea life in a particular region. After extensive research, they discovered the safest advice was eating only marine life with fins and scales!

Over and over again, medical science confirms the healthfulness of the diet found in Genesis. Now that's pretty extraordinary considering the Bible was written thousands of years ago!

Your food choices dramatically impact your health, as well as your ability to think clearly. Whole grain foods, fruits, vegetables, and nuts provide the best nutrition to build strong healthy bodies. Anything else—soda, candy, cookies, chips, meat—should be eaten sparingly, if at all!

Think about what you ate today. What can you do to make your diet more body friendly?

2. What does the Bible say about alcohol and drugs?



“Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At the last it _____ like a serpent, And _____ like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things” (Proverbs 23:31–33).

Many who have seen the mangled remains of a crashed car, or wept at the grave of a friend, or felt the painful blows from an abuser know the destructive power of alcohol.

Yet young people are still targeted and influenced by the slick slogans and ads that say you need to use alcohol to be accepted, cool, and sexy. What the ads won't tell you is how detrimental alcohol

is to your health—especially for a growing teen.

“Wine is a _____ , Strong drink is a _____ , and Whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).



Alcohol isn't the only substance that bites like a serpent. Smoking, chewing tobacco, caffeine, drugs, and “huffing” all have dramatic and destructive physical and mind-altering effects. In many cases, these substances are tenaciously addicting, with many long-term debilitating consequences.

It's easy to disregard the far-reaching effects your decisions have, because the results often are not immediately seen and your life is just getting started. It's like stealing cash from the register, a dollar at a time. The first few might not be immediately missed, but sooner or later, someone will notice and you'll be in danger. It's the same with your body—stop robbing your body of its health little by little and take measures to protect it.

“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

3. What can I do to increase my mental and physical strength?

“Be _____ , be _____ ; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

When we read or hear the word “sober,” we typically take it to mean someone who isn't under the influence of alcohol. Yet the meaning is much broader. A “sober” person is someone who has self-control over of his or her mental and physical faculties.

While it is obvious that alcohol and drugs—including some prescription medicine—have a negative effect on our self-control, something simple like a lack of sleep can also impair your motor

control, memory, and the ability to process information.

Have you ever inhaled helium from a balloon and then amused your friends with your high, chipmunk-sounding voice? Even with your best efforts, your voice didn't sound normal again until enough helium was exhaled past your vocal cords.

In a serious and sobering way, this is a lot like what happens to your brain and body when you're under the influence of harmful substances or poor health choices. Because your body is His temple, God expects you to keep your body uncontaminated and in good working order.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, _____ - _____. Against such there is no _____” (Galatians 5:22, 23).



In what area of your life do you wish you had more self-control? How can you get more control over it?

4. Can I do whatever I want as long as I'm being moderate and balanced?



“He who loves _____ will be a poor man; He who loves _____ and oil will not be rich” (Proverbs 21:17).

Self-control doesn't mean just avoiding what is harmful. It also involves making wise use of what is healthful. Balance in even the good things is important in maintaining and building a strong physical temple.

“The _____ of a laboring man is _____ , Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep” (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

Unfortunately, many teens today are chronically sleep deprived. According to a 2006 survey, nearly half of students sleep less than eight hours on school nights—significantly less than the recommended nine hours! Did you know this corresponds directly with lower grades, irritability, anxiety, depression, and motor vehicle accidents?



Part of the reason for this epidemic of sleep problems among teens is a lack of practical exercise and overstimulation of media devices. Daily exercise with fresh air and sunshine can work wonders toward a good night's rest!

And there's this: Thousands of years ago, King Solomon discovered what millions of people now wish they had known:

“It is not good to eat much honey” (Proverbs 25:27).



Obesity and diabetes, once thought to be the afflictions of adults, now affects millions of teens. Sugar and its substitutes are major culprits. Not only that, they also have an immediate, negative impact on your immune system. (Plus, too much sugar will keep you awake!)

In fact, simply eating a medium piece of cheesecake or drinking a milkshake drops your body’s ability to fight bacteria by 92 percent. What’s more, this drop in immune protection lasts at least five hours! Imagine all those colds and flu symptoms you could avoid just by cutting back on sugary foods!

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

Dressing for Success

Humans are different from every other creature in regard to clothing. All of the other animals in God’s kingdom were born with their clothes on; the covering they need grows from the inside out. We are the only creature whose clothing must come entirely from the outside.

God originally dressed people with robes of light, but that light dissipated when Adam and Eve sinned (Mark 9:3). The first artificial clothes they wore were skimpy fig leaves, but God told them that would not be enough, and so He provided them robes of animal skin as a symbol of Christ’s righteousness.



Today, every man and woman must make daily decisions regarding what to wear, and the clothing we choose says something about what we think of God and ourselves.

5. Does it really matter to God what I wear?

“But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your _____, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:15, 16).



You’ve probably heard it said that “you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover.”

But the fact is, people always look at the cover and make judgments. Therefore, your wardrobe choices make a statement about your priorities and values. So, should a Christian’s clothing reflect the extravagant, egocentric, or seductive styles worn by non-Christians?

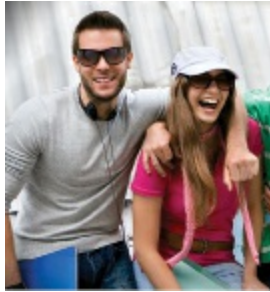
“Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be _____, says the Lord. Do not touch what is _____, And I will receive you’ ” (2 Corinthians 6:17).



Do your clothes reveal a sincere desire to honor God, or do they show your hunger for attention and approval from others? In choosing clothes and hairstyles, the guiding principles for a Christian should be cleanliness, order, and modesty.

Take a moment to evaluate what’s in your closet. What do your clothes say about you?

6. Is it wrong for me to keep up with current styles?



“Do not let your _____ be merely _____—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel” (1 Peter 3:3).

Today, it’s a favorite pastime for people to keep up with what’s going on over at Madison Avenue—and it’s probably social suicide if you don’t. But Scripture says that your attractiveness should come from more than just the clothes you wear.

“Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible _____ of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very _____ in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:4).

Your inner beauty and Christ-like character should be reflected in clothing appropriate for God’s temple. Unfortunately, much of today’s fashions accentuate sex appeal instead of wholesome attractiveness. This is an area where both young women *and* men need to exercise extra caution.



“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a

_____ or a cause to fall in our brother's way" (Romans 14:13).

Many girls unwittingly arouse impure thoughts in guys who see them just by the clothes they wear. For instance, a young lady might think she's just looking attractive in her favorite fitted t-shirt and low-slung jeans, but the guys who see her might be fighting the temptation to lust. It's up to *all* Christians to give each other our best chance to remain pure.

So adorning your temple in a way that causes others to defile theirs with impure thoughts is not Christ-like or respectful. While modesty certainly doesn't mean wearing a potato sack, it does mean being conscious of the image you project to others. A good rule of thumb is to avoid exposing or emphasizing intimate or alluring parts of the body.

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

7. What does the Bible say about tattoos or body piercings?

"You shall not make any _____ in your flesh for the dead, nor _____ any marks on you: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:28).



The origins of tattoos and body piercings spring from pagan and tribal religions directly opposed to God. In fact, tattooing is still practiced by many animist tribes in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America, as well as New Age and occult adherents, while multiple body piercings remain common among Hindus and other religious groups. In the Bible, a man harassed by a devil "cut himself" (Mark 5:5).

The Bible declares,

"So God created man in His own _____ ; in the _____ of God He created him; male

and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

You are created in God’s image. Because of this, you bear a strong family resemblance to God. That is why He asks you to be a pure and holy temple. Getting a tattoo or body piercing is like permanently painting graffiti on God’s mirror. Besides, over time, all tattoos fade and wrinkle—looking much worse than having no tattoo.

Body piercings also open you up to serious infections and blood-borne diseases, such as Hepatitis B and C, HIV, and tuberculosis. Tattoo shops and body piercing establishments are not held to the same instrument sterility standards as medical offices.



Four weeks after receiving his \$45 tattoo, a 22-year-old grocery store employee needed a liver transplant. In November 2005, a teenage boy died of blood poisoning after getting his lip pierced in England. In 2007, the Australian government offered free blood tests to patrons of a body piercing salon after it was determined they could have been exposed to blood-borne viruses.

Sexually Pure



God created men and women with the miraculous ability to create in their own image when they become one flesh through sexual intimacy. This is a sacred treasure that is to be guarded and reserved for the one person you marry.

That’s why God also designed your body with a moral security system. It is up to you to decide whether you guard the security code or give it out to others freely, potentially compromising the security and wellbeing of your body and future.

8. Why should I wait until marriage to have sex?

“Flee _____ . Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

God created sex and intended it to be a blessing. And because He knows how powerfully bonding the sexual relationship is, God also gave three specific boundaries to safeguard *your* happiness.

“And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no longer _____ but _____. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate’ ” (Matthew 19:4–6).



God’s three easy-to-remember boundaries are:

- 1) Sex is to be between male and female.
- 2) You must be married.
- 3) Your partner must be your spouse.

All three of these criteria must be met if you want to obey God. It’s not a multiple-choice answer or about choosing any that apply. Society wants you to ignore these boundaries and have you believe that God is keeping something good away from you. But that’s not the case.

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No _____ will He withhold From those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).



Engaging in pre-marital sex is like midnight looting and vandalism. Not only do you clandestinely desecrate your own temple, you also ransack someone else's temple and steal sacred gifts dedicated to another. "Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned?" (Proverbs 6:27).

The greatest sexual pleasure can be yours only if you exercise the greatest patience waiting for the right time and the right person.

"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed _____; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

God's boundaries also make practical sense. Sexually transmitted diseases infect millions of new people each year—one in four are teens! By simply choosing to follow God's three-step plan, you eliminate the risk of acquiring one of these incurable—and often deadly—diseases.

9. How can I keep myself morally pure in today's sexually crazed society?



"But I say to you that whoever _____ at a woman to _____ for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

Guard what you see and think about.

According to Jesus, sex is far more than a physical act. It is a state of mind, an attitude of the heart. Your thoughts determine your actions. If you make a habit of fantasizing about sex, be it through TV and movies, romance novels, or the latest skin magazines or on the Internet, your actions will soon follow in the footsteps of your thoughts.

“Keep your _____ with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Research indicates that while many Christian teens want to reserve the “ultimate” sexual act for marriage, they admit to pushing the envelope in other ways. Heavy petting, virtual sex, sexting, sexual fantasizing, indulging in pornography, and ... well, you get the idea.

However rationalized, these “unofficial” sexual encounters count, at least, as lusting in the heart. As a teenager, now is the time to practice self-restraint. Sexual temptation will not disappear once you are married. The habits you form now will impact your future marriage for good or evil.

Take just sexual fantasizing and pornography, for instance. Rather than choosing to exercise self-control over their desires, thousands of teens are teaching their bodies and minds to “fly solo.” These self-gratifying habits are addictive and carry into a marriage relationship with toxic results.

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone _____ the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is _____, which temple you are” (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17).



What things can you do to keep your thoughts and actions sexually pure?

When Jesus offered His life to save you, He suffered for all of your sins—redeeming you from the death penalty. He paid the complete price for your sins of mind and body, and now He offers you eternal life. But to accept that gift, you must give Him your mind, heart, and body.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

As God’s living temple, He is calling you to live a life that honors Him. He will help you.

Is it your desire to magnify God with the temple of your body? _____



What Is God's Will for My Life?

CHAPTER SEVEN

*“The will of God will never lead you where
the grace of God cannot keep you.” —Unknown*

Wilma Rudolph faced adversity from the very beginning.

First, she was born prematurely—weighing only four-and-a-half pounds at birth.

Then she spent the next several years being nursed by her mother through one illness after another: measles, mumps, scarlet fever, and chicken pox. And by the time Wilma was four years old, she contracted double pneumonia and polio, which left her with a paralyzed and deformed left leg. Doctors said she'd never get around without assistance.

But little Wilma's simple faith in God would not allow her to give up. Instead of pouting or blaming God for her misfortunes, she determined to do the best with what she had. At age seven, Wilma learned to walk with a metal leg brace. Just two years later, she stunned doctors when she removed the brace and began to walk around without it. By age 13, she had developed a rhythmic walk, which doctors proclaimed as a miracle.



That very same year, Wilma decided to become a runner. She entered one race and came in last. In fact, for the next few years, every race she entered, she came in last. Everyone else thought it was depressing and told her to quit, but she kept running. Then one day she actually won a race. And then another ... soon she won virtually every race she entered. Eventually, this little girl, stricken as a child and told she would never walk again, went on to win *three* Olympic gold medals for running!

You might wonder: Was it God's plan for Wilma to suffer as a child so she could overcome adversity and become a champion? Is it God's will for anyone to suffer, or does the Lord simply work circumstances out for the best in the lives of His children?



These questions naturally lead to our most important questions for this lesson. Are our lives controlled by a great divine destiny? Do we have a choice in our future and our salvation—or is everything that happens subject to chance and unpredictable luck? Can we know God’s will for our lives and have real security about the future?

Let’s get to the bottom of these questions and discover the truth together as we explore, from Scripture, the subject of God’s will.

1. Is everything that happens God’s will?

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is _____ toward us, not willing that any should _____ but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

The Bible says it is God’s will that no one perishes eternally. But we know from Scripture that many will:

“The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9).



Why would God tell us to pray that “His will be done” if it is going to happen anyway? (Matthew 6:10). Because it doesn’t! Besides, if God’s will were always done, wouldn’t it be His fault that

Adam and Eve sinned? Yet the Bible is full of stories in which God warns people not to do things, yet they do them anyway and suffer terrible consequences.

So although God is sovereign, there is something that *stops* His will from always happening—the freedom of choice that He gives to His intelligent creatures.

2. If God can do anything, why doesn't He just make His will happen in my life?

“But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may _____ My power in you, and that My name may be _____ in all the earth” (Exodus 9:16).

In this Bible passage, God is speaking to the rebellious Pharaoh through Moses. He tells Pharaoh His purpose: to reveal Himself to Egypt and the surrounding nations. He invites Pharaoh to cooperate with Him, but the pagan king refuses.

Yet despite Pharaoh's stubbornness, the people of Egypt and the surrounding nations still learned about the marvelous power of God. So ultimately, God's full purpose is always accomplished. But why doesn't He just make His will always happen?

Think about it:

- Is Satan doing God's *will*? _____
- Is God's *purpose* of revealing His love being accomplished even through Satan's rebellion?



God loves people too much to force them to always do His will. If someone were to lock you in a jail cell and tell you they weren't going to release you until you loved them, you might get desperate enough to say “I love you.” But would you really love them?

Think about it:

- Would you want to live in a world in which God *forces* you to do His will? _____

Real love can't be forced. Imagine buying a talking doll that repeated “I love you” over and over again. Would that make you feel truly loved? Like ripping open a rosebud, trying to force love is a

waste of time. But warm sunshine, water, and time will cause that rosebud to open into a fragrant, beautiful blossom. Love grows like that too.

Love is unselfish, and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Logically, a God of love would never force people to love Him in return. That is why He has given us—and all the universe, Satan included—the opportunity to choose. God created us in His love whether or not we would love Him in return.



Of course, His *will* is for people to love Him in return. He will not force us, however. But no matter what choices individuals make in the battle between good and evil, ultimately God’s purpose will be accomplished: showing His love to us and the world.

3. Where can I find the clearest revelation of God’s will?

“I delight to do Your _____, O my God, And Your _____ is within my heart”
(Psalm 40:8).



The most basic expression of God’s will is found in His Ten Commandments.

For example, we don’t need to wonder at all about God’s will if we’re deciding whether or not to rob the local bank. His law says, “Thou shall not steal.” That is a very clear expression of God’s will on that subject.

This principle is also true with the rest of the Bible. The will of God will never lead you in opposition to the teachings of His Word. That’s why having a regular habit of reading the Bible and praying will bring the ongoing will of God into sharper focus for you.

4. Who can I turn to as a good model of God’s will?

“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to _____ just as He _____” (1 John 2:6).



A Christian is not a follower of other Christians—but rather a follower of Christ.

The example of Jesus’ life provides us a very powerful revelation of God’s will. When facing a difficult choice, we must always ask, “What would Jesus do?” When we reflect what Jesus did in His life, we know we are doing God’s will.

Of course, one important key to discovering God’s will for our lives is having a willingness to do His will when we learn it—surrendering our hearts to follow His Word. “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself” (John 7:17 NASB).

Whatever happens to us, it is always God’s will that we live in harmony with His purpose—living out His love as an example to others. As we grasp by faith the truth that God will ultimately win the battle over evil, we stop worrying so much about whether things are going to work out for us on earth and we resolve to participate eagerly in the process of fulfilling His purpose (1 John 2:17). We need to trust that God’s will is the best way.

5. Does everything that happens really work out for good?

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



Not necessarily. Let's face it, some people's lives are miserable and end tragically. In fact, most people forget this part of this verse: "to those that love God."

Pharaoh didn't love God, so things didn't work together for good for him. On the other hand, lots of bad things happened to Joseph—and Wilma Rudolph—but in the end they all worked together for good. If Joseph had become bitter and stopped surrendering to God's purpose, his story would have been very different. Even for people like John the Baptist, who was beheaded, we know that from an eternal perspective, things will work together for good for him. Indeed, his next conscious thought will be of the resurrection and eternal glory with Jesus!

Here is a really good illustration of this principle: In Jeremiah chapter 18, God sends Jeremiah to watch a potter. As the potter is shaping a vessel, the clay doesn't cooperate. Instead of throwing it away, the potter changes the shape of the vessel he is molding to accommodate the fault. *Because the clay does not cooperate, the will of the potter changes.* God then explains to Jeremiah, "As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel" (Jeremiah 18:6 KJV). God then explains that if He says He is going to destroy a nation but then the people repent, He will no longer have to destroy them. If He says He will bless a nation but then the people rebel against Him, He can't do what He had planned after all. God's *purpose* is to show love, but sometimes the most loving thing He can do is allow some painful experience to discipline us so we can know the consequences of sin.

Sickness, accidents, death—God doesn't want these things to happen. But sometimes even bad things powerfully unveil Satan's true character, and it makes us hate sin's power. In this way, they accomplish God's ultimate *purpose*.

In order to find God's will, we must understand the crucial difference between His *will* and His *purpose*. God's perfect *will* is often disrupted by sin, but His *purpose* will be accomplished no matter what we do. As we seek to let His *purpose* be fulfilled in our lives, we allow His love to conform us to His image. The first step toward finding God's *will* for our lives is surrendering ourselves to His *purpose*.

This is revealed throughout the mighty cosmic battle between Christ and Satan. Think about it: No matter how much Satan and his followers oppose God, ultimately God’s purpose will be accomplished—not in spite of, but actually *through*, their actions!

6. If I want to discover God’s will, can I just ask for a sign?

“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).



It’s true that God sometimes spoke to His people through signs, and He might still do that today occasionally. However, when making important life-changing decisions, seeking signs should be a last resort. In many ways, life is sort of like driving with a GPS—sometimes we get the directions we need only at the moment we need them. God has given us minds and wants us to use them to analyze the decisions we have to make (Isaiah 1:18).

Often, the reason we want a sign is because we lack patience or faith in God, but God wants to build our faith through the process of waiting, praying, and surrendering (James 5:11; Psalm 90:4; Luke 21:9). Or like the wayward prophet Balaam, we might not really want to do God’s will anyway and just want a sign so we can feel better about doing our *own* will (Numbers 22).

God wants to use our circumstances to transform us into His image. He is not a divine “fortune teller” who demands payment of worship and then repays us with the verdict we want. The process of praying and waiting teaches us reliance on God and “tuning in” to Him much more effectively than getting a quick sign—like flipping a coin. The journey—the process of being changed into God’s image—is more important than the destination.

7. Where can I find God’s will more plainly revealed than in a sign?

“Your word is a _____ to my feet and a _____ to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Notice, this does not say that God’s Word is like the sun in the sky, revealing everything ahead of us in the distance. If you were hiking on a dark, dangerous trail and only the person in front of you had a flashlight, wouldn’t you be motivated to stay close to them?



God often reveals only one step at a time to help us remember that we need Him and His Word.

Sometimes we ask for signs because we just don’t want to follow the process God has outlined in His Word for finding His will. (That’s why we must always pray when we read the Bible.) We probably don’t need a sign to tell us whether we should spend our summer sharing the gospel or spend all our time at the beach.

God’s Word is sufficient to show us where we will be most effective in accomplishing His goals and being changed into His image.

8. If the Bible doesn’t clearly show me God’s will in a situation, where should I look next?

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a _____ was _____ to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 2:12, 13).

This passage shows us that God will sometimes use circumstances to guide us. Throughout the Bible, we see God using circumstances to point people to what He wanted them to do. (See Ruth 2:3; Esther 2:8; Judges 16:29, 30, for some amazing examples!) Sometimes God opens and closes doors of opportunity for us in answer to prayer.

Can you think of a time when God used circumstances to show you His will, either in a Bible story or in your life? If so, explain:



Plus, when we are surrendered to God and are in tune with His Spirit, sometimes He chooses to speak to us simply through the influence of His Spirit on our hearts (Psalm 37:4; 20:4).

Of course, we must be very careful not to confuse our own inclinations with God’s voice. But when we have prayerfully studied God’s counsel and followed His direction through circumstances as much as possible, we can have confidence that His Spirit will lead us.

9. What are some other keys to finding God’s will for my life?

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



God has promised to reveal His will to us when we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Never forget how important His help always is in searching for meaning in our lives.

Pray With a Humble Heart

“The humble He _____ in justice, And the humble He _____ His way” (Psalm 25:9).



When we surrender to God, we resolve to let Him fulfill His purpose—that is, changing us into His image. He has promised to show us what He wants us to do. (See John 7:17.) We are to trust in the Lord with all our hearts, that He will show us what He wants in His perfect timing (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

Get Wise Counsel

“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the _____ of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14).



There is a saying that good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of experience comes from bad judgment. Those who have traveled the rocky road ahead of us can often save us a lot of time and heartache if we listen to them.

Sometimes it's hard to see how the Bible applies to the situations we face in life. Having a

parent, mentor, or counselor show us how biblical principles apply can be as useful as having a translator when you're trying to find your way through a foreign city. But watch out for counselors who tell you only what you want to hear. (See 2 Chronicles 18:7–22; 2 Corinthians 13:1.)

Fast and Pray

“As they _____ to the Lord and _____, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’ “ (Acts 13:2).

The Bible tells us that God wants us to pray earnestly and repeatedly for things, even when they are already His will (1 Kings 18:42–44). This helps us recognize the things that happen as answers to prayer. (See also Acts 13:2, 3; 2 Chronicles 20; John 15:15.) Prayer helps bring our hearts in tune with God so that we desire what He desires (Matthew 17:20).

Be Faithful

“And whatever you do, do it _____, as to the _____ and not to men” (Colossians 3:23).



What this means is that if you have no indication of God's will for your future, it might be because He is waiting for you to follow through on what He has already revealed to you.

If we are knowingly rebelling against the Lord's will in some specific area, why should we expect Him to reveal His will in a new area? Pride can also make us think that we are very important and God *must* do something special with us. However, humility makes us realize that we are *privileged* if God chooses us to be His tools to do something great.

Glorify God

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do _____ to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).



The Ten Commandments are summed up as loving God and loving others as ourselves. We might not always be sure what God wants, but we can be confident that He wants us to think of Him and others as we make our decisions (Romans 14:7; Galatians 5:14).

10. What if I have already deliberately done something that wasn't in God's will?

“If My people who are called by My name will _____ themselves, and _____ and seek My face, and _____ from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Remember, God told Jonah to go east to Nineveh to preach to the people in an effort to save them from destruction. But Jonah had other plans. Instead of going east, he went west. You know the rest of the story: Following a stormy sea voyage, Jonah ended up getting swallowed by a sea creature. But when Jonah prayed from the creature's digestive system, God heard his prayer and forgave him. In the end, He still sent him to Nineveh and thousands were saved.



When children rebel, parents can get exasperated. But good parents never stop loving their children. Only unloving parents would wreck their children's lives to "get even."

Likewise, when we disobey God, He often allows consequences to happen to us to teach us the hard lessons. But He doesn't get mad and say, "Fine! Go find out what happens when you do that." He is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). His goal is never to get even with us, but always to restore us to Him.



When we make mistakes because we don't know better, God is very patient (Acts 17:30). But even if we have deliberately gone against God's will, He loves us and will do everything He can to work with us. Like the potter with the clay, God doesn't give up on us, but changes His will so that His purpose—revealing His character of love to the world—can still be accomplished through us.

So don't give up on God—He hasn't given up on you!

Finally, remember this lesson: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17).

If you have faith, God will honor you far more than you dreamed!

Do you resolve to let God fulfill His purpose of changing you into His image, so He can show His love to the universe through you? _____

Will you seek to do His will as He reveals it to you? _____

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness." —Martin Luther



Can We All Get Along?

CHAPTER EIGHT

“If God asks that you bend, bend and do not complain. He is making you more flexible, and for this be thankful.” —Terri Guillemets

Park rangers were utterly bewildered about how to stop the carnage.

In a baffling five-year rampage of uncharacteristic violence, several adolescent bull elephants at the Pilanesberg National Park in South Africa savagely killed more than 40 white rhinoceroses.

As a last resort, some of the young elephants found closest to the crimes were killed. Yet the problem persisted. Flush with hormones, these young male elephants were also making a horrible nuisance of themselves, uprooting trees and snorting dust in the faces of other animals.

What the park rangers eventually realized was that all these males were orphans—they had missed out on the positive socialization inherent in a normal elephant herd. Instead of being trained by the example of the group, they had been left to their own devices, without any mature role models.



The solution? The park rangers brought in six older bull elephants. These mature bulls modeled acceptable elephant etiquette, and the harassing and violence from the orphans ceased.

Like the young elephants of Pilanesberg National Park, humans have a deeply rooted desire to belong, to fit in, and to be an accepted part of the group. That’s why our relationships with family, friends, and the church are so important. But when someone doesn’t have this secure sense of belonging, or good role models to follow, he or she can sometimes start behaving as erratically as one of those young elephants.

Of course, you are not an elephant; after all, you’re reading this! But this illustration is a powerful way to introduce the subject of relationships and how they play such an important role in your life. Let’s explore some of the biblical principles by asking this most important question: How can we strengthen all of our relationships so that we can avoid “uprooting trees“ in our lives?

As we begin, it’s imperative to look first at God’s relationship with you and understand His perspective. Once you see yourself through God’s eyes, it will dramatically impact your interactions with everyone else.

1. How am I related to God?

“Behold what manner of _____ the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called _____ of God!” (1 John 3:1).



According to the Bible, *you* are a child of God. After all, He invites you to address Him as your “Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9).

This makes you a member of God’s family and a royal heir to the heavenly fortune! Sure, you might not have paparazzi following your every move or adoring fans always asking for your autograph, but your inheritance is bigger than that of the richest Hollywood celebrity. Not only that, God considers you so important that He has you protected 24/7 by His elite bodyguards! Better known as angels. (See Psalm 34:7; 91:11; 2 Kings 6:16, 17.)

But the best part of all these royal privileges is that the King of the universe offers you a deep, personal relationship with Himself—a relationship so intensely satisfying that you realize instantly that you belong, that you are loved and accepted for who you are. You never need to worry about a few zits on your face, having the latest fashions, or hanging out with the right crowd, because God loves you unconditionally.



“The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an _____ love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (Jeremiah 31:3).

2. What does God think of me?

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of _____ and not of evil, to give you a _____ and a _____” (Jeremiah 29:11).

God understands your dreams and your goals. He also knows what will bring you ultimate happiness and fulfillment. The plans He has for your future are not boring or a dead-end. Instead, they are plans that sparkle with opportunity and exhilarating challenge.

Your heavenly Father created you for a special purpose. He gave you a unique set of talents and gifts. He made you one-of-a-kind. As a result, you are especially equipped to accomplish the horizon-expanding plans He has customized just for you.



“How precious also are Your _____ to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You” (Psalm 139:17, 18).

No concern of yours is too small for God to notice. Nor is He too busy to listen or spend time with you. There’s no need to leave a voicemail or wait while He takes another call. You always have immediate, direct access to Him.

“It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24).

Once you accept this close relationship with your heavenly Father, your life will be transformed by His matchless love. Then as a member of His royal family, you will want to uphold His reputation by treating the people in your life with the same unconditional love and respect He has shown you.

One day a lawyer asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. Jesus' answer sums up what the Bible says on how to relate to God and everyone else:



“Jesus said to him, ‘ “You shall love the LORD your God with all your _____ , with all your _____ , and with all your _____ .” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your _____ as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets’ ” (Matthew 22:37–40).

Simply put: Love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself. With this understanding, let's explore how you can demonstrate real love to the people around you.

3. Why does the Bible say that I need to honor my parents?

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be _____ with you and you may live _____ on the earth’ ” (Ephesians 6:1–3).

Notice, choosing to treat your parents with respect is a key that unlocks many of God's other blessings—such as a long life.

Please note: Even if your adult guardian is a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or foster parent, the principle is the same. We must respect the adults God has made responsible for our care.

In Western countries like the United States, parents are directly responsible for their children for the first 18 years of life. This is a huge commitment. Your parents were not only to feed, clothe, protect, and care for you when you were a helpless infant, they must also continue to provide for you and teach you valuable life skills on your way to independence.

Certainly, no parent is perfect. They all make mistakes. But no matter how imperfect your parents are, God says they are worthy of your respect and that you should defer to their authority while in their care.



“My son, hear the _____ of your father, And do not forsake the _____ of your mother” (Proverbs 1:8).

However, respecting your parents does not mean it is God’s will for you to endure physical or sexual abuse. If this is happening to you, seek help from a trusted adult. God never intends for parents—or anyone else—to mistreat His precious children. “When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me” (Psalm 27:10).

4. What does it mean to honor your parents?

“_____ to your father who begot you, And do not _____ your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22).



Your teenage years are a wonderful opportunity for growing, exploration, and self-discovery *while* still having the advantage of family ties to support you as you try new ideas and skills and, yes, make mistakes. More than ever, this is the time for you to respect and seek your parents' input—especially if you have godly parents. Your parents should have your best interest in mind. They want to see you succeed and grow into a productive adult. Their years of experience provide them wisdom, which often allows them to see the results of a decision before you do.

It's similar to eagles teaching their young to fly. The nest is a fine home, but it's dizzyingly far above the ground. It takes much coaxing to convince a young eagle to jump. The parents will soar around the nest calling for their fledglings to join them. If a young bird is too scared, a parent will actually shove it from the nest. As it flaps wildly in tumbling terror, mom or dad will swoop below the frightened youngster and stop its fall by catching it on their backs and outstretched wings. Then the parent will soar high and repeat the dropping, flapping process—each time rescuing the youngster before it crashes.



To the young eagle, leaving the nest probably seems like an insane idea—so does repeatedly plunging earthward when it's clear it can't fly. But that's the only way eagles learn to fly!

What things are your parents challenging you to do that, from you perspective, make little sense? What do you think they are trying to teach you as a result?

**“A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke”
(Proverbs 13:1).**

Learning to fly like this is still dangerous business—about five percent of fledgling eagles don't survive the process. In fact, many actually jump when their parents are not watching.



Some human teens act as if they can fly from the moment they step off the nest. They believe that because they are old enough to stretch their wings, they no longer need their parents' input. But what they don't realize is that like the fledgling eagles, they are tumbling toward trouble and their inexperienced wings don't have the necessary strength and control to avert disaster. These young adults still need the rescuing lift provided by their parents' wisdom and counsel.

“But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:31).



5. How can I resist peer pressure?

“The righteous should choose his _____ carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26).



How you choose your friends is one of the most important life skills you will ever develop. Your friends exert a powerful positive or negative influence on you for years to come. If you want to avoid violating your values and beliefs, choose your friends wisely.

“You shall not follow a _____ to do evil” (Exodus 23:2).

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego is a dramatic example of how your choice of friends can help you withstand intense peer pressure. King Nebuchadnezzar built a golden image nearly 90-feet tall and commanded all his government officials to come for the dedication. At the king’s command, everyone was to bow down and worship the image—or face immediate execution. The three young Hebrews didn’t bow down; they stood strong together. As a result, they were thrown into the fiery furnace, only to be miraculously rescued by God.

“My son, if sinners _____ you, Do not consent” (Proverbs 1:10).

Joseph is another great Bible character who stood strong against tenacious temptation. In his case, it was one determined woman—his boss’ wife—enticing him to disobey his conscience and God’s law. Yes, he paid a price for doing what is right, but later he became the prime minister of Egypt.

These biblical examples highlight two significant areas where people frequently stumble.

One is following the crowd. It’s the “everyone is doing it” argument. But just because “everyone” else is doing drugs, having pre-marital sex, and listening to worldly music doesn’t make these things right.



The second area is compromising principles. It's the "just this once" argument. For instance, you might rationalize, "I know stealing is wrong, but I'm hungry, so I'll take this candy bar just this one time. No one will notice." As God's beloved child, He's trusting you to stand strong against negative peer pressure.

Think of a time when you experienced negative peer pressure. What did you do (or wish you had done) to stand for what is right?

6. What are some proven Bible principles that will help me pick good friends?



Don't be friends with a hothead. "Make no friendship with an _____ man, And with a _____ man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul" (Proverbs 22:24, 25). People with bad tempers often commit crimes and other irrational errors. You don't want to be an accomplice when they explode with anger. "The more shallow the pot, the quicker it boils."

Avoid showoffs. "Better to be of a humble spirit with the _____, Than to divide the spoil with the _____" (Proverbs 16:19). Proud braggers are often publicly humiliated. Keep your distance from these self-absorbed people.

Shun bullies. "_____ is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road" (Deuteronomy 27:18). Bullies are insecure and get satisfaction by humiliating others. Find kind friends.

Avoid “users.” “_____ to him who gives drink to his neighbor” (Habakkuk 2:15). Even briefly experimenting with drugs or alcohol can lead to a deadly accident or lifelong addiction.

Choose wise friends. “He who walks with wise men will be _____, But the companion of fools will be _____” (Proverbs 13:20). Wisdom is different from intelligence. A person can be a math genius but lack common sense. Develop friendships with people who have both wisdom and knowledge. Some of it will rub off on you.

Remember, you will generally become like your friends, so pick them carefully.

7. How can I be smart in my dating relationships?

“Keep your heart with all _____, For out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).



In a time when popular wisdom recommends starting early and dating lots of people before you get married, King Solomon’s advice is radically different: Guard and protect your heart.

For many teens, a dating relationship is very important. As a result, considerable emotional energy is invested. It is exhilarating to be loved by another—and to be the envy of non-dating friends. Unfortunately, many teens fearful of being alone rush into dating relationships that last only a few months, weeks, or even days.

But while these relationships might be short-lived, the emotional pain is often intensified because of an unguarded heart and painful regrets. Teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are major issues today. However, what many teens discover too late is that sex also creates deep emotional ties with their partner—and these feelings don’t quickly disappear when the relationship ends.



“Rest in the LORD, and wait _____ for Him” (Psalm 37:7).

Sexual intimacy is a sacred act designed by God to strengthen the bonds between a husband and wife. But unmarried sex is like donating a small sample of your brain to science while you are still alive. You can never get it back. This is why most sexually involved teens feel as if a part of them has been ripped out.



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

8. Does the Bible have any practical dating tips for me?

“Love suffers long and is _____ ; love does not _____ ; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave _____ , does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).



Today the word “love” is bantered about cheaply with little thought (e.g., I “love” ice cream). However, the Bible gives us a clear picture of what true love means. It is beautiful and incredibly powerful. It’s a description of God’s unconditional love for you and the love He wants each of His children to demonstrate to others.

When considering a potential dating candidate, you’re really considering someone who might be a spouse. Compare your potential partner’s values against those found in 1 Corinthians 13. Are the two of you patient and kind with each other? Are you envious of one another? Rude? Easily angered?

Christian Dating Checklist

1. Surrender your dating relationships and aspirations to God (Proverbs 3:5, 6; Isaiah 30:21). God knows your dreams and hopes. Give Him complete control and trust Him to bring you the right person in His own time and way.
2. Do your parents approve of the person you’re dating? (Proverbs 10:1; Colossians 3:20). Parents can see things in your dating relationship that you cannot—or don’t want to acknowledge. If your parents are opposed to the person you are dating, it’s very wise to consider their reasons.
3. Is the person a Christian? (Deuteronomy 7:3; Amos 3:3; 2 Corinthians 6:14). The Bible is very clear about how God feels when His children get romantically involved with non-Christians. You will eliminate unnecessary heartache and confusion by choosing to date only likeminded Christians.
4. Establish clear boundaries and stick to your beliefs (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Does your boyfriend/girlfriend respect your values and beliefs, or does he or she try to change you or pressure you into doing things you know are wrong?
5. Maintain sexual purity and avoid sexual temptation (Job 24:15; Proverbs 6:32). Commit to remaining sexually pure. Don’t put yourself in

compromising situations where you might be tempted to fall. Date in groups and in public places to provide extra accountability.

6. Does this relationship improve your relationships with God, family, and friends? (Matthew 7:20, Galatians 5:9). A healthy dating relationship will positively impact on all your other relationships. The reverse is also true. If your other relationships are suffering—especially your relationship with God—then it’s time to reevaluate your relationship.

9. How should I respond when someone hurts me?



“I say to you, _____ your enemies, _____ those who curse you, do _____ to those who hate you, and _____ for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44, 45).

When someone trips you in the hall or steals your girlfriend, it’s easy to want to retaliate—to make them pay, to wish a meteorite would strike them on the head. But as a child of God, you are called to a higher standard. As His goodwill ambassador, it is up to you to demonstrate unconditional love for the person who hurt you.

Anyone can be nice to the people who like them. What sets God’s children apart is that they are showing loving kindness to people who are mean and nasty.

“Therefore ‘If your enemy hungers, _____ him; if he thirsts, give him a _____ ; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:20, 21).



If a classmate spreads malicious lies about you, let it go. Slander can be lived down by how you actually live. It is not lived down by words of righteous indignation. In fact, defending yourself often makes the situation much worse. Rather, look for ways to “overcome evil with good.”

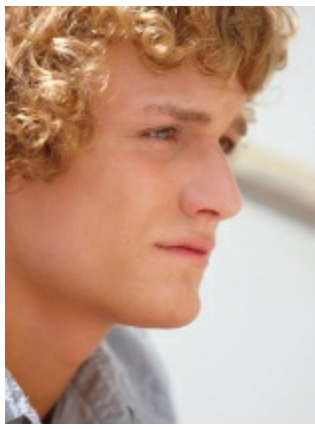
10. Why is it so important to forgive those who hurt me?

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive _____. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14, 15).



Because of God’s boundless mercy and grace, He freely grants forgiveness to all who ask. You are no exception. At your request, His cleansing stream will penetrate into the darkest corners of your life and make you spotless. When you realize how much you have been forgiven, your heart will overflow with gratitude.

“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor _____ us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He _____ our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:10–12).



Because you are a member of His family, God expects you to model the characteristics of His kingdom. An unforgiving spirit is completely out of character with God. And unforgiveness modeled in His child is hypocritical, especially considering how merciful He's been to you.

On a practical level, forgiving someone frees up extra energy and capacity within you to love unconditionally. The hurt you've been carrying melts away, and you begin to see the other person with more grace and compassion.

Who do you need to forgive?

Finally, God has entrusted you, His child, to demonstrate the attributes and values of His kingdom to your family, friends, and peers. Do they see a difference in your life? Can they tell that you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself? Can they tell how important they are to you?

Of course, ultimately, the most important element in having healthy relationships with others depends on a strong relationship with God.

Is it your desire to honor God and reflect Him fully in all your relationships? _____

*“Love is the only thing you get more of
by giving it away.” —Tom Wilson*



Can I Break the Sin Cycle?

CHAPTER NINE

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” —Jim Elliot

Has anyone ever asked you if you’re “stuck in the doldrums”? Did you wonder where they got such a strange expression? Back in the days when ships were driven by wind and sail, nothing was so feared by sailors as being trapped in the doldrums. They are a part of the ocean near the equator where currents are weak and winds are either baffling or strangely nonexistent. To make matters worse, seaweed tends to gather there in huge mats that entangle vessels.

These sailing ships, when caught in the doldrums, would sometimes lie helpless for days and weeks, trapped in the seaweed and waiting for the wind to blow to liberate them. The weather in this region is hot, humid, and extremely dispiriting—and sometimes it drove already irritable sailors to violence or insanity. Surprisingly, most hurricanes and squalls grow out of the doldrums.



So the saying “stuck in the doldrums” refers to a state of listlessness, despondency, depression, inactivity, stagnation, or a slump. It’s as if you were trapped in a slowly rotating rut that goes in endless circles. Often times, when this happens to us emotionally or spiritually, we can stop thinking clearly and lash out with destructive behavior—and things actually get worse.

Have you ever been caught up in the emotional doldrums? Do you ever feel trapped by a cycle of spiritually self-destructive behavior, unable to find freedom?

Well, there is a way out. And answering our most important question for this lesson will help us to get out: How can I break out of the depressing cycle of sin and finally be set free?

1. Why do I sometimes get trapped in cycles of destructive behavior?

“The heart is _____ above all things, And desperately _____ ; Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).



Mankind was created to find its greatest joy in a relationship with God. But after humans fell into sin, we began to substitute the worship of God with the worship of self—and now we automatically seek happiness through selfish satisfaction (Matthew 7:23; 23:26).

“Yet man is _____ to trouble, As the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7).



Our very natures are infected with the chronic virus of selfishness, and it always seems natural to put our happiness first before God’s will. That’s why we need His help: to break free from sin. Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5 KJV). If we do things out of a selfish desire and make our happiness a priority, no matter how noble or loving our actions might appear, we are really just worshiping ourselves ... and we are heading for self-destruction.

The Bible calls this sin—idolatry. And of course God says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3 KJV). (See also Isaiah 59:2.)

What letter goes in the middle of the word “sin”? _____. Without God, “I” am always at the center

of my life.

And it's true: Whenever people choose to break one of God's commandments, they are generally thinking of themselves.

2. How does the Bible describe this condition?

“For the good that I will to do, I do _____ ; but the evil I will not to do, that I _____” (Romans 7:19).

Since the entrance of sin into the world, a war has been raging in every human heart, a war between the spirit and the flesh. Every person desiring to serve God feels the battle between these two opposing masters. “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17).



A teenager in Virginia was shocked to find a two-headed turtle behind her home. She caught the poor creature and watched as the two freakish heads did a tug-of-war over a piece of food she gave them—or it! According to scientists, two-headedness can occur in all animals, but the lifespan is typically short. The reason is that each head tends to work independently of the other, controlling its own side of the body, and therefore creating disunity, confusion, and frustration. Unless one head takes primary control, the creature will soon die from starvation and indecision.

We all have these two natures battling within us. Whichever nature we choose to feed is the one that will ultimately gain the victory.

Sin is described in the Bible as disobeying God's law (1 John 3:4). Any one sin will usually lead to other sins. Coveting, for example, leads to stealing, which naturally leads to lying ... and so on.



When God is not on the throne of our hearts, whatever else sits on that throne in His place becomes a form of addiction. We will compulsively seek earthly treasures—pleasures, relationships, comforts, achievements, or other things—to fill the aching hole in our hearts that only Jesus can truly satisfy.

What is the solution? How can we reverse the cycle of addiction and find freedom? There are two steps: first, by inviting God to take the throne of our hearts; second, by allowing God to wrestle off the throne anything that tries to take His place.

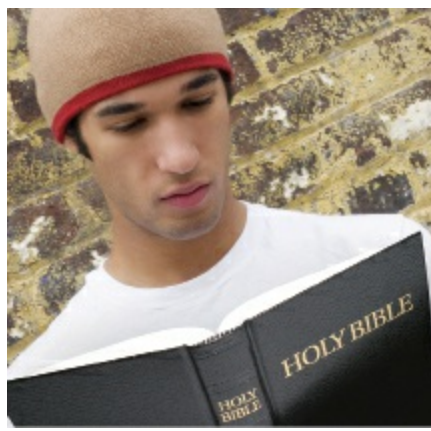
3. How can I make God the center of my life?

“And you will _____ Me and find Me, when you search for Me with _____ your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity” (Jeremiah 29:13, 14).

Seeking God means building a real friendship with Him. How do you build a relationship with God? Nearly the same way you would with any other person in your life.

Love for God grows and develops the same way human love grows. Through quality time and communication, you get to know Him. As God, He already knows about you, but He wants to know you as His friend.

God primarily speaks to us through His Word, and we speak to Him in our prayers. We can see from the Bible and the creation story that God loves us—and as we spend time with Him, we grow to love Him in response. And this love brings the fulfillment of God’s law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Mark 12:30 KJV).



Prayer and Bible study are the two most important secret weapons to connect with God. Going to church, listening to uplifting preaching and music, spending time in nature, or just being with other Christians can help too. Sharing God's love with others will make it blossom in your own life. You can get to the place where you are always aware of God being with you. The bottom line is: Make God your best friend.

God's plan is for us to drink deeply of His love, be filled with His Spirit, and make Him the center of our lives. It is much easier to resist the devil and turn from sin when God is satisfying our deepest needs.

4. How can I be sure that God wants a relationship with me?

“The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an _____ love; Therefore with _____ I have drawn you' ” (Jeremiah 31:3). (See also Isaiah 43:4.)

God has planted in every person's heart two powerful longings: the desire for love and the desire to be valued by another.

Each of us craves someone to love us *and* to sense that we are worth something! But love from a human alone will never be enough. There is no person that can ever value us enough to satisfy that God-given longing. Looking for these things outside of God forces us into self-destructive, co-dependent cycles of addiction.



If we are not “addicted” to God (a good thing!), then we will certainly be addicted to something else that is not good. It might be anything from money and drugs to food or sex. Some are addicted to fashion and shopping, others crave work or sports. So if we are not yearning to be filled with God, we just need to ask the honest question: What is our substitute addiction?

But we don’t have to turn to shallow earthly things for love or value. The Bible assures us that God desperately loves us and infinitely values us (Matthew 18:13). Each individual is precious to Him. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:30, 31).

Nothing we do can increase that value, and nothing can reduce it (Isaiah 64:6; Luke 15:11–32). After all, God created us in His image and redeemed us by the precious blood of His Son (Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). Think about it. You are virtually walking around with the most expensive price tag in the universe on your forehead!

You are made by God, in His likeness, and bought with His life!

As we meditate on how God measures our worth and lovability—creation and redemption—our hearts will be satisfied and the aching need for other things will melt away.

5. How can just praying and reading my Bible change me?

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every _____ that proceeds from the _____ of God’ ” (Matthew 4:4).



The Word of God is a living and powerful weapon.

Every time Jesus was tempted by the devil, He quoted from Scripture, saying, “It is written.” It’s evident from this and other exchanges that Jesus had memorized considerable amounts of Scripture: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11 KJV). And He used this mastery to fight off Satan’s attacks. As with Jesus, so with us—that is, we must use the Bible to fight off temptation.

We also can compare our lives to Jesus’ life to see how we need to change. When we are tempted to do something wrong, His Spirit whispers to us and we listen (Acts 5:32). The main ingredient in this miraculous process of change is not our effort, but God’s power: “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Our main job is to surrender and trust our lives to God—which is not always easy!

6. What if I don’t feel like I am “connecting” with God?

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was _____ down, and the birds of the air _____ it” (Luke 8:5).

If you were trying to make a footpath in a garden, what would you do? First, you would use something sharp—like a pick or a shovel—to break up the hardpan dirt. That’s what God has provided for our hearts.

“The Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12 KJV).



As we meditate on it, God’s Word will soften and break through the hardness of our hearts.

However, simply scraping even a sharp tool over hard dirt won’t do much good. To truly break up the soil, you have to point a sharp instrument directly at the ground—and then put some force behind it. The same is true of the Word of God; if we just casually pray and read a verse in the Bible, it might not do a lot toward changing our hearts (Psalm 119:9, 11).

Many people don’t get much from Bible study because they don’t use the Sword the way God designed. Rather than simply reading, we must point the Bible directly at our hearts so it can do what it was designed to do—help us discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts. You can make the most of Bible study by choosing a very short passage—sometimes even just a verse or two—and prayerfully studying it and meditating on what it means for you today.

You might also join a group in Bible study and learn from how experienced Christians do it.



When Bible study time is what it should be, prayer won’t be mindless repetition—it will become talking to your best friend about everything on your mind and in your life. *Everything!*

The soil of our hearts gets hard because of many things. Satan, for instance, will try to shame us over our past mistakes so that we feel hopeless. Many people feel unloved by God because of how other people, maybe even their parents, have misrepresented His love. The best way to overcome these feelings is to rely on the Bible to tell us what God is like. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Instead of relying on how we *feel*, we need to trust the Word of God to *tell* us what He is like.

As you first begin to seek after God, you might not immediately feel connected—a mustard seed does not blossom the first day you plant it, but *you will see* the results in your life as you persevere in

7. What if there's something I'm afraid—or not willing—to give up for God?

“Therefore submit to God. _____ the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7, 8).



As we repent of our sins, we turn away from them and surrender the throne of our hearts to Jesus; He also draws near to us with power and gives us comfort. But there are still choices to be made in resisting the devil.

Like two magnets held too closely together, we might find it difficult to cling to Christ because we are too powerfully drawn to something else. There are times that we need to get rid of the other magnet—be willing to sever ourselves from anything, or anyone, that has become an idol.

“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29, 30).



Do you have any idols in your life that need to be removed? It might be worldly DVDs, music, or magazines. What about drugs, alcohol, or cigarettes? It might even be an unhealthy relationship that's choking your relationship with God. What sin could be worth more than a relationship with God? So choose now to throw whatever it is away. Turn it off and run to God. When you do, He promises to draw near to you!

Sometimes God will actually step in and crush our idols so that we will return to Him. It is only in drinking from the fountain of His love that we can satisfy our desperate thirst and see our idols clearly for what they are. Only Christ can break the grip of these sins. Then His burden is light and we become "more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). (See also Luke 16:13; Joshua 7:12; Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 5:8; Revelation 21:27.)

List some places where you have looked for love or worth away from Christ.

8. What if I try to surrender, but feel I can't?

"So He left them, went away again, and _____ the third time, saying the _____ words"
(Matthew 26:44).

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed three times, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42 NIV). He surrendered His life into the Father's hands—and was victorious.

The power of Jesus, when united with a surrendered heart, cannot fail! (See Isaiah 50:7.)

God might work by sending you supportive friends and family (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12). Helping us through the process of becoming like Him is part of why God has churches (Hebrews 10:25).

But if you fall, don't get discouraged—you're never beaten until you stop getting back up.

- "When I fall, I will arise" (Micah 7:8).

- “For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again” (Proverbs 24:16).
- “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ” (1 John 2:1 KJV).



Your success is not dependent upon how strong your faith is, but on whether you determine to follow Jesus despite the obstacles (Matthew 17:20; Genesis 32:26; Proverbs 28:13). Don't just read the promises—cling to them when difficulties assault you. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

9. What if I feel dirty or unlovable because of someone else's sin against me?

“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not _____ the guilt of the father, nor the father _____ the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20).



Some people feel dirty because of others' sins against them, such as sexual or verbal abuse.

It is Satan, the great deceiver, who tells us that someone else's sin can defile us. It is a lie. The Bible says that things that happen to us can't defile our hearts—only our sinful responses to others' sins can stain us. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man” (Matthew 15:19, 20).

If we have sinned in response to someone else's sin, repentance can wash away that guilt.

If someone has sinned against you and you feel you can't forgive them, meditate on how God has forgiven you and study what the Bible says about forgiveness. God will give you the power to forgive. (See Colossians 3:13; Matthew 18:23–35.)

10. Can I really be pure when I still feel dirty?

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to _____ us our sins, and to _____ us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).



You don't have to guess whether you are forgiven or not based on whether you feel dirty or clean.

God has promised that He will blot out the sins of repentant sinners from His records. “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). (See also Micah 7:19; Psalm 51.)

It is important not to confuse guilt with shame. Guilt is a message from God saying, “You have sinned. Repent, so I can wash you white as snow.” But shame is a message from Satan: “You are bad. Even God can't love you or forgive you.”



Guilt and shame feel similar, but you can tell the difference easily: Guilt drives you to God, and shame drives you away from Him. If you have confessed and repented, but you still feel dirty, recognize that feeling as Satan tempting you not to believe in God's power to forgive—and reject that temptation.

11. Do I have to be perfect for God to accept me?

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who _____ say, ‘Come!’ And let him who _____ come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).



Not perfect—but perfectly surrendered.

In the last chapter of the Bible, Jesus calls us to accept everlasting life; He pleads for us to come to Him! When we come to the Lord the way we are, He will receive us. Then He will begin a work of transforming us, which will continue for a lifetime.

The plan of redemption is God changing us into His image through all of eternity, making us more and more loving—more like Him. He wants to start this process now, even while we live in a sinful world, by helping us behold Him every day through prayer and Bible study. As we live in joyful surrender, He will keep revealing to us more new ways to grow.

“The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18 KJV). This is the experience you can expect as a Christian—perfect surrender every day and a never-ending process of growing in your awareness of who God wants you to be.

God will not share the throne of your heart. He wants to free you from the doldrums and break the cycle of sin and addiction in your life—and He will unleash His power in your heart as you trust Him.

Are you willing to surrender your heart and drink the Living Water every day?

*“Man is born broken. He lives by mending.
The grace of God is glue.” —Eugene O'Neill*



Who Needs Church Anyway?

CHAPTER TEN

“Churchgoers are like coals in a fire. When they cling together, they keep the flame aglow; when they separate, they die out.” —Billy Graham

Honey is a sweet miracle made through amazing teamwork and cooperation.

To produce about one pound of honey, bees must travel roughly 43,000 miles and visit about 2 million flowers! Plus, while making the sweet stuff, every bee must also work together to build and protect the hive, care for the young, and perform other crucial colony tasks.

In the process of making honey, bees also provide a crucial service to nature. They pollinate vast fields of fruits, vegetables, and berries, providing abundant food for man and beast. Hundreds of major crops depend on honeybee pollination.



This is an especially sobering fact as a growing plague has infested U.S. bee colonies. Beginning in 2007, beekeepers from across North America began reporting that large colonies of honeybees were dying off in unprecedented numbers. Orchards that were once buzzing with bees had become silent. About half of U.S. states report honeybees are vanishing at an alarming rate, leaving beekeepers struggling for survival and farmers worried about the pollination of their crops. One beekeeper in California lamented, “Hive after hive is empty. There’s just nobody home.”

Experts are struggling to explain the losses, which they are calling Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). This might include pesticide contamination, tiny mites, genetically modified crops, poor bee nutrition, and, strangely enough, cell phone radiation that disorients the bees so they can’t find their way back to the hive. (You might have some friends that struggle with this last one!)

Some believe that should all the honeybees die off, ceasing their vital work of pollination, it would cause an environmental and financial catastrophe that could lead to unprecedented famine. Who could have guessed the cooperative work of these little creatures was so crucial to our survival?

But did you know that there is another kind of CCD—“Christian Church Disorder”—affecting

young people today? This CCD is leading to empty churches everywhere, and this will ultimately lead to a terrible form of famine that will devastate the entire planet ... a famine of the gospel.

So in this final lesson, we're going to ask some of the most important questions you'll ever ask, questions revolving around one of your most important needs—the need to belong to a group that believes like you.

Why do we need the church? Why do we need to be baptized? And why do we need to avoid Christian Church Disorder? Let's find out now.

1. If I love the Lord, why do I need a church?

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build _____, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Notice what Jesus said: building *His* church.

The church isn't just some manmade building or organization. It's not some purely human society, like a street gang or even the Red Cross. The Bible teaches that the church is something that the Lord Himself instituted. Thus, if we want to follow Jesus, we need to be a part of the divine institution that He made and rules over.

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be _____ over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22).



Have you ever heard someone say, “I'm not into organized religion”? You might ask that person what the alternative is ... a *disorganized* religion?

The fact is, you cannot read the Bible without seeing, over and over again, how crucial the whole idea of church—an organized body—truly is. The apostles spent most of their time establishing churches and making sure they were run properly. If that weren't an important part of what it means to be a Christian, why would they have spent so much time doing what they did? Why would so many of

their letters in the Bible be filled with words about church life and community?

Indeed, the church is a place where Christians can gather to be encouraged through fellowship and to feed on the honey of the Word (Psalm 119:103). It's also a place from where they go "pollinate" communities with the gospel.

But the devil has introduced a virus of entertainment overload and counterfeit relationships that has disoriented millions of every age with CCD. With today's cyber social networking, it's easy to have all sorts of shallow relationships. Interestingly, some recent behavioral studies question just how healthy Facebook and similar websites really are. Sure, they might be a fun way to pass along trivia, but research has shown that humans, from infancy onward, need direct face-to-face interaction in order to connect and thrive.



We need to be, in the best sense of the phrase, "in each other's face." We were designed by God for fellowship, for community, for being part of a "hive," something bigger than ourselves. "God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone'" (Genesis 2:18).

And this is especially true for Christians, which is one reason why God created one of the most important earthly institutions known—the church.

Of course, you're not saved by having your name registered in some church's book; rather, you are saved by Jesus' sacrifice. But having membership in a church is a way of expressing to others that you have made a commitment to Christ and that you are part of His body of believers.

Indeed, you can no more be a Christian without the church than a bee can make honey without a hive.

2. What's the purpose for church anyway?

"To the intent that now the manifold _____ of God might be made known by the _____ to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:10).



For one thing, we can see that God uses the church to demonstrate the wonderful truth of salvation to those lost in the world.

A very wise woman once wrote,

“Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.”



Suppose there was no church—no gathering place where likeminded Christians could assemble for instruction, encouragement, and inspiration. Where would those who had experienced Jesus for the first time go for guidance, fellowship, and help?

And if no organized church existed, how would God’s people coordinate and fulfill their mission to reach the whole world?

The whole point of church is to be a place where people can come to God, learn what He wants, and go out for Him. Indeed, there are so many diverse teachings out in the world that it is only logical that God would raise up a body of believers, no matter how imperfect, who would create a place where those seeking truth can find fellowship, guidance, love, acceptance—and more light.

The world is filled with lonely people desperately seeking for answers, purpose, and happiness—in all the wrong places. The church provides the *right* place for the lost to find the truth.

3. What was the early church like?

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in _____ , and sold their possessions and goods, and _____ them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44, 45).



These words, written during the days of the early Christian church, reveal a strong sense of community, of looking out for each other, of being committed to something bigger than one's self.

It's what church is supposed to be all about.

The meaning of the word “church” taken in the Greek language is “a calling out.” The church was “called out” of the world and called into a special place of fellowship, community, and worship—a place of mutual support, caring, and love.



One of the main ways God's church does this is when a community of believers reaches out as servants, not only to each other, but also to the world. Indeed, as indicated above, the early church was this kind of community, giving of themselves for the good of the whole—not because they were forced by God, but through their willing love.

You might be thinking, *But my church isn't anything like that!*

Well, now you have a better reason to be there—to help make it that way!

4. Why should I join a church when there are hypocrites and judgmental people in it?

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a

_____ against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were _____ in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1).

Here, in the early church, there seems to have been some kind of ethnic tension between the Jews and the Hellenists (Greeks), with people being accused of playing favorites. Yes ... *in the church!*

Hypocrisy was even a problem with some of the early church leaders, like Peter. In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul rebukes Peter and Barnabas because even though they would typically eat with Gentiles, when other Jewish believers came around, they kept their distance from Gentiles.

“And the rest of the Jews also played the _____ with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their _____” (Galatians 2:13).

Having hypocrites in the church is nothing new—even among leaders. And remember, Jesus had a major hypocrite among His 12 disciples: Judas, the one who betrayed Him.

So yes, there are hypocrites in the church. The devil has always placed unconverted people in the church to discourage the rest of us, but nothing in the Bible says that’s an excuse to stop going. And hypocrites don’t mean that nothing good comes out from churches. All hypocrites do is slow the good news down—but when you go to church, you can help speed it back up by being a good example.



We’re not called to follow churchgoers. Rather, a Christian is a follower of Christ. People might disappoint you, but Jesus will never let you down. If anything, we should pray that the Lord will use us as a good example to help others not get discouraged by the hypocrisy they see in the church. Your kindness might even help a hypocrite be truly converted!

5. Why should I go to church when it is sometimes so boring?

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the _____ of ourselves _____, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24, 25).



Let's face it: Society is so addicted to entertainment that we've now managed to find a way to get it through our cell phones!

Perhaps compared to some action-packed or romance-filled blockbuster movies, some church services might seem boring. But you need to ask yourself: *What is the reason I'm going to church?*

If it's to be entertained, then you're going for the wrong reason.

Here's another common complaint about church for any age group: *I just don't get anything out of church.* Yet this actually represents the attitude of the world. The whole point of being a Christian, about giving yourself to Christ, is so that you can give to others. That's how we're called to live. "The Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35 NIV).

The most miserable, selfish, and unhappy people are those who live only for personal gratification.



So if you aren't getting anything out of church, then you might not be putting anything into it. The more you put into church—the more you give of yourself, your time, your energy, your commitment—the more you will get out of it and the less bored you will be ... *guaranteed.*

Look around at the ministries in your church. Certainly there's something you would find of interest. If not, ask your pastor how to start one!

If you love the Lord and want to be part of what the Bible calls "the body of Christ," then you have all the reason in the world to go to church, and you can make it exciting by your enthusiasm

about God (1 Corinthians 12:27). When you walk into church, realize that you are passing through the portals of the universe and are heading into the presence of the Creator. Now that's awesome!

If church seems boring to you, start talking about these tremendous topics with other members. Seek out those who are excited about the Bible and get involved in teaching these truths to others. One person can start an epidemic of enthusiasm in a church.

You won't be bored then—that's for sure!

6. But I'm just one person. What can I really do for God's church?

“If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a _____, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an _____, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an _____, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?” (1 Corinthians 12:15–17).

It's true that the body of Christ has different limbs and organs that perform different functions, but all are needed. It's not like you are an expendable pair of tonsils or an appendix.

If you see a nose on somebody's face, you know that's perfectly normal. But if you see a nose lying on the floor, you know that something is wrong. In the same way, a church member separated from the body is unnatural and doesn't survive long. After all, what good is an eye or a hand if it's not connected to the body?

But when together and functioning as a whole—well, that's the ideal! “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

If you are a Christian, you are part of Jesus' body. You possess some unique talents that others in your church might not have. Your talents are always needed by others in the church family. But you certainly don't have all the talents, do you? Of course not.

That's why we need a church body, a group of believers who pool and blend their talents and do things as a group that would be very hard to do as individuals trying to do it on their own.

7. How do I enter the body of Christ—the church—officially?

“For by one Spirit we were all _____ into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians

12:13).



Baptism is a lot like a marriage ceremony.

In a wedding, a man and a woman announce in public a relationship that is governed by laws and comes with new privileges. They become one flesh. Likewise, through baptism we are joined with Christ and His body. Baptism is an announcement of our commitment to God; it's like a marriage ceremony with Jesus.

It is through baptism that we officially enter Jesus' church:

“Then those who gladly received his word were _____ ; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ... And the Lord _____ to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:41, 47).

You might also be wondering, *Does it matter which method is used when I'm baptized?*

Some churches sprinkle water, while others simply speak words. Some baptize babies, while others say you must be at least 12 years old. How do we know what to do? The best advice is to follow the example of Jesus. The Bible says that Christ was baptized by immersion by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Jesus as a baby was dedicated to God, but He wasn't baptized until He was older (Luke 2:22; Matthew 3:13).

Whenever you are in doubt, just do what Jesus did and you will be safe. That works for baptism and everything else you have questions about.

8. Is baptism really that important?

“Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of _____ and the Spirit,

he cannot _____ the kingdom of God' ” (John 3:5).



Every person must pass through two experiences in order to be saved: be born of the water and be born of the Spirit. It's like being washed inside and out. Born of water, baptism, is when we choose to publically express our commitment to Christ. Born of the Spirit is when God sends the Holy Spirit to wash and transform us on the inside.

We cannot live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit, so we need both baptisms. The good news is that the Lord promises to give the Holy Spirit to us if we come to Him in faith through baptism.

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the _____ ’ ”
(Acts 2:38).

When you go to a wedding, it's appropriate to take a gift. The “wedding gift” that God gives us when we are baptized is the Holy Spirit.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were _____ to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him” (Matthew 3:16).

Baptism is clearly very important for the follower of Jesus. In fact, the last words of Christ before He ascended to heaven included the command for His followers to teach and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

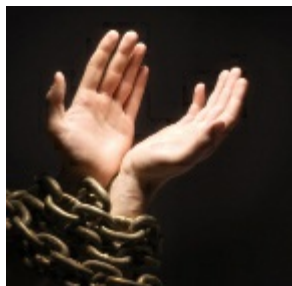
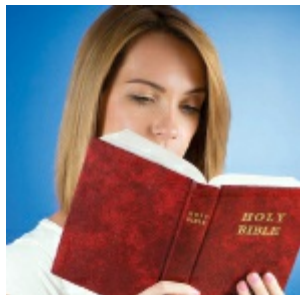
It makes sense that the last words of Jesus on the earth should be a first priority for Christians. Doesn't it?

9. What should I do to prepare for baptism?

“Seek the LORD while He may be found, _____ upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have _____ on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6, 7).

Put simply: Come to the Lord with all your heart. Give Him your life and trust Him to forgive you for all of your sins. This is the first and most important step—but preparation doesn't end here.

Next, in preparation for your baptism and membership in the church, understand and follow these biblical principles:



- A. Learn God's basic requirements. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them ... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19, 20 KJV). We don't have to wait to be baptized until we understand everything about the Bible, but we should know and be comfortable with the main teachings of Christ.
- B. Believe the truth of God's Word. “Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized]’ ” (Acts 8:37). We should have a sincere faith in the truth of the words and the reality of God before we are baptized.
- C. Repent, turn from sin, and experience heart conversion. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19 KJV). We should be willing to repent of our known sins and believe God's Spirit is working in our hearts. (See also Luke 3:7, 8.)

When you feel you are ready for baptism, talk to your parents or your church pastor. They will

help you ensure that you are indeed ready to take the plunge, so to speak.

10. How long should I wait to be baptized?

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and _____ your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).



Baptism is an outward expression of our death to self and our rebirth as a new life in Christ. So once we commit our hearts to Jesus, we are told to be baptized and not to delay.

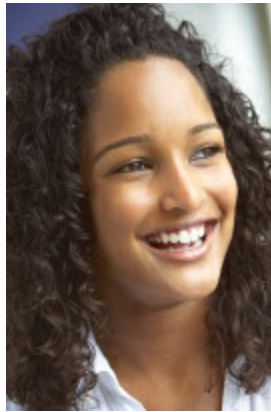
You might be wondering, *But what about Jesus? Why did He wait so long, and why was He even baptized at all?* Jesus was actually not baptized for His sins or for a new birth, but rather as a perfect example for His people to follow (1 John 2:6). Jesus was also baptized to show us what we should experience through our baptism.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ ” (Matthew 3:16, 17).

Consider the specifics of Jesus’ baptism and how they apply directly to you:

- “Behold, the heavens were opened to Him.” When you are baptized, in a special sense the heavens are open to you. Sin separated you from God, and baptism represents the moment when your sins are washed away and, through Jesus, you have direct access to heaven!
- “And He saw.” Your spiritual eyes will be opened, and you will see everything in a new light (Isaiah 35:5).

- “The Spirit of God.” The Lord will send the Holy Spirit into your life (Acts 5:32).
- “Descending like a dove.” The Lord will send meekness and peace into your heart.
- “This is My beloved Son.” Following baptism, you are adopted into God’s family and become His child (Isaiah 56:5).
- “In whom I am well pleased.” God now looks upon you with the same favor with which He looks upon Jesus. Imagine, God is well pleased with you!



Everything that happened to Jesus during His baptism is what you can expect by faith when you surrender your heart and choose to follow Him.

God is offering you a new powerful life in His church and, even more important, in His Son. Why would you tarry? Come to Him now and He will answer your most important questions and satisfy your most important needs.

A new heart and eternal life are within your reach right now. Just kneel where you are or bow your head and ask God to forgive your sins and give you a new life.

Are you willing to give your life to God and to become a part of His church? _____