

Lessons for Living from the Bible in Everyday English
An Anthology of Over 100 Daily Devotionals

By Dennis Magee

November, 2020

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	Page 1
Preface	Page 2
Lesson 1: What is Important and Meaningful in Life	Page 3
Lesson 2: Lessons in Morality	Page 5
Lesson 3: God’s Law, His Word, the Commandments	Page 6
Lesson 4: Reaping What We Sow	Page 8
Lesson 5: Changing Ourselves	Page 8
Lesson 6: God’s Power in Us	Page 8
Lesson 7: Justification/Sanctification	Page 8
Lesson 8: God’s Love	Page 8
Lesson 9: Growing Our Love	Page 8
Lesson 10: God In Us	Page 9
Lesson 11: No Longer Under God’s Condemnation	Page 9
Lesson 12: Adultery/Faithfulness in Marriage	Page 9
Lesson 13: Working Out Our Salvation	Page 11
Lesson 14: Our Union with Christ	Page 11
Lesson 15: Two Kingdoms: The Heavenly Kingdom and the Earthly Kingdom	Page 11
Lesson 16: Be Joyful in the Lord in All Circumstances	Page 12
Lesson 17: The Deity of Christ	Page 12
Lesson 18: Knowledge of God’s Will	Page 14
Lesson 19: All That God Has Done for Us	Page 14
Lesson 20: Sanctification	Page 14
Lesson 21: Faith, Hope and Love	Page 15
Lesson 22: Sexual Immorality	Page 16
Lesson 23: Assurance of Resurrection	Page 16

Lesson 24: Patience and Endurance	Page 17
Lesson 25: Living by the Holy Spirit	Page 18
Lesson 26: Christ’s Mission	Page 18
Lesson 27: God’s Grace	Page 18
Lesson 28: God’s Blessings to Us in Christ	Page 19
Lesson 29: God’s Judgment	Page 20
Lesson 30: True Repentance	Page 20
Lesson 31: God Satisfied His Own Requirement for Justice	Page 21
Lesson 32: Enduring Trials and Tribulations	Page 22
Lesson 33: Backsliding	Page 23
Lesson 34: Imitating Christ	Page 23
Lesson 35: Examine Yourself	Page 24
Lesson 36: Proof of God	Page 25
Lesson 37: The Bible No Longer Relevant?	Page 25
Lesson 38: The Power of Prayer	Page 25
Lesson 39: Sampson and the Modern Christian	Page 26
Lesson 40: When Good People Suffer	Page 27
Lesson 41: Living Our Faith	Page 29
Lesson 42: Remedy for Struggle with Sin	Page 30
Lesson 43: Idolatry	Page 30
Lesson 44: Leaving a Legacy	Page 31
Lesson 45: Accepting and Loving God for Who He Is	Page 31
Lesson 46: Godly Precepts to Live By	Page 32
Lesson 47: Spiritual Gifts We Need Daily from God	Page 33
Lesson 48: Union with Christ	Page 34
Lesson 49: Made Righteous in God’s Sight Through Faith in Christ	Page 34

Lesson 50: Living for God	Page 36
Lesson 51: Living as a Child of God	Page 36
Lesson 52: Our New Faith-Based Life	Page 38
Lesson 53: Importance of the Bible	Page 38
Lesson 54: Accepting God’s Only Salvation	Page 39
Lesson 55: Our New Life in Christ	Page 40
Lesson 56: Faith	Page 41
Lesson 57: Our Assurances as Children of God	Page 41
Lesson 58: Living without Fear of Punishment from God	Page 42
Lesson 59: Suffering – Summary Insights from “Be Still My Soul”	Page 43
Lesson 60: Inspirational Note from the Gideons	Page 44
Lesson 61: Trusting God	Page 44
Lesson 62: The Christian Gospel Message	Page 46
Lesson 63: Some Thoughts on Salvation	Page 47
Lesson 64: God’s Comfort	Page 49
Lesson 65: God’s Righteous Kingdom	Page 49
Lesson 66: Serve the Lord with Gladness	Page 49
Lesson 67: Jesus: The Only Way	Page 50
Lesson 68: Enduring Hardship	Page 50
Lesson 69: Obedience to God	Page 51
Lesson 70: Don’t Fret Over Evil or Violent People	Page 51
Lesson 71: The Glory of God	Page 51
Lesson 72: God’s Justice	Page 52
Lesson 73: Prayer	Page 52
Lesson 74: Delight in God	Page 53
Lesson 75: Living by the Moral Order	Page 53

Lesson 76: Universalism or Election	Page 53
Lesson 77: Joy in Spite of our Circumstances	Page 54
Lesson 78: The Fleeting Pleasures of Sin	Page 54
Lesson 79: Accepting God’s Will	Page 55
Lesson 80: Having the Bible More Important than Seeing a Miracle	Page 55
Lesson 81: Resisting satan	Page 55
Lesson 82: The Struggle to Control the Mind	Page 55
Lesson 83: Worldly Versus Godly Satisfaction	Page 56
Lesson 84: The Psalms, Our Manual on How to Pray	Page 56
Lesson 85: Our Complete Dependence on Christ	Page 57
Lesson 86: Obedience from Gratitude	Page 57
Lesson 87: Fear of Dying	Page 58
Lesson 88: Our Fall from Grace	Page 58
Lesson 89: God as the Center of our Lives	Page 59
Lesson 90: My Summary of the Christian Faith to One Examining Faith	Page 59
Lesson 91: Biblical Principles for Marriage	Page 63
Lesson 92: Perfected in Christ Though We Struggle with Sin	Page 63
Lesson 93: Membership in God’s Kingdom: A Present Reality for the Believer	Page 64
Lesson 94: Fear of God	Page 65
Lesson 95: Pleasure Versus Happiness	Page 65
Lesson 96: Salvation Guaranteed	Page 66
Lesson 97: We Need God and Jesus More Than We Think	Page 66
Lesson 98: The Reality of Death	Page 66
Lesson 99: The Pleasures of God	Page 68
Lesson 100: Wake-Up Call	Page 69

Lesson 101: Words of Comfort for a Funeral/Celebration of Life Memorial Service	Page 71
Lesson 102: Words of Comfort for a Suicide Memorial Service	Page 73
Lesson 103: What Jesus Did for Us	Page 73
Lesson 104: How Can We Be Sure That We Have the Holy Spirit	Page 74
Lesson 105: Mankind’s Problem with God: Resolved	Page 75
Lesson 106: Lukewarm Faith	Page 76
Lesson 107: Establishing a Relationship with God	Page 77
Lesson 108: Living Life to It’s Fullest	Page 78
Lesson 109: Indestructible Joy (John Piper)	Page 79
Lesson 110: The Full Meaning of Easter	Page 80
Lesson 111: The Fall of Man and Why there are Natural Disasters	Page 81
Lesson 112: Man’s Condition Under God’s Law	Page 82
Lesson 113: Living God’s Highest Purpose	Page 83
Lesson 114: Connecting with Someone in Need	Page 84
Lesson 115: Life’s Lessons Learned	Page 85
Lesson 116: Work from a Biblical Perspective	Page 86
Lesson 117: Sin No Longer Our Master	Page 87
Lesson 118: Life’s Meaning and Purpose	Page 88
Epilogue	Page 89

Acknowledgements

Without the continual support and involvement of my wife, Helen, these lessons could not have been produced. I owe her a large debt of gratitude for patiently creating this document as I dictated each lesson from my hand-written notes.

Preface

In having read the Bible through a number of times, and hearing numerous scripture-based sermons, various insights have come together in my mind that address certain themes. These themes, over 100 in all, I've come to call "Bible Lessons". There are an infinite number of lessons that could be gleaned from the Bible but for me, these more than 100 address a wide, representative range of the concerns, issues, fears, hopes and questions that we all have. Some lessons share similarities with others but are presented in a different or unique context for increased emphasis.

The majority of these lessons came from the New Testament, although some were taken from Old Testament books, primarily Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Psalms and Job. I haven't in all cases remembered exact chapter and verse where certain lessons were taken, because I was more concerned with remembering the content and meaning, particularly if the lesson was based on a sermon I was hearing. In some of the lessons I'm quoting directly from scripture, often times using direct quotes from one of the Apostles, especially, Paul. Many of these lessons have been heavily infused with language and thoughts from the commentaries in the NIV Study Bible I use.

After carefully considering the utility of grouping these lessons under topical subheadings, I found that the diversity of subject material covered herein gave rise to more differences than similarities. This would have resulted in too many subheadings to be useful, and so I decided to keep them all separate. This will give the reader the opportunity to meditate on each lesson as a distinct entity, and give it the full, careful consideration it deserves. They need not be read in any particular order. Go through the Table of Contents and choose lessons to read as circumstances and spiritual needs lead you. Contemplate each lesson, reading it over again to let its full meaning sink in before moving on.

I am well aware that there is a plethora of scriptural study guides and devotionals, and each contributes something of value in one's journey to maturity in the Christian faith. I am not a trained clergyman or Bible scholar, and have assembled these lessons from knowledge and insights gained over a period of about 15 years while engaged in my own journey of discovery. I find these lessons useful in my prayer life, in addressing issues I face, and in witnessing to others. I found that I can recombine parts of lessons into new lessons tailored to fit new circumstances and situations. Some people find the Bible itself difficult to read and understand. To bridge this gap, I have used common language and familiar concepts as much as possible. Hopefully these lessons provide another tool that will be useful to others in stimulating thinking and discussion on biblical concepts and teachings, and will contribute to their personal spiritual growth.

Lesson 1 – What is important and meaningful in life: taken from the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs.

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work because these are gifts from God; for without Him who can eat or find pleasure. Without God nothing satisfies but with him we find satisfaction and enjoyment. True pleasure comes only when we acknowledge and revere God. God created a gap in us that can only be filled by himself. To try to fill that gap with things, pleasures and accomplishments leaves us unsatisfied; but if we have a close relationship with God all of these things become much more meaningful to us and we can appreciate these in a new light.

God has made everything beautiful in its time and he has set eternity in the hearts of man; but man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end. God's world is beautiful yet tantalizing; it is too big for us and its satisfactions are too small. Since we were created for eternity the things of time cannot permanently or fully satisfy; and so there is nothing better for a man than to be happy and do good while he lives that everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in their work. For the Christian, life has meaning only when it is accepted as a gift from God.

God tests men so that they may see that they are not different from animals; man is as mortal as any animal but unlike the animals he must be made to see this condition and be distressed. The same fate awaits them both which is to our observable destination; our end is the grave – a return to dust. For who can begin to tell a man whether his soul rises up to the heavens and the soul of the animal goes into the earth. On his own, man cannot know he can only guess. The truth revealed at first only in glimpses has been fully disclosed in the gospel. One of the glimpses we see is in Daniel 12: 2 where the prophet foretells the end times. "The multitudes that sleep in the earth shall awake; some to everlasting peace, others to everlasting scorn and shame." This is the only reference in the Old Testament to resurrection of both the righteous and wicked. So, there is nothing better for a man than to find satisfaction in his work for who can begin to tell him what will come after him. As an end in itself, work too, is meaningless; only receiving it as a gift from God gives it enduring worth.

And so, there is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in all of the toilsome labor that God has given him in the few short years that he has under the sun, for this is

his lot. Eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart and enjoy every day of your life with your wife whom you love, for this is your lot. If God gives a man possessions and the ability to enjoy them and the ability to find satisfaction in his work and the ability to accept his lot in life, these are bonus gifts from God; neither a right nor a guarantee, but a person so blessed seldom reflects on the measure of his years because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. For the secularist, that is one who does not believe in a hereafter, life is a pointless journey to extinction. Only in God does life make sense and have meaning.

And so, in summary, Ecclesiastes, teaches us to accept the human condition because it has been appointed by God. We need to accept our birth, our death, all the stages in between and life's ups and downs and try to lead the life we have given as fully as possible. Don't expect too much from yourself, you're only human, embrace wisdom and fear and obey God. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to live life purposely, meaningfully, and joyfully, within the theocratic context primarily by keeping God at the center of one's life, work, and activities.

The book of Proverbs was written to provide prudence for the simple, knowledge and discretion for the young, and increased wisdom for the wise. The pursuit of wisdom and knowing how to avoid the pitfalls of folly lead to personal well-being, happy family relations, fruitful labors and right standing in the community. Proverbs, although a practical book dealing with the art of daily living, bases its practical wisdom solidly on fear of the Lord. Reverence for God and reliance on him are set forth as the path that leads to life, prosperity and security. In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path lies immortality. Broad is the pathway to destruction and many will go that way, but narrow is the pathway to eternal life, and few there will be that will ever find it. Such Godly wisdom is a virtual tree of life that yields the happy life that this creation was designed to produce. We're urged to follow the path of wisdom leading to life and shun the pathways of folly which lead to death. Two examples are given: getting ahead by relying on somebody else's efforts instead of our own, and finding sexual pleasure outside the bond of marriage. Together these two temptations illustrate the power and pervasiveness of the allurements of folly that we need to be prepared to recognize and avoid.

We're urged to adopt virtues such as: honesty, integrity, diligence, compassion, generosity, forgiveness, patience, humility, loyalty, truthfulness, cheerfulness and self-control. We need to be constantly aware of the consequences of our attitudes, the steps that we take, and the decisions

that we make. We need to keep anger in check, and avoid quarrelsomeness and violence, gossip, gluttony, and drunkenness.

There is an order in the Lord's creation, and to defy it leads to painful consequences. To honor it leads to proven positive results. Wisdom guided the creator and wisdom pervades the creation order. To live by wisdom is to imitate the creator and conform to the divinely established creation order. In cities, where human experience is concentrated, in the regulations, laws, and conventions that govern human interaction, we see the creation order in microcosm. Again, to honor these leads to proven positive results and to defy them leads to unhappy consequences. Here the human experience is tested in the crucible of faith.

We need to live life in conscious awareness of the unfailing scrutiny of God and in reliance on his generous provision. He sovereignly directs the steps that people take; even the actions of kings. His eyes observe all that humans do. All history moves forward under his guidance and control.

And so, in summary, Proverbs teaches us how to live wisely and successfully in the fear of the Lord, which includes reverence for, trust in, and devotion to, God, and his will as displayed in the creation order and as revealed in his word. Wisdom then, is following the benevolent king's design for human happiness within the creation order leading to quality of mind and quality of life.

Lesson 2: Lessons in Morality (from Second Corinthians 6)

Murderers, thieves, adulterers, homosexuals, and drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of God. But God makes allowance for the salvation of souls such as these if they will repent and turn from their sins.

Many things are allowable for the Christian but not all things are beneficial; we need to be careful not to be enslaved by these things that we have the freedom to enjoy.

Our bodies were created for the Lord and not for immorality, which gives us dignity; so how we use our bodies is very important, particularly in the use of our bodies for sex, which God intended to be between man and woman in marriage.

God has high regard for the body which is why he raised Christ's body from the dead. A body destined for resurrection should not be used for immorality.

We are members of Christ – body and soul – which gives us dignity.

When two people come together in a sexual union, they become one and offspring could result. Sexual union outside the bond and responsibility of marriage is a gross perversion of the divinely established marital unity.

The only stronger union is our union with Christ which is intended to serve as a model for the marital unity.

Flee from sexual immorality because when we sin in this manner, we sin against our own body which is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit lives in us we have the power to control our morality.

Lesson 3: God's Law, His Word, the Commandments

Thy law O God is eternal. God's law, by which he created, maintains and upholds all things is trustworthy and eternal. It stands firm in the heavens; the secure order of the heavens and the earth proclaim the reassuring truth that God's word, by which he maintains and upholds all things, is trustworthy and eternal. Your faithfulness extends to all generations. You established the earth and it endures. Your laws endure to this day for all things serve you. If your law had not been my delight I would have perished in my affliction; would not have found the way of life which is in your word. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have established my life. Save me for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts. Just as a surgeon's scalpel can cut into the body to expose sickness and disease so the Lord's word can expose the heart, the mind, and the feelings and the sickness therein, so that by His word we may be healed. There are people who would deny reading the Bible, claiming it was written by man and so is fallible. Yet these same people accept history and current events, even though they were recorded by men. God's word is even more reliable; as we see in 2 Timothy 3:16: all scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Lord I long to see your salvation, and your law is my delight. Let me live that I may praise your name, and may your laws sustain me. Like a sheep, I have gone astray. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands. The Psalmist, for all his devotion to God's word, making it his guide and most treasured possession, still falls into paths of waywardness and needs to be brought back by the heavenly shepherd. All of us need a similar prayer; and a similar confession.

God's law, his commands, are good. If we could follow them we'd have peace and happiness throughout our lives. But we can't; as Paul said in Romans 7: "In my inner being I delight in God's law but in my members I see another law at work which wages war against the law of my mind and makes me prisoner to my sinful nature. Who will save me from this body of sin and death, (which Paul felt hung upon him like a corpse). Thanks be to God that it has been done by Jesus Christ; so now in my mind I'm able to serve the righteous law of God while in my body I still serve the sinful nature." As long as we Christians are human, we need to reckon with the fact that we have a sinful nature. But we needn't be controlled by that sinful nature; for the law of the spirit of life, which is the Holy Spirit within us, sets us free from the law of sin and death, which is our sinful nature. The controlling power of the Holy Spirit sets us free from the controlling power of our sinful nature. The influence of the Holy Spirit draws us from a life of sinfulness to a life of obedience.

We are not under the law in the same manner that people in the OT era were, depending upon it as a means of salvation. The law in itself provides no enablement to resist sin; in fact, it stimulates sin. As Paul said in Romans 7 "If the law had not said thou shalt not covet, I'd not have known what it was to covet; but since the law says thou shalt not covet, every covetous desire within me is awakened." The law in itself is good and is intended for our good, but because of our hostility and rebellion toward God, all that we know that we shouldn't do we are drawn to do even more.

So, what the law could not do, in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did, by sending his son in likeness of sinful man to serve as a sin offering and to condemn sin in sinful man. The sin is condemned in us because we are justified by faith in Christ and led to a life of holiness. So now we are able to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law by living not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The law still has a role in the life of the believer; not as a means of salvation but as a moral and ethical guide obeyed out of love for God and by the power of the Holy Spirit. God's purpose for sending his son was to provide enablement for us to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law by not allowing the sinful nature to hold sway, but to yield to the directing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit within us.

Lesson 4: Reaping What We Sow

If we sow to gratify our sinful desires we reap the rotting, decaying, fruits of our sinfulness; but if we sow to gratify the Holy Spirit within us, we reap the eternal fruits of peace with God and tranquility.

Lesson 5: Changing Ourselves

We need to put off the old self, which is constantly corrupting us with evil desires, and by a change in the attitude of our minds, put on the new self, created to be like God in holiness and righteousness.

Lesson 6: God's Power In Us

Pray that God will strengthen us with power by his spirit in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith.

Lesson 7: Justification/Sanctification

We are justified by faith in Christ; nothing less and nothing more. We are sanctified, not through legalism, attempting to follow every letter of the law in ritualistic fashion, but by the obedience that comes from faith in what God has done for us, through us, and in us by the power and grace of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Lesson 8: God's Love

God's love is perfected in us through obedience. Our abilities to love God and to love others are perfected by being obedient to his commands. Christ said, "He who obeys my commands, he it is that loves me, and he who loves me, will be loved by my Father and I will love him and will disclose myself to him."

Lesson 9: Growing Our Love

Pray that our love will grow in understanding and wisdom to perceive that which is morally and ethically superior. Try to live a life that is blameless, without any mix of sin, in order to avoid censorship because of moral or spiritual failure. Let your life be filled with the fruits of

righteousness provided by Christ in our union with him through the Holy Spirit, giving praise to God which is the end purpose of all that God does in the life of the believer.

Lesson 10: God in Us

The Lord lives, as shown by his intervention and miracles in my life. I have a living, spiritual, intimate, vital relationship with Jesus Christ, which is the source of my joy in all circumstances. All of life's meaning is in Christ and I would die to be with Christ; both now and forever my chief concern and my richest possession is my union with Christ.

Lesson 11: No Longer Under God's Condemnation

From Romans 8: There is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Jesus Christ and we will one day share in his glory by virtue of our union with him, but we must also share in his suffering. God allows suffering to come in to our lives as discipline for past sins. (God does not punish us, Christ already took the punishment for our sins.) And so we need to be prepared to accept hardship in our lives as discipline from God. He also allows suffering to come into our lives to display his power and glory in which case we are blessed if we are so used. But our suffering will not last forever; in due time it will end and we will enter our place of rest to claim our inheritance. Whatever happens to us happens for our good to bring us into the likeness of Christ. If God is for us, who can be against us, for God who did not spare even his own son, but gave him up for our salvation will not fail to give us every good thing to complete the work begun on the cross which is our sanctification. Satan cannot accuse us in heavenly places. Christ is there to petition our cause before God. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ; we are more than conquerors, nothing can separate us from the love of God; not depth, nor height, nor life nor death.

Lesson 12: Adultery/Faithfulness in Marriage

Christ said, "The law says, thou shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that if a man even looks at a woman with lust in his heart, he has already committed adultery with her." He wasn't referring here to a casual glance, but to a willful, calculated stare that arouses sexual desire. This goes to lustful intent, wanting a person to behave as a husband or wife toward us; wanting a level

of intimacy that is inappropriate for the relationship we are in. In one of the early Proverbs, we are told that stolen water is sweet and food eaten in secret is delicious (referring to the illicit sexual pleasure that some allow themselves to enjoy). But in Job 20:12-14 we are told that “Though evil is sweet in his mouth and he hides it under his tongue, though he cannot bear to let it go and keeps it in his mouth, yet it will turn sour in his stomach like the venom of vipers within him. The delicacies he has tasted he will spit out; God will cause him to vomit them up.” One cannot hold hot coals in his lap or walk on hot coals without being burned. Instead we should follow the advice in Proverbs 6 which tells us, “Let your own wife be your source of pleasure, as water refreshes a thirsty man.” In view of the great joy found within marriage and the utter ruin outside of it, why commit adultery? And, so, we need to discipline our minds not to think adulterous thoughts. As Job said in Chapter 31, “I have made a covenant with my eyes to not look lustfully at any girl.” When we regard someone as a sex object we degrade that person, and when we enter into a relationship that is inappropriate physically, we defile that person and make him/her party to or participant in sexual immorality. If one persists in sexual lust, as a type of excessive desire, he is practicing greed; he is placing the thing before God and making the thing a god. We’re told in one of the commandments, “Thou shall not have any Gods before me”; therefore, lust and greed is a form of idolatry. God will punish people for such disobedience.

In the book of Malachi, the prophet said to the people, “God will not listen to you; he will not hear your voice in prayer.” Why, because he is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her though she is your partner, and the wife of your covenant marriage. In our marriage ceremony, when we invoke God to be the witness, this is for a lifetime, to ensure that the agreement that we made is kept. In our marriage vows we also agree to forsake all others; which means that others are to be regarded as strangers who worship foreign Gods. If we ignore this instruction, we ignore the covenant we made before God and man. So guard yourself in your spirit and don’t break faith with the wife of your youth. God brought them together and made them one, because he was seeking Godly offspring. God hates divorce and he hates violence in marriage so guard yourself in your spirit and don’t break faith.

Lesson 13: Working Out Our Salvation

We need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We don't so much need to be fearful, because we've been justified before God; but we need to practice our salvation in an on-going process of persistence (one who does not persist reveals that he is not really a child of God because persistence is the hallmark of God's children); humble service, spiritual growth and maturation, all in active reverence and singleness of purpose, in response to God's grace.

Lesson 14: Our Union with Christ

My chief blessing is my union with Christ; all other blessings flow from this one. Everything is loss compared to the joy of knowing Christ. I do not bring my own righteousness to this union based on legalism, but a righteousness that is based on faith in Christ provided by God by faith. I long to share in the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his suffering, and his death and resurrection; not that I have attained any of this yet, but I work toward that goal.

Lesson 15: Two Kingdoms: The Heavenly Kingdom and the Earthly Kingdom

We're born into the earthly kingdom, which is corrupt, evil, and ruled by satan; ultimately this world is headed for destruction. We're born spiritually dead; from birth our bodies are dying and our spirits are dead. We want nothing to do with God; we want to do everything we shouldn't do; we are totally depraved and hostile toward God in every way; and for a people like this God sent his Son to die that by faith in Him we could have eternal life. As a further act of grace, He touches the souls of some, and convicts them by the Holy Spirit, so they will want to receive His free gift of salvation through faith in Christ. The standards of the world tell us we should go for everything we can now, because there is nothing else; but the Scriptures tell us to build up our treasures in Heaven where they cannot be corrupted or stolen. We are aliens on this earth; our true home is in Heaven with Christ. We await for Christ's return; Christ who by his power and control over all things, will renew these dying bodies and give us eternal bodies like He has. So, how are we to live our lives while on this earth? We live it in obedience to God; not out of fear

that He is going to send us to hell, but out of reverence for all that He has done for us, taking us out of what should have been our just fate, which is eternal separation from Him, and preparing for us an eternal home in His kingdom to be with Him; he promises to keep us in the faith until we reach our eternal inheritance.

Lesson 16: Be Joyful in the Lord in all Circumstances

“Be anxious for nothing but in all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Worry and anxiety are self-centered and unproductive, except for genuine concern over the spread of the Gospel. Worry and anxiety, and prayer, are opposing forces in the life of the Christian; but prayer with supplication and thanksgiving, is an antidote for worry. If we bring all our requests before God, we can leave them all with Him and worry about them no more. We don't fully understand the scope of God's care; his protective custody over the believer goes to our innermost being and our deepest intentions. We need to take every thought captive and surrender it to Jesus Christ. We need to reflect on holy righteous things, and good things which will help us to develop healthy thought patterns, which will lead us to a life of moral and spiritual excellence.

Lesson 17: The Deity of Christ

Christ is the image of the unseen God; He is the first born over all creation. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All things were created by Christ, for Christ; all things are held together by his power. He is before all things; he is the leader of the church and the first born among those to be resurrected. It pleased God for all of his fullness to dwell in Christ so that by Christ's death God might reconcile all things to himself. He is unable, however, to reconcile everyone to himself; there is still an eternal punishment for those who refuse to receive God's provision for salvation. When Adam and Eve sinned the harmony between God and Man was broken and disorder came into the world. But through Christ's sacrifice peace was again made possible between God and man, and at Christ's second coming order will be restored to the world.

The supreme kingship of God, as displayed in his transcendent goodness and greatness, is a pervasive theme throughout the Book of Psalms and the Old Testament. It provides us the perspective we need in order to view ourselves, creation, history and the future. All of creation is God's kingdom, and every creature born into the world is under God's rule. Every human born into the world is ultimately accountable for everything he has thought, said, or done. Everyone must take stock of the measure of his years so doesn't play the fool without regard to his mortality or his accountability to God.

God's election of the righteous and the giving of his word represent the renewed in-breaking of God's righteous kingdom into this world of wickedness and rebellion. Ultimately God's plan will come to pass, and the establishment of his kingdom on this earth will be fully realized; at that time all wrongs will be redressed, the prideful will be humbled, and the humble will inherit the earth.

The righteous are those who seek to glorify God in all that they do. In all things they order their lives in accordance with God's will. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill all the obligations that each particular relationship entails, of the sort that includes social, domestic, economic, physical and intellectual, realizing that power and authority are to be used to bless rather than exploit

The following prayer contains elements that we would do well to keep in mind daily. "I lay myself down to sleep knowing that I will awake because the Lord sustains me. I surrender my own watchfulness to sleep because the watchful Lord preserves me. If I have done evil to someone who is at peace with me, or made someone the innocent victim of an unmotivated attack, then let my enemies pursue me and trample my life into the ground. In the Lord's righteous kingdom, those who wickedly attack others, bring destruction on themselves; their end will be the grave. Do not take away my soul with sinners; do not bring on me the end that awaits the wicked; do not drag me off with the wicked, with those who have done evil, but hear my plea for mercy. The wicked are those who from birth go astray, even in the womb they are wayward. They stumble about all their lives in the dark not knowing what it is that makes them stumble.

Lesson 18: Knowledge of God's Will

Only those who know and do God's will can expect favorable response to their prayers. If you have cherished sin in your heart the Lord will not listen; he will not hear your voice in prayer. Pray, therefore, that God will give us knowledge of his will with all spiritual understanding and wisdom in order that we may live a life worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in our knowledge of God, depending upon God's strength to help us grow in patience and endurance, giving praise to God for bringing us out of the kingdom of darkness under the dominion of evil and into the kingdom of light under the benevolent rule of his son Jesus.

Lesson 19: All That God Has Done for Us

Since you have received Christ continue to grow in him, being rooted and built up in him, growing in the faith you have been taught and giving thanks to God. God in all his fullness dwells in Christ and we have completeness in Christ. We have been redeemed from our sinful nature and from spiritual death; we were buried with Christ in baptism and are raised with him by our faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. God forgave us our sins; when we were dead in our sins God made us alive with Christ. The accusation of the law against us has been cancelled – nailed to the cross. We are no longer under the dominion of evil spirit beings for God has disarmed and defeated them. We needn't feel overwhelmed by satan because Christ defeated him and his cohorts and his eventual end is certain.

Lesson 20: Sanctification

Since you have been raised, set your hearts on things above where Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father. Set your minds on spiritual things, not on earthly things, for you have died and your life is now hidden in Christ with God. We will one day share in his glory by virtue of our union with him. So then, put to death whatever pertains to your earthly nature. Put to death sexual immorality, impurity, lust and covetousness, shameful desires, greed, and idolatry, for the wrath of God is coming upon such things as this. You used to walk in these paths in the life you once lived but now put aside these things; put aside also anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy

language, and don't lie to one another. Put away the old self with its practices and put on the new self, growing in knowledge in the image of the Creator.

As Christians we have special standing before God, but this doesn't dull our human responsibility; we must strive all the more to live lives in the image of Christ; we need to put into daily practice what we already are in our status before God. So then, clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness, humility, sensitivity and patience, forgiving one another as you have been forgiven and binding it together with love. Let the peace of Christ dwell in your hearts and let his word dwell richly within you, so that you might admonish one another with spiritual understanding and wisdom. Whatever you say and whatever you do, say it and do it in the name of Christ, giving thanks to God. Wives obey your husbands; husbands don't be harsh with your wives, children obey your parents, and parents don't provoke your children. Whatever you do work at it with all your heart, as though working for the Lord, and he will give you an inheritance as your reward. Let your speech be filled with wisdom and grace so that you will be prepared to give an answer to anyone at any time.

Lesson 21: Faith, Hope and Love

Three things we have been given: faith, hope and love. Faith: God demands our action in addition to our believing and thinking. Just as the soul is dead without the Holy Spirit so also is faith dead without works. We need to put Christ at the head of every area of our lives so our lives will bear fruit. Hope is not unfounded wishful thinking; it is firm confidence in Christ and in His return. Love to be sincere, must be based on right motives and right intentions, good conscience and sincere faith.

The Gospel, which can save us from spiritual enslavement, has come upon us with power. This power resides in the Holy Spirit but it also resides in the Gospel. Three things mark our conversion: turning from our idols to God, serving God, and waiting for Christ's return, Christ who will save us from the coming wrath.

Lesson 22: Sexual Immorality

It's God's will that we should be sanctified and that we should avoid sexual immorality. The definition of morality seems to change from one generation to the next but God's standard is clear and unchanging. Each of us needs to be in control of his own body in a way which is holy and honorable, not in lustful passion like the heathen, who do not know God; and in this manner one must be careful not to betray his brother or take advantage of him. When two people come together in an immoral sexual relationship, not only are the participants wronged, but in the case of extramarital sex, the spouse is wronged. In the case of premarital sex the future partner is wronged by robbing him or her of the virginity that ought to be brought to marriage. God called us to be pure not impure; if we ignore this instruction, we are not rejecting man but God who gives us the Holy Spirit. Sexual sin is always against God who gives us the Holy Spirit for our sanctification. To live in sexual sin is to reject God, specifically in regard to the Holy Spirit.

Lesson 23: Assurance of Resurrection

“Let us not be in the dark about those who have fallen asleep or to mourn like those who have no hope.” In one of the early Psalms there is expressed the joy of the total security that God's faithful care provides. “My body will yet rest secure because you will not abandon me to the grave; you have willed life for me hence you have made known to me the way of life which is in your word. Though my heart and my flesh will fail, with the Lord as my fortress, even the grave cannot rob me of life.” As Christians, sleep is a metaphor for death because death's horror and finality are removed by the assurance of resurrection. For the non-believer death is viewed with horror, as the end of everything. But we believe that Christ died and rose again and that God will bring along with Jesus all who have fallen asleep trusting in Him. When we die our souls go immediately to be with Christ; we will not receive our eternal bodies until Christ's second coming. The soul of the non-believer goes immediately to Hades, to await the final judgment.

When Christ died, he experienced the full horror of death which is separation from God so that we would not need to. In the Lord's own words, “Those who are still alive at His second coming

will not precede those who have fallen asleep in the grave.” With a loud command and the trumpet blast of God the dead in their graves shall awake to join those who are still alive and meet with Christ in the air. Encourage one another with these words.

For the non-believer Christ’s second coming will be as unexpected as a thief in the night. When he is saying all is well, life is good, destruction, which is eternal separation from God, will come upon him as suddenly as a woman’s labor pains and there will be no escape. But for the Christian, Christ’s second coming shouldn’t be a surprise, and so we should be alert, not living like those who are spiritually asleep or dead. We need to put on the breastplate of patience and endurance, and the helmet of hope in our salvation, for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive eternal life through Jesus Christ. Christ gave himself for us in order that we might be with him forever, whether physically dead or alive, spiritually alert, or living like those that are spiritually asleep. Once we are Christ’s we have entered into a relationship that nothing can destroy.

Lesson 24: Patience and Endurance

If we endure our trials and tribulations with patience and endurance, the judgment of God is right, and we will be considered worthy of the kingdom for which we suffer. We can rely upon God’s strength to help us grow in patience and endurance. God’s justice will bring trouble on those that trouble us and remove trouble from us. God’s justice will bring punishment on unrepentant sinners; this punishment will occur either in this life as God allows sin to run its full course in the life of the sinner, or it may happen at Christ’s second coming; Christ, who is now hidden in the clouds and many deny his existence; but at his second coming everyone will see him as He is. He will come with blazing fire and mighty angels to destroy wickedness and to punish those who do not know God and who have failed to live by the Gospel of our Lord. This does not mean those who have never heard of God; it means those who have heard and who fail to acknowledge Him. The Gospel invites acceptance; to reject the Gospel is to be disobedient to a divine invitation. God will punish such people with everlasting destruction; they will be shut out from his presence and from the majesty of his power. This separation from God is the

essence of hell. This will happen on the day Christ comes to be glorified in the lives of his people, and we will share in his glory by virtue of our union with him.

Lesson 25: Living by the Holy Spirit

If we walk in the spirit we won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh. The desires of the spirit for us are in conflict with our sinful nature. But if we are led by the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit, we'll have what we need to resist temptation to follow our sinful desires. We'll be under grace and not slave to the power of the law to entice us to sin. But as long as we are humans we will still have sinful thoughts and want to commit sinful acts. But when we do, we are immediately convicted of our wrongs and we seek to repent. This conflict between the Holy Spirit within us desiring our sanctification, and our sinful nature is evidence of our salvation. Anyone comfortable in their sin and not feeling convicted, reveals that he is among the unsaved.

Lesson 26: Christ's Mission (A Quotation from the Apostle Paul)

Christ came into the world to save sinners, of which I am the worst; and for that reason I was shown mercy, so that in me the worst of sinners, Christ might display his unlimited patience, as an example for those who would come to him and receive eternal life.

Lesson 27: God's Grace

God's grace, which has been revealed to all men, is the love he showed us in Jesus Christ while we were yet sinners and his enemies, and by which we are saved apart from any moral achievements or religious acts on our part. This grace teaches us that our salvation should produce a life of good works. This grace teaches us to say no to un-Godliness, to being disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all sorts of worldly desires, and to live lives which are self-controlled, upright, and Godly as we await Christ's return. Christ gave himself in order to purify for himself a people of his own, anxious to do what is right. Our salvation involves two works: freeing us from guilt and judgment, and creating in us moral purity and useful service to others.

Lesson 28: God's Blessings to Us in Christ

In bringing many sons to glory it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the champion of their salvation perfect through suffering. Anyone who comes to Christ becomes a child of God; and the champion is the one who comes to the aid of those in bondage to satan. It was through Christ's suffering that God declared him fully qualified to carry out his redemptive mission. When Christ prayed in Gethsemane that the cup be taken from him, he was referring to the cup of God's wrath poured out over all humanity for all time. Though he could have refused he still obeyed God's will.

Both he who is holy and he who makes men holy are of the same family and Christ is not ashamed to call them brothers. He became like us so that he might serve as a substitutionary sacrifice and redeem our lost holiness. Christ said, "I will put all my faith and trust in God the Father"; and, is our example of perfect obedience to God. It is through Christ that fallen humanity is seen as it was intended to be. In as much as the children were flesh and blood, he too became flesh and blood so that by his death he might put to death him who has the power over death (satan) and free those who all their lives have lived in bondage of fear of death. satan wields the power of death only in so far as he induces men to sin, the penalty for which is death. Christ became like us in every way to serve as an atonement for our sins. He became fully human in order to turn aside God's wrath toward guilty sinners and die as a substitute for us. In as much as Christ suffered when he was tempted, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

God tests His people. He tested Moses for 40 days to ensure that he would be a worthy leader. He tested the Jews in the desert for 40 years, allowing them to experience hunger and then providing manna; He did this to show them that they cannot live by bread alone but need God's word. He tested Christ by allowing Him to be tempted by satan for 40 days. He told Christ he could turn stone into bread to relieve his hunger; although Christ could have done this he chose to trust in God's provision. He said "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word from God." Bread sustains but doesn't guarantee life, which is God's promise to those who accept and live by His word. Christ also told satan that we cannot put God to a test, and that we should worship God, not the things of the world.

Lesson 29: God's Judgment

God's judgment is final; it is almighty, it is eternal, it is deserved, it is pitiless, it is imminent, it is just.

Lesson 30: True Repentance

“It is impossible for those who have tasted the heavenly gift and been partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they should fall away, to be renewed to repentance, because they have, to their loss, crucified the son of God, again putting him to open shame.” This is a warning to all of us to examine ourselves to be sure we are in the faith and that we don't fall away. If our lives bear the fruits of righteousness God will reward us, but if they bear the fruits of wickedness we will be under his wrath and he will punish us. We must produce good fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8); repentance is not merely a change of mind but a radical change in one's life as a whole that especially involves forsaking sin and returning to God (Matthew 3:2 note). Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down (Matthew 3:10); this refers to those whose lives don't reflect forsaking sin as evidence of repentance. God is not unfaithful to forget acts of love that we have done in his name. He will reward us. Let us be imitators of those who through faith and patience have already laid claim to that which was set before them – which is peace with God. Let us cling to Christ as the cornerstone of our faith.

If we deliberately continue to sin, there remains no more forgiveness for sin, because we have rejected the only salvation there is. To ignore such a great salvation or to give up the pursuit of holiness is to incur the anger of God. God will destroy his enemies with blazing fire. When we accept God's plan for salvation, and accept Christ as our savior, God justifies and sanctifies us. Our responsibility then is to live out in daily practice what we already are in our status before God. To deliberately continue sinning means that we haven't really accepted God's provision, because if we had, we would not continue in our sinful ways. We would be producing fruit in keeping with repentance. When we accept Christ we take on a responsibility to try to live a moral life. If anyone who claims to be a Christian doesn't do this he has forgotten that he has been cleansed from past sins. When in the time of Moses one sinned on the testimony of two or three

witnesses, he was immediately put to death. How much more deserving of punishment is the one who tramples the son of God under foot, considering as an unholy thing the blood of the sacrament shed for his salvation. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a wrathful God. Deliberate sin is rejecting Christ. People do this by abandoning Christianity, but they also do it by deliberately sinning. Even as Christians the things in the Bible that should give us joy often do not, and those things that should cause us to be fearful do not make us fearful. We have become callused of heart and mind, and so it becomes easy to commit some favorite sin. We feel that in the grand scheme we won't lose our salvation; but the deceptiveness of sin is such that the more we continue to commit it the more hardened we become so that it becomes easier to sin, and even to up the ante until we are committing a sin we never thought we could commit. This can lead us to loving the sin more than Christ, and could lead us to rejection of Christ. Let's not be like Esau in Genesis who gave away his inheritance for a meal. Let's not give away our eternal salvation for the sake of a sinful pleasure.

We could benefit from keeping the following prayer in mind: "Forgive me my hidden faults, lord, and keep also your servant from willful sins, let them not rule over me. Do not give me over to my own sinfulness – to my own waywardness. Let me not be among the unfaithful, who are trapped by evil desires, but let me be among the upright whose righteousness delivers them. Save me from my inner faintness."

Lesson 31: God Satisfied His Own Requirement for Justice

There are many who say, "If God is loving, why doesn't he just forgive everybody their sin?" This is because God is as just and righteous as he is loving, and this justice requires that sin be punished. As infinitely loving, just and righteous as God is, humans are as infinitely sinful, disobedient and hostile toward God. All that we know we shouldn't do we want to do even more. More than one person has observed that given the right set of circumstances, each one of us would be capable of committing nearly all of the atrocious sins that have been committed by humans in the past. There is no way that on our own we could ever be justified to be in the presence of an infinitely holy God. The only just fate for us is eternal separation from God, which is the essence of hell. No amount of finite time spent in purgatory can change the fact that

we are infinitely wicked and cannot be in the presence of an infinitely holy God. We carry a sin debt that is impossible for us to ever pay on our own. From the beginning God's plan was to save us from this dilemma, and so he took full responsibility for satisfying the righteous requirements of his own justice by sending his son to be punished as a substitute for us. If we are punished we only get what we deserve because we have a sin debt, but he allowed us to commute our sins to Christ; since Christ had no sin debt he is able to receive all of our sins. A good analogy would be us having a credit card that is maxed out and we cannot get anymore credit; but Christ's credit card has never been used. And so, once we are justified through faith we're made perfect in God's sight and have access to him in prayer. But he did this for a purpose, which is for us to try to put into daily practice what we already are in our status before him, which is perfect.

Lesson 32: Enduring Trials and Tribulations

Consider it pure joy when you suffer trials of many kinds, for this testing of your faith builds patience, and patience must complete its work in order to make you mature and complete, not lacking in anything. If anyone lacks the faith to accept his trials with joy, he must ask God for it. But when he asks, he mustn't doubt because one who doubts is like a wave of the sea cast about by the wind. A person like that should not feel that they will receive anything from God, because he is double-minded and unstable in all that he does. Poor Christians should take pride in their high position as believers, and wealthy Christians should take pride not in their possessions, but in the fact that God has humbled them and given them a Godly outlook.

Blessed is the man who stands up under the temptations that test his moral strength and his ability to resist sin – he will be blessed by God. We are tempted when, by our own evil desires, we are carried away and enticed; and when desire has fully conceived it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully matured to death. The human heart is deceptive beyond all things and impossible to cure; who can know it. We need to remove all filthiness from our lives and cling humbly to the word of God which is implanted in us. But when we read the word we need to be careful to do what it says, because one who reads it and doesn't put it into action, is like one who

looks into a mirror and, when he turns away, forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and doesn't forget what he has heard but does it; he will be blessed by God. The perfect law that gives freedom is the commandments brought to perfection by Christ. Contrast the man who cannot escape his sinfulness without God with the man who lives by the moral and ethical principles of his Christian faith. He will have the glorious freedom to be all that God intended that he be.

Lesson 33: Backsliding

If one escapes the corruption of the world through knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and then becomes entangled in it and overcome, he is worse off at the end than he was at the beginning. Better not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then rejected the sacred command that was passed on to him from the beginning. For a person to fall completely away means that he had not been completely regenerated. Knowledge of the way of righteousness carries increased responsibility, and increased hardness of heart if we then reject it. The sacred command is the full message of Christianity, which we are commanded to receive. Try to live a life that is spotless and blameless so that we may have peace with God. We have a certain amount of peace already because we have been justified through faith, but if we don't live as he desires, we may fail to receive his commendation or his reward.

Lesson 34: Imitating Christ

"We know that when we see him, we will be like him because we will see the way he truly is. Everyone who puts his faith in Christ purifies himself by turning from sin. No one can live in Christ and continue to sin." This does not mean sinless perfection but it means a life not characterized by sin. One cannot be born of the spirit or contain the seed of the spirit and continue to sin. This does not mean complete cessation of sin but a life not characterized by sin. But if we do sin, Christ is there to petition for us before God.

If our hearts do not convict us we may approach God with confidence asking him for what we need knowing that he will fulfill our needs, because we obey his commands and try to do what pleases him. And this is his command, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and

love others. If we obey his commands, we live in him and he lives in us. And this is how we know he lives in us; we have the Holy Spirit. If you devote your heart to him, stretch out your hands in prayer to him, put away the sin that is in your hand, and allow no evil to dwell in your tent; if you follow in his steps, keep to his way without turning aside and don't depart from his commands, then you can hold your head high and without shame; then you can stand firm and without fear. If you devote your heart to him you should also devote your life to him. This is itself the gracious working of God's spirit within you.

Lesson 35: Examine Yourself

"We are loved by God and held by Christ. Christ who holds all things together will see to it that we are kept in the faith and that we reach our eternal inheritance." There are people who believe that salvation by grace gives them the right to continue to sin without restraint and that God will graciously forgive all their sins. But God will see to it that on judgment day the unrighteous are consigned to eternal punishment. In the Book of Amos the prophet said to the people "If you will turn from your sins and repent God may yet save a remnant of you." Such a widespread change in attitude would need to stand the test of time to prove its genuineness. This points to the folly of presuming upon God's grace.

We're told in 2 Corinthians 13 – "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith, test yourselves, do you not know that the spirit of Christ lives in you; unless of course you fail the test." And in 2 Peter 2: "Be all the more eager to make your election and calling sure." If we cultivate the qualities of faith identified in Chapter 1 we and others can be sure that God has chosen and called us. To your faith add goodness, to goodness, knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, persistence; to persistence, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to this love. When God elects and calls it is to a life of obedience. The Holy Spirit leads us from an attitude of rebellion to one of obedience. If we give evidence of our faith in this manner, we will not fail to persist in overcoming the corruption in this world caused by evil desires. God invites everyone to be part of His kingdom (Matthew 22) but few are chosen. This doesn't mean that God is being arbitrary. The invitation needs to be accepted, accompanied by an appropriate change in behavior. Proper conduct is evidence of being chosen.

Lesson 36: Proof of God

We are told in the Book of Isaiah that without faith it impossible to please him. “He who would come to God must believe that he is and is a rewarder of those who seek him.” Christ said, “Blessed is he who having not seen yet believes.” When Moses lead the Jews out of captivity out of Egypt, God traveled with them, performed miracles among them, and spoke to them, yet the people were from time to time still dissatisfied. When he spoke to them on Mt. Sinai, he spoke to them in a voice so powerful that they begged him to stop. He commanded them not to worship idols, but a short time afterward they build a golden calf and worshipped it. During the ministry of Christ his disciples witnessed dozens of miracles, yet when they were on the lake and a storm threatened, they lost faith. We are no different, and if people were given the proof they ask for, God speaking to them or doing a miracle, it likely would make no difference in their lives. God has given us something much more important, which is his word; and satan would attempt to dissuade us from reading the Bible, which is why for so many people their happiness is dependent upon their circumstances. But Paul commands us to rejoice in the Lord always. We can do this if we realize that everything of value to us was created and is maintained by Christ. If we would draw close to the essence of that which is important to us we would draw close to Christ. We do this by being obedient to his commands, using Christ himself as our example for obedience. If we are obedient to him, we live in him and he lives in us.

Lesson 37: The Bible No Longer Relevant?

There are people in every generation who choose to reinterpret the instructions, rules for daily living, and commands that God gives us in order to justify their own sinfulness. So many people today claim that the instructions in the Bible were written in a different era and are no longer relevant. Morality never goes out of fashion; God’s standards are the same yesterday, today, and always.

Lesson 38: The Power of Prayer (A Collection of Verses)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding.
All things are possible with God.

If we bring all our petitions before God, we need not worry about them anymore; we can have peace of mind.

God's protective custody over the believer goes to the core of our being and our deepest intentions.

Casting all your cares upon him because he cares for you.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

Christ said, "Don't doubt, only believe."

And finally, if our hearts do not convict us we may approach God with confidence knowing that he will give us what we need.

When we pray we need to do so with praise and thanksgiving. In so doing we acknowledge that God is in control and wants to answer our prayers. This will give us the freedom to accept that God will answer our prayers in the right way at the right time, and to trust in the wise goodness of God.

Lesson 39: Sampson and the Modern Christian

Much like the modern day Christian, Sampson led a life set aside for God. As a sign of this, he grew his hair long. God filled him with his Holy Spirit and gave him the physical powers to do mighty deeds. He was able to slay armies and wild animals single-handed. Then he met the Philistine woman, Delilah, who persuaded him to abandon the true God and to follow her gods. So often, we too, follow false Gods and abandon the true God. So God withdrew his spirit from Sampson and his powers left him. He was captured by the Philistines, bound up and blinded. Then he was taken to the Temple to be put on display. He prayed to God to receive the Holy Spirit and to restore his powers. God answered his prayer and Sampson was able to break down walls, collapsing the Temple, and killing several thousand Philistines. Sampson died in this event. We too can always return to God if we repent by confessing our sins but our lives may show the consequences of our sinfulness in broken homes, broken marriages, and other tragedies of life.

Lesson 40: When Good People Suffer

When good people, those who fear God and shun evil, suffer, we ask why? The Book of Job demonstrates that the suffering of the righteous provides an occasion like no other to demonstrate true godliness. Our relationship with God is not an exclusive one; there is satan, the adversary, and though he can't compete with God in power, he attempts to thwart God's creation centering on the creature who bears God's resemblance, which is us. As tempter, he seeks to alienate us from God and as accuser (satan means accuser), he seeks to alienate God from us, and so bring about a chasm of alienation that cannot be bridged. In the Book of Job, satan attacks Job and tries to make God look foolish centering on the relationship that is dearest to them both. In a manner true to his form, satan accuses Job before God stating that his righteousness is evil; the righteousness in which God takes such delight is flawed; Job's righteousness is self-serving, he is righteous only because it pays. If God will allow satan to break the link between blessing and righteousness he can expose Job and all godly people for the fakes that they are.

We're dependant upon God for our lives and all our needs, which occasions one of mankind's greatest temptations, which is to love God's gifts more than God, to want to please God for the sake of his gifts and to be righteous because it pays. And this is the deep truth concerning satan's accusation concerning God's people. If he is right, then a chasm of alienation stands between God and man that cannot be bridged, such that redemption of even the most righteous would not be possible because they would be the most flawed. So God would have no choice but to sweep away the creation in judgment. The question once raised couldn't be ignored nor could it be silenced because it strikes too deep into the nature of creation and the condition of man within it.

And so, God allows satan to tempt Job. Satan is given certain powers to afflict but he is kept on a leash and all of the evil that he brings about in the lives of people is still under God's control. And so Job suffers with every sign of God's favor having been removed. Even his friends offer no consolation saying that his own lack of righteousness gives him what he deserves using the logic of the orthodox theology of the time. Though Job curses the day of his birth, he doesn't curse God, and so God's delight in the righteous is vindicated and the accuser is silenced. Job suffers in silence but will not repudiate his maker and though he faces God with anger, confusion,

anguish and bitter complaints, he'll not turn his back on his maker, and so he passes the test, but in order for this test to be genuine, Job had to be kept in the dark about the goings on in God's counsel chamber.

But Job is a member of a race of beings with insight, wisdom and understanding that seeks to learn all it can about the creation and the nature of God. The limits of his own wisdom fail to answer the question about his suffering, and the wisdom of the theology of the day cannot provide the answer. Still, Job wants to meet with God as an equal to discuss the matter. God gives man the ability to understand certain creaturely things and some of God's ways, the most important of which is to fear God and shun evil. This is how Job had tried to live most of his life. Over time Job comes to live by the wisdom that God gave him, recognize the limitations of that wisdom, and regret having ever doubted God. In the end, God restores all of his blessings. A lesson to be learned from Job is that, above all else, God values our righteousness, and satan knows that if he is to thwart the all-encompassing purpose of God, which is the redemption of the righteous, then he must attack the righteousness in Godly people. At stake here in the suffering of the righteous, is the outcome of the titanic battle between God and satan. True wisdom is to love God more than his gifts, trust in the wise goodness of God, and accept that some of God's ways are beyond our ability to comprehend. We need to trust in God, fear God, and remember that some suffering is the result of unseen battles in the spiritual realm between the powers of God's kingdom and the powers of satan's kingdom.

Although Job is a book primarily about the suffering of righteous people, much suffering we bring on ourselves. Much suffering caused by natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, will invoke even the atheists to ask "Where is God?" But we've eliminated God from government, we don't allow "In God We Trust" on money, and if we salute the flag, we can't say "One nation under God"; prayer has been banned in public schools, and the Manger scene banned in many communities. Many people don't have the decency at mealtime to even thank God for all his provision. We have done everything we can to tell God we don't need him and we don't want him in our lives and so, God, being the gentleman that he is, gives us what we want; we have no claim on his protection or on his blessings; we reap what we sow.

Although this lesson is primarily about our relationship with God it has applications for relationships with each other. Just as we should value God for himself and not for what he can do for us, we should love people for themselves and not what they can do for us.

Lesson 41: Living our Faith

There is often a gap in people's lives between what they think and believe, and how they live their lives. People can proclaim their Christian faith but behave as atheists in daily practice. Paul tells us toward the end of Galatians "If I boast in anything let it be the cross of Christ and Christ risen." What he meant was that if he were to be remembered or revered for anything, then it should be how well he exemplified Christ in daily life; expressing the joy of salvation, forgiveness because we have been forgiven, and peace. Often life circumstances can make one feel distant from Christ; this is because we have allowed the gap to widen.

To live daily what we believe, we need to put Christ first in our lives. He gave everything so that we could have eternal life; in return he wants our lives dedicated to him. Then we are able to eliminate the gap. To do this we need the power of the Holy Spirit alive in us to help us; and we need to believe that God and Christ are real. Constant prayer, scripture reading, attendance at church, and fellowship with other Christians helps us to live daily that which we believe.

Christ said "If one is not for me, he is against me"; there is no in between. If we've accepted Christ and want to be assured of eternal salvation then we need to give our lives over to him; this is the purpose for which he saved us. Being lukewarm is the same as having no relationship with him; like the person who wants nothing to do with God, so also is the lukewarm person; their end will be an eternity without God, which is hell. God gives everyone what they want in the end.

We need to live each day trying, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to reflect Christ in all we think, say and do. We need to surrender our lives to him and trust in him completely. If we

immerse ourselves in God's word, we come to see how completely applicable it is to every way we think and behave and also the way we should be thinking and behaving.

Lesson 42: Remedy for Struggle with Sin:

Taken from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Chapters 1 and 2:

- God has blessed us with every heavenly gift beyond measure in Jesus Christ.
- In our natural state we are all spiritually dead; we want nothing to do with God. We want only to pursue our fleshly passions and appetites.
- We are undeserving of any of God's grace.
- Because of God's infinite grace and love He made us alive spiritually in Christ. He even gives us the faith to accept Christ.
- We want to fully experience the extent of God's grace and love until the new age, when everything we consider good will be magnified.
- In the meantime we need to be patient and tolerant with each other.
- We will suffer trials caused by things such as dysfunctional families, finances, etc.; we need to continually remember all the blessings we have in Christ.

Lesson 43: Idolatry:

- We commit idolatry when we fashion idols in our imagination, worshiping that which we believe will bring us happiness.
- Paul told the Corinthians to cast down imaginations and bring every thought into obedience to Christ.
- To flee from idolatry we need to judge every thought and imagination by the word, to determine if our passion for them has overshadowed our passion for God; are they Godly thoughts we have elevated to an improper place of prominence or ungodly delusions.
- It is the role of your mind, as it has been enlightened by the Spirit and Scripture, to correct your thinking when you begin to worship thoughts of imagined happiness.
- Idolatry is the belief that happiness can be found in something other than God; when we do this we're worshiping a false God.

- Our nature is to put ourselves and desires first and God second; there is no way we can act any different.
- Pleasing ourselves brings only shallow, temporary gratification; living for God brings deep, long lasting happiness; to live for God we must be in His word and obey his commands.
- We need to ask Christ to help us, by his Holy Spirit, to put Him first.
- Christ will help us if we sincerely ask Him to but we also, by a conscious decision of our will, need to seek to be holy and make every effort to put aside our idols.
- We need to find our total joy and fulfillment in celebrating God's grace, power, love and control over all things; all other blessings flow from this.

Lesson 44: Leaving a Legacy (How You Want To Be Remembered)

- Give away that which you can't keep to gain that which you can't lose.
- Live by God's word as revealed in the Bible.
- Live true to your calling as reflected in your talents and abilities.
- Seek God's guidance in living according to His calling for you.
- Be a person of your word.

Random Note:

What fool would allow himself an indulgence in a moment's sinful pleasure to open up a sea of God's wrath.

Lesson 45: Accepting and Loving God for Who He Is

- So many people want to believe in a God who conforms to their own preconceptions and desires about who He should be and what He should be like.
- They also want to interpret God's word in ways that justify their own sinful behavior and preferences. They like to say that what is in the Bible is out of date and not relevant today, or needs to be reinterpreted to fit our times.
- The religious leaders in Christ's time had the same problem; though He interpreted the scriptures written by God's prophets and performed miracles that they witnessed, they killed

Christ because neither He nor His words conformed to their preconceived beliefs and biases.

-- Many people today reject the true, living God and His word because they don't conform to what they want to hear.

-- God's long suffering patience with us should serve as our role model for behavior toward each other.

Random Notes:

Whatever pain and struggles we endure, Christ doesn't claim He will solve our problems, but He does say He will be with us to strengthen and guide us.

His grace is larger than any of our circumstances in which we suffer. We need to turn to Him always, trusting in His wise goodness.

Random Note:

When we receive Jesus as our Savior we then are given His Holy Spirit to help us desire to live lives of righteousness. To receive Jesus we need faith. God uses a number of means for us to have this faith; such as His word as given in the Bible and as heard in sermons. When people accept His word and believe it they receive the faith they need to receive Jesus. Many people find His word nonsense, and by an act of their own will reject the only means that God gives them to have the faith necessary to accept Jesus. God sees that everyone gets what they want, either a relationship with Him through Christ or a life and an eternity without Him.

Lesson 46: Godly Precepts to Live By

o Honor your wife or husband in all of your behavior. Eliminate all inappropriate behavior that fails to honor her/him and which dishonors God.

O Don't speak negatively about others; don't say anything in someone's absence you wouldn't say in their presence.

O Allow others to take the lead when appropriate; don't interrupt when others speak; consider other's opinions as valid as your own.

O Be tactful in dealing with others and respect their sensitivities.

O Be humble; don't seek people's praise, seek God's favor. Don't consider yourself to be any more important than anyone else.

- O Think carefully before you speak; evaluate every situation before speaking or acting; listen much even to fools because they too have their story; wise people can learn even from them.
- O Surrender every thought to Jesus; develop healthy thought patterns leading to a life of moral and spiritual excellence.
- O If someone is in need or in trouble be a first responder; don't say "Let someone else do it"; you be that "someone else".
- O Control your appetites; many things are allowable by God but not everything is beneficial if taken to excess.
- O Trust in God in all things; He directs the steps that people take; pray frequently for his guidance and provision in all things.
- O Remember that this life is temporary. The most important thing anyone can do is accept Jesus as Savior, this determines where we spend eternity. Work hard in whatever you do and Christ will reward you now and later.
- O Remember that whatever one sacrifices in this life for Jesus' sake, He will reward many times over in this life, and give us eternal life.
- O Remember that in many cases, a person is just doing the best they can; don't judge.
- O Be cheerful; others should see that life in Christ is a happy one.

Lesson 47: Spiritual Gifts we need daily from God

Pray for:

- O Increased faith in Jesus.
- O Increased understanding of God's will in our lives; base all our decisions on His will.
- O Strengthen us with power by His Holy Spirit in our inner being.
- O Increased ability to live by His commands.
- O Increased understanding of the wisdom in His word, the Bible.
- O Keep us from again becoming entangled by the evil in this world and overcome; keep us in the faith throughout life.
- O Help us eliminate all the idols that capture our desires and detract from our worshipping Jesus.
- O Remember all that Jesus did for us; never lose sight of His suffering so we could have eternity with Him, and His gift of the Holy Spirit to help us lead lives of righteousness.

- O Give us a vision for future glory in heaven so we can live this life with patience and long suffering.
- O Increased ability to voice praise for God and to spread the Gospel message to others that by faith in Jesus they can have eternal life.

Lesson 48: Union with Christ (Romans 6)

Adam's willful disobedience to God caused him to yield to the reign of sin. We, through our natural human birth, are united to Adam. We are born sinful and in our natural state we allow sin to reign every minute of our lives. There is no way we can avoid willful disobedience to God. The cost of sin is physical and spiritual death, eternal separation from God. This is our destiny in our natural state.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and our faith we have union with Christ. We are united with Him in His death and resurrection.

Christ submitted for our sake to the reign of sin, though He lived a life of perfect righteousness. He took on our burden of sin, and as a result, He suffered sin's penalty, which was physical death and spiritual death, separation from God. But because He lived a life of righteousness, He was able to break the link between sin and death, which we could never do because of our sinful nature.

Now, in our union with Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us, and the link between our sinfulness and separation from God is broken. When we receive Christ through faith, we submit to sin's reign in the new sense that our sinful nature dies and we no longer need to be enslaved by it. So we are considered perfect in God's sight through union with Christ and now it is our calling to try to live a righteous life.

Our resurrection is a present reality for us. Through our union with Christ we died to our sinful past and are raised to a life of righteousness. When we die physically, we will again submit to sin's reign in the sense that our sinful body will die. But we will be raised again with a perfect, sinless body to be with God for eternity, which has always been God's plan for us.

Lesson 49: We are made righteous in God's sight through faith in Christ (Roman 3-6)

No one is born with any possibility of not being sinful. We are born sinful. Physical death, the penalty for sin, is symbolic of spiritual death, ultimate and eternal separation from God.

Abraham, father of the Jewish nation, was a sinner like all humans. But he was made righteous before God because of his faith in God's promise to bring life out of death. God did this in his life by enabling Abraham at that time 100, and Sarah in her 90's, to give birth to a son, Isaac. God promised that Abraham would become the father of countless people through time. Abraham never wavered in his faith in God's promise. Abraham is considered the father of all Christians as well as Jews because we also gain righteousness in His sight by having faith in God bringing life out of death. God did this by raising Jesus from the dead.

The problem humans face is not God's hostility toward us, but our hostility toward Him. God took the initiative in ending this hostility by providing His son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this not out of any inherent worthiness in us but in spite all our undesirable qualities.

God allowed our sinfulness to be imputed to Christ, who God punished because of this sin and in turn exchanged it by allowing Christ's righteousness to be imputed to us. So, if we believe that Christ died as punishment for our sins and God raised Him to life again, we become righteous in God's sight just as Abraham was considered righteous by believing in God's promise to bring life from death.

We gain proof of this when we receive Christ as our Savior, because at that point, His Holy Spirit enters us and we experience His love in our lives.

So now we can have hope in a glorious eternity with God. Just as Christ was raised from the dead so also will we be. Physical and spiritual death was the penalty for sin but through our faith in Christ this penalty has been removed; we are considered righteous in God's sight and so will spend eternity with Him. This hope is not unfounded wishful thinking. It is God's assurance and promise to every one considered righteous in His sight through faith in Jesus.

God's grace in the free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ is available to all, but needs to be accepted by faith.

Through our natural birth we are united with Adam, who by his own will, sinned against God by being disobedient. We, from birth, have no possibility of not living a sinful life.

The penalty for sin is physical death of the body and spiritual death, eternal separation from God. Prior to Adam's sinning there was neither physical nor spiritual death.

Christ, for our sake, submitted to sin's penalty and suffered both physical death and separation from God. But unlike humans, He never sinned; He entered this world perfect and remained perfect. In so doing, He broke the link between sin and death. God was satisfied that our sin debt had been paid and raised Christ from the dead.

When we receive Christ as our Savior through faith, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into a union with Christ. Our sinful nature can be viewed as a body that can be put to death. So, just as Christ, after He had taken on our sin died, physically and in being separated from God, so we too in our union with Him need to put to death our sinful nature.

Just as we are united with Christ in being assured of physical resurrection and eternal life with God, so also, we need to be united with Him in no longer allowing our sinful nature to be master in our lives.

We need to consider our sin nature as having been killed on the Cross with Christ. Since we still live in this flesh, we will continue to sin but we needn't be ruled by it. At death we will become perfect, no longer ruled by the flesh.

"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. This life I live in the flesh I live by faith in Christ, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me".

We need to spend our lives working at what we already are considered to be before God because of our union with Christ, which is holy and righteous.

As resurrection followed death for Christ, so we too, in our union with Christ, experience a resurrection in the here and now, living new lives committed to serving God. We're to live our present lives this way until our death to this life and resurrection to eternal life with God.

Lesson 50: Living for God

The Apostle Paul, earlier called Saul, was a strict Jew who relentlessly persecuted the early Christian church. He murdered, tortured, and imprisoned many Christians. One day on a trip to Damascus the resurrected Christ appeared to him. He convicted Saul of his wrong doing and called him to service for God. When Saul understood how much he had been forgiven, he received the Holy Spirit and spent his life spreading the Gospel that others might be saved. After his conversion, Saul, then named Paul, was a completely changed person.

Christ calls each of us to Himself. When we were in the depths of our sin and His enemies, He died for us. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we receive the Holy Spirit, are drawn to His word, and become a changed people. God wants to use us to spread the Gospel so that others may be saved. When we realize how much we have been forgiven and by living in God's word, we are empowered to spread the Gospel by the Holy Spirit that we received when we accepted Christ.

Not everyone is a gifted evangelist. But each of us can spread the Gospel by deeds of love toward others, telling people about Christ when the opportunity arises. Our actions, behavior and words should identify us as changed people, which we can truly be by living in Christ and his word.

Lesson 51: Living as a Child of God

- When we accept Christ as our Savior we become a child of God and a member of His household.
- Like a member of any household, there are standards and rules that we are held to; these are fixed and never change.
- God has written His Commandments on our hearts and in our conscience, and He has given us His word for instruction on daily living.
- God has given us His Holy Spirit to give us strength to keep his commands and to prick our conscience with guilt when we disobey.
- As children of God we are called upon to take up our Cross daily and follow Christ. This involves daily suffering as we put aside our own sinful desires and try to live up to His standards and rules.

- If we fail and don't live up to the standard because of a specific sin, and pray for forgiveness with a sincere heart, Christ will forgive us.
- Christ knows our hearts and if we sin deliberately in a premeditated manner, and then pray for forgiveness with full intension of repeating the sin, we are being defiant and will not be forgiven; this is not genuine faith with sincere repentance.
- We will all stand before Christ in judgment for how well we've lived life by the standards set forth in the Commands and in the Word. To whom much has been given much will be expected; we have been given much.
- Everyone has free will and makes their own decision regarding following his own desires and pleasure vs. living in obedience to God.
- Since we have the Commands written in our hearts and conscience, God's Word and the Holy Spirit to guide and remind us, if we do make a decision to follow our own will and give into our desires, we will have no excuse when we face judgment and must be prepared to accept the consequences for the choices we've made in this life. We all struggle with this internal conflict due to our sinful nature.
- As Christians we all share in the suffering brought about because of our internal struggles.
- We need to be constantly in prayer, the Word, in Church, and in fellowship with other Christians.
- "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also that you may endure it".
- "Wake up, strengthen what remains and is about to die, for your deeds are not complete in the sight of my God. Remember therefore, what you have heard and received, obey and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come to you as a thief, and you will not know when I come to you. But he who keeps his clothes unsoiled (by sin) will walk with me in white".
- Churches who teach false doctrine lead their members to lives with problems. Living by the true Gospel message and all contained in Scripture, will lead to satisfying lives that will glorify God.
- We need to thank God for all that we have because it is all from Him. We need to repent if we have emphasized or loved anything more than God. We need to pray for forgiveness and strength to enjoy but not make idols of our blessings. To not repent is to be trapped in satan's snare; we need to pray this for others also.

Lesson 52: Our New Faith-Based Life (from 1 Peter)

- Martin Luther said, "We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that is alone".
- Faith that is genuine is reflected in a life of righteousness.
- Saving faith results in a life of good deeds.
- The sanctifying of the Holy Spirit leads to a life of obedient, saving faith and cleansing from sin.
- The result of Christ's death is that the believer is positionally dead to sin and may live a new life as an instrument of righteousness for God.
- Those that live by righteousness will find life most gratifying; God's eyes are on the righteous, ready to bless them; His ears are ready to hear their prayers.
- Baptism is a commitment on the part of the believer, in all good conscience, to be sure to make what baptism symbolizes (death of the sinful nature and living in newness to God) becomes a reality in their lives. By this commitment we enter into an agreement to be obedient to the Lord. This constitutes a covenant that requires total consecration of our faith and loyalty to God.
- We have spent enough time in debauchery, lust and idolatry.
- When one's life is in danger (eternal life), the sinful desires and practices that seemed so important, become insignificant.
- Now that Christ's attitude prevails in us, God's will is the controlling factor in our lives.
- Be self-controlled and alert, your enemy the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, stand firm in the faith, remembering that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering.
- In as much as Christ suffered when He was tempted, He is able to come to the aid of those being tempted.

Lesson 53: Importance of The Bible (from 2 Timothy)

- Our highest purpose for living is to glorify God; this is the reason He created us. To glorify God means to love, enjoy, trust in, and obey Him.
- The Bible is foundational for this. In its passages we learn about the true God and the Lord Jesus, their nature and character.
- By means of the teaching, correction, reproof, training in righteousness it provides we become wise unto the way of salvation; we learn how God wants us to live by understanding the commands, rules, and guidelines He gives in His Word.

- As we grow in this process, the Holy Spirit works in us to reveal the truths in the Bible and illuminate our minds and hearts to understand and change/transform the attitude of our minds.
- We are to live exemplary lives, by means of the influence of the Bible, and instruct others by our example and by our teaching.
- Our over-riding purpose in so doing is to point others to Christ.
- We are to share this Gospel with which we have been entrusted with others every opportunity God lays before us.
- To persist and grow in all of this we need the power of God through the influence of the Holy Spirit. We need to be regularly in prayer, reading the Bible, attending church, and fellowshiping with other Christians.
- Our fallen nature and satan's influence pull us in the direction of comfort, pleasure, and desiring all the things that God forbids and which are bad for us.
- The life of the Christian is one of daily repentance and a sincere effort to glorify and enjoy God, looking forward to being with Him forever and praising Him for all He has done for us by providing salvation and power to live a full satisfying life here on earth.
- Through the Bible, God speaks to us, just as He did ages ago through the prophets, through Christ's teaching, and through the apostles' teachings, all of which have been accurately set forth in the Bible under the inspiration and direction of God.

Lesson 54: Accepting God's Only Salvation

There is a New Testament scripture that tells us "If we deliberately continue to sin, there remains no more forgiveness for sin, because we have rejected the only Salvation there is". On the other hand, the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans, chapter 7, that he cannot stop doing what he shouldn't do and can't make himself do what he should do. So, all of us, even Paul, is guilty of deliberate sin. Paul said "Who can save me from this body of sin and death?"

Left on our own, and ruled by our sinful nature, we can't escape deliberate sin and its consequences, which is eternal separation from God. But then Paul says "Thanks be to God, it has been done by Jesus Christ; so now in my inner being I serve the righteous law of God, though in my body I still serve the sinful nature".

When Christ died, was resurrected, and returned to God, He left us His Holy Spirit. When we truly accept Christ as our Savior, we receive the Holy Spirit. And so Paul says "The law of the spirit of life sets us free from the law of the spirit of sin and death; the controlling power of the Holy Spirit sets us free from the controlling power of the sinful nature; we are not enslaved by it or obligated to follow it as we did before we received the Holy Spirit".

Now if we sin, we are convicted by the Holy Spirit, feel guilt, and repent. Repentance is a change of mind and will arising from sorrow for sin and leading to transformation of one's life. Our continuing to sin is due to our fallen human condition; but if we truly have accepted and not rejected the only salvation there is, we will have the Holy Spirit within us and will be in a continual state of repentance. Those who deliberately and defiantly continue to sin and don't feel guilt or the need to repent haven't received the Holy Spirit because their faith has not been real, and so they have rejected the only salvation there is. There are many who go through the motions of living the Christian life whose faith was never genuine. In the New Testament (2 Corinthians) Paul says "Examine yourselves to see if you are truly in the faith; do you not know that the spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) lives in you?; unless you fail to pass the test".

And so when we sin, even deliberately, but feel guilt and repent because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, God forgives us. We have a union with Christ because we have accepted Him as our Savior and trust that we are considered righteous by God through this union. Though we displease Him from time to time, just as a child might, that doesn't change our union with Him no more than a relationship with a son or daughter would change. So we can take comfort in the fact that though we sin, and will continue to throughout this life, we will spend eternity with God due to our union with Christ. We need to remember that Christ's sacrifice covers our past, present, and future sins. But He still expects us to try not to sin in all good conscience.

Lesson 55: Our New Life in Christ

We become united with Christ by faith when we trust in Him as our Savior and believe the Gospel message. When Christ died on the Cross, He submitted to the reign of sin in that He accepted sin's penalty, which is death. He then broke the judicial link between sin and death in being raised, God being satisfied that sin's penalty has been paid and His requirements for justice has been met.

The eternal reality for believers is that we will die physically because of our sinful nature, but will not die the second death, final separation from God. Christ suffered temporary separation from God for our sake but then was reunited with Him forever. Through our faith God allows our sinfulness to be commuted to Christ and His righteousness to us. We become justified by faith in Christ.

The present reality for believers is that we die to the old life we have been living and are raised to a new life of righteousness. Symbolically, we are buried with Christ in baptism, baptized into His death, and raised to new life in Him. As Paul says, "Since you have been raised set your hearts on heavenly things, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your minds on heavenly things, not on earthly things, for you have died and your life now is with Christ in God". "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; this new life in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me." When one puts his faith in Christ, he purifies himself by turning from sin. One cannot live in Christ or be born of the spirit of God and continue to sin. This doesn't mean sinless perfection, it means a life not characterized by sin. Baptism is a commitment to God, in all good conscience, to be sure all that baptism symbolizes will become a reality in our lives.

We have lived long enough enjoying the pleasures of sin. Given the scope of eternity, those desires and practices that seemed so important, pale in comparison. We need to put off the old self, constantly corrupting us with sinful desires, and put on the new self-growing daily in God's image. Put off everything that pertains to our sinful nature. Our attitudes shape the choices we make and the steps we take. All will be accountable to God for everything we have thought, said and done. All would do well to consider the measure of our years and our accountability to God.

Clearly, we have a choice. Paul says to not allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies, that whatever we become slaves to, will become our master, whether to sin leading to death or righteousness leading to life. Pray that God will strengthen us in our inner being with His spirit so that Christ will live in our hearts by faith.

Lesson 56: Faith

When one receives Christ, he becomes obedient to the faith, and becomes responsive to the commands of the Gospel. Repentance is a change in attitude leading to turning from sin to God and resulting in eternal life. Possessing this involves both human faith and divine appointment.

When one hears the Word and learns the way of righteousness, he invokes a blessing on himself. He may think he is safe even though he persists in going his own way, but one who denies God brings destruction on himself.

But when one chooses God he chooses life; love Him, listen to Him, and hold fast to Him. God, His Word and life are all bound together. Life refers to all that makes life rich, full and productive the way God intended it to be.

Lesson 57: Our Assurances as Children of God (from Romans 8)

If we are God's children, we have the Holy Spirit within us that bears witness with our soul that we belong to God. We no longer need live in fear that God will judge us for our sins, but we live as children of God in closeness.

The Holy Spirit gives us manifestations of His presence in us in three main ways:

We pray to God as father; not as our judge but as a helpless child, completely depending upon Him. He relates to us as His child because of the Holy Spirit within us.

We hate our sin and go to war constantly against it, confessing to God that we can't overcome it on our own. We gain victory bit by bit.

We confess Jesus as Lord and master of our lives, owned by Him.

As God's children we can be confident in our inheritance:

The new heavens and earth in their glorified state and all the nations.

God Himself and all His glory as the center. Without God the material inheritance would have little value for us.

But we must also suffer in this world.

Not only persecution for our faith but also sickness, infirmities, losses and terrible circumstances.

Sometimes Christ answers prayers directly and solves our problem and other times He doesn't.

He allows suffering to build maturity in faith and to get us to rely on Him instead of ourselves.

We need to endure our trials with faith and patience; never reject God because of it like so many do.

The entire creation groans as we await the new life.

We will also receive new bodies free from pain and death.

We will share in all of God's blessings that we enjoy now except these will be glorified and much better.

We need to be in frequent fellowship with God now; building the relationship now that we'll have for eternity.

Lesson 58: Living Without Fear of Punishment by God When We Die (Knowing We Are At Peace With God Though Imperfect)

From 1 John – "Dear children let us not love with words or tongue but in deed and truth. By this we will know that we are children of the truth, and quiet our hearts in the presence of God whenever our hearts condemn us."

An over sensitive conscience can be quieted by the knowledge that God Himself has declared active love to be an evidence of salvation. He knows the hearts of everyone, whether in spite of shortcomings they have been born of Him. Anyone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God lives in God and God in him, and we know and rely on His love. God is love and anyone who lives by love lives in God and God in him. In this way love is made complete among us so we can have confidence on the day of judgment, because we are like Him (Jesus) in love. There is no fear in love and perfect love eliminates fear because fear has to do with punishment. In those who fear, love has not been made perfect. Anyone who confesses that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. The love by which we love God and others is made complete by our obedience to God's commands. This should not be burdensome because we have the help of the Holy Spirit that lives in us. Anyone born of God has overcome the world (its sinful pattern) by obedience to God's commands. Faith gives the victory that overcomes a worldly life (living in a pattern or lifestyle of sin). The first victory is turning from the world to God; the second, is a life of daily Christian living.

Lesson 59: Suffering – Summary Insights From “Be Still My Soul” (From Nancy Guthrie, ed.)

- When physical and emotional suffering occurs in our lives, it helps us to grow and mature spiritually. This leads to greater fullness of life for us and others around us.
- Our suffering is very minor compared to the reward we will have for eternity. Anyone would be willing to suffer for five minutes if they knew the rest of their lives would be very happy. A lifetime of suffering wouldn't equal a second in eternity, where the joy will be incomparable.
- We don't suffer because of sins we have committed; Jesus was sinless yet suffered. God will never forsake us in our suffering. Physical pain is good for us because without it we would continually injure ourselves. Emotional pain is even better because it can save us from spiritual injury. God is not so much concerned with saving us from suffering in this life as He is in rescuing us from sin. He wants us to learn to hate our sin and grow in likeness to Jesus. God may allow us to feel the sting of sin's penalty through suffering to remind us of what we're being saved from.
- When we don't know why certain circumstance are playing out in our lives, we need to remember that as individuals occupying only a short period of time on earth, we have very limited perspectives and so we need to trust and have complete faith in the wise goodness of God who alone knows why.
- When God remains silent during times of great need, trial or expectation, we need to continue on in faith, believing that all will ultimately work out for our good, if we are children of God. We need to always remember that God is always there, and God is good. Even Jesus asked “My God, where are you?”
- God is in control of all things and He uses good and evil people and circumstances to bring about good. All of history, including our own personal lives, are under God's control.
- All Christians need to take up our own Cross daily and follow Jesus. It will be our own Cross to bear and not one of our own choosing. But Jesus says “My yoke is light”. By contrast, the burdens we place on ourselves due to our own sinful choices, may be very heavy. When we take up our God-given Cross and suffer, we will also feel joy because we will have closeness and communion with Jesus.
- We tend to think that our burdens are worse than those of others. Christ suffered more than any of us could. If we grow to understand and appreciate that, we would find it easier to help others and share their burdens.
- God allows both blessings and sorrows to come in to our lives. To expect a life filled only with good fortune would give us the false impression that each of us is the center and God is here to serve us. God does not direct the course of things according to our desires; in His plan there are other motives that operate outside of our preferences. We are helpless and He is in control and we have no choice but to submit to an almightiness that absorbs us and everything that is ours. The sooner we realize this the sooner we will know God as He is and not as we would like Him to be. We need to cooperate with God's plan and enter into it, whether it be through joy or sorrow.

Lesson 60 – Inspiration Note from the Gideons

Following are the words of a young African man before he was martyred.

I am part of a fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast, I have stepped over the line, the decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed vision, worldly talking, cheap giving and dwarfed goals. My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I've stayed up, stored up, and prayed up for the cause of Jesus Christ. I must go until He comes, give until I drop, preach until everyone knows, work until He stops me; and when He comes for His own, He will have no trouble recognizing me because my banner will have been clear.

Does your life measure up to that statement? I am striving to make mine so, and I know that the only way we will survive as Gideons is that all of us that call ourselves by that name want to do the same. If we do not strive to be like that we will not survive as a ministry and indeed we shouldn't.

I leave you with the words of Jesus in: Rev.2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place – unless you repent".

Lesson 61: Trusting God

-- By His infinite wisdom God created and sustains everything, from the vast universe to the smallest creature on this earth. He created a world with perfect conditions for providing us with everything we need for comfortable, happy lives, a garden of Eden.

-- When the timing was right God created man in his image, the only creature who could be aware of and praise God for all that He did in creating and sustaining him.

-- God wants a relationship with every person He created. But people by nature want nothing to do with God or His commands He gave us for our own good. Because He is infinitely holy and righteous our sinfulness had to be dealt with, which He did by allowing His son Jesus, himself equal to God, to die in our place to satisfy His justice. In so doing God gave the most and best He possibly could for us. As an added act of grace He calls people to faith in Jesus.

-- This world is ruled by satan, who persecutes those who follow Jesus. Jesus says "take up your cross daily and follow me." Followers of Jesus will experience this persecution in the form of trials and difficulties in daily life, that cause people to question God and their faith.

-- One of the hallmarks of Christian living is thankfulness to God, regardless of our circumstances, for drawing us to Himself by means of faith in Jesus, for an eternity in heaven.

-- Another hallmark is that of daily growth in spiritual strength and maturity. This happens as we allow God to use the ups and downs of daily life in this satan-ruled world to help us in this daily growth process. As Paul says, "consider it pure joy when you suffer trials of many kinds; this testing of your faith builds perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work to make you mature and complete, not lacking in anything." We can rely on God's strength that He gives us as we ask for more faith to endure our trials and to persevere with the right attitude. This means to never lose faith, trust and patience in the wise goodness of God, convinced that as we pass through each set of trials the ultimate outcome for us and our loved ones will be good because God loves us. Outstanding examples of this are given in the lives of Job, Paul and Jesus himself.

-- A third hallmark is growing in our knowledge of God. This process happens as we grow in the first two hallmarks, thankfulness and daily growth, along with repeated study of God's word.

-- The fourth hallmark, which is dependent upon the first three, is bearing fruit for God. We are told by Paul that God's grace in our lives teaches us that our salvation should produce a life of good works. This means living a life committed to obedience to God and humble service to everyone, Christian and non-believer alike.

-- And so when we pray to God for help in specific circumstances, we can't expect Him to answer us according to our perceived needs or our timing. God recons time different than we do. But as we trust God we know that He hears our prayers. We are told "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding". We are also told "be anxious for nothing, but in all things by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, bring your requests before God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord." And "cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you". This means that God will give us grace, strength, and faith to face each day's new challenges and troubles and realize that whatever He allows to happen in each of our lives is for our own good, to help us grow in the likeness of Christ.

-- We are told in the book of Job that some suffering is a result of unseen spiritual battles going on for people's souls between God and satan, along with all the devil's forces of evil.

-- And so we need always to trust in the wise goodness of God even when circumstances in our lives arise that don't make sense to us. It all does make sense to God, who alone has the big picture. We understand only a tiny fraction of all that God is and does and we need to constantly trust in Him.

-- We need to put life's daily problems in perspective and realize that God is using them for our growth in the faith, and also realize that these trials and their duration are short, and are nothing compared to the eternal joy we'll have with Him.

-- Continual prayer, Bible reading, attending a good Bible-preaching Church, and fellowship with other believers are powerful weapons in our walk with Jesus.

-- Finally, we need to remember that our growth in faith is not an even, linear process. For every two steps forward our faith enables us to make, we'll take one back as we fail due to our sin and weakness. But we need only to persevere, and we can be assured of continual and ultimate spiritual growth and

maturation. We are all on the same journey and will finally arrive when our life ends and we see Jesus; only then will our struggles be over as we are transformed into His likeness. We can be joyful and praise God knowing we are on the right path, and even though we fail continually, we can take comfort in that at least we care enough to try.

Lesson 62 - The Christian Gospel Message

Our Dilemma:

God deeply loves each one of us and wants more than anything to have a relationship with each person. As much as He is a God of love, He is a God of righteousness, and in our natural state our sinful nature separates us from God. To fix this problem that we all have that has existed since the beginning of the human race, He provided a Savior allowing us to cast our sin burden on Him, Jesus Christ, so that we can be viewed as righteous before God and have an eternal relationship with Him. In providing His only son, Jesus, to be a sacrifice and take our punishment, He gave the best He possibly could. "For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." [John 3:16] Contrary to popular opinion, there are not many different ways to come to God; He only provided one way, faith in his son, Jesus Christ. There is no way that anyone can be good enough to be justified before God on his own.

The Gospel:

And so, the Gospel "good news" is the message that God will give us pardon from our sins and eternal life (salvation) with Him in heaven, if we will turn away from our sins and turn to His son, Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior, recognizing that Jesus died for our sins and rose on the third day. Humans, given their limited reasoning powers, may find the truth about Christ rising from the dead difficult to accept. But God is the creator capable of giving and taking life. When Christians refer to the Gospel, they are referring to the "good news", the truth that Jesus Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins that we might become children of God through faith alone in Christ. It is God's plan for salvation. There is absolutely no sin that God cannot forgive. But once we are freed from any punishment for our sins, we need to try our best to not continue to sin, and to sincerely be sorry and ask God to forgive us when we do slip up. As long as we are alive in this flesh, we will all struggle with sin.

My Decision To Receive Christ As My Savior:

Confessing to God that I am a sinner and believing that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God who died for my sins on the cross and was raised from the dead for my justification, I do now receive and confess Him as my personal Savior.

My Confidence In My Salvation:

The New Testament of the Bible provides clear assurances that God has forgiven us and given us eternal life once we receive Jesus as our Savior.

“For as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to be called children of God, even those who believe in His name.”

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you will know that you have eternal life.”

We can also be assured that God will be with us in this life. Once we are a child of His, we can be assured He will never leave us. Even when we experience life’s ups and downs, we have confidence that whatever happens to us will ultimately be for our good. We need only to trust in the wise goodness of God.

Don’t Be Discouraged by Others:

Many friends, acquaintances and even family members may try to discourage you as you grow in your faith, or try to convince you you’re on the wrong path. All the more reason to become a member of a good Christian Church where we can be encouraged by other believers having the same struggles. And remember the words given to us in the Bible,

“Broad is the pathway to destruction and many will go that way, but narrow is the pathway to eternal life, and few there be who will ever find it.”

“For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (on their way to hell). 1 Cor. 1:18.

There are those who will say that the whole message of Christ, His life and His mission are nothing more than unsubstantiated stories. In fact, even atheists if they are well read and have researched the matter have to agree that there are more eye-witness accounts and documented historical facts about Jesus than exist about many prominent historical figures that we accept as fact. For example, there are approximately 400 people who were present at Jesus’ crucifixion, who later saw Him after He had risen and walked the earth for a period of weeks before ascending to heaven. We are assured of His second coming and that we, as believers, will be with Him.

Lesson 63 - Some Thoughts on Salvation

There is nothing we can do to secure our salvation; God will not love us less and cannot love us more. Being preoccupied with our progress in overcoming sin, serving others and spreading the Gospel, as to whether we are doing enough, causes us to be self-focused, which places a burden on us that produces anxiety and joylessness. Instead, we need to pray for increased faith to trust and be fully confident in the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross to save us from the penalty of past, present, and future sins. Knowing for certain that we will be with Jesus for eternity produces a tranquility that frees us to focus on all He did for us in taking our sin and commuting his righteousness to us. This will produce a desire to serve others and tell them all that Jesus did for us; we will do this willingly, as an outpouring of gratitude. At the same time, we need to pray for vigilance and God’s grace to not presume upon that grace by sinning deliberately. When we do sin, we need to repent, hating the sin and trying to gain

victory. Some sins we may never totally overcome, which will keep us humble and more reliant on God's grace. But we need to never be complacent in it but try the best we can to work toward some measure of victory. As an expression of saving obedient faith, our goal should be to lead a life that is "blameless, without any mix of sin, to avoid censorship because of moral or spiritual failure". In this way we will model for others all that God intended us to be, which will glorify Him.

Why We Need A Savior

From earliest times man has known that a greater being is present in the Universe. Man's concepts of God were based on wrong understandings, desire for God to be who they would like Him to be, and the wrong teachings of false prophets. This has produced false gods and false religions that societies still worship today. Man has looked for God in the wrong ways and in the wrong places; meanwhile, the one true God has always pursued a relationship with man while man continually flees from Him. He sought us, and has revealed Himself to us by actually speaking to certain people, through the inspired writings of true prophets, and through displays of His power and glory. From the beginning, He gave man guidelines and commands governing how we are to relate to Him and to each other. And from the first man has rebelled against the one true God and sought after gods that conform to their flawed concepts of who they want God to be.

God, being a God of love, is also a God of justice and demands that sin be punished; since He is infinitely holy He cannot be in the presence of sin, and so the punishment is eternal separation from Him, which is the essence of hell. Every person is rebellious from birth by nature and so is under God's wrath; no one on his own can have peace with God. We need a Savior to protect us from God's wrath and the punishment that will be due each one of us. But God, being rich in mercy, sought to redeem fallen man by sending His Son, Himself God but also human, to teach us how to live to please God and to die as punishment for our sins. In this way, God makes it possible for man to have peace with himself. But from birth to death, Jesus was treated shamefully and was rejected, and still is by all but a few. Even today, despite all the warnings and promises God has given us in His word, through His prophets, apostles, and teachings of Jesus Himself, the majority of mankind seeks after false gods and religions. Such false gods or idols can also take the form of obsession with money, career, addictions, and lusts, all of which deliver little in the way of true peace but cost much in the way of broken relationships and poor health. The true God offers our only lasting peace and the deep satisfaction we seek. Praise God for the gifts of his Word, the Holy Spirit, and Godly pastors and church families through which we can know true Salvation and peace with God. Praise God for His patience and His promises to help us navigate through this demon-filled, satan-driven world. We need to avail ourselves of all He can give us by means of prayer, studying the Bible, going to church, and fellowshiping with other believers so that we can succeed in ridding ourselves of our idols and follow the one true God.

Lesson 64: God's Comfort

God comforts us in our trials and suffering. This doesn't mean He takes away the suffering; instead He gives us the strength to endure. He does this to build faith, patience, and trust.

When we allow God to comfort us and as our strength grows, we can comfort others and help them find strength to deal with their circumstances. If the person is a believer, then we can say God is building patience in them. If not, we can say God is drawing them to Himself.

To share in the fellowship of Christ's suffering is what we do as we suffer in our circumstances because of the sin that pervades this broken world. Christ suffered differently, in order that we may be freed from sin's penalty.

At His second coming He will take away all suffering because He will restore creation to perfection, the way it once was.

Lesson 65: God's Righteous Kingdom

Israel's entrance into Canaan, the Promised Land, is the story of how God, at one stage in the history of redemption, reconquered a portion of the earth from the powers of this world that had claimed it for themselves by war and reliance on their false Gods. The Jews were God's army who took back the land with His aid. This story of God's kingdom breaking into the world testified that God is the one true and living God whose claim on the world is absolute. It was also a warning to the nations that the irresistible advance of God's kingdom would ultimately disinherit all who opposed it, giving place in the earth only to those who acknowledge and serve God. The conquered land belonged to God and so had to be cleansed of all paganism. On that land Israel was to establish a commonwealth faithful to God's righteous rule and be a witness to all nations. If Israel conformed instead to Canaanite culture it would lose its place in God's land. War is a curse that humans bring on themselves but it pales before the curse that awaits all who reject God's warnings, oppose His rule, and reject His grace. Now, for a time, God reaches out to the world with the Gospel. He commissions His people urgently to carry His offer of peace to all nations. The sword of His judgment waits in the wings.

Christian existence is not merely on an earthly plane. It derives its meaning and significance from heaven where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Nonetheless, that life is lived out on earth where the daily practical life of the believer continues to work out the purposes of God (from Introduction to Ephesians).

Lesson 66: Serve the Lord with Gladness

The Christian life of prayer, Bible reading, church attendance and good deeds should not be done out of a feeling of obligation because we are Christians. There is nothing more we can do to change our status before God as far as salvation or reward in heaven. Rather, we should do these things and live the Christian life with an ever-increasing sense of gratitude as our knowledge of all that Christ and God did

for us grows as a result of prayer, Bible reading and church. Our identity we derive from our work; but accomplishments and abilities should not be as strong as the identity we have in Christ. To derive our primary sense of pride from what we accomplish leads to pridefulness and causes us to value this as primary. In so doing, we replace Christ in importance with our own activities and achievements. We need to remember that it's not we who are primary in importance, but Christ. As Paul says, our only boast should be in Christ and all He has done for us. Our primary identity should come from our spiritual union with Christ.

Lesson 67: Jesus, The Only Way

The terms "exclusivity and narrow-mindedness" as applied to Christianity are based on commands from God regarding the means He provided for us to come to Him.

If Jesus was only a moral person, an enlightened man or a prophet but still only a man, none of it would make sense.

But Jesus is the only founder of a world religion who claimed to be the Son of God, a claim He supported by raising the dead, healing the sick and Himself, rising from death. All of Jesus' miracles and His resurrection were witnessed by many people, proving His deity. His statement about being the only way to God, makes Christianity the only true religion. This is not man's choice but God's command.

It would make no sense for God to give a separate means of coming to Him by means of Islam, Buddhism, Hindu, or being a good person.

God didn't provide multiple ways for people to satisfy God's wrath against sinners. John 3:16 quotes "for God so loved the world, He gave His only Son". If God had provided multiple ways to come to Him all that Jesus sacrificed for our salvation would be for nothing. Such is not the case and the other arguments make no sense.

Lesson 68: Enduring Hardship

As Christians we need to continually, in all circumstances, give thanks to God for giving us faith to believe in Christ as our Savior. All who try to live godly lives will experience persecution by Satan, the ruler of this world, who wants to destroy God's people. He does this by bringing about hardships in our lives so that we will become discouraged and lose faith. God may allow certain hardships to come into our lives in order that we will grow and persevere in our faith. In this way He helps us to become strong, persevering and patient. The Apostle Paul said he delighted in hardship because although they were weakening him, he was growing stronger in his faith. So, God often uses Satan's evil intentions to destroy us for our good, to help us become mature and complete. God wants us to bear fruit in our lives. We do this by giving thanks to God for our salvation and allowing Him to use temptations and troubles to grow in perseverance because this brings increased knowledge of God. As we grow in our knowledge of God in this manner, and by continually reading His word and learning His will, our ability to be fruitful

will increase. So that's how we can avoid being overwhelmed by the struggles of this life, by knowing that they are temporary, and are being used by God to help us grow in Christ-likeness. The struggles of this life are small and of short duration compared to the eternal joy we will have in God's kingdom. And so we need to continually pray with thanksgiving, read our Bible, attend a Bible-preaching church, and encourage others to grow in faith. The four cornerstones of our faith: 1) Continual thanksgiving to God, 2) Becoming strong and persevering by facing troubles in our life as opportunities for growth, 3) Growing in our knowledge of God by the last two steps and by continually and repeatedly reading our Bible, which will help us 4) Bear fruit for God.

Lesson 69: Obedience to God

1 John: The fruit of the Holy Spirit working in us is obedience to God's commands. Anyone who has been reborn works to keep those commands, which are summed up in loving God and loving others. This is not burdensome if God's love is in us. So often we fail to love God or others as we should because of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. But faith in Jesus gives the victory that overcomes the world (its sinful pattern). When we trust in Jesus as our Savior, we are assured that when we fail, He advocates for us before God for His sake. Thus, even though our own consistency in obeying God's commands always fails us, Jesus' consistency in loving us gives us enablement to be obedient, and so we keep trying and improving throughout our lives. This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith in Christ.

Lesson 70: Don't Fret Over Evil or Violent People

From Psalm 37: Do not fret because of evil men. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath. Do not fret, it only leads to evil. Turn from evil, trust in God and do good. There is a future for the man of peace but the future of the wicked will be cut off.

Psalm 36: Evil men do not fear God. Even at night, in his bed, when thoughts are free to range and set the course for the day's activities, he plots evil and commits himself to a sinful course; he does not reject what is wrong. He does not meditate on God's commands or let a godly heart instruct him. He does not commune with God, think of Him, or reflect on His promises.

Do not envy violent men or seek to copy any of their ways. To reflect too closely or too long on violent men and their deeds can cause us to be like them.

Lesson 71: The Glory of God

The supremacy and glory of God are displayed in the infinite universe with its millions of galaxies, stars and planets. Earth, though insignificant in the solar system, contains the only beings able to understand and give glory to God. There are many who postulate the strong likelihood of other intelligent life, but so far there is absolutely no evidence to support the existence of other beings created in God's image. All

else in the universe is inanimate and without awareness. God's own glory, and human expression of it, is the most important thing to Him, as it should be. He, not us, is at the center of the universe. God gave humans the ability to perceive the vastness of the universe, the glory of God, and our own insignificance, and to give all the glory to Him.

Lesson 72: God's Justice

God forgives our sins when we repent sincerely. But the universe itself demands justice. There is no punishment God could inflict on us, no matter how many years spent in hell, that could satisfy our sin debt; because God is eternal the scope of our sin and punishment must be eternal. So, what we cannot do for ourselves God did by allowing the sinless Jesus, His Son, to suffer punishment to pay our sin debt. Through faith in Him we have forgiveness of all our sins. We are supposed to give evidence of our faith by turning from our sins, by crucifying them with Christ on the Cross. As such we have no right; we are bought and paid for by Jesus. God's justice is satisfied by us accepting Jesus as Savior and turning from sin, or by Him exercising His wrath and punishment on those who don't accept His salvation. We need to be constantly repenting, trying to turn from sin, praying, reading scripture, and glorifying God.

From Sermon based on James: We don't do good works to earn justification with God; we do them as a result and an expression of justification by God. We will endure trials all though this life because we are fallen beings living in a broken world. When we face trials, these make us see what we turn to, if not God, then He needs to make us aware of our need to turn from trusting in lesser things to trusting in God. This will bring us to maturity in faith. Part of the way we express justification with God is through repentance for not expressing this strongly enough and by asking for His help in living our faith.

Lesson 73: Prayer

The Psalms, like no other part of the Bible, teach us how to pray. As the life of David shows, nothing is impossible or too big for God. His life was in constant turmoil, and in the end, God delivered him. Sometimes we feel besieged on all sides by life's circumstances and like David, we need to cry out loudly to God in prayer. We mostly all have experienced direct unmistakable answer to prayer; but this may be followed by long periods of drought where God seems to be doing nothing. David experienced the same thing. But God is at the finish line and sees the end after His purposes have been worked out. He alone knows how the puzzle of our lives all fits together. Sometimes bad circumstances help us grow into what God needs us to be. Joseph, was in prison for 15 years before finally being brought to second in power over all of Egypt. During his time in prison he learned and grew in what he needed to know to function as second in command. Also, satan and his powers of darkness are continually attacking God's people. Much of our suffering is a result of unseen battles going on in the spiritual realm between the kingdom of God and the powers of darkness. We need to trust always in God in all circumstances and accept that our prayers will not always be answered in the way or by the time we think they should. But if God never answered a prayer for relief in the circumstances that engulf us, He provided salvation through faith in Jesus so that we can be assured of eternity with Him. God is anxious and waiting for us to come to Him in prayer.

Lesson 74: Delight in God

When we delight in God our love for others increases and overflows and enables us to provide for their needs. We delight in God by enjoying all that He is that we see partly revealed in appreciating His handiwork in the world. The intricacy and care displayed in things He created gives insight into His mind, and the steadfastness with which He maintains a secure order speaks of His faithfulness and trustworthiness. God's grace gives us the ability to love others joyfully even under circumstances of poverty and affliction. We need to ask Him for this grace as well as the grace to delight in Him. If we endure our trials with faith and patience God will give us the crown of life in the end. We can do this because the security of knowing our faith is solid and genuine helps us endure the trials. The insecurity of not knowing and so being uncertain about our salvation is more painful than the trial itself. Christ suffered willingly for the joy set before Him. For us this joy should come from the assurance that we are forgiven and will be raised to eternal life with God.

Psalm 71 & Deut.6-4: Because of God's faithful care we are moved to fulfill in our lives God's high purpose in saving and blessing us. God's mighty acts on our behalf are evidence of His righteousness. We have the mature faith that God, who created and sustains everything, holds all things in His hands. His purpose for humankind is salvation from sin, judgment and evil. The serenity this gives us amidst the ragings of history and its chaos is the gift of faith for all who know and trust God.

Lesson 75: Living by the Moral Order

Psalm 83 – Most circumstances and choices involve moral issues. The world order embraces both its physical and moral aspects and both have been established by God as aspects of His one kingdom and both are sustained by His one rule. The stable order of the heavens declares that God's reign similarly governs the moral order. If this is defied then this contributes to crumbling of the world order where good rules over evil, so that the destiny of the world is left to the godless powers to shape it as they will. The commands and guidelines underlying God's moral order are given in His word.

Lesson 76: Universalism or Election

One pastor's understanding -- God has made salvation available to everyone. "For by grace you have been saved by faith, and not of yourselves, it is a free gift of God not a result of works, that no one may boast". Abraham was justified by faith in God's promises; because he believed, it was credited to him as righteousness and not a result of any works he did. Faith is given by the Holy Spirit, which is made available to all people. People, as a matter of the free will God gave them, can accept or resist the Holy Spirit. Steven, before he was stoned, said to the Jews that they were resisting the Holy Spirit as their fathers had done. The Calvinist doctrine claims that God elects only certain people. In the Gospels Jesus says some people He will turn away because they didn't give Him food or drink, or visit Him in the hospital, etc.; "Whatever you have failed to do for the least of mine, you have failed to do for me".

It is clear that turning away from helping someone when we have the means is sin. God has the ability to give each of us what we need, the Holy Spirit, which will lead us to faith. To deny anyone this is sin, which God cannot do. If one had the means to take in all the kids in an orphanage but only took in one or two, this would be like God giving the Spirit to only a few, which would be sin. But He makes the Spirit available to all. Calvinists will say that man is too depraved to come to God on his own; he needs to be called (elected), because he is dead. Many people are dead as far as resisting the Spirit, yet obey God's commands and do more good than many Christians. God says "Those not hearing the law obey my commands because I have written my law on their hearts". On the other hand, the Christian is supposed to be dead to sin yet still sins. The point is, that no one is so dead as to not be capable of having the faith to believe; accepting or rejecting the Spirit is a matter of choice.

Calvinists will say that unless God gives us the ability to believe then it is a work on our part. As shown by Abraham, believing is not a work. God says those He foreknew he elected. This means He knew who would come to Him. To make our salvation sure we need to struggle with sin and not allow it to characterize our lives. We cannot lose our salvation as long as we are not allowing sin to rule us and render our faith not genuine. Christ will reward each of us according to how well we have done with what He has given us. If we die while committing a sin, we won't lose our salvation so long as we have held firm to believing in Christ and trying to conquer our sins and repent. To do this and to find joy in God, we need to constantly pray, read the Bible and go to church. It is not God's will that any should perish. Read Romans and Galatians.

Lesson 77: Joy in Spite of Our Circumstances

That we should have joy in God regardless of circumstances is a command. But we can't force ourselves to have joy. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Christ said "Come to me all who labor and I will give you rest. I will give you living food and water and you will never be hungry or thirsty". To have this rest and joy, and to desire God is a battle against our human nature, which doesn't desire God. To succeed we need to be always in prayer, in His word, attending church, being with other Christians and persisting in this all our lives. The human nature is always trying to convince us to indulge in the immediate desires and gratifications of the flesh.

Lesson 78: The Fleeting Pleasures of Sin

Sinful pleasure gives us immediate joy and fulfillment and, at the time, is very sweet. But inevitably the consequences of these sins cause pain and suffering which often are more far-reaching than we ever expected. One needs to keep in mind that the consequences are far worse than the pleasures and don't allow ourselves to go down those paths. Christ promises to help us in time of temptation as we try to live a blameless life with no mix of sin. We want to avoid censorship from people and God coming from moral and spiritual failure. Christ has defeated satan and his cohorts and we need no longer feel overwhelmed by him.

Lesson 79: Accepting God's Will

Often times things happen in our lives and we get angry at God and ask Him how He could allow this. Bitterness toward God will only cause damage to our faith. God doesn't promise to answer our prayers every time in the way we think He should; but He does promise always to be with us through every trial. But we need to bring our prayers always before God, and He will hear us and give us peace in knowing He is in control and all will work for our good and His glory. The faith to believe this and allow it to comfort us comes from Philippians 4 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". We need to remember Jesus' promise to always be with us. Only then can we endure the trials this life presents us as the devil and life's circumstances attempt to derail us and damage our faith.

Lesson 80: Having the Bible is More Important than Seeing a Miracle

For many people, they believe if God would speak to them or do a miracle, they would find it easier to have faith. In the books of Peter (1 and 2), he tells us that he, James and John witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain. They heard the voice of God and saw the prophets Moses and Abraham. Yet Peter concluded that this one-time experience is not nearly as valuable as having God's word, the Bible, because faith comes from reading and hearing the word, not from a revelation. When we do this the living word, which is the spirit of Christ, enters into us the more we read and hear it.

Lesson 81: Resisting satan

To resist the devil, we need to draw near to God, and in so doing He will draw near to us. We do this by daily humbling ourselves by confessing our sins and asking for God's grace to be obedient to His word. If we resist the devil in this way, we are told he will flee from us. Prayer, reading God's word and attending church are our strongholds against the devil.

Lesson 82: The Struggle to Control the Mind

Most if not all people from time to time allow thoughts that are evil to enter their minds. Such thoughts can give rise to impulses to do evil things totally contrary to that which we value and cherish most. Such impulses can target things we value most. Psychologists long ago named this the "id". Jeremiah 17:9 tells us "The heart is deceptive beyond all things and impossible to cure; who can know it". The devil takes advantage when he can to move us toward evil thoughts and impulses. One subtlety used by both our innate "id" and the devil is when we allow pleasurable sin into our lives. To allow one's self to enjoy and indulge that which is wrong and contrary to God can and does create an insensitivity that makes it easier to continue and even increase the nature and extent of the sin, bringing us to levels we would at first never have contemplated. This insensitivity brought about by the pleasurable sin can move us in the direction of weakness in resisting the "id" that wants to move us toward the thoughts and impulses to do the evil things that our hearts and values are most opposed to. The church is our only hope.

Attending church, reading our Bible, prayer, and fellowship with other Christians are the defenses God makes available to us so that our thoughts and actions can be pure. The power of our “id” and Satan’s use of it are at their weakest in the stronghold of God’s defenses, and strongest when we put ourselves outside of them and into Satan’s realm, which is the world at large. One of God’s promises is “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. And God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the escape, also that you may endure it”. The Scripture also tells us that we need not feel overwhelmed by Satan and his cohorts, because Christ has overcome him and his end is certain.

Lesson 83: Worldly versus Godly Satisfaction

Worldly satisfactions compared to the joy we will share with God for eternity are fragile, temporary and shallow. When we come to faith in Christ and we are truly born again our lives will change so that we will hate sin and want to please God; our faith and the change that results may be as small as a mustard seed at first, but there needs to be at least a minor difference; if nothing changes then we need to question whether we are saved at all. God created the world for us to enjoy, and enjoying food, scenery, accomplishments, and possessions is good so long as we remember that all of it was created and is sustained by God, and we give Him praise and glory. When evil happens to innocent people, like child rape, neglect and abuse, we question God’s sovereignty and goodness to allow something to happen that He could have prevented. Over the course of one’s life God disciplines (here defined as shaping not punishing) using every experience to bring a person to a place where he is able to serve God in a special way. There are rape victims who have gone on to counsel other victims and win them to Christ. As we live out the daily routine of our lives, dealing with the priorities and duties throughout the day, we can stay grounded and close to God by referring to His promises in Scripture, such as “I am always with you” and, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

Lesson 84: The Psalms; Our Manual on How To Pray

A prayer pieced together from the Psalms – Lord my soul longs for assurance of my salvation. This assurance is given in your word. The wicked have no regard for the precepts that are in your word, but I have sought your precepts. Reveal their truths and illuminate my understanding. Your protective custody goes to the core of my being and my deepest intentions. And my deepest intentions are to give evidence that my faith is genuine by a life of obedience. I have put my hope in your word; by your word you have established my life in you for eternity. Thank you for the comfort I can find in the security provided by your promises. You promise to keep me in the faith until I reach my eternal inheritance and that once I am Christ’s I have entered into a relationship that nothing can destroy. Yet despite my devotion to your word I continually seek wayward paths. Seek your servant, for I have sought your precepts. Let my hope in your word not be dashed nor let Satan cast doubt on my assurance of salvation. Create in me a pure heart. Let there be no wicked way in me. Turn my eyes from worthless things and create in me healthy thought patterns leading to a life of moral excellence. Renew in me a

steadfast spirit of faithfulness. Cast me not away from your presence and give me not over to the consequences of my own sinfulness. My dependence on and devotion to you are total. I will praise you with all my heart and glorify your name forever. Take not your Holy Spirit from me but help me to be led by His prompting and power and not allow my sinful nature to hold sway. Restore to me daily the joy of my salvation and grant me a willing spirit of service to you. Shed your grace on me by drawing me to a life of service, good works, and righteousness.

Lesson 85: Our Complete Dependence on Christ

We shouldn't be obsessed over questions such as how much faith we have, the amount of progress we are making in overcoming sins, the amount of service we are doing for God, as this causes us to be focused on ourselves instead of on God. We need to rest securely in the sufficiency of Christ's work on the Cross, and that He fulfilled perfectly everything we can't. We are saved by God's grace, apart from any religious acts or moral achievements on our part. There's nothing we can do to add to or take away from our security with God once we have received Christ. He even keeps hold of us at times when our faith grows weak. We need to depend on God to help us grow in faith, overcome sins and serve Him. We need to rely totally on the fact that Christ paid everything for us, and rely on God's help and provision in all things. We don't need to and can't really do anything on behalf of our salvation or living the way God wants us to on our own. Since we can't do anything but rely on the fact that we are totally dependent on God and Christ's work, this gives us the freedom to love others and win them over to Christ, rather than obsessing over or trying to achieve our own salvation. Trusting completely in God and in Christ's work, loving God and others, while doing the best we can and repenting when we fail, gives us peace and underlying joy in this raging, chaotic, unpredictable world.

Lesson 86: Obedience from Gratitude

There is nothing we can do ourselves to warrant or feel secure in our salvation. It is all about God's grace. "God's grace is the love He showed us in Jesus while we were yet sinners and His enemies, and by which we are saved apart from any religious acts or moral achievements on our own". "God, who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for our salvation, will not fail to give us every good thing, to finish the work begun on the Cross, which is our sanctification". "If God did this for us while we were unbelievers and His enemies, how much more will He do for us after we have received Christ and are saved, and His friends". And so how are we to live while on this earth? In obedience to God's commands; not out of fear that He is going to consign us to hell, but out of gratitude for all He has done in taking the initiative to draw us to Himself. "We need to practice our salvation in an on-going process of persistence, humble service, spiritual growth, and maturation, all in active reverence and singleness of purpose in response to God's grace". Although "faith without works is dead", and "we are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone", and "in addition to our thinking and believing God also demands our actions" we need to guard against making our salvation about our works and

righteousness and rely totally on the total sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross to save us. Out of this should flow expressions of love and gratitude toward God as we realize all He has done for us in creating and redeeming us. We do this by focusing on loving God and loving and serving others willingly without feeling we need to out of obligation. We will struggle with keeping God's commands as long as we live, and so long as we are not sinning defiantly or presuming on God's grace, but feeling convicted when we have sinned and repenting and trying to please God, we are still loving God. And so because of the total sufficiency of Christ's death and resurrection and our faith in Him, we are positionally dead to sin and free to live lives of righteous service to God, doing the best we can and resting secure in our salvation through complete trust in Christ's work. We are helped to do the best we can by constantly reminding ourselves of all that Jesus sacrificed to pay the price for our salvation. Knowing our eternity is secure with Christ in heaven should give us an undergirding peace despite this life's circumstances. As part of our willing service to God and others, should also come the desire to share with others all God has done for us by telling others when the opportunity is there, and by the example we set in our own lives and in our service to other Christians as well as those outside the faith.

Lesson 87: Fear of Dying

The thing most of us fear and dread more than anything is death, being separated from families, friends and all that pertains to the life we have come to love. No ordinary person has ever come back to tell us what is on the other side. We fear and dread the unknown and judgment. But Jesus, being both God and man, was the first to die, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, rise from the dead never to die again. It was necessary for Him to die, because in His incarnate flesh, though He Himself was perfect, He took on the sins of man and so had to die as the punishment that was due us, for death is the penalty for sin. But after He had paid the penalty, God through the Holy Spirit, raised Him up. We too will die because in our mortal bodies we are filled with sin. But once we have accepted Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit fills us and will also raise us up as He did Jesus, because we are united with Jesus by our faith. And we need not fear going through it alone because Jesus promised to be with us, even when we walk through the shadow of the valley of death.

Lesson 88: Our Fall from Grace

From the beginning, since Adam and Eve, God has provided mankind with all he has needed for a full, complete life. He offered them His companionship, and His only requirement was that they acknowledge His authority over all things. He forbade them to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of sin, but satan tempted them, convincing them that there were pleasures beyond those that God provided, and that they could make themselves equal to God. This resulted in man's loss of harmony with God, and man was consigned to labor for his living in a world that became fallen and broken because of sin. Today people still convince themselves that there are pleasures outside of those that God has given them. This is seen often in adultery, lust and covetousness as people try to believe that another relationship is better than the one God brought them to. This is all a result of pride, man

convincing himself that he can control his own destiny, and find life more fulfilling apart from God's will. We need to continually come back to the truth that pleasure and fulfillment outside of what God has made permissible (i.e. seeking the forbidden fruit) is worse for us, not better. These forbidden pleasures that promise joy leave us broken. We need to trust in the wise goodness of God and conform to His benevolent plan for our happiness within His creation order.

Lesson 89: God as the Center of Our Lives

Often, it seems, there are times when something we anticipate with great joy doesn't end up being nearly what we expected; or while we are experiencing something, we're only taking in through a narrow window of our being all that is being revealed to us. The Scriptures tell us that without God nothing satisfies, and that with Him we find satisfaction and enjoyment. If we view everything as a gift from God, each thing we will appreciate with new understanding. And so, the key to experiencing everything in its fullness is to give thanks to God for creating, sustaining and upholding everything and every new experience He brings us to; not in focusing on ourselves and whether or not we are feeling fulfilled. As we make God the center of our life, work and activities, and prayerfully ask Him to be part of each of our experiences, then we can live life's experiences to their fullest. God understands everything each of us needs to be happy and fulfilled, and He can bring this out of every experience as we invite Him to be part of every day's activities. In so doing we will be living to our highest purpose, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We will never perfect this in this lifetime, in our human weakness in a world ruled by Satan. But we can experience enough of a foretaste to experience this life much more fully.

Lesson 90: My Summary of the Christian Faith to One Examining Faith

This will likely be the most important letter I'll ever write to you because I want to discuss something that is foundational for my life, and is the most important aspect of any of our lives. That is the spiritual aspect, too often neglected. All of us get involved in the day-to-day events of our lives without thinking about the spiritual side. I don't know to what extent your upbringing included religious training, but remember this, you have a soul. Your soul will survive through eternity after your body ages and dies, and will be in one of two places, heaven or hell. It's not my style to hassle anyone about religion, so unless you take an interest and want to discuss it further with me, I'll not discuss it again in any depth. I may ask you from time to time how this part of your life is going, but I won't get into it in any depth unless you want to. I want to discuss this in depth at least this one time however.

Man has been speculating about the nature of God and life after death since the beginning. When I was an undergraduate I myself read extensively on various Eastern religions. Also, as a science major, I had lots of training in evolution. I've always approached all facets of my life by reasoning things out and evaluating available evidence, and did the same thing with religion. And, this is why, after a lot of thought and examination of facts I've come to realize that the only religion in the world that has any relevance for mankind is Christianity. God came to earth in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, to demonstrate how we should live our lives and to show us how to be saved from our sins and gain

eternal life. Most major events surrounding the life of Christ, His miracles, etc., are very well documented. The Bible contains God's instructions to mankind on living life and on attaining eternal life. Bible scholars know that it was written over a period of between 800 and 1500 years by about 40 different people. God instructed and guided each of them on what to write and how. Only God knew how He wanted it all to fit together. And the amazing thing about it is that it does all flow together. In the Old Testament for example, various prophets foretold events about the life of Christ many hundreds of years before He was born, such as where He would be born, what His profession would be, where and how He would die, even the events that would take place at the Cross while he was dying. The prophets mentioned crucifixion before it ever came into being as a form of execution, and talked about the soldiers gambling for His robes at the foot of the Cross. All of these things came to pass, because God foresaw that they would. This is why I am a strong believer in Christ. I can't ignore the evidence.

Some people who you'll discuss this with will say that Christ was one of many great prophets, a great man. This is wrong. Christ was the Son of God, the means by which God could overlook our sins and reconcile us to himself. He loves us more than we can know, and created us because He wanted other beings on whom He could lavish this love; He wants our companionship, but only if we want to give it. Love isn't love unless there is an object, or being, toward which it can be expressed. God is love, and so He created mankind to love and share eternity with. But this would mean nothing to Him if He didn't give us a choice to love Him or not. And so He gave us free will to decide. But God also created a need in us for Him. And it is not until we are one with Him that we feel completed and fulfilled. God is pure and cannot tolerate sin; man is by nature sinful and unclean. The only way God can accept our companionship is by cleansing us from our sin. This is where Christ comes in. Christ knew no sin, and God can view each of us as being pure like Christ, and therefore acceptable to Him if we accept Christ as our personal savior. Here are some relevant quotes from the Bible:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that who so ever believeth in Him shall not perish but have eternal life",

"I am the way, the truth and the life, no one shall come to the Father but through me".

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life".

"For as many as received Him, to these He gave the right to become children of God".

What this all means, is that if we receive Christ as our personal savior, God views us in the same light, completely acceptable to Him, and entitled to all He has. This means eternity in heaven. Since Christ is the only means God provided for our salvation, if we don't receive God's plan for salvation we come under His wrath, and are destined to spend eternity in hell. Hell will be as inconceivably horrible as heaven will be wonderful. I don't want to see anyone I care about end up there. Each of us has to make this choice. Inactivity, in the sense of ignoring your spiritual life and receiving Christ is one choice, the one that will result in hell. None of us can afford not to make the right choice and receive Christ. Any of us regardless of age, can die at any time; and then it will be too late. Hell is not only for murderers, rapists and thieves, and so none of us can afford to take the attitude that "I'm basically not a bad person

and I do good deeds, so I'll get into heaven". The extent of our sinfulness and the extent of God's purity are so far separated that nothing that we try to do on our own can bridge the gap and reconcile us to God. All that we can do is receive Christ, and then we are reconciled. None of us can rely on good works to save us. God considers the best of our works as but "filthy rags", that don't even come close to justifying us before God because of the extent of our sinfulness.

"For by grace we are saved through faith, and this not of ourselves; it is a free gift from God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast".

Once we have received Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God. When we are children of God, we want to do good because we want to please Him. There is a big difference between wanting to do good to please God versus thinking that it will earn our way into heaven. But so many people miss the point, live their daily lives without regard for their spiritual future, and feel some how they'll make it to heaven. Or most people just don't think about it.

"Broad is the road to destruction and many will go that way, but narrow is the path to eternal life and few will find it".

And so, the focus is on Jesus Christ. It is of value to revisit who He is and what He means to us. Jesus is the Son of God, and He came to earth to show us how God wants us to live and how to attain eternal life. To demonstrate His deity, He performed miracles that were witnessed by hundreds of people. He raised people from the dead, cast demons out of people, and healed the sick. He was then crucified and after three days rose from the dead to demonstrate His control over death. Over 500 people saw Him alive after they witnessed His death. He endured separation from God and death of His body as an atonement for our sins.

The Bible tells us that our earthly battles are not against flesh and blood, but against the spirits of evil. It's difficult for people to grasp because we can't see it, but living parallel to us in this world, is a spirit world of angels and also satan and His demons. There is an on-going battle for people's souls. Satan wants your soul to be in hell for eternity where he can torment you forever; God wants you for His companionship and everlasting love in heaven. All of us are beset with demons, who try to get us to live contrary to the will of God. In extreme cases, they can cause people to commit atrocious acts against other people, but in most cases, they want to prevent people from knowing the truth about salvation and living a Godly life. This is subtle but dangerous. A person can feel that he or she is leading a good life, and is convinced of this by these evil spirit forces that tell us we don't need God, nor church, and that God's plan for salvation is hogwash. And without being aware of it, we're headed down that broad path to hell. In our daily lives, we take our mates for granted, talk about other people, fail to help others when we could, etc.; nothing really bad, but all manifestations that we aren't living Godly lives. When we belong to Christ, we have patience, love and commitment to helping others.

None of us can lead a Godly life on our own because satan's influence is too strong. We need God's help. When we receive Jesus as personal savior, two things happen: 1) We become totally acceptable to God and are given eternal life, and 2) He gives us the Holy Spirit to help us in our daily lives. When you become a child of God you are in His daily care and He watches over you. He gives you what you ask for

if it is best for you to have it. He has a plan for your life and will help you to lead the most fulfilling life possible, if you will trust in Him. By the power of His Holy Spirit He will grant you wisdom, understanding and all the qualities you need to live a Godly life. And He gives you strength to resist satan's temptations. The Bible tells us that satan is like a lion, looking for a soul to overcome. Without God, who is much stronger than satan, the devil will succeed in ruling our lives. Without God in charge of our lives, we are like a ship on a stormy sea without an engine or rudder, cast to-and-fro by the winds of this evil world. Among young people this is manifested in drug abuse, pregnancy, abortion, and a downward spiral that for many young people ends in suicide. Some of the rock groups are satanists who glorify death and suicide. As the antithesis of God, satan is death, and totally opposite everything that is alive and healthy. It is because of satan that there is death and disease; but God is the affirmation of all that is life, and health, and well-being.

So how does one receive Christ and become a child of God? It's as simple as praying this simple prayer: "Jesus I am a poor miserable sinner, totally lost without you. Please forgive me my sins and be my personal Savior. Help me to lead a Godly life". It is as simple as this, such a simple step that most people don't take. Jesus comes to us by invitation only. God isn't about to force us into this decision, because He wants us to come to Him on our own. Jesus tells us: "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with me".

Most of us, especially when we are young, don't think about death. We think we're going to live forever. The reality and finality of death don't hit us until we have been at a wake. But thinking about death is not a bad thing. It can reaffirm our lives. If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, you would treat people differently and appreciate every aspect of life more. When we're on the other side, having died, and our soul reflects back on how we have lived our lives, we don't want any regrets. We need to avoid this while we are still alive and able to make choices. Each of us will face Jesus after death, and will be called to account for our lives. We will want Him to tell us how well we've lived and that we have pleased Him.

Finally, everything we have has been given to us by God. He owns everything, including us. All He asks is for us to acknowledge this by accepting His plan for salvation (receiving Christ as personal savior) and trying to live as He wants us to. None of us is perfect, even the most devoted Christian. We all have failings, and over the course of our lives He helps us to overcome these. We only need pray and ask Him and through faith, He will grant it. He even gives us faith to help us believe if we ask for it.

Everything in this world that is good and decent and loving comes from God. Without God's presence the world would be filled with every kind of wickedness and cruelty. This is what hell will be like. Eternally separated from God's love, forever tormented by satan and his demons. So, for one's own sake, one needs to make the right choice. Receive Jesus Christ as personal savior and you will receive all of His power and blessings for living a full, rich life; and all through your life you'll have the peace of mind of knowing where you will be when you die. In paradise with Him through eternity. Can you say for certain now that this will happen? Don't be caught dead without Jesus.

Lesson 91: Biblical Principles for Marriage

- o God, not man, created the institution of marriage.
- o Only by making God the center of our lives, can we experience life and marriage to its fullest.
- o God has a design for marriage that He gives us in His word.

[Read Ephesians 5]

- o The Word shows here that this is not a one-sided submission but a reciprocal relationship.
- o God also has a design for love in marriage.
- o If we live by it, this can be the difference between a marriage that is successful and mutually fulfilling vs. one that over the years becomes only a co-existence with no life in it.

[Read 1 Corinthians 13]

- o These ideals cannot be perfected in this life by any person or couple.
- o But God commands us to try.
- o How well we succeed is very strongly related to the relationship each person in the marriage has with Jesus Christ.
- o Christ is the source of love and as we grow in Him, our capacity for love in marriage grows toward God's ideal.
- o To grow in Christ attend church, read your Bible and pray regularly.
- o Given the stresses and allurements of this life it is easy to fall away
- o But we need to persevere, because in the end, love for God, love for each other, and love for others is all that really matters

Lesson 92: Perfected in Christ Though We Struggle with Sin – Romans 6-8

Sin is defiance of the world moral order of right and wrong established by God. Even before the Commandments were given people knew that actions such as murder, theft, adultery and a host of others, are wrong. Everyone has a basic sense of right and wrong; as written in the Scriptures, God tells us "I have written my law on their hearts so they may not sin against me". And even though God formalized His law by giving man His Commandments, these provided no enablement to resist sin. God's law (the Commandments), points out sin and even stimulates it, because humans by nature want to do whatever is forbidden.

Given the fallen nature of man, it is impossible for us not to sin, and the penalty for sin is death, eternal separation from God. Each of us carries a debt of sin that we cannot atone for ourselves. Any punishment

God could inflict on each of us as individuals wouldn't make us right with Him. We would only be getting what we deserve and the punishment would need to be eternal because we've offended an infinitely perfect and eternal God. Moreover, an eternal punishment would never purify us because our sinful nature would never change.

To satisfy God's requirement for justice, sin must be punished. And so He allowed His Son, himself God, to live on earth as a human, like us in every way, but who never sinned in any way. Because Jesus has no personal sin debt to atone for, He is able to take the punishment due us; and because He also, with the Father, is eternal and perfect, His punishment on our behalf is able to atone for our sin debt.

The Scriptures tell us that when we receive Christ as Savior we are "buried with Him in baptism" and that we are "baptized into His death". Here an exchange takes place whereby our sinfulness is commuted to Jesus and His righteousness is commuted to us. His sacrifice for us is sufficient to atone for our past, present and future sins; we are considered righteous in God's sight. And Jesus' resurrection from death is proof that the sin debt He bore for all of us has been satisfied. So now we are considered perfect in God's sight, it is a free gift and there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation; but we are obligated to work toward becoming evermore like Jesus until our years here are ended. In identifying closely with Jesus' death, we need to "put off the old self, which is constantly corrupting us with sinful desires, and by a change in the attitude of our minds put on the new self, growing daily in the image of Jesus".

But it is impossible for us to live up to this expectation on our own; we'll always struggle with our desire to sin. However, our faith in Jesus as our Savior not only makes us righteous before God, but the Scriptures tell us that "the spirit of God lives in" every believer. And so even though each of us will always have a sin nature until we die, this sin nature no longer controls us; this is the difference between one who doesn't have the Holy Spirit and one who does. The one without the Holy Spirit is fully controlled by his sin nature. But the Holy Spirit is infinitely stronger than the sin nature. Through the Christian's relationship with Christ he is led and controlled by the spirit and does not allow the sin nature to hold sway. When he sins, he is quick to repent and try to control himself in the future. Scriptures tell us "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness". And so though we will continue to sin, we won't be living in sin. The Christian with the Holy Spirit living in him is convicted of wrong doing by the Spirit and lives to please God for all He's done for us.

Lesson 93: Membership in God's Kingdom – A Present Reality for the Believer

When we meet Jesus face to face at the end of our lives the Book of Matthew Chapter 7 tells us not everybody who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of God will enter heaven; they already have membership in God's kingdom as evidenced by obedience to his commands. However, no one can perfectly do the will of God and live in obedience; but part of obedience is to admit and confess sin and make every attempt to turn from sin. Jesus is the only person to ever do the will of God perfectly and live in perfect obedience to him, and we can claim his obedience as our own and rest in the security of membership in God's kingdom, a present reality for anyone with faith in Jesus as his savior. But we need to always be ready to confess sins and repent, because even though we are considered

perfect in God's sight through faith in Jesus (positionally dead to sin), we are expected to make very effort, in all good conscience, to live a life of obedience. This means trying not to sin and repenting when we do on an ongoing basis. When receive Jesus by faith we are given the Holy Spirit to help us live this kind of life. By living this way, we bear the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit within us and being members of God's kingdom. Those comfortable in their sins, who see no wrong in doing them and feel no need to confess them and repent, are not bearing fruit of any indwelling of the Holy Spirit or membership in God's kingdom. They will be told by Jesus to depart, that He never knew them, which will consign them to an eternity in hell.

Lesson 94: Fear of God

The Book of Proverbs tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and turning from sin is understanding. Most of us think of fear of God as something negative, and it can be if we consider that He created and sustains all things, knows our thoughts and motives, and decides our eternal fate. But the Scriptures tell us there is no fear in love, perfect love casts out fear, and that if a Christian still fears, the love of God has not been perfected in him. In its larger meaning, fear encompasses such attitudes as reverence, reliance, devotion, awe, humility, obedience, trust and love. By nature, people are concerned first with self- preservation, and their fear has to do with being consigned to hell if they haven't done enough good works or made sufficient progress in overcoming sinful habits. None of us will ever succeed in attaining perfection in these ways. And so, the negative connotations of fear need to be replaced by the larger meaning of fear along with its proper attitudes. We can do this only through trusting completely in God's promises, as revealed to us in his word, the Bible, and trusting completely in the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to acquit us from the punishment due us for our sins. The Scriptures promise that through faith in Jesus as our savior, our sin debt is transferred completely to him and his righteousness is transferred fully to us together with the Holy Spirit, our guide. And so, through Jesus, we can come in to God's presence with confidence, both now in prayer, and after death when we meet him face to face. We can relate to him as our ultimate father, in a close, loving relationship. And so, for the mature Christian, fear has to do with falling away from this intimate, soul- fulfilling relationship with God and Jesus, ultimately allowing ourselves to turn our back on God. We needn't fear God rejecting us for He who did not spare his only son to bring us salvation will not fail to give us all that we need for our continued spiritual growth. We need primarily to fear us rejecting God to pursue the allure and sinful pleasure offered in the ways of the world.

Lesson 95: Pleasure Versus Happiness

God wants us to experience both; He created sex and Christ made wine. But if we allow pleasure to take control in our lives, we can become slaves to it. Two glasses of wine can lead to three or four, and cause us to behave out of character, sometimes not remembering what we said or did. Beyond a reasonable two glasses or so the law of diminishing returns comes in, leading to loss of both pleasure and happiness. This

can profoundly affect one's own life and the lives of those closest to us. We can't be enslaved by those things we have the freedom to enjoy. We need to follow Jesus and ask for his grace each day. Not doing this will cause us profound regret; however, we will never regret mastering an obsessive pleasure.

Lesson 96: Salvation Guaranteed

When God provides salvation, he also guarantees it. Christ's sacrifice on the cross covers our sin, past, present and future. When Christ becomes our savior, the Holy Spirit enters us; He can help us try to lead a righteous life. When we do sin God will discipline us; the nature and duration of this will depend on the seriousness of the sin. The discipline may come in the form of people and circumstances.

Lesson 97: We Need God and Jesus More Than We Think

The Scriptures tell us that when this life is over our physical bodies will undergo corruption. This means that as our bodies decay and only bones remain, all thoughts, ambitions, sins and works of righteousness also end. For those who have never accepted Jesus as savior and established a relationship with him, their souls are in the same condition; their souls will also undergo corruption in the ultimate sense, eternal separation from God, or spiritual death. But for anyone who has received Christ as savior, their soul is "buried with Jesus in baptism and baptized into his death". When this happens, our souls are rid of all corruption that comes from sin that hadn't formerly been dealt with. As we receive Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are positionally pure; that is, our souls are counted pure in his sight. For the remaining time we are in the flesh we need to work to become as pure as possible, practically speaking; the ultimate state of perfection won't come until this life is over. The closer we grow to spiritual purity in a practical way, the more peaceful and contented with life we become. Most people search for this feeling in possessions, experiences and accomplishments, but none of these or anything else really satisfies. The only thing that satisfies the deep hunger and thirst in our souls is finding completeness in Jesus. We do this by growing closer to him in prayer, reading his word, attending church, and fellowshiping with other Christians. As we grow more pure in our soul, we will have more peace in all circumstances. This will happen increasingly as we find more of our fulfillment in our union with Jesus, than with things of this world, which will always disappoint. At the resurrection, when our souls are made pure, both positionally and practically, we will also be given eternal bodies. In eternity neither body nor soul will ever again suffer the corruption that is the result of sin, because there will never again be any sin.

Lesson 98: The Reality of Death

When we see a cemetery, we are reminded that here, beneath the headstones, are men and women who once lived, loved, hated, worked, and partied just like we do. Now all there exists is their remains. The same end awaits us, and for many if not most people, thinking about it brings on feelings of dread and fear.

Death is separation from life as we know it, and separation from fellowship from God, the creator and sustainer of life. We are separated from God and life because of our sin. God is perfect and holy in every way and cannot be in the presence of sin.

The first death, that of our physical bodies, is inevitable because every human is corrupt, and death is the penalty that everyone has to face, because of the sins we have committed while in the flesh.

The second death, that of our eternal soul, is being separated from God, the author of life, for eternity. Because the core of our being, the soul, is also corrupt, this is the fate that awaits all of us. The physical death we can do nothing about, but spirit death we can avoid.

From the beginning God, being rich in mercy, saw our dilemma and provided us a way out. He sent Jesus, his perfect, pure, holy son, himself God, to earth to live in the flesh like us. The difference was that he was also God and pure and sinless both in body and soul. And so, God allows everyone who will believe in Jesus as their personal savior, to have their sins commuted to Jesus and his righteousness to them. He is able to take on our sin debt because he has none of his own, like an unused credit card. On the other hand, our sin debt is like a credit card that has been maxed out.

Anyone who confesses that Jesus is the son of God who died in our place as punishment for our sins and was raised to new life by God and accepts him as savior, has been given a pure soul totally acceptable to God.

So now that which separated us from God and life, our sinful bodies and souls, have been replaced by that which enables us to have eternal fellowship with God, a pure soul, and He will also give us a pure, sinless body made to last for eternity. There will be no second death for the Christian because his soul has been made pure and acceptable to God.

And so, the death our bodies will undergo will not separate us from the creator of life, God himself. The death of this body will instead unite our pure soul with God, the author of life.

As a guarantee and down payment, God has given everyone who has accepted Jesus as savior the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, in addition, works with us to help us be obedient to God's commands.

If our family members and friends are Christians, we will see them in God's kingdom, and our loss of fellowship will be temporary.

We need to pray for the souls of those haven't accepted God's only salvation, his son Jesus as their savior.

Jesus demonstrated his complete control over death in the company of about 400 witnesses who saw him raise Lazarus from the dead, though he had been dead for four days. During his ministry on earth he also raised several others who had died.

Jesus said "He who believes in me will not see the second death", which is eternal separation from God in hell.

And so, as we contemplate death, we can be comforted in knowing that Jesus overcame it. He is the only being to have died in the flesh and be resurrected to new life, his soul and new eternal body never to see death again. This was witnessed by some 400 people who saw the Crucifixion and then the same people saw him in his resurrection body.

We, who identify with Jesus through faith in him, have the same guarantee. Death to our bodies brings us to full union with God, the creator and sustainer of life.

Lesson 99: The Pleasures of God (John Piper)

The worth of one's soul is measured by what it places its love and affections on; what it values most. The best and highest thing our soul can value is the glory of God, which is an eternally, infinitely deep well-spring of soul-enriching pleasure and joy. We can know this only by knowing God and those things that give Him pleasure. These include his pleasure in his relationship with his son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, his pleasure in his power and omnipotence, his pleasure in his creation, his pleasure in people coming to his plan of salvation. We can continue to grow in our knowledge of God and what he values by reading his word, which is his message to humankind, and seeking every means to grow in our understanding of it. Then we need to be an active part in God's great commission, bringing others to the saving knowledge of Jesus by means of spreading his word, our testimony, and our actions of loving and serving others.

As humans, we identify most readily with God's glory in his creation, that which we can see, hear, feel, smell and taste. When we look into the night sky and see countless stars, galaxies and worlds, when we examine snowflakes and see that each one is unique, when we contemplate the age of dinosaurs and see the enormous size of some of them by their remains, when we realize a spoonful of sea water may contain tens of thousands of single cell creatures, many of which are unique from the others, when we contemplate the ocean depths of up to seven miles with wonders that humans have never seen, when we realize that there are magnificent landscapes in remote parts of the earth and wonders in subsurface caves that no human has ever seen, we come to realize that God did not create everything to be used, enjoyed or marveled at by humans. He created most of creation for his own pleasure and as reflections of his own glory. As magnificent and enjoyable so much of creation is for humans, it's not about us; it was created for God's pleasure, enjoyment and glory. All that we experience in the creation are just shadows and reflections of God's glory. Heaven will be fully enjoying what we can only dimly enjoy now, being with God himself. And this is the chief purpose for God creating man, that he should enjoy and glorify God forever.

God takes pleasure in his namesake, and it is this, not any inherent value in the sinner that makes salvation, forgiveness and mercy possible. The purpose of Jesus' death was to glorify God. This is how God vindicated his name from any accusations of unrighteousness in the forgiveness of sinners. The un-Godly are justified before God by placing their trust in Jesus sacrifice on the cross. We should pray "Forgive me Lord, because your holy name has been vindicated by the death of your son and I am placing all my hope on him and not on myself".

God takes pleasure in his sovereign right to save people by giving them the faith to believe in Jesus, out of his own compassion, not on any worthiness of the recipient of his election and calling. He takes pleasure in having caused his son to suffer and die for us to vindicate his glory as manifested in his justice and righteousness, and enable millions of souls to be with him for eternity cleansed of sin. God takes pleasure in fulfilling the needs of all who put their hope and trust in his love, and those who pray to him, sincerely sorry for their sins and hating their sins. He takes no pleasure on those who outwardly try to live righteous lives by going to church and doing good but without any desire to live as he desires. God takes pleasure in obedience to his commands because it demonstrates that we value a relationship with him more than the fleeting pleasures of sin, that we're willing to give up. Our salvation depends not only on faith in Christ but in obedience which bears the fruit of a changed life.

Lesson 100: Wakeup Call

Life as Usual

Most people fall into a daily routine of working, eating, sleeping, socializing, watching TV, attending events and a host of other activities that typify life in a modern, civilized society. We seem to go on day after day, thinking that things will continue as they have been, without a thought to the finiteness of our lives, even though we are daily reminded that there is an end as we see family, friends and acquaintances pass away and become over time, a distant memory. Most people just don't want to think about it, much less personalize it; it's much easier to allow the activities of daily life wash over, immerse, and consume us. Then, at some point, a sudden serious illness forces us to come face to face with our mortality. Even more daunting and sobering is the prospect of sudden death, which can come upon anyone at any time, at which time we will become disincorporated with all that we've become familiar and comfortable with all of our lives, our bodies, families, homes, and all that constitutes our comfort zone. At that time, we will be immersed in a different reality, one that will last for an eternity.

The Deception

Over the course of their lives most people have had at least some exposure to church, Bible study, TV evangelism or prayer, and have formulated their own misguided perceptions of God, the hereafter or lack of a God or hereafter. Despite attempts to bring the truth to them, using even the best logic and proofs, many of them remain immovable and unconvinced. The Greek scholars proved several thousand years ago, using mathematics, that the earth is round. Over time this became accepted as common knowledge; then about a thousand years ago, the dark ages came upon societies and people rejected the ancient teachings and destroyed libraries and centers of learning. Many people in the middle ages became convinced that the earth was flat, because it appeared to be so given their limited perspective from where they were standing at the time. But they were dead wrong, and couldn't be convinced otherwise. Going to one's death thinking the world is flat doesn't harm anyone. But going to one's death with the wrong idea about God, the hereafter, and where one's soul will spend eternity carries deep

implications as to whether he will experience abject, unimaginable misery, or complete joy. Everyone while still alive in their body needs to take stock of the measure of his years and his accountability before God. To ignore and avoid thinking about it is no different than driving on a busy highway at high speed with one's eyes closed. At some point an unavoidable disaster will occur. It is an awful thing to have an immortal soul committed to your charge and neglect it; this is dreadful. It's no less an awful thing to be content with a religion that can do you no good. After death everyone will be accountable for the choices they have made while in the flesh.

The Way Things Are

That God is real is seen in the immense, wonderous universe He created and, in our earth, perfectly placed and maintained just the right distance from the sun, and with perfect conditions for life. Wonder upon wonder, from the highest mountains to the ocean depths; God's handiwork is everywhere and God's provision of life's necessities from the land and sea is bountiful beyond belief. His love is baked into every detail of the beauty and bounty of this world. Although mathematicians theorize the probability of life elsewhere in the universe, none has been found. From the beginning man has felt and sensed God in all of his generous provision.

But God has not left man to speculate over his existence and involvement in the events of life on earth. He has actually spoken audibly to people at various times in ancient history. More importantly, he's communicated with mankind for all time by means of his word, which he gave to his servants, the prophets and later the apostles of Jesus. His commands on how we are to relate to him and each other have been recorded for us in the writings of the prophets and apostles, and these have been assembled into the Bible. There are many who don't read the Bible because it was written by men; so were all historic books written by men. The Bible is a history book, and like all such books, its claims and facts need to be supported by archaeological evidence, documents and eye-witness accounts. The Bible is better supported by these kinds of proofs than many historical documents about other people and events that have been accepted as fact. To not accept the Bible on the grounds that it was written by men is to not accept recorded history itself. The same logic applies to both. Others say that if God would speak to them personally, they would find it easier to believe. Three of Jesus' main apostles, Peter, James and John, witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the Mount of Olives, heard the voice of God speaking to Jesus, and saw ancient long dead prophets talking with Jesus. Still they concluded, that it was more important to have God's written word because actual experiences can fade over time, whereas his word is permanent.

The concept of life after death is difficult for many to understand and accept. People need to understand that God, by his nature and his works, stands outside our limited capacity to comprehend. Hundreds of eye witnesses saw Jesus die, and those same people saw him alive after his resurrection. Each person has an eternal soul, and if we want to be with God for eternity, we need to accept his only provision for our salvation, his son, Jesus, himself God. In our natural born selves, we stand at enmity with God. We want nothing to do with him; our sin has been against a God who is infinitely pure and holy. There is no way we could ever be punished enough or be good enough to justify being in his

presence. It took the sacrifice of one who is perfect, blameless and holy to take the punishment for our sins, Jesus, equal in God in purity and holiness. God gave the best and all that he had for our salvation. Jesus, as our savior, is the only way. If it were possible for people to be made right with God through Buddha, Muhammad, Krishna, or any other way then Jesus died for nothing and God did not allow that to happen.

And so, with Jesus as our savior, his atonement made for our sins, we have the confidence to live each day knowing that if death should come suddenly our soul will be with God for eternity. This security frees us for lives of righteous service to God. We give evidence of our sincere faith by living lives of obedience to God, loving and serving others, proclaiming the Gospel, and repenting each day by confessing our sins and trying to gain victory over them.

The devil is as real a being as God and his overarching goal is our destruction. One of his tools to bring this about is delay. If he can get us to go on living each day without regard for our condition before God without Jesus, and if death should suddenly come upon us we will be eternally separated from God. And so, each day we need to confess our sins, try to turn from them, and serve God, so that we are always ready to meet him in our death or at his second coming. We can't afford to not always be ready. Our fate for eternity is at stake. This life occupies only the briefest part of eternity.

Lesson 101 – Words of Comfort for a Funeral/Celebration of Life Memorial Service

Thank you for the privilege of saying a few words at this celebration of life ceremony.

The Bible, God's word to us, has words of wisdom and comfort for us that are relevant and appropriate.

The Book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, considered one of the wisest men who ever lived, has this to say about death:

"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad".

You might ask, how can this time of mourning be better than feasting and celebration.

Most of us live out each day the same as the days just passed, our lives taking on a pattern of sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, working and resting, without thinking that one day it will all end.

Occasions like this remind us that one day, for each of us, our end will come, and we will be at the precipice of eternity.

We ask after this life what comes next. Solomon says this is wisdom and by understanding we are made glad.

The Bible gives us wonderful words of assurance about what our eternity can be like.

“My body can yet rest secure because God will not abandon me to the grave. He has willed life for me and made known to me the way of life in His word”.

“Though this heart and this flesh will fail, with the Lord as my fortress even the grave cannot rob me of life”.

The Bible teaches, “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”.

None of us can ever earn our way to heaven by good works. We all need a Savior, and Jesus comes as that Savior.

The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him, will not perish but have eternal life”.

Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and life, no one comes to the Father but through me”.

And so, the “way of life in His word” is only by means of faith in Jesus as our Savior.

J.C. Ryle, a pastor who lived in the 1800’s, had these words of wisdom to say:

“It is an awful thing to have no religion at all. To have an immortal soul committed to your charge and neglect it – this is dreadful”.

“But it’s no less an awful thing to be content with a religion that can do you no good”.

The Bible tells us, God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God and God in that person.

I was friends with her for nearly 40 years and knew her as a very loving and compassionate person. In her work as a Physical Therapist, she brought comfort to many people. Whenever I had a problem due to an injury, I always found her very willing to talk to me on the phone or visit with me and do a treatment. She also worked with the disabled to help them find employment. She truly lived in love.

Her passing has left a gap in all of our lives that can never be filled.

At this time, I want to offer this prayer and benediction of comfort for her family and to all of us.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God”.

My hope and prayer is that God will be your comfort in our loss of wife, mother, and friend, and that you will know the comfort of salvation through faith in Jesus.

Lesson 102: Words of Comfort for a Suicide Funeral

There is very little to say that hasn't already been said by us and others to express our shared grief over your loss of Kyle. We know this is at the top of the most painful experiences anyone can undergo in this life, one that penetrates to the core of the soul. Such grief can surround us with a depth of hopelessness that makes it difficult to go on, and continue to find life worthwhile and joyful.

Only Jesus truly understands the depths of such suffering, and only He can give us comfort. The Bible speaks of Him as "a man of sorrows well acquainted with grief". Jesus wept outside the tomb of Lazarus, a dear friend who had died days prior to His arrival. But then He raised him to new life. The fact of something far better than this life is the only hope that gives the strength, grace and peace to go on and live the life God gave us fully and joyfully

Life is difficult, and for some, too difficult to finish out the 70-80 years the Bible gives as our life span. And so, grieve we must; it's part of our healing. But we can't be consumed by thoughts of what might have been. The Lord gives life as a gift and He can take it away, or not prevent someone else from taking it. One can only cherish the years and the memories, and be thankful for the happier times.

The only assurance each of us can have at a time like this, is in the nature and character of God himself. He is a God of unimaginable love, compassion, grace, mercy and forgiveness and desires that each of us will spend eternity with Him. At times like this, when we are reminded of how temporary and brief this life is, we can know that we have peace and reconciliation with Him with Jesus as our Savior, our certain hope for eternal salvation.

No one can ever know the mind, heart and soul of another person, and at what point in his life he turns to God and Jesus. No sin is unforgivable; Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, murdered Christians before he came to Christ. But we can believe the Scriptures that tell us "It is not God's will that any should perish but that they should receive eternal life through Jesus Christ". God, out of His compassion and love, extends the benefit of every doubt and opportunity to every person to receive Jesus as Savior, even in the fleeting last seconds of life. But each of us can know our own heart, and turn to God and Jesus while we have life, before circumstances and aging end our lives here.

Lesson 103 - What Jesus Did for Us

Adam was created by God as a perfect man. He was perfect because he was created in God's image both physically and in having a soul, because God is spirit but can also have a body. And God gave Adam free will in order to dignify him beyond being a robot, without the ability to choose whether or not to obey Him. But when given the choice to sin or not sin, Adam chose to deliberately disobey God. Then, and for all future generations, the harmony between man and God was broken. Now every person, ultimately descended from Adam, sins. In fact, we cannot not sin. And God tells us the wages of sin is death, and there can be no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. Because He is a God of righteousness, He demands that sin be punished. But also, being merciful, He doesn't require the life and blood of the sinner. Under the covenant He initially established, He allowed substitutionary atonement and accepted

the sacrifice of the life of another being, a sheep, bull or goat. But the sacrifice had to be perfect, without spot or blemish. And so, over millennia, God allowed sinful people to be made right with Him by regularly offering up sacrifices to atone for their constant sinning. But God said that He does not delight in the blood of bulls, sheep and goats; what He wants is obedience. Instead, people were ritualistically offering up sacrifices without changing their hearts. This did not please God.

Foreseeing this, God had in mind from the beginning a new covenant, by providing a sacrifice that would atone for sin, once, for all people for all time. This eliminated the need for every person to repeatedly offer sacrifices. The sacrifice of atonement would have to be of a perfect sinless human. It had to be in the flesh because our sins are all committed in our flesh. No human who ever lived could ever meet this requirement. It could only be met by God sending His son, Jesus, himself God, who took on flesh and became human in every way, except He lived a totally sinless life. Jesus experienced the full range of emotions and fears that every human does. His would be the only perfect sacrifice totally acceptable to God. And because Jesus himself was also God, his death alone was sufficient to atone for the sins of all people for all time. Jesus had the choice to not go to the cross; He said "If thou wilt let this cup pass from me, but thy will be done, not mine". And so, like Adam, He had the choice as to whether or not He would obey God, but unlike Adam, He chose to be obedient to death. And so, the wrong that Adam committed in disobeying God, Jesus righted by his act of obedience. This despite not only the physical suffering He would undergo, but primarily separation from God for the first time from eternity past. But Jesus said He did this of his own will for the joy that was set before him, eternity with his father and now with many brothers and sisters. Jesus accomplished not only our forgiveness, but also, in leaving us a helper, his Holy Spirit; we now have the ability to please God in a life of obedience, which was not possible under the old covenant. Now we can choose whether to obey or disobey God. Without Jesus' willing sacrifice for us, we would be consigned to eternal separation from God. Jesus' resurrection evidences God's satisfaction that justice has been served, and that by faith in Jesus, our lost holiness has been restored.

We will always struggle with sin because we live in the flesh. But Jesus paid the price for our sins, past, present and future. And with the help of the Holy Spirit we can gain victory over our sins bit by bit. Obedience is the fruit of genuine faith and repentance when we do sin, is a form of obedience. For the believer Easter means that through our union with Jesus through faith, we too will be raised to everlasting life with God. When we meet Jesus to give an account of our lives, we will need to own up to our sins but will not be punished because Jesus already took the punishment. This is what Jesus did for us.

Lesson 104 - How Can We Be Sure that We Have the Holy Spirit

Jesus was raised to new life because of the Holy Spirit living in Him. The Gospel tells us that anyone who accepts Jesus as Savior, confesses their sins, and turns from them also receives the Holy Spirit. His presence in us is our guarantee that we too will be raised from the dead to eternal life with God. When Jesus took on the punishment for our sins, we were made perfect in God's sight; He allowed Jesus'

righteousness to be commuted to us and our sinfulness to Him. And, so we are positionally dead to the sin that before, separated us from God. But now God expects us in our daily lives to strive to become in practical daily living what we already are in His sight, that is sinless. This is the second part of our salvation.

The Bible tells us to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus, and that in doing this we can expect to suffer as He suffered. But our suffering is different. Jesus suffered because He was being punished for our sins. We struggle in our daily attempts to fulfill the second part of our salvation, turning from sin. The Bible tells us we need to put to death the sinful desires that are part of our earthly being. These lead to eternal separation from God, spiritual death. The pleasures of sin are short lived, and need to be indulged in over and over. Anything that brings worldly satisfaction, such as pleasure, wealth and fame, will soon end. These allurements are short lived and will separate us from God if we don't strive to put them to death.

And so, our daily struggle and suffering involves not coddling, pandering to, or in any way stimulating or encouraging sinful desire or behavior. This is different for everyone but includes common struggles like addiction, covetousness, pride, anger and seeking wealth. Anyone who feels comfortable in their sins is in a dangerous place in terms of their salvation; because they are not fulfilling the second condition, which is trying to turn from sin. The mark of a person who has the Holy Spirit is hating their sin and struggling daily to gain victory over it, suffering as Jesus did. Every person has something they are struggling with, mentally or behaviorally. But the fact that we struggle in practical daily living is evidence of our salvation.

But God sympathizes with our struggles, and realizes we can't do it on our own. He gives us weapons for our spiritual warfare. When we accept Jesus as Savior, He promises to be with us and walk along side us each day. We need to pray daily for His strength and grace to help us turn from our sins. We need to read the Bible each day to learn more and more about God's will in our lives and how we can live to please Him. We need to attend a church and fellowship with other Christians for strength and support, and we need to persist in this daily.

We live in the flesh and this is a daily reality. What we have and enjoy is in the here and now and it takes time and growing in our daily relationship with God to open our minds to see that where and how we spend eternity is infinitely more important than any pleasures we enjoy now. No sinful pleasure in this life is worth it. We need to put on all of God's weapons and take up our cross daily as we follow Jesus. Then we will have the joyful assurance that the Holy Spirit lives within us.

Lesson 105 - Mankind's Problem with God: Resolved

From birth, every human, sins deliberately against God, breaking His commands continually. Left in this condition, our fate would be eternal separation from God. Which is hell. There are no acts of goodness and no amount of punishment that would make us right with God. If we are punished for our wrong doing, we only get what we deserve. Moreover, our sin is against a God that is eternally righteous and pure, and our punishment would need to be eternal for justice to be served. Nothing short of this would satisfy God's requirement for justice, and no amount of punishment would change our sinful nature.

But in His mercy, God did not abandon us to this condition. To accomplish our salvation required a sacrifice of one who Himself was eternally righteous and pure, Jesus Christ, Himself God. In an exchange that is difficult to understand, God allows our sinfulness to be commuted to Jesus and His righteousness to us. By our faith in Him as our Savior, we are baptized into His death and buried with Him in baptism. Our soul, once corrupt and grotesque is made pure through this union. Through faith in Jesus we become positionally dead to our sins, and can then be free to give ourselves over to a life of righteous service to God. We emerge from this burial with Christ as new creatures. Jesus paid the price God required for justice to be served.

And so, Jesus' physical body died because of sin, our sin, just as every human must die because of sin. Jesus also suffered the second death, separation from God. But because He was sinless, the separation from God was only temporary. His physical death and temporary separation were enough to satisfy God's requirement for justice, and Jesus was raised to new life. Our union with Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, ensure that although our bodies will die because of our sin, we will not be separated from God even temporarily, because Jesus already paid the price.

It's up to us now, each day, in all good conscience, to ensure that in the day's activities we put forth every effort into making all that baptism symbolizes a reality. We need to confess our sins each day, pray for God's strength to turn from them, and repent when we fail. We can then have confidence in, delight in and trust in, the love of God in Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, even death. And though we will leave the world we know with trepidation over going to the unknown, we can trust in the promises of God in bringing us to a far better place.

Lesson 106 – Lukewarm Faith

There are many who accept Jesus as Savior and then don't pursue a relationship with Him. These people feel self-satisfied in whatever security and pleasure they have established in this life. They have successful careers, secure jobs, nice families and every earthly need fulfilled. In the Book of Revelations, we are told that the Laodicean Church was of this mindset. They had the wealth this life's best circumstances offer but were not zealous for a relationship with Christ. They felt they had all they needed. And so, Jesus, in His reprimand of this church, said He would spit them out, because they were neither hot nor cold.

Jesus would rather have someone for or against Him, but not in the middle. He told this church that in his view, they were naked, blind and needy, because they were lacking the spiritual gifts that only He provides. He told them "Come to me, and I will give you milk and honey and all that you need without cost". He was referring to the deep, spiritual food and drink that only He can provide.

Jesus seeks a deep relationship with each of us. Moreover, He initiates it. He says in Revelations "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and dine with him and he with me". The Scriptures also tell us "Once you have received Him continue to

grow in Him, being rooted and built up in Him, growing in the faith you were taught". If we receive Jesus as Savior this is only the first step. We need to strengthen our relationship with Him daily so that we don't become content with only the material goods this world provides.

All of us are naked and blind when it comes to our spiritual needs, and in this regard, we can do nothing on our own. We need to take hold of Jesus' offer to pursue the spiritual food and drink He provides. We need to invite Him into our lives daily, if not several times a day, because we fall away and are lured by the stuff of this world. Pleasures this world offers are good, but don't satisfy the deepest longings of our soul. So each day we need to spend time with Jesus in prayer and in His word, and deepen our relationship with Him. Otherwise we can become lukewarm.

Lesson 107 – Establishing a Relationship with God

Everyone requires a close relationship with God because He created each of us with a void that can only be filled by Himself. Sinful thoughts and actions separate us from God, and it is only by obeying God's commands and His precepts that we can have this relationship. His principal commands are to believe in Christ and love others. This becomes progressively easier to do when we grow to love God and desire Him more and more. But this can't come from our own efforts alone; we need to pray to God for the help of the Holy Spirit to give us this desire to love Him. Our willing obedience is a fruit that comes from our love for God, and will flow naturally and joyfully from this love. Any attempts to just mechanically obey God's commands will not produce this love for God.

For many of us loving God is an abstract concept because we don't experience Him through sight, sound, touch or any of our physical senses by which we perceive the world. But it can become less abstract and more real as we realize everything we hold of value, the creation itself and all its beauty and bounty, the people we care about and our works and accomplishments are but cloudy reflections of the full glory of God. We can continue to grow in our valuing and appreciating of these things only as we draw closer to God himself, the one who created and sustains it all. Moreover, we gain a renewed appreciation for these things as we understand that all we've been given, and life itself, are gifts from God.

To draw closer to God we also need to pray to Him in the Holy Spirit to help us grow in our knowledge of Him. This happens as a direct result of spending time with Him. To do this we need to pray regularly, read His word to us, the Bible, attend church and fellowship with other Christians. As we grow in our relationship with God then we can live lives of joyful obedience to Him. And in so doing, we will grow in our ability to enjoy all God has given us in this life, and have the assurance of fullness of joy when we see Him in His full glory when we spend eternity with Him. This also gives us the fulfillment of knowing that we are living for something bigger than ourselves, to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

God wants nothing more than a full, intimate relationship with each of us. As the maker and sustainer of each of us as well as everything else, this is His due. God wants this relationship only if we can give it freely and without feeling we are sacrificing or giving it grudgingly. But most of us choose to exercise our freedom of choice by pursuing the comforts, pleasures, security and good things this life has to offer. It

is only by keeping God at the center of it all, and growing in our relationship with Him, that we can enjoy all He's given us to enjoy to its fullest. Fortunately, to everyone who has accepted Jesus as Savior and asked Him to fill us and change our lives, we have the help of the Holy Spirit to keep our priority on growing our relationship with God.

Lesson 108 – Living Life to Its Fullest

In the book of Ecclesiastes, God tells us to accept our human condition, our birth, death, and stages in between, and try to live the life we've been given as fully as possible. There are at least three main areas of life where people can find it easy to fall short of this. Everyone falls into this to one degree or another, and in extreme cases, this can lead to an unfulfilled meaningless life. Life is precious and for one to waste it is a terrible thing.

One area is one's body. The body is wonderfully made, and can renew and heal itself. But over time, dissipations such as eating too much, eating the wrong foods, drinking too much alcohol, using drugs and not exercising regularly can take their toll, resulting in a reduced feeling of well-being and sometimes early death. Controlling what one eats and drinks are passive resolutions that most people can at least partially implement. But the body is designed to be used and forcing oneself to exercise vigorously and regularly, can be more difficult. It's easy to get into the rut of too much inactivity, especially with age. Not having time is always a convenient excuse; but then needing to take time out to be sick or see a doctor can be the result. Regular exercise affords not only the benefit of the exercise itself, but enables one to enjoy the times of inactivity to a much greater extent. It is the contrast between vigorous activity and inactivity that makes this possible. This is not the same as feeling better when one stops hitting oneself with a hammer. Moderating and reducing one's dissipations and exercising lead to a state of physical well-being, and provide a foundation for a good overall quality of life.

Another area where people can fall short of living life as fully as possible is in their overall perspective of life and in their lifestyle choices. Much of people's lives are spent maintaining their lifestyles. We work for wages in order to provide shelter, food, recreation and a full range of all our needs. But if we plan and allocate our time and finances wisely, we can break the routine of simply maintaining and surviving with hobbies, volunteering, entertaining and vacationing. Ecclesiastes, in its discourse on the meaning of life, tells us there is no better thing than to eat our food and drink our wine with a merry heart, find fulfillment in our work, and accept our lot in life, and that if God blesses a person by appreciating these things, he "seldom reflects on the measure of his years because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart". To break the rut of the routine that life becomes for most people, and find the answer to what's it all for and what meaning is there in life, we need to adopt the perspective that everything we have in our life of routine, is a gift from God. Without God nothing satisfies, but with Him we find satisfaction and enjoyment. True pleasure comes only when we acknowledge and revere God and place Him at the center of our life, work and activities. Then everything in our lives will have meaning, and we will find ourselves taking delight even in the smallest things.

The third and most crucial area where people can fall short of living a full life is in the spiritual area. We need to actively seek a full, deep relationship with Jesus Christ. No one likes to think about death, but at some point, every living thing dies. The bodies we have were not made to last for eternity. The Scriptures tell us that when a seed falls to the soil it will die as a seed but then give rise to a complete plant. Similarly, Christ will give us new eternal bodies like He has. Each of us will live for eternity, and where a person's soul spends it depends on the choices we make throughout our lives. God is the source of everything good in this life, and we want to be with Him for eternity. The highest purpose for which a person was created is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We can have this relationship now, and our lives here can be as meaningful and rich as can be possible in this life. We can have an overall joyfulness regardless of our circumstances, because we can be assured we are living the highest purpose while on earth for which we were created, and will be with Jesus for eternity. To have this we need to take hold of the means God has provided for our salvation. Once we've accepted God's provision for salvation, by receiving Jesus into our lives, we need to read his word, the Bible, fellowship with Him through prayer, and be part of a Church family. Many people find it difficult to get up on a Sunday morning to go to Church, but we can't grow in our walk with Christ without it. The world is under the influence of Satan, and we need the full protection of God so that we don't fall prey to this influence. The Scriptures tell us "The devil prowls like a lion, looking for someone to devour; therefore, put on the full armor of God".

As we grow in our relationship with God and Jesus, He then wants us to show the fruits of our faith in our lives. We then need to learn the areas in which He has gifted us and use these to bless others and lead them to Christ. In every interaction with someone we can reflect the nature of Jesus who we serve, and use every opportunity to love believers as well as unbelievers. It's often difficult to step out of one's routine and comfort zone to attend a support group meeting, spend part of a holiday in a soup kitchen, or do anything inconvenient when there is an opportunity to do God's work. But when we do, we bless others and become part of something much bigger than ourselves, displaying God's glory. We also grow and receive spiritual blessings ourselves and, by contrast, better appreciate our own routines when we return to our comfort zone. In the end, we each want to be able to face Jesus when our lives end or when He comes, knowing we're living the lives He's given us fully, to His glory, and are doing His work. We only have so much time to come to this understanding and change our lives before it's too late.

In the words of Melville we want to be able to say "And his eternal delight shall be, who coming to lay him down can say, oh Father, mortal or immortal, I have striven to be thine more than this world's or mine own, and here I die, yet this is nothing; I leave eternity to thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God".

Lesson 109 – Indestructible Joy (from John Piper)

God is the source of all joy. He takes joy in his Son and Jesus takes joy in Him. We are invited to share in that joy by means of the Holy Spirit He has given us and through His word.

God's glory is the most important thing to Him and should be for each of us. He doesn't need anything from anyone. Out of the wellspring of His grace and for the sake of His glory, come an outpouring of blessings to us, including our salvation and a joy that is independent of our circumstances.

Jesus desires nothing more than that we should spend eternity with Him, and He sought each of us who are believers, first. And so, we should love and desire Him more than anything. There is no better person to spend eternity with than Jesus, the only perfect being and with God, the source of all true joy. This can happen now and come to full fruition when we die.

Jesus is the word of God incarnate. He lived out all that prophets had predicted about Him. We can trust fully in the truth and faithfulness of the promises of God given in His word. Jesus expects His followers to serve each other and non-believers, regardless of the suffering it will cost. This calling is also so that we can learn how to be served by Him.

God doesn't need our service nor is He glorified by it. He is so self-sufficient in power and life and joy that He glorifies Himself by serving us. Every time He commands us to do something, it's His way of telling us how He wants to serve us. The path of obedience is where Christ meets us as our servant to carry our burdens and give us His power. Jesus does not need our help; He commands our obedience and offers His help.

Only God can forgive sins against God. That is why God sent Jesus into the world because He is God. Only those who receive Jesus as their Savior can experience the peace He brings. If we want peace to rule in our lives, God and Christ must rule in our lives.

We have peace with God when we believe in Jesus as the Savior, Lord and treasure in our lives; we are justified by this faith. By having peace with God we can also have peace with ourselves. But guilt, worry, uncertainty, anxiety, threaten our peace. God wants to guard our hearts and mind with His peace. He does this when we carry them to God in prayer and trust that He will carry them for us. When we do this this peace comes to us, steadies us so that we can go on. We can have peace with others in so far as it depends on us, by forgiving others, remembering how much God forgave us. Keep trusting God and keep His glory primary and not our success in our relationships, or our effectiveness in peace making. Jesus is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Lesson 110 – The Full Meaning of Easter

The essence of sin is disobedience to God. Man, by nature chooses to exercise his free will and disobey God. And so, each of us has a sin debt, that keeps accumulating every day of our lives. Left to his own, each of us is under God's wrath. This is the human condition. In the beginning, it was God's intention that each person would live for eternity, glorifying and enjoying Him forever. But when man fell from grace and chose to sin, the harmony between man and God was broken. God is pure and holy, and cannot look upon sin, and so our sin separates us from God. God's law states that the wages of sin is death, both death of the body and, the second death, eternal separation from God, which is death of the soul.

Since before creation God knew that humankind would fall, and so he formulated a plan for our salvation. At the beginning He established a covenant with man, that allowed the death that a person deserved for his sin to be satisfied by the substitutionary death of an animal. This sacrificial animal had

to be pure and undefiled. And so, for many hundreds of years God allowed people to offer sacrifices of sheep, goats and bulls to absolve them of their sin debt. What God really wanted was for people to change their hearts and try to live lives pleasing to Him. But the ritualistic sacrifice of animals didn't change people's hearts. This old covenant He intended to be temporary, and the Bible tells us that this was all preparing the way for a new and lasting covenant. And so, He sent His Son Jesus to die once, for all.

There is no way for us to be punished in a way that would absolve our sin debt, and we would forever be under God's wrath. Our second death, separation of our soul from God, would need to be eternal, because our sin is against a God that is eternally pure and holy. And, no matter how long we suffer separation from God, it doesn't change our sin nature. Jesus is the only being who can take away sin. He is God and came to live among us as a man. Since our sins are committed in the flesh, Jesus had to take our punishment in the flesh. But unlike us, He was pure and holy, and had no sin of His own; He is the only one who could take on our sin debt. When He died on the Cross He not only died physically, but He endured the second death, separation from God, so that we wouldn't need to. But because He is pure, this separation didn't need to be for eternity.

When a person asks Jesus to be his personal Savior, God allows His righteousness to be commuted to us in exchange for all of our sin debt taken on by Him. As the Bible tells us, when we accept Christ we are baptized into His death and raised with Him to new life. When Jesus died physically and endured separation from God this satisfied God's requirement for justice; He paid the wages of sin by His death. And so, by an act of faith in receiving Jesus as Savior, we are viewed by God in the same way He views His Son. There is nothing anyone can do to earn God's approval and forgiveness. We need to trust in the total sufficiency of Jesus' death on the Cross to make us right with God.

We have a sin nature and will continue to struggle with sin. But when Jesus left us, He left us a helper, the Holy Spirit. The spirit helps us to live the way God wants us to and to repent as often as we fall short and sin. This Holy Spirit is the same one that raised Jesus from the dead, and we also have the promise of being raised to new life after we die because we who have accepted Jesus, have the same Holy Spirit within us.

Lesson 111 -- The Fall of Man and Why There Are Natural Disasters

After God had finished His creation, He created man, His crowning achievement. He created man in His image, and since God is spirit humans also are unique among all other creatures in having a soul. When Jesus, Himself God, came to earth He had a human body. He said if you have seen me you have seen the Father. And so, we also have the same physical appearance as God when He was in the flesh. God made man the steward of the rest of His creation, to be His representative and be responsible in caring for and enjoying the creation.

God created man to have an intellect vastly superior to any other creature, so that he could worship, glorify and enjoy God. He also gave man free will, the greatest demonstration of love and dignity that

one being could bestow on another. And He placed man in a perfect garden, one that provided everything that he could ever need or want. Growing in the garden was the tree that bore the fruit of eternal life if man partook of it. God also placed in the garden a tree that bore the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil if man partook of it, but forbade man to eat of it or he would die. In giving man free will he also gave him the opportunity to obey or disobey Him.

Prior to man's fall he had perfect fellowship with God. Although he was naked, he didn't feel self-conscious because he was innocent and lacked knowledge of sin. But Satan, also present in the garden, and who is known as the great deceiver, tricked man into believing he would not die if he ate of the fruit of that tree, and that he would be equal to God in knowledge of good and evil. As he tasted of the fruit, he saw that it was pleasing, and he then gained knowledge of sin. Ever since then man has had a strong desire for the things that are forbidden by God. Disobedience to God is in itself sin; if there is something we cannot have then we want it even more. At that time man lost his innocence and felt self-conscious over his nakedness. Although at the beginning God gave man a moral compass, now that he had knowledge of sin, he desired to sin. Although much of this Biblical account is likely allegorical, the truths it contains are timeless. As Paul says in Romans 8, "Before God's law said thou shalt not covet, I didn't know what it was to covet, but now that I am aware of that command, every covetous desire is awakened within me". And so, since man's fall from grace after exercising his free will to disobey God, man cannot not sin. The Bible shows man's increase in moral depravity and delight in sin over time. From the beginning God said that the wages of sin is death, and forbade man access to the tree of eternal life. And this is why today there is death.

Although in the beginning man presided over a perfect creation, after the fall God subjected the creation to desolation. Whereas at the beginning everything man needed God provided, after the fall man needed to work in order for the earth to bring forth food. Moreover, God could no longer allow the depraved, sinful being that man became to preside over a perfect creation. So, the creation became imperfect, and every living thing eventually had to die. The forces of nature that cause pain and suffering, the hurricanes, earthquakes, pollution, sickness are all manifestation of a creation that also fell. God grieves at the suffering we've brought on ourselves, and is there to comfort us through prayer. As the Scriptures tell us, all of creation groans in anticipation of man to be reconciled to God and the creation restored. God's word promises us that there will be a new heavens and new earth restored to the perfection that God intended from the beginning. At that time every believer who has faith in Christ will comprise a people, anxious to obey God, glorify Him and enjoy Him forever after we die.

Lesson 112 – Man's Condition Under God's Law

God's law, and all of His standards and decrees are set forth in the first five books of the Bible and are summarized in the Ten Commandments. Sin is when we break any part of the law by thinking, speaking or doing whatever is contrary to the nature of God. His nature is embodied in the law with all its parts. For man, the law is a curse because it is impossible for us to keep it, beginning at birth. This is sin and

the penalty for sin is eternal separation from God. Moreover, the law stimulates sin, causing us to want what we shouldn't have. And so, we are born dead, in that we are destined for eternal separation from God, because it is impossible for us to satisfy God's requirements for righteousness.

Sin, which we commit as beings in the flesh, needed to be paid for in the flesh. And so, God sent his son, Jesus, who took on flesh, to take the penalty for our failure under the law. As the Scriptures tell us, He became a curse for us. But since He was also God, He kept all parts of the law perfectly. When Jesus died, He paid our sin debt while in the flesh by being tortured, dying on the Cross, and enduring separation from God, the latter a punishment we are destined to suffer. But Jesus's separation didn't need to be eternal, because He had no sin. Jesus's resurrection indicated that God's requirement for justice had been satisfied. So, by faith that Jesus is God's son, also himself God, that He died for our sins and God raised to new life, we are forgiven our sins and considered righteous in God's sight. All who so believe not only are forgiven but are given the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus to eternal life.

We receive this spirit by the faith that comes from hearing and reading God's word, the Bible. We grow ever more able to manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit, love, peace, joy, the more we read, hear and meditate on God's word. We thus grow in sanctification, i.e. becoming more righteous. Those who haven't received Jesus as Savior and the Holy Spirit live lives that bear the fruit of the sinful nature, sexual immorality, lack of compassion for others, lack of self-control. But the Bible tells us in Romans 7 that the law of the spirit of life (the Holy Spirit) sets us free from the spirit of the sinful nature, and that if we walk in the spirit, we won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Though we are no longer under the law when we receive Jesus and the Holy Spirit, it still plays a role in our lives. God gave us the law to function as our guardian. It reminds us of our sinfulness and that none of us can afford to feel self-righteous. The law also reminds us that confession of our sins and faith in what Jesus did for us is counted as righteousness. Repentance involves both confessing sin and turning away from it, and confessing and asking pardon every time we fail. There is nothing we can do to merit God's favor. Jesus's sacrifice alone is totally sufficient for us. And so, we live lives of obedience to God not to gain salvation but as a manifestation of sincere faith. Without faith in Jesus as our Savior we die under the law and its curse, which bears the penalty of death, eternal separation from God.

Lesson 113 -- Living God's Highest Purpose

Our greatest good is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, and want His glory more than anything. We can understand what it means to seek and desire God's glory by realizing that everything that gives us joy and fulfillment, namely His creation itself, and all of God's generous provisions, are but reflections of His full glory. In the presence of God's full glory and the perfection of His creation in heaven, we will find joy incomparable, not just the reflection we have here. We also can reflect God's glory by dealing with each of life's situations according to His word, as Jesus would deal with them.

Because of His perfect sacrifice for us, we are already perfected in God's sight even as we strive for perfection in this life. Knowing that a joyful eternity awaits us, and living each day for the purpose of displaying God's glory, His character and His kingdom can give us an underlying joy and sense of well-being, if not always happiness, through all of life's trials. We need to use our giftedness to glorify God, not exalt ourselves, because it gives us the opportunity to be part of something bigger than self. We need to allow God's strength to be displayed in our weakness by letting His grace be sufficient for us in every circumstance. Then we will be living the highest purpose for which we were created, which will give our lives true value and purpose, leading to the deepest sense of fulfillment.

Lesson 114 -- Connecting with Someone in Need

Every person we encounter has been created for eternity, and after the death of their body will be transformed into either one of the most beautiful beings imaginable or one of the most grotesque, depending upon whether they have ended up in heaven or hell. Our manner of interacting with each person can have an influence, even a small one, on where they spend their eternity. God places a high value on each person and sent His Son to die for Him. And so no one is unworthy of our attention and concern, regardless of their appearance, mannerisms, and station in life.

Give the fallen, sinful nature in each of us it is tempting to relate to others on the basis of what they can do for us, which can lead to being manipulative and/or taking advantage. We all need to be vigilant and guard against being this way even subconsciously. It's God's calling for each of us to genuinely desire the good for each individual, and to seek how to best relate to him/her in whatever situation God places us in with that person. We can best do this by fostering a welcoming and inviting attitude.

The person behind the register in a foul mood may have no one in his/her life and would welcome someone to connect with. We can accomplish this with God's grace, helping us more each day to display the nature of Jesus and God's kingdom in the way we live and treat others, proclaiming God's message of salvation at any opportunity that is presented. The consequence of someone not accepting God's only provision for salvation is hell itself, eternal separation from God. By taking the time to connect with someone, even briefly, in some meaningful way, we can plant a seed that might lead to the salvation of a soul.

Lesson 115 -- Life's Lessons Learned (Precepts for Living)

- o Regard each day as a gift from God; it could be your last.
- o Live each day thoughtfully and try to avoid making choices for your words and actions that would cause you regret in your last moments.
- o Don't take any person for granted, no matter how young or old. Today might be the last day you see that person.
- o Be personally involved and take a real interest in the life of every person God has put in your path; whatever is important to them, let it be important to you.
- o Try to build up each person's feeling of self-worth; make them feel special, like a best friend.
- o Get together with everyone in your life on a regular, if sometimes infrequent, basis; food and hospitality are nurturing and comforting. In doing this we truly give of ourselves.
- o Having enough time for oneself is important and necessary, but never to the complete exclusion of others; we give nothing to the world if we live totally unto ourselves.
- o Though inconvenient at times, and not always our personal preference, be involved in some area of service to someone and/or to God; He still allows us plenty of time for ourselves.
- o Even if it seems sometimes that being involved in something isn't contributing much, just being present supports and affirms others also involved in the same thing; in this way we often end up contributing more than we know. After this kind of involvement we always feel better for it.
- o Age, gender, social status and ethnicity should play no part in the friendships we cultivate; we grow by deriving something from each friendship and we help others to grow. Always be open to new friendships even if you already have many old ones. Every friend is a precious gift placed in our path by God.

- o Don't postpone an opportunity to get in touch with someone or to do a service or favor.
- o Serve other people with humility and in the context of Christ's teachings.
- o Be in constant communication with God, as you would a dear friend; in the next moment you could be in His presence.
- o Read the Bible and pray daily; it's how we grow to get and give the most we can in this life and to live life to its greatest fullness.
- o In the end, your life will not be measured by how much you have loved, but by how much you are loved by others.

Lesson 116 -- Work from a Biblical Perspective

Our work is one of the most important things in life we do, and we spend more time on this single activity than on any other. There is work that we do to earn a living and for some people, there is other work, an avocation, done purely for a sense of fulfillment not found in the job. The reality of it all is that whatever we do today, has been done in some manner before, and will be done again. In the words of Solomon, in the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, "there is nothing new under the sun". With rare exceptions we ourselves and our works will, after sufficient time has passed, be forgotten by future generations. Moreover, God intends to create a new heavens and new earth, and the present earth will pass away. This is a humbling realization, one that can lead to a hopeless, why bother sort of attitude; that is if our lives and works are viewed from a strictly humanist perspective.

In the Bible, God's word to humankind, we are told to "subdue the earth". As beings created in God's image, we were given stewardship over His creation, and have been given the charge of using its resources, and also loving and protecting it to ensure that it continues to provide for our needs as well as those of our fellow beings. God is creative and He fashioned people to be creative. He gave each of us special abilities, which include not only those we use to earn a living but also gifts we can use to benefit others such as care giving, hospitality, writing and organizing and entertaining to name a few. God has a plan for each of our lives and He gives each of us work to do. We need to seek God's will in our lives through prayer so that we can unveil the path He wants us to take. Then we need to develop those skills and talents, whatever they are, to be the best we can in that calling. If it feels right then it most likely is right. Whatever job we find we can use our abilities and find fulfillment. And, if we find satisfaction in our work, this is an added blessing.

Our jobs and careers, for most people, occupy only a link in a long chain that leads to an overall betterment of the human condition through science, technology, innovation and discovery. Without continued forward progress, generation by generation, in subduing the earth and being good stewards

over the creation, civilization would not have progressed beyond life in caves. But one person stands on the shoulders of another and each generation lays a groundwork for evermore forward progress for succeeding generations. Our individual contribution to this shouldn't be underestimated.

The Bible makes it clear that each of us will be accountable to Jesus for how we've used the talents and abilities He has given us. The Bible tells us "Whatever you do work at it with all your heart as though working for the Lord, and He will give you an inheritance". And so, no job is unimportant, whatever it is, and no matter how seemingly menial, provided it does a service for people, and if we do it to the best of our ability to glorify God. The gas station attendant's role in filling the car of a doctor on his way to a surgery serves a very important purpose. Likely neither he nor the doctor nor their works will be remembered in 80 or 100 years, but for the brief period of time in history they lived, worked and died they glorified God. Indeed, their lives and works will be immortalized in the silent memory of God. Even if one doesn't consciously work for the glory of God, God can still use his labors for His glory.

And so, work in itself attains its highest level of importance for us, when we view it as a gift from God. Whatever our vocation or avocation is, it is a gift because it gives life meaning and purpose. We can find joy and enthusiasm in our lives and works by realizing that we are living out God's highest purpose for us, which is to glorify Him and contribute tangibly to societal well-being in the brief time we are here. The Bible tells us to accept the human condition and live life as fully as possible. Absent this perspective, work and life itself can become humdrum. But if we start each day with a renewed vision that we serve something infinitely bigger than ourselves, Almighty God, our works and each day's activities will have special meaning. As we love and serve others and do good work, we will be starting a new day in our eternity with God to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

Lesson 117 -- Sin No Longer Our Master

Sin reigned in death in that the wages of sin is death, death of our bodies and eternal separation from God. In our natural state, each human falls into sin and is subject to death, just as Adam sinned and died. For our sake, Christ submitted to the reign of sin and in His death died to sin. But because He was without sin, He broke the judicial link between sin and death. In so doing, He passed forever from the reign of sin in death. In having been raised from the dead, He cannot die again. Sin and death no longer has mastery over Him.

By faith in Christ, we establish a union with Him. Symbolically, we are buried with Christ by being baptized into His death. We should be dead to sin in the sense that it is no longer our master. Just as Christ was raised from the dead the believer is raised to a new quality of life. Our resurrection in the sense of a new birth is already a fact, and continues to exert itself in the believer's life. We are not sinless as long as we live in our flesh, but we will no longer live lives characterized by sin.

Christians have a call to work at becoming in practice what we already are in our status before God. Dead to sin and not letting it dominate our lives. Our sins past, present and future have been paid for by Christ's death; His death satisfied God's requirement for justice. So that just as sin reigned in death,

grace reigns through the righteousness imputed to us by our faith in Christ. And so, in our new life, to try to live to please God, we try to be obedient to His commands. When we fail, we confess our sins to God and try to gain victory over them. Recognizing and owning up to our sins is itself a form of obedience.

And so, every Christian needs to recognize their complete dependence on the total sufficiency of Christ's death to absolve us of our sins. When we realize that, in God's eyes, we are considered perfectly righteous, and are already forgiven, past, present and future sins, this gives us full confidence that we will be with Him for eternity because of our union with Christ, though we will always struggle with sin. Confident in our own salvation, this frees us for acts of serving others and telling them, by our example, demeanor, attitude, actions and words when appropriate, all that Christ has done for us and can do for **them**.

Lesson 118 – Life's Meaning and Purpose

At some point in life most people ask why am I here, who am I? Do we live each day for the sole purpose of waking up, working, seeing to the many menial tasks we're responsible for each day, eating, sleeping, socializing, and hoping for another day of life to do it all over again? Many ask, and a song was written "Is that all there is?" From the humanist outlook, life is a circular pattern of being born, growing up, working, marrying, reproducing, dying and trying to capture as much enjoyment, pleasure and self-gratification as we can along the way. Over time, each of us, our works and the people who knew us will all be forgotten. This is the circularity of the humanist perspective.

But anyone who believes in the God of the Bible comes to understand that God created each of us as a unique individual, with a certain purpose in time and space. It's up to each of us to seek God's purpose in our lives. By prayer, contemplation and trust in God to reveal His plan for us, we can find that purpose and true meaning in our life. Then if we live true to what we were created to be, we can, in each of our lives and circumstances, fit into God's purpose in creation. Given this perspective our lives contribute a link in the chain of the human experience that leads to the establishment of God's kingdom, inhabited by a people God purified for Himself, to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

So long as we trust in God, seek His guidance, and depend on the insights and answers He provides, our lives will fulfill His purpose for each of us. We can reflect this purpose driven life to others as we go forth each day, in whatever circumstance we are placed in, to glorify God in our works and by our actions, behavior, demeanor, and love for others. Done for God's glory even the most routine, humdrum tasks have meaning and contribute to God's highest purpose for us in creation. We need God's help for us to live each day for our true purpose and not allow short-term pleasures and goals to become our priority. Surely God wants us to enjoy all He has given us in this life but not to lose the perspective that He provided it all, and we need to thank and glorify Him for it.

Epilogue

I hope these Bible lessons will be helpful in your prayer life, in dealing with the circumstances you will face throughout life, and in witnessing to others. God's word contains an infinite source of wisdom on how to get the most and best out of life, which is to be all that God intended we be. Although fulfilling work, comforts, pleasures, a good circle of friends are all nice things, they are not the most important things. Daily attention to the following eight items is guaranteed to provide the best this life has to offer, and ensure the highest reward when we pass to God's kingdom when life ends here.

Prayer – Speak to God daily in prayer with supplication and thanksgiving.

Bible Reading – Be in the Word every day; read a good, understandable version such as NIV. We can no more lead fulfilled lives as Christians without the Bible than one can learn any subject matter without the right texts.

Reflecting on our spiritual life – Reflect on passages in the Scriptures we read and/or thoughts given in sermons.

Fellowship with God – Speak to God throughout the day in prayer.

Attend Church – One can no more come to full spiritual growth without a good church than one can become a doctor by just reading medical books and not attend school.

Proclaim the Gospel – Do this by leading Godly lives from what we learn from the Bible and in church. Tell others what a difference Christ's presence in your life has made.

Be in service to God – Express love for God by loving others. Help anyone in need whether Christian or not. Use whatever gifts God gave you (money, mechanical ability, possessions, wealth, etc.).

Fellowship with Others – Fellowship with and encourage others, both Christians and non-believers. We have a chance as Christians to make a difference in the lives of others, and possibly win them to Christ.