

Yes, I want to...



Understand

God's will

for my life



Over 750 Bible verses referenced!

Jim Harper

www.UnderstandGodsWill.com

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Understand God's will for my life

**** STUDY VERSION ****

In this PDF file all of our footnotes are on the bottom of each page.
We have another file where all of our footnotes are in the back of the book.

Jim Harper

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(Over 750 Bible verses are referenced throughout this book)

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Why this book was written



Jim and Charlene
Harper

I have been married to my lovely wife, Charlene, for 35 years, and we have two beautiful daughters. Without having any skills - or even a desire - to write a book, I began to have feelings to write about the mission that God has for all of us. It was an odd feeling, and it didn't make any sense, so I simply dismissed the feelings. How could I possibly write about something that I knew nothing about? That would be silly, maybe even crazy.

It didn't matter, the feelings continued.

The feelings stayed with me for several years and they began to feel like a worry that would never go away. I am not a worrier - so this was a very different type of feeling for me. It felt like God wanted me to do this. But why? And why me? In the back of my mind I kept wondering how I could possibly accomplish something like this without having any skills needed to do it. I love challenges - but this was a doozie. Why was this constantly on my mind? This was so far beyond my capabilities I had no option but to continue to dismiss the feelings. Maybe I just needed more exercise.

It didn't matter, the feelings continued.

Over the next few years the feelings became stronger and more consistent and I kept telling the Lord in prayer that if these feelings were from Him - He had the wrong guy. I am not a writer. I am not an author. I certainly didn't know anything about the "mission" that He has for all of us, and more importantly, I didn't have any of the skills needed to write a book. This was not in my skill set. No. Way. Besides, surely God knew that I only type with two fingers. Find someone who can type.

About this same time I met Nikki Frizzell at my church. What I didn't know about Nikki was that she had just written some songs. The morning after one of my rather fervent nights of prayer with the Lord I heard one of Nikki's songs. It was called: "Made for a mission." Oh boy, another nudge. But this was a huge nudge. This was a nudge that I couldn't ignore, especially since I had just asked the Lord for a sign - a sign that I couldn't miss. This sign brought tears to my eyes. It was just too painfully obvious. It was then that I realized that meeting Nikki was no coincidence. I felt so bad. The Lord kept nudging me, and I kept ignoring Him, and even denying Him. He could see my lack of faith. The stories of Peter in the Bible began pouring through my mind - where Peter denied Jesus three times. It was a horrible feeling.

It took years, and a lot of nudges, but the Lord finally answered my prayers, and the answer was very clear: "You're right. You can't write this book."

"Without Me."

After telling Nikki about all of the nudges that I had been receiving, and hearing about some of her own, we both knew that it wasn't by accident that we met. We both knew that her song, and my (future) book, were made for each other: to help people understand who Jesus is, and to help everyone know for certain that God has a plan and a mission for every single one of us. We are all made for a mission - no matter how small we might feel.

This was all so wonderful and it confirmed our calling, but a book still had to be written. Ugh. Okay Lord, this is where You come in. I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief. I have zero skills in this area, and I also don't know the topic. This was like having a huge mountain in front of me and I had to climb it. I also needed some desire, and a huge dose. I can't write (i.e., climb this mountain) without desiring to do so. I prayed about this and the Lord answered my prayers. He gave me the desire to dive into His Word to find the answers to all of these incredibly important questions. Wow, what a miracle. He gave me the desire to do something that I would have considered impossible - like climbing Mount Everest. But with Him all things are possible.

I now know, and understand, that all it takes is faith. Faith as small as a mustard seed.

God tells us that if we have faith as small as a mustard seed nothing will be impossible for us. How do we know when something that seems like an impossible task (like writing this book) comes from God? It is actually quite simple. If we can accomplish it on our own and we don't need God - then we wouldn't need any faith to accomplish it. So faith is needed to accomplish the impossible. Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists - and He will reward those who earnestly seek Him. It is through our faith that we can do immeasurably more than we ask, or even imagine.

So, through faith (alone), this book was written.

I hope this inspires you to do the impossible. Listen to God and He will bless you. Listen to Him and believe. For everything is possible for one who believes.

I have written this book, but I am not a writer. I have published this book, but I am not a publisher. I am not a pastor, priest, minister, reverend, bishop, or theologian. I simply acted on the nudges that the Lord kept giving me - and through His grace, and just a little bit of faith, I was able to write this book.

Listen to His nudges. The Lord wants nothing but the very best for you. In fact, He wishes to heap His blessings upon you. Just have faith.

In His Name,
Jim Harper, author

Reader Testimonials

From William in USA

By the time I got to chapter 5 and asked God to forgive me of my sins - I was overwhelmed.

From Pastor Charles in Rwanda

I am so grateful and I thank so much Jim Harper who is teaching me more and more about the Word of God through his wonderful book.

From Pastor Jean in Dominican Republic

I love your book that you gave me when we met. Chapter six of your book is my great inspiration of all.

From Pamela in USA

Your book has changed my life. I took 4 years of bible study classes, which I very much enjoyed, however, I had a difficult time understanding the big picture. Your book was simple to read yet gave great detail and guidance. I felt like God was speaking to me through your writing.

From Pastor Matthew in Ghana

Your book is very powerful to my ministry.

From a Prison Chaplain in Nigeria

After reading your book 5 inmates on death row gave their lives to Jesus Christ.

From Pastor Mark in Malawi

Your book is more than good. It is changing my life everyday as I go through it.

From Anthony in Pakistan

After listening to your audiobook on Mix-cloud I have come to know the will of God for my life.

From Pastor David in India

I took printouts of your book - all 124 pages. Praise the Lord for your great book as I read every page. Please accept me as your partner in your ministry.

From Anonymous

I just love your book and I gave my neighbor one, can I have more?

From Isingoma in Uganda

I couldn't sleep comfortably until I finished the whole book because of the revelations it contains.

From Dorothy in USA

I am 80 years old and it is the best book I have ever read!

From Pastor Tej in Nepal

Your book will help accomplish God's plan in Nepal. I will translate it into Nepali.

From Pastor Felix in Rwanda

My ministry in Rwanda kindly confesses with our mouths that Jim Harper's book has spiritually lifted us up and brought us closer to the amazing grace of God. Jim's book is truly amazing and is a great book that we have never seen before. His book will help convict and convert many hearts to Christ.

From Pastor Asa in Uganda

There is no clearer and divinely inspired book on earth as this.

Reader Testimonials...continued

From a Pastor in Nigeria

During our crusade 143 people gave their lives to Christ. This revival came after reading your book.

From Pastor Paul in USA

Jim Harper has a real & honest faith and it shows in his encouraging book. Jim provides answers that connect with everyday life and are firmly grounded in the Bible.

From Pastor Hilaire in DR Congo

I read with enthusiasm your book. All 6 chapters are a great blessing. I will tell many others.

From "His Royal Highness" in Nigeria

Your book has changed my life and my kingdom. I wish to tell everyone!

From Pastor Theodore in Kenya

Your book has given me more wisdom and insights from the word of God and I now understand God's will for my life. Your book has made me aware of what I am capable of.

From Pastor Job in India

In India we are creating many sparks for Christ through your book. Things will never be the same.

From a Cult Member in Nigeria

For 3 days I stayed indoors reading your book and praying. I couldn't stop reading it. I renounced all my cults and I accepted Jesus Christ.

From Joyce in USA

I am being blessed as I read your book. One of my passions is writing. I can't even imagine the amount of time you put into this amazing, easy to read, right on book. I love the way you substantiate everything you say with scripture.

From an ex-Islamist Terrorist in Nigeria

I read throughout that night. I couldn't sleep. In the morning I gave my life to Jesus Christ.

From Pastor Jean in Rwanda

Thank you dear brother Jim Harper as your teachings found in your book are leading me in my ministry and Christian life. I have indeed committed to be sharing what I read from your book with others. So I pray the Lord to choose me among the winners to enter heaven.

Many more testimonials can be found on our web site

www.UnderstandGodsWill.com

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A note about our footnotes in this book

In this version of our book - all of our footnotes (all Bible verses - almost 700 total) are on the bottom of each page. Having footnotes on the bottom of each page can, in some cases, turn the book into a great study guide - as the footnotes will be on the same page that you are reading.

We have another version of this book (another e-book) where all of our footnotes have been moved to the back of the book. If you would prefer to read this other version you can download it from our web site below.

We also have an audio version - so you can sit in your easy chair and simply listen to this book. This also works really well while you're driving in a car that has Bluetooth speakers. Go to our web site below and start our audio book - and while it's playing, have the audio play through your car's speakers (via Bluetooth) or your headphones.

Be sure to tell others about all of these reading and listening options!

Regarding all of our Bible verse footnotes, many different Bible translations were considered. Unfortunately, most of the translations, including the NIV, NKJV, NASV, RSV, NRSV, NAB, and several others translations, are copyrighted and require royalty payments to reference their verses in mass (like in this book; we have almost 700 verses referenced in this book). For us to blanket the world with our book, and to keep our e-books free and our paperback book cost as low as possible, we could not incur the cost of these royalty payments. Many of these translations are very good - but they become too expensive when trying to blanket the world with hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of free books. Therefore we had to make the difficult decision to use- a royalty-free version of the Bible in our footnote references. The translation that we chose is a free and updated version of the American Standard Version (1901) called the World English Bible. The ASV was, and is, considered to be a very reliable and honest translation of the Bible. New American Standard Bible (NASB) verses are also referenced in this book as the NASB has a liberal use clause which allows us to reference up to 500 verses without written permission and without needing to pay royalty payments. If you have any questions about any of the verses/references that we used throughout this book we recommend that you cross-reference it with the Bible translation that you prefer - to see what your translation says. We are not for or against any specific Bible translation, we simply want to get this message out to the entire world - without paying royalties - so everyone in the world can learn about Jesus and understand God's will for their life.

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Chapter 1

I was made – to know God

God will wait patiently

If you have opened this book and have started reading this first chapter, you have made the second-most important decision about learning who God is. You have opened your heart. You see, God will never force His way into your heart. He will always wait until you let Him in. He knows that you have been designed and created to know who He is. He has given you a mind to think, a mind to reason and understand, and a mind that lets you know that you are a unique and special creation. There is no other person just like you.

God has also given you a desire to know why you were created, and also to learn who your Creator is. We have all been created to understand who God is. But the first step in understanding who God is, while at the same time finding out who we are, is to open our hearts. Our hearts must remain open if we wish to learn who God is.

So, you are probably wondering, if opening your heart is the second-most important decision that you can make to understand who God is, what is the most important decision? Well, your heart must remain open just a little while longer to learn the answer to this question. There are a few more things you must learn before the answer to this question becomes relevant. Your heart is the door through which God will enter so you can understand who He is,¹ so keep your heart open just a little while longer. God cannot reveal Himself to you if your heart is closed. If you seek Him with all your heart, He promises you that you will find Him.²

¹ Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened.

² Deuteronomy 4:29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.

He told us He was coming

Did you know that God told us He was coming to live among us many years before He actually came? Between four hundred and twelve hundred years before God came to live among us He gave us many details of His plan:

- He told us He would dwell in our midst and would walk among us.^{3 4}
- He told us He would be born of a virgin and His name would be Immanuel, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, and Mighty God.^{5 6}
- He told us that for a long time He had kept silent about sending His son to earth to save us.⁷
- He told us He would bring justice to the nations⁸ and would make a new covenant for His people.⁹
- He told us He would write His laws in our minds and on our hearts.¹⁰

³ Zechariah 2:10 Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD. ¹¹"Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

⁴ Leviticus 26:12 I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you will be my people.

⁵ Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel ("Immanuel" means "God with us.").

⁶ Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born. To us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Isaiah 42:14 "I have been silent a long time. I have been quiet and restrained myself. Now I will cry out like a travailing woman. I will both gasp and pant. ¹⁵ I will destroy mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers islands, and will dry up the pools. ¹⁶ I will bring the blind by a way that they don't know. I will lead them in paths that they don't know. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. I will do these things, and I will not forsake them.

⁸ Isaiah 42:1 "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights-- I have put my Spirit on him. He will bring justice to the nations.

⁹ Jeremiah 31:31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

¹⁰ Hebrews 8:10 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days," says the Lord; "I will put my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

- He told us that He would bear the sins of many¹¹ and that our sins would be forgiven.^{12 13}
- He told us He would die, be pierced for our transgressions, be crushed for our iniquities, and by His wounds we would be healed!¹⁴
- He told us He would rise from the dead.¹⁵
- He told us He would ascend to heaven.¹⁶
- He told us He would pour out His Spirit on all people.^{17 18 19}

All of this was told to us hundreds of years before God actually came to live among us.

God's prophets throughout the Old Testament explained to us why God had to come to live among us: that unless He came, because we are all sinners, we were all doomed.²⁰ The only way that God could save us from our sins was to come to earth, live among us, show us how to live, and while here on earth explain to us why He would need to die for us. He would be the ultimate sacrifice to save us from our sins - something that only God could do.

So, the story that is told throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament is a complete story. The New Testament fulfills the Old Testament, and the New Testament also gives us a hint of what is yet to come. In the New Testament the story continues, and is fulfilled:

¹¹ Isaiah 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

¹² Isaiah 1:18 "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

¹³ Zechariah 3:9 For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.

¹⁴ Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.

¹⁵ Psalms 16:10 For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will you allow your holy one to see corruption.

¹⁶ Psalms 68:18 You have ascended on high. You have led away captives. You have received gifts among men, yes, among the rebellious also, that Yahweh God might dwell there.

¹⁷ Isaiah 44:3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit on your seed, and my blessing on your offspring.

¹⁸ Joel 2:28 "It will happen afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. 29 And also on the servants and on the handmaids in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.

¹⁹ Ezekiel 39:29 I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.

²⁰ Proverbs 10:16 The labor of the righteous leads to life. The increase of the wicked leads to sin.

- He told us He is the image of the invisible God^{21 22}
- He told us why He had to be made human in every way²³
- He told us He had to come to reach the sinners^{24 25}
- He told us He would provide a new temple (Himself) after three days - not built by human hands²⁶
- He told us He came to give His life for many²⁷
- He told one of his followers (Peter) that he would deny Him three times - before it actually happened²⁸
- He told one of his followers (Judas) that he would betray Him - before it actually happened^{29 30}

²¹ Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

²² Hebrews 1:3 His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself made purification for our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

²³ Hebrews 2:17 Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

²⁴ Matthew 9:12 When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. ¹³ But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

²⁵ Isaiah 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

²⁶ Mark 14:58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'"

²⁷ Matthew 20:28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

²⁸ Mark 14:29 But Peter said to him, "Although all will be offended, yet I will not." ³⁰ Jesus said to him, "Most certainly I tell you, that you today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." ³¹ But he spoke all the more, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." They all said the same thing.

²⁹ John 13:18 I don't speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen. But that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me.' ¹⁹ From now on, I tell you before it happens, that when it happens, you may believe that I am he.

³⁰ Mark 14:17 When it was evening he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ As they sat and were eating, Jesus said, "Most certainly I tell you, one of you will betray me--he who eats with me."

- He told His followers that He would be condemned to death and that He would be mocked, flogged, beaten, spit upon, and killed. He told his followers that after all of this happened He would rise from the dead after three days^{31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40}
- He told us that His death would begin a new covenant for all people⁴¹

³¹ Luke 18:32 For he will be delivered up to the Gentiles, will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit on. ³³ They will scourge and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again.

³² Mark 9:31 "The Son of Man is being handed over to the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, on the third day he will rise again."

³³ John 16:16 A little while, and you will not see me. Again a little while, and you will see me." ¹⁷ Some of his disciples therefore said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you won't see me, and again a little while, and you will see me;' and, 'Because I go to the Father?'" ¹⁸ They said therefore, "What is this that he says, 'A little while?' We don't know what he is saying." ¹⁹ Therefore Jesus perceived that they wanted to ask him, and he said to them, "Do you inquire among yourselves concerning this, that I said, 'A little while, and you won't see me, and again a little while, and you will see me?'" ²⁰ Most certainly I tell you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.

³⁴ Mark 10:33 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles. ³⁴ They will mock him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

³⁵ John 17:11 I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them through your name which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are.

³⁶ Luke 24:45 Then he opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high."

³⁷ Luke 13:32 He said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I complete my mission. ³³ Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, for it can't be that a prophet perish outside of Jerusalem.'

³⁸ Luke 18:31 He took the twelve aside, and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be completed. ³² For he will be delivered up to the Gentiles, will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit on. ³³ They will scourge and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again."

³⁹ Matthew 17:22 While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, ²³ and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up." They were exceedingly sorry.

⁴⁰ Matthew 16:21 From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

⁴¹ Isaiah 42:6 I am the LORD, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, ⁷ to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison.

- He told us that for those who believe in Him their sins would be forgiven⁴² and they will find life⁴³
- After He rose from the dead He told us that He had defeated Satan and that unless He left the earth - God's Holy Spirit couldn't come to live within us⁴⁴

God came to earth and lived as a man. He had to; it was the only way that He could save us. His name, is Jesus.

To confirm that His plan had been executed to perfection, after Jesus rose from the dead He gave us many convincing proofs that He was alive. Jesus appeared to over 500 people over the next forty days and He continued to speak about the kingdom of God.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ He told everyone that when He leaves, i.e., after He ascends to heaven,⁴⁷ He would leave behind the Spirit of God that would live within us. His Spirit would guide us in all of our decisions, and His Spirit would also give us peace and comfort.

So, what God told us would happen in the Old Testament - did happen. It happened exactly as He said it would. The New Testament is a fulfillment of God's plan given to us in the Old Testament. It was, and is, the perfect plan, executed to perfection.

⁴² Acts 13:38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

⁴³ Proverbs 8:35 "For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD. ³⁶"But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death."

⁴⁴ John 16:7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Counselor won't come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he has come, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment; 9 about sin, because they don't believe in me; 10 about righteousness, because I am going to my Father, and you won't see me anymore; 11 about judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:6 Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep.

⁴⁶ Acts 1:3 To these he also showed himself alive after he suffered, by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's Kingdom. 4 Being assembled together with them, he commanded them, "Don't depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me. 5 For John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁴⁷ Mark 16:19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Why did God need to live among us?

Delivering truth in a world full of untruths

God sent his Son, Jesus, to live among us, because no matter who we are, or what we have done, God has incredible love for each and every single one of us. And that includes you. Look in the mirror for just a moment. God loves you. Yes, you.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16-17

God's desire was, and continues to be, to deliver His truth in a world full of untruths. Because He knew we would sin, He knew we would be in need of a redeemer. He also knew that we could never redeem ourselves. No person with any amount of sin could qualify to redeem us with his life. This would be a sinful man trying to redeem a sinful man - and this equation just doesn't work. It had to be a person without sin - and no human could ever qualify.

Decided eons ago

So, somewhere in the eons of time God knew that He would need to send His own Son, Jesus (i.e., God in the flesh), to earth to fulfill this incredibly important mission. Unlike the Old Testament sacrifices that could never take away sins, this sacrifice only needed to be done once⁴⁸ because it would be a holy sacrifice. God Himself, in the name of Jesus, would be the sacrifice.⁴⁹ God could, and would, come to earth to live as a sinless man to cleanse the condition of sin inherited by all of us.⁵⁰

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

Isaiah 1:18

What an incredible plan. God knew that this was the best way to communicate with us, to feel the same hurt and suffering and rejection that we feel, to experience the same temptations that we experience, and while here on earth He could also teach us how to live. He could be our ultimate mentor. He could also be our ultimate Savior. He made it clear to us that He came down from heaven not to do His own will - but to do the will of the Father who sent Him.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hebrews 10:14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

⁴⁹ Hebrews 10:10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

⁵⁰ Leviticus 16:30 Because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.

⁵¹ John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39 This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day.

Not lose a single soul

God uses human shepherds to explain how a good shepherd acts when just one of his lambs goes astray. A good shepherd will always go far and wide to find and save just one lost lamb.⁵² God will do the same thing for you - and me.

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 10:11

So this was God's mission. He came to earth to find us, and save us. When we become lost, or when we wander, God does not give up on us. He is always there - searching. He came to earth to find everyone because everyone becomes lost at one time or another. When we lose touch with our Creator, we wander, we rebel, and we sin.⁵³ We live this way because we don't understand why we were born. This isn't what God ever intended.

The unfortunate thing about being lost is it puts us under the control of Satan - who is like a wolf on the prowl. Satan knows that if we wander too far from our shepherd he can lure us into a dangerous world, so he throws temptations at us that are meant to make us wander. The temptations that he uses are temptations of wealth, pride, fame, convincing us that having more "stuff" will make us happy, that we can satisfy our earthly flesh (okay, sex) anytime and anywhere, and anything else that will lead us away from God's standards. Satan deceives us into thinking that there is no harm in doing it our way, or living for the moment, or putting ourselves first - before others. But this is not God's plan for our lives. Living outside of God's will - will never bring happiness. We often think it will, but this is one of Satan's great deceptions.

Satan just loves it when humans live in ignorance of God and His powers.

Note: Since the word ignorance (being ignorant) is used several times throughout this book we are going to show you how Webster's dictionary defines this very important word. It must be our goal to avoid being ignorant of the Bible's teachings - as Satan absolutely loves it when humans are ignorant of God and His powers. The more ignorant we are of God and His plan for us, the more power and influence that Satan has over us.

Being ignorant:

Adjective.

- 1. lacking in knowledge or training; unlearned*
- 2. uninformed; unaware*
- 3. due to or showing lack of knowledge or training*
- 4. lacking knowledge or information as to a particular subject or fact*

⁵² Luke 15:4 Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

⁵³ Ezekiel 18:4 For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.

He came to trump evil

In the Bible darkness is representative of sin and judgment.⁵⁴ Sin in our lives darkens our understanding and knocks us out of alignment with God's will. It is like hitting a pothole while driving a car. We all hit potholes (i.e., we all sin), and every time we hit a pothole our internal steering is knocked out of alignment with God's will. If we hit a pothole that is really deep - it can cause serious problems, possible injury, and even death.

When we are out of alignment with God's will we aren't able to drive straight and true. There might be days when it doesn't seem so bad, but being out of alignment is a dangerous way to live. Our lives will eventually shake, and shudder, and wobble - just like a badly aligned car. And if we don't fix the problem, if we don't align our lives with God's will, some very bad things could start to happen. This is because when we sin God can't protect us; He lets us reap what we sow.

Most people don't want to think of themselves as living in darkness, but this is how God looks at people who are living in sin within a fallen world. They are out of alignment. They are living without following the truth - His truth. This is why Jesus had to come to earth. Jesus had to come to earth to trump evil and to teach us His truth. He had to teach us what truth is in a world strewn with untruths. God wishes to steer you around potholes that are on the road in front of you; potholes that are meant to harm you. We often can't see the potholes in front of us, but God can. Follow God's Word and His bright light will illuminate the path ahead of you so you can steer clear of Satan's potholes. This will allow you to stay in alignment with His will and will give you hope and a future.⁵⁵

God doesn't want us to get hurt

We all know what light is. We depend on light when we are in the dark so we don't stumble. This is why God's message is associated with light⁵⁶ because it provides a direction and a way out of a dark world. Jesus came to earth so we don't need to live in darkness. He came to earth so we can have life and live it more abundantly.⁵⁷ And when we live according to His truth we will also be able to shine God's light⁵⁸ toward others who are driving toward potholes - so they will also be able to see and avoid the problems that are ahead of them.

When God created us He knew we would be a challenge, and He knew we would sin - because He gave us free will. We see this challenging behavior in our own children. We know our children will challenge our rules. We know they will sometimes rebel. We know they will sometimes ignore our direction. A parent just yearns to have a child who behaves and follows the rules so they won't get hurt.

Well, God is the same way. He doesn't want His children to get hurt. He came to earth so He could be close to us and teach us how to live. Unfortunately, many of us deny Him. We don't listen. We do what we want not realizing that when we step outside of God's will we make Satan very happy. Satan knows that

⁵⁴ 1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

⁵⁵ Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

⁵⁶ Psalm 18:28 You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.

⁵⁷ John 10:10 The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

⁵⁸ Matthew 5:16 Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

when we rebel against God, or if we ignore God, we are taking a step down Satan's road, the road that is strewn with dangerous potholes that Satan can use to knock us out of alignment with God's will - potholes meant to harm us.

We all know what it's like to hit a pothole that we didn't see coming. Ouch, it hurts. But if we admit it, we will remember that it was probably because we took our eyes off the road for a moment. We missed God's warning beacons. We didn't listen to our conscience. And that is exactly what Satan wants us to do. He wishes to distract us and whisper in our ear - that we don't need to watch out for dangerous potholes (i.e., dangerous activities in our lives), or follow God's standards.

When we rebelled as a child we couldn't understand why our father did what he did. We now know as parents that it was because our father loved us; we seem to have forgotten this very important lesson. As adults we have forgotten that our Father in heaven also wants only the best for us. Yet we deny Him, and we ignore Him, and we sin. How soon we forget.

God wants us to know Him

He wishes to give us wisdom and knowledge

Do you know that God loves you even when you don't love Him?⁵⁹ God is at work in your life even if you don't know Him, or love Him.

Not wanting to learn who God is can result in a spiritual death in your soul that creates a separation from the One who created you. If you are indifferent about God (i.e., you choose to ignore Him), or if you choose to actively oppose Him (i.e., you deny Him), both of these will result in a separation from God and you will never learn His plan for your life.

If we accept God and His Word we will begin to gain the wisdom and the knowledge that He wishes for us.⁶⁰ It's a free gift - but we must accept His gift. We must invite Him into our hearts so He can reveal Himself to us.

⁵⁹ 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice.

⁶⁰ Proverbs 2:1 My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, ² make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; ³ for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; ⁴ if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God. ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. ⁹ Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; ¹¹ discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you.

We must learn to recognize God's voice

But to know God, to really know Him, we must first recognize His voice. We must recognize His voice because the evil one will do everything he can to drown out God's voice. Satan is an absolute master at interrupting what God is trying to tell you. Just start doing something that promotes God's plan for your life and you will see how Satan attempts to interrupt, misdirect, mislead, and turn you away from learning who God is.⁶¹ You see, Satan wants you to remain ignorant of God's plan for your life and the inheritance that He has for you.⁶² Satan is opposed to God's plan and he wants everyone who has been created in God's image to be destroyed.⁶³

Satan would prefer to destroy God, but he can't, so next in line is you, and me. Satan knows that if he can destroy humans he can make God very sad - and Satan is working overtime to do just that. Simply turn on the news and you will see how successful he is. Someday, Satan and all of his minions will be vanquished, but for now he has free reign and he is destroying people around the world at a record pace. But it doesn't need to be this way. We simply need to learn his tricks. We need to become wise to his deceptions, and we need to learn how to avoid Satan's potholes that are being put in front of us.

One of Satan's spirits, a fallen angel, even interrupted Jesus once as Jesus was preaching in a synagogue.⁶⁴ If the devil will attempt to interrupt Jesus in a synagogue, he will certainly attempt to interrupt you as you attempt to learn God's will for your life. So be on guard. We must all learn to recognize God's voice the same way that we recognize a friend's voice. We must also learn to recognize the evil one's distractions. When we recognize his distractions we can block them out and begin to learn God's will for our life at a record pace. Turn off the TV, turn off social media, lay down the magazine, do some personal Bible study, and sit back and watch it happen. You will be amazed.

Satan has no real powers

Did you know that Satan can't actually hurt you? He has no real powers over you other than to deceive you. He is like a roaring lion that has no teeth or claws. A loud and roaring lion with no teeth or claws must deceive you into thinking that he is all powerful. This means Satan must rely on deception to accomplish his objectives. He knows that if he can deceive you into driving down his beautiful parkways surrounded by enticing pleasures on both sides (meant to keep your eyes off the road) he knows that you might miss God's warning beacons and hit his potholes that are designed to harm you. If we simply become wise to Satan's deceptions we won't be deceived into taking our eyes off the road; we will remain focused. We will drive with full knowledge that God's warning beacons (i.e., His Word) is meant to steer us clear of potholes, which will keep us in alignment with His will.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Mark 4:15 The ones by the road are the ones where the word is sown; and when they have heard, immediately Satan comes, and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

⁶² Ephesians 1:11 in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will;

⁶³ John 10:10 The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

⁶⁴ Mark 1:21 They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. 22 They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 24 saying, "Ha! What do we have to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One of God!" 25 Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" 26 The unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

⁶⁵ Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Many of us have experienced Satan's deceptions first hand. We have been deceived and have made a poor choice - and then have had to pay the consequence of our poor choice.⁶⁶ It's sad, but it happens. Many times it happens because we were convinced by "you know who" that there would be no consequence. Satan knows how feeble and weak-minded we are. He knows that we can't connect the dots: we make a poor decision, we get hurt, and then we can't figure out why we got hurt. Many times we got hurt because we ignored God's warning beacons. We were ignorant of God's teachings. Satan just loves this form of ignorance. It gives him energy to do it again and again.

Satan uses every means possible

Satan will attempt to deceive us using every means he can, including radio, the internet, TV, newspapers, magazines, and even some of our friends. If we listen to and think that his lies sound appealing, how much more important is it that we learn to recognize our Father's voice? We must continually test what we hear, and see, and read, against God's truth.⁶⁷ In fact, it's critical. Over time we will begin to test every message that we see and hear against God's truth. When we do, with authority and with confidence we will be able to say, "Okay, Satan, I know your game, and I'm not going there. I see your pothole, but I also know what the Lord says - so I'm steering clear of your pothole. You might get others, but you are not going to get me."

There is only one defense

Do you think God sits by as Satan roars his deceptive messages to us and God remains silent? Not at all.⁶⁸ God is constantly convicting us to testify to His truth.⁶⁹ If we take the time to listen - God's Word and His truth will pierce our conscience. But we must always keep watch because Satan's messages are unrelenting. If we can begin to recognize that certain messages do not align with God's truth, we will have the confidence to say no to those messages and we will be able to steer clear of Satan's potholes.

It is really important to understand that some people, even some of our closest friends, can cause some rather severe interference as we begin to learn God's many truths. Their static can actually drown out God's Word. We must learn how to clear away the static. Sin is a sin and none of your friends' static (i.e., their opinions) can change that. Don't let your friends' static try to convince you that it is okay because "everybody else is doing it." It isn't. Read the instruction manual. God's instruction manual never changes.

⁶⁶ Galatians 6:8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

⁶⁷ John 10:3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. 4 Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers."

⁶⁸ Isaiah 30:30 And the LORD will cause His voice of authority to be heard, and the descending of His arm to be seen in fierce anger, and in the flame of a consuming fire in cloudburst, downpour and hailstones.

⁶⁹ John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to him, "Are you a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

We all have dark spots in our hearts

Unfortunately, sin is a very difficult topic and many people don't want to talk about it. We don't want to feel guilty, or feel convicted, or feel bad about how we are living. But we need to. We need to learn what sin is, that sin is a violation of God's standards. We must learn which areas of our lives are not in alignment with God's standards and we must be willing to change those areas.

Christ wishes to remove sin from our lives. If we put a heavy weighting on our friends' opinions, rather than relying on what the Bible says, we will miss the true blessings and favor that God intends for us. God's Spirit within us will be searching, convicting, and will help us hear Him - if we clear the static. But to hear, to really hear, we must listen. Are you listening? To hear God's warnings you must go to a place where Satan can't interrupt you. You must disconnect from the world for a little while, a world that is controlled by Satan.

God wants your whole heart

God speaks to us with a single purpose. He wishes to possess all of your heart, to help you destroy all lusts, all idols, all selfishness, and to help purge all sins from your life so He can bless you, give you favor, and reward you.⁷⁰

If you want to hear God's voice and His direction you must be willing to have your heart cleansed.⁷¹ That is what He wants and needs from us, to repent of our sins and to follow Him. His many truths are meant to protect us. His truths are the beacons signs that will protect us from Satan's many potholes.

Our world is controlled by Satan

Did you know that God wants you to know His will?⁷² He does, but it will require change - a change in your thinking and the way that you understand and follow His Word. The world in which we live is controlled by Satan. This means that much of what you are seeing and hearing in the world today does not align with God's standards. Many of the messages that you are hearing each and every day are meant to deceive you; this is Satan's form of marketing. And he is very good at what he does.

God has given Satan control of the world until the end times^{73 74} at which time Satan will be vanquished and sent to hell for eternity. But until that time we must become wise and we must be transformed⁷⁵ so we

⁷⁰ Deuteronomy 5:32 So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³³You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you will possess.

⁷¹ Hebrews 10:22 let's draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water,

⁷² Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

⁷³ Revelation 17:17 For God has put in their hearts to do what he has in mind, and to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.

⁷⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:4 in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them.

⁷⁵ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

can recognize Satan's many schemes. Remember, Satan is constantly looking for people to devour.⁷⁶ He is so cunning he even attempts to deceive teachers of the Bible.⁷⁷ But God promises us that He will instruct us and guide us⁷⁸ and He will lead us in the right direction - around Satan's many potholes - if we follow Him. This will require that we study His Word so we can make decisions that are compatible with His will.

Be as wise as lambs

God will never lead you into a situation that violates His principles - such as hurting yourself, or hurting others. If you study God's Word you will be able to pick up on Satan's lies and be ready to avoid the potholes that are in front of you. We will continue to struggle if we don't recognize God's voice. Remember the lambs that recognize their shepherd's voice and only follow that voice? The lamb that hears a voice that he doesn't recognize - he knows that he must not follow that voice. He knows the strange voice is not his Protector. We must strive to become as wise as lambs. Turn around and walk the other way.

Here are some things that God wants you to know:

- He will give you wisdom if you ask and believe that He will give it to you⁷⁹
- He has a plan for you⁸⁰
- God's will is that you have a relationship with Him through His Son⁸¹
- Honor God and believe in Him so He can reveal Himself to you⁸²

As you hear God's voice and recognize it, you must be willing to change direction as He leads you.⁸³

⁷⁶ 1 Peter 5:8 Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Withstand him steadfast in your faith, knowing that your brothers who are in the world are undergoing the same sufferings..

⁷⁷ Mark 13:22 For there will arise false christs and false prophets, and will show signs and wonders, that they may lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones. 23 But you watch. "Behold, I have told you all things beforehand.

⁷⁸ Psalms 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will counsel you with my eye on you.

⁷⁹ James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him.

⁸⁰ Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

⁸¹ 1 Timothy 2:4 who desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all; the testimony in its own times;.

⁸² Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. 2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

⁸³ James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him



Chapter 2

I was made – in God's image

God knew what He was doing

They were all there

In the beginning God said, "Let us make mankind in our image."⁸⁴ Did you ever notice the words "us" and "our" in this verse? Who do you think "us" and "our" is? This will be explained in more detail later, but "us" and "our" is, (1) God the Father, (2) God's Son, who is Jesus, and (3) God's Holy Spirit.

So when God said, "Let us make mankind in our image" - this means God the Father, Jesus, and God's Holy Spirit were all present when mankind was created.⁸⁵ Yes, even Jesus was there. Jesus was there when the universe was created,⁸⁶ and Jesus was there when the earth was formed.⁸⁷ And yes, Jesus was there when a plan was put in place at the beginning of time to defeat evil and sin.

⁸⁴ Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them.

⁸⁵ Genesis 2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. ⁸ The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

⁸⁶ Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

⁸⁷ Isaiah 48:13 Yes, my hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand has spread out the heavens: when I call to them, they stand up together.

God knew what He was doing. His plan was already in place when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden - and Jesus was central to that plan.

Most excellent creation

So, how are we made in the image of God? Do we look like Him, or are we like Him in spirit? The Bible says that we all carry the image of God within us.

Look closely in the mirror for just a moment. Can you even begin to comprehend how complex you are? You are not the result of a spontaneous reorganization of molecules, or a close cousin of animals. You are a creation that is great and wonderfully made⁸⁸ - the most excellent of all of God's creations and a special expression of His divine nature.⁸⁹ You are an incredibly complex and exquisite piece of art that is a direct gift from God. God knew you before you were born and He predestined you to be created in the likeness of His Son, Jesus.⁹⁰

But this doesn't mean that we, as humans, have any of God's unlimited characteristics, such as omnipotence, omnipresence, or omniscience. We are limited in our capabilities but we do have God's likeness in many areas. Let's review some of these areas -

1. Spirit

God is Spirit⁹¹ - which means God is invisible. When the Bible says we are created in God's image it means we have been given a spirit. It does not mean that God is a physical being, or that we are like God in physical form. Did you know that your body is just a temporary "dwelling place" in which the real you - your soul and your spirit - resides? God created your human body for your soul to exist until such time that your physical body dies.

Within your body God placed all of your amazing parts with an exacting role - and every part knows exactly what it is supposed to do. Your body is made up of nearly 100,000,000,000,000 (trillion) cells and every one of these cells has been woven together to operate in harmony with each other. Can you image 100 trillion of anything that can operate as one? Even a highly complex engine has only about 500 moving parts and it took hundreds of skilled engineers almost 100 years to get it right. Your body is an absolute miracle and there is zero probability that your 100 trillion cells came together with the ability to work in harmony with each other - by chance.

How do the 100 trillion cells in your body know how to work together and then transfer their information to other "systems" in your body?

How do your eyes know how to see - with lights and colors and the ability to focus with exacting detail - and then coordinate this information with your ears and your brain for balance and your arms and legs for movement?

⁸⁸ Psalms 139:13 For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well.

⁸⁹ 2 Peter 1:4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁹⁰ Romans 8:29 For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers 30 Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.

⁹¹ John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

How does your nose know how to smell - with the ability to differentiate the smell of burnt toast with a beautiful rose - and then coordinate these smells with your sense of taste and your joy and sight to see these things differently?

How does your mind know how to create, empathize, feel joy, feel guilt, feel anger, and have feelings of despair and love? Man can't even create life much less create something that requires billions and even trillions of interconnections to create "a feeling."

You are the most intricate and exacting design that has ever been created - times a trillion - and there is zero probability that your trillions of cells and innumerable complex systems in your body was created without a Designer. Take just one of your many amazing senses (e.g., sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch), and the probability that any one of these was created by chance - is zero. And you have many thousands of these amazing parts and systems in your body; every single one has incredible, even incomprehensible, complexity.

And here is what is so wonderful about all of this: God created all of us in the same bodily form that He someday would assume - the bodily form in which He would choose to reveal Himself to us while here on earth.⁹² It is in this bodily form that He would come to earth to live among us, and eventually die for us, to save us. It was His physical body, like ours, with all of these amazing systems within it - that would be pierced for our transgressions.⁹³

2. Heart – Your Feelings and Emotions

God placed something else in your soul when He created you. He gave you a heart. We are not talking about the heart that pumps blood. We are talking about the heart that gives you the ability to feel things, such as your emotions, your thoughts, and your beliefs. God gave you a heart so you could feel love, and compassion, and hundreds of other emotions. He has given you these feelings so you can better know Him and understand who He is. God wants you to understand the very intentions of His heart. God gave you the capacity to feel the same emotions that He feels; He wants you to love what He loves, and hate what He hates. God wants you to love Him with all your heart, mind, and soul.⁹⁴ This is why He created you in His own image, and this is also why He gave you a heart.

3. Relationships and Fellowship

Our Creator also created you to have a relationship with Him. God wants to have a rich and meaningful relationship with every one of His creations. The great news is, we can - but each of us must choose to have this relationship. God will never force it. He will never force His way into your heart. If He forces His way in - it won't be a relationship. He will knock on the door of your heart and then wait. He won't barge in, He is a gentleman. He will wait until you let Him in. He knows that you have been designed and created to know who He is. But it's your choice. You can open the door and let Him in, or you can choose to keep the door closed. You can accept His invitation, or you can let your pride keep Him out. You can choose to learn who He is, or you can live in ignorance of who He might be. But the great news is, it's your choice, because

⁹² Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross!

⁹³ Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.

⁹⁴ Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

you have been given free will (one of the many incredible systems in your body, also known as choice). You get to decide.

When He knocks on the door of your heart He is hoping that you will let Him in so He can tell you where you are going. He has a wonderful trip planned. But, unless you open your heart you will never learn where His trip will lead you. It's a destination you won't want to miss. Later in this book you will understand why God has given you these incredible choices.

4. Free Will

God permits everyone to choose their own path and to make their own decisions. This is called free will. Just like the angels, we all possess free will. As we learned earlier - Satan used his free will to rebel. We have all been given this same choice. We can follow God's path (i.e., God's standards, meant to protect us), or we can follow our own path. If we don't follow God's path don't expect His protection. He will let us reap what we sow - which means He will let us suffer the consequences of our own bad decisions.

When you don't follow His light the path that you take could get very dark, very fast. You might be led into places where you could get hurt. It will be like entering a cave. Your walk into a cave gets darker and darker with every step that you take. Without His light you might not see rocks and ruts on the path so you could stumble. Without His light you might not see sharp objects along the path so you could get bumped and bruised. You might not see turns and drop-offs so you might fall. If you go far enough and bump into something extremely dangerous (e.g., someone convinces you to try drugs) you could get hurt, and possibly die. Satan will use all sorts of tricks to lure you down his dark path, and if he can use your friends to help lure you and deceive you he will surely use that option. Satan just loves the dark.

But God's path is bright. You will be able to see God's light no matter how far away you are. Following God's light will lead you out of the darkness very quickly. In fact, if you feel lost and you accept Jesus as your life leader you can be transported back onto His bright path almost instantaneously. His bright light is designed to save you, and save you He will.

God gave you free will so you can choose to obey Him, or not. God didn't want to create a robot that must always obey His every command. He doesn't want to force His will on anyone. While He is always reaching out in an attempt to develop a relationship with you, you are the one that must accept this invitation. His invitation is always awaiting your response. He is inviting you to spend eternity with Him. But the big question is, will you choose to follow Him, or will you choose to take your own path - a path that could lead you into some dangerous territory. It's your choice. Both God and Satan are waiting for your decision.

We must all choose to follow or deny God. Not making a decision - is a decision. Don't believe that you can simply delay your decision. Delaying is denying. In the end God will judge every person who rejects His Word because God created man for Himself. We can choose His path of light, or we can choose the path of darkness. God will wait patiently for your decision. But don't wait too long as your time here on earth could end at any moment.

Be sure to read chapter 5 in this book and make a decision. If you finish this book and you haven't made a decision - you are making a decision.

5. Conscience and Knowledge

You have been endowed with an intellect that is far superior to any animal, and you have also been given a mind that is capable of understanding. But where God's knowledge is unlimited,⁹⁵ ⁹⁶ you are limited in your knowledge.⁹⁷ While animals act primarily on instinct, you are capable of looking beyond your needs.

The Bible says that we all have knowledge of right and wrong implanted in our hearts.⁹⁸ Perhaps our ability to comprehend what is right and wrong best exemplifies the way we are most like God. Just as there are natural laws that govern the universe, there are also laws that govern our moral behavior and our thinking.

Our intellectual gifts are seen in our ability to design and build, write and compose, make ourselves more efficient, choose, reason, laugh, beautify, and so much more. Each of us possesses different kinds of intelligence, and each of us must also develop our capacity to think and reason to its fullest. But, even with all of our knowledge and all of our creativity, we still have some rather severe weaknesses - like not being able to feed the world's population without strife, not cherishing cultural differences, and not being able to create world peace. The reason is - deception. The world is being deceived. The Great Deceiver keeps convincing people that they don't need to follow God's standards. Unfortunately, many people around the world listen to the Great Deceiver. He is everywhere, in every channel of communication, in every school, and even in our churches and other places of worship. There are no boundaries to where the Great Deceiver can attempt to deceive people.

6. Creativity

Just look around. Look at all that God has created on earth, in the sea, and in the heavens above.⁹⁹ ¹⁰⁰ ¹⁰¹ ¹⁰² Also look around and see all of the incredible things that humans have created. It is quite obvious that humans are incredibly creative.

⁹⁵ Psalms 147:5 Great is our Lord, and mighty in power. His understanding is infinite.

⁹⁶ Isaiah 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? ¹⁴ With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding.

⁹⁷ Isaiah 55:8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nNor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

⁹⁸ Romans 2:15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.

⁹⁹ Genesis 1:21 God created the large sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good.

¹⁰⁰ Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and for him.

¹⁰¹ Isaiah 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these, who brings out their army by number. He calls them all by name. by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, Not one is lacking.

¹⁰² Isaiah 45:18 For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, "I am the LORD, and there is none else."

Look at all of the beautiful fish in our oceans. Not only is God an incredible designer, He also has a great sense of humor. There are even fish in our oceans that require other fish and other plants for their survival. They have an incredible symbiotic relationship. How did they find each other - before becoming extinct?

What about the gull that is born in the Arctic region that somehow knows how to fly thousands of miles over an open ocean to find a tiny island in the South Pacific that it has never been to before - where it will nest? If it makes just one tiny (.000001%) navigational error it won't have enough energy to make it. But it does.

What about the turtle that is born near the equator and it somehow knows how to circumnavigate the entire Atlantic Ocean on its journey of discovery - and then many years later it is able to find the exact same beach where it was born to lay its eggs? This would be like you and me walking from a house in Los Angeles, to a house in New York, and then back again - without using a map.

And what about the Monarch butterfly that starts out as a tiny caterpillar in Canada, and then through the miracle of metamorphosis (be sure to look up the word "metamorphosis" in the dictionary!) is completely transformed into a beautiful butterfly that somehow knows how to fly thousands of miles to a two square mile location in Mexico where it must go to survive. If it can't find this tiny location where it has never been before - it won't make it. But it does. Upwards of 300,000,000 (million) Monarchs all over the Northern Hemisphere somehow all collectively know how to do the exact same thing - all born basically as mush inside a cocoon. It evolutionists are correct, this Monarch has somehow transmitted survival traits and other improvement information through its death and metamorphosis inside a cocoon. Yikes.

There are thousands of other examples just like these that cannot be explained. All of this is creativity on a grand scale. How could any one of these creations do any of this without a Creator? We were all created by an incredibly creative God.¹⁰³ So, what God did was simply give us just a small sliver of His unimaginable creativity.

In Genesis 1 it says that God created everything. Every time He created He would simply say, "Let there be..." and it came into being. God creates by speaking. God's creative power is what we need to tap into. And we can - if we know Him. It is His creative power that releases healing, feelings, faith, provisions in our life, miracles, and so much more.

7. Wisdom

Wisdom is also a characteristic that both God and man possess. Theologians usually use the term "omniscient" when speaking of God's infinite knowledge. God knows everything about everything. He knows what we are thinking,¹⁰⁴ ¹⁰⁵ and He knows everything that will happen.¹⁰⁶ God cannot devise a bad plan because He knows the answer. His omniscience supports His wisdom.

¹⁰³ Isaiah 45:12 I have made the earth, and created man on it. I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens; and I have commanded all their army.

¹⁰⁴ Ezekiel 11:5 Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and He said to me, "Say, 'Thus says the LORD, "So you think, house of Israel, for I know.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 5:22 But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, answered them, "Why are you reasoning so in your hearts??"

¹⁰⁶ 2 Kings 8:10 Then Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You will surely recover,' but the LORD has shown me that he will certainly die."

God also gives us wisdom,¹⁰⁷ but the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man is not the same. In fact, they are incompatible with each other.¹⁰⁸ True wisdom does not come from man, it comes from God.

God, through His wisdom, will bring about what He has promised in ways that you and I cannot even comprehend.¹⁰⁹ But you must follow Him to learn what it is. If you lack wisdom - God says to ask for it.¹¹⁰ Wisdom, if used properly, can ensure moral goodness and it can also be a guiding light for your life. Wisdom will steer you clear of Satan's potholes. Wisdom is about making proper choices. Believing in God and Jesus can be the beginning of your wisdom.¹¹¹

But be careful when praying for wisdom because there is also a wisdom that is not from God. This other wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.¹¹² We need to learn how to tell the difference. We must show our true wisdom by our actions. Having true wisdom is not knowing about good and evil, it is knowing good from evil.¹¹³

Do you ever wonder why we can't seem to understand God's wisdom with all of the horrible things that are happening in our world today, such as wars, famine, natural disasters, sickness, death, and sorrow, to name a few? God leaves many of these a mystery¹¹⁴ because God's wisdom is so much higher than ours. He has a grand conclusion that He has yet to reveal. He doesn't dare tell us how it will all end because this would dispel the wonder of His final act. It would also remove our faith in Him. So, let us have faith in God and let His wisdom, not ours, be the light that guides our path.

¹⁰⁷ Proverbs 8:10 Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. ¹¹ For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her.

¹⁰⁸ I Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, I will bring the discernment of the discerning to nothing." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom didn't know God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe.

¹⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written, "Things which an eye didn't see, and an ear didn't hear, which didn't enter into the heart of man, these God has prepared for those who love him." 10 But to us, God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

¹¹⁰ James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed.

¹¹¹ Psalms 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments;
His praise endures forever!

¹¹² James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good conduct that his deeds are done in gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition are, there is confusion and every evil deed.

¹¹³ Isaiah 5:20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight.

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:7 But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom that has been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds for our glory,

8. Sovereign / Authority

We are also like God in the sense that we have been given sovereign authority. God has sovereign authority over the universe, and we have been given sovereign authority over the world in which we live.¹¹⁵
¹¹⁶ This sovereign authority, however, is not a birthright. It is a gift from God.¹¹⁷ Just as God created and formed our world to His liking, we are now responsible for managing it. This is a responsibility that has been entrusted to us and we should not take it for granted. We will someday answer to God for the condition that we leave it in.

9. Eternal Being

God is eternal¹¹⁸ and the spirit within us is also eternal. If you haven't looked up the word eternal in the dictionary lately, it means "without a beginning, and without an end." Being eternal means it will last forever. The important question for all of us is: after our physical body dies, will we live eternally in heaven,¹¹⁹ or eternally in hell?^{120 121 122 123} Eternity is a very long time.

Our potential, and our uniqueness

Although all humans possess all of the aforementioned god-like qualities, every single one of us has the potential to express them differently. This is because God's image is imprinted in each of us differently. With God's infinite creativity there are no duplicates. You are the only one who will ever be born with your unique qualities. If you are ever able to fully grasp what this means you will be amazed at the possibilities. You have the capacity to reflect God's spiritual, emotional, relational, creative, sovereign, and eternal capacities, and you also have the capacity of doing these things synergistically with God. Can you say "Wow!"

¹¹⁵ Genesis 9:3 Every moving thing that lives will be food for you. As the green herb, I have given everything to you.

¹¹⁶ Genesis 9:7 Be fruitful and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply in it.

¹¹⁷ Daniel 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

¹¹⁸ Daniel 4:3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.

¹¹⁹ Matthew 19:29 Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life.

¹²⁰ Matthew 25:46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

¹²¹ Revelation 14:11 The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.

¹²² 2 Thessalonians 1:9 who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

¹²³ Revelation 21:8 But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

The apostle Paul says that we are always in the process of being transformed into the image of God by God's Holy Word and that our image will be made new in all righteousness and holiness.^{124 125}

He made you unique and special for a reason

God created you

Yes, you are different. You are different from every other person who has ever lived. It was God's plan from the very beginning that all of His creations would inhabit the earth¹²⁶ and that every person would be unique and fearfully and wonderfully made.¹²⁷ You weren't born by accident. God knit you together in your mother's womb.¹²⁸

From the very beginning God wanted you to be unique - while giving you some of the attributes and characteristics of your parents. That is why you may have some of your parent's physical features, and maybe even some of their behaviors, both good and bad.

When God created you He broke the mold. There is no other person just like you. You are a "one and only." It says in the Bible that we were the clay and God was the potter.^{129 130} We were formed in His hand for a special purpose¹³¹ which someday will be revealed. God was involved in your physical and psychological formation from the very beginning. He knows how many days you will live, and He also knows all of the experiences that you will live through during your lifetime. He has a plan for you - a glorious plan. But you must believe. He can't reveal Himself to you, and He can't reveal His plan for you,¹³² unless you open your heart and let Him in.

You should take comfort in knowing that God has all of your experiences under His sovereign control. God would never put you on a bus while taking even the slightest chance that you won't reach your destination. God is, in fact, driving the bus. He knows exactly where you are going and He knows everything that will

¹²⁴ Ephesians 4:23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new man, who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

¹²⁵ Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator.

¹²⁶ Acts 17:26 He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.'

¹²⁷ Psalms 139:14 I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well.

¹²⁸ Psalms 139:13 For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹²⁹ Isaiah 64:8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand.

¹³⁰ Lamentations 4:2 The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

¹³¹ Romans 9:21 Or hasn't the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor?

¹³² Luke 2:26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

happen along the way. This includes all of your good experiences, and even your bad experiences. In God's economy - every one of your experiences is for your spiritual development.

You may not feel like you are wonderfully made, but you are. You may have days when you are deeply troubled and even days when you are in despair. Life is not easy. But God wants you to know how much He loves you and that He created you the way you are - for a reason.

God knows everything about you

No matter what darkness you may experience, and we all live in darkness at some point in our lives, whatever feeling the evil one puts on you God feels your pain and wishes to comfort you. How can you know? You simply have to consider how unique and wonderfully made you are. You don't have to feel any pressure not being like others because God made you the way you are because He has a special mission for you - a mission that only you can accomplish. God didn't just randomly design you with random skills, random traits, and random looks. Your body and your mind are unique to you and you were designed the way you are to complement the gifts He has given to others.

Not a random design

Sometimes it is hard to understand why we are so different from everyone else. When we were young this was especially difficult to understand and accept. We wanted to be like everyone else, not different from everyone else. We wanted to wear the same type of clothing as our friends. We wanted to hang out together. We wanted to do things together. And we especially wanted to be "liked" by everybody (no, we're not talking about Facebook "likes" here...). If we were ever considered different by our friends - oh my, that was bad. We wouldn't be accepted. And at such a young age it's all about being accepted. If we ever felt "not" accepted by others - we felt horrible. But these feelings, if you ever experienced them, were planted in your mind by the Great Deceiver, not by your Creator. Satan works overtime trying to destroy us through our emotions and he knows exactly where we are the weakest.

One of the reasons for our uniqueness is because of God's incredible creativity. As we grow and mature we need to learn to treasure our differences - not our similarities. We need to understand that being unique and different from everybody else is a blessing, not a curse. God made you the way you are because He has a mission for you that only you can accomplish. This book is meant to help you understand your mission, the mission that God has reserved just for you.

A really good beat

Just for a moment - think of yourself as a member of a large orchestra and you have been equipped through your uniqueness to play the bass drum. Playing the bass drum is what makes you - you. God designed you with a really good beat within you so you can play the bass drum better than everybody else. But this uniqueness makes you different - not the same - as everybody else. Oh my, how can that be good?

Now, suppose somebody comes along who plays the trumpet really well and you think to yourself, "I sure wish I was like him. I would be so much happier." But since you weren't born with thin lips, which a trumpet player needs, you could never become a great trumpet player. It's not the gift you were given. You were designed by God to play the bass drum. He gave you your uniqueness so only you can play the bass drum. In fact, the gift that you have been given makes playing the bass drum effortless for you. You don't need to work on having a good beat because you have this gift within you. Nobody else can do what you can do.

Now, suppose another person comes along who plays the violin really well and you think to yourself, "I sure wish I could be like her. I would be so much happier." But since you weren't born with long fingers to reach all of the strings and the ability to move the bow quickly, you could never become a great violinist.

It's not the gift that you were given. You were designed by God to play the bass drum. He gave you your uniqueness so only you can play the bass drum. Being a bass drummer is in your genes.

God created you this way - for a reason.

When we focus on the gifts that we have been given, instead of focusing on what others have, we can begin to live our lives without effort. We won't need to spend any energy trying to be like others. We will be able to play the most beautiful "symphonic" music with everyone else because we will all be playing the instrument that the Lord has given us. It will be beautiful because it will be the music that is within us - within our soul, and within our spirit. It won't be like anybody else. Feel blessed for how different you are; your uniqueness is an incredible blessing. Your uniqueness will support the mission that the Lord has reserved just for you - which you will learn about later in this book.

Satan is all about making us feel bad about how different we are from everyone else. He is constantly trying to deceive us into thinking that we would be "so much happier" if we had what others have. And because we listen, he succeeds. Satan knows just the right strings to pull (no, not violin strings) to make you desire what others have. We simply need to focus on the gifts that we have been given. Always remember, God has given you everything you need to be content. Everything. It's called - Him. God is all you need. Focus on God and He will give you the desires of your heart.¹³³

He has a plan for you

We can be content

When you begin to understand that God designed you for a special purpose and that His will is perfect, you will begin to understand that the unique gifts that He has given you - they are meant to bless you. And when you delight in the gifts that God has given you, He will give you the desires of your heart.¹³⁴ And when you have the right desires, He will fulfill those desires. It's a win-win. If we focus on the gifts the Lord has given us¹³⁵ we can be content and we will no longer desire what others have. We won't need anything - except God. This is the Lord's plan for each of us. So be grateful for your uniqueness. In fact, cherish your uniqueness. Don't try to be like others. It would be a very boring world indeed if God made us all alike.

¹³³ Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

¹³⁴ Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

¹³⁵ Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

Nothing is impossible

Did you know that God put a plan in place for you before the earth was formed?¹³⁶ ¹³⁷ ¹³⁸ He also predestined you eons ago to live the life that you are living.¹³⁹ His plan might include taking you over some bumpy roads in the bus that He is driving - but each and every one of these bumpy roads has a purpose. They are meant for your spiritual development. You might be riding over some bumpy roads right now.

Riding over bumpy roads might be something that God feels that you need to experience. He might want you to see something, or feel something, or maybe experience something. It might include experiencing hardship. It might include experiencing pain, or loss. It might include experiencing His grace, possibly even a miracle. But it's all for a reason. God came and lived with us so we can believe in Him, and trust in Him, with our life and our future. Following Him requires faith, and with just a little bit of faith He promises us that nothing will be impossible for us.¹⁴⁰

Having a relationship with the One who created you will give you a whole new perspective on the reason why you were born. God is happy when we are grateful for what we have.¹⁴¹ Being grateful allows us to be transformed into what He can use. Being grateful for what we have also releases us from the need to impress others. Think about the significance of this. When you are grateful for what you have you will never feel a need to impress others. What a relief. Relax, and enjoy, and be blessed for having an attitude of gratitude with what you have. All you need - is Him.

Also remember that whatever you experience, which might include both suffering and despair, God can use for good.¹⁴² Being grateful for everything that you experience can turn your negative thoughts (e.g., "Why did this happen to me?"), into positive thoughts (e.g., "Thank you Lord for always being there for me."). Being grateful forces your attention outward - to God, and to others, instead of inward to yourself. Gratitude will calm you. You will worry less. You will attract others with your calm, which will make your life more connected and more purposeful. This is when God can use you and bless you for having faith in Him.

¹³⁶ Psalms 139:13 For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. 15 My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.

¹³⁷ Proverbs 8:22 The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. ²³ "From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.

¹³⁸ Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.

¹³⁹ Romans 8:29 For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

¹⁴¹ Psalms 147:7 Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praises to our God on the lyre,

¹⁴² Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

Those who are different

Some people are born different from others, but God says He has a purpose in everything He creates. Listen to this passage in the book of John regarding someone who was born blind:

John 9 ¹ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" And Jesus responded: ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

God teaches us that this man was born this way so his life can glorify God. So if you have a negative feeling or a negative thought about the way somebody was born, always remember that God has a reason for creating him this way. God's reason is so the person can glorify Him.

We tend to think that someone who is born a certain way is somehow incomplete, or disadvantaged. God doesn't view it this way at all. God creates everyone a specific way so they can use their uniqueness to minister to others. God doesn't want us to quarrel with Him, or feel sorry for how someone was born, because He has created everyone a certain way for a reason.¹⁴³

We are all God's treasured possession

In God's eyes we have all been created just the way He wants us. We are all wonderfully made and His treasured possession.¹⁴⁴ ¹⁴⁵ He has a plan for every single one of us.¹⁴⁶ This means there is a special work that God has planned for you that only you can do, in just the way that you can do it. There is nothing in your life that will be wasted. God uses your past, your present, and all of the hardships that you have experienced to prepare you for the future.

Ask God for wisdom to help you understand why He made you the way you are and why He placed you on this earth. He has a beautiful plan for you. You were created for Him to do good works.

¹⁴³ Isaiah 45:9 "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—an earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands'?" ¹⁰ "Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to a woman, 'To what are you giving birth?'" ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons, and you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. ¹² "It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands and I ordained all their host.

¹⁴⁴ Psalms 139:13 For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. ¹⁵ My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.

¹⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

¹⁴⁶ Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

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Chapter 3

I was made – to live through many difficulties

A sinful nature

Was I born a sinner?

God didn't create man to sin. God created man blameless.¹⁴⁷ But God gave us free will, which is the ability to make our own decisions. This means that we can make decisions that align with God's standards, or we can make decisions that do not align with God's standards, also known as sin. And He has given us the ability to choose. This means that God has given us the ability to ignore Him, and even deny Him. But the great thing is - it's our choice.

Who doesn't like having 100% control over our own decisions? This is like putting a child in a candy store and then leaving. Well, this is exactly what God has given each of us - the ability to make our own decisions and to do what we want. To make matters worse, He has left the candy store owner, in this case Satan, inside the store to convince all of the children who enter (all of us) to eat as much candy as we want. And being as naïve as we are, and if we don't listen to our father's warnings, we will believe the candy store owner. The candy store owner will continue to tempt us, "The candy is so good how can it possibly hurt you?" And, "Eat as much as you want, it's good for you!" And, "Nobody is going to know how much you ate, so take some more!" And because we chose to ignore our father's advice, we got sick. And then we wake up in the middle of the night and say, "Ow, my stomach hurts. I was only doing what the nice candy owner said, and promised, so why did I get sick?"

¹⁴⁷ Ecclesiastes 7:29 Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright.

When God created us He knew the only way He could ever have a relationship with us was to give us the option of listening to Him, otherwise it wouldn't be a relationship. Love is not love if it is in any way coerced. So God permits all of us to make our own decisions even if it means we choose not to listen. God lays down his warning beacons next to the potholes on the road in front of us - and then He gives us the keys to the car. We can heed His warnings, or we can ignore His warnings. He will then let us drive where we want.

Sin entered the world through one man, which was Adam, and has been passed down through the generations to every one of us.¹⁴⁸ We all inherited this sin nature at birth.¹⁴⁹ This sin nature is the basis for our sinful thoughts and our sinful habits. Sin has its roots in our heart,¹⁵⁰ which influences our mind, which eventually finds its expression through our body when we follow through with our sinful desires.¹⁵¹ ¹⁵² Every time we sin we fall short of God's standards for our life.¹⁵³

It's our choice

Since we have all been given free will we can choose to live according to God's standards, or we can choose to live according to our own standards. The definition of sin simply means to offend against a principle or standard. So, this means that when we sin we fail to adhere to the righteous standards that God has set forth for us.

The important question that we must all ask ourselves: were we all born sinners, which is the failure to adhere to the righteous standards that God has set forth for us?

The answer is Yes, and No.

Yes, we were all born with a sinful nature. But No, we didn't come out of the womb a sinner. Our sinning came later - when we were old enough to understand the difference between right and wrong and we started to make conscious decisions that we knew did not align with God's standards.

We all inherited a sin nature

It is relatively easy to prove that we all inherited a sin nature.¹⁵⁴ Just watch any small child. The child is naturally selfish and there was nobody that had to teach the child to be selfish. Being selfish is how we all started out. It is basically in our DNA.¹⁵⁵ Having a sin nature is a condition that we all inherited.

¹⁴⁸ Romans 5:12 Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned. 13 For until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not charged when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those whose sins weren't like Adam's disobedience, who is a foreshadowing of him who was to come.

¹⁴⁹ Psalms 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me.

¹⁵⁰ Genesis 8:21 because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.

¹⁵¹ Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies.

¹⁵² Hebrews 3:12 Beware, brothers, lest perhaps there be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God.

¹⁵³ 1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.

¹⁵⁴ Psalms 58:3 The wicked go astray from the womb. They are wayward as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

¹⁵⁵ Isaiah 48:8 for I knew that you did deal very treacherously, and was called a transgressor from the womb.

As the child begins to grow up he begins to learn right from wrong and that selfishness is not a great way to live. The child learns, sometimes the hard way, that people can get hurt if he continues along his selfish ways. He learns that his selfishness causes problems. He eventually learns to control his selfish desires and that sharing is a better way to live. This is when his character starts to develop. He starts making conscious decisions about how he wishes to live - to share, or not share.

As he continues to grow and interact with others, he is confronted with even more important choices - to do things that are right, or wrong, with kindness, or with evil - and this is when sin enters the picture. He now has to make decisions that align with God's standards,¹⁵⁶ or do not align with God's standards, which is sin.

As we grow older we also learn about personal responsibility and personal accountability for our decisions. We learn, sometimes the hard way, that our decisions can have a very high price, such as contracting a disease, going to jail, drinking and getting into a car accident, and sometimes even death. As we approach adulthood we begin to learn that our decisions can have an everlasting consequence.

So, either we allow our sin nature to control our life, or we control our sin nature by making decisions that align with God's standards and trusting in His provisions and His plan for our life. When we follow and trust in God our moral character grows and we begin to "adhere to the righteous standards that God has set forth for us." Did you happen to recognize that this is the definition of sin - turned upside down?

We will be held accountable

As adults we must always be concerned with the choices that we make. The good news is - we can all overcome our inherited sin nature. We can all choose to align our decisions and our actions with God's principles and His standards.

So, will you suffer if you don't live according to God's principles? You may feel like you don't suffer much, if at all, for the decisions that you make.

The answer is - probably Yes, but the consequences may not be immediate, and the suffering that you cause might not be something that you experience personally. Here is an example that brings both of these into play. You learn late in life that a decision that you made as a young parent caused mental anguish to one of your children - which the child never told you about. And that mental anguish changed the course of that child's life - and not for the better. This means we should never feel consolation when we don't seem to suffer the consequences of our sinful decisions. God promises us that we will reap what we sow.¹⁵⁷ Even if we don't suffer from our own sinful decisions, we will be held accountable for the suffering that we cause others.

The fact that we might not experience pain and suffering from our actions means the opposite must also be true: that other peoples' actions and their decisions might also cause us pain and suffering. It has to work this way - otherwise free will isn't free will. When we choose to sin we are choosing to live contrary to

¹⁵⁶ Isaiah 7:15 He shall eat butter and honey when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings you abhor shall be forsaken.

¹⁵⁷ Galations 6:7 Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

God's principles - which can bring difficulties and suffering into our own life¹⁵⁸ as well as the lives of others.¹⁵⁹

God can turn our suffering into something very good

Yes, God could have prevented your pain and suffering. He's God, remember? But God allows pain and suffering because He wants you to lean on Him. We are all hard-wired to call out to God when we feel anguish, sorrow, or despair. If you have ever ridden on an extremely bumpy plane ride you know exactly how this feels. You grab the armrest, or the person next to you, and you pray. You pray for deliverance. You pray that you can be relieved of your anguish. God can, with His infinite powers, save you, but He might not. He knows that a bumpy ride can draw you closer to Him. And as we all know, pain and suffering happens all the time. He can turn all of our pain and our suffering and every bumpy ride that we experience into something very good.¹⁶⁰ It is through our pain and suffering that we find Him. It is through our brokenness that we are healed.

Sinning isn't something that we inherited; our sin nature was inherited. Sinning is a choice. God hates sin¹⁶¹ and our sin separates us from the loving protection of God.¹⁶² Sometimes our suffering from our sin can be extremely painful. But no matter what type of difficulty we experience, or pain that we suffer, God has also experienced pain and suffering. God experienced His pain and suffering when He came to live among us. His suffering was so severe that He died from His suffering - on purpose, on the cross, after being severely beaten, with whips and hooks pulled through His skin and prickly thorns pushed into His skull. He hung on a piece of wood, on the top of a hill, with iron pounded through His hands and feet, all which He created. He experienced all of this on purpose.

He could have stopped His suffering and His death, but He didn't. He had to die for you and me. This was all part of His plan - which He foretold in the Old Testament.¹⁶³ It was His reason for coming. It was His plan from the very beginning. He knew that sin would rule the world¹⁶⁴ and He knew that there was no other way to save us from our sins. He knew He would need to come to earth and die for us. If God didn't know that Adam would sin, and that one of His highest angels Lucifer (i.e., Satan) would rebel, then He made a mistake. But God doesn't make mistakes. He knew exactly what would happen after giving us free will -

¹⁵⁸ Galatians 6:7 Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

¹⁵⁹ Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you may be no priest to me. Because you have forgotten your God's law, I will also forget your children.

¹⁶⁰ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

¹⁶¹ Psalms 45:7 You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness.

¹⁶² Isaiah 59:2 but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

¹⁶³ Isaiah 42:14 "I have been silent a long time. I have been quiet and restrained myself. Now I will cry out like a travailing woman. I will both gasp and pant. 15 I will destroy mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers islands, and will dry up the pools. 16 I will bring the blind by a way that they don't know. I will lead them in paths that they don't know. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. I will do these things, and I will not forsake them.

¹⁶⁴ Isaiah 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

that we would wander and sin. He knew we would act like a small child in a candy store, and that the candy store owner would easily deceive us into thinking that lots of candy would be good for us.

So God can definitely empathize with your suffering. He suffered¹⁶⁵ and He died for you so that you, if you believe in Him, can live with Him for eternity.¹⁶⁶ If you don't believe in Him - well, your eternal destiny will be far worse.¹⁶⁷

Yes, He was there

So you might be asking yourself: Where was God when that "bad thing" happened in my life? The answer is, He was right there. He felt all of the pain that you felt, and He hated what happened. But He had to allow it to happen to accomplish something far greater. That something far greater is His gift to each of us, which is our eternal reward for trusting in Him and having faith in Him. Someday He will restore all things¹⁶⁸ ¹⁶⁹ and there will be no more suffering.

Just as a loving parent might need to allow a child to suffer through the consequence of a bad decision, God must also allow us to suffer through the consequences of our bad decisions. Unfortunately, this includes suffering through the consequences of what others do as well. We might not understand the lessons that God is teaching us at the time, but the painful consequences that we experience might result in a life changing event. And in God's economy, life changes are good, especially those that are created from pain. God desires that we change so He can use us. He wants us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.¹⁷⁰

This means God allows us to experience problems and difficulties in our life¹⁷¹ ¹⁷² so we will grow closer to Him. He needs us to be transformed into His way of thinking so He can use us, and bless us. When we start to understand His will for our life this is when we can begin to understand why we were born, and what our purpose is.

¹⁶⁵ Isaiah 53:3 He was despised, and rejected by men; a man of suffering, and acquainted with disease. He was despised as one from whom men hide their face; and we didn't respect him.

¹⁶⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound to us, even so our comfort also abounds through Christ.

¹⁶⁷ Matthew 10:28 Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.

¹⁶⁸ Acts 3:19 Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

¹⁶⁹ 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

¹⁷⁰ Romans 12:2 but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

¹⁷¹ Acts 14:22 and that through many afflictions we must enter into the Kingdom of God.

¹⁷² John 16:33 I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.

I might be experiencing difficulties because I am being deceived

In the garden

God's perfect creations, Adam and Eve, became sinful when they chose to disobey God's command in the Garden of Eden. They chose to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil even though God told them not to. Of course, Adam and Eve weren't in the Garden all by themselves. The Great Deceiver was right there. Satan's #1 goal is to mess us up, make us hurt, destroy our lives, and get us to deny God. He wants to put a major hurt on us because he hates everything that is made in the image of God. Deception and lies are the tools he uses. Anybody who has ever been deceived knows how easily it can happen - even when we are watching out for it. And when we get hurt, about all we can say is, "He did it to me.....again!"

Satan is so good that his lies sound like truth. So we listen to him, and we believe him, even though we keep getting hurt. We just can't seem to make the connection between our bad decisions and the troubles that follow us around. Satan was the instigator of this sinful act in the Garden of Eden, and he continues to be an instigator of lies and deception in our world today.

In the Garden, Satan convinced Adam and Eve that they would "surely not die" if they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And when Adam and Eve denied God's truth by eating from this tree, this is when their innocence, and ours, was lost, and this is also when the world of suffering began.^{173 174} Humanity chose not to obey God that day - and much of the human race continues to disobey and deny God today.

God could fix all of the world's suffering in a second - but He gave us choice. He gave us free will. If God fixed all of our worldly problems, which we ultimately created, then the free will that He gave us would hold out no meaning and there would be no accountability for our poor choices. Right now we are simply being held accountable for our poor choices.

So, while you are searching for your direction and purpose in life - the evil one will continue to whisper in your ear (he might be whispering in your ear right now...) that you are unworthy and that you should hold out no hope. But remember that this is a lie. This is not the Lord's plan for you. We must all learn how to recognize the Lord's voice just as a lamb recognizes its shepherd's voice. We simply need to become as wise as lambs. When it's not the Lord's voice that we are hearing, we need to be wise enough to turn around and go the other way.

Satan's only power

Satan has no real power over any of us other than to deceive us - but in this area he is extremely cunning. He can't physically hurt us, and he can't make us do anything, but he can whisper in our ear. He is so good that we don't even realize that his temptations are based on our human weakness and our human desires. He knows exactly where we are the weakest.

So we listen to him, and we get sucked into his ploy ("the candy was supposed to be good for me..."), and then we realize we were duped - again. If we continue to let our desires run unchecked we will continue to inherit the consequences of trouble, hurt, pain, suffering, broken relationships, and much more. Just take a moment and connect the dots. Many of the problems that we experience are the result of not listening to

¹⁷³ Genesis 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

¹⁷⁴ Genesis 3:17 To Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

God's voice and His teachings. We ignore God's warning beacons and we drive right into the potholes that Satan has put in front of us. And sometimes the potholes are very deep, and it hurts - a lot.

But let's not forget that we are still human, and we will always make mistakes. No matter how aware we are of Satan's many schemes - we will always experience heartache, loss, loneliness, despair, sorrow, and many other difficulties for as long as we live. The good news is, however, that God tells us that He can use every bad experience that the evil one creates - and He can create something good out of it^{175 176} if we follow Him. This should give you great hope for whatever you are going through.

This is so important that we are going to repeat this again: God can use every bad experience that the evil one has created in your life - and He can turn it into something very good^{177 178} if you follow Him.

What an incredible promise.

Our suffering is the means by which our faith is proven

This means that there is a miracle in our suffering. God's sovereignty and His plan for us will use our difficulties and our suffering to help strengthen our faith in Him. Our trials and our suffering is the means by which our faith is proven.¹⁷⁹ So basically, our difficulties and our suffering is the means by which God perfects, strengthens, and molds us into the creation that He can use¹⁸⁰ which will make us steadfast and able to withstand Satan's many schemes. The very same temptations and trials that Satan puts you through to destroy you - God will use for your deliverance and your spiritual development.¹⁸¹

Some of Satan's requests might pass through Jesus first

Did you know that God allows Satan and his servants to tempt you? God could stop Satan from tempting you if He wanted to (He's God, remember?), but allowing Satan to tempt you is all part of God's grand plan to build your faith in Him. God will test you¹⁸² but He will never tempt you.¹⁸³ We are tempted when we are

¹⁷⁵ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

¹⁷⁶ Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

¹⁷⁷ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

¹⁷⁸ Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

¹⁷⁹ 1 Peter 1 ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

¹⁸⁰ 1 Peter 1:7 that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹⁸¹ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

¹⁸² Deuteronomy 13:3 for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

dragged away by our own evil desires.¹⁸⁴ Jesus teaches us that sin begins with us.¹⁸⁵ We must never forget that God has total control over Satan.^{186 187}

The Bible teaches us that at least some, and maybe all, of Satan's requests to tempt you might actually pass through Jesus first - and Jesus must say "Yes" to Satan's request. But even if Jesus says Yes, He promises us that He will never allow Satan to tempt you in a way that is beyond your capabilities.¹⁸⁸ During the Last Supper when Jesus told His disciples where He was going (i.e., to be crucified), Jesus told Peter that Satan had made a request to sift Peter as wheat.¹⁸⁹ Sifting in this situation means Satan put in a request to test Peter. This means that some, and maybe all, of Satan's requests to tempt you might actually pass through Jesus first. Isn't that incredible? The reason Jesus allows this to happen is to see if you can resist the temptation to prove your faith in Him.

As this is happening - Jesus will always pray that your faith will not fail, just as Jesus told Peter that He had prayed for him that his faith would not fail.¹⁹⁰ So even if we aren't sure whether Satan asks Jesus to tempt us, we should know that Satan does wish to attack us and sift us as wheat. This means we might be tested by many trials to determine if our faith is genuine.

Do you sometimes feel as though you are being sifted by Satan? Perhaps Satan has been given permission by Jesus to sift you as wheat. Is your faith strong enough to survive such a test?

We should consider it pure joy when we face trials

We all find it hard to be joyful when we are being sifted, but God tells us to consider it pure joy whenever we face trials¹⁹¹ as the trials will test our faith, and the testing of our faith will develop perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work so we can be perfect and complete - lacking in nothing.¹⁹²

¹⁸³ James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death..

¹⁸⁴ James 1: 13 Let no man say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God," for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.

¹⁸⁵ Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?

¹⁸⁶ Matthew 28:18 Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

¹⁸⁷ Mark 3:27 But no one can enter into the house of the strong man to plunder, unless he first binds the strong man; and then he will plunder his house.

¹⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:13 God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

¹⁸⁹ Luke 22:31 The Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat, 32 but I prayed for you, that your faith wouldn't fail. You, when once you have turned again, establish your brothers."

¹⁹⁰ Luke 22:32 but I prayed for you, that your faith wouldn't fail.

¹⁹¹ James 1: 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

¹⁹² James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

But be forewarned - it is precisely when you place your faith in Jesus that you will be tested and you will face trials, so get ready. Who do you think Satan wishes to test? Do you think Satan wishes to sift those who don't believe in God and haven't put their faith in Jesus? Not at all, he already has these people. Satan wishes to test and attack those who are still learning to put their faith in Jesus; Satan still has a shot at winning these people over to their human desires so he can destroy them.

Important take-away

Here is an important learning moment so please take note: We should consider it pure joy when we are being tested.¹⁹³ Jesus might allow Satan to sift you in order to test your faith. But this time, because you now understand how the game is played, you will win the fight. You have learned that if you test the message you will find out that candy is not always good for you, and having as much as you desire will probably cause you much pain. You have recognized that the candy store owner's voice and his promises - as good as they may sound - will lead you down the wrong path. You have shown faith in your decision, and because of your faith God will put more trust in you.

But get ready. If Satan asks Jesus if he can sift you, and if Jesus says "Yes" and then prays for your faith, this is when your trials could become extremely difficult. Hang on tight as it could be a very bumpy ride. But when you learn to put your trust in God, and when Satan sees your new-found faith in Jesus, Satan will learn that you are not one who can be easily deceived so he will spend less time on you. Life will get easier. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.¹⁹⁴

Satan especially likes sifting leaders. He will go after leaders in your family, leaders in your circle of friends, leaders where you work, and even your church leaders. Satan knows that if he can deceive the shepherds of the flock the flock will be unprotected, and that's when the wolves can come in and destroy what remains.¹⁹⁵ So it is paramount that you pray for your leaders.

Satan's key deception – pride

You also need to be on special alert when things are going well for you. When things are going well - Satan will try to convince you that you don't need God. You might be having a run of success with your family, your job, your finances, your friends, and during these times Satan will do whatever he can to puff you up and make you feel prideful. He will try to convince you that you don't need God.

When things aren't going so well - Satan will use the reverse ploy. His message during difficult times is that God has abandoned you. He will try to convince you that God can't possibly care for you because godly people shouldn't suffer. Satan is an absolute master at playing with our minds and influencing the way that we think. He knows how to use our human emotions against us. Satan will employ whatever suffering and doubt he can use to turn us away from God, but this is all deception and lies. We need to continually test our thoughts and the spirits.¹⁹⁶ We need to become wise to Satan's many tricks.

¹⁹³ James 1: 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

¹⁹⁴ James 4:7 Be subject therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

¹⁹⁵ Acts 20:28 Take heed, therefore, to yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly of the Lord and God which he purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know that after my departure, vicious wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Men will arise from among your own selves, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them

¹⁹⁶ 1 John 4:1 Beloved, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit who doesn't confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh

Lust & coveting what others have

One of our greatest weaknesses, and one of Satan's greatest successes, is when Satan convinces us that we should have more things - to make us happier. He will whisper in our ear that others have so much, and we have so little. Satan will constantly try to make us feel unhappy with what we have. And because of our human weakness, if we listen to him we might actually believe in this lie. But don't be deceived. Having more things will never bring you happiness. Just ask the people who have won the lottery - many have lost their happiness. In fact, many have become miserable. When we sin we tend to try to fill our hearts with more stuff, but more stuff isn't what we need. What we need to do is to fill our hearts with God, for when we fill our hearts with God He will fill our hearts with joy.¹⁹⁷

God's gift is awaiting you, all you have to do is accept it. He is knocking on the door of your heart. Simply open your heart and let Him in. When you do this He will begin to reveal the incredible plan that He has for you.

Renewing your mind

God tells us that He will help transform us¹⁹⁸ which will help us understand His will for our life. Transforming our mind is the plan that He has for us. When we choose this transformation it will confirm our calling and our election into His family - where we will no longer stumble.¹⁹⁹ We will learn, sometimes after many bumpy roads, that true happiness and true joy can only be satisfied by God. He will bless you for following Him.

I might be experiencing difficulties because I live in a fallen world

It was never meant to be this way

The world in which we live is horribly broken; it was never meant to be this way. Our world is full of injustice, hurt, illness, heartache, disease, misery, violence, death, suffering, broken relationships, and relentless messages to deny that God exists, and to live for you and to live for the moment. Just look around. The message to live "for you" is everywhere: in newspapers, in advertisements, on TV, on the internet, and in many other places. The messages that we are bombarded with include: you need it, you deserve it, it will make you happier, people will like you more, everyone else has it, and so much more.

Through the unbelief of Adam and Eve darkness began to infiltrate the human race. The sin that we all inherited from this darkness permeates our life and effects our relationships. This darkness, which started in the Garden, tries to drag us into a life of misery and non-purpose. This darkness, this disease, this viper, this sin, has the destruction of the human race as its goal.

We live in a world that is all about self-satisfaction, self-gratification, and self-actualization. Remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs that is probably still being taught in schools today? The top of the hierarchy is called self-actualization and it is all about "me" - self this and self that. As you work your way up the

is not of God, and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of whom you have heard that it comes. Now it is in the world already.

¹⁹⁷ Acts 14: 17 Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

¹⁹⁸ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

¹⁹⁹ 2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers, be more diligent to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never stumble,

hierarchy do you see anything about God, or purpose? No. It's all about fulfilling your own purpose and to self-actualize. Self-actualization is the opposite of God's plan for you. That's why our world is so broken. Our world is so broken many people long for the day when it will be liberated from the bondage and decay that we are being subjected to,²⁰⁰ the bondage of self-actualization. It's not about me, or you, it's about God. He created everything. He is trying to share His fortunes with you, but you must accept His gift.

He had to let us mess up

Because Adam and Eve made the decision to listen to Satan instead of God in the Garden of Eden, God basically said, "Okay, since you think you know better than Me how to live, let's give it a try. Let's see if your way is better than My way."

This is when our world was put under a curse,²⁰¹ and this is also when God transferred the authority of the earth over to Satan.^{202 203} Satan has been hard at work deceiving and destroying people ever since. It will remain this way until God vanquishes Satan and restores the earth to the way it was meant to be - pure and innocent.²⁰⁴

But God knew all of this would happen. As part of His grand plan He had to let us find out for ourselves - for several thousand years - that we couldn't do it without Him. Like a good parent, God had to let us make our own mistakes. He had to let us mess up. So until the day when Satan is vanquished we will need to live in a world that is full of hardship and injustice, crime and violence, death and suffering, wars and senseless killings, people who die too young, and all of the other horrible things that you can think of.

But there is good news in all of this. We have the ability to ease the pain and suffering and affliction in our lives if we live the way that God has taught us to live. Many people think that living according to God's standards is difficult, or hard, or burdensome. But in fact, it's just the opposite. Living according to God's standards makes life so much easier. Living His way is a dedication and a commitment that is placed in our hearts by a new Spirit. Once you have dedicated yourself to living God's way, God's Holy Spirit will guide you in your decisions and His Spirit will support you in your many areas of human weakness and human suffering.²⁰⁵ This is incredibly valuable since the world in which we live will never change as long as it is controlled by the god of this world, which is Satan.

We must constantly remind ourselves that our world has an incredible number of potholes and fantastic sounding lies that wish to suck us into a world of sin. We need a special Spirit that will help us identify and

²⁰⁰ Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

²⁰¹ Genesis 3:17 To Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

²⁰² Revelation 17:17 For God has put in their hearts to do what he has in mind, and to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.

²⁰³ 2 Corinthians 4:4 in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them..

²⁰⁴ Revelation 21:27 There will in no way enter into it anything profane, or one who causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

²⁰⁵ Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered. 27 He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

withstand these attacks because the enemy is constantly looking for ways to destroy us. There is a very good chance that you might be feeling or experiencing some of Satan's attacks and his destructive forces in your life right now. Satan is real. Just because you can't see him doesn't mean he isn't real. He is very real.

Why does God allow pain and suffering in the world?

People that don't believe that God exists - well, they must also believe that Satan doesn't exist. You can't have one without the other. Believing in one and not the other would be like saying there is a right, but no wrong. There is hot, but no cold. There can be light, but no darkness. Look at evil in our world. It's everywhere. So where do you think this evil is coming from? You simply have to open your eyes to see who is in control of our world²⁰⁶ and who is causing all of the pain and suffering in our world.

But this raises an incredibly important question, and here it is: Why is God allowing all of this pain and suffering if He has total control over Satan? Why doesn't God just stop all of this pain and suffering? Why doesn't God stop Satan? Is it possible that God is powerless against the destructive forces of Satan?

The answer is simple - but it is an incredibly difficult answer to face. Here is the answer: It is through our tremendous suffering in our sin-filled and fallen world that the glory of God can be seen the clearest. It is through our many failures and our many difficulties as well as our inability to solve many of the world's problems that proves there is a God, and that we need God. God knows this, and He is waiting. He is waiting until everyone hears His story and His good news. He has told us that His good news must be preached to the far corners of the world before He rids the world of Satan.²⁰⁷ But while we wait we should not become discouraged, or feel burdened.²⁰⁸ On the night before Jesus died He told His disciples, "In the world you will have trouble. But cheer up! I have overcome the world."²⁰⁹

So, we wait...

²⁰⁶ 1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

²⁰⁷ Matthew 24:14 This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

²⁰⁸ Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.

²⁰⁹ John 16:33 I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world."

Seeing suffering differently

While you are waiting, and because of what God told us in the Bible and what you have just learned in this book, you now have the ability to understand your suffering very differently:

- It will refine you and will make you stronger²¹⁰
- It will equip you to comfort others.²¹¹ Those who have suffered make the most effective comforters.
- It will allow you to experience God at a deeper level²¹²
- Your suffering can be used to mature your faith²¹³

I might be experiencing difficulties because God is disciplining me

Does God ever punish people for the things that they do?

When we hear the word discipline - the first thing that many people think of is punishment. But there is a huge difference between being disciplined, and being punished. Look at how Webster's dictionary defines the two:

Punishment:

1. A penalty or sanction given for any crime or offense
2. The act of punishing, or the state of being punished
3. Informal rough treatment
4. Any aversive stimulus administered to an organism as part of training

Discipline:

1. Training or conditions imposed for the improvement of physical powers, self-control
2. Systematic training in obedience to regulations and authority
3. The state of improved behavior, etc., resulting from such training or conditions
4. A system of rules for behavior, methods of practice
5. A branch of learning or instruction

²¹⁰ Isaiah 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction. 11 For my own sake, for my own sake, will I do it;

²¹¹ 2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound to us, even so our comfort also abounds through Christ.

²¹² Job 42:5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.

²¹³ James 1:4 Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So what does a loving parent choose - punishment or discipline? A loving parent will always choose discipline over punishment because discipline has a training element associated with it. Discipline also has love associated with it. Unless we love someone - why would we choose to discipline them? Well, we wouldn't. We discipline because we care. We discipline our children because we want them to grow up to become loving and caring individuals. We want them to learn how to become independent while still obeying authority. We also want them to know that we are disciplining them because we love them. Do they ever understand this? No. Why do you think that is?

Unfortunately, as our children grow up rebellion gets in the way. Rebellion has its core in defiance, and defiance has its core in not listening to authority - which is sin. So, when our children don't listen to us it is a form of sin.

It isn't that much different when we don't listen to God. When we don't listen to God we are usually not living according to His standards. We are rebelling, which has its core in defiance, whereas defiance has its core in not listening to authority. This, by definition, is sin.

Disciplining our children is most effective when we tell them (i.e., we "train" them) about what they are doing wrong, why it is wrong, and what might happen if they continue with this particular behavior. Punishment is very different from discipline because true punishment has no training or love associated with it - you committed a crime so you are going to jail. There is no love there. So even though we sometimes say we are punishing our kids, what we really mean to say is we are disciplining them - because we love them.

We should feel blessed when we are being disciplined

Wouldn't God also want to discipline His children - you and me? The answer is Yes.²¹⁴ For the same reason that we just discussed, God might discipline us when we "don't live according to His standards."^{215 216} Our rebellion knocks us out of alignment with His will. Rebellion has its core in defiance, and defiance has its core in not listening to authority. When we don't listen to God we are rebelling against His authority. We are sinning.

God is not a punishing God. God never punishes you and me for the things that we do. Because God has given us free will He simply "allows" us to suffer the consequences of our own poor decisions. It's a hard lesson to learn, but when we don't live according to His standards He can't be there to protect us. He lets

²¹⁴ Deuteronomy 8:5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

²¹⁵ Job 5:17 "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects. Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.

²¹⁶ Hebrews 12:5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with children, "My son, don't take lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him; 12:6 For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." 7 It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have been made partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not children. 9 Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they indeed, for a few days, punished us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. 11 All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised thereby.

us reap what we sow.^{217 218} But when we choose to live according to His standards we will reap a sure reward.²¹⁹

In both the Old and New Testaments God reveals Himself as One who disciplines His children. God has revealed to us that His discipline is similar to the way that we discipline our own children. And here is the lesson that we need to learn: we should feel blessed when God disciplines us - because it means He loves us.^{220 221} If He didn't love us, He wouldn't discipline us. Think about this for a moment. If God didn't call you His child He wouldn't even care to discipline you. You wouldn't want that.

If you are going through some difficult times right now it might be because God is disciplining you.²²² Don't turn a deaf ear to His instruction.²²³ God is more than willing to discipline those He loves who are not living according to His standards - just like any good parent would do. A good parent will want to guide and direct his children. God also wants to guide and direct His children. He knows that loving His children means disciplining them.²²⁴ God also knows that His discipline must be something that is felt and must not feel good, otherwise the discipline might be dismissed. It must get our attention and it must be something that we don't ever want to experience again. So, if you are going through some of God's discipline right now you might be experiencing something very difficult. In fact, it could be something extremely painful. It might be God making sure that He is getting your attention.

It isn't easy disciplining someone. It doesn't always seem like an act of love when we are disciplining our children. But, in God's mind, disciplining us is an expression of His love.^{225 226} And just for the record, God disciplines everyone, not just the head-strong.²²⁷ So even if you don't believe you need to be disciplined, God may see things differently. Some of the fiery ordeals and discipline that you experience might even be ordained - predestined eons ago.²²⁸ No discipline seems pleasant at the time. Usually it is very painful.

²¹⁷ Proverbs 22:8 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed.

²¹⁸ Job 4:8 According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity, and sow trouble, reap the same.

²¹⁹ Proverbs 11:18 Wicked people earn deceitful wages, but one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.

²²⁰ 1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "Don't fear what they fear, neither be troubled."

²²¹ James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him.

²²² Hebrews 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline?

²²³ Proverbs 28:9 He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

²²⁴ Psalms 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.

²²⁵ Hebrews 12:5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with children, "My son, don't take lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him; 6 For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives."

²²⁶ Deuteronomy 8:5 Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

²²⁷ Hebrews 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have been made partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not children.

²²⁸ 1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you..

Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.²²⁹

But be aware - there are some really big differences between the way that we discipline our children and the way that God disciplines us. We usually tell our children why we are disciplining them. God's discipline isn't so clear. We don't always know why we are going through some difficult times and whether God is the reason. It could be just another unexplainable event that is happening because we live in a broken world. So don't try to explain everything that is happening to you as God's discipline. It might not be God at all. It could be Satan messing with you.

Consider your hardships not as burdens - but as spiritual exercise

Don't become discouraged when God disciplines you²³⁰ but have hope in the Lord and He will renew your strength.²³¹ Don't draw back in your walk with Him. God's discipline is always perfect. His discipline will never exceed what is needed. It will never be too harsh, or too weak. His discipline is not intended to be a burden but is meant to lesson your load. It is meant to make you stronger and it will allow you to withstand the many temptations that the evil one sends your way.

In order to handle suffering with inner joy we must continue to seek to understand God's purpose for our suffering. You were created for a purpose and it is your blessing - yes, blessing - to find out what it is. Consider your troubles and your hardships not as burdens, but as spiritual exercise. Exercise your faith in order to grow closer to God. When you exercise your faith you will start to build spiritual muscles, and the stronger your spiritual muscles become the more you will be able to appreciate what God is doing in your life - even as you suffer through His discipline.

What is God's standard?

Don't let your friends' opinions sway your decision

When in doubt always follow the instruction manual, also known as the Bible. For in His instruction manual God tells us, "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."²³²

So, here is a very important question: Which gate do you wish to enter? Your answer to this critically important question has eternal consequences. If you make a mistake on this one you could suffer for eternity - so it might be worth a few hours of your time researching the decision that you must make. And don't think that not making a decision is a wise choice. It's not. Not making a decision - is a decision. Be sure to read chapter 5 to see what this means.

As you consider your decision it is important that you not let your friends' opinions sway your decision. Almost none of what you hear from your friends will be based on God's truth (unless your friends know the

²²⁹ Hebrews 12:11 All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised thereby.

²³⁰ Galations 6:9 Let us not be weary in doing good, for we will reap in due season, if we don't give up.

²³¹ Isaiah 40:31 Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

²³² Matthew 7:13 Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. 14 How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.

Bible really well). What you must understand is that Satan does not want you to believe that there is a divine standard by which you should live your life - because Satan's goal is to keep you ignorant of God and His powers. Keeping you ignorant is his goal.

There is that word "ignorant" again. If you forgot what being ignorant means (or ignorance) go back to chapter 1 and read the definition again. It's a devastating definition; the definition convicts us. We are ignorant if we remain lacking in knowledge and training of the Bible, or if we remain uninformed and unaware of what it says. This is one area where you do not want to be ignorant. You might choose to remain ignorant about how to sew, or how to ride a bicycle, or how to grow flowers, or how to cook, but you do not want to remain ignorant about what your Creator is telling you. The Bible is His Word.

Remember, Satan absolutely loves it when we live in ignorance of God and his powers. Satan is working full time on everyone, including your friends, so don't listen to your friends who love to give you their opinion on certain topics unless their opinions are based on scripture. Scripture is truth. Opinions are usually not. God's standards are meant to save. Satan's standards are meant to keep you away from God's truth. If Satan can fill you with your friends' opinions - he will surely use that approach.

Satan will also fill you with doubt, which might be happening to you right now, such as, "Why do I need to make a decision now? It can wait. I might feel different tomorrow." This is one of Satan's greatest deceptions - to fill us with doubt. Don't let Satan win. There is no doubt that you are an incredible creation, created by an incredible God, and that God has an incredible plan for you. But you must open your heart and let Him in. Don't let your pride keep the door closed. Don't let Satan win the doubt game.

God's standards are based on His truth - so absolute right and wrong are totally unaffected by human opinion. We must get answers to life's most important questions out of His instruction manual, the Bible. Everyone who hears His Word and puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock.²³³

Are you living your life with a compass?

Here is another important question you must ask yourself - and answer. Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God? Your answer to this important question will not only determine how you view the Bible, your answer will also determine whether you trust in the authority of God's Word and whether it will be the instruction manual and compass for your life.

If you believe the Bible is the Word of God then you will want to study it, trust it, and obey it. If you choose to believe that the Bible isn't the Word of God, then your life may be tossed by opinions and hearsay - which is exactly the type of belief system that Satan wants you to have. Being unsure that the Bible is truth will allow the evil one to lure you away from your Shepherd - where the wolves prowl. Basically, you will be living your life without a compass. God's Word and His will for your life can be your compass - to keep you close to your Shepherd.

²³³ Matthew 7:24 Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. 25 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell--and great was its fall.

God's Son, Jesus, didn't say that scripture (i.e., the Bible) contains the word of God. Jesus said scripture is His Word.²³⁴ ²³⁵ And Apostle Paul warned us that we must never exceed what is written.²³⁶ If you believe this then the Bible must be the standard by which you live your life and you must never add to, or exceed, what is written. This means if a friend tries to convince you that it is okay to do something by adding a "maybe" or "sometimes" or "if others do it, it must be okay" to a passage in the Bible (e.g., such as a certain sin), this is adding to what God said - which we must never do. Adding words to the Bible is how the evil one tries to get us to re-define what God has already taught us in His own words. Whose words do you wish to follow? You will probably notice that God didn't use the words "maybe" or "sometimes" or "might be" or "could be" very often. God isn't wishy-washy. If you wish to be wishy-washy then you might not be following God's standards. And by now you know what that means.

The Bible - as it is written today - must be the final authority over all of our moral beliefs regarding what is, and isn't, sin and how we should live our lives.

Putting everything into context

There are many evidences that the Bible is, in fact, the Word of God. One of the evidences is its unity. Even though it is made up of sixty-six separate books written over a period of 1500+ years in three different languages and written by over 40 authors who came from different walks of life, the Bible remains a single unified book from beginning to end. But as with any book, you must put the first chapter and the last chapter and every chapter in between into context with each other. You cannot pull out a single verse or a passage from these sixty-six books and call it the answer. The truth will come from the context of that scripture with everything else that is written in the Bible.

One of the easiest ways for a person to contradict the Bible's authenticity, or to contradict what the Bible says about a certain topic, is to choose a verse or a passage and say, "This is what the Bible says about that topic..." Putting a verse or a passage in the Bible into context with the rest of the Bible is critical to understanding what God is saying about that topic. The Bible is a complex book and it can only be understood as a whole.

Also, many people say there are contradictions between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The fact is, it is very easy to open the Bible and read a passage and say, "That can't possibly apply anymore," or, "That verse contradicts what is stated in the Old Testament." That's why we must read the entire Bible to fully understand the context of God's teachings. Sometimes a seemingly out-of-date passage in the Old Testament is fully clarified in the New Testament. You must read the entire Bible in order to get the full message and meaning of what is being taught.

It is also important to understand that the New Testament does not make the Old Testament obsolete. The New Testament fulfills what is stated in the Old Testament. You must read the Old Testament and everything that is stated in the Old Testament, and then you must read the New Testament and everything that is stated in the New Testament, to get the full and accurate truth about any topic. Don't make the mistake of taking any of God's teachings in the Old Testament and believe it is the full truth. It may not be. Read the New Testament to see if God completed His point, His teaching, and His Truth regarding that topic.

²³⁴ Luke 24:44 He said to them, "This is what I told you, while I was still with you, that all things which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds, that they might understand the Scriptures.

²³⁵ 2 Tim 3:16 Every Scripture is God-breathed and {or, Every writing inspired by God is} profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

²³⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:6 not to think beyond the things which are written, that none of you be puffed up against one another.

Prophecies have come true

Another way to validate the authenticity of the Bible is to look at the prophecies contained within it - especially in the Old Testament. There are hundreds of detailed prophecies relating to the future of nations, the future of cities, what we should expect in terms of calamities and catastrophes, and the future of mankind. There are also hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the New Testament concerning the One who would come to live among us and the One who would become our Savior. All of these prophecies have happened just as God said they would (through His prophets), and there are more to come. Be sure to read the sister book to this book entitled, "It's Time." This other book will inform you of what is yet to come - which we should all be aware.

If you count them all, there are over 300 prophecies concerning Jesus in the Old Testament. Many people think that Jesus is only described in the New Testament (e.g., born in a manger...). But the Old Testament talks about Jesus many times. The Old Testament foretold the city where Jesus would be born. The Old Testament foretold His family lineage. The Old Testament foretold how Jesus would enter the city of Jerusalem in His last days (e.g., on a donkey). The Old Testament foretold how He would die using a form of torture that hadn't even been invented yet (i.e., crucifixion).²³⁷ And the Old Testament foretold that He would rise from the dead after 3 days. This was all foretold to us in tremendous detail hundreds of years before it actually happened.

The Old Testament also makes it clear that Jesus' death on the cross would be His New Covenant²³⁸ that would save us from our sins. Through His prophets He told hundreds of people that He would come to earth, live among us, die for us, and that He would overcome death.²³⁹ And this is exactly what happened.

There is no way to explain the many prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled with incredible accuracy other than to say they were provided by divine origin. There is no other book that includes the extent and the accuracy of predictive prophecy that is contained in the Old Testament.

There is also physical evidence that indicates that the Bible is the Word of God. Archaeological evidences have proven that the dates in the Bible are accurate where the scrolls were found near the Dead Sea (near Qumran, Israel), as well as the many events that happened around that same time period. Not only that, but all of the archaeological and manuscript evidence that supports what is written in the Bible makes it the best documented book ever. The fact that the Bible accurately records historically verifiable events is a great indication of its truthfulness.

The integrity of the Bible's authors also provides evidence of the Bible's authenticity. All of Jesus' disciples left their families and occupations to follow Him. Every single one of them would eventually be beaten, imprisoned, and many of them would be killed proclaiming what they believed - that they believed that Jesus was God. How many people do you know would follow someone for three years and then choose to die for them if they didn't believe who he was? The fact that Jesus' disciples were willing to die for what they believed testifies that these men believed that they were being led by God.

²³⁷ Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions.

²³⁸ Luke 22:20 Likewise, he took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

²³⁹ Psalms 16:10 For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will you allow your holy one to see corruption.

God's definition of sin never changes

When Jesus died on the cross He paid the penalty for all who sin - which is all of us. But this doesn't mean that those who follow Jesus will always be perfect and will never sin. If you admit your sins and ask Jesus into your heart you will be saved and no future sin can turn you away from heaven. When Jesus died for you, He died for all of your sins - your past, your present, and even your future sins. But we still need to realize our sinful condition and confess to God that we are sinners. When we feel convicted it is because we feel shame for how we have acted and that we know that someday we will be held accountable for our sins.^{240 241 242}

Sin isn't sin just because we are tempted. Sin is a sin when we give in to a temptation and we act it out.²⁴³ Jesus was also tempted, but He didn't sin.²⁴⁴ He didn't elevate His desires over God's desires. Jesus' death on the cross represented a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for every sin that we have ever committed, including those that we haven't committed yet.^{245 246}

Do we need to give up our sinning to be saved? The answer is No, but we need to acknowledge them for what they are - they're sins. Sins are a violation of God's standards. Be careful not to rationalize your sins and say that what you are doing isn't that bad, or everyone else is doing it, or that God's standards are old and antiquated. God's standards never change. A sin is a sin. A sin one thousand years ago is a sin today.

Many people believe that God's standards should change to keep pace with the times. But God's moral standards never change. If something was sinful in the Old Testament it is also sinful in the New Testament. If it was sinful 2000 years ago it is sinful today. Unlike today's lawmakers, God never changes His mind or alters His laws.²⁴⁷ God's standards stay firm and unaltered.²⁴⁸ They were established and will remain the same forever and ever.²⁴⁹

It might be time to open the Bible and learn what it says. It isn't a book that is full of "do's and don'ts." The Bible is a book of incredible wisdom. It is meant to make your life easier. The Bible provides a description

²⁴⁰ Romans 14:12 So then each one of us will give account of himself to God.

²⁴¹ 2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

²⁴² 1 Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God. If it begins first with us, what will happen to those who don't obey the Good News of God?

²⁴³ James 1:14 But each one is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.

²⁴⁴ Hebrews 4:15 For we don't have a high priest who can't be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who has been in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.

²⁴⁵ Hebrews 9:28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, without sin, to those who are eagerly waiting for him for salvation.

²⁴⁶ Jeremiah 31:34 for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.

²⁴⁷ Psalms 89:34 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.

²⁴⁸ Luke 16:17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tiny stroke of a pen in the law to fall.

²⁴⁹ Psalms 111:7 The works of his hands are truth and justice. All his precepts are sure. 8 They are established forever and ever. They are done in truth and uprightness.

of personal, family and societal problems and prescribes solutions for each and every single one of them. Read the instruction manual, the answers are all there.

How do we live according to God's standards?

To live by God's standards we must live by the Spirit and not by the flesh.^{250 251} We need to listen to God's Spirit within us and heed what He says. It is only by the Spirit of God within us that we can overcome our sinful nature; we can never live up to God's standards on our own. We can try, but we will fail. We must understand that God's commandments were created to convict us and to make us aware that we are sinful.²⁵² We must accept the fact that we will always have sinful thoughts, do sinful things, and we can only be saved by believing that God came to earth to save us.

Jesus also wants us to know that obeying His commandments in the Old Testament is still of utmost importance because in the New Testament He teaches us, "Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."²⁵³

The end times – many will not believe, so do not follow those people

The Apostle Paul warns us in 2 Timothy 4: ³ *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.* ⁴ *They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

²⁵⁰ Romans 8:4 that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

²⁵¹ Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

²⁵² Romans 3:20 Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

²⁵³ Matthew 5:19 Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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Chapter 4

I was made – to know God's grand plan

Uncovering Satan's Plan

When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and told them not to eat from the tree of good and evil,²⁵⁴ and then Satan convinced Eve that it would be okay to eat the apple from that tree, this was Satan's first successful deception of the human race.²⁵⁵ That is when God transferred the authority of the earth over to Satan,^{256 257} and Satan has been deceiving us ever since.

But God knew this would happen.

God is bound by His Word. When God delegated the earthly realm over to Satan it allowed Satan to go on his man-hunt. This is why there is so much pain and suffering in our world today. This is because Satan and his fellow demons have control over the world in which we live - to deceive us, to hurt us, and to try

²⁵⁴ Genesis 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

²⁵⁵ Genesis 3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, ³ but of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ The serpent said to the woman, You won't surely die.

²⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:4 in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the Good News of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn on them.

²⁵⁷ Revelation 17:17 For God has put in their hearts to do what he has in mind, and to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.

and destroy us. Satan knows that he has been defeated because he saw Jesus' victory on the cross, but he still has some time to try and bring humans to hell with him.

God knows all about Satan because God created Satan. Satan is one of God's highest angels gone bad. God gave Satan so many incredible powers that Satan wanted to be God, but he couldn't - job taken. So Satan rebelled. He rebelled by doing whatever he could to convince other angels to follow him. And he did just that. He convinced about a third of God's angels to follow him.²⁵⁸ But since Satan can't destroy God, well, next in line is you, and me. Satan wishes to destroy humans because we are created in God's image.

So, with Satan having the ability to deceive humans all over the world and with the ability to lure us away from our Shepherd, and with humans having free will and an attitude of "I don't need anybody else and I will go wherever my pleasures take me" - what could possibly go wrong? Oh boy, you can almost hear the wolves salivating.

Kind of a bad combination, isn't it? This is a little bit like professional baseball players playing against little leaguers. Not much of a contest.

Satan is also an eternal spirit - which means Satan can deceive humans for eternity if allowed to.

Wow, this is really bad.

Humans are so easily deceived, and Satan is so cunning, that Satan just might deceive the entire human race - forever. How many little leaguers ever win a baseball game against professional baseball players? Not many.

Okay, none.

It really isn't that hard to deceive humans. Convince humans to satisfy their carnal desires and tell them that there will be no consequences. Convince humans that we can violate God's standards and nobody will ever know. Convince humans that having more "things" will make us happier. Convince humans that if we don't like what we have - well, just throw it away and start over, including marriages, kids, relationships, and so much more. Convince humans that it's all about "me" and don't worry that it might hurt others. And especially, send people to us that have great sounding opinions to try to deceive us into thinking that their opinions make the violations of God's standards okay.

Living in ignorance

Basically, give Satan free reign over the entire human race and let him have a field day with all of the people that he can deceive. But don't ever tell humans about the destruction that will be left in their wake when they sin - the suffering, the sorrow, the agony, the broken relationships and despair. And surely don't tell humans that God's protection will be removed when they sin because God is holy and He can't help sinful people.

This is pretty much the perfect scenario for Satan. Let Satan convince humans to wander, humans listen. Humans stray too far from their protector and they get hurt. Satan then tells them that God has abandoned them. And then the humans - as ignorant as many are - can't seem to figure out why they are suffering; they can't connect the dots. They are like sheep who are lured away from their shepherd and aren't wise enough to realize that it was their shepherd who was protecting them. After the wolves have them surrounded - they can't figure out what they did wrong.

²⁵⁸ Revelation 12 ⁴ Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.

Satan absolutely loves it when humans live in ignorance of God and His powers. Let's take a moment and refresh our memory of what ignorance means:

Adjective.

1. *lacking in knowledge or training; unlearned*
2. *uninformed; unaware*
3. *due to or showing lack of knowledge or training*
4. *lacking knowledge or information as to a particular subject or fact*

As you can see, it is not a good thing to be ignorant of God and His powers - this is what Satan feeds off of.

The angels that Satan convinced to follow him, we call these bad angels demons - because their agenda is to destroy. They are demonic, which means evil. Satan hates God so much that Satan will do everything he can to deceive and destroy anything and everything that is made in the image of God. We can't see these demonic angels because they are spirits, but these spirits are everywhere. Their goal is to destroy us. Just turn on the news to see how successful they are - you would have to say they are pretty successful. You can't watch the news for even one minute without seeing how Satan and his minions are busy destroying something, and everything.

That's why every time a human being does something that hurts himself, or others, Satan is off in the corner saying to himself, "Yay, I deceived another one!" Satan hits the jackpot when he deceives a human to kill himself while at the same time killing others in the name of (pick any word, they've all been used). When this happens Satan is ecstatic that God's creations are being killed on both sides.

But God knew this would happen - and He had a plan. Yes, a perfect plan.

God's grand plan

Who was in the garden?

We know that God is spirit and spirits are invisible. So, who was visible and walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden shortly after Adam sinned?²⁵⁹

Remember in Genesis 1 where it says, "Let us make mankind in our image."²⁶⁰ As we learned in chapter 1, the "us" and "our" in this verse refers to (1) God the Father, (2) God's Son, who is Jesus, and (3) God's Holy Spirit. So when God said, "Let us make mankind in our image" - they were all present when mankind was created.

This means if Jesus was present when mankind was created - it could have been Jesus who was walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was probably not God the Father who was in the Garden because of what Jesus' disciples told us:

- Timothy told us that no one can see God,²⁶¹ and
- John told us that no one has ever seen God the Father at any time.²⁶²

Jesus has always been God's representative on earth - appearing for Him and as Him. It is clear in scripture that Jesus and God the Father are One.²⁶³

This means that it is not only possible, it is actually quite likely that it was God in bodily form - Jesus - who was visible and walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden shortly after Adam sinned. If Timothy and John are correct that nobody has ever seen God the Father, it was probably Jesus (e.g., God in the flesh) who was in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned.

The incredible plan

If this is true, isn't it ironic that Adam and probably Jesus were in the Garden of Eden when Adam started the downfall of the human race through his sin, and Jesus was there at the same moment to save the human race with His plan?

These two events had to happen at the same time in the Garden otherwise God made a mistake. God knew Satan would deceive Adam in the garden (it's not that hard, remember?), and He also knew that He had to have a plan in place at the moment that Adam sinned to save us from our sins.

²⁵⁹ Genesis 3:8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

²⁶⁰ Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁶¹ 1 Timothy 6:16 who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and eternal power.

²⁶² John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The one and only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.

²⁶³ John 10:30 I and the Father are one.

This also means that it was probably Jesus, in the Garden, who knew at the very moment that Adam sinned that He would need to die for us. At the very second that there was sin, there was a solution. At the very moment that Adam sinned, Jesus presented Himself as our Savior. This was all part of God's grand plan.

A baby has to do nothing to get into heaven

This incredible plan in the Garden also means that every baby born into the world already has a Savior. A baby does not come into the world bearing the condemnation of sin, but through God's love and His grace as well as Jesus' death on the cross the baby is saved.²⁶⁴ The baby doesn't have to do anything to get into heaven. It is only when the child starts to knowingly sin that he will need to ask for God's forgiveness - through his faith in Jesus - to be saved.^{265 266 267}

Jesus wouldn't defeat Satan and sin until He died on the cross, but the game was in the bag. His rescue plan had been launched.²⁶⁸ Jesus knew that He couldn't come to earth to be the sacrifice for our sins anytime soon because He still needed to give us His ten commandments. Giving us His ten commandments hundreds of years later was for a reason - so we would learn that we couldn't possibly follow them. The commandments needed to convict us²⁶⁹ and make us guilty.

We needed to learn - that we needed a Savior.

Total destruction averted

God's plan in the Garden also means that Adam and everyone who has lived after Adam has not been left for even one second under the penalty of sin and condemnation. At the very moment that Adam sinned, Jesus was there to save us from our sins.²⁷⁰ There is only one condition - we need to believe in Him. We need to believe that Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins. It is the perfect plan, developed by a perfect God, executed to perfection by Jesus. We just need to believe.

This perfect plan solved the problem of a race under condemnation and in dire threat of total destruction. Jesus' plan in the Garden forever changed the condemnation that Adam, through his sin, gave to every single one of us.

²⁶⁴ Matthew 19:14 "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

²⁶⁵ Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore, thus says the LORD, "If you return, then I will restore you—before Me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, but as for you, you must not turn to them. ²⁰"Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you; for I am with you to save you and deliver you," declares the LORD.²¹ "So I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the grasp of the violent."

²⁶⁶ John 3:36 One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won't see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

²⁶⁷ John 5:24 "Most certainly I tell you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and doesn't come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life

²⁶⁸ Romans 6:18 Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness.

²⁶⁹ Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God. ²⁰ Because by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

²⁷⁰ Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.

So God knew that Satan would rebel, and He also knew that Adam would sin. But even knowing all of this God still created them - because the fall of mankind and Satan's rebellion is all part of God's grand plan to manifest His glory. This means that our free will and our sinning is the means by which God's glory and His will is carried out. And Jesus' plan to die for us on the cross is the central component of God's grand plan.^{271 272}

Jesus wasn't born because Adam's sin caused an unforeseen problem

This relationship between God and humanity - through Jesus - was never God's plan B. Jesus wasn't born because Adam's sin caused an unforeseen problem that had to be fixed. As stated in Ephesians, God had always purposed to become flesh:

Ephesians 1: ⁴For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

How can you predestine the human race to adoption through Jesus if Jesus is not to become human unless Adam falls into sin? Well, you can't.

This means that many people underestimate the place of Jesus in God's grand plan. God coming to earth was His plan from the very beginning - before the foundation of the world, before there was an Adam and Eve.²⁷³ God didn't suddenly become Trinitarian in the New Testament. God the Father, Jesus, and God's Holy Spirit is not a new form of triune god that God created to fix the fall of the human race. God coming to earth was always plan A and there was no other plan.²⁷⁴ Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega.²⁷⁵ Jesus was on the road to the incarnation (i.e., becoming human) while Adam was a mere thought in the mind of God.

God became human to accomplish His eternal purpose

So, how do you get from the fall of mankind - were everyone deserves to go to hell due to their sin - to people getting into heaven and being with God? The only way is through death; God demands a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus did not come to earth to die in order to change God. He came to earth to die for us so we can be changed. He did not get crucified on the cross to appease His Father's anger. He went to the cross to call a halt to the fall of the human race and to eliminate our estrangement from our Holy Creator. He went to the cross to be the sacrifice for our sins.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Acts 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

²⁷² 2 Corinthians 5:21 For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

²⁷³ John 8:56 "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

²⁷⁴ Revelation 21:6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

²⁷⁵ Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

²⁷⁶ Romans 3 ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

This - was God's plan from the very beginning.

The fall of the human race had been anticipated by God. God became human to accomplish His eternal purpose - to adopt us into His family through His son, Jesus. We must believe that Jesus came to earth to live for us, and die for us, to become a child of God.

Satan serves God's purpose

Since all of this was anticipated, does this mean that Satan somehow serves God's purpose?

The answer is Yes. Satan is cunning, but he isn't wise. He can't figure out how to counter God's perfect plan. Satan's effort to destroy you and me actually produces the opposite effect. God knows that people will draw closer to Him when suffering comes into their life. Our suffering, while inflicted by Satan, is allowed by God. And through Satan's efforts to destroy you and me, God gains a more intimate relationship with us - which is exactly what He wants!

This shows the important role that Satan plays in God's grand plan. God uses Satan and sin to achieve His ultimate purpose. Satan's power is given to him by God, and it is God's providence that allows Satan to do what he does. Satan has power to affect us - but only by how much God allows.

But even though Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, this doesn't mean that God is the author of sin. Nor does it mean that God tempted Adam and Eve to sin. God tempts no one.²⁷⁷ He simply uses Satan for His purpose.

God also uses Satan to bring about His divine discipline. Satan is allowed to do only what God has planned for His glory, and our good. Through Satan's opposition to God's instruction manual - God's purposes are fulfilled. After we suffer from our sin and our disobedience God restores us and makes us strong, firm, and steadfast.²⁷⁸ Our suffering is used to produce humility and a dependence on God.

All of this means that the harder Satan works to oppose the gospel, the more he actually promotes it. God has purposed Satan's existence and his opposition to God's standards to fulfill God's grand plan.²⁷⁹ In everything that Satan does, and is allowed to do, he is actually serving God.

How can a Holy God have sin in His plan?

Think about it. The glory of God is actually declared by allowing sin in the world:

- Having sin in the world allows for God's mercy and His compassion^{280 281}

²⁷⁷ James 1:13 for God can't be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.

²⁷⁸ 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.

²⁷⁹ Acts 26:18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

²⁸⁰ Exodus 33:19 And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."

²⁸¹ Micah 7:18 Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of his heritage? He doesn't retain his anger forever, because he delights in loving kindness.

- It allows God to show His love and His forgiveness of our sins²⁸²
- It allows God to show His righteousness and His wrath to those who deny Him²⁸³
- And, through Satan, it shows that God doesn't leave the guilty unpunished²⁸⁴ just like any good court system

God is actually glorified by condemning the guilty to hell. Our courts would not be legitimate if they didn't condemn a murderer to a long prison sentence. So our courts are glorified, in effect, they are made legitimate by their accurate sentences of people who abuse the law. This means that God's wrath is justified and God is glorified when He provides for man's forgiveness, and man rejects it.

This means that behind Satan and all of Satan's unrighteous deeds is a holy, righteous, and a compassionate God who causes all things to work for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to his purpose.²⁸⁵

God has executed a glorious plan that includes a solution that accomplishes His eternal purpose. His eternal purpose is to adopt us into His family - through Jesus. Not everybody can get in; only those who believe.

This means that His wrath and His mercy highlight His glory - and you can't have either without the fall of the human race.

Our suffering is the means by which God perfects us

This was His plan from the very beginning. God chose to allow sin and suffering in the world because He wants a relationship with us. He wants us to know His will.²⁸⁶ He wants us to love Him.²⁸⁷ He wants us to lean on Him.²⁸⁸ He wants us to have faith in Him.²⁸⁹ He wants us to follow His standards.²⁹⁰ If we do all of these things He will bless us.

²⁸² Numbers 14:18 The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression;

²⁸³ Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

²⁸⁴ Exodus 34:6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

²⁸⁵ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

²⁸⁶ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

²⁸⁷ Deuteronomy 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

²⁸⁸ Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

²⁸⁹ Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Allowing us to be tempted by Satan, and then allowing us to experience the hurt that follows our sinful desires, draws us closer to God. God may even allow you to be totally broken - because He loves you that much. He will let you reap what you sow^{291 292} to draw you closer to Him.

As you learned in an earlier chapter, we should feel blessed when God disciplines us because it means He loves us.^{293 294} If He didn't love us He wouldn't discipline us. Our trials and our suffering is the means by which our faith is proven.²⁹⁵ So basically, our suffering is the means by which God perfects us, strengthens us, and molds us into the creation that He can use²⁹⁶ which will make us steadfast. The very same trials that Satan puts us through to destroy us - God turns into good.

Do you remember in an earlier chapter that Satan must first ask Jesus before he can tempt you?²⁹⁷ This is part of God's grand plan to build your faith in Him, and to glorify God.

I can know God, really?

Marked with a seal

Yes, you can know God and His will. In fact, God wants you to know His will.²⁹⁸

Knowing God is why we were born. It is the nature of our existence. There is not a single one of us that just appeared on this earth without a plan and a purpose. God chose us before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.²⁹⁹ In Him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan

²⁹⁰ Ezekiel 5:7 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because you have more turmoil than the nations which surround you and have not walked in My statutes, nor observed My ordinances, nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you,' ⁸ therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments among you in the sight of the nations.'

²⁹¹ Job 4:8 those who plow iniquity, and sow trouble, reap the same.

²⁹² Proverbs 22:8 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed.

²⁹³ 1 Peter 3:14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "Don't fear what they fear, neither be troubled."

²⁹⁴ James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him.

²⁹⁵ 1 Peter 1:7 that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

²⁹⁶ 1 Peter :10 But may the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

²⁹⁷ Job 1:12 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

²⁹⁸ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

²⁹⁹ Ephesians 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love; 5 having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, 6 to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely bestowed favor on us in the Beloved.

of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will in order that we who were the first to put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of His glory.³⁰⁰

But to truly know God and to learn His plan for you, you must repent of your sins and believe that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you. When you commit and become a believer in Jesus you are marked in Him with a seal - and God's Holy Spirit will live within you.³⁰¹ It is the Holy Spirit who will be your advocate who will help testify about God.³⁰² The Holy Spirit will also teach you all things and will remind you of everything that Jesus promised.³⁰³

Why you were born

Many people live for a very long time but they don't understand why they were born. Here is the answer: To know God. God created you to know Him. When you understand this - your life can begin. You will be at peace. You can have joy. Your search for the meaning of life will be over. Your grandiose expectations of what life "should be" about, false as it may be, will disappear. You will be free. And this will allow you to enjoy who you are and the process that you will go through. It will be an exhilarating ride, so hold on.

God will set you free due to His grace alone. There are no loans to repay. No obligations. No duties. No payments. No offerings needed. No work needs to be done. There is nothing that you must do to get to heaven. It's all been done for you. You simply need to accept Jesus' free gift and then you can start to enjoy the reason why you were born, which is to know God. And when you put your trust in God - He promises to take care of you, and He also promises to give you the desires of your heart.³⁰⁴

You now have direct access to God

The great thing about knowing God is there is no effort. There is nothing you must do. Jesus did everything for you on the cross. Everything. When Jesus died on the cross Satan's defeat was complete and Satan knew it. This was the plan that was put in place at the beginning of time, started in the Garden, and completed when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. Jesus defeated Satan and He defeated sin. And through both of these God is glorified.

The very moment that Jesus died on the cross the huge and heavy curtain that separated people from the inner sanctuary in the Jewish temple was torn from top to bottom. God ripped it. With Jesus' death on the cross God's plan was complete, and the ripping of this huge and heavy curtain was just one of Jesus' many messages to all of us. Jesus' death on the cross removed this human barrier - this man-made curtain - that used to exist between God and man. By ripping this huge and heavy curtain God was telling us, "You are no longer on the outside. My Son, Jesus, has made a way for you to have direct access to Me. Come on in. I'm waiting for you."

³⁰⁰ Ephesians 1:11 in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will; 12 to the end that we should be to the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ.

³⁰¹ Ephesians 1:13 in whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the Good News of your salvation,--in whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

³⁰² John 15:26 When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me.

³⁰³ John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.

³⁰⁴ Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

With this curtain gone you no longer need to go through anyone to reach God. No people. No rituals. No barriers. No specific building. Nothing is in the way. You can talk to God right now, right this minute, wherever you are. Remember, your heart is the door through which God will enter but He will never force His way in. He will wait until you let Him in. He will knock (feel your heart, He may be knocking right now), and then He will wait for you to answer. Just ask Him in. He will come in if you invite Him in. Chapter 5 will teach you how to invite Him - be sure to read it.

This was God's plan from the very beginning when He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to live and die for us. Through your belief and your faith in what God said would happen in the Old Testament - which happened exactly as He said it would in the New Testament - God can be with you now. The God and Creator of the universe can be with you right now. But you must believe.

Jesus came to earth to reveal who He is and to tell us how we can have a relationship with Him. God is a single and eternal God but He exists in the relationship of three persons: God the Father, God's Son (Jesus), and God's Holy Spirit. When the earth was created, all three were there. When mankind was created, all three were there. When Jesus ascended to heaven approximately 40 days after He rose from the dead He left behind His Spirit to live within those who believe^{305 306} so His Spirit can lead us and guide us in everything that we do.

God has saved each of us not because of what we have done, or what we will or could do, but because of His mercy alone.³⁰⁷ It is through our faith and His mercy alone that we are saved.³⁰⁸ God in three persons - they all exist in perfect unity, to give us life, to adopt us into God's family, and to give us hope and a future.

God's incredible creativity

Whether you admit it or not - everyone has been created with a desire to search for the One who created them. We have all been made to discover who God is and to find satisfaction and joy in Him. This is the reason why we were born. He made us all so very different, in vastly different cultures, in different nations,³⁰⁹ so we might search for Him and discover who He is.

God's incredible creativity is clearly visible in everything that we see here on earth, in the heavens above, and in the oceans below. Because of all that God has created, which can be clearly seen, we are without excuse in knowing who God is.³¹⁰ For the heavens declare the glory of God.³¹¹

³⁰⁵ Acts 15:8 God, who knows the heart, testified about them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just like he did to us.

³⁰⁶ Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

³⁰⁷ Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit

³⁰⁸ 1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy became our father again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

³⁰⁹ Acts 17:26 He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.'

³¹⁰ Romans 17:26 He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.'

If you were able to look inside the human body with an electron microscope, you would see incredibly tiny machines and motors - with gears and axles and drive-shafts and so much more - that could have only been designed by an incredible Designer and Creator.

Note: There is a video on YouTube.com that you might want to watch that shows human cells that are incredibly complex molecular machines - with gears and axles and drive-shafts and much more. If any of these parts were missing on the day the motors (our cells) were created, we wouldn't be here today.

The video is called "Michael Behe - Lee Strobel - Molecular Machines Disprove Evolution" (URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7WwO1iETuw>).

If you are on a computer while reading this book simply click on the link above (you may have to hold down your CTL button) and watch and enjoy. If you are not reading this book on a computer be sure to watch the video when you have the opportunity.

All human beings have been created to know God and to have the ability to discern that He exists. All humans can arrive at a basic understanding of God's incredible creativity through mathematics, the sciences, analysis, and much more. Look at something as simple as a blade of grass and just try to comprehend the miracle that is within that blade. It takes quantum mechanics and quantum physics to explain the efficiency and the complexity of photosynthesis that is within that blade. God's purpose in giving us these extraordinary areas of creativity and design is to pique our interest so we will want to ask and gather more information about Him.³¹²

God will make known to you the path of life

God has also placed eternity in our hearts - which means that the longing that we have to understand who God is cannot be replaced by anything else. If you try to fill this longing with anything but God you will be left with an empty feeling. This is why so many people wonder as they grow older, "Is this all there is?"

For many people this is because they haven't invited God into their heart. God is knocking - simply open your heart and let Him in. He wants to share His unimaginable fortunes with you. But you must let Him in. He can't reveal Himself to you unless you open your heart. Stop trying to figure things out all by yourself. Simply trust in God; He will make known to you the path of life.³¹³ For God told us through His prophet Isaiah, ⁸"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

But never forget that there is a power in the world by the name of Satan who wishes to keep you from learning who God is. Satan hates God so much that he wishes to destroy anything and everything that is made in the image of God - and that includes you. Satan's goal is to deceive you, confuse you, darken your

³¹¹ Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech, and night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun.

³¹² Acts 17:27 that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us

³¹³ Psalms 6:11 You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

understanding,³¹⁴ corrupt your affections,³¹⁵ cause your priorities to be turned upside down,³¹⁶ which will, if you listen to him, render you so ineffectual that God Himself may choose to distance Himself from you.³¹⁷ Don't let that happen to you. Remember, Satan absolutely loves it when humans live in ignorance of God. When we live in ignorance of God this is when our lives are not our own; we will be controlled by Satan.

If we claim to be wise by denying the existence of God, we become fools^{318 319 320 321} - and worse, we become an enemy of the very God that we know exists in our hearts. Remember, God's laws have been written in your heart. Through your free will, however, you will always have the option of denying God. That is an option that your loving Father has given you.³²² If God demanded that you love Him - He could never have a true relationship with you.

³¹⁴ Ephesians 4:18 being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their hearts; 19 who having become callous gave themselves up to lust, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

³¹⁵ Romans 1:24 Therefore God also gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

³¹⁶ Ecclesiastes 7:29 Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they search for many schemes.

³¹⁷ Romans 1:21 Because, knowing God, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 and traded the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. 26 For this reason, God gave them up to vile passions. For their women changed the natural function into that which is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural function of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another, men doing what is inappropriate with men, and receiving in themselves the due penalty of their error. 28 Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil habits, secret slanderers, 30 backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them.

³¹⁸ Psalms 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt. They have done abominable works. There is none who does good.

³¹⁹ Psalms 107:17 Fools are afflicted because of their disobedience, and because of their iniquities.

³²⁰ Proverbs 1:32 For the backsliding of the simple will kill them. The careless ease of fools will destroy them;

³²¹ Proverbs 14:9 Fools mock at making atonement for sins, but among the upright there is good will.

³²² Jude 1:4 For there are certain men who crept in secretly, even those who were long ago written about for this condemnation: ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master, God, and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Yes, you can discover the knowledge of God

When you accept Jesus into your heart you won't be able to get any closer to God - because He will be within you.³²³ Through your belief in Jesus you will have full access to God.³²⁴ If you accept Jesus and store up His commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, if you ask for discernment and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as you would look for silver, and search for it as for a hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and you will discover the knowledge of God.³²⁵

Ephesians 1: ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, ¹⁹and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the One to come. ²²And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

³²³ Luke 17:20 Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God would come, he answered them, The Kingdom of God doesn't come with observation; 21 neither will they say, 'Look, here!' or, 'Look, there!' for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.

³²⁴ Ephesians 2:14 For he is our peace, who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, 15 having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace; 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

³²⁵ Proverbs 2:1 My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, ² make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; ³ for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; ⁴ if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; ⁵ Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God.

Believing without seeing

The fabric between heaven and earth

Many people have seen beautiful tapestries. Many of the designs on these tapestries are filled with beautiful patterns, colors, shapes, some have meanings and relationships in the designs, some have ornate borders, and when you look at these beautiful tapestries all you can really say is "Wow!"

But, have you ever looked on the back side of these tapestries? It's a total mess. There are none of the qualities on the back side that you see on the front. The strings and threads are all tangled, mixed up, cut up, dangling, torn, and even ripped. There is nothing that resembles a design on the back side and there is nothing beautiful about it. What an incredible difference between the front and the back sides. If you couldn't see both sides at the same time - you might not even believe it's the same tapestry!

Now, just for a moment, imagine that one of these beautiful tapestries is between us, on earth, and heaven. Guess which side we see? Yep, we see the crummy side. We see the mess. We see death, disease, heartache, injustice, broken relationships, and so much more. When God transferred authority of the earth over to Satan after Adam sinned, this is when our side of the tapestry started to get really messy. But since God knew that Satan would rebel, and Adam would sin, God knew that our side would be a mess - until God's plan is complete.

God would have made a huge mistake if He didn't know all of this would happen. But God doesn't make mistakes.

So, God's plan before Adam sinned included creating a tapestry with both sides bringing Him glory. The very messy back side of the tapestry, which is our world controlled by Satan, is actually a very important part of God's sovereign plan to manifest His glory and to accomplish His eternal purpose of adopting us into His family - through Jesus. This means that the back side of the tapestry, which is earth, and the front side of the tapestry, which is heaven, are both important elements of God's grand plan.

And Jesus' death on the cross is the thread through which the back side and front side is knit together. In effect, Jesus is the fabric of God's grand plan.^{326 327}

Without Jesus we would be stuck on the back side forever - on the ugly side. Without Jesus we would never get to see the front side. Jesus gives us a free pass to the front and there is nothing we must do to get there. We simply need to believe. We simply need to believe that the thread of God's grand plan is His son, Jesus, and that through this thread Jesus is our path to the front side where we will see God's beautiful design - which is heaven.

As messy as the back side of the tapestry is, which is our world controlled by Satan, God provides a miracle for each of us as we live through trials and difficult times. He uses our difficulties and our suffering to strengthen our faith in Him. Our trials and our suffering is the means by which our faith is proven.³²⁸ The very same trials that Satan puts us through to destroy us (i.e., on the back side of the tapestry), God uses

³²⁶ Acts 2:23 him, being delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by the hand of lawless men, crucified and killed.

³²⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:21 For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

³²⁸ 1 Peter 1:7 that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

for our deliverance³²⁹ in our preparation for His Kingdom (i.e., on the front). We will get to the front of the tapestry through our faith in Jesus, and only Jesus.

Jesus is the fabric of God's grand plan

Unfortunately, we can't see God's side of the tapestry - well, at least not yet. We must have faith that the design on the front is as beautiful as He says it is. But even though we can't see God's beautiful design on the front He has given us many of His design notes. His notes, which are scattered throughout the Bible, give us a wonderful glimpse into what the front of the tapestry looks like.

His notes say that He will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain,³³⁰ and righteousness will indwell us.³³¹ Through His Word we have been given a wonderful glimpse of heaven. We won't see His beautiful design until we join Him, but when we do it is going to be an awesome sight.^{332 333 334} That is when we will finally understand what God has been up to all these years. This is when we will see how our lives, including all of the trials and difficult times that we have lived through,^{335 336 337 338} have been woven into His beautiful design on the front side. God will allow us to be included in His beautiful design on the front side through our faith in Jesus. Jesus is the thread of God's beautiful design and the fabric of God's grand plan.

But, until we see God's beautiful design on the front side we will need to trust in Him and have faith that His plan, through Jesus, was meant to save us and adopt us into His family where He will share His inheritance with us.

Until we get there, however, we must accept the fact that on our messy side of the tapestry there will be death, illness, disease, injustice, heartache, and so much more. We must also understand that we will be attacked while on the back side by the evil one who wishes to keep us from ever seeing the front side. Satan wishes to keep us on the back of the tapestry where he is condemned for eternity. Satan does not want you to learn about the thread, the thread that will get you to the front.

³²⁹ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

³³⁰ Revelation 21:4 He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away.

³³¹ 2 Peter 3:13 But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

³³² Matthew 13:45 Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls.

³³³ Matthew 25:1 Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom.

³³⁴ Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

³³⁵ Deuteronomy 7:19 the great trials which your eyes saw and the signs and the wonders and the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the LORD your God brought you out. So shall the LORD your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid.

³³⁶ Luke 22:28 But you are those who have continued with me in my trials.

³³⁷ 1 Thessalonians 3:3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you know that we are appointed to this task.

³³⁸ 1 Peter 1:6 Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been put to grief in various trials.

So, as we live our lives on the back side of the tapestry it is not always going to be pleasant, or pretty, or fun. We won't always understand why God is allowing trials and calamities in our life,³³⁹ but we must have faith that the difficulties that we are living through will be woven into His beautiful design. We must have faith that we will be with Him in paradise no matter what we have done - if we believe in Him, which is what Jesus told one of the criminals hanging on the cross next to him just moments before He died.

It is through our brokenness that we are drawn closer to God. It is through our brokenness that we learn that we can't make it through life without a Savior. It is through our brokenness that we learn that there is evil in the world - a force that cannot be ignored. It is only through Jesus that we can defeat sin. And it is only through Jesus that we can defeat Satan's influences in our lives. We must always remember that in everything that happens in our life, God has a reason for driving the bus over that particular road³⁴⁰ - sometimes bumpy, and sometimes smooth. All of our experiences are for our spiritual development. We now understand that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to His purpose.³⁴¹

Believing in God's plan requires faith

A lot of what we just discussed requires that you believe that God has a plan. Do you believe that God has a plan, or do you believe that all of this is just a really great story? What are you putting your faith in? Are you putting your faith in God and His Word, or are you putting your faith in the things that you see and hear in the world? Or, maybe you are putting your faith in you? Maybe you - is all you need. Maybe things are going so well for you that you don't need anything, or anybody, because you have everything under control, and everything is in your control.

You might even believe that there is no God - so why would you need any faith? That seems to work pretty well until someone close to you dies, or you fall off a ladder and become paralyzed, or you get cancer and have two months to live, or someone walks into your school and shoots one of your children. When these things happen we are all wired to call out to God.³⁴² It is the nature of our existence. Knowing there is a God is hardwired into our DNA.³⁴³

Here's another really important question for you: What are you going to do about all of this information? Are you going to ignore God, or deny that He exists? Or, will you take just a moment and try to find out more about Him? You can ignore or deny God all you want - but He will never ignore or deny you. God will continue to stand outside the door of your heart and He will wait for you to invite Him in.³⁴⁴ He is there right now. Can you hear Him? He has so much to share with you, but you must invite Him in. He will come in if you ask Him to. Simply ask. You could spend an eternity in hell if you let your pride keep Him out. Eternity is a very long time.

³³⁹ 1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you. 13 But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy.

³⁴⁰ Lamentations 3:38 Doesn't evil and good come out of the mouth of the Most High?

³⁴¹ Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

³⁴² Hebrews 10:16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."

³⁴³ Jeremiah 24:7 I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.

³⁴⁴ Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened.

God's majestic design of the heavens and the earth are clearly evident to everyone - so we are without excuse in knowing that He is real.³⁴⁵ For the heavens declare the glory of God.³⁴⁶

Note: If you like math, one scientist and mathematician has determined that the probability that the earth came into existence with the ability to maintain life as we know it - is approximately 1/10³²². That would be .000 (plus another 319 "0s") and then a 1. Check out the article entitled "Evidence for God from Probability" on www.PleaseConvinceMe.com. This infinitesimally small number is just for the earth. What about man? If you look at the incredible complexities within each of us you might also say that the probability of humans coming into existence without a Creator is also infinitesimally small. You would then need to multiply these two infinitesimally small numbers together to get the probability of earth and humans somehow coming into existence without a Creator. This would be about the same probability of shooting a bullet toward the center of our galaxy (about 30,000 light-years away) and assuming the bullet could leave the earth's gravitational pull and travel at the speed of light - it would travel for 30,000 light years and hit a target in the center of our galaxy the size of a peanut. And we haven't even discussed the probability of the butterfly yet - a creature that must actually die in order to be born. What's the probability that a butterfly could actually "evolve" through a death (an evolutionary life-death-life scenario?) to become what it is today - without a Creator? Oh my, this is becoming an incredibly small number. And then there are thousands upon thousands of additional species in the animal and insect worlds that also have incredible complexity, with many of them needing all their current capacities on day 1 in order to survive; they would never have survived in order to evolve.

You will see it when you believe it

Because we're human, we tend to put our trust and faith in things that we can see, not in things that we can't see. It is so much harder to believe in things that we can't see. We have probably all said at one time or another, "I'll believe it when I see it."

Well, unfortunately, this is not how God operates. In fact, with God, it's just the opposite. With God it is, "You will see it when you believe it."³⁴⁷

With God it is all about faith and trust. When we have a close friend that we know really well he has probably earned our trust. This gives us faith that he will do what he says he will do. It's no different with God. To trust God we need to know Him really well, and to know Him really well we need to read and understand His instruction manual, the Bible. The Bible says that He cares for those who trust Him.^{348 349 350}

³⁴⁵ Romans 1:19 because that which is known of God is revealed in them, for God revealed it to them. 20 For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse.

³⁴⁶ Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God. The expanse shows his handiwork. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech, and night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun.

³⁴⁷ Matthew 21:22 All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.

³⁴⁸ Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

³⁴⁹ Nahum 1:7 The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him.

³⁵⁰ Jeremiah 39:18 For I will certainly rescue you, and you will not fall by the sword; but you will have your own life as booty, because you have trusted in Me," declares the LORD.

Well, you're in luck! God would like to spend time with you as well. God says in Jeremiah 29, ¹³ *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* ¹⁴ *I will be found by you,* declares the LORD.

Without faith it will be impossible

When you put your trust in God the weight of the world will be lifted off your shoulders.³⁵¹ Having trust in God requires faith, and having faith in God is critical because without faith it is impossible to please Him. God will only reward those who earnestly seek Him.³⁵² We need to study His Word to have confidence in Him and to hear Him speak to us. When you spend time reading His Word it will help strengthen your faith in Him. And when you believe in Him that is when He will start answering your prayers.³⁵³ At that point He will help you make decisions based on what He is leading you to do.

When we think about this level of trust we often say to ourselves, "I can't do that, that's too difficult. How can I put my trust in something that I can't see?"

This is a common feeling for a lot of people, and it's also a common roadblock to understanding who God is. But, wouldn't you know, God has a solution for you. When you accept Jesus into your heart God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, takes up residence in your heart.³⁵⁴ And because the Holy Spirit knows you better than you know yourself, He will give you all that you need, including understanding, patience, and kindness.³⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit will help you trust in God.³⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit will help catch you when you stumble.³⁵⁷ And the Holy Spirit will help you succeed where you would otherwise fail.³⁵⁸

You might be saying to yourself, "That will take a lot of faith!" or, "That will take a miracle!" The good news is: the miracle is available to you. You simply need to accept Him into your heart. Open the door of your heart and let Him in. It is only when you let Him in that He can reveal himself to you.

True faith

Most of us are willing to put our trust in almost anything but God. We will trust a spouse, a friend, a boss, a doctor, maybe a relative. But, God? No way! That's way too risky. How can I possibly trust in something that I can't see?

Proverbs 3 says, ⁶ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight.*

It is when we lean on our own understanding that we get ourselves in trouble.

³⁵¹ Psalms 111:7 The works of his hands are truth and justice. All his precepts are sure.

³⁵² Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to him, for he who comes to God must believe that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

³⁵³ Psalms 17:6 I have called on you, for you will answer me, God. Turn your ear to me. Hear my prayer.

³⁵⁴ Acts 5:32 We are His witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

³⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 6:6 in pureness, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love.

³⁵⁶ Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

³⁵⁷ 2 Tim 1:14 That good thing which was committed to you, guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

³⁵⁸ Luke 1:37 For everything spoken by God is possible.

Have you ever felt like you are caught in an endless loop with a certain situation in your life? Maybe you feel like you are living through the same bad circumstance, or maybe a bad situation, over and over again. Well, you might be. And Satan loves it when we are stuck in that kind of loop because it usually means we aren't getting any closer to God. Receiving what God wants you to have depends on being connected with Him. If you submit to Him, and have faith in Him, He promises to make your path straight.³⁵⁹ His straight path will help get you out of that recurring loop in your life.

To change, however, won't be easy. Having true faith in God may require you to abandon nearly everything you have ever seen, felt, heard, and maybe even believed regarding what you "think" is right, and what you "think" will bring you happiness. Are you ready for this type of change? Much of what you have thought in the past has been a lie anyway. Has Satan led you down the primrose path? He probably has. Then change! It will make your life so much easier.

³⁵⁹ Proverbs 3:6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

The secret

The secret is trusting in God in everything that you do, with every major decision that you make,³⁶⁰ not trusting in your own understanding,³⁶¹ being still and listening for His voice,³⁶² not being afraid,³⁶³ not being anxious,³⁶⁴ valuing others above yourself,³⁶⁵ observing His commands,³⁶⁶ relying on Him when you are in trouble,³⁶⁷ loving Him with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind,³⁶⁸ so the Holy Spirit can teach you all things³⁶⁹ and give you the desires of your heart.³⁷⁰

If you do all of this, God will fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him so you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit³⁷¹ and He will give you abundance in all things.³⁷²

Are you ready for this type of change? If your answer is yes, here's how...

³⁶⁰ Deuteronomy 17:11 and according to the judgment which they shall tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall show you, to the right hand, nor to the left..

³⁶¹ Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

³⁶² Psalms 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.

³⁶³ Mark 5:36 But Jesus, when he heard the message spoken, immediately said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Don't be afraid, only believe."

³⁶⁴ Philippians 4:6 In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

³⁶⁵ Philippians 2:3 doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others better than himself; 4 each of you not just looking to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.

³⁶⁶ Deuteronomy 8:6 Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

³⁶⁷ Psalms 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

³⁶⁸ Luke 10:27 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.".

³⁶⁹ John 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.

³⁷⁰ Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

³⁷¹ Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷² 2 Peter 1:2 Grace to you and peace be multiplied in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord

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Chapter 5

I was made – to choose

Before we die, we must choose

We deserve death

The Old Testament is where God gave us His ten commandments. The Old Testament is also where God told us that He would need to live among us^{373 374} because our sins would require a Savior.³⁷⁵ His plan is outlined in the Old Testament - which was written hundreds of years before God actually came to earth to live among us.

Of course, Jesus wouldn't come to earth and die for us for another thousand years. God knew that we needed time - plenty of time - to learn that we needed a Savior. But the Savior was already known.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Zechariah 2:10 Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the LORD. ¹¹ "Many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

³⁷⁴ Leviticus 26:12 I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you will be my people.

³⁷⁵ Zechariah 3:9 For behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave an inscription on it, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.

³⁷⁶ Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,"

There is no other way or by no other name by which one can be saved.^{377 378 379} Everyone who believes in Jesus and proclaims it will be set free from sin.³⁸⁰ This includes your past, present, and all of your future sins. It is by God's grace alone that you are saved.³⁸¹ There is nothing else you can do to gain a ticket into heaven.³⁸² There is no way to earn it, or buy it. You must simply declare your faith in Jesus.³⁸³

God makes this gift available to everyone, but to be saved you must verbally³⁸⁴ accept His gift. You must believe in God's plan, the plan that He foretold in the Old Testament, and fulfilled in the New Testament. God gives you righteousness and eternity in heaven with Him through your faith in Jesus.³⁸⁵ That's it. Through Jesus your wounds can be healed.³⁸⁶

In the moments just before Jesus was about to die on the cross, God the Father turned His eyes away from Jesus and the sins of the world were heaped on Jesus.³⁸⁷ At this exact moment God had to disconnect His holiness from His son; this was the only time this would ever happen. This is because God the Father cannot be a part of sin, any sin. In complete agony Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"³⁸⁸ This separation from God the Father, and Jesus' proclamation as He suffered this excruciating death, was so Jesus could bear the sins of the world.³⁸⁹

³⁷⁷ Acts 4:12 There is salvation in none other, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, by which we must be saved!

³⁷⁸ John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you know him, and have seen him."

³⁷⁹ Isaiah 43:11 I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no savior besides Me.

³⁸⁰ Acts 13:38 Be it known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man is proclaimed to you remission of sins 39 and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

³⁸¹ Ephesians 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved.

³⁸² John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. 14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

³⁸³ Ephesians 2:8 for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, that no one would boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

³⁸⁴ Romans 10:9 that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart, one believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. 13 For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

³⁸⁵ Romans 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe.

³⁸⁶ 1 Peter 2:24 who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were going astray like sheep; but now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

³⁸⁷ 1 John 2:2 And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

³⁸⁸ Matthew 27:46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

His rescue plan complete

Those who believe in His perfect plan will be saved. Those who don't believe - well, their future won't be so glorious. Jesus' death on the cross was the defeat of Satan and sin. God's rescue plan was now complete.³⁹⁰ Anyone who puts their faith in Jesus will no longer go to hell with Satan.³⁹¹

On the third day after Jesus was crucified, He rose from the dead and showed Himself to His disciples and hundreds of other people.³⁹² This was to prove who He was - God in the flesh - and to remind us of His plan.³⁹³ There are many historical documents from this time period that state that people saw Jesus after He was crucified and buried. Jesus then visited various people for the next 40 days³⁹⁴ before He rose to heaven where He is today - at the right hand of God.³⁹⁵

It's never too late

As Jesus hung on the cross, there were two other crosses next to His with criminals hanging on each.³⁹⁶ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Jesus, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the second criminal rebuked the first, "Don't you fear God?" he said, "Since you are under the same sentence? We are being punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then the second criminal said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." And Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise."³⁹⁷

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, came to earth to save the lost. Just minutes before His death on the cross He saved another of His lost sheep - the criminal hanging on the cross next to Him. This criminal was a lost soul who heard and recognized his Shepherd's voice.

³⁸⁹ Isaiah 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

³⁹⁰ John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁰ This is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

³⁹¹ Revelation 12:9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

³⁹² Acts 10:41 who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

³⁹³ Hosea 6:2 After two days he will revive us. On the third day he will raise us up, and we will live before him.

³⁹⁴ Acts 1:3 To these he also showed himself alive after he suffered, by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's Kingdom.

³⁹⁵ Mark 16:19 So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

³⁹⁶ Luke 23:32 There were also others, two criminals, led with him to be put to death.

³⁹⁷ Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who was hanged insulted him, saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Don't you even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² He said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." ⁴³ Jesus said to him, "Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

And, he believed.

No matter what type of life you have lived

What does this mean to you? It should mean something very special. It means that no matter what type of life you have lived, even if you have committed grievous crimes, you still have the opportunity to turn your life over to Jesus and be saved before you die. That is God's gift to you for having faith in Him.³⁹⁸

Jesus' death on the cross looked to be Satan's victory. Satan thought it was the defeat of God and His kingdom. In reality, it was Satan's demise.³⁹⁹ It is now Satan who is condemned.⁴⁰⁰

Would you like to accept Jesus' gift right now? You must say the following prayer out loud⁴⁰¹ and you must repeat it while you are still alive. Don't wait. Remember, Satan is hoping you will delay this decision. Do it now and your decision will be complete. Simply say the following prayer out loud and believe that Jesus came to earth to die for your sins.

Dear God,

I don't understand everything - but I know that I am a sinner.

Because I am a sinner I deserve death and a permanent separation from you. Thank you for sending Jesus to die in my place.

I trust in Jesus alone to forgive my sins and accept His gift of eternal life. I ask that Jesus be my personal Savior and the Lord of my life.

Amen.

If you have repeated this prayer and you believe in Jesus, you have been saved. You have been saved to spend eternity in heaven with God. In your remaining years here on earth there is nothing more you must do - but there may be many things you will want to do. You are now blessed and God's Holy Spirit has entered your heart. We hope you will want to pass this blessing on to others. Tell them about this book so their eyes might also be opened.

You now have a mission. Be sure to read chapter 6 to learn what it is. Don't worry, it isn't a hard mission, it is something you will want to do. In fact, it is something you will love doing.

If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior you now have the opportunity to let your light shine before men so they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.⁴⁰²

Not making a decision – is a decision

Don't forget - not making a decision is a decision. Think about it for just a moment, it might not get done if you delay your decision any longer. This is what Satan is hoping you will do. Satan is hoping that you will not accept Jesus' free gift - which means Satan still has a chance. Satan knows that if you accept Jesus

³⁹⁸ Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

³⁹⁹ John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world. Now the prince of this world will be cast out.

⁴⁰⁰ John 16:11 about judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged.

⁴⁰¹ Romans 10:9 that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

⁴⁰² Matthew 5:16 Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

as your Savior his opportunity to bring you to hell with him is over. Satan is already condemned, but when you accept Jesus' free gift you will no longer be condemned. You will be saved. You will have opened the door of your heart and Jesus will have come in. He now wishes to share His glorious plan with you.

In Acts 22 it says: ¹⁶*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*

How should I live after I put my trust in God?

You will want to honor Him

If you accept Jesus into your heart you will want to live your life in a way that is pleasing to God. This is not because you have to, it is because you will want to.

God knew you before you were born⁴⁰³ and He saw that you were doomed to destruction because of Adam's sin. So He came to earth, lived a sinless life, and He died for you. He died for you so you wouldn't spend eternity in hell - which is where we all deserve to go for violating just one of God's commands. God didn't have to do what He did; He wanted to. He loves you that much. Even if you were the only person on earth He would have come to earth and died for you to save you from destruction. Just like a good shepherd.

Because of what Jesus did for you, you will want to honor Him with your choices. He honored you with His death, the very least you can do is honor Him with your choices. That's quite a bit simpler than what He did, don't you think?

The Bible gives us instructions as to how we can live our lives so we can be salt and light in the world⁴⁰⁴ glorifying God in all that we do. Scripture gives us guidance regarding the choices that we make - living as God's sons and daughters.⁴⁰⁵ His guidance includes living by His standards and living by His greatest commandment, which is, ³⁷*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* ³⁸*This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹*And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*⁴⁰⁶

Here are some other areas where you will want to align your choices and decisions with God's will:

1. Prioritize
2. Study the Bible
3. Go ahead and ask God
4. Quiet yourself - and then listen
5. Seek Godly counsel

⁴⁰³ Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.

⁴⁰⁴ Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men.

⁴⁰⁵ 2 Corinthians 6:18 And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

⁴⁰⁶ Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

6. We must exercise our faith
7. We must learn from our mistakes

Let's look at each of these:

Prioritize

If you believe in Jesus - what should your priorities be as a believer? According to Jesus, the greatest commandment is to love God and to love others.⁴⁰⁷ Following this command will be a very good start as you start working on your list. You will want to make decisions that honor God, and then you will want to make decisions that honor and love your family and your neighbors as yourself. That's right, God commands all of us to love your neighbors as yourself.

God loves you. This means He will want to support you in everything that you do.⁴⁰⁸ He will give you choices and He will reward you for the righteous decisions that you make.⁴⁰⁹ In many cases there won't be any right or wrong decisions, only personal preferences. Both of these are within God's perfect plan and His will for your life,⁴¹⁰ and both of these will lead to the fulfillment of God's purpose for your life⁴¹¹ as long as you follow Him.

Study the Bible

*Your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*⁴¹²

When making any key decision - there is an important question that you should always ask, "What does God say about it?"

When facing important decisions you should always research the Bible and see what God says about it. It might also help to ask others as they may have a better understanding of what the Bible says than you do. You should research the Bible because that is where God's guidance is located. Every scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in all righteousness.⁴¹³ So let God's Word direct your footsteps.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁷ Matthew 22:36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?":37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

⁴⁰⁸ John 16:27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

⁴⁰⁹ Jeremiah 32:19 great in counsel, and mighty in work; whose eyes are open on all the ways of the sons of men, to give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

⁴¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 8:5 Whoever keeps the commandment shall not come to harm, and his wise heart will know the time and procedure.

⁴¹¹ Philippians 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.

⁴¹² Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.

⁴¹³ 2 Tim 3:16 Every Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

⁴¹⁴ Psalms 119:133 Establish my footsteps in your word. Don't let any iniquity have dominion over me.

Go ahead and ask God

If you want to know what God wants - ask Him!⁴¹⁵ He is with you right now. In other words, pray. And then expect Him to answer your prayer. But don't always expect His answer right away. Oftentimes it is through someone else, or through a totally unpredictable situation, where He will answer your prayer. He might speak to you through a friend, or through someone that you don't even know; He is very good at that. God also has an incredible sense of humor so you might receive your answer through the weirdest of situations or circumstances. You could be at a place where you have never been to before (like a gas station), at a time you could never have planned (you just had a flat tire), surrounded by people you don't know (a bunch of teens just stopped in to buy some candy) - and BANG, your answer is given to you. When you hear God's answer be sure to praise Him for His responsiveness and His love for you. And then laugh your head off at the way He answered your prayer. He just loves doing this to people who love Him.

Also be sure to ask God for wisdom.⁴¹⁶ For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.⁴¹⁷ All godly wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Don't be a fool; fools despise wisdom and instruction from the Lord.⁴¹⁸

God wants to guide you and help you make important decisions in your life, and He promises to teach and instruct you through His Word.⁴¹⁹ For God knows the plans that He has for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.⁴²⁰ Let Him guide you - through His Word.

Quiet yourself – and listen

Many of us pray, but we don't listen. We view prayer as one-way communication. But God can't talk to us if we are continually talking, so we need to stop talking and we need to listen. Listening is probably the most important form of communication. Learning to recognize and hear God's voice is one of the most important aspects of a believer's life.

We will continue to struggle with our decisions if we don't learn to recognize God's voice. Remember the lambs that recognize their shepherd's voice and they follow only that voice? The lambs that don't recognize their shepherd's voice - well, they know not to follow that strange voice. We need to recognize our Shepherd's voice so we aren't led in the wrong direction. For God knows that those who know Him will recognize His voice.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁵ James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him.

⁴¹⁶ Proverbs 2:6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

⁴¹⁷ Proverbs 2:10 For wisdom will enter into your heart. Knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

⁴¹⁸ Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

⁴¹⁹ Psalms 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will counsel you with my eye on you.

⁴²⁰ Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

⁴²¹ John 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

Seek Godly counsel

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.⁴²²

For the really important decisions in your life it is wise to get counsel from other godly leaders. A parent, a pastor, or even a friend who is well-versed in scripture can be of immense help. They can help you remove any doubts that you have. The very last thing you should do is isolate yourself and not seek counsel.⁴²³ Of course, the strongest counsel you can possibly receive is from Jesus.⁴²⁴ So don't be afraid to ask Him.

Continue to surround yourself with people who are further along in their faith journey than you are. Take advantage of their knowledge and their wisdom, especially when you plunder through mistakes - mistakes that you will surely make. Take advantage of friendly counsel and learn from their mistakes so your own personal learning curve won't be so high. You can take comfort in knowing that your mistakes might help others in the future. When others are troubled - you will be able to give them the same comfort that God gave you.⁴²⁵

We must exercise our faith

We must remember that decision-making is a process that takes time. You may need to submit your will over and over again to God throughout your decision-making process, and then have faith and confidence that He will reveal His will to you. Commit to the LORD whatever you do and He will establish your plans.⁴²⁶

It is highly unlikely that God will reveal His plan to you if He knows that you won't obey Him. It is essential that your will is completely submitted to His will. When your will is fully submitted to God you can have confidence that He will illuminate your path.⁴²⁷

Never forget, without faith it is impossible to please God.⁴²⁸ All He asks is that you have faith as small as a mustard seed, and when you do nothing will be impossible for you.⁴²⁹

⁴²² Proverbs 15:22 Where there is no counsel, plans fail; but in a multitude of counselors they are established.

⁴²³ Proverbs 18:1 An unfriendly man pursues selfishness, and defies all sound judgment.

⁴²⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:1 Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.

⁴²⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

⁴²⁶ Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.

⁴²⁷ Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.

⁴²⁸ Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to him, for he who comes to God must believe that he exists, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.

⁴²⁹ Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

We must learn from our mistakes

You will always make mistakes - and lots of them. But being a follower of Jesus does not exempt you from the responsibility of becoming a better decision-maker based on the mistakes you have already made. Being a better decision-maker is not always something you need to work on, or do. Sometimes you simply need to be quiet so God can impart His wisdom on you.⁴³⁰

When you do happen to make a mistake, be sure to confess it to God and ask Him for His forgiveness. Don't allow the enemy to condemn you.⁴³¹ ⁴³² Be sure to ask God for wisdom. God wishes to impart His wisdom on you - but you need to ask Him for it.⁴³³ When you do make a decision, and if you are blessed by the result, be sure that God gets the credit and the glory.⁴³⁴ Also hope that others, someday, will look on your life and learn how you made wise decisions that glorify God. Little by little you will gain wisdom from God's Word as you trust in Him.⁴³⁵ You will also begin to see the results reflected in your decisions.

If you love God, you will be blessed.⁴³⁶ Blessed are those who fear the Lord.⁴³⁷

You mean He will protect me? And comfort me?

Can God protect you? Absolutely. But will He protect you? Well, that depends on His will - and you may not know what is best for you.

God doesn't promise us that He will protect us from all of the bad stuff that happens in the world. What He does promise us is He will walk beside us during difficult times. He guarantees that He will never leave us or forsake us,⁴³⁸ and He will give us strength and an inner peace when we face difficult times.

⁴³⁰ Job 33:33 If not, listen to me. Hold your peace, and I will teach you wisdom.

⁴³¹ 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us

⁴³² Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death.

⁴³³ James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, without any doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed.

⁴³⁴ Romans 16:27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

⁴³⁵ Jeremiah 17:7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD. ⁸"For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.

⁴³⁶ Deuteronomy 11 ¹³ So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul- ¹⁴ then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.

⁴³⁷ Psalms 112 ¹ Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands. ² Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

⁴³⁸ Deuteronomy 31:8 The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

What this means is that even though God has the ability to protect us from physical harm, and also deliver us from trouble, it might not be His will to do so. Sometimes He uses trials and difficult circumstances to purify us. God sometimes tests our faith in order to develop a higher level of faith by allowing us to grow through trials so we can persevere and grow to maturity.⁴³⁹ When this is the case, protecting us from trials would not be beneficial to us. When God allows suffering in our lives, it is almost always an opportunity to strengthen our trust in Him.⁴⁴⁰

Shaping us

His protection is far more than a perk for having a little bit of faith in Him. He wants you to know Him. He wants you to be transformed so you can know His will. That's right - God wants you to know His will.⁴⁴¹ You can only know His will if you are transformed, and being transformed may require some hardships and trials.

Sometimes pain and suffering can be used to shock a person out of their normal routine, and the suffering that they experience might force them to encounter God in a fresh and new way - possibly breaking the hold of a bad habit. This might be happening to you. We need to use our pain and our suffering to exercise our faith. Consider troubles not as burdens, but as spiritual exercise. When you exercise your faith you will start to build spiritual muscles, and the stronger your spiritual muscles become the more you will be able to appreciate what God is doing in your life. If you do this, God will give you a peace that surpasses all understanding.⁴⁴² The peace that He gives you is free. Lucky for you it is a peace that does not depend on a specific circumstance and can be used in every situation.

Never be afraid

We must remember that God does a lot more in our lives than what we will ever see. His protection is far more vast and far-reaching than our narrow-minded understanding. God never promised us a version of heaven while here on earth. What God does promise us is eternal life to all who trust in Jesus for their salvation.⁴⁴³

Jesus makes it clear that we should continually ask God for what we need, but that doesn't mean He will always give it to us - because what we ask for is not always what is best for us. God will surround you with His favor as a shield.⁴⁴⁴ If you call on Him and acknowledge His name, God will answer.⁴⁴⁵

⁴³⁹ James 1:4 Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

⁴⁴⁰ Psalms 62:8 Trust in him at all times, you people. Pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us.

⁴⁴¹ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

⁴⁴² Philip 4:6 In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

⁴⁴³ John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

⁴⁴⁴ Psalms 5:11 But let all those who take refuge in you rejoice, Let them always shout for joy, because you defend them. Let them also who love your name be joyful in you.

⁴⁴⁵ Psalms 91:14 Because he has set his love on me, therefore I will deliver him. I will set him on high, because he has known my name.

The Lord will bless those who obey His word

Why does God bless His people?

There is one over-arching reason why God blesses His people. It is so they can bring glory to His name.⁴⁴⁶ He also blesses and gifts certain people so they can serve and bless others. But for God to bless us we must be obedient to His Word.

God repeatedly promises us that He will bless us abundantly⁴⁴⁷ so we will abound in all good works. For Him to fulfill that promise we must truly believe that He will. God's promises may seem impossible to you, but for God who has created the universe, the earth, and all living creatures - nothing is impossible.⁴⁴⁸ God promises to give you the desires of your heart⁴⁴⁹ but you must ask Him for it. You do not receive because you do not ask.⁴⁵⁰

Unfortunately for many people, the only time that God ever hears from us is when we need or want something. We can go weeks, sometimes months, and even years without ever calling on His name. And then as soon as something tragic happens - who do you call? Yep, we call on God. This would be like having an acquaintance that you haven't seen for years who calls and asks for money. What will be your answer? If you're honest you will probably say, "I barely know you." And then later you will be thinking to yourself, "Wow, he has quite the nerve to ask for money when I barely know him."

Why would it be any different with God? Do you think you can just call on Him every couple of months, or years, and only when something bad happens in your life and ask Him if He will rid you of your problem? That would be really inconsiderate, wouldn't it? But that's what we do. And then when God doesn't answer our prayer right away we get all mad and huffy about it, and then we say that God never helps us when we are in need. Think about it, this is exactly what we do. But for Him to bless you, He has to know you, and He has to trust you. He needs to know that you will do what He asks, when He asks.

Our inattentiveness to God and our disobedience to His Word will always be an obstacle to receiving His blessings. We must do what His Word says. Whoever looks intently into His Word and forgets what it says, they only deceive themselves.⁴⁵¹ But whoever looks intently into His Word and does what it says, they will be blessed in all that they do.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁶ Psalms 67:1 May God be merciful to us, bless us, and cause his face to shine on us. 2 That your way may be known on earth, and your salvation among all nations.

⁴⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that you, always having all sufficiency in everything, may abound to every good work.

⁴⁴⁸ Matthew 19:26 Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

⁴⁴⁹ Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

⁴⁵⁰ James 4:2 You don't have, because you don't ask.

⁴⁵¹ James 1:23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

⁴⁵² James 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Does God answer all prayers?

There is no doubt that God hears every prayer, whether the person believes in Jesus or not. God is omniscient, which means He hears and sees everything that happens on earth.⁴⁵³ Is there any place on earth where you could possibly hide where God will not hear your prayer? No, there isn't.⁴⁵⁴ Everything you do and think is laid bare before the eyes of the One to whom you must give account someday.⁴⁵⁵ Everything. So nobody should have any doubt that God hears all prayers.

But, does God respond to all prayers? And does God respond to prayers from people who believe in Him, as well as those who don't?

Jesus not only hears the prayers from those who believe in Him, He answers them - but not always in the way that we want or in the way that we ask. He tells believers to boldly approach His throne so He can help us in our time of need.⁴⁵⁶

In Luke 11 we are told, ⁹"So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Jesus asks those who believe in Him to "pour out your heart" to Him, because He is our refuge.⁴⁵⁷

Our prayers might be overruled

But this doesn't mean that the answer to your prayer will always be a Yes. Sometimes it will be No. And sometimes - well, the answer may be something very different than what you expected. This is because Jesus knows what you need far better than you do.

The nice thing about our prayers is Jesus knows our intentions; we don't need to use any fancy words. If our intentions aren't right with Him, He will see right through it. He knows whether answering a prayer will be good for everyone, or not. He knows whether satisfying a prayer will further His kingdom, or not. He knows whether satisfying a prayer will allow us to serve or bless others, or not. This means that not all of our prayers are consistent with His will - so some may go unanswered.

Chosen before the creation of the world

Jesus died to atone for the guilt of our sins. This means that our sins are atoned-for through Jesus' death, and if we believe in Him the guilt of our sins will be removed. In fact, in Jesus' eyes, our sins don't look like sins at all: "Though our sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵³ Proverbs 5:21 For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths.

⁴⁵⁴ Jeremiah 23:24 "Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD.

⁴⁵⁵ Hebrews 4:13 but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

⁴⁵⁶ Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace for help in time of need.

⁴⁵⁷ Psalms 62:8 Trust in him at all times, you people. Pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us.

⁴⁵⁸ Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool."

This means that God does not hate His people when they sin - those who believe in Jesus - because His children are in His Son, Jesus. For God chose believers in Jesus before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.⁴⁵⁹

There is no question that God hears and answers the prayers of those who believe in Him⁴⁶⁰ ⁴⁶¹ for the prayers of His children are both powerful and effective.⁴⁶²

It's not who you think

So, who will be blessed by Jesus? It's not who you think.

In Matthew 5 it says,

¹Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and He began to teach them. He said:

³Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled

⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

¹¹Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me

¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

Even though many of us would like to have success, popularity, wealth, a big house, a fancy car, and a lot of valuable things - these aren't the types of blessings that God wishes for us. God wants us to have - Him. He wants us to have His love, His forgiveness, His kindness, His service to others, and so much more, because these are the things that will be important in His kingdom someday.

When we see people who seem to be happy with all of their pricey "stuff" - it surely doesn't mean they are happy and they will reap His eternal rewards. From outward appearance they may look happy, but outward appearances are deceiving.

If you are in His presence you will be blessed in areas that are meant for His children. You will have true joy and peace in your life. You won't need anything else but Him to make you happy. Follow Jesus and you will find rest for your soul.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁹ Ephesians 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love; 5 having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire.

⁴⁶⁰ Proverbs 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

⁴⁶¹ Psalms 34:15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry.

⁴⁶² James 5:16 Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective.

You might be separated from God

But this is very important: You can't be free from sin until Jesus sets you free.⁴⁶⁴ Until you accept Jesus' gift you are separated from God by your sin.⁴⁶⁵ Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.⁴⁶⁶ He tells those who have not been saved that you will find Him when you seek Him with all your heart.⁴⁶⁷ God takes no pleasure in the death of the unsaved.⁴⁶⁸

What about a believer in Jesus who continues to sin?

What about those who obeyed God's commandments at one time, but have since "fallen away from grace"⁴⁶⁹ and are entangled in sin again?⁴⁷⁰ Does God still love them? The answer is Yes. God does, in fact, love the redeemed even when they sin because God's Holy Spirit now lives within them to intercede for them.^{471 472}

But there is a big difference between a person who has fallen away from grace and is diligently striving to become God's servant again, and a person who has fallen away from grace and is making no legitimate effort to return to God. Basically, this is a person who has chosen to continually and willfully live in sin. For those believers who refuse to be obedient to God's Word, God will hear their prayers but He will not answer them.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶³ Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls.

⁴⁶⁴ John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. 35 A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. 36 If therefore the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

⁴⁶⁵ Isaiah 59:2 but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

⁴⁶⁶ James 4:4 You adulterers and adulteresses, don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

⁴⁶⁷ Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.

⁴⁶⁸ Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.'

⁴⁶⁹ Galatians 5:4 You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace.

⁴⁷⁰ 2 Peter 2:20 For if, after they have escaped the defilement of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in it and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

⁴⁷¹ Romans 8:27 He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

⁴⁷² Romans 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

⁴⁷³ Isaiah 59:2 but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

For those who have fallen away from His grace and are trying to return to Him - a prayer offered in good faith will make that person well again and the Lord will raise them up and they will be forgiven.⁴⁷⁴ Their prayers will be heard and answered.

Disobeying God may seem like a lot of fun at the time, but it will never bring about His blessings. God will discipline believers when they sin,⁴⁷⁵ for God disciplines those He loves.⁴⁷⁶ Anyone who persists in sinning proves they are not following His commands and therefore God will not listen to their prayers.⁴⁷⁷ But His wrath is in no hurry. Record will be kept and accounts will be received and the sinner will need to account for everything that he did on Judgment Day.⁴⁷⁸ This will be a sad day for those who put their trust in Jesus and then continue to sin - in some cases willfully. God will not, and cannot, listen to the prayers of a believer who willfully sins.⁴⁷⁹

How does God bless those who follow Him?

There is a beautiful symphony when we follow God's Word. When we follow God's Word and we put our trust in Jesus it causes us to have pure joy in everything that we do, which makes us want to glorify God. And when we glorify God, well, God wishes to heap His blessings on us. And when we receive His blessings it gives us more joy. And with our increased joy, well, we want to glorify God. Yes, you probably see what is happening here.

Those who don't glorify God - they will continue to walk in darkness and they will be without pure joy in their life.

For Psalm 128 says, ¹Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in obedience to Him. ²You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. ³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. ⁴Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the LORD.

Being blessed and living a life for the Lord is living a life that actually works. It is a life that is full of joy even when difficulties come your way. It is a life that has an attitude of gratitude and sees the positives in all of life's circumstances - as bad as some may seem when you first experience them. It's a life that looks forward to what lies ahead instead of looking in the rear-view mirror and feeling bad about what could have been. The fear of the Lord, and accepting Jesus into your heart, is the key to this incredible treasured life that you can have.⁴⁸⁰

John 15 says, ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in My name the Father will give you.

⁴⁷⁴ James 5:15 and the prayer of faith will heal him who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

⁴⁷⁵ Psalms 38:1 O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, and chasten me not in Your burning anger.

⁴⁷⁶ Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

⁴⁷⁷ Amos 3:2 "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins."

⁴⁷⁸ Matthew 12:36 I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

⁴⁷⁹ Psalms 66:18 If I cherished sin in my heart, the Lord wouldn't have listened.

⁴⁸⁰ Isaiah 33:6 And He will be the stability of your times, a wealth of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is his treasure.

What a wonderful promise.

Why does it feel like you are not receiving any blessings?

You must be obedient to God's Word to receive His blessings.⁴⁸¹ Being disobedient, or living in sin, will always be an obstacle to receiving God's blessings.⁴⁸² ⁴⁸³ God hates sin and He gets angry with the wicked.⁴⁸⁴ But God also loves each and every person and desires for everyone to repent and be saved, so He will wait patiently for you to do so.⁴⁸⁵ God repeatedly promises to bless each and every person beyond what they can possibly imagine if they follow His commands.⁴⁸⁶ ⁴⁸⁷

Receiving God's blessings might require you to wait on Him.⁴⁸⁸ God's timing isn't your timing. Many times our desire is to have God's blessings come to us right now, but God doesn't operate this way. He will bless you when it's the right time to bless you. And if you have to wait on Him, well, that might be God testing your faith.⁴⁸⁹ Your ability to wait on Him will require you to be confident in who He is and what He is doing in your life. You must be confident in His wisdom, His timing, His love, His forgiveness, and you must trust in His standards, His promises, and His power. You need to have faith as small as a mustard seed. If you have faith as small as a mustard seed He promises that nothing will be impossible for you.⁴⁹⁰

God will send His blessings to those who seek Him and will wait for Him.⁴⁹¹ Waiting on God teaches us to have a single and consistent focus on Him as the source of our life. While you wait, don't fret that other people seem to be succeeding in their wicked ways.⁴⁹² God can be your rock and your fortress. If you put your trust in Him, your foundation will never be shaken.⁴⁹³ You might run out of strength if you attempt to

⁴⁸¹ Deuteronomy 28:2 All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God.

⁴⁸² Malachi 2:2 If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name," says the Lord Almighty, "I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings."

⁴⁸³ Deuteronomy 30:19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

⁴⁸⁴ Proverbs 3:33 The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.

⁴⁸⁵ 2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

⁴⁸⁶ Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

⁴⁸⁷ Deuteronomy 28:1 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.

⁴⁸⁸ Zephaniah 3:8 Therefore wait for me," declares the Lord, "for the day I will stand up to testify.

⁴⁸⁹ James 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

⁴⁹⁰ Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

⁴⁹¹ Lamentations 3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD.

⁴⁹² Psalms 37:7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

operate on your own power, but God will give strength to the weary and He increases the power of the weak.⁴⁹⁴

Maybe you are not committed

It's possible that you are not receiving God's blessings because you are not committed to God and His teachings. In the eyes of the Lord - you might be considered lukewarm.⁴⁹⁵ When things are going well for you, you ignore Him. Then when something bad happens in your life you cry out and ask Him to "please fix my problem." You are cold, then warm, then cold, then warm, and since you don't trust in Him for every major decision in your life - how can He trust you?

God needs your commitment. He needs to know where you stand and whether you trust in His standards. Having a lack of commitment to God and His standards is probably the biggest problem in our society today. Everybody seems to want everything and they will do whatever it takes get it, including lying, cheating, and being dishonest, even if it means getting ahead at the expense of others.

Many people seem to be living a life without having any real commitments, or even standards. Many people will say what they believe you want to hear with no moral thought as to what they are actually saying. They will say that they believe in God, yet they don't live according to His standards. They will follow God's standards that they like, and disobey the rest - as if these "other" standards don't mean anything. A person will get married, and then a little while later file for divorce. They will attend church, and as they leave the church parking lot they will cut somebody off and shake their fist. This is a grievous and non-committed lifestyle that God abhors.⁴⁹⁶ God needs your commitment. If you are not 100% for God and committed to His principles, then you are against Him. As you can imagine, if you are not living a committed lifestyle where God can trust you, you will not receive His blessings.

What can you do to receive God's blessings

God must trust you.

Can you be trusted with managing a lot of money without blowing it or being greedy?

Can you be given a new position at work with increased authority without hurting people or being self-serving?

Can you keep an important secret without violating a person's trust?

These are just a few of the things God looks for before He will bless you. He must know that He can trust you with these things - and so much more. It's all about character. Your character is all about the choices that you make when nobody is looking. Your character is about the decisions that you make, and your decisions must be consistent and trustworthy to God. God is looking for people after His own heart. If God can't count on you to be consistent and trustworthy with your choices, then His blessings will only bring out the worst in you.

⁴⁹³ Psalms 62:1 My soul rests in God alone. My salvation is from him. 2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress-- I will never be greatly shaken.

⁴⁹⁴ Isaiah 40:29 He gives power to the weak. He increases the strength of him who has no might.

⁴⁹⁵ Revelation 3:16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of my mouth. 17 Because you say, 'I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing;' and don't know that you are the wretched one, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

⁴⁹⁶ Malachi 2:16 "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the Lord Almighty.

Here are some more examples...

If you aren't trustworthy with money, He will know that you will misspend it if He gives you more.

If you aren't trustworthy with authority, He will know that you will abuse your position and power if He gives you more.

If you aren't trustworthy about sharing with others, He will know that you will likely be greedy and keep things that are meant to bless others.

If you aren't trustworthy with someone's secret, your friends will learn that they can't trust you, and so will God.

For God to continue to forgive your trespasses He must know that you will forgive others when they trespass against you.

For God to send you His blessings you must be dependable and He must know that you will always do the right thing - even if it hurts.

He must know that if He blesses you, you will be a blessing to others.

If you always do and say things that please the crowd, instead of doing what is right, God will know that He can't depend on you to make the right decision when He needs it the most. If He can't depend on you why would He risk blessing you with things that might go to waste?

God might test your faith to see if you can be trusted.⁴⁹⁷ Testing your faith is how God finds out whether He can depend on you through thick and thin, through troubles and difficulties, through pain and suffering, through failures and frustration, and so much more.

You will be blessed when...

You are at the end of your rope⁴⁹⁸

You keep peace between those who argue and corrupt⁴⁹⁹

For being persecuted while holding firm to your faith⁵⁰⁰

For showing mercy to those who persecute you⁵⁰¹

For helping those in need⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁷ Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.

⁴⁹⁸ Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁴⁹⁹ Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

⁵⁰⁰ Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁵⁰¹ Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

⁵⁰² Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

You hear the word of God and obey it⁵⁰³

Your mind and your heart is right with God⁵⁰⁴

Ask God to help you align your mind and your heart with His mind and His heart. Admit your moral bankruptcy and ask God to forgive you for your sins. Ask for wisdom. Instead of relying on your own strength turn your life over to Jesus and rely on His strength. When you are weary you will find rest for your soul through God.⁵⁰⁵

Only through God will you be able to fill the emptiness in your soul, the emptiness that you might be trying to fill with more “stuff” in your life. Don’t try to fill your emptiness with more stuff. Only Jesus can fill your emptiness.

An incredible gift to our children

It becomes an incredible blessing when we care for others. Many people think it is those who are cared for who are blessed. But, in reality, it is just the opposite. Those who are blessed are those who care. It is resisting selfishness and considering the needs of others over yourself. It means blessing others because you are blessed. It is letting God’s blessings flow through you to others.

Helping others is an incredible gift that we can give to our children. Your children will learn that when they bless others - they are really blessing themselves. It’s a beautiful circle of blessings that God has taught us: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Ask for wisdom and you will love life, and the one who cherishes understanding will soon prosper.⁵⁰⁶

But never forget - even when we are committed to God and we are doing our best to bless others, we will still experience difficulties, pain, heartache, suffering, hardship, and injustice. When we face trials God will give strength to the weary and will increase the power of the weak.⁵⁰⁷ When we experience difficulties it is easy to develop a negative attitude and get angry with God, but we need to maintain a positive attitude and trust in God. Persecution and suffering are opportunities that we need to experience to find our well-being in God alone.

⁵⁰³ Luke 11:28 But he said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it."

⁵⁰⁴ 1 Chronicles 28:9 And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

⁵⁰⁵ Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

⁵⁰⁶ Proverbs 19:8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul. He who keeps understanding shall find good.

⁵⁰⁷ Isaiah 40:29 He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. ³⁰ Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, ³¹ Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

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Chapter 6

I was made – for a mission

You were in God's plan – before you were born

In His book

Have you ever wondered why you were born? Have you ever wondered why God put you on this earth and what your reason for being is? Sooner or later we all think about these things, and at some point in our lives our inner spirit desires to connect with the One who created us⁵⁰⁸ to help us understand why we were born, and to help us find out what our mission and our purpose in life is.

God has a plan for you. He has had a plan in place for you before you were born.⁵⁰⁹ The life that you have lived and the problems you have experienced have not come about by accident. It is all part of God's grand plan (i.e., the front of the tapestry). Your birth and your future were all ordained.⁵¹⁰ It has all been planned by God for a very specific purpose. All of your experiences have been for your spiritual growth.

⁵⁰⁸ Isaiah 43:7 everyone who is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, yes, whom I have made.

⁵⁰⁹ Psalms 139:15 My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth.

⁵¹⁰ Psalms 139:16 Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.

Our spirit is why God came to earth

When we begin to ask these questions it means our spirit is prompting us to learn why we were created and to search for our purpose. It is the spirit within us that God wishes to save; our spirit is the reason why He came to earth. God didn't come to earth to die on the cross to save our earthly bodies. He came to earth to save our soul, which is our spirit. Our bodies are just temporary. Our bodies are weak and they will always be full of problems. Some of our weaknesses are by God's design.⁵¹¹ Our bodies will continue to fail us as they haven't been designed for eternity, but our spirit has been designed for eternity. It is our spirit that provides a guarantee of what is yet to come.⁵¹²

The longing in our hearts to find out who we are and why we were born starts a new direction in our lives. We were all made for a mission - but God leaves it up to each of us to find out what it is. God gives us His Holy Spirit to live within us⁵¹³ to help us find the answer to this very important question. But for God's Holy Spirit to help us, we must believe that God came to earth in the form of Jesus to die for us. This is the only way God can help us. He won't enter your heart until you invite Him in.

Since you have read this book this far you may be searching for the answers to these questions. You may be wishing to learn why you were born and what God's plan is for your life - especially if you have lived through difficult times. The problems you have experienced may be God's way of prompting you to come back to Him. He created you, He knows you, and He wants you to live a life that is full of purpose and meaning. But to do that - you must know Him.

God wishes that we all be transformed by the renewing of our mind⁵¹⁴ so we can connect with our spirit and learn God's will for our life. Every one of us knows, deep down, that there is more to life than living the way we have been living. God has never desired that we reach the top of Maslow's hierarchy - called "self-actualization." Self-actualization is the opposite of God's will for you. Self-actualization is how Satan wishes to destroy all of us.

Created with infinite potential and possibilities

When we first begin to feel these feelings, our inner spirit is starting to awaken. We are spirit beings but many of us don't seem to realize this fact. Our spirit being is so much more than our physical being, but our spirit isn't something that we try to understand. But we need to. We have an inner radiance and an inner beauty within us, within our spirit, that is hard for us to even comprehend, but God wants us to learn about our inner radiance. God wants our radiance to connect with His radiance - and through Jesus this can be accomplished. Our life on the back side of the tapestry is being woven into God's design on the front, and Jesus is the thread that will get us there.

Because we have been created in God's image, the spirit within us will continually attempt to stir us to move us into action. It might be that little voice in your head right this minute that is trying to prompt you - to change, to search, and to find out who you are. Don't ignore these feelings. It might be God trying to nudge you out of your comfort zone.

⁵¹¹ John 9:1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but, that the works of God might be revealed in him."

⁵¹² 2 Corinthians 1:22 who also sealed us, and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts.

⁵¹³ Romans 8:27 He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

⁵¹⁴ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

A feeling of dissatisfaction

Do you ever struggle trying to understand why you were born? The dissatisfaction that you are feeling might be God prompting you to seek out His perfect will for your life. Don't ignore these feelings. The feelings may be God trying to help you not conform to this world⁵¹⁵ so you can learn His will for your life. He chose you before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In Him you were chosen, having been predestined according to His plan and in conformity with the purpose of His will.⁵¹⁶

God's will for your life is so much more than you can even imagine. God's blessings will flow into and through your life when you follow Him. It might just be God's Spirit within you that is pushing you to find out what your purpose is. Listen to what your spirit is telling you, and have faith in changing your life so you can live and learn why you were created. There is true gold at the end of your life's rainbow, but it will take faith to get there.

It's going to take some work

Unfortunately, understanding God's will for your life is not something that will be handed to you on a silver platter. It's going to require some work. God wants you to know His will; He isn't hiding it from you. But you must search for it. You must start your search by not conforming to the things of this world. Remember, Satan has control and dominion over the world in which we live - which means if you continue to listen to the messages "the world" sends your way you are basically agreeing to conform to Satan's many schemes, his deceptions, and his destructive messages. If you continue to conform to his way and his messages you will be led down his path, and we know where that path leads.⁵¹⁷ It leads to darkness. It will lead you away from your Protector, your Shepherd.

God wants everyone to find the purpose for their life. Unfortunately, not everyone will. Not everyone will find it, or even seek it. It is your own personal responsibility to discover God's will for your life, nobody else can do this for you. To find it, you must seek it. How do you find something if you don't look for it? It is the seeking that requires work. The best way to do this is to read what He is telling you in His instruction manual - the Bible. This book is meant to help you and give you some insight into what the Bible says, but the Bible will be many times more thorough. The Bible is God's full and accurate Word.

Must order the full meal

This book started out by saying that the second-most important decision that you can make - is to open your heart. By reading this book you have started this process and you have kept your heart open. God

⁵¹⁵ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

⁵¹⁶ Ephesians 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and without blemish before him in love; 5 having predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his desire, 6 to the praise of the glory of his grace, by which he freely bestowed favor on us in the Beloved, 7 in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him 10 to an administration of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in him; 11 in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will;

⁵¹⁷ Matthew 7:13 Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. 14 How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.

will never force His way in to your heart, He will always wait until you invite Him in. He knows that you have been designed and created to know who He is. Your heart must now remain open to learn, to feel, and to desire to know who God is. There is so much to learn. As you discover who God is you will learn that He loves you so very much. There is nothing that you have done in the past, or can do in the future - if you accept His free gift - that can separate you from the love of God.⁵¹⁸

Have you accepted His free gift? If you haven't, go back to chapter 5 and read the prayer that is provided and simply believe. Do it now. You will be so glad that you did. Your work will be done.

Simply believe

You now know why God came to earth to live among us. It's because He loves you⁵¹⁹ and He came to save you. He came to save you from your sins, something that you can't do on your own. Only Jesus can save you from your sins - and that is exactly what He did. God came to earth and He paid the ultimate price for you. He died for you.

This leads us to the most important decision that you can make to learn who God is. The answer is very simple - it's to believe in Jesus. You must believe that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to earth to save you from your sins, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.⁵²⁰

God is watching. He created you and He is watching for your commitment. He came to earth to die for you, and because of what He did He needs to know that you believe in Him. He needs to know that you are committed. Until you are committed, and until He knows that you believe in Him, He can't help you.

His plan was perfect. It was a plan that was already in place when Adam sinned. God's plan means that we all have a Savior. But to be saved we must believe. It was, and is, the perfect plan, developed by a perfect God. We just need to believe. Jesus is the thread that will allow us to get to the front of the tapestry, which is heaven.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Romans 8:37 No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

⁵¹⁹ John 16:27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

⁵²⁰ John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

⁵²¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21 For him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There is no other way and by no other name by which one can be saved.^{522 523 524} Everyone who believes in Jesus, and proclaims it, will be set free.⁵²⁵ This includes the forgiveness of your past, your present, and all of your future sins. It is by God's grace alone that you will be saved.⁵²⁶ There is nothing else that you can do to get a ticket to heaven.⁵²⁷ You can't earn it, or buy it. You simply need to declare your faith in Jesus.⁵²⁸

It all starts with the Word of God

So you might be asking yourself, "How do I find out God's will for my life?"

Well, it all starts with the Word of God since God's Word is His will. Don't be foolish and not try to understand God's will for your life.⁵²⁹ The primary purpose for your life is to live according to His will, and when you live according to His will there will be a supernatural peace and a supernatural joy that will come into your life. This is also when God's blessings can begin to flow into your life - when you live according to His standards and you do what He has called you to do.^{530 531}

There isn't a special process that you must follow to discover God's will for your life. You must simply desire to live a life that is connected with His and live a life that aligns with His standards; this will start the process of spiritual discovery. When you do this God will begin to reveal answers that you have been seeking. After you open your heart, pray and ask for answers and you will begin to receive revelations that He gives you. Simply ask Him and He will provide. It is God's Holy Spirit that has taken up residence in your heart that

⁵²² Acts 4:12 There is salvation in none other, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, by which we must be saved!

⁵²³ John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you know him, and have seen him."

⁵²⁴ Isaiah 43:11 I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no savior besides Me.

⁵²⁵ Acts 13:38 Be it known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man is proclaimed to you remission of sins, 39 and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

⁵²⁶ Ephesians 2:1 You were made alive when you were dead in transgressions and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience; 3 among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

⁵²⁷ John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. 14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

⁵²⁸ Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

⁵²⁹ Ephesians 5:17 Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

⁵³⁰ Deuteronomy 28:2 All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God.

⁵³¹ Psalms 128:2 For you will eat the labor of your hands. You will be happy, and it will be well with you.

will give you a level of understanding and knowledge that you so desire.⁵³² This new understanding will give your life meaning and purpose.

As you start your journey – be sure to walk slowly

When you do this He will bring a special light into your life⁵³³ and He will be a lamp to your feet.⁵³⁴ God's light will guide you in everything that you do⁵³⁵ and His light will also allow you to shine your light onto others in order to bless them - as you have been blessed.⁵³⁶ For it is His Spirit which is the lamp of the Lord that will shed light on your inner most being.⁵³⁷

Don't feel disheartened if God's will for your life doesn't jump out at you the very moment that you start your journey. The answers to your prayers will probably come over time - like taking a long walk through the woods. The longer you walk, and the more alert you are, the more you will see. During your search be sure to walk slowly because God's treasures and His answers to your prayers are behind every plant, under every rock, in every tree, and in every stream. Also be sure to watch the beautiful clouds as they roll by.

God's treasures and His blessings will come to you in many forms. To recognize God's blessings you need to be on high alert, and when you are on high alert His blessings will begin to speak to you.⁵³⁸ Too many times we walk so fast that we miss out on seeing His blessings. This can happen if we let the world consume our lives and we walk too fast. One of Satan's goals is to blind us with work, TV, computers, magazines, social media, and other "stuff" so we don't see or experience God's blessings, or even experience God. Remember, Satan does not want you to experience God so Satan will do everything he can to keep you walking too fast so you don't see or experience God's blessings. Slow down and resist Satan's "busy"-ness and he will flee from you.^{539 540}

As you take your walk trust that the Lord will reveal more of His will to you. Be confident that He who began good works in you will carry it out to completion.⁵⁴¹ For God's purpose is that His son, Jesus, will be glorified and that His Good News will be communicated throughout the world.⁵⁴²

⁵³² Job 32:8 But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.

⁵³³ Job 22:28 You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established to you. Light shall shine on your ways.

⁵³⁴ Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.

⁵³⁵ Psalms 27:1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?

⁵³⁶ Matthew 5:16 Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

⁵³⁷ Proverbs 20:27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being.

⁵³⁸ Proverbs 6:22 When you walk, it will lead you. When you sleep, it will watch over you. When you awake, it will talk with you.

⁵³⁹ James 4:7 Be subject therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁵⁴⁰ 1 Peter 5:9 Withstand him steadfast in your faith, knowing that your brothers who are in the world are undergoing the same sufferings.

⁵⁴¹ Philippians 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

God's will may not focus on your talents or natural abilities

We now know and understand that God has given every single one of us very different gifts, different talents, and vastly different abilities.⁵⁴³ We have all been made so very different. Some of us are gifted in the arts, some in the sciences, some have an extraordinary level of empathy in caring for others, some are fantastic at being mothers and fathers and raising children, some are good in sports, some are great at teaching, some are good with mechanical things, and the list goes on and on. Our competencies come from God.⁵⁴⁴

A mistake that many of us make is assuming that whatever we are good at - this is God's will for our life. We assume that if we are good at something it must mean that God wants us to use that to further His kingdom. This might be true, but we shouldn't assume that this is the case. God has given each of us unique skills and abilities and talents, which is wonderful, but if we only focus on these things while we search for God's will for our life - we might miss something extremely important. We need to lean on God. We need to lean on Him to sustain us in all areas of our life.^{545 546 547 548 549 550} God's will includes having a relationship with Him, connecting with Him, needing Him, following Him,⁵⁵¹ and living a life according to His standards.

Don't cause a short-circuit

When we are really good at something, when we feel that we are so good that we don't need any help from anyone, this is when we might short-circuit what God desires for us. God's will for our life is so much more than focusing on our talents and our natural abilities. God wants us to have faith in Him. God wants us to accomplish things that we could never accomplish without Him (like writing this book). When we

⁵⁴² Colossians 1:6 which has come to you; even as it is in all the world and is bearing fruit and growing, as it does in you also, since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.

⁵⁴³ Exodus 31:3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, 4 to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, 5 and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship.

⁵⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:5 not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God.

⁵⁴⁵ Psalms 41:3 The LORD will sustain him upon his sickbed; in his illness, You restore him to health.

⁵⁴⁶ Psalms 55:22 Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

⁵⁴⁷ Psalms 147:6 The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground.

⁵⁴⁸ Isaiah 50:4 The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.

⁵⁴⁹ Hebrews 1:3 His Son is the radiance of his glory, the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself made purification for our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

⁵⁵⁰ Isaiah 46:4 and even to old age I am he, and even to gray hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; yes, I will carry, and will deliver.

⁵⁵¹ Luke 9:23 He said to all, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

accomplish something that we could never accomplish without Him it strengthens our faith in Him and we will overflow with thankfulness.⁵⁵²

Our goal must be to live a life that is pleasing to God and to allow the Holy Spirit within us to help guide our daily decisions. For the Lord says, He will bless those who follow Him.^{553 554}

Blessings will flow

When you live according to God's will and you work to fulfill your purpose, God will provide you with a supernatural peace and a supernatural joy in your life.^{555 556 557} This is God's gift to you, that you may be blessed, so you can bless others. His gift will include a confidence in everything that you do.⁵⁵⁸ God will also help you make key decisions in your life, decisions that will be easier and clearer - which will give you additional peace.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

Proverbs 3:5-6

But this doesn't mean that you won't have hardships or difficulties; don't forget, you will always have problems. But as a believer in Jesus you can delight in your weakness, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties - for when you are weak you can be strong.⁵⁵⁹ And as you persevere through difficulties you will receive what He has promised you.⁵⁶⁰ For Jesus has won the war. The war is over.⁵⁶¹ Jesus has overcome the world.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵² Colossians 2:7 rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, even as you were taught, abounding in it in thanksgiving.

⁵⁵³ Deuteronomy 28:1 Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth..

⁵⁵⁴ Psalms 128:2 For you will eat the labor of your hands. You will be happy, and it will be well with you.

⁵⁵⁵ Isaiah 55:12 For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.

⁵⁵⁶ Romans 14:17 for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁵⁷ Galations 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.

⁵⁵⁸ Isaiah 32:17 The work of righteousness will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.

⁵⁵⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong.

⁵⁶⁰ Hebrews 10:36 For you need endurance so that, having done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

⁵⁶¹ Jeremiah 1:19 They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD.

⁵⁶² John 16:33 I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.

The true joy in your life will be finding God's will for your life. Keep God's Word as your foundation and watch His plan unfold right before your eyes. This is when you will start to receive some more hints as to how your life fits into his glorious design - on the front side of His beautiful tapestry.

The gifts you have been given are not for you

Live in harmony

We learned in chapter 2 about how different we all are from everyone else and the fact that God created every single one of us special and unique for a reason. We also learned that He has a plan and a purpose for every person and that His plan stays firm throughout all generations.⁵⁶³

So you might be asking yourself: Since we are all so different, how can we possibly work together to glorify God? That sounds impossible. But here is the answer: If we believe in His Word we can live and work in harmony⁵⁶⁴ with one another because that is how God designed us. He designed us to complement each other.

A great example is your body. Your body has many thousands of different parts and every one of these parts, all miraculously designed, must work in harmony and in unity for your body to function properly. The same is true for you and me and everyone else who believes in Jesus. It is the miracle of our differences that will allow us to work in unity and in harmony through our faith in Jesus. It is only through Jesus that our many differences can be made whole, in unity, according to His purpose.⁵⁶⁵

When you believe – God gives you a special gift

At the very moment that you pray the prayer in chapter 5, this is when God's Spirit will take up residence in your heart.⁵⁶⁶ At that moment God gives you a special gift - a spiritual gift⁵⁶⁷ - that indwells your soul. This special gift will help manifest God's presence in your life⁵⁶⁸ which will help you understand and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.⁵⁶⁹ This special gift is a blessing from God. It will help you serve others and it will also help you build His kingdom in unity and in harmony with other believers.

Since this spiritual gift will help shape your perspective on your life and your purpose, it is imperative that you learn which gift you have been given⁵⁷⁰ because there are many different gifts that the Lord gives to

⁵⁶³ Psalms 33:11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation.

⁵⁶⁴ Romans 12:16 Be of the same mind one toward another.

⁵⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.

⁵⁶⁶ Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:7 Yet I wish that all men were like me. However each man has his own gift from God, one of this kind, and another of that kind.

⁵⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the profit of all.

⁵⁶⁹ 2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

⁵⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual things, brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant.

His people.⁵⁷¹ Some people will receive one gift, and some people will receive multiple gifts. But every person will receive at least one spiritual gift from God when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

The gift that you receive is a God-given assignment⁵⁷² and a desire for you to perform a specific function within the body of Christ. Your gift is given to you along with a supernatural energy that will make your service to others effortless and joyful. Did you get that? You will use your gift to serve others - and you will love doing it! You don't get to choose which gift you get because God chooses it for you, but don't worry about this because you will be happy with the gift you receive.⁵⁷³

After you receive your gift you will be given an opportunity to develop it, and to improve on it. This means that even though God gives you a supernatural gift there will be room to make it even better. So, discover your gift and strive to understand what it is and how to use it.⁵⁷⁴ You have been gifted for a purpose.⁵⁷⁵ God wants you to be involved in His work; He is so gracious that He has given everyone who is saved this wonderful gift.

Your talents and abilities are not what you think

Don't think of your talents or your natural abilities as your spiritual gift. The spiritual gift that you receive when you accept Jesus into your heart is the grace of God working within you to empower you to help and serve others. Your spiritual gift is given to you to help strengthen your community through Jesus and to empower you to help those around you - effortlessly.

Typically when we use our natural talents we don't need God's help. But God wants us to call on Him to accomplish things that are way beyond our natural talents and our natural abilities. Our God-given spiritual gift will empower us to accomplish things that can only be accomplished with His empowerment.

Here are some of the spiritual gifts that God gives to His believers. There are well over 20 different spiritual gifts listed in the Bible and the list below is just a partial list. Some people will receive one of these gifts, and others may receive multiple. If you read the list and you see that you perform one or more of these gifts and you really enjoy doing it, and it seems effortless to you, it may be your spiritual gift.

In alphabetical order:

1. The gift of Administration - the gift of planning and directing

Reference: 1 Corinthians 12: ²⁸ *And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.*

2. The gift of Art & Artistry - the gift of creating artistic expressions of things

⁵⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 12:4 Now there are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

⁵⁷² 1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, employ it in serving one another, as good managers of the grace of God in its various forms.

⁵⁷³ 2 Corinthians 8:12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what you have, not according to what you don't have.

⁵⁷⁴ 1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, employ it in serving one another, as good managers of the grace of God in its various forms.

⁵⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:7 so that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reference: Exodus 31: ³ *and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills - ⁴ to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, ⁵ to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.*

3. The gift of Discernment - the gift of knowing what is right and wrong and knowing God's will

Reference: 1 Corinthians 2: ¹² *What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.*

4. The gift of Evangelism - the gift that moves believers to reach nonbelievers so they may become active members of the Christian community

Reference: Ephesians 4: ¹¹ *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Also: 2 Timothy 4: ⁵ *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

5. The gift of Encouragement /Exhortation - the gift that moves believers to reach out with love to people in conflict or facing a problem

Reference: 3 John 1: ⁷ *It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.*

6. The gift of Faith - the gift that gives believers the eyes to see the Spirit at work within them

Reference: Ephesians 2: ⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

7. The gift of Giving - the gift that enables a believer to recognize God's blessings and to respond by being generous with time and talent

Reference: 2 Corinthians 9: ⁶ *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

8. The gift of Healing - the gift that allows a believer to use the healing power of the Lord

Reference: 1 Corinthians 12: ⁷ *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

9. The gift of Hospitality - the gift that moves a believer to welcome and receive guests, especially those in need

Reference: Romans 12: ¹³ *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

10. The gift of Intercession - the gift that enables a believer to pray with the certainty that their prayer will be heard

Reference: Ephesians 6: ¹⁸ *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all of the Lord's people.*

11. The gift of Knowledge - the gift that drives a person to fully understand the Bible's teachings and the promises outlined in the Bible

Reference: 1 Corinthians 12: ⁷ *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

12. The gift of Leadership - the gift that gives a believer the confidence to fully prepare for the future

Reference: 2 Timothy 4: ² *Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

13. The gift of Mercy - the gift that motivates a believer to feel deeply for those in need and then act to meet that need

Reference: Luke 10: ³⁶ *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" ³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

Also: Matthew 25: ⁴⁰ *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

14. The gift of Music - the gift that gives a believer the capability to inspire others through song and instruments

Reference: Psalm 100: ¹ *Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. ² Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.*

Also: Psalm 150: ³ *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, ⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, ⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.*

Also: Psalm 149: ³ *Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp.*

15. The gift of Prophecy - the gift that gives a believer the capability to speak forth the truth

Reference: 1 Corinthians 13: ² *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*

Also: 1 Corinthians 12: ⁷ *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

16. The gift of Shepherding & Pastoring - the gift that gives a believer the ability to provide spiritual leadership and direction for individuals or groups

Reference: 1 Timothy 3: ¹ *Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.*

Also: 2 Timothy 4: ¹ *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.*

17. The gift of Service - the gift that enables a believer to serve others so God's work is fulfilled

Reference: Romans 16: ² *I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.*

Also: Philippians 2: ¹⁹ *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*

18. The gift of Skilled Crafts - the gift that enables a believer to make, repair, and maintain things

Reference: Exodus 31: ³ *and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— ⁴ to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, ⁵ to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.*

19. The gift of Teaching - the gift that enables a believer to communicate an understanding of something so it becomes clear and understandable to others

Reference: 1 Corinthians 12: ²⁸ *And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.*

Also: Acts 18: ²⁵ *He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue.*

20. The gift of Wisdom - the gift that allows a believer to determine the best solution for something

Reference: James: ¹³ *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.*

21. The gift of Writing - the gift that gives a believer the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and the truth through the written word

Reference: 1 John 2: ¹² *I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.*

Also: 1 Timothy 3: ¹⁴ *Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

Also: Jude 3: ³ *Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.*

Your spiritual gift is not all that matters

Before you attempt to determine what your spiritual gift is, it is important to remember that your spiritual gift is not the only thing that is important in serving God. God calls all of us to obedience in serving Him in all areas - not just the area where you believe your spiritual gift resides. You should never get so caught up in your spiritual gift that you only seek to serve God in that area.

To fully equip you for a special need, such as encouraging others, this is where God may give you a spiritual gift and this is where you need to use His gift. There is no magic formula for determining what your spiritual gift is; the Holy Spirit distributes His gifts as He determines are needed for the common good.⁵⁷⁶ There are a wide variety of spiritual gift tests that might help you determine what your gift is, but these tests typically can't be relied upon to give you a "for sure" answer to what your gift is.

Do you know the best way to determine what your spiritual gift is? Find a place to serve and put your gift into action.⁵⁷⁷ It is when you put your gift into action that you will confirm what it is. As you might expect, this may require some trial and error, but eventually through serving you will determine which area(s) of service you are gifted. The emphasis must always be on serving others and not serving yourself.

You can also ask other people. Sometimes other people will see how you get energized in a certain area - an area that you can't see yourself. What other people see about you might give you an indication as to where your spiritual gift resides. If you aren't energized by using your gift in a certain area, chances are God won't call you to serve in that area. Of course, the only one who knows for sure what your gift is - is the Holy Spirit Himself! Ask God to show you how you are gifted.

But, as a reminder, specifically knowing what your spiritual gift is does not excuse you from serving God in areas outside of your gift. If you focus too much on your spiritual gift you might miss important opportunities to serve God.

As it says in Philippians 2, ¹³ *for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose.*

⁵⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the profit of all.

⁵⁷⁷ 1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, employ it in serving one another, as good managers of the grace of God in its various forms.

If you are able to determine your gift, it will help you carry out good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do.⁵⁷⁸ Your spiritual gift, used alongside your natural talents and your natural abilities, can be a powerful combination that can be an incredible blessing to the kingdom of God. Used in conjunction with other believers your spiritual gift can also help you determine God's will for your life. You simply need to step out in faith and rely on the Lord to help lead you in the direction and in the area of service that He has chosen for you.

Your gift - is not for you

The worst thing you can do is to hide your gift and not use it, or to use your gift to benefit you. This is not what God ever intended. God wants each of us to share our gift to serve others.⁵⁷⁹ You have been given a special gift within you that will enlighten and enrich the world - especially when you use your uniqueness to serve others. For it is the miracle of our differences, through Jesus, that will allow us to live and serve in unity.

Your gift is meant to be given away. Your gift is meant to bless others in your service to them; it is not meant for your own pleasure. Another way of saying this: your gift is for God's glory, not for your own glory. When you use your gift to serve others you are bringing about the unity of the body of Christ, and when the body of Christ is in unity you will help stimulate spiritual growth within the body's members.

This is similar to how we exercise our own body. When we exercise our body it is stimulated and stretched. The result? We have a healthier body. Even though our organs and our bones are unique - an eye is unlike a leg, a leg is unlike a heart, a heart is unlike a toenail - exercising our whole body will allow all of our body parts to be healthier and they will function better together. We will glorify God when we live and serve in unity.⁵⁸⁰ We will grow spiritually faster when we are challenged by other believers. When we live to glorify God the Holy Spirit within us will energize us and will help energize our spiritual growth.

Our spiritual growth, and getting to spiritual maturity, is a journey. The more we wish to discover God's will for our lives the more God will reveal it to us. But we must always commit ourselves to glorifying God in order to grow in our spiritual maturity.

Your life becomes easier

Have you ever had a friend that has told you, "Wow, you got really excited about that!" And they're right. There are certain things in our life that gets us excited and raises our energy level - sometimes without us even knowing it. Next time you see this happening to you, stop and try to determine what caused it. It might be related to your spiritual gift.

What are some of the things that you do better than others and it gives you joy? Maybe it's taking care of kids. Or maybe you enjoy building things. Or maybe you love playing the guitar, or the piano, or some other instrument. Our spiritual gift is like a seed that is planted in our soul. When we water and fertilize our seed it grows into something beautiful. If we ignore it - well, it won't do so well. If we can't identify our seed we

⁵⁷⁸ Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

⁵⁷⁹ 1 Peter 4:10 As each has received a gift, employ it in serving one another, as good managers of the grace of God in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, let it be as it were the very words of God. If anyone serves, let it be as of the strength which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

⁵⁸⁰ Psalms 133:1 See how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!

might give it the wrong fertilizer, give it too much water, or maybe give it too much or too little sun. If we ignore our gift it won't grow to its fullest potential.

We need to identify our seed (i.e., our spiritual gift) so it can grow to its fullest potential. When we take care of our seed and we grow it responsibly, God will see the beauty in the flowers that it produces and He will reveal other places where our flowers can be given away - to bless others. When we follow the Lord we will be given unlimited energy to produce and distribute our beautiful flowers to many other people.

You may be incorrect in your assessment

There may be times when you feel that your gift is the only gift that matters, and that other believers who have different gifts aren't serving with the same passion that you serve. But in many cases this will be an incorrect assessment because we don't and won't fully understand the gifts that others have been given.

We are all given unique gifts, and just because somebody else doesn't have the same amount of energy that you have to serve, it certainly doesn't mean that they aren't as dedicated as you. It simply means that they may have been given a gift that is different than your gift. It means that he or she is not empowered by the Holy Spirit in the same way that you have been empowered. Put their gift in the correct serving environment and they may flourish, and you may flounder.

When we use our spiritual gift in the way that it is meant to be used - we will operate under God's power and in His strength, instead of under our own power and our own strength. When we use our spiritual gift in the correct environment it will be a wonderful feeling and we will serve with joy.

Pray, and ask

So - why should we pray?

God already knows what we need and want, so why should we pray? Is it because we think God doesn't know what we need? Is it because we think God doesn't know we are hurting? Or, maybe we think that He will give us a special favor or dispensation if we solemnly ask Him in prayer?

Here is the answer: True prayer is asking Him in faith. We must pray and ask that His will be done.

God wants us to ask for things. When we ask God for things we are expressing our dependence on Him and we are acknowledging that He is in control. We are acknowledging that He knows what we need and that we need His involvement. We want His involvement. Prayer is faith in action. Prayer is knocking on His door and through faith in Him we know that He will open the door and give us what we ask for.⁵⁸¹ When we align with His will and obey His commands we know that He will bless us and He will set us high above the nations.⁵⁸²

But just because God knows what we need, it surely doesn't mean we should stop asking Him. We should pray because we wish to align our will with His will. We should pray because we wish to deepen our

⁵⁸¹ Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened.

⁵⁸² Deuteronomy 28:1 "Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God: ³Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

relationship with Him. God says that He will help transform us so we can know His will.⁵⁸³ Let's repeat this very important point - through prayer and dependence on Him our minds will be transformed so we can know His will.

Don't need fancy words to pray

You might be thinking to yourself that you really want to pray - but you don't know how. Or, maybe you think that you can't put your prayer into the right words. Here's the good news: God has taken care of this for you. When you accept Jesus into your heart God's Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart,⁵⁸⁴ and because the Holy Spirit knows you better than you know yourself the Holy Spirit will help you pray.⁵⁸⁵ The Holy Spirit will intercede for you and will put everything that you wish to say into the right words.⁵⁸⁶ What a blessing!

This means that you don't need to use fancy words to tell God what you are thinking. You simply need to have faith.⁵⁸⁷ The Holy Spirit knows exactly what you want and need and He has a direct connection to God - so He knows exactly how to ask.⁵⁸⁸

We need to pray more because there will be godlessness soon

The main purpose of prayer is to show our commitment and our faith in God. The Lord wants us to pray if we are in trouble,⁵⁸⁹ if we are happy,⁵⁹⁰ if we are sick,⁵⁹¹ if we have sinned,⁵⁹² and for our healing.⁵⁹³ He also says that we should pray in quiet⁵⁹⁴ and to pray for those who persecute us.⁵⁹⁵ He teaches us that if

⁵⁸³ Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. 2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

⁵⁸⁴ John 14:16 I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever.

⁵⁸⁵ John 15:26 When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me.

⁵⁸⁶ Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which can't be uttered.

⁵⁸⁷ Jude 1:20 But you, beloved, keep building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁸⁸ Romans 8:27 He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession for the saints according to God.

⁵⁸⁹ James 5:13 Is any among you suffering? Let him pray.

⁵⁹⁰ James 5:13 Is any cheerful? Let him sing praises.

⁵⁹¹ James 5:14 Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the assembly, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

⁵⁹² James 5:15 If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

⁵⁹³ James 5:16 Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective.

⁵⁹⁴ Matthew 6:6 But you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

⁵⁹⁵ Matthew 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, 44 But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and

we only pray for those who love us - what reward is that? We need to pray for those who don't love us; we need to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. God even taught us how to pray.⁵⁹⁶

As we near the end times God wants us to pray more and to pray for each other. He tells us that there will be godlessness in our world soon like we have never seen before.⁵⁹⁷ We need to realize how insignificant and powerless we are without the Holy Spirit within us.⁵⁹⁸

Pray daily for God's Spirit to bless you and to help you influence the lives of people around you who don't know God's grand plan. One of things you can do -- tell them about this book!

persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

⁵⁹⁶ Matthew 6:9 Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. 13 Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

⁵⁹⁷ 2 Timothy 3:1 But know this, that in the last days, grievous times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; 5 holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof. Turn away from these, also.

⁵⁹⁸ Zechariah 4:6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.

Be a spark

The song

As we near the end of this book it is important that you listen to the following song, "Made for a Mission." The song is integral to the rest of this book and the song helps explain what God wants all of us to do. You can listen to this song on our web site:

<http://UnderstandGodsWill.com/listen.aspx>

At the beginning of this book you read how the author of this book and the writer of this song were brought together - not by chance - but due to His plan, to create this book's message.

There are several messages in this song that are discussed throughout the remaining sections of this book - so we hope you will take the time to listen to it. If for whatever reason you can't listen to it here are the words:

Song:

MADE FOR A MISSION

Singer and songwriter:

Nikki Chapin Frizzell

I never really had a way with words
Not too convincing
and not so persuasive
So why would I believe I can reach someone
and I can teach someone
and I could lead them to the Kingdom

One small light in the dark
One small voice
One small heart
But I believe in the spark
the tiny flame that starts a fire

And I was made for a mission
I was created for a cause
I was saved to serve the Lord my God
And He will bless my decision
And I will see that someone as small
as me can be made for a mission

I can't imagine what it must be like
with no hope of Heaven
and no word of Jesus Christ
So I will go out while I still have time
and I will reach them
and I will lead them to the Kingdom

One small light in the dark
One small voice
One small heart

But I believe in that spark
the tiny flame that starts a fire

And I was made for a mission
I was created for a cause
I was saved to serve the Lord my God
And He will bless my decision
And I will see that someone as small
as me can be made for a mission

He never said I'd go in glory
He only said go out on a limb
and bring someone home to Him
So I, I, even I, was for a mission
I was created for a cause
I was saved to serve the Lord my God
And He will bless my decision
And I will see that someone as
small as me is made for a mission.

Why is it so hard?

Why do we find it so hard to talk about our faith, or about Jesus? Are we afraid what people might think or say? Are we afraid that someone might disagree with us - or maybe have an opposing view? Are we afraid they will no longer like us?

Or, maybe it's because we have so very little knowledge of what the Bible actually says, or who Jesus is.

There is absolutely nothing that we should be afraid of since we have the Creator of the universe on our side.⁵⁹⁹ There is no One else who gives life. Think about this for a moment. We need to praise the One who gives us life. The Lord tells us that if you are ashamed to talk about Him with others, He will be ashamed of you when He returns in all His glory.⁶⁰⁰ Not a good thing.

It is difficult for many people to share their faith with other people because they don't truly understand what the Bible says. They have never taken the time to read it, or study it. Many people don't study the Bible because it is an incredibly difficult book to read. You can't open the Bible and read a few pages, or even a few chapters, and understand what it says. The Bible is a collection of 66 books that must be read in their entirety or there will be something that is missing in your understanding of what it says.

Also confusing is the fact that the 66 books of the Bible aren't laid out in timeline (also known as chronological) order, so if you open the Bible and start reading it like a normal book, you are hopping around in time. This can be very confusing and can keep many people from reading it - which is sad.

Trying to describe Jesus to other people without understanding His grand plan - would be like trying to describe a person by only reading their obituary. It can't be done. Is there anyone who can describe a person they never knew? To describe a person - any person - we need to know what they said, what they did, what was important to them, what they stood for, how they cared for others, what they believed, and so much more.

⁵⁹⁹ Isaiah 40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.

⁶⁰⁰ Luke 9:26 For whoever will be ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels.

The same is true for many of us when someone brings up the topic of Jesus in conversation, or someone asks us about our faith. We get nervous. Our heart rates jump. We want to change the subject. But it shouldn't be this way. We need to understand what God did for us and we need to be comfortable talking about it. This is the God of the universe that we're talking about. He has a grand plan, and we need to tell others about His grand plan.

Hopefully this book will help, but you still need to read and study the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God, and the Word of God describes God's will. This book is just a small capsule of what the Bible says. We always need to be ready to tell others about the hope that we have.⁶⁰¹ Give this book to others so they can also learn what you just learned. Don't keep this great news to yourself. Share this book with others. You can go to our web site and download it for free - and then email it to others. You can also order the paperback.

If you have a hard time believing that you were created for a purpose - please re-read chapter 4 and the paragraph that describes the probability that you were created by accident without a Creator. It is a mind-bogglingly small number (ok, mind-bogglingly may not be in Webster's dictionary just yet). The probability that the earth and all of humanity was created by chance is so small that there is no way to describe it. It is so infinitesimally small it is off-the-charts small. Back in chapter 4 the probability was stated as $1/10^{322}$. This is the same as .000 (plus another 319 more "0s") and then a 1. This incredibly small probability doesn't even include the probability that the hundreds of thousands of species of exquisitely designed and highly complex flora and fauna (i.e., plants and animals) also came into existence by chance. So now it's an infinitesimally small number times an infinitesimally small number that all of this came into existence by chance. So I hope this helps you understand that you weren't born by accident. You are an exquisite work of art and you have been designed for a purpose by an incredibly loving God. You simply need to find out what your purpose is and then work to fulfill it.

What should you do now?

Congratulations, you have taken the time to read this book and you now understand who Jesus is. You also understand what Jesus did for you and why He did it. We hope you have also accepted His free gift so you can start to live your life with purpose. If you haven't accepted His free gift, pray that God's Spirit will help bring you to accept His truth. Don't let the evil one continue to deceive you.

Satan is extremely cunning. Satan could be giving you his lies right this minute - telling you that this book isn't important or that you can wait and make your decision later. That's his tactic: to delay, to confuse, to deceive, to get you busy with something else, and to take your mind off of what is really important. Do it now. Read the prayer in chapter 5 and let God rule your life. It will be so much easier than ruling it yourself. God will guide you, fulfill you, comfort you, and lighten your path. When you accept God into your heart your soul will be saved for eternity. Eternity! Don't make a mistake that could condemn you for eternity. Eternity is a very long time.

So, after you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you can ride off into the sunset knowing that you have been saved and you can keep all of this wonderful information to yourself, right?

Wrong.

There are many people, including some of your friends, maybe some of your family members, and many others in the world who will be going to hell for eternity if they don't learn what you just learned. We must find them and tell them what Jesus did for all of us. There may be people who live in your neighborhood, people you work with, people you exercise with, people you play sports with, people you see in your local

⁶⁰¹ 1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear.

coffee shop, people you go to school with, people you pass on the street, maybe people you meet on a train or bus as you commute to/from work. Every one of these people need to learn what you just learned - every single one. That's a lot of people. For many of us this can seem like an impossible task. How can we possibly reach every person - in the whole world? That's impossible, right?

No, it's not.

Listen to the song again, and believe. Believe that you can be a spark. Being a spark is actually a very easy thing to do. Every one of us can be a spark - that tiny spark that starts a flame, a flame that starts a fire. That spark can be you. Maybe you have never been too convincing, never been persuasive, never been very good with words. It's so easy to think that you can't do much because you are so small, and this is exactly what Satan wants you to think. You may wonder how you can ever reach someone, and teach someone, and lead them to the Kingdom.

Listen to the song again. You can.

Yes, you are one small light in the dark. Yes, you are one small voice. Yes, you are one small heart. But you now know that you can be a spark, that tiny flame that starts a fire. You were made for a mission. You were created for a cause. You have been saved to serve the Lord and He will bless you for your decision.

For someone as small as you, with just a little bit of faith, faith as tiny as a mustard seed,⁶⁰² you will see that someone as small as you can make a difference. It can be your spark that starts a fire in your city or town, in your neighborhood, where you work, on your bus or train as you commute to or from work, in your health club, or coffee shop, and in so many other places.

We will not do this in glory

Every single one of us can reach someone, people that we know, and people that we don't see very often - maybe some of your neighbors, shut-ins, acquaintances, casual friends, and others. Together we can all reach everyone. All we need to believe is that we can be a spark, a spark that starts a flame, a flame that starts a fire, a fire that cannot be consumed. This fire can travel to all parts of the world, to every single person, if we believe.

As the song says, God never said we will do this in glory. We will not become famous. He only said for us to go out on a limb and bring someone home to Him. Why would we do this? Why would we tell others that they should read this book? It's because - Jesus died for you. He went to the cross and He had nails pounded into His hands and His feet and He hung on a cross until He died. As He hung on the cross He took the sins of the world with Him to His death⁶⁰³ - for all time. And He did all of this for you, and me. He took your past, your present, and all of your future sins with Him. Even your future sins. All you need to do - is believe.

The piece of wood on which He hung, He created. The rocky hill on which His cross stood, He created. The nails that pierced His hands and His feet were made out of His star stuff (iron). Eight hundred years before He came to earth He told us that this would happen,⁶⁰⁴ and through His prophet Isaiah He also told us how He would die - that He would be "pierced for our transgressions."

⁶⁰² Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

⁶⁰³ 1 John 2:2 And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

⁶⁰⁴ Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.

And then, after He was born of Mary, it all happened exactly as He said it would. He did all of this because He loves you that much. You. Only you. He would have done all of this for you even if you were the only person on earth. You are His perfect creation. He came to earth to save your spirit, the spirit that He created to be with Him for eternity. But - you must believe. And you must accept His gift. He will bless your decision and He wants you to know that someone as small as you is made for a mission.

Why does the Lord want you to be a spark?

There are many reasons:

- (1) Because the Lord told us to^{605 606}
- (2) The Lord told us to always be ready to explain the hope that we have⁶⁰⁷
- (3) The Lord told us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us⁶⁰⁸
- (4) The Lord told us to tell others - whether they wish to listen, or not⁶⁰⁹
- (5) If you are ashamed to talk about Him, He will be ashamed of you when His is glorified⁶¹⁰
- (6) Because telling others is one of the fruits of the Spirit⁶¹¹
- (7) Because telling others is a wise thing to do⁶¹²
- (8) Because telling others will help keep them from going to hell⁶¹³
- (9) Because telling others will please God⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁵ Matthew 28:19 Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen

⁶⁰⁶ Acts 10:42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that this is he who is appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins.

⁶⁰⁷ 1 Peter 3:15 and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear.

⁶⁰⁸ Matthew 7:12 Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

⁶⁰⁹ Ezekiel 3:11 Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'

⁶¹⁰ Luke 9:26 For whoever will be ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels.

⁶¹¹ Galations 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.

⁶¹² Proverbs 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. He who is wise wins souls.

⁶¹³ Luke 12:5 But I will warn you whom you should fear. Fear him, who after he has killed, has power to cast into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

⁶¹⁴ Luke 12:8 I tell you, everyone who confesses me before men, him will the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God.

- (10) Because telling others provides fellowship with God⁶¹⁵
- (11) Because telling others will make the angels rejoice⁶¹⁶
- (12) Because telling others will help provide more workers for the harvest of finding more un-saved souls⁶¹⁷

Here are some ways that you (yes, you!) can be a spark

There are many ways to be a spark. Here are just a few ways. No doubt you will be able to think of other ways that you can be a spark.

Get together with other believers and put together your own list and then do what you can to execute on your list. Be a spark - and start fires!

- (1) Tell your friends and acquaintances about this book. Give them a copy, or email them our free e-book, or tell them about our free audio book. Maybe listen to the book with them?
- (2) Drop this book into your neighbors' mailboxes. Maybe attach a short note that says someone loves them.
- (3) Send copies to student ministry organizations that you know.
- (4) Send copies to charitable organizations that you know.
- (5) Send a copy to church leaders in your city and elsewhere so they can tell others about the book.
- (6) Start a small group and read and study the book together.
- (7) Send copies of this book to an overseas mission group or organization.
- (8) Send copies of this book to your family members and relatives who don't know who Jesus is.
- (9) Read or listen to this book during "family/evening time" with your kids.
- (10) Send copies of this book to nursing home residents and shut-ins (maybe visit them and read it to them?).
- (11) Send copies of this book to people who are doing time in a work-house, jail, or prison.
- (12) Hand the book out to people who live in your apartment building, flat, or other.
- (13) Hand the book out to people at your city's festival, as well as county and state fairs.
- (14) Make the book available to churches and synagogues and other places of worship.
- (15) Make the book available to local food shelves and shelters (e.g., homeless, women's, men's, other).
- (16) Make the book available to people you work with.
- (17) Make the book available to single moms and dads that you know.
- (18) Make the book available to your men's or women's coffee group.
- (19) Always carry a few books with you and hand them out to people the Lord puts in your path.
- (20) Send copies of this book to social workers that you know.
- (21) Send copies of this book to psychiatrists, psychologists, and life coaches that you know.
- (22) Send copies of this book to politicians that you know.
- (23) Send copies to business coaches and business leaders that you know.
- (24) Send copies of this book to teachers and professors that you know.
- (25) Walk around your city (or town) and hand them out.

⁶¹⁵ 1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

⁶¹⁶ Luke 15:10 Even so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner repenting.

⁶¹⁷ Luke 10:2 Then he said to them, "The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send out laborers into his harvest."

- (26) Make your local libraries aware of this book.
- (27) Make your local TV, newspapers, and radio stations aware of this book.
- (28) Make the book a gift at celebrations - births, birthdays, anniversaries, and more.
- (29) Make the book available to those who are contemplating divorce.
- (30) Make the book available to those who are contemplating marriage.
- (31) Make the book available to people who are ill, who are in hospice, or are in the hospital.
- (32) Make the book available to someone who has recently lost someone (e.g., a child, spouse, or other).
- (33) Make the book available to grief counselors.
- (34) Start a study group and use this book and the available study guide (on our web site) to help lead a study group.
- (35) Get a bunch of students at your school together and study this book together. And let other students who aren't involved know what they are missing. Be a spark of sparks and let every student and every teacher know about this book. Tell them it's a must read. Tell them it's FREE - and that they can go to our web site and read one of our free e-books, or listen to our free audio book using their iPhone, Android phone, or iPad. Put our audio book on speakerphone and let others hear it. What could be easier?
- (36) Tell people they can also order our paperback - however many they want. To read, or to give away.

Each of these ideas is a way to become a spark, to start fires around the world, but you will surely think of more ways to be a spark.

Be an "Igniter"

There are many ways to become a spark as listed above, but there is one type of spark that can touch hundreds and possibly thousands of lives. And that is being an Igniter. Being an Igniter means you have the ability to influence many people with what you have been blessed with - possibly your wealth, possibly your ability to translate languages (we need this, please contact us), possibly your ability to print and/or distribute things (such as this book), or maybe you have another skill.

Wealth isn't always about money. There are people in many parts of the world who don't have much, but they would consider themselves wealthy. They have family. They have friends. They have true joy in their lives. They have enough food to feed their family this evening. And they have faith which provides them with a guarantee.⁶¹⁸ They aren't wealthy financially, but they would consider themselves wealthy in so many ways. When some of us see how happy they are, with so few possessions, we wonder how we can get the type of happiness that they have. You can. The Lord will heap His blessings on you through His promises.

Wealth can, of course, mean that you have an abundance of money (which is probably the most common definition), but wealth can be an abundance of almost anything. You can have a wealth of love for others, you can have a wealth of influence, you can have a wealth of mechanical skills, you can have a wealth of compassion, or empathy. So being an Igniter is simply sharing your wealth in a grand fashion. It's finding a way to use your wealth to impact many lives, not just with a few.

Being wise to the significance of it all

Being an Igniter is like a person who is carrying a torch - and as he walks past a building full of fireworks he knows the significance of tossing his torch into that building. An Igniter knows that he can make a lot of fireworks ignite in that building in grand style. He is aware that just a tiny spark (him) can cause a huge

⁶¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:5 Now he who made us for this very thing is God, who also gave to us the down payment of the Spirit.

explosion of fireworks everywhere. Some of the exploding fireworks will go east, others west, some north, and some south. Some will go straight up and straight down. And some fireworks may not light at all (i.e., those who choose not to believe).

A wise Igniter knows that just a small spark can start many flames, many flames that can start many fires, many fires that cannot be consumed. An Igniter has the vision and the desire to change the world because they know they have been blessed with faith, or financial wealth, or both. An Igniter wishes to share their wealth to further God's kingdom because they know they have been saved - and their only real meaningful mission that remains while here on earth is to serve the One who created them.

Those who have been blessed with financial wealth

Those who can touch hundreds and even thousands of lives with a single flick of a wrist include Igniters who are blessed with financial wealth. People become wealthy for many reasons. Some have financial wealth because they have been blessed by God,⁶¹⁹ some have gained financial wealth by working hard and gaining wisdom and understanding,⁶²⁰ some have gained financial wealth through an inheritance,⁶²¹ and some have gained financial wealth through means that do not necessarily align with God's standards.⁶²² But, it doesn't matter where your wealth came from - you can be a huge difference maker right now.

No matter how you are blessed, from this day forward you can be an Igniter in a huge way. You can accept Jesus' free gift and honor God with your wealth.⁶²³ For your wealth will be worthless on your last day.⁶²⁴ In fact, your wealth on your last day might testify against you.⁶²⁵ Don't allow the worries of this life and your wealth and desires for more "stuff" choke out the Word of God.⁶²⁶ Use your wealth for good.

From this day forward put your hope in God. God will provide you with everything for your enjoyment.⁶²⁷ For the person who puts their love in things will never have enough.⁶²⁸ And people who have wealth but lack an understanding of God's Word will perish like beasts in the wilderness⁶²⁹ and they will have made no mark on the world. Don't let this happen to you.

⁶¹⁹ Proverbs 10:22 It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.

⁶²⁰ Ezekiel 28:4 by your wisdom and by your understanding you have gotten you riches, and have gotten gold and silver into your treasures.

⁶²¹ Proverbs 19:14 House and riches are an inheritance from fathers

⁶²² Ecclesiastes 6:2 a man to whom God gives riches, wealth, and honor, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him no power to eat of it, but an alien eats it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

⁶²³ Proverbs 3:9 Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce.

⁶²⁴ Proverbs 11:4 Riches don't profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

⁶²⁵ James 5:3 Your gold and your silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be for a testimony against you, and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up your treasure in the last days.

⁶²⁶ Mark 4:19 and the cares of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

⁶²⁷ 1 Timothy 6:17 Charge those who are rich in this present world that they not be haughty, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

⁶²⁸ Ecclesiastes 5:10 He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase: this also is vanity.

Would you like to be an Igniter? You can be an Igniter that makes a mark on the world, makes an impact on your family members, your friends, your co-workers, your neighborhood, your city, and so many other places. The wealth that you have is a gift from God and God may have saved you for this very moment. Think about it. No matter what type of life you have lived God may have prepared you, and blessed you financially, for this very moment. You can use your wealth to honor God.

Through your generosity you can help us distribute this book to people everywhere. You can help us make this book available to hundreds of people, maybe thousands of people, even millions of people, because you have been blessed. Think about this for a moment. You can be an Igniter and you can help start hundreds and possibly thousands of sparks around the globe, sparks that start fires, fires that cannot be consumed. And God will bless you for your decision.

To be an Igniter you don't have to do anything. Simply support our ministry so we can get this book's message distributed to all corners of the world. You can be a difference maker. You can use your wealth which God gave you to be an Igniter, a very wise Igniter. Our mission teams will do all of the hard work such as distributing our various books and e-books to those who want it - for free. You can help keep our mission healthy through your financial support so we can continue to deliver this book's message to everyone in the world who wants one of our e-books, our audio book, or our paperback. Simply let the Lord's blessings flow through you. Live your life like a river (see the Appendix to see what this means). Your gift will have eternal rewards - for both you and the many people that you touch.

You can be an Igniter that helps start sparks, sparks that start flames, flames that start fires, fires that cannot be consumed - as long as you believe. Together we can reach everyone. On our web site you will find a page that includes our calculation on how we can reach everyone in the whole world. Yes, the whole world. It is possible. Our calculation proves it.

When you make a donation to our ministry we promise to keep you informed of the many lives that you touch. We will keep you informed as often as you like - weekly, monthly, or yearly. You decide. Through your generosity you will be blessed because you believe.

Would you like to make a difference to hundreds, thousands, and maybe even millions of people? You can. Simply partner with us. With your help we can create many sparks all over the globe - as the Lord has asked us to do.⁶³⁰ See the last page of this book to see how you can become an Igniter, or go to our web site www.UnderstandGodsWill.com and go to our "Save Souls!" tab. You will be blessed for helping us distribute our book throughout your city, and the world.

⁶²⁹ Psalms 49:20 A man who has riches without understanding, is like the animals that perish.

⁶³⁰ Acts 10:42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that this is he who is appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins.

God's will be done

You can know God's good, pleasing, and perfect will

Always, always, always refer to His instruction manual to find out His will. The Bible is God's Word and it is in God's Word where you will find God's will - His good, pleasing, and perfect will.⁶³¹ God's will isn't a mystery, He isn't hiding it from you. You simply need to find it and apply it to your life.

It is in the Bible where you will find God's will for your life. Have you opened and studied the Bible lately? Maybe it's time. Get into a Bible study group, or at the very least start dedicating some time each day where you can study the Bible on your own. Don't be a fool^{632 633} for not learning who God is.

Don't forget that Satan wishes to keep you ignorant of God's Word and God's will for your life. You can overcome Satan's deception of being an angel of light⁶³⁴ but it will take time and persistence. For showing persistence God will give you eternal life.⁶³⁵ After you get into a consistent routine of studying God's Word, always remind yourself that learning His Word is not a sprint, it's more like a marathon. It must become a part of your daily routine, not just a passing fancy.

Do you believe?

Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God? The answer to this important question will not only determine how you view the Bible, it will also determine whether you let the Bible guide your life.⁶³⁶ If you believe the Bible is the Word of God, you will want to study it, trust it, and obey it.

The Bible can be your bedrock and your compass. God will never lead you into a situation that is contrary to what the Bible says - because the Bible is God's Word. Always use the Bible to test things that you hear and see to determine whether it is true or whether it is contrary to the Bible's teachings. You can use the Bible as your "truth meter" in everything that you do, and for every major decision that you make. Being unsure that the Bible is truth will allow the evil one to deceive you, which will lead you away from your Shepherd.

God's desire is that everyone be saved.⁶³⁷ Unfortunately, not everyone will be. Because of the free will that God gave all of us He knows that many people will choose not to follow Him and that many will be deceived.⁶³⁸ He also knows that there will be many who will continue to live in ignorance. Don't let that happen to you.

⁶³¹ Romans 12:2 Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.

⁶³² Ephesians 5:17 Therefore don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

⁶³³ Psalms 94:8 Consider, you senseless among the people; you fools, when will you be wise?

⁶³⁴ 2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light.

⁶³⁵ Romans 2:7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life.

⁶³⁶ Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.

⁶³⁷ Acts 2:21 It will be, that whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

⁶³⁸ Matthew 7:13 Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it.

God wants all of you

To draw close to God you must do what He says.⁶³⁹ You can't pick and choose and obey just some of His commands, you must follow all of His commands. Picking and choosing the ones that you like and ignoring the rest, this will be like saying, "It's not Your will God, but mine." If you think that following only those commands that you like will honor God - sorry, it won't. In the end Jesus will say to you, "I never knew you."⁶⁴⁰ Keeping all of His commands is how we demonstrate our love for Him, and this is also how we remain in His love. It is observing His commands that will allow His blessings to flow into and through your life.

God wants to draw close to you, and when you pray to Him and turn from your disobedient ways He will hear you and He will heal you.⁶⁴¹ When you become His friend He will reveal His purpose and His plan for your life.⁶⁴² If you are a friend of Jesus everything that God the Father reveals to Jesus, Jesus will reveal to you.⁶⁴³

Our mission while on earth

Our mission while here on earth is summarized in The Lord's Prayer:

⁹"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

- Matthew 6

Do you see in verse 10 where it says that our mission is to help bring God's kingdom to earth? Our eternal salvation is guaranteed the moment that we put our faith in Jesus, but the quality of our lives while here on earth depends on carrying out God's plan after our salvation. It is through our obedience to His Word and leaving our former way of life behind us that our eyes will be opened to our glorious inheritance.⁶⁴⁴ ⁶⁴⁵ This will require that we continue to grow in our knowledge of Jesus,⁶⁴⁶ which requires that we study the Bible

⁶³⁹ James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he sees himself, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does.

⁶⁴⁰ Matthew 7:23 Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity'

⁶⁴¹ 2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

⁶⁴² Psalms 25:14 The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant.

⁶⁴³ John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you.

⁶⁴⁴ Ephesians 1:18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might.

⁶⁴⁵ Ephesians 4:22 that you put away, as concerning your former way of life, the old man, that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit; 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new man, who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth.

so we will not be ashamed when we are provided with an opportunity to tell others.^{647 648} Our persistent learning of God's Word will enlarge our capacity for loving, forgiving, joy, and happiness, and it will also give us the ability to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and that His love surpasses all knowledge.⁶⁴⁹

So, as you can see, our mission while here on earth is to bring glory to God and to be a personal testimony to everyone we come in contact with. We can only do this if we learn and apply what the Bible says and we put our learning and our faith into action in everything that we do.

Here are some of the areas where the Bible says we should abide by His teachings while letting the fruits of His (Holy) Spirit flow through us:

- Trust in the Lord⁶⁵⁰
- Live by the will of God⁶⁵¹
- Seek His Kingdom in everything that you do⁶⁵²
- Give God thanks in all circumstances - both the good and the bad things that happen in your life⁶⁵³
- Honor God in all that you do - obey His standards⁶⁵⁴
- Serve and do good works according to His will^{655 656 657}
- Seek the good of others⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁴⁶ 2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever.

⁶⁴⁷ 2 Timothy 2:15 Give diligence to present yourself approved by God, a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth.

⁶⁴⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16 Every Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

⁶⁴⁹ Ephesians 3:18 may be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

⁶⁵⁰ Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.

⁶⁵¹ 1 Peter 4:2 that you no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

⁶⁵² Matthew 6:33 But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.

⁶⁵³ 1 Thessalonians 5:18 In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you.

⁶⁵⁴ Ezra 10:11 Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will.

⁶⁵⁵ Hebrews 2:4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, by various works of power, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?

⁶⁵⁶ Hebrews 13:21 make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

⁶⁵⁷ Ephesians 1:11 in whom also we were assigned an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his will.

⁶⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:24 Let no one seek his own, but each one his neighbor's good.

- Let your light shine before others (as you serve) so they may see your good works and glorify our Father in heaven⁶⁵⁹
- Silence the ignorant talk of non-believers through your good works⁶⁶⁰
- Avoid sexual immorality⁶⁶¹
- Teach, rebuke, correct and train others in righteousness⁶⁶²
- Pray in all righteousness, and believe that God will answer your prayers⁶⁶³
- Pray for His blessings and His forgiveness and have confidence in approaching God⁶⁶⁴
- Don't let any unwholesome talk come from your mouth⁶⁶⁵ and do not take the Lord's name in vain
- Continue to do God's will even if you suffer for it⁶⁶⁶
- Be generous and give with a loving heart⁶⁶⁷
- Don't store up treasures on earth⁶⁶⁸
- Persevere⁶⁶⁹

Final Blessing

We started this book by stating that there were two important decisions that you must make to learn who God is. The second-most important decision, which you have just accomplished, was to open your heart and keep it open for the duration of this book. Congratulations, you have accomplished this task. Now, to continue to learn who God is and to learn God's will for your life you must keep your heart open so God can talk to you, lead you, and bless you. He has so much to tell you. He wants to be your friend and He wishes to reveal who He is to you. Take just a moment and try to comprehend what was just stated: the Creator of the universe - He wants to be your friend. You are His handiwork, His brilliance, His unique

⁶⁵⁹ Matthew 5:16 Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

⁶⁶⁰ 1 Peter 2:15 For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

⁶⁶¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God: your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality.

⁶⁶² 2 Timothy 3:16 Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

⁶⁶³ John 9:31 We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God, and does his will, he listens to him.

⁶⁶⁴ 1 John 5:14 This is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he listens to us.

⁶⁶⁵ Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for building up as the need may be, that it may give grace to those who hear.

⁶⁶⁶ 1 Peter 4:19 Therefore let them also who suffer according to the will of God in doing good entrust their souls to him, as to a faithful Creator.

⁶⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 15:10 You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.

⁶⁶⁸ Matthew 6:19 "Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

⁶⁶⁹ Hebrews 10:36 For you need endurance so that, having done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

design, His work of art, and His radiance. He wants you to know and understand His will and He also wants to share His kingdom with you. To help you learn all of this He created you with a desire to learn why you were created, and what your purpose is. This book is just a small first step. It is now up to you to continue on your journey of discovery.

Now - onto the most important decision that you can make. Your most important decision is simply to believe that God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to die for your sins. This decision is the only way you can be saved from your sinful nature. God did all of the hard work for you, you simply need to believe. God conceived the perfect plan and it was executed to perfection. There is nothing else you can do to gain a ticket to heaven.⁶⁷⁰ There is no way to earn it, or buy it. Your wealth won't do it for you. You must simply declare your faith in Jesus.⁶⁷¹ God makes this gift available to everyone, but to be saved you must verbally⁶⁷² accept His gift. Through Jesus your wounds can be healed.⁶⁷³ If you haven't accepted His gift - return to chapter 5 and learn how this can be done. You will be richly rewarded.

You can live with purpose

Each of us has just one life to live and most of us want to live it with purpose. Do you? Do you want to know what your purpose is? You can. But you must know God first and He will only hear your requests and your prayers if you believe that He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to save you from your sins.

When you make this decision He will enter your heart and God's Holy Spirit will help guide you in all wisdom so you can know Him better.⁶⁷⁴ ⁶⁷⁵ But this doesn't mean that you will receive your calling immediately. You will need to continue to study His Word, determine which spiritual gift He has given you, and He will then start to reveal your purpose and your mission over time. It could take days, weeks, possibly years. But as you start to learn what your gift is, and you start to use your gift to serve others, you will learn which areas feel right. Some areas will bring you deep satisfaction, others not so much. Those that feel natural and give you a supernatural peace and joy and energy - that is probably the area where the Lord wishes for you to serve Him which He prepared in advance for you to do.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷⁰ John 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven. 14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

⁶⁷¹ Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, that no one would boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

⁶⁷² Romans 10:9 that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart, one believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich to all who call on him. 13 For, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

⁶⁷³ 1 Peter 2:24 who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were going astray like sheep; but now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

⁶⁷⁴ Ephesians 1:17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

⁶⁷⁵ James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach; and it will be given to him.

⁶⁷⁶ Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

Your life will shine within His glorious design

Your life matters. It matters a lot. It matters because you are fearfully and wonderfully made.⁶⁷⁷ You are made in God's image to reflect His very nature. By putting your hope in Jesus, God will give you a new heart. He will set you free. He will give you hope and peace. He will give you a new life. When you abide in Him, He will give you the desires of your heart⁶⁷⁸ and He will give you the kind of good works that He prepared in advance for you to do.⁶⁷⁹

But there is still some work that you must do. You must learn what God's will is for your life, and to do that you must study God's Word. Don't waste another minute wondering what could have been, it still can be. You can continue to make unwise decisions regarding how you spend your time - potentially wasting the impact that your life could have had - or you can start making wise decisions right now.

When you dedicate some time to this, you will have the type of life that will serve the Lord and will bless you and others at the same time. Start now. But you will need to be patient while you wait. God must trust you before His blessings will flow. And you must trust God that He will show you more of His plan when He is ready. God isn't going to show you everything all at once, but God does have a plan for you and it might take some time to find out what it is. Someday you will get to see the front of His beautiful tapestry and it is going to be exquisite. Your life will shine within His glorious design.

Until that day, do your best to fight the good fight, finish the race, be a spark, and put your faith in Jesus⁶⁸⁰ in everything that you do. For when you put your faith in Jesus there will be nothing that will be impossible for you.⁶⁸¹ Nothing.

God bless you on your journey.

⁶⁷⁷ Psalms 139:14 I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

⁶⁷⁸ Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

⁶⁷⁹ Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them.

⁶⁸⁰ 2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith.

⁶⁸¹ Matthew 17:20 He said to them, "Because of your unbelief. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Appendix A: Do you feel blessed? You can now bless it forward!

(With your help we can keep this book free to everyone who is lost, or searching, or has been deceived by the Evil one. There must be no barriers to learning God's Truth – and receiving His free gift.)

Tear off and mail

Yes, I feel blessed by reading this book. I have learned so much - I would like to bless others.

Because God's gift is free -- I would like to help keep this book free to everyone who would like to read it. Yes, I want to be a spark! And I can - right now. This is a bless-it-forward ministry. Those who are blessed (and they know it) will help find and bless those who are being deceived or are searching for their purpose. Every \$1 that is donated will help us print and distribute one more book to people all over the world who don't know Christ's Good News!

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State Zip: _____
 _____ Yes! Please send me monthly updates via email about how this book is changing hearts!
 My email: _____

Tear off and mail this form to:
I was made for a mission, inc
P.O. Box 846
Wayzata, MN 55391
All gifts are tax deductible!

Yes, I want to support this ministry in the following way (check all that apply):

I would like to make a ONE-TIME gift of:
 One-time amount: ___\$25 ___\$100 ___\$250 ___\$500 ___\$1,000 ___\$5,000 ___\$10,000 Other: _____
 I would like to make a gift/payment EVERY MONTH to help SUSTAIN and GROW this ministry. Praise the Lord!
 Monthly amount: ___\$10 ___\$25 ___\$50 ___\$100 ___\$250 ___\$500 ___\$1000 Other: _____

Here is my payment information for my choice above:

____ I have enclosed a check.
 ____ I authorize you to make a **ONE TIME** payment using my **CHECKING ACCOUNT** information below.
 ____ I authorize you to make an **ONGOING MONTHLY** payment using the **CHECKING ACCOUNT** information below. Make this e-check payment on the _____ of each month.
 Here is my checking account information: Bank routing #: _____ Checking account #: _____
 ____ I authorize you to make a **ONE TIME** payment using the **CREDIT CARD** information below.
 ____ I authorize you to make an **ONGOING MONTHLY** payment using the **CREDIT CARD** information below. Make this credit card payment on the _____ of each month.
 Here is my credit card #: _____ Expiry Date: _____ Security Code: _____

This is the name on my check or credit card (please print): _____

My signature/authorization: _____

Appendix B: Fan into Flame the Gift of God

Anyone who would like a copy of this book - it will be provided to them for free. Jesus' gift is free, therefore this book will be free. It is our intention to make this book available to anyone in the world who wants a copy - for free. There is no easier way to be a spark than to give away a free gift, especially a free gift that provides the gift of eternity.

Every book that is given away will help fan the flame:

2 Timothy 1: ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. ⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

Making this book free to everyone may seem like an impossible task. And you're right, it is impossible.

Without God.

The cost to print our paperback book is about \$1.00 (one dollar) per book, depending on the quantity of books printed. It is a 184 page soft cover book with a beautiful high gloss color cover.

If you have been blessed we hope you will want to help us print more books so we can give them away. Those who are saved will help find the unsaved; we will work in unity as God has taught us to do. Your wealth and your generosity is a gift from God and God may have saved you and predestined you for this very moment. Think about it. No matter what type of life you have lived God may have prepared you and blessed you financially for this very moment - to help us tell others about Jesus. You can use your wealth to honor God, and God will bless you for your decision.

If you choose to be an Igniter (as described in chapter 6) this is how you can impact people around the world. Here are a few examples:

- A donation of \$10 will help us print 10 books - up to 10 souls might be saved
- A donation of \$1,000 will help us print 1,000 books - up to 1,000 souls might be saved!!
- A donation of \$100,000 will help us print 100,000 books - up to 100,000 souls might be saved!!!!

Giving to others is part of our mission and God will bless you for your generosity. We simply need to allow God's blessings to flow through us and He promises to enrich us for our generosity. For God says, "You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."⁶⁸²

God has taught us to live our lives with a river mentality, not a lake mentality. When we live our lives with a lake mentality we tend to be cautious and we wait until the lake (i.e., our savings) fills up - and only when the lake is nearly full do we feel like we can be generous. When the lake is low we tend to hold on to what we have. Our tendency to live this way is because we lack faith. We are afraid the lake may not fill up again anytime soon - so we hoard, and we don't give. And when we don't give, we can't bless others. And when we don't bless others, we aren't honoring God. And when we don't honor God, well, He can't bless us. As you can see this is not a good situation to be in.

⁶⁸² 2 Corinthians 9:10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

Jesus taught us to live our lives with a river mentality. He wants us to be generous with our time and our savings and let our generosity flow like a rushing gushing river - with nothing to slow it down. When we are generous He wants us to have faith that He will constantly replenish our generosity from His upstream storehouse. When we live our lives like a river we will be blessed for having faith in Him. For God said, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."⁶⁸³ He also said, "Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to."⁶⁸⁴

When we live our lives like a river, and we have faith in His promise, we can do the impossible. We can be generous because we know God will reward us for our generosity. This means we can supply this book to everyone in the world who wants a copy - to help communicate God's message to those who have not heard it yet. This is because through our faith we know that God will bless us for our generosity. He will replenish us. The more that we give, the more He will give us, like a rushing gushing river. It's a win-win. For God said, "For whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."⁶⁸⁵

Your donation might save the soul of someone that you know, or someone that you don't know. It could be your neighbor, or people on the other side of the world. Let's give them the opportunity to learn who Jesus is, just like you just learned. With your support we can distribute thousands of free books and e-books and audio books to everyone who wants a copy - in all countries around the world. You can be an Igniter that helps start many flames, flames that start many fires, fires that cannot be consumed. Enabling sparks around the world with your financial support will help fan into flame the gift of God (2 Timothy 1:6) to others - no matter where they are.

When you donate please pray that God's Will be done. Pray that He will protect those that you love from the evil one. Also pray that those who do not know Jesus may find Him. He is always here and He is waiting for a heart to be opened. He won't enter a heart without an invitation. He wants to give everyone His free gift, but people must ask Him in. Let's give everyone the opportunity to invite Him in.

The Lord will hear your prayers if you put your faith in Jesus. If you believe in Jesus and you help our mission - you will become an Igniter and you will be supporting sparks in every corner of the globe, sparks that will start flames, flames that will start fires, fires that cannot be consumed. Souls will be saved. Your donation will help fund the distribution of our free book to everyone who wants a copy, in every country of the world, and you will be blessed for your decision.

If you are considering giving a significant donation to our ministry - please contact our office so we can discuss it with you. We would love to have a face-to-face meeting, anywhere in the world, so we can bless your contribution. Our contact information and a page that describes how you can help support our ministry can be found on our web site:

After reading this book we would love to hear from you.
You can email me directly at: jim@understandgodswill.com
Many blessings to you and yours. Jim Harper, author

⁶⁸³ Proverbs 11:25 The liberal soul shall be made fat. He who waters shall be watered also himself.

⁶⁸⁴ Deuteronomy 15:10 You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.

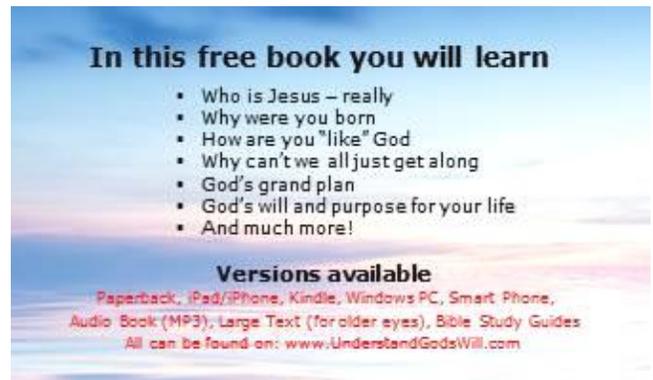
⁶⁸⁵ 2 Corinthians 9:6 Remember this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Appendix C: It's Easy to be a Spark!

Front side of card



Back side of card



(Actual size 2" x 3.5" - business card size)

Have you ever found it difficult telling others about your faith, or about Jesus? Of course you have. It's hard. It's personal. It's difficult for everybody. But we have found a very easy way to tell others about Jesus.

Simply hand them a business card like the one above - and tell them that you know where they can find a really good FREE eBook. That's it. Your job is done. If they go to our web site, read our free book, and if they open their heart and let Jesus in, you will have helped save a soul.

You can order this full color two-sided card on our web site (only about \$36 per 1000 cards). After you receive your cards you can carry them in your purse, or wallet, keep them in your office, or car. You might even carry a few in your pocket so you are always prepared. You never know when the Lord will put somebody in your path that is needing, and desiring, to make a change to their life. And YOU can be the change agent. You can be the person - the spark - who hands them this card and tells them that they can learn God's will for their life. You might be the person who, at just the right moment, hands them what they have been searching for. They might be ready for a change, and all you have to do is hand them the card.

See how easy it is to be a spark?

Appendix D: God's gift is free – so everything we have is free!

If you have read this book - you now understand who Jesus is and we hope you will want to tell others about our free book.

Think of people that you know who need to understand God's will for their life - and we will send them a book. That person might be a friend, a neighbor, a co-worker, a relative, they might ride on your bus or train, or they could be your son or daughter. It doesn't matter. Simply go to our web site www.UnderstandGodsWill.com and fill in our Contact Us page and provide us with their name and address - and we will send them a free book.

You can also urge your church to order our business card to place on your church's information table, As people walk by they can grab a handful to hand out to others. See the page in this Appendix that describes this card.

We also have several [pdf versions](#) of our free book on our web site that you can download and e-mail to people. This will allow them to read it on their computer or laptop, or they can print it and read it like a magazine.

We also have several [e-book versions](#) on our web site that you can download and read on your favorite e-reader. We have versions for your iPad and Kindle.

We also have an [audio version](#) (.mp3) on our web site for those who might want to listen to our book as they drive, walk, jog, work in their home, listen with their kids, or other. You can listen to our book directly from our web site or you can download our mp3 files to a smart phone or mp3 player and listen to the book through car speakers or a home entertainment system.

We also have a [LARGE TEXT version](#) for those who might like larger words. Regular books are so difficult for older eyes - and this version will help. You can print copies of this version and put the pages into a presentation folder. This will allow people to read it like a magazine, and when they are done they can pass it around to others. What a wonderful gift.

We also have a [study guide](#) and a [group leader's guide](#) (for a facilitator) if you would like to study this book as a small group. Simply download and print these guides and you will be ready to go.

Whichever version you choose - they're free. We don't want a single obstacle to be in the way of reading this book and giving it away to others. It will only take a little bit of your time, which is also free by the way.

Be sure to visit our web site www.UnderstandGodsWill.com for more ideas and more information.

Many blessings to you and yours.

A note about our study guide and audio book

After you read this book - you might want to do some Bible study around it. We have prepared Bible study material that you can use as an individual, or as a group, and you can download it from our web site below. With our Bible study material you can learn many things about the Bible that you never knew - and even thought about before.

Our study guide has been developed to align perfectly with our audio book (i.e., also available on our web site below). You can open our study guide, press "play" on our audio book, and when you hear the answer to the next question in the study guide you can press the "pause" button on the audio book to write down your answer. You will find this invaluable for group discussion and learning -- you can learn together! Everybody will have their own understanding (and maybe perception) of what the Bible says in a certain area, so you can stop the audio book to discuss. When it comes to Bible study - all questions are good!

Our note about our free books and more

You will find all of our free e-books, free study guides, free audio books, and much more on our web site below. God's gift is free, therefore all of our books and our study material is free. Yes, totally free. We hope you will join us in being a spark (see chapter 6). You were made for a mission!

www.UnderstandGodsWill.com

Have you ever wondered...

- Can I know God?
- How am I made in God's image?
- Our world is full of pain and misery - is God or Satan in control?
- Is God a punishing God? Does He ever punish me for the things that I do?
- Who is Jesus - really?
- Does God ever "use" Satan for His benefit?
- Why is there so much evil and sin in the world?
- I pray, but God doesn't answer my prayers. Why?
- Why does it seem like God is blessing others, and not me?
- Why was I born, and what is God's will for my life?
- What can I do to live a life full of purpose and meaning?

If you have ever wondered about these things - and have never found answers, this book may be for you. This book has been created to answer life's most important questions - including the questions above and a whole lot more.

We would love to hear from you after you read this book. There is a comment section on our website below.

Jim Harper

*This book is not for sale, but we invite you to bless it forward!
Donate on our website!*

Romans 12:2

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is
-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For free e-books, study guides, audio books and more, visit us at:

www.UnderstandGodsWill.com