

LIVING A VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

By

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INTRODUCTION

I cover many topics in this essay because the more you know about biblical verses pertaining to your life, and the more you live by them, the greater are the chances that you will indeed live a happy, victorious Christian life. But remember that for this kind of life to be possible you must have a close relationship with the God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

FEARS: GOOD AND BAD

I have put this topic at the front of this essay because fear is usually thought of as something bad. This section will show that life is sometimes good if it has the right kind of fear in it. So I believe the following discussion will help a person to confront any good-bad” fear with a minimum of anxiety.

Fear is a normal part of life and it can be defined as “an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm” (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Eleventh Edition).

There are many levels of fear. Let’s say fear ranges from one to ten. A “One” might be the fear that your hair is not combed right, or that your slip is showing. A “Ten” would be the fear of death and spending eternity in hell. A “Phobia” would be about a “six,” and a “Normal” fear would be about a “three.”

I believe a normal fear is a “healthy” fear that God puts into all of us; it is one that keeps us from doing foolish things, like jumping off a barn with a bed sheet as a parachute, or picking up a rattlesnake!

But there is one fear that is a good fear and everybody should have it: a fear of the Lord. Also, if we have this “fear of the Lord,” we should reap great benefits, some of which are listed in the Bible in the Book of Proverbs.

- Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”
- Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”
- Proverbs 10:27: “The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.”
- Proverbs 15:16: “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and turmoil with it.”
- Proverbs 19:23: “The fear of the LORD leads to life, so that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.”
- Proverbs 22:4: “The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor, and life.”

Indeed God wants us to have the results of good Godly “fear” as listed in Proverbs. And if we are living good Christian lives, the Lord will “manage” our other fears for our own benefit. Following are some examples of this.

- Psalm 23:4: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”
- Psalm 27:1: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”
- 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (KJV).

Psalm 91 gives us assurance that if we abide in God and put our trust in Him, He will protect us from all manner of things including: the enemy, pestilence, terror, destruction, and evil; I recommend that you read it.

One final bit of advice: When you are confronted with an irrational fear don't run from it; face it and work through it; it will strengthen your ability to overcome future fears; and continually walk close to the Lord and your problems with fears will be minimized

GOD'S HOLY WORD

The foundation for having a victorious life is to have an unquestionable faith in God and an unshakable belief that the Bible is God's Holy Word and that it is all true.

To begin with, let's look at two scriptures that point out the value of God's Word—the Bible.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’” (John 6:68-69, NIV).

And without the Bible we would not have the most significant, comforting, and oft-quoted scripture: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Tragically, despite the importance of believing the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, a search of the Internet* revealed that only about thirty percent of Christians do so believe. However, this should not be too surprising because Satan's first anti-God ploy was to plant doubt about God's Word (which makes up the Bible) in Eve's mind in the Garden of Eden: “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1, KJV). He is still using subtlety to cast doubt about the Bible in the minds of people.

Archaeologists are constantly making discoveries that verify biblical records** ***. This is good news and it adds to our belief that the Bible is God's Holy Word and that it is all true. However, unquestionable confirmation of this belief must come from the Holy Spirit. Please let me explain.

I grew up in a mainline denomination and was never taught anything that was contrary to the belief that God's Word is all true.

But in my graduate schooling I had to take two courses on Evolution; and at sometime during the teachings I became skeptical about the belief that the Bible is God's Holy Word, and that it is all true.

Any miracle that I could not explain as a natural phenomenon I declared as a myth, parable, or allegory. But that all changed in 1974, when the Holy Spirit in a split second convinced me that indeed the Bible is God's Holy Word and that it is all true! (More on this later.) What a blessing that was! Now I do not have to ponder a scripture and ask myself, “Is this really a true statement?” I KNOW it is true.

I pray that by now you are convinced that the Bible is the true Word of God, and that you have come to realize the importance of knowing and believing it. If you have not become convinced, please ask the Lord to convince you; I feel sure He will.

Make it a habit to read, study, and meditate on God's Word before you read the newspaper, watch television, or let anything else take priority over your time in the Word. Remember, just as your body needs nourishment to function properly, your spirit needs Godly nutrition daily for it to function properly.

*<http://www.gallup.com/poll/27682/>

**<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-abr/abr-a008.html>

***<http://www.provethebible.net/T2-Verac/C-0401.htm>

LOVE GOD AND THYSELF

I have put this chapter here, near the beginning of this essay, because I feel that some readers will read this wondering if they are good enough to be saved; and certainly they do not “love” themselves or God.

But this chapter shows that God really loves us and we must “love” ourselves (but not in a narcissistic manner). And if you can convince yourself that God really does love you, and you “love” yourself in the proper way, you will benefit more from what you will be reading in later chapters.

Two of Satan’s favorite tricks are to tell you that you are not worthy of receiving God’s love, and that you certainly have no right to “love thyself.” I had a real struggle with these tricks. Following are some reasons why I didn’t like myself, and why I felt unworthy.

I grew up with an unaffectionate and critical father who, on various occasions, would exacerbate my poor self-image by joking remarks he would make to other people: “I would have been better off if I had knocked him in the head when he was a baby, and sold the milk.” Or, “I wouldn’t take a thousand dollars for my kid, but I wouldn’t give a nickel for another one just like him.”

He never complimented me for any of my successes, like high grades and doing a man’s job when I was seven years old. But he was very quick to criticize me anytime I made a mistake.

As a result of my father’s criticisms, unkind remarks, and failure to show me any affection, I grew up with a poor self-image and the belief that God was harsh, critical, and unloving just like my dad was. (However, in defense of my dad I need to say that during my childhood he was under severe stress due to the financial conditions brought about by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Later in life he showed a genuine, loving interest in me.)

Because of the fearful and unloving relationship with my father during my youth, and the “wrath of God” sermons I heard in my church, I thought God was sitting up there in heaven just waiting for me to make a wrong move so He could zap me out of existence and into hell. I really had a fearful and very warped image of God until I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

My negative relationship with my father early in life was certainly a major contributing factor in the formation of my poor self-image, but there were additional ones. I was not handsome, I had a wide gap between my two front teeth, and they were fluoride-stained from drinking our well water.

Some of you readers probably grew up with poor self-images also, and you have not been able to overcome them. So please let me give you some suggestions and scriptures that will help you to overcome your problem.

First, if your father [or any other person(s)] degraded, criticized, abused, or in any way contributed to your having a poor self-image, you must forgive them. (If this is your case, please be sure to read the section below on unforgiveness.)

- “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (Psalm 139:13-16).
- “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19)?
- Also, think on what is probably the most quoted scripture in the Bible: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- God’s love for you, for me, and all mankind was so great that He allowed His Son, Jesus, to die a sinner’s death by crucifixion. He Who was sinless, bore on the cross the penalty for the sins of all peoples, past, present, and future. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- For a short period of time His heavenly Father had to turn His back on Him because Jesus had to suffer as an unsaved person. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, KJV).

Why was Jesus’ death so agonizing to Him? For one thing, He who had never sinned experienced the indescribable punishment for all of mankind’s sins. And perhaps most agonizing to Him was the fact that His heavenly Father had to abandon Him for a time so He would suffer the horror that an unsaved person will experience after death.

Jesus went through all of this agony so unworthy people like me and you (and everyone else) could become His children and ultimately spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Further proof you are very important to God is shown by Jesus’ statement in Matthew 10:29-31: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”

I pray that by now you are convinced that you really are loved by God and are very special in His eyes.

The Lord commands us to love Him, and our neighbor as ourselves: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31, KJV).

These scriptures make it very clear that we are to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves; and when we have the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we will be able to love ourselves in a manner pleasing to God—not narcissistically, but as one of God's created and loved children.

We just need to ‘cooperate’ with Him. In my case that meant periodically peering at myself in a mirror and saying something like this, “I love you because you are a child of God and you are loved by Him.”

Initially I would almost gag on the words; but after a reasonable length of time of repeating the procedure, I accepted myself as worthy of being loved by both the Lord and myself.

If you need to improve your self-image, I would recommend that you periodically reread this section and then peer at yourself in a mirror and repeat the above expression or one similar to this: “The Lord loves you, and I love you.”

A closing thought: If we fail to learn to love ourselves in a Godly manner, we are insulting God by implying that He made a mistake in creating us. (As the little boy said, “God don’t make no junk.”) Also, when we learn to love ourselves appropriately we will feel more “worthy” to humbly accept the blessings He wants to bestow on us.

SALVATION

This is the most important subject in this dissertation because without salvation you cannot live a victorious life in this world, or get to spend eternity in the presence of God in Heaven.

Salvation means getting delivered from the bondage of sin and its consequences—commonly referred to as “getting saved.”

Obtaining salvation guarantees that we are saved and will spend eternity in Heaven with God, and not in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels.

What is sin? James 4:17 puts it this way: “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” Another definition of sin is “Willful disobedience of the laws of God;” but there is a way out: Salvation!

The scripture makes it clear that the unsaved will have horrible eternal lives.

- “Then He will also say to those on His left (the unsaved), ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matthew 25:41).
- “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). This “lake of fire” is often referred to as “hell.”
- “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Getting saved and living a Christian life, ushers us into God’s Kingdom and assures us that we will spend eternity in Heaven in the presence of the Lord.

At this point I would like to make it very plain that you do not want to spend eternity separated from the Lord because you never got saved. Please let me share with you an experience I had in 1960.

I was sitting in our kitchen one morning and suddenly, in a vision, the Lord appeared to me. He looked at me for just a few seconds, then turned His back to me and walked away. Instantly, the most horrible, terrifying feeling shot through me, and I thought: “You are going to be separated from the Lord forever!”

I believe I would have gone stark raving mad had not the Lord graciously lifted the ghastly feeling from me in a few seconds.

In retrospect, I believe the Lord allowed me to have this vision so I could pass on to unbelievers a glimpse of what their fate would be if they died unsaved. No, you absolutely do not want to die without the Lord as your Savior!

SALVATION

Unfortunately, there are false doctrines about through whom we can be saved. Some say salvation can come through such persons as Mohammad, Buddha, Confucius, and through ancestors. But the Bible makes it clear that it is only through Jesus that we can be saved:

- Acts 4:12: “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”
- Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast”
- John 6:44-45: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day”.

I once heard a true story in a church we were visiting that made me believe we can resist the call of God too long, and our ability to confess our sins and receive the Lord will depart from us; following is the story:

A church group had been trying to persuade a certain person to repent and receive Jesus as Savior. He kept refusing to do so.

Then one day he found himself on his death bed. He tried to repent and accept Jesus in accordance to the plea of the preacher who was attending him. But the man began to scream, “I can’t, I can’t, I see flames, I see flames!” Shortly thereafter he died still screaming in terror. It appears that he had grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit too long.

Please don’t you make that mistake and disregard the call for repentance and salvation; you never know when your life will end. (I personally knew two apparently healthy young men who dropped dead without any warning.)

The beginning of the way to salvation is when the Holy Spirit brings a person under conviction about their need for salvation. This conviction can occur at any time and in any place. It sometimes happens when the person is alone. However, it is most commonly experienced in a setting where the gospel has just been presented. This can be in a prayer meeting, a Bible study, in a church, or even via a TV program. If you sincerely ask the Lord to save you, you have just been brought under conviction. Then take the following steps to fulfill your conviction.

- Repent: To repent means to be genuinely sorry for your sins, and then to quit sinning.
- Confess your sins: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

- Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, NIV).

When people truly want to get saved they will usually seek a counselor, or pastor, in whom they have confidence about spiritual matters.

Or they will go “forward” to meet the minister if they are in a church setting and declare their desire to get saved.

After answering some questions about why they want to be saved, they are usually asked to follow the minister in a “prayer for salvation.”

Some prayers are very short and some very long. The prayer does not “save” you, but it is an affirmation that you believe and accept what the Bible says about obtaining salvation.

Following is a “sample” prayer.

Dear God, I confess that I am a sinner. But now I repent of all my sins, known and unknown, and ask for Your forgiveness. I thank You for having loved me enough to send Jesus to this earth to die on a cross so I could be forgiven of my sins. I thank You for giving me the faith to get saved by Your grace. Thank You for the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit, and the assurance of eternal life in heaven. I now believe in my heart that You raised Jesus from the dead, and I proclaim Him as my Lord and my Savior.”

Then to finalize the salvation experience, I believe you should be baptized in water just as the Lord commanded. “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

If you have sincerely accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, have prayed a salvation prayer, and have been (or will be) baptized, I believe you are now a member of God’s family as indicated by the two scriptures below.

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:15).”

At this point I need to make two things clear: you are not automatically saved by “just going through the motions.” You are saved by the Grace of God who alone knows the sincerity of your desires and confessions.

To help you grow in your Christian walk, please join a Bible-believing church where the fruit of the Spirit (and hopefully the Gifts of the Spirit) are manifested. The Christians there will be more than willing to help you learn how to live a Christ-centered life. In the meantime please finish reading this essay to get some pointers that will also help you in your endeavor to live a victorious, Spirit-filled life.

Am I saved, or just immature?

Now for any of you, who have previously gone through the steps to salvation but are presently not really sure you are saved, please review the discussion above on how to get saved. Then consider the following questions in the next paragraph. [These questions and comments can also be used to help believers (new and “old”) determine how “far along” toward Christian maturity they are.]

Did your lifestyle become “new?”

- “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Are the fruit of the Spirit being manifested in your life to a significant degree?

- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22-23)

Do you have a confirmation of your salvation in your spirit?

- “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16, NIV).

Do you spend time in prayer?

- “Pray without ceasing” (1Thessalonians 5:17, KJV).

Do you study the Bible?

- “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Do you participate in assemblies of Christians?

- “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Do you earnestly try to live the two Great Commandments as given by Jesus?

- “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.
- “And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31, KJV).

Only the Lord knows if you are saved, but if your spirit bears witness to the scriptures cited in this chapter, and you answered “Yes” to the questions above, I believe you should certainly be considered a saved, mature Christian.

On the other hand, if you were not able to answer “Yes” to all the questions, that does not necessarily mean you are not saved; it only means you are not living up to your potential as a Christian.

If at this point you still have doubts about your being saved, I suggest you get before the Lord in earnest prayer and ask Him for confirmation of your salvation.

(I once had serious doubts that I was saved, so I asked the Lord for confirmation of my salvation. And praise His name, He gave me confirmation in some dreams, and the troubling of doubt in my spirit vanished.)

One other issue I feel I must address: Are you unsaved and feel that you are not worthy to be saved because you have sinned too much? If you are condemning yourself, be patient. The Lord can and will forgive you of your sins if you genuinely repent.

The only sin that cannot be forgiven is refusing to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Divine Entity through whom God the Father and Jesus the Son bring about their empowering on the earth; and the empowering of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is absolutely necessary if you want to live a victorious life.

The Bible makes it very clear that it does not matter when or how we receive the empowering of the Holy Spirit, our loving Savior wants us to have the same empowering the disciples received so we can be effective witnesses for Him.

Today, just as it was on Pentecost, the Lord fills His children with the Holy Spirit for the same purpose: to have the power and desire to accomplish His perfect will.

Now to illustrate the love and grace of God towards His children, I will relate my experience of receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and His subsequent workings in transforming my life from carnality to a Christ-centered life. The story begins in 1974.

One day my wife, Mary Alice, brought home a book *The Promise of the Spirit* (written by William Barclay) from the library of the church where we were members. A few days later I picked it up, read it, and was convinced that if I were to ever do anything significant for the Lord, I needed the power of the Holy Spirit.

So I asked the Lord for the baptism with the Holy Spirit with two stipulations: I wanted to receive Him in my own home, and I did not want the gift of tongues. (I was completely ignorant about the Holy Spirit as I had never heard any teachings about Him.) The Lord did indeed answer my prayer but not in the way I had in mind!

A few days later, about four o'clock in the morning, the Lord awakened me. He spoke to my heart in a still, small voice and said, "Son, you have some things in your life that you need to get rid of." And immediately the Lord began a purging session. With the help of the Holy Spirit I got set free from various sins and bondages that night; I felt that my soul had been cleaned out!

I told my wife that I did not really understand what had happened to me. She said I just needed to ask the Lord for more faith to "believe." So that night I asked the Lord to increase my faith but I had no idea how he was going to do it.

Then about one o'clock the next morning, I was aroused and immediately wide awake. I began to wonder what had awakened me. Had it been a dog barking, a passing car, or one of our two sons? I listened and heard no sounds. So I settled back to go to sleep.

Suddenly across the back of my eyelids went a ticker tape and on it were the words, "My faith looks up to Thee." I asked myself, "What could that be?" And immediately the message was repeated: "My faith looks up to Thee."

Then I remembered that we used to sing a song in my home church that had these words in it. Then I thought, “Is the Lord trying to tell me something?”

Instantly, I felt a gentle pressure on my chest just below my throat, and something began to flow into me. It was just as if I had a giant hot-water bottle in my chest. The Holy Spirit continued to flow into me, and I got fuller and fuller! When I got filled to the bottom of my throat, the filling stopped. I was so full that I burped as if I had just finished a six-course meal.

The feeling that came over me is indescribable! I remember saying to the Lord, “If this is what heaven is all about, I am ready to go!” And I was totally serious. (I believe my “huge” infilling was the direct result of the Lord having cleaned me out the previous night.)

There are no words in the English language that are adequate to describe how I felt that morning. I had a peace and joy and an inexpressible feeling that I was truly in the presence of the Lord.

As I lay there basking in His glory, Mary Alice woke up. She asked me what the matter was, and I opened my mouth to tell her. But I was so overcome with the presence of the Holy Spirit that I could not get the words out in my normal voice. So I whispered what had just happened, and she rejoiced with me. In due time, we went back to sleep.

Later that morning when I awakened, I was facing the sliding doors on our bedroom closet. There on one of the doors was a cross of the most beautiful red I have ever seen. It had a slight movement—it was a living cross. Mary Alice awakened at that time, and she saw exactly what I saw.

The presence of the Holy Spirit again became very manifest, and I began to weep tears of incomprehensible joy. I do not remember how long I lay there or what happened to the cross. (Incidentally, the following morning at essentially the same time of day, we tried to manipulate the curtains and blinds to duplicate the image of the cross, but we never even got close. The cross was a supernatural sign from the Lord!)

When I got out of bed that morning, it was as if the Lord had given me new eyes, new ears, and a new heart. I could see the glory of God in everything, whether it was a flower, the sky, and even a smudged window pane.

And now my ears perceived music in a new way. I had a little Toyota that I drove to work every morning. As I was leaving the driveway that morning, I turned on the radio that I kept tuned to an “easy-listening” station.

Before I got very far down the road, the tears began streaming down my face because the music was so heavenly. So I drove all the way to my office just praising the Lord in my heart and basking in the glory of His presence. For several mornings, the same experience occurred.

And love.... My heart was full of God's agape love. For the first time in my life, I knew what love really was.

While I was going through some difficult years, I had asked my counselor, "How do I show love to my children?" After reading a couple of books that he loaned to me, I gave up on books as they hadn't helped. Now I had love for everyone: my wife, my kids, and even total strangers.

As I would drive to work and see the hippies walking along the road, I would get the urge to get out of the car, hug them, and tell them that I loved them, and God loved them too. However, I decided that after two or three times of actually getting out and hugging them, the men in white coats might be coming after me with the padded wagon!

Two or three mornings after my indescribable miracle, I was shaving and meditating on the Lord. Suddenly, just like a lightning bolt, two thoughts crossed my mind. The first one was, "Jesus is divine; He is the Son of the living God." The second one was, "The Bible is God's Holy Word and it is all true." I was stunned.

When I recovered a bit, I searched my mind and found there was not a trace of doubt about either statement. This was quite significant because in the course work of my graduate-school education I had two courses in Evolution. As a result, my Baptist beliefs were eroded to the point that I had come to doubt the divinity of Christ. And I certainly did not believe that the Bible was all true.

Anything I could not explain by known phenomena, I considered a myth, parable, or allegory. But the revelation I received while shaving that morning nullified all my erroneous ideas.

After a few days of enjoying heavenly bliss while driving to work listening to music on my car radio, I got into the Toyota and turned on the radio—there was no sound from the easy-listening station. I could get every other station but that one. So I drove to work dry-eyed and very disappointed.

Then I asked the Lord, "Why?" His answer, in that still small voice, was, "Son, you have been up in the heavenlies long enough. It's time for you to get your feet back on the ground, for that is where the action is."

I have never experienced that overpowering presence of the Holy Spirit since that time. However, my life was completely changed. According to my wife and children, I had been transformed from a loveless, overbearing, demanding husband and father, to a gentle, loving person.

My beloved wife said, "I got a brand new husband and didn't even have to change men!" (Over the prior years of our marriage I had constantly belittled, nagged, and criticized my wife until she had no self-respect or confidence in herself because, in my twisted mind, I had put a lot of the blame for my problems onto her; and I had reduced her to a "blob of protoplasm" with my ungodly tongue.)

This testimony would not be complete without my relating the rest of the story.

Shortly after my baptism with the Holy Spirit, I bought some books that helped me better understand what had happened to me. I learned a great deal more about the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the benefits from having Him rule in my life.

After I finished my research, I was convinced that my concept about speaking in tongues and prayer languages was totally wrong. I learned that the Holy Spirit is a Gentleman and will not make people do anything against their will. And if people have a prayer language, they can exercise it at any time, or choose not to exercise it.

Now enlightened about the matter, I asked the Lord to please give me my prayer language and on September 2, 1974, He did.

At bedtime, I was down on my knees leaning on the bed praying. Suddenly a strange feeling came into my throat and I said to myself, “Could this be the time?” I opened my mouth to continue my praying, and the next word out of my mouth was one in a language I had never heard before! So I continued praying in the Spirit for some time, with tears of unspeakable joy rolling down my cheeks.

Years later, I was driving down the road praising the Lord and praying in the Spirit. I said to the Lord, “I wish I could have the interpretation of what I am praying.” Instantly the Lord gave me the interpretation. With all humility, I must declare the interpretation the Lord gave me was the most beautiful praise psalm I have ever heard or read. It was a psalm glorifying God.

When the Holy Spirit finished giving me the interpretation, I wanted to write it down. But as I was out on the road with nothing on which to write—I could not record it.

And before I had the opportunity to write the psalm down, I had forgotten the words; I was so disappointed. But later it came to me that if I had been able to write down the words, I would have shown them to people and undoubtedly I would have become very proud of my “spirituality.” The Lord would not have approved of that.

What a change God made in my life! By the grace of God, my wife was able to wholeheartedly forgive me for all the misery and suffering I had caused her over the twenty-three years before I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. (I never once struck my wife with anything.) Also my children totally forgave their dad for all the mean things he had done to their mother (with my tongue).

Another change was that suddenly I had a voracious appetite for God’s word, and passages that did not make any real sense to me before, were now very clear.

At this point I would like to emphasize that to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit all you need to do is ask the Father, in sincerity, to give it to you. Luke 11:13 says, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

Just as you do not need to be “worthy” to receive salvation, you do not need to be “worthy” to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In my mind’s eye I was certainly not worthy to receive the baptism as I had a lot of “garbage” in my life.

For example, I was teaching my Sunday School Class on reincarnation when the Lord gave me the infilling of His Holy Spirit. In other words, I was a spiritual disgrace, but the Lord cleaned me out and baptized me anyway. And I believe the Lord will do the same for you if you are willing and sincere in your desire.

Getting saved and filled with the Holy Spirit provides us with certain benefits, including greater spiritual power. He works in our lives as directed by the Father and the Son. And if we welcome Him and allow Him to work out God’s purposes in our lives, we will live a very blessed and victorious life, and we will obtain God's special power as further discussed in the following chapter.

BENEFITS OF BEING SAVED AND SPIRIT-FILLED

For years I believed that when you got saved all you received was a ticket to Heaven and you just had to struggle with the devil and the stumbling blocks of life until you got “called home.”

But by God’s grace, I have learned that receiving salvation not only assures us of a place in heaven, it also opens up the way for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives to bring us multiple blessings, and to empower us to do the special works which the Lord has appointed us to do.

Some of the blessings we will receive:

- Having our spiritual needs met
- Having our faith increased continually
- Having the Holy Spirit direct our lives
- Experiencing God’s presence in special ways
- Receiving a greater measure of the fruit of the Holy Spirit
- Having the assurance that our prayers will be answered
- Having the Lord speak to our spirit in that “still small voice”
- Having a special language in which to pray and praise the Lord
- Having a greater understanding of the Word and spiritual matters

We will be empowered to:

- Resist the enemy
- Spread the gospel effectively
- Manifest the spiritual gifts of God
- Lead others to Jesus and salvation
- Minister deliverance from the enemy
- Serve the Lord in supernatural ways

If we earnestly strive to live a Spirit-filled life for the glory of our God, these blessings will be very evident in our lives, and we will indeed be used by the Lord for His glory.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit enables us, as mentioned above, to manifest the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, NIV). But because they are not always easily understood, I will present a brief comment about each gift as I have perceived it and have observed its manifestation. But let me make it very clear that every Gift of the Holy Spirit is in the supernatural realm. Therefore, a Gift can only be manifested through a believer by the power of the Holy Spirit and only as He chooses.

- Message of wisdom: a message of Spirit-given wisdom brought forth by the believer
- Message of knowledge: a message that brings forth Spirit-given knowledge by the believer for the benefit of the hearer (v 8)
- Faith: a special faith given to the believer to know that God will do appropriately what needs to be done in any particular situation (v 9)
- Gifts of healing: ability of the believer to bring about healings through the power of the Holy Spirit (v 9)
- Miraculous powers: Spirit-empowerment of the believer to accomplish feats beyond his innate abilities (v 10)
- Prophecy: A message from God brought forth by the believer through the power of the Holy Spirit (v 10)
- Distinguishing between spirits: Spirit-given ability of the believer to determine if an act, occurrence, atmosphere, or demeanor is of God or the enemy (v 10)
- Speaking in different kinds of tongues: a Spirit-enabled utterance in a language not known by the believer, and it is to be interpreted (through the power of the Holy Spirit) either by the believer who is speaking or another believer (v 10).
- Interpretation of tongues: Spirit-given ability of a believer to interpret into his natural language a message in a tongue given by another person or himself (v 10)

It has been my privilege to see the Holy Spirit bring forth every one of these gifts. And they were generally manifested in a full-gospel church, or a group of Spirit-filled believers.

In addition to the group of scriptures about Gifts of the Holy Spirit discussed above, there are two other groups of gifts commonly mentioned in a discussion of “Gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

One group is listed in Ephesians 4:11 (NIV): “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people (for service). . . .”

The other group is found in Romans 12:6-8 (NIV): “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;

if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”

Our salvation and the infilling of the Holy Spirit opens the door for us to receive and manifest any one these gifts listed above.

Please note: If you should ever desire to be used by the Holy Spirit in the manifestation of one of His gifts, and you are in a setting where manifestation of them is acceptable, the Holy Spirit can give you “signs” if He wants you to manifest one of the gifts.

You will experience such things as a significant increase in pulse rate, a sense of anticipation, nervousness, excitement, and a feeling of “He wants to use me.”

When these signs occur, step forward in faith and He will give you one or more of the gifts discussed above.

But, as mentioned above, the Holy Spirit determines who gets the Gifts and when they will be manifested. This is for our benefit and “protection.” Think about this: If we could exercise these Gifts anytime we wanted to without any restrictions, how long would it be before we would be proud, spoiled-rotten brats? God in His infinite wisdom and love knows what is best for us in any and all circumstances.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The fruit of the Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

In the chapter on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit I pointed out that the gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and we cannot operate in them except as the Holy Spirit enables us to do so. All nine of the fruit mentioned in the above scripture can be manifested by both the saved and the unsaved. However, the level of the manifestation that the Lord desires can be attained only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is my opinion that the level of any given Fruit in a person’s life is directly proportional to the degree to which the person is allowing the Holy Spirit to direct his life—after all, they are His gifts!

The following definitions of the nine fruits are from the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition. I do not cite the definitions in their entirety. Also, I just cite a minimum of what I consider pertinent scriptures. As you read the definitions and scriptures, you may want to rate the level of the Biblical Fruit in your life on a scale of one to ten; one is essentially none, and ten is the highest level you can have from the Lord.

LOVE:

- Strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties. (In these scriptures the Greek word for love is agape, love that can come only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Additional definition for God’s love is given in another place below.)
- “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part;

then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:1-13, NIV).

- “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8, NASU)
- “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, KJV).

- JOY:

- “The emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires.”
- “And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52).
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy” (John 16:20).

- PEACE:

- A state of tranquility or quiet.”
- “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
- “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).
- “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

- PATIENCE:

- “The capacity, habit, or fact of being patient.” And the characteristics of being patient are: “Bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint; manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain; not hasty or impetuous.”
- “The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

- “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).
- “Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love” (Ephesians 4:2, TLB).

KINDNESS:

- “A kind deed, favor; the quality or state of being kind.”
- And kind is defined as: “Affectionate, loving; of a sympathetic or loving nature; of a forbearing nature; gentle.”
- “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4).
- “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7, NIV).

GOODNESS:

- “The quality or state of being good.”
- And good is defined as: “Of a favorable character or tendency.”
- “I said to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good besides You’” (Psalm 16:2).
- “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8-10, NIV).
- “To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

FAITHFULNESS:

- “Steadfast in affection or allegiance, loyal; firm in adherence to promises or in observance of duty; conscientious.”
- “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin’” (Exodus 34:5-7, NIV).
- “Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies” (Psalm 36:5, NIV).

- “The LORD'S loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

GENTLENESS:

- “The quality or state of being gentle.” And gentle is defined as: “Kind, amiable, tractable, docile, free from harshness, sternness, or violence.”
- “Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great” (2 Samuel 22:36, KJV).
- “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...” (2 Corinthians 10:1, NIV).
- “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:5, NIV).
- “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12, NIV).

SELF-CONTROL:

- “Restraint exercised over one’s own impulses, emotions, or desires.”
- “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28, NIV).
- “Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5, NIV).
- “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control” (2 Peter 1:5-6, NIV).

Again, I suggest that periodically you review your “ratings” to see if you are doing better, worse, or no change. Getting high ratings on these Fruit will greatly enhance the probability that you will have a more victorious life.

TONGUES AND PRAYER LANGUAGES

There is probably no subject more debated about the Holy Spirit than the gift of tongues, the gift of interpretation of tongues, and prayer languages.

So I want to make it unequivocally clear at this point that speaking in tongues, in any manner, is not necessary for salvation.

For many years I was very strongly opposed to the idea of speaking in tongues. When I was a child I occasionally heard people talking about the “Holy Rollers.” So I developed a mental image of what a Holy Roller must look like when he was praying: a man rolling around on the floor, babbling loudly and incoherently, and with his eyes rolled back into his head!

Then one evening, when I was about seven years old, I had the “misfortune” to pass a Pentecostal church located on the main street in my home town. The loud, indistinguishable sounds that were coming out from the church convinced me the Holy Rollers were all praying at the same time, and probably rolling around on the floor! It was very frightening to me, and I immediately ran up the street to get away from the sounds.

The Bible makes it clear that speaking in tongues is not to be forbidden: “Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:39).

Reasons given by people who have a problem with speaking, or praying, in tongues include the following: they were pressured to learn to speak in tongues; they were brought up to believe tongues ceased when the New Testament was published; their denomination condemns speaking in tongues, or their congregation does not believe in speaking in tongues.

Unfortunately there are people who do not seek the baptism with the Holy Spirit because they fear the Holy Spirit will make them break out in tongues at an inopportune time.

The Holy Spirit will never make you do or say anything; He is a perfect “Gentleman.” Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:32-33 (NIV): “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”

In First Corinthians Paul discusses speaking in “tongues”:

- “For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Corinthians 14:2).
- “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14:4).
- “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not

understand say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified” (1 Corinthians 14:14-17).

In these scriptures Paul is saying that a prayer language enables a believer to talk to God (but without knowing what he is saying), to edify himself (build up himself spiritually), and to pray and sing to God, and to praise Him “in the Spirit.”

Following is an experience in which I felt led to pray in my prayer language and the results were astounding.

A friend called and asked us to pray for her husband who, according to the doctors, was dying. So I began praying in English, but after a few moments I felt the urge to pray in my prayer language.

After several minutes of praying in my usual prayer language, the language suddenly changed dramatically. I prayed for several minutes in this “new” language. Then abruptly, the language changed back to my usual one, and I got the impression that I had prayed sufficiently because I now had a real peace in my spirit.

Shortly after I had ceased praying, our friend called again and said her husband had made a miraculous recovery. As I recall he went home the next day. To God be the glory!

On several occasions while praying I have had my prayer language abruptly change to a “new” language, and then a little later, change back. It would seem that the Holy Spirit changes our prayer language to fit the circumstances. For example, He may be changing it from praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, to an intercessory prayer.

In closing this chapter, please let me encourage you to pray earnestly about asking the Lord to give you the baptism with the Holy Spirit and a prayer language (if you have not already done so). Don’t be afraid or ashamed to ask the Lord to do this. He wants you to have a victorious, Spirit-empowered life.

GOD IS LOVE

There are multitudes of people in the world who do not know that Almighty God exists. Also there are many who do know He exists but they have little or no concept of Who He is, and they know virtually nothing about Him.

According to some theologians, many people's impressions of what God is like are based upon their relationship with their fathers. People who have, or have had, a loving relationship with their fathers have no problem believing God is a God of love. On the other hand, those whose relationship with their fathers was bad have a hard time believing God is a loving God.

The Bible does not give us a physical description of God the Father, but people tend to form a mental picture of what they think He might look like. Those who have, or have had, a bad relationship with their fathers might visualize God as a God of wrath looking down on the earth with a scowl on His face, and a lightning bolt in His right hand, ready to zap them out of existence.

Those who have, or have had, a good relationship with their father might visualize God the Father as a grandfatherly-looking person with a loving smile on His face and a glow of light about Him.

But in whatever "material form" we might visualize Him, we should look upon Him in the way He is revealed in the Bible: faithful, gracious, incorruptible, just, long-suffering, merciful, all powerful, all knowing, ever present, wise, unchanging, perfect, sovereign, and righteous. In addition, He is portrayed as a Deliverer from the snares and works of Satan and his demons.

However, the most glorious and outstanding characteristic of our God is His love—and He is love: "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:8-10).

The Greek word for love in 1 John 4:8 is *agape*. When referring to God, *agape* is defined in many ways such as unconditional, highest form of love, inexplicable.

God's love is confirmed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Sometimes God's love is manifested in ways we may not particularly like: "For when he punishes you, it proves that he loves you. When he disciplines you, it proves you are really his child" (Hebrews 12:6, TLB).

God's love manifested in these ways is for our own good. They are often to teach us a lesson in obedience, or to get us back on the right path.

Another manifestation of God's love is probably not looked upon as "love" by many people—that manifestation is His wrath: "He who believes in the Son has

eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

Because God loves the unsaved (all of us initially), I believe He shows His wrath, when necessary, toward us as a means of encouraging us to repent and get saved, because He wants all to be saved: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Do Christians need to fear God’s wrath? Definitely not!

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Romans 5:8-9).

In conclusion: What is God really like? HE IS LOVE, and out of that love He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross in our place so we can be saved, spend our lives on this earth in victorious living, and spend eternity with Him, basking in His glory!

LOVE THYSELF

Two of Satan's favorite tricks are to tell you that you are not worthy of receiving God's love, and that you certainly have no right to "love thyself." I had a real struggle with these tricks.

I grew up with an unaffectionate and critical father who on various occasions would inadvertently exacerbate my poor self-image by joking remarks he would make to other people: "I would have been better off if I had knocked him in the head when he was a baby, and sold the milk." Or, "I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my kid, but I wouldn't give a nickel for another one just like him."

He never complimented me for any of my successes, like high grades and doing a man's job when I was seven years old. But he was very quick to criticize me anytime I made a mistake.

As a result of my father's criticisms, unkind remarks, and failure to show me any affection, I grew up with a poor self-image and the belief that God was harsh, critical, and unloving just like my dad was. (However, in defense of my dad I need to say that during my childhood he was under severe stress due to the financial conditions brought about by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Later in life he showed a genuine, loving interest in me.)

Because of the fearful and unloving relationship with my father during my youth, and the "wrath of God" sermons I heard in my church, I thought God was sitting up there in heaven just waiting for me to make a wrong move so He could zap me out of existence and into hell. I really had a fearful and very warped image of God until I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

My negative relationship with my father early in life was certainly a major contributing factor in the formation of my poor self-image, but there were additional ones. I was not handsome, I had a wide gap between my two front teeth, and they were fluoride-stained from drinking our well water.

Some of you readers probably grew up with poor self-images also, and you have not been able to overcome them. So please let me give you some suggestions and scriptures that will help you to overcome your problem.

First, if your father [or any other person(s)] degraded, criticized, abused, or in any way contributed to your having a poor self-image, you must forgive them. If this is your case, please be sure to read the section below on unforgiveness.

Next, you must realize and believe that God loves you far more than you can ever imagine, and that you are very special to Him. You were not an "accident" in God's eyes.

Please ponder the following scriptures—they pertain to you.

- "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27).

- “Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts. Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother’s womb” (Psalm 22:9-10).
- “By You I have been sustained from my birth; You are He who took me from my mother’s womb; My praise is continually of You” (Psalm 71:6).
- “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (Psalm 139:13-16).
- “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19)?
- “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, His heavenly Father had to turn His back on Him because He had to suffer as an unsaved person. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, KJV).

Why was Jesus’ death so agonizing to Him? For one thing, He who had never sinned experienced the indescribable punishment for all of mankind’s sins. And perhaps most agonizing to Him was that His heavenly Father had to abandon Him for a time so He would suffer the horror that an unsaved person will experience after death.

Jesus went through all of this agony so unworthy people like me and you (and everyone else) could get saved, become His children, and ultimately spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Further proof you are very important to God is shown by Jesus’ statement in Matthew 10:29-31: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”

I pray that by now you are convinced that you really are very special in God’s eyes; and the Lord commands us to love Him, and our neighbor as ourselves:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31, NIV).

These scriptures make it very clear that we are to love God, our neighbor, and ourselves. And when we have the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we will be able to love ourselves, and others, in a manner pleasing to God—not narcissistically, but as one of God's created children.

We just need to ‘cooperate’ with Him. In my case that meant periodically peering at myself in a mirror and saying something like this, “I love you because you are a child of God and you are loved by Him.”

Initially I would almost gag on the words; but after a reasonable length of time I accepted myself as worthy of being loved by both the Lord and myself.

If you need to improve your self-image, I would recommend that you periodically reread this section and then peer at yourself in a mirror and repeat the above expression or one similar to this: “The Lord loves you, and I love you.” As you continue to verbalize a “love yourself” expression the Holy Spirit will help you; in due time you will come to really believe what you are saying.

A closing thought: If we fail to learn to love ourselves in a Godly manner, we are insulting God by implying that He made a mistake in creating us. (As the little boy said, “God don’t make no junk.”) Also, when we learn to love ourselves appropriately we will feel more “worthy” to humbly accept the blessings He wants to bestow on us.

FAITH

Jesus certainly knew Christians would need faith and He commands us to have it: “‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered” (Mark 11:22, NIV).

- We must have faith (believe, trust) if we are to receive eternal life: John 3:16: “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” (NIV).
- We must have faith to get our prayers answered: Matthew 21:22: “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (NIV).
- We must have faith to become justified: Romans 3:28: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (NIV). (Justified means “just as if I had never sinned.”)
- We must have faith to receive joy and peace: Romans 15:13: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (NIV).
- We must have faith to please God: Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (NIV).
- We must have faith to be able to resist the devil: 1 Peter 5:9: “Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (NIV).

The previous scriptures tell us various things about faith so we need to know what faith is. Faith is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. “It (faith) is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead” (Hebrews 11:1, TLB).

How do we get faith? “Yet faith comes from listening to this Good News, the Good News about Christ” (Romans 10:17, TLB).

This is the beginning of our faith in the Lord, and the more we study God's Word (the Bible) and LIVE BY IT, the greater our faith will be. Notice I emphasized the phrase “live by it.”

To live by the Word of God is all encompassing. It means that every facet of our lives should be under His control through the Holy Spirit who lives within us. And as we allow Him to control and to change us, we will experience an increased faith.

During the three years that the disciples walked with Jesus they had seen manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit as He directed and empowered the Lord from day to day. But it was not until after their infilling by the Holy Spirit that the disciples began to act upon what they had learned from Jesus and observed during their time with Him.

The lesson in this is that knowledge and observation do not empower a person or increase his faith, but the infilling of the Holy Spirit does.

After we receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit we must continually endeavor to do the things of the Lord, and have Him increase our faith and Godly power. We can have this happen by:

- Allowing the Holy Spirit to direct our lives—completely!
- Reflecting on what He did for us in the past
- Recollecting adverse experiences which God saw us through.
- Reviewing “mountain-top” experiences.
- Reflecting on our blessings as we enumerate them.
- Continually praying and studying the Bible.

“Stepping out in faith” is another way to build your faith. For example: you feel in your spirit that the Lord would have you witness to a certain person, but you do not want to do so. Going ahead and doing so is “stepping out in faith.”

Exercising our faith is a bit like exercising our muscles—if we don’t exercise them they get weak. Likewise, failure to exercise our faith will result in spiritual weakness.

And remember, having faith in God is an essential key to living a victorious life; please make every effort to continually increase your faith, and your works for the Lord.

PRAYER

Prayer might be defined simply as “Spiritual communication with God.” It is one of the essentials of the Christian’s life that is too often neglected. It has been my observation over my many years as a church member, teacher, and pastor, that the people who seem to be closest to the Lord are the ones that are the most dedicated to their prayer life.

The Bible has much to say about prayer. The number of times the words pray, prayed, prayer, and prayers are used in the Bible totals over three hundred and fifty.

The following scriptures reveal many components that make up the Godly attitude the Lord wants us to have when we come before Him in prayer.

The components include:

- Humility (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- Praise (Psalm 100:4)
- Forgiveness (Matthew 6:12)
- Faith (Matthew 21:22)
- Submission (Luke 22:42)
- Spirituality (Ephesians 6:18)
- Thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6)
- Earnestness (1 Thessalonians 3:10)
- Holiness (1 Timothy 2:8)
- Confidence in God (1 John 5:14)

We are also to be in a state of continual prayer: “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV). (Little girl said, “Just don’t say ‘Amen’”)

I believe this means we should have a prayerful attitude all the time. I find myself “talking” to the Lord at various times during the day, particularly if I am working at a job that does not require a lot of concentration.

I sincerely believe that praying constantly enhances our relationship with the Lord. (Keep in mind that “listening” to Him is also a vital part of praying.)

To better establish and enhance our prayer lives, we need to be mindful that our prayers are hindered by sin in any form.

“Listen now! The Lord isn’t too weak to save you. And he isn’t getting deaf! He can hear you when you call! But the trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God. Because of sin he has turned his face away from you and will not listen anymore.” Isaiah 59:1-2 (TLB):

Naturally, all sins are obstructions to answered prayer, but some sins are more prevalent among Christians because they are not always obvious. Following are

some of the more common sins which stand in the way of people getting their prayers answered.

- Pride: “There they cry out, but He does not answer because of the pride of evil men” (Job 35:12).
- Unconfessed sin: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me (Psalm 66:18, KJV):
- Ignoring the poor: “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered” (Proverbs 21:13, NIV).
- Ignoring God's laws: “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).
- Worshipping idols: “For your gods are as many as your cities, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to the shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal. Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not listen when they call to Me because of their disaster” (Jeremiah 11:13-14).

[Keep in mind that an “idol” is anything that stands between you and God. Idols can be such things as ourselves, cars, homes, jobs, family, sports, TV, alcohol, drugs, leisure time, money, and even food.]

- Unforgiveness: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25, NIV).
- Not abiding in the Lord: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7).
- Praying without faith; being double-minded: “That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (James 1:7-8, NIV).
- Praying with wrong motives: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3).
- Not praying in God's will: “This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

People generally close their prayers with the phrase “In Jesus’ name” or something similar. I grew up with the impression to pray “in Jesus name” was just a way of tacking on a closing statement—just like we close a letter by putting “Sincerely” and our name at the bottom of it.

But to truly pray in Jesus' name means we must pray in harmony with His will and in His authority. And I believe in order to fulfill these two requirements we must be having the Holy Spirit directing our lives.

But God in His love, mercy, and grace will many times answer our prayers when we are not really praying in the name of Jesus—we just think we are.

And sometimes the Lord will not answer our prayers in the way we want because He loves us, and He knows that answering them our way would be a disaster. And it sometimes means that He has something better for us. Following is a personal example.

I was a freshman in college and was smitten by a certain young lady who lived back home. One weekend in a spell of “mad passion” I asked her to marry me. She paused for a few moments while I waited breathlessly for her answer. Finally the answer came: “I believe you had better take me home.”

I was crushed, but I continued to ask the Lord to answer my prayer: “Lord, please change her mind so she will marry me.”

But He answered that prayer with a “No,” and I am so glad He did because He really did have something much better for me—He had another young lady waiting for me, Mary Alice Grossman.

I met her when I was a senior in undergraduate school and she was a freshman. We married shortly after I graduated with my Bachelor's degree. She was my beloved wife for over fifty-nine years.

So don't despair if you do not get your prayer answered in the way you wanted. Just be patient—He may truly have something much better in store for you. Just believe what it says in Romans 8:28: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

When we are anxiously waiting for God to answer our prayers, He may just be testing our faith. In any case, we should do as instructed in Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV): “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

But thank the Lord we have a way to get our sins forgiven so we can once again be in right standing with God: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

But we cannot disparage God's grace, continually and willfully sinning, and expect Him to answer our prayers—quite the contrary: “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:26-27, NIV).

On the other hand, I believe those who try to live as sinlessly as possible will receive a special grace from God, and He will hear the cries of His repentant children. To this end, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us our sins, known and unknown.

We should ask as David did: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything you find in me that makes you sad, and lead me along the path of everlasting life” (Psalm 139:23-24, TLB).

I realize that asking the Lord to point out our sins may be something we sometimes really don’t want Him to do. But I believe it is something we must do because any sin is an impediment to answered prayer. And once the Holy Spirit has revealed our sins to us, we must confess them, repent from them, and ask for God’s forgiveness. Keep in mind 1 John 1:9 (NIV), repeated here:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Another part of our prayer life is deciding for whom we should pray, and the number is virtually unlimited. However, for various reasons, there might be some for whom we might be reluctant to pray, but we are to pray for them nonetheless.

Let me give you three examples:

- We are to pray for those in authority over us, even if it is obvious they are not Christians (First Timothy 1:1-2).
- We are to pray for our enemies, including those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44-45).
- We are to pray for those who desert us in our time of need (2 Timothy 4:16).

Following is a suggestion for preparing you for prayer: Clear your mind of distracting thoughts and meditate a few moments on the nature of God the Father. Think of Him as your heavenly Provider, Comforter, Protector, Counselor, and One who loves you more deeply than you could ever imagine.

After you have prepared yourself, you are ready to put your prayer into words. Following are some things you may wish to include in your prayer.

- Acknowledge God as your heavenly Father, praise Him, and thank Him for all your blessings.
- Confess any sins and ask for forgiveness.
- Pray your own needs and for the needs of others.
- Praise and thank Him for hearing and answering your prayers.
- Close like this: “For it is in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.”

If your prayer requests can be answered with a simple “Yes” or “No,” the answer may be immediate. On the other hand, if your prayer is for something

specific to happen, the answer may be immediate, sometime later, gradually, or it may be a “No.”

However, in any and every case, exercise patience and stand firm in your faith, confident that God always knows best.

I believe it appropriate for me to again write Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (KJV).

Whether you are new at praying, or a long-time pray-er, I would encourage you to keep your prayer life “alive” and growing—do not let it become just a “needs” list, or a “form” prayer.

The more you pray in sincerity, the closer to the Lord you will become, and the more victorious, delightful, exciting, and rewarding your prayer life will become!

Please let me repeat myself here. “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV).

I believe Paul meant for us to be ready to pray at any time. And in some cases a person would not need to go through all the steps given above. For example, say you hurt yourself and needed help. You could simply pray “Lord, please send me some help immediately.”

I believe the Lord loves Christians enough that sometimes He will hear and answer our prayers in His perfect way and in His perfect timing, regardless of how they are prayed.

Also I believe that if you have a special prayer language (tongues) you should pray in that language if you feel led to do so.

DEALING WITH SIN

It says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (TLB): “When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!”

So after we have been saved, life should be a “bed of roses,” and we should be through with sinning. Right? Anyone who has been a Christian for any significant length of time will tell you that statement is untrue!

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus said: “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The Greek word for “perfect” is *teleios* and Strong’s Concordance defines it this way: “Complete in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc; completeness, of full age, man, and perfect.”

I take this to mean we are to be as much like our heavenly Father as we possibly can; therefore, we should strive to be like Jesus who never sinned.

But if we are to fight sin, our first step is to know what sin is. In James 4:17 it is written: “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

A more widely used definition is: “Willful disobedience to the known will of God.”

The Holy Spirit has the task of convicting people of their sins: Jesus said in John 16:8-9: “And He, (the Holy Spirit) when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.”

It takes courage and humility to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your sins to you, but I urge you to do so. And when they are revealed to you, repent of all of them so you will be qualified to receive forgiveness. Now let us look at some scriptures that list various sins.

- “For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other folly" (Mark 7:21-22, TLB).
- “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21, NIV).
- “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

- “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19, NIV).

If you are a Christian, you probably are not plagued by any of these. But if you are, repent and claim 1 John 1:9. Then to keep from repeating the sin(s), “practice” the items on the “Many ways for you to avoid sinning” list given later in this chapter.

(Another sin, absent from the above lists but very important, is the sin of unforgiveness. This sin can be very subtle but it has very severe consequences. For this reason I address it separately in the next chapter.)

We sometimes overlook other serious sins, such as sins against our body. And certainly we should not sin against it because our bodies are “sacred” to the Lord as indicated in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NIV): “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”

There are several lifestyles that must certainly be regarded as sin against our bodies (in effect, they slowly destroy our bodies), and probably the most common one is addiction to food, commonly called gluttony.

Observing people on the street, in grocery stores, and elsewhere will convince you that many of the people in the United States are obese. In fact, in 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported: “About one-third of U.S. adults (33.8%) are obese and approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents aged 2-19 years old are obese.” And the medical establishment has verified that obesity promotes serious health problems.

(There are many available programs, some Christian based, for overcoming obesity. If obesity is a problem for you, please seek help from one of these programs.)

Examples of additional sinning by abuse to our bodies will most definitely include use/addiction to any of these four: nicotine, alcohol, drugs, and pornography.

In the September 2011 CDC issue of “Vital Signs,” it was reported that “Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States.”

In a similar report using data from 2009, they stated: “Number of alcoholic liver disease deaths: 14,406;” and the “Number of alcohol induced deaths, excluding accidents and homicides: 23,199.”

The CDC report for July 2009 on “Illegal Drug Use,” stated: “Percent of persons 12 years of age and over with any illicit drug use in the past month: 8.7%.”

In 2011, The American College of Emergency Physicians released information on emergencies and deaths from drug related causes: “More than half a million (638,484) drug related emergencies were reported in 2001—nearly a 75% increase over 1990 (371,208). Nearly 20,000 people in 2000 died of drug-related causes.”

Another serious sin is pornography. Pornographic material is readily available in magazines and on the Internet; consequently indulgence in it has become rampant. Some statistics reported on the www.blazinggrace.org website in 2011 are: “The U.S. Customs Service estimates that there are more than 100,000 websites worldwide offering child pornography (which is illegal).” The report also states: “39 million homes receive the adult channels in scrambled form, while the number of children with potential exposure to such images is about 29 million.”

According to various Internet reports, consequences of pornography range all the way from divorce to murder. The reports also make it clear that once pornographic material is viewed, the image never leaves the mind.

It is quite obvious that these four types of sin are problematic in the United States. They are very difficult to overcome and some believe demonic forces may be part of the problem. (There is much debate about this possibility, but I personally know of people who were “delivered” from nicotine and drugs.)

Therefore, anyone plagued by any of these four sins should seek help from a program that, if possible, includes Spirit-filled believers who are experienced in the deliverance ministry.

I might add that the success of any program is primarily determined by the level of the desire of the addicted person to be free from the addiction.

We have now dealt with various sins against our bodies (and the Lord). Now let’s look at ways of dealing with any and all sins, and keep in mind that you can have the Father on your side—He does not want you to sin.

Obviously, you cannot live a sinless life here on this earth. But the closer your relationship to the Lord is, and the more you allow the Holy Spirit to direct your life, the greater the probability that you will not sin.

There are many ways for you to avoid sinning and the Lord expects you to follow those ways, and by following them you will be enhancing your relationship with Him.

Ways to avoid sin.

- Get saved.
- Get filled with the Holy Spirit and let Him direct your life.
- Read and study the Bible constantly.
- Attend regularly a church where the Holy Spirit is in charge.
- Have a committed prayer life.

- Fellowship with people who are led by the Spirit.
- Frequently evaluate your relationship with the Lord.
- Daily affirm that you are going to do the Lord's will and not sin.
- Control your temper and your tongue.
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Do not allow unforgiveness to remain in your heart.
- Be alert for the works of the enemy and resist him.
- Don't allow ungodly thoughts to reside in you mind.
- Resist temptations that lead to sin.
- Be humble.

If you will do these things, the odds of your committing a sin are greatly reduced. However, that is a long list, so you might say to yourself: “Why don't I just forget about all those ‘ways’ and every evening when I get ready for bed, I will simply confess my sins and claim 1 John 1:9 (NIV): ‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’”

There is one major reason (among others) to not do that: Hebrews 10:26-27 (NIV): “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

Also be sure to ask the Lord to help you in your war against sinning just as the psalmist did in Psalm 19:13 (NIV): “Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.”

In summary, remember that the closer your relationship with the Lord is, and the more you seek the Holy Spirit, the lower are the chances you will fall into sin.

And also remember that the Lord, in His grace, love, and mercy, has provided you a way to get forgiven when you do slip up and sin. I repeat: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV).

STEPS TO FORGIVENESS

Regardless of whom you may have unforgiveness against, you should take immediate action to deal with the problem. Subsequently, I will propose some steps that will help you to do so. But first, let us look at some of the scriptures in the New Testament that deal with forgiving and unforgiveness:

- Matthew 5:23-24 (TLB): “So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and remember that a friend has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God.”
- Matthew 6:14-15: “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”
- Matthew 18:21-22: “Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus tells the parable about the man who was forgiven of his debt of ten thousand talents, but would not forgive a man who owed him one hundred denarii. Then in verses 34 and 35 Jesus said, “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

In Mark 11:25 Jesus said, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.”

In Ephesians 4:32 Paul wrote: “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

In addition to the consequences of unforgiveness cited in the above scriptures, scientific research has found that unforgiveness can cause many health issues, including headaches, depression, arthritis, high blood pressure, and hardening of the arteries.

Because of the many serious consequences of unforgiveness, it is obvious we should strive to never allow unforgiveness to come into our lives. We should always take immediate steps to forgive, regardless of the circumstances under which the unforgiveness started.

The bottom line from all this discussion is we **MUST** forgive! Over the years I have formulated some steps that have enabled me to forgive. I hope that implementing these steps will enable you to do likewise.

- Ask the Lord to bring to your mind all those against whom you have unforgiveness, and write down their names (even if they are deceased).

- Start at the top of your list and ask yourself the following questions concerning that person. This may make the process of forgiveness easier.
- What were the circumstances that precipitated the unforgiveness? Could I have “brought it on myself” by something I said or did?
- Could the offending party have been having a “bad hair day,” or was the person having a crisis unknown to me?
- Can I afford to harbor unforgiveness knowing that the Lord will not forgive me of my sins if I don’t forgive the person who offended me.?
- Repent, confess to the Lord your unforgiveness as sin, and ask for His forgiveness. (1 John 1:9):
- Verbalize the situation that prompted your unforgiveness toward the person.

Be as specific as you can. Example: “Father by an act of my will I forgive ‘John Doe’ for insulting me in front of other people and making me feel stupid. Please bless him, help me to forgive him, and give me your agape love for him. (Please note that agape love is a love that wants the best for the person.)

Repeat the procedure for each name on your list. (If during the forgiveness procedure the name of an additional person comes to you, add that name to the list of those who are to be forgiven.)

Any time that “forgiven” person’s name comes to your mind after you have gone through the steps of forgiving him, simply say: “Father, please bless ‘John Doe’ and give me your agape love for him.”

And you will know that you have completely forgiven a person when you can think about that person without feeling any negative emotional response. When that happens, be sure to praise the Lord and thank Him for helping you to forgive.

The name of a person you need to forgive may come to you at any time. When it does, go through the “forgiving” procedure. (Note: If at anytime you find you have unforgiveness against God, confess it to Him and ask for His forgiveness; He will grant it.)

For the forgiveness process to be complete, you must also forgive yourself.

Self-forgiveness is an absolute “must;” here is why. If you do not forgive yourself, you are guilty of unforgiveness, and thus you negate God’s forgiveness for you!

If you want to enjoy good health, happiness, peace in your heart, a right relationship with the Lord, and have your sins forgiven, you must rid yourself of all unforgiveness.

It may take some time, but our loving heavenly Father will help you to forgive. And when that happens, be sure to praise the Lord and thank Him for helping you to forgive.

SATAN'S DEVICES

The first mention of Satan in the Bible is in Chapter 3 of Genesis where he appears as a serpent; his last mention is in Revelation 20:10 where he is thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone.

He is our greatest enemy, and he is always looking for people he can devour: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

More about Satan and his other names:

- Satan is a created angel who was cast out of heaven because of his pride, arrogance, and his aspiration to become like God. (See Isaiah 14:14, and Ezekiel 28:11-19). “Satan” in Hebrew means “adversary,” “accuser.”
- In the Bible, Satan is referred to by various names and titles, including: the devil, the enemy, Beelzebub, that old serpent, god of this world, ruler of this world, prince of the power of the air, dragon, angel of light, accuser, and father of lies.
- Regardless of what he is called, his objectives are in stark contrast to those of Jesus: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- In 1 John 3:8 (NIV) it says... “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”
- By His resurrection Jesus defeated Satan, but he (Satan) still has some power on earth. Fortunately though, Christians have authority over him through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. In 1 John 4:4 it says, “...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

Job 1:12 and 2:6 make it clear the enemy cannot harm believers without God’s permission. I don’t claim to understand why God allows Satan to “harm” us, but I once heard an explanation by a well-known pastor that makes a lot of sense. He said that God in His great love does not want to punish His children. So when we need punishment (see Hebrews 12:6) He withdraws His hand of protection and allows Satan to scourge us for a while. Then when we have received enough discipline and scourging, He makes Satan back off. Sort of makes sense doesn’t it?

Satan is not omnipresent. Therefore, he uses demons (also referred to as evil spirits, unclean spirits.) to help him accomplish his objectives.

The origin of these demons is much debated, but the consensus seems to be they are the angels that fell from heaven with Satan as recorded in Revelation 12:3-4: “Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”

Then in conjunction with these verses is Revelation 12:9: “And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

The Bible characterizes Satan and the demons as cowardly, deceitful, fierce, cruel, malignant, powerful, presumptuous, proud, subtle, and wicked. These evil forces are capable of bringing about illness and bondage to people, and in some cases they can actually “possess” people.

But keep in mind we live in a fallen world, and not all sickness and “bad events” are the work of demonic forces.

From my personal encounter with demons I can unequivocally state that they are real. But “in the name of Jesus” and through the power of the Holy Spirit, they can be expelled. (There are many good books available that deal with this subject.)

I have witnessed the manifestation of demons in various situations. One such manifestation occurred at a weekend spiritual “Advance” I was attending. During an evening praise and worship service a man in the row in front of me fell to the floor and began writhing around and hissing loudly. Immediately a small group of believers gathered around him, restrained him, and commanded the unclean spirit to come out of him.

In a few seconds the man went limp and appeared to be unconscious. A little later he regained consciousness, and some men helped him up and escorted him to another area where they counseled and prayed with him.

The next evening at the worship service the fellow testified to what the Lord had done for him the previous night. He said he had been delivered from drugs, alcohol, and other problems; consequently, he was now rejoicing and praising the Lord for setting him free and saving his soul.

Jesus devoted much of His ministry to dealing with demons, and gave His disciples authority to deal with them. He also gave believers that same authority in Mark 16:17: “These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues;”

Unfortunately few denominations today teach about demonic forces and how to deal with them in a rite commonly called “deliverance.”

A word of caution about deliverance: Be sure you are in a right relationship with the Lord before you attempt to bring about deliverance. This warning is based upon the following scripture:

“But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them

and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (Acts 19:13-16).

Not all demonic activity presents itself in such a spectacular, unnerving way. For example, one subtle way the enemy tries to influence us is through our minds. The first recorded act of sin was brought about when Satan talked to Eve and planted in her mind doubtful thoughts about God’s word (Genesis 3:1, KJV): “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

Since then Satan has corrupted millions of people by getting them to doubt God’s Word, the Bible.

As part of his scheme of influencing people through their minds, Satan will try to tempt them. He even had the audacity to tempt Jesus three times as recorded in Matthew 4:1-10.

Paul recognized the dangers of Satan’s temptations as written in First Thessalonians 3:5: “For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter (Satan) might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.”

You will always face temptations. Some temptations will be relatively minor, such as the temptation to eat a second piece of candy. But there will also be some serious temptations, temptations orchestrated by the tempter; one example is pornography.

Through easy access to books, magazines, and the Internet, countless youths and adults (including the clergy) have become addicted to pornography. This addiction often results in rape of children and adults, divorce, job loss, extreme guilt, suicide, loss of friends, loss of self-respect, and even murder. Therefore, it is absolutely mandatory that adults refrain from indulging in pornography; and parents should do their best to prevent their children from getting exposed to it.

And the best way to prevent problems with porn is to never view it. (Experts say once a porn scene is viewed, that image never leaves the mind.) Obviously, the best way to prevent viewing porn is to never be in a situation where it can be seen. This would mean avoiding Internet porn sites, not tuning to TV stations that show porn materials, not going to movie theaters that show porn, and not entering places that sell pornographic materials. (Today, even many ads have pornographic overtones.)

If you have, or any member of your family has already gotten into pornography, I strongly urge you to seek a Spirit-filled counselor for help.

You will always face temptations, but when they come, remember that God will provide a way out. “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But

when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1Corinthians 10:13, NIV).

When temptations come to your mind, look for God’s “way out.”

Fortunately, we cannot think of two different things at the same time. So when a thought comes to our minds that can lead to a sinful act, we should immediately switch our thinking to something Godly. I have found that singing a gospel song, praising the Lord, and praying in the Spirit are all effective in driving away evil thoughts. Also, repeating the Lord’s prayer, the 23rd Psalm, or other scriptures help me fend them off.

And to reinforce your determination to overcome sinful thoughts and temptations, stop and think about the possible undesirable consequences that will ensue if you yield to them.

At the top of the list of consequences is the possibility of losing your salvation. Other consequences of continually yielding to ungodly thoughts and temptations include divorce, alienation of friends and relatives, loss of job, loss of self-respect, and the loss of respect of others.

Because many people are unaware of the “occult” or take it as being “harmless,” I have included the following discussion of it. Some of the discussion may seem childish and unbelievable, and that is exactly what the enemy would have us believe, but I can assure you the occult is neither childish nor harmless and it should be avoided. Period!

Some people use the occult as a means of guidance, but the Lord forbids such guidance. “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead” (Deuteronomy 18:9-11). Definitions of these various practices may be found in dictionaries.

In addition to the occult practices mentioned above, present-day occult practices in the United States include palm reading, horoscopes, crystal-ball reading, fortunetelling, Ouija boards, table tapping, and reading occult books.

Before I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit I dabbled in the occult, not realizing the dangers of doing so. For example, while a high school student, I participated in a “table-tapping” session at a class party. I had never heard of such a ritual and was anxious to participate in it.

So we placed a card table in the middle of the room; then I sat on the south side of it, one student sat on the east side of the table, and one sat on the west side of the table. We all placed our finger tips on the table and began chanting in unison: “Up table up.”

After a few minutes of chanting the north side of the table began to slowly rise. We kept chanting and the table kept rising on the north side until the two north legs of the table were about six inches off the floor. We stopped the chanting and began to ask questions that could be answered with a “Yes” or “No.” We instructed the table to tap once for a “Yes” and twice for a “No.”

After a few minutes of questions and answers, I decided to show that it was all a phony.

So I told the other two classmates to stand up, and I stood up with them. Then with all of us just touching the table top with our fingers, the table remained standing with the north legs about six inches off the floor. Puzzled at this phenomenon, I told the other two kids to stand away from the table, leaving only me standing with my fingertips on the table. The table remained elevated!

I was amazed and a bit frightened because I knew there was no way I could be holding that table up!

After some other classmates checked to be sure I was not holding the table up, I backed away and let the table legs drop to the floor.

And to this day I am convinced some demonic power was making that table rise and fall in answer to our questions. A search of the Internet revealed that this occult ritual is still being practiced.

Years later I got interested in the supernatural and began to read books on the subject. I became really caught up in the occult. I even attempted out-of-body travel and believed I was about to succeed.

Then one day while meditating on the subject a very frightening feeling suddenly came over me and I decided I had better cease and desist. (Thank you, Holy Spirit!) So I threw away all my occult books and never again knowingly dabbled in the occult.

I had one more occasion to experience a manifestation of occult phenomena.

During the years that my wife and I were woefully ignorant of the devil’s devices, we bought our daughter, at her request, an Ouija board.

She and a friend were using the board one day, and our daughter became alarmed at the way the planchette was behaving in answer to their questions. So they quit using the Ouija board—for good. I believe it was God’s grace through the Holy Spirit that prompted them to quit using it.

Sometime later my wife threw the planchette away but kept the board. She thought it was about the right size to use as a sheet-cake holder; so she sanded off the writing on the board.

Periodically she would cover the board with foil, place a sheet-cake on it, and then decorate the cake. After the cake was removed she would store the board in the cabinet.

Many years later (after we both had received the baptism with the Holy Spirit) I was reading a Christian-authored book on dealing with the occult. My purpose was to better equip me for ministering to people who had a problem with the occult.

In the book was a list of possible occult items, and the Ouija board was one of them. So I interrupted my reading and asked my wife what had become of the Ouija board, and she told me what she had done. I asked her if she still had it and she said she did; I asked her to bring it to me.

She got it out of the cabinet and brought it to me in the living room. We had a fire in the fireplace, so I opened the spark screen, placed the board on the flames, and returned to my chair.

Almost immediately, a loud and unearthly scream came from the fireplace. Simultaneously, brilliant, multicolored flames engulfed the board. As we watched in wide-eyed amazement, the multi-colored flames finally consumed the board.

The wife and I looked at each other in absolute astonishment, and with a tinge of fear. We had never witnessed anything like that before and we have not since. We were both convinced the board had been “demon-possessed.”

I later asked a house-builder friend of mine if a burning plywood board could produce such phenomena as we had witnessed, and he said it could not. The occult is real—have no part in any of it!

I pray that this chapter has alerted you to the wiles of the enemy. And to remain free from his evil attempts to ensnare you, stay close to the Lord and remember to act in accordance with the following scripture.

“But he gives us more and more strength to stand against all such evil longings. As the Scripture says, God gives strength to the humble but sets himself against the proud and haughty. So give yourselves humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:6-7, TLB).

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING

If you want to start a spirited discussion in a group, just bring up the topic of politics, religion, speaking in tongues, or tithing, and I can guarantee you will have a lively discussion.

I don't have the privilege of talking with you face to face, so I simply ask you to read this chapter prayerfully and with an open mind.

I thought when I started to write this chapter on giving it would be fairly easy—I was wrong! If you want to get thoroughly confused, just put “tithing” in your search engine. You will find that there are multiple web sites for tithing and multiple websites against tithing, and some are for “giving” as led by the Holy Spirit.

Most Christians are probably aware of Malachi 3:8-12 as this is the basis, or starting point, for giving in many denominations (ten percent).

However, there are some Christians who believe giving should be done as the Holy Spirit leads. Some arguments these proponents put forth for giving as led by the Holy Spirit, and not tithing as required by the “Law,” are as follows:

In the New Testament there is not a single scripture commanding Christians to tithe. Tithing is mentioned only two times in the New Testament and both times it is when Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees about tithing (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42).

Malachi 3:10-12 was under the Old Covenant (the Law), and therefore it does not apply to New Testament Christians. Also, the tithe mentioned there was actually a one-tenth tithe given by the Levites (“in the field”) for those who ministered in the Temple.

As Jesus did not give a clear commandment to believers to tithe, believers should not tithe in the Old Testament sense of tithing but should be led by the Holy Spirit in matters of giving.

If Christians choose to go back under the Law for tithing guidance they must keep all of the Law. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10, NIV).

Tithing under the Law means giving only ten percent, but giving as led by the Holy Spirit may mean giving more or less than ten percent.

The bottom line, according to these arguments, is that Christians are not to tithe under the Old Testament rules of giving, but they are to give according to the leadings of the Holy Spirit. Naturally, the amount to be given under this doctrine is contingent upon how “clearly” you hear from the Holy Spirit.

Paul's thoughts on giving are given in First Corinthians 9:6-8 (TLB): “But remember this—if you give little, you will get little. A farmer who plants just a few seeds will get only a small crop, but if he plants much, he will reap much. Everyone must make up his own mind as to how much he should give. Don't force

anyone to give more than he really wants to, for cheerful givers are the ones God prizes. God is able to make it up to you by giving you everything you need and more so that there will not only be enough for your own needs but plenty left over to give joyfully to others.”

The pattern of giving utilized by me and my wife probably has not been very traditional, but I feel that the Lord would have me share it, and I humbly do so.

Years ago, while still trying to pay off sizable debts we incurred while I was in graduate school, we started giving to the church as best we could, and we purposed in our hearts to increase our giving up to ten percent of my gross income. (I don't think we were even aware of Malachi 3:10 at that time.) When we paid off a debt we would increase our giving by the debt-payment amount. Within two years we were debt free and were giving at least ten percent to the church.

As the Lord continued to prosper us we kept increasing our giving to the church, and began supporting faith-based ministries. We also began giving to individuals in need as we felt led by the Holy Spirit.

We have been richly blessed for our faithfulness in giving, and the blessings have been spiritual as well as financial. All four of our children got saved, my wife and I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has continually supplied all our needs. I believe we are being abundantly blessed because we give in harmony with the two scriptures given below:

Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap” (Luke 6:38).

Paul said, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

Some might say that we would have received the same blessings had we simply tithed. I can neither prove nor disprove that statement.

I have heard some preachers say, in effect: “Sow a faith seed of one thousand dollars with us, and the Lord will bless you with a lot more.”

Please do not think you can bribe the Lord by your giving. After all everything we have is really His; we have just been given the privilege of being stewards of it. And we should always thank the Lord in accordance with Ephesians 5:20 (TLB): “Always give thanks for everything to our God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Again, it certainly is not my place to tell you what you should do about giving. However, I would encourage you to earnestly seek the Lord about how much to give, to whom, and to what ministries.

If you are not yet to the point in your spiritual walk that you feel confident in your ability to hear from the Holy Spirit, give as much as you can and then trust in

the Lord to help you make future decisions about your giving. Remember, you can't out give the Lord!

Words of caution: If you decide to begin giving according to the Holy Spirit's leading **so you can justify reducing your giving**, please be sure you are REALLY being led by Him. Also, be aware that the enemy will encourage you to give only a pittance—he certainly does not want you to get blessed!

MAKING A MARRIAGE WORK

One very important element of a marriage is husband/wife relationships. These relationships include the much debated verb “submission” and the verb “love.” Unfortunately the word “submission” is too often taken to mean the wife has to do whatever the husband commands.

At this point I want to make it clear that the following discussion about wives submitting to their husbands, and about husbands loving their wives, is based on the premise that both the husband and wife are Christians and are being led in their marriage by the Holy Spirit.

If that is not the case then the following discussion is probably of little value. (I want to reemphasize that if you want to truly live a victorious Christian life, you naturally have to be a Christian. If you as a reader are not a Christian being led by the Holy Spirit, then I would encourage you to become a Christian and get filled with the Holy Spirit.)

Following are scriptures pertinent to a wife’s submission and a husband’s love:

- Ephesians 5:22-26 (NIV): “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy...”
- Colossians 3:18-19 (NIV): “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.”

The above two scriptures make it clear that a husband is to love his wife with agape love, and she is to be submitted to him.

Loving with agape love means the husband will love his wife with an unconditional love and will do all within his power to meet all her needs, including food, clothing, shelter, safety, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, and the continual assurance that he will love her unconditionally until “death doeth us part.” Why would any wife who is being so loved and so cared for not want to be submitted to her husband?

And now to a discussion of submission.

When a wife is submitted to her husband it does not mean that he’s superior to her in any way; he definitely is not. Also, the wife’s being submitted to the husband does not mean she cannot disagree with him. However, it does mean that when disagreements do happen, they should be settled without any residual anger or unforgiveness. In other words the couple should not let the sun go down on their anger: Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV): “‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

But in cases of a stalemate, the husband has the responsibility of making the final “decision.” (More about these issues is given in the “Do” and “Do not do” sections below.)

I prefer to think of a successful marriage as a “mutual admiration society.” That is, the husband and wife are working together in harmony, each striving to make their mate feel happy, secure, fulfilled, and loved.

To do this the spouses must be led by the Holy Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV). And if the husband and wife are working together in harmony and love, that marriage will never be in jeopardy!

The husband and wife should share equally the responsibility of raising the children; but the husband should be the one to resolve the cases of disagreement between him and his wife about raising the children.

For decisions in other matters, the husband and wife should share the responsibilities. However, in cases where they cannot agree, it is the husband’s responsibility to make the final decision or seek outside counseling about the matter under consideration.

Now for another very important element in the husband-wife relationship: the attitude and behavior of spouses toward each other in the “bedroom setting.” These should be in keeping with the scriptures.

Paul had this to say about it: “The man should give his wife all that is her right as a married woman, and the wife should do the same for her husband: for a girl who marries no longer has full right to her own body, for her husband then has his rights to it, too; and in the same way the husband no longer has full right to his own body, for it belongs also to his wife. So do not refuse these rights to each other. The only exception to this rule would be the agreement of both husband and wife to refrain from the rights of marriage for a limited time, so that they can give themselves more completely to prayer. Afterwards, they should come together again so that Satan won’t be able to tempt them because of their lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5, TLB).

I speculate that Paul was trying to say delicately (and in a sort of veiled manner) that the husbands and wives should honor the sexual needs of their spouses, but without coercion or manipulation, and with mutual consent.

Because “problems with sex” are a leading cause for divorce, I suggest that couples having problems in the bedroom setting should seek a Christian counselor, or obtain a book written on marital sex from a Christian perspective. Marriage is too important and too sacred to allow problems in the realm of sex to destroy it.

And although some of these suggestions I am making below may seem rather insignificant, remember that it is the little foxes that ruin the vineyard (Song of Solomon 2:15).

Husbands and wives, you should do the following things for your spouse:

- Make them feel needed, wanted and loved
- Demonstrate your love by giving sincere hugs and kisses regularly
- Meet their needs in the bedroom setting
- Forgive them 70 times 7, or more
- Resolve all problems before going to sleep at night
- Compliment them on their appearance when warranted
- Accept their friends
- Spend quality time together
- Dine out with them on a regular basis
- Work with them on various projects; it will bring you closer together
- Have some out-of-the house “fun time” with them on a regular basis
- Turn off the TV and computer and play games with them, or just talk
- Practice good hygiene and good manners at all times
- Have vocal interaction during all meals

Husbands, these are special things you should do for your wife:

- Show her that (next to the Lord) she has first place in your life
- See to it that she does not want for anything she needs
- Continually give her your love, admiration, trust, and respect
- Pray with her daily and study the Bible with her
- Take her shopping when she asks you to
- Bring or send her flowers on both special and non-special occasions
- Provide her with an allowance to spend as she chooses
- Tell her you are proud to be her husband
- Remember lovemaking begins “in the kitchen,” not in the bedroom
- Take your wife on a “second” honeymoon at least once a year, if possible

Wives, these are special things you should do for your husband:

- Show that you consider him to be the “head of the household”
- Continually let him know you really love and respect him
- Before going out in public, dress modestly: no cleavage, no short skirts
- Let him know you are proud to be his wife
- Take an interest in his work

- Make it a high priority to do “special tasks” for him

Also, couples should attend church services, worship the Lord, and participate in Christian Ministries together. Again, the more activities a couple can do together, the stronger their relationship should become.

The “perfect” marriage is probably never attained, but you and your spouse will certainly do well to continually seek to achieve one.

To that end, the two of you should sit down together periodically, review this section, and make any changes in your relationships that are needed. If you will do so, the odds are that your marriage will never fail, and it will get better and better! And if you feel your love for your spouse is waning, ask the Lord to give you a special, enhanced, agape love for your mate. You will be amazed at the results! (I am speaking from experience.)

CONSIDERING DIVORCE?

One survey, made by a professional, indicated the divorce rate is about thirty two percent for both Christians and non-Christians. Also, statistics show that sixty-six percent of second marriages end in divorce if children are involved.

NEVER consider divorce as an option. Apparently many people believe marriage is just something to try out, and if it doesn't work, you can always try again. God has a different viewpoint; to Him marriage is a very special and permanent alliance:

- Jesus said in Mark 10:6-9 (NIV): “But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”
- In Hebrews 13:4 (NIV) it says: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”
- And in Malachi 2:16 (TLB) it states: “For the Lord, the God of Israel, says he hates divorce and cruel men. Therefore, control your passions-let there be no divorcing of your wives.”
- Matthew 5:31-32 (NIV): “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

Now let me relate some reasons (from multiple websites) that people have given for getting a divorce. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and the reasons are not necessarily ranked in order of significance.

Money, alcohol, immaturity, jealousy, unrealistic ideas about love, irresponsibility, cohabitation preceding marriage, lack of communication between spouses, infidelity, religious differences, abandonment, substance abuse, sexual abuse or incompatibility, interference from parents or in-laws, physical abuse, emotional abuse, inability to resolve conflict, intolerance of petty idiosyncrasies, spousal domination, refusal to compromise, pride, hormone imbalance and hypoglycemia

The above list should be examined periodically, and if any one of these reasons is causing a problem in your marriage, please take immediate action to resolve it. Nipping the problem in the bud can save your marriage and minimize potential emotional damage to your children.

If outside help is needed in resolving the problem, seek help from a professional, unbiased, third party: A spirit-filled minister or a spirit-filled Christian counselor, approved by both parties, and who specializes in saving marriages. If your spouse will not go with you, go alone; and “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

One final admonition: If you are considering divorce, please think of those who will be most affected by it: you, your spouse, and your children.

My suggestion to those who are considering divorce is to research the subject on the internet; enter something like “Effects of divorce on children,” and “Psychological and emotional aspects of divorce,” into your search engine. I entered these two phrases into my search engine and was very dismayed at what I found:

Adverse effects on children from divorce ranged from regression in emotional development and behavior in the very young, to rebellion, promiscuity, and suicidal intensions in adolescents.

The feelings in the two becoming divorced ranged from anger and fear, to victimization and vengeance.

Always keep in mind that there are no winners when it comes to divorce.

REMARRIAGE

Now for those of you who are divorced, and planning to remarry, the first thing you should do is to objectively analyze your former marriage to detect what you believe were the causes for the divorce. Then ask yourself: “Will I be able to avoid any and all of my behaviors that were contributing factors in my divorce?” In other words will you be able to profit from your previous mistakes and not repeat them?

The following questions should be discussed by the couple; and this procedure should be followed even if one party has never been married or has never had children.

Important questions that should be answered before remarriage:

- Will the children be “time-shared” with the former spouse? If so, will you and your prospective spouse be agreeable to the arrangements made?
- Will you and your prospective spouse agree to allow each other to discipline all the children, regardless of to whom they “belong”?
- Will you and your prospective spouse agree to accept the other spouse’s children as your own? This means you will love them and treat them as you will treat your own children.
- Are the children agreeable to this proposed marriage? If not, you should seek professional Christian counseling for all involved, if at all possible.
- Finally, resolve any and all points of contention before marriage.

LAUGHTER IS GOOD FOR YOU

Having a victorious life can be made even better by laughter. Out of curiosity I put “Benefits of laughter” into my computer search engine and I came up with a multitude of “hits.” I recommend that you do the same. But for the benefit of those who cannot do this, I have presented a summary of some of the things I learned about the benefits of laughter.

When we laugh we:

- Alleviate depression.
- Lower our blood pressure.
- Promote relaxation.
- Reduce stress.
- Increase the oxygen level in our blood, giving us more energy.
- Increase the endorphin activity in our body resulting in a sense of well being.
- Decrease stress hormone levels.
- Strengthen the immune system.
- Induce muscle relaxation.
- Reduce pain levels.
- Improve the condition of the Cardiovascular System.
- Increase natural anti-depressants.
- Strengthen the immune system.
- Release natural pain-killers and reduce stress hormones in the body.
- Release tension, promoting relaxation and deeper sleep.

I was surprised to learn that even “forced” laughter is as beneficial as spontaneous laughter. Laugh frequently—it is a good way to live your Christian life.

LIVING A DAY IN THE VICTORIOUS LIFE

Experts say the kind of day you will have is determined primarily by your attitude when you get out of bed in the morning. Therefore, you need to make sure your attitude is very positive, and then make the decision that it is going to remain that way throughout the day.

Begin your day by thanking the Lord for your night of rest and for all the blessings He has so graciously bestowed upon you. Then, if possible, spend some time alone (or with your spouse) praising the Lord, praying, and studying the Bible.

Remind yourself: “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones” (Proverbs 17:22, KJV). No one likes to be around someone who is “down in the dumps.” Gloom is catching, but so is a merry heart.

If possible, throughout the day listen to good Christian music; it is always uplifting. If the music has words, sing along with the singers if you can. It will lift your spirit to a higher level.

The psalmist believed in making music to the Lord: Psalm 108:1 (NIV): “My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul.”

Paul also realized the value of music. In Ephesians 5:19-20 (NIV) he writes: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Don’t believe that you must be a good singer to praise the Lord: “Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob” (Psalm 81:1, KJV).

The enemy does not like for believers to be victorious in life so he will try to steal your joy, dampen your spirit, and get you in a bad mood. But if he does come around, take authority over him in the name of Jesus, and send him packing! As a believer you have the authority to say: “Devil, I am not going to allow you to destroy my joy; be gone in the name of Jesus!”

This authority comes from James 4:7 (NIV): “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Be in a continual attitude of prayer. To me this means keeping “in touch” with the Lord at all times. Or as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV): “Pray without ceasing.” (As one little girl said, “Never say Amen!”)

Read and meditate upon various scriptures during your break times. For years I read the Bible during my lunch break, and it was of much comfort and very edifying to me.

At sometime during your waking hours review a portion of your mental list of blessings; and if you are a Christian you will have a multitude of them.

Help someone without expecting anything in return. Your good deed may be nothing more than holding open a door for a person, or giving a compliment.

Just speaking with a smile to someone you meet walking down the hall at the office or someone on the street will usually generate a smile and a nice response from them. You never know how much good you might do by simply being nice to someone.

And always keep in mind the advice of our Lord: Matthew 7:12: “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Remember that your thoughtfulness and consideration should not end when you enter your home. You should treat your spouse and family in an even-better manner than you treat your boss, colleagues, customers, and other people. Doing so generates blessings, not only for you, but for all the family.

It is beyond the scope of this book to go into much detail about family affairs and how to raise your children. (There are plenty of books available that can educate you in those matters.)

In a nutshell, my counsel about family matters is to do whatever is necessary to establish a close, loving, and positive relationship with your children and your spouse.

Remember the adage, and act on it: “The family that prays together stays together.” Also, remember it is God's love that is the glue that holds families together through thick and thin.

If you can say “Amen” to what you have just read in this essay, you most certainly are “Living a Victorious Christian Life.”

AFTER WORDS

This treatise was written some time ago, so I want to add a little to it today, April 26, 2017. My wife died of cancer in September 2010, but according to her, she never had any serious pain; and she was very cheerful during her last months. She was sure she was going to be with the Lord and her loved ones when she did pass away. She had these feelings because she had been a good Christian all of her adult life.

I have been in a very good Assisted Living Home for almost four years. I thank the Lord for getting this Home for me to live in. I am very contented with my life here and have made friends with several other people, one of which is a lady I am very fond of.

I am almost eighty-seven-years old and in good health, according to the doctors. I give the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit the credit for all the countless blessings that I, my family, and my friends have received.

Now for a final word of advice: Become a Christian, if you are not already one, and live a life filled with the Holy Spirit. It may not be an easy life, but I assure you that when you get to heaven, you will certainly thank the Lord that you lived a Christian life!

BIBLES USED

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NOTE: In this essay I sometimes use the pronoun “they” instead of the singular pronouns “she” and “he.” This usage of “they” is based on information in the following website:

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/words/he-or-she-versus-they>.