





# A Better Way

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## Introduction

Have you ever read the story about Daniel in the Bible? You may remember him as the guy who got thrown into the lion's den because he insisted on praying. He prayed even when the king made a decree saying if anyone prayed they would have to die. Not only did Daniel pray, he prayed three times a day with his window open for all to see because that is how he always prayed. When he was thrown into a den full of hungry lions as his punishment, God shut the lion's mouths. You can find this story in Daniel Chapter 6. If you read that chapter of the Bible you'll find out why all this started against Daniel and what happened to the guys that started the whole thing.

Another famous story found in the book of Daniel has to do with Daniel's best buddies who are popularly known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. If you remember, these were the three guys who got thrown into the furnace of fire. They came out of it with all their hair intact. They didn't even smell like smoke, and this furnace was so hot that it burned to a crisp the guys that threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fire. These three landed in the bottom of the furnace and walked around admiring the view. How were they able to do that? In Daniel chapter 3 verses 24 and 25 King Nebuchadnezzar said, "Did not we cast three men into the fire... I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they

have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” For some good reading read this story found in Daniel Chapter 3. Find out why Nebuchadnezzar got so mad at these three guys that he threw them into this situation. Find out about the new law that he made in his country as to what would happen to everyone that didn’t serve God after he saw what happened in the furnace. Sometimes we don’t serve God with all our heart because we are afraid that we can’t make a difference. Look what a difference these three guys made to change the lives of everyone in their country because they stood up for what was right. These boys were just teenagers like you. They dared to stand up for God and do what was right. God stood up for them and stood with them.

I hope that you read their stories in the Bible when I gave you those references. When we read in the Bible about people that make a difference in their world, we are strengthened to be able to make a difference in our own world. You might say to me, “But, Mrs. Haga, you don’t know what it’s like today trying to stand up for God and do what is right. Everybody at school at the public school makes fun of you if you don’t go along with the crowd. You can’t be a Christian and be popular. You can’t even take a Bible to school or talk about God unless a teacher has something bad to say about it. Sometimes if you stand up for what is right the drug crowd or the drinking crowd comes down on your head. Why stand up for God and go



through all that when nobody cares and nobody listens when you try to make a difference?” Those are just some of the quotes from people I’ve talked to through the years. Is there a reason to stand up for God? Can you do it? Is it important? Will it make a difference? How will God help you to stand up? Will He be there for you if you stand up for Him? Why should you? I hope to answer these questions for you in this book. I hope that by reading this book, you find the courage to stand up for God and change your world with His help.

The only way this book will be worth anything to you will be if you read it. I mean read the whole thing. If you are reading this book for a class assignment, for goodness sake don’t just skim through it to get your questions so that you can be done with your assignment. Are you a Christian? What does it mean to be a Christian? Will you go to heaven if you die today? We hear a lot of talk about the Lord coming back soon. What does that mean? If He comes back today, will you go with Him? Will you get to go or will you get left behind to face the horrible things that will happen on earth to those left behind. What does it mean to be a child of God? How can you find the love of God and peace of mind that being a child of God can give you? If sometimes you doubt that there even is a God, how can you find out for sure? What does it mean to be saved and can you know for sure that you are saved? These are some of the questions that I hope to answer for you if you will read this book. If you just

skim through it to do your assignment you will get very little out of it. As with anything you do, what you put into something will be what you get out of it.

What made Daniel different than the rest of the teenagers there during his day? Was he really a lot different than you? Let's start at the beginning of his story and find out.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **A Better Way**

This chapter starts with Daniel Chapter 1. Hey, it won't hurt you to get out a Bible and read it. You might find out you actually like it. I know it seems hard at first to read all the thee's and thou's and all that. But the more you read it, the easier it will be to understand. By the way, if you haven't ever been saved, the Bible won't make much sense to you.

Let's get off of the subject a little here and talk about Babylonian history. If you read the first verse in Daniel, you will read that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem, which was Daniel's hometown. This was also where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were from. Babylon was a great city of the ancient world, the capital of the kingdom of Babylonia. It was between the Tigris and Euphrates River in what is now Iraq. It ruled most of that part of the world between BC 1792 and somewhere around 320 BC which is a really long time. Also, Babylon was the site of the tower of Babel, which was historically documented to be there. It was a ziggurat, a tower with many levels of terraces. To find out more about it read your Bible in Genesis 11:1-9. Read how it got there and how it changed how you talk today. Some of the people and events connected with Babylon that you've probably studied in World History are Hammurabi with his code of laws, Nebuchadnezzar II (who is probably the Nebuchadnezzar in the book of

Daniel) who built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Later on came Alexander the Great from Macedonia who conquered Babylonia. The religion of Babylonia was definitely not the same as Daniel's religion. They believed in many gods. The king ruled on earth as a representative of the gods. Sometimes he was worshipped as a god. These guys studied the stars a lot since supposedly their gods had a lot to do with the skies. This was the beginning of astrology and horoscopes like we have today. They also had a lot of magicians who were supposedly given power from these gods.

In school you are made to feel like history is important but the Bible is something that you shouldn't even mention. You aren't even allowed in some public schools to carry one, which by the way, is legally wrong. You do have a right to carry a Bible and read it at school. You are made to feel that it is wrong to mention the Bible in class. You are made to feel like you are a religious weirdo if you do. Did they ever tell you in the public school that a lot of history as we know it today came from Biblical writings? Did anyone tell you that the Bible confirms historical accounts so much so that the first historians actually used the Bible as references to their work? Just as an example, look up the Tower of Babel in the encyclopedia. You'll find that even the encyclopedia gives a Biblical account as to why the tower is there. Hey, this was in a country where they didn't even believe in God. Why the Biblical

reference? Because it is a true reference. Have they told at the public school that education in many countries for thousands of years was centered on the Bible as the main textbook? Definitely it was so in our country for the first couple of hundred years. Not only was this true in our country, but also in many others around the world. Have they taught you what brought about the change from the Bible being the center of education to being banned in schools? One lady, Madeline O'Hara, made a crusade of saying that it wasn't fair for people just to hear about the Bible in school. They needed to teach other things as well and not discriminate against other religions. From there things got worse. Today you are made to feel like there is something wrong with the Bible. You are made to feel that other religions are better than Christianity. You are made to feel that the Bible is wrong in what it teaches about right and wrong. You are made to feel that there is no right or wrong. You're made to feel that no one can tell you any different, and if they try to, then there is something wrong with them. All these things came about because the Bible was taken out of school. Prayer was taken out of school. God was taken out of school. Now everybody is confused. Students carry guns to school and kill other students and teachers. A lot of teachers are immoral and you have to put up with all that goes along with that. Most schools are totally out of control and they are really in a mess. We need to get back to the Bible.

In Daniel 1:1, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and “besieged” it. What does that mean? These guys came in and surrounded the city. They took it over. It would be like Canada turning mean, coming down and surrounding Washington DC and taking it over. It’s the capital of our country and it would be under Canada’s control. Then from there they would take over our whole country. Nebuchadnezzar carried back to Babylon all their gold and treasures. One of the greatest treasures that they carried back was a lot of their children. They picked out the best of the children to take to Babylon. There they taught them their language and their way of life. They were to eat everything the King ate, the best and richest foods. Then after three years they were to appear back before the king and he would pick the best of them to become his advisors on how to deal with their countries’ affairs. Pretty smart. Four of these children were: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Can you imagine what that would be like? A totally bizarre country compared to yours would conquer your city and probably your whole country. Then you would have to leave home. It was never mentioned in the Bible that Daniel ever got to see his family again. The Bible says these guys were children so it is a fair guess that they were younger than you are. Sounds like they were treated well, but what an adjustment. From the day that they walked in, though, people took notice of them.

There was something different about these guys. So different that eventually they became chief advisors to the king. Daniel even served a chain of kings that came after King Neb. What made them different? They had found a better way.

Daniel 1:17 tells us, “As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom...” When it was their time to stand before the King verse 19 says, “And the king communed with them, and among them all was found none like them.” They were not only healthier, but also a lot smarter than the rest. What happened to all the rest of the guys that came out of their same country? They all believed the same way. How come only four were mentioned? I think that it was because during those three years the rest of them compromised with the Babylonians so much that at the end of that time there was little difference between them and the Babylonians. They gave in and started acting and talking just the same way they did. They became just like them, taking on their messy way of life. Isn't that so easy to do. If we are around people that are a certain way, before long we will start to act and talk and walk just like them. Have you ever known that to happen to anyone? I remember a girl at school that started hanging around with a rough crowd. She wasn't really like them at first. She started dressing a certain way so that she looked like that crowd. She wasn't the same as them in her heart, but she began to look like them on the outside. Then

they convinced her that it was OK to do some of the things that they were doing. At first, it was little things. Just one little drink. Just try drugs once, what could it hurt. She was convinced that the bad things that happen to other people couldn't happen to her. After all, she was doing just a little bit. Everybody was doing it. These people were her friends, and they cared for her. They all did it. It couldn't be that bad. She would fight her parents for her friends any time that they brought up the fact that she shouldn't hang around them. Regretfully they didn't put their foot down. That has been over 10 years ago. Where is she now? She is stuck in a rut going absolutely, positively nowhere. She has three kids by a guy that cares nothing for her. She has no job because the things that she got into with her wonderful friends who cared so much for her caused her to fail in school. She eventually quit school. She missed out on every opportunity to better herself. She now lives on food stamps and welfare. When you have worked with young people as long as I have, you see a lot of this story. She is one of the most fortunate. Don't be like the other boys from Jerusalem. Don't go along with the crowd.

What made Daniel different? Daniel 1:8 tells us, "Daniel purposed in his heart..." He purposed some things in his heart. He even purposed in his heart not to eat like the Babylonians, so we know that he didn't compromise with them in other things. I'm sure that the crowd tried to get him to go their way.



Both sides probably made fun of him. Can't you hear the other boys from his home town say, "Daniel, come on over here and sit with us. You just think that you are better than we are. You think you are too good to eat with us. What does this hurt? This is really good food. Let's be like these people. Their religion sounds pretty good to us. Maybe all this isn't that wrong. Why should we discriminate against how other people believe? Maybe we don't know all the truth." Daniel didn't stand up for what he believed in just to become famous. But we know the names of all four of these boys thousands of years later. They stood up for what was right because they knew it was right. They stood up for the truth because they knew it was true. No one could convince them differently. Can you be like those four guys? Were they really a lot different than you? You can stand up. These guys were teenagers just like you. Pimples, hormones, being stuck between adulthood and childhood, not knowing which direction to go in, all the things that go with being a teen have been the same since the beginning of time. What made it possible for these guys to be different? You have the same thing that helped them. God can make a difference. He can help you to make that stand if you ask Him and trust Him to. He can help you in a way today that He couldn't help those guys back in those days. Today, He can live in your heart through His Spirit. Before Jesus died, that couldn't happen. Jesus in you can give you the strength to do what you can't do

by yourself. You have to make up your mind and purpose in your heart like Daniel. Daniel had found a better way and he was determined to walk in it regardless of what the rest of the people around him did.

So, can things like this happen today where a few people make a difference? I knew a young person that had been in a really rough crowd. She was one of those people that everyone knew, and they all knew how wild she was. One day she gave her heart to the Lord and Jesus changed her life. Just like everybody talked about her when she was wild, they talked about her when she got saved. It made everybody curious. Curious enough to want to find out what made the difference. God had done such a miracle in her life and changed her so much that everybody knew that He was real. Others found hope to be able to change.

This reminds me of a story in the Bible. A woman lived in the country of Samaria. Her story is found in John 4:4-42. This woman went to the well and found living water. She met Jesus at the well that day. He told her all about her life and her sins. Jesus told her that she had had several husbands and that the man she lived with now wasn't her husband. It is a sin to live with someone that you are not married to. I know that a lot of people today do this. Does this make it right according to the Bible? The Bible sets the standard of what is right and wrong, not people. Jesus told her what she was doing wrong. He told her that He knew everything about her. He told her that He

had better water than the water that she was drawing at the well. He was talking about His Spirit. She found there living water that changed her heart and her life. She was so excited she ran all over the whole town telling about Jesus, how He knew all about her, and how He had forgiven her and changed her life. The Bible tells us that many of the Samaritans came to know Jesus because of her words to them. They saw the change in her and believed in Jesus. Then they came to Jesus and got to know Him for themselves.

Throughout the book of Daniel you'll find astrologers and magicians are mentioned. Remember, this country had a lot of gods. One of their gods was the king. There is only one God and one way to get to know Him. The way to get to Him is through His only begotten Son, Jesus. He loved us enough that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins. Jesus didn't die because we are perfect. God didn't love us because we are perfect or because we can do anything to deserve His love. God sent His Son to die because we are all sinners. Romans 3:23 tells us, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." We all need a Savior. None of us are good enough to get to heaven on our own. No matter how good we think that we are. The only way to get to heaven is to get saved. We have to ask Jesus to forgive us. We have to ask Jesus to come into our hearts. We don't have to worship the stars and sun. They can't help us at all. We can worship a God that walks with us. He loved us

enough to send His Son Jesus, because He knew we needed a Savior. We serve a God who can come in to our hearts and live and change us from the inside out. What more proof can you find that God is real? If it hasn't happened to you, then ask Him in your heart. You will know then for sure that God is real. John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Verse 17 goes on to say, "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through Him might be saved."

God loves you. This love is a personal love. Yes, He loves the whole world, but He loves you like you are the only one. He sends His Spirit to live inside you to help you to change, to give you the strength to do what is right. How could the Babylonian stars do all that for them? What could they do? What other religions can claim that the central figure their religion is based on rose up from the dead? If the Moslems could claim that Mohammed had come back from the dead, don't you think that they would? If the Buddhists could claim Buddha came back from the dead, they would. If they could claim that, they would. Why don't they? Because it wasn't proven as true. It didn't happen. Why? Because there is only one true God. There is only one Son of God, Jesus. He is the only one who was given the power to do that. What other religion can say that their God can come into their heart and live and

change them from the inside out? None. Why? They can't claim this because their gods can't do that, because their gods aren't real. We'll talk more later about how we know God is real and the Bible is true. Because of all their superstitious beliefs, the Babylonians got really caught up in astrology and magic and things comparable to witchcraft and wicca today. The schools are full of this stuff today. You have the horoscope crowd, the wicca crowd, the gothic crowd, and the new-agers. There are all kinds of spiritual ideas out there. It's a lot like Babylon. Some of the ideas out there are pretty weird. It seems like the weirder it is, the more people fall for it. That is a little strange.

Why is all this so? I guess everybody is looking for something to believe in. Most people fall for whatever the crowd falls for. They don't seek out a better way. They just fall for something. There is an old saying, "When we don't stand for something, we fall for anything." We fall for it no matter how stupid it is. Don't let the crowd dictate the truth to you. Find out what the truth is for yourself. Find out and dare to stand in it.

Be like Daniel. We have had lots of young people who wound up fighting depression and feelings of suicide, some have even wound up going to mental institutions because they got messed up in some of this stuff. Others got into drugs by getting caught in other kinds of cult type beliefs. Of course the people who are involved in this stuff don't call it cult beliefs, but it is anyway. We have to be

careful what we believe in. Find out the truth and walk in it. You will have to pay a dear price if you don't. There is a better way.

### **Chapter 3.**

## **How Do You Know God Is Real?**

I have a lot of students ask me, “With all the things out there to believe in how do you know which is true? How do you know God is real? With all the churches out there for Christians, how do you know which one is the right one? How do you know which book is right? There are a lot of books out there like the Koran, the Book of Mormons, and other religious books. How do you know which is the truth?” Part of why you have so many questions like this is because of how the public school teaches you. I hear about schools that make students bring in the Koran, the Muslim Bible, and practice this religion, and other religions, just to teach them to be tolerant of other religions, and they refuse to let them take a Bible and discuss it. Something is wrong with this. You can practice wicca, or witchcraft, as part of a class assignment, but you can’t call a Christmas program, a Christmas program, because it mentions the word Christ. You have to call it a holiday program so as not to offend someone. Something is wrong with all this. Why are things this way? Christians have a real enemy. There is a very real devil that wants to make you so confused that you don’t know what is true and what is a lie. He wants to get you confused about what is real and what is make believe. He wants to confuse you so that you don’t know right from wrong. Most of all he does not want you to find out that there is a

truth. That there is a Savior from all of his junk. He doesn't want you to know that Savior's name is Jesus. The devil does not want you to give your heart and life to Jesus. He wants to stop you from finding victory in your life. He wants to take you to hell eternally. Now you have to admit that it is a smart thing for the devil to use the public schools. That is where you spent most of your waking hours. That is where you learned how to think and what to think. You are told that what you are taught is true and that you should accept it as such. That isn't always so. It's time for you to find out the truth. John 8:32 tells, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." The truth will be what will change your life.

I pray that by reading this book you find out the truth and you get to know Him. His name is Jesus. John 14:6 tells us, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." There are a lot of different beliefs. But there is one God, one truth, and the way to both is through Jesus. There will be one thing that will determine whether or not you spend eternity in heaven or hell. That will be whether or not you are saved. If you give your life to Jesus and ask Him into your heart. If you repent of your sins and ask Him to forgive you, not just when you get saved, but every time you sin. Whether or not you have a personal relationship with Jesus and whether or not you let Him be Lord of your life will determine whether or not you get to go to heaven. That is why I am writing this book,



so that you can get to know Jesus. So that you can know that you can get to know Him. That sounds like double talk, but I want you to know that you can personally have a relationship that is a walking, talking relationship with Jesus that is real. I pray that He becomes real to you.

Where do we go to find out more about all this? If I wanted to find out about someone, say for example a historic figure, where would be the best place to go to learn about this person? The best place to find out about them would be to read an autobiography. Let me refresh your memory here. An autobiography is a book that someone has written about themselves, their own words about what they are like. The same thing goes for God. God has written an autobiography. That autobiography is the Bible. Does that mean that He picked up a pen and wrote it? Something almost as good as that happened. He impressed people's hearts with what to write. He put it on people's hearts what to write and they did. He spoke to their hearts and told them what to write and they wrote it down. You might say that He dictated notes and they wrote. How do we know that is true? Here are some things that prove that God inspired the Bible. That it is true and it is God's Word. Let's talk about how we know that God's Word is true.

The number one place to go to prove that God's Word is true is by looking in God's Word. There are historic proofs as well. There are many proofs, historical and Biblical, that prove that God Himself inspired the writers of

the Bible. One example is the prophecies. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Bible. These were things that were written detailing events that happened hundreds of years later. How else could these have come to pass just as they were spoken if they weren't given by inspiration of the Spirit of God? There are historical proofs that prove that the prophecies in the Bible were written before the prophecies were fulfilled. There is no other book that has prophecies that are proven countless times over like the Bible. There are many prophecies, but the most remarkable are the prophecies about Jesus. There are historical proofs from sources outside the Bible to prove Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies. There is also historical proof from Jewish writings, the Jewish Talmud, that Jesus lived and fulfilled the prophecies regarding Him.

Here are only a few of the prophecies found in the Bible. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 talks about several of the prophecies. This was written by the prophet Isaiah around 700 BC. Please read this section of scripture. In it we see that Jesus would be beaten beyond recognition. That He would be beaten with stripes. In Psalm 22:14-19 David wrote around 1000 B.C. that they would pierce Jesus' hands and His feet. That they would divide His garments among them, and cast lots, or gamble, for them. I am sure that the Roman soldiers who cast lots for Jesus' robe that day had not read the scriptures. They weren't doing this to obey the scriptures. In Zechariah 9:9 Zechariah

at around 520 B.C. wrote that Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey colt. Here are some more prophecies. I have written them beside of their fulfillment. Please read each of them for a blessing. Prophecy found in Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled in Matthew 1:18-23. Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in Matthew 1:18-23. Micah 5:2-3 was fulfilled in Luke 2:4-7. Isaiah 42:6-7 was fulfilled in Luke 4:17-21. Isaiah 49:6-7 was fulfilled in Acts 13:47, 15:6-18. Isaiah 61:1 was fulfilled in Luke 4:17-21. Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled in Matthew 21:5-6. Isaiah 50:6-7 was fulfilled in Mark 14:65. Psalm 16:8-11 was fulfilled in John 20:14-30. Psalms 49:15 was fulfilled in I Corinthians 15:1-8. Isaiah 53:10-12 was fulfilled in Matthew 28:1-10. Now it won't do you much good to just read the references and not the Bible. Get out a Bible and read those scriptures. There are countless other prophecies that are recorded in the scriptures. Some of them prophesied the rise and fall of whole civilizations and countries. Always they happened to the detail of what God's prophets had written in the scriptures.

Jesus' death and resurrection is the greatest proof of the Bible as being God's inspired Word. What other religion claims to have a risen Savior? If the Buddhists could get by with claiming that Buddha rose from the dead, they would. Why haven't they? Because he didn't. It was proven in history by many, many eyewitness accounts that Jesus rose from the dead. If that wouldn't have been so, then we couldn't claim it today. You couldn't just go

around saying that somebody came back from the dead and have everybody believe it the way they believed that Jesus came back from the dead if it hadn't been proven to be true.

What are some other facts that prove the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible was written for over a 1,500-year span for over 40 generations by over 40 authors from every walk of life. It was written in many different places, and at many different times. It was written on three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its subject matter includes hundreds of subjects. Subjects that now can't be agreed on when mentioned or discussed. Yet there is an agreement between the writers that could only exist because God's Spirit inspired them. They agree as if one author had written what they wrote. There is a continuity that runs throughout the book. Another fact, it was written on material that perishes, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls written on papyrus, yet they were preserved miraculously for thousands of years. Also, the scrolls had to be written by hand for thousands of years, but every copy agreed. Those who copied it were especially chosen for that task. They kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word, and paragraph. These men even counted the syllables to make sure that it was copied correctly. Another fact that proves the Bible is the Word of God is this. No other book has been attacked like the Bible, yet through time it has stood every test and still stands as the Word of God today. These are

only a few of the reasons why we know that the Bible is God's Word.

Now that we have established that we know God's Word is true, let's read what God's Word has to say about itself. I am not writing these scriptures down here quoting them directly. I am doing this for a purpose. Please get out your Bible before you even start reading this section of scriptures. Read them for yourself.

Psalm 119:89 and Isaiah 40:8 tells us that God's Word is settled forever.

Matthew 5:18 tells us that ever little part of it will come to pass.

I Peter 1:25 tell us that it is how we hear the Gospel.

Deuteronomy 8:3 tell us that it is food for our soul.

Jeremiah 15:16 tells us that it is our rejoicing of our heart.

II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:21 tell us that it wasn't just written by man.

Psalm 119:11 tells us that it will keep us from sin.

Romans 10:8 tells us that it is faith.

Psalm 119:105 tells us that it shows us the way to go.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that it is our sword.

Psalm 119:9 and John 15:3 tells us it cleanses us.

I John 5:13 tells us that in its pages we find eternal life.

Revelations 22:19 tells us to leave it like it is.

Isn't it good to know that there is something that you can trust to be true?

This truth won't ever change. You won't wake up one day and find out that it is all a lie. You don't have to stay confused about what is real. You don't have to feel like a tennis ball being banged back and forth from one side of the court to the other. Learn what is true. Trust in God to show you. He can speak to your heart just like He did to the people who wrote the Bible. Know what you believe and stand up for it. If you don't, then you will fall for anything. Don't let anybody cause you to give up on what you know is right.

God's Word is powerful. It can change your life. It is definitely a best seller. No other book through history has sold as many copies as the Bible. Today thousands of years after it was

written, it is still a number one best seller. When we read it and live by it, we can have a happy, successful, and longer life. What other book can give us that. When we die, we can move into a perfect world for eternity. What other book can give you that? We know how important the Bible is, but do you read it? When is the last time that you read the Bible? Maybe you haven't ever read it. We have had several students come to school at New Life that had never opened one up. For those students, let's take a look at what it is like.

The Bible is split into two main sections: the Old Testament, and the New Testament. The Old Testament was written before the birth of Jesus. The New Testament starts with the birth of Jesus. For just a minute, let's go through a lesson on how to look up scripture. There are books in the Bible that go together to make up the Bible. These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and so forth. You can find a list of the books in the Bible and where each is found by looking at the beginning of the Bible for the table of contents that will list each and the page they are found on. When you see scripture written it will look like this: Genesis 1:1. This means the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. Each book is divided into chapters. Each chapter is divided into numbered verses. Genesis 1:1 means chapter 1 and verse 1 in the book of Genesis. That is how you look up scripture references. You see these a lot in your Bible textbooks.

The Bible has some of the wisest teaching. It has some of the most exciting epic movie material stories. These stories are all true, too. Guaranteed with the TRUTH seal. There are some of the most heart wrenching love stories that have ever been written. One thing that I find the most fascinating about the Bible is that thousands of years ago people wrote about what we are going through today in details. It has the history of nations in its pages. No other book has the power to change your life like the Bible can. It comes with its own guarantee that it will change your life. When you read it, something good is going to happen to your life. So why don't you read it? Try it, you'll like it.

I know a grandmother who gave her grandkids a Bible for Christmas. She also gave them a \$50.00 check. She put it in the pages of the Bible. She didn't tell them what she had done. It was nearly a year before one of them found it. One didn't find it at all until the others told him. She proved a point. It pays to read your Bible. You may not find a \$50.00 check in its pages, but you will find a lot of things that are more valuable than that. You'll find something that is true. Something to guide you through your life. You will find how to live a happy and victorious life. You'll find how to out run bullies like depression, loneliness, fear, and other things that can beat you up and get you down. You'll find Jesus and how God loves you. Most of all you'll learn what you believe and you'll learn how to stand up for the



truth. How powerful is the Bible? For thousands of years the devil has tried to destroy it. People who wrote it were killed. People who translated it into English were killed. In many Moslem controlled countries even today, if you own a copy, you are imprisoned or killed. Did the public school refuse to let you mention any other book? This all just proves that there is something special about this book. Isaiah 40:8, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the Word of our God shall stand for ever.”

## Chapter 4. What's God Like

We talked earlier about how we can read someone's autobiography to learn more about them. We talked about how the Bible is true and how it is God's Word. It was written by people who listened to God and wrote what He said to write. So it is just like his autobiography. He didn't take up a pen and write. He dictated it to men who wrote it down. Let's find out what we can learn about God through His book. What does the Bible have to say about God?

To do this chapter I looked in my concordance to find all the verses that start with the words, *God Is*. One way to study the Bible is by using a concordance. A concordance is a book that has all the words used in the Bible. It tells what scriptures have these words. You can find a short concordance at the end of most Bibles. Or you can find a whole book that is a concordance. *Strong's Concordance* is the name of a really good one. We have an online concordance at our website at [www.nlcm.net](http://www.nlcm.net). Find the link on the right of the first page that says Concordance. One verse that tells what God is like is I John 4:16, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in Him." This verse is in the New Testament. There are really four books there named John. The first is found in the Gospels. The Gospels are four books that were written

about the life of Jesus. They are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were written by four of the disciples who walked with Him when He was on earth. They wrote about the things they saw Jesus do and they wrote what Jesus is like. Jesus' disciple, John, wrote the books named John. John 21:20 talks about John being the disciple that Jesus loved. He understood God's love. These books are full of understanding about God's love. They are good books to read when you are just learning what God and Jesus are like. They are also good to read when you need to be reminded about God's love.

Jesus lived 2000 years ago. I wrote this sentence in that last paragraph. "They are good books to read when you are just learning about what God and Jesus are like." I didn't put that in the past tense. I can get by with saying that in the present tense, what they **are** alike, because Jesus is the same today that he was 2000 years ago. When He walked with the disciples on earth, He is the same as He is today. He is in heaven now, but He hasn't changed. One thing about God and Jesus is that they are eternal. All the things around them are eternal.

A student asked me the other day where did God come from. Who made God? The Bible tells us that in the beginning of all things God already was. John 1:2 tells us, "The same was in the beginning with God." Nobody made God. He wasn't born. He had no beginning. In the beginning, He was already there. He always

will be. Eternally He will not change. James 1:17 tells us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” “With whom is no variableness” means there is no change. God never changes. He doesn’t have to. He is perfect. How can someone who is perfect change for the better? (Hold on, I’ll get back to the subject of Jesus in a minute.) All this is hard for our little finite (not eternal) minds to understand. On earth we were born and we will die. On earth we have a beginning and we will have an end.

It is hard for us to understand someone that isn’t that way. But it is still true. A lot of things about God are too big for our minds to understand. That doesn’t change the fact that they are true. The Bible says that as far as the heavens are from the earth God is above our understanding. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” God is smarter than us. As far as the heavens are above the earth is His understanding above us. We can’t even understand Him with our minds if He doesn’t show Himself in a way that we can understand. He is so big that He is bigger than eternity. He understands eternity. He is bigger than time itself. He sees the beginning of all things at the same time that He sees the end. He knows you

and what you are like. He knew you the day you were born, and He knows how you will be the day that you die. Not only that, but He knows all about you, even what your heart is like, how you feel and how you think. Luke 16:15 tells us that “God knoweth your hearts”. He knows you even better than you know yourself. Better than that, He will always be there for you. He will never forsake you. Isaiah 41:17 tells us, “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.” He will be there for you and never let you down. He is perfect. Deuteronomy 32:4 tells us, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth without iniquity, just and right is He.” Iniquity is another word for sin. God has no sin. He makes no mistakes. He does no wrong. There is no darkness in Him. He is all light. You won’t find any dark side to God. I John 1:5 tells us, “This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

As we said earlier, God and Jesus never change. So when the disciples wrote about how Jesus was, and how God was, then they are also writing about how they are today. Just like God, Jesus has always been there. He will never change. He always will be there. Wait a minute. Wasn’t Jesus born at Christmas in a manger? Right. But that wasn’t where He started. John 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning was

the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Verse 14 tells us, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” That Word that verse 1 talks about is Jesus. Before He came to earth, He was in heaven with God. Then He let Himself be born as a baby on earth. How did He do that? I don’t know. I don’t understand how this happened, but I know that it is true. I don’t understand all about how the sun doesn’t burn up all its gases, but I still feel its warmth every day. We don’t have to understand something to know it is real and true. Jesus was in heaven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of a virgin named Mary. Matthew 1:23, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel which being interpreted is, God with us.” This was not an alien pregnancy type thing. And God didn’t have sex with Mary. Our brains can’t understand how this happened but no matter. Jesus is God’s only begotten son.

Why did all this happen? John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” We already talked about how God is love. That was the motive behind why Jesus was born. He was born so that you could be forgiven for all that you do wrong, and have done wrong. So that you can go to heaven and

live eternally in a perfect world that God has made for those that love Him and keep His commandments. It all started with Adam and Eve. God created them. They were the first humans. We didn't come from monkeys. God made us. Read about how God made all this in the first chapters of Genesis. God created a perfect world for Adam and Eve to live in. The devil got in there and they messed up big time. They disobeyed God. Since they disobeyed God, we inherited from them the tendency to sin. Sin separates us from God.

God is perfect. He is holy. In the perfect world that He has made for us to live in eternally, there can't be any sin. That would only mess it all up. For us to get to go there, we have to be forgiven. Not perfect, but forgiven. To be forgiven, and set free from this sin nature that we inherited from Adam and Eve, blood had to be shed. Somebody had to die for our sins. That is why Jesus came. He didn't come to earth to be born as a baby because you deserved it. But it was because you didn't deserve it. That is called grace. Grace means love that we don't deserve. God doesn't love you because you are perfect. You don't have to be a perfect 10 for God to love you. You don't have to be in the "in crowd". You don't have to have a perfect boy friend for God to love you. You don't have to be a nerd, a skater, a gang banger, a geek, a jock, or in any other crowd for God to love you. You can just be yourself. You can be who He made you to be. He loves you because that is how He is. That is what He

is like. He loves you with a perfect love, because He is a perfect love. He loves you so much that He sent His only Son to die for your sins so that you can eternally be with Him. That is grace. You don't have to be afraid that one day he will find out that you aren't perfect and quit loving you. He already knows all about you and still loves you. He will be there for you and be your God. Leviticus 26:12 tells us, "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." He won't love you today and be gone tomorrow like your friends sometimes do. He will only grow dearer to you as time goes on.

He has been my best and closest friend for close to 30 years, and He has never let me down. He has seen me through my worst times. The more I get to know Him, the better He is. My grandmother died when she was 96 years old. She gave her heart to the Lord when she was only a teenager. She talked about how Jesus was her best friend. She talked about how as time went on He grew sweeter and their friendship got better. Now in heaven, He is sweeter to her still. Jesus died because He loves you. Proverbs 17:17 tells us, "A friend loveth at all times..." Proverbs 18:24 tells us, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Jesus is the friend that sticks closer than a brother. What friend do you have who will die for you?

How can you get to know this friend? Read the Bible. We will talk more about that



later. And we will talk more later about Jesus and His love for you. I can tell you all kinds of things about how good God is and how much Jesus loves you. If you don't do something about it you won't ever find out yourself. Let Him know that you want to get to know Him. If you haven't asked Him to come into your heart, then do so. Then pray. Prayer is really spending time with Him, talking to Him. I pray just like I talk to anyone else. I pray in ordinary words and talk my heart out to God. He hears. He answers.

Here are some more verses that tell what God is like. II Samuel 22:33 tells us, "God is my strength and power: and He maketh my way perfect." I Chronicles 16:14 tells us, "He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the earth." Psalm 62:7 and 8 tells us, "In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us." Psalm 71:5 tells us, "For thou art my hope, oh Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth." Romans 15:13, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

## **Chapter 5.**

### **God's Love**

#### **Jesus**

I want to introduce you to my best friend. He has never let me down through all the years I have known Him. He has always kept His Word. He has been my Comforter when my heart was breaking. He has been my strength when I lacked the strength to go on. When I needed a fresh new start, He was there to make me new. When I needed love, His love was more than enough. When I needed encouragement, that is when He would send a miracle. When I needed hope, I looked to Him, and I knew somehow, it all would be all right. When I needed joy, because I could find none of my own, I looked to His Word and found strength in Its pages. When I needed to see the truth about situations and circumstances, He gave me the vision to see things clearly and the strength to change what I needed to change. When I was alone, He would come in the late hours of the night and wipe my tears with His comfort.

No one else can love you like Jesus. No one else can take the mistakes of your life and turn them into miracles. No one else can forgive and forget the way He can. No one else can change the circumstance around you and change your life. No one else can lift you up above it all. If you have not met this wonderful Friend, go to Him. His Word promises that He will make you His child. Don't wait until

tomorrow. Run to Him today. Don't waste another day without His love.

We talked about in the last chapter how that God loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die so that you could be forgiven. So that you could spend eternity in heaven. Jesus loved you so much that He came to earth, was born as a baby so that He could understand you. He knows what it is like to be 15, 16, 17, and even 25. He walked here with us so that He could know what it was like to be human. He has been touched with our infirmities because He had a body like us. Hebrews 4:14-15 tells us, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He understands you because He's been there. Not only did He come to earth so that He could understand us, but He came to die for our sins. You know that old saying, "Born to Die". In this case it is the truth, not just a macho commercial.

Jesus was born to die. That is a lot of love. What other friend has done that much for you. Romans 5:6-8 tells us, "for when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He is a friend that will stick closer than a brother.

When I was a teenager, I ran away from God’s love and got into a lot of trouble in my life. Wait a minute. I can hear it now. I know that a lot of you think that anybody over 20 is too old to listen to. Well, she was young a lot of years ago, and everything has changed a lot since then. That is a statement that I hear a lot. This usually comes right before you make the statement, “So how can my parent’s really understand me and anything that I am going through? They were young a long time ago.” That is what I used to think about my own parents. Until I wised up and figured out that they really did know something. This was after I’d wrecked my life by doing everything that they had warned me to stay out of. Believe you me I spent a lot of time wishing that I had listened to them.

I hope that this doesn’t happen to you. Like I said, I spent several years totally wrecking my life. We called it “having a good time”. Have you heard that one? Don’t ask me how staying so drunk that you don’t know what you are doing, or what you’ve done is having a good time. Spending mornings puking your guts out, that is wonderful fun. How is loosing every bit or what little respect you had for yourself doing things that make you hate yourself a good time? Or how can you call a good time watching every dream you’ve ever had for your life go down the drain, watching your future crumble because of a stupid

mistake. Sometimes we miss the point. I have never had one teenager come into my office to share with me that they were pregnant that had set out to accomplish that on purpose. I've not heard of one person who died in a car wreck out being stupid who got into that vehicle with the thought that was what they were going to do that day. I have not talked to a young person who wound up with a juvenile record who had purposed in their heart the day that they got in trouble that they wanted to do just that.

I've never counseled one young person with aides that had sex purposefully just to catch it. No. Matter of fact, most of them had the attitude that these things could never happen to them. These were all things that only happened to other people who were out doing the same things that they were doing. They were all out there "just having fun". You won't believe how many young people have refused to give their heart to Jesus because they wanted to have fun. God would start to deal with their hearts. They would feel His love and His conviction. Some would shake like a leaf because He was dealing with them to give their heart and life to Him. I've even seen tears squirt out of their eyes when they were trying hard not to cry. They would shake their head like they could shake it off and they would say, "Mrs. Haga I can't commit my life to God right now. I want to have some more fun."

I remember one young man that God would deal with like that. He had grown up in church. His grandmother had raised him. She

was a Christian lady that prayed a lot for him. I talked to him one day about where he was going to spend eternity if we were to die. He wouldn't even discuss it. All he said was that he didn't think it was fair that God wanted him to stop having a good time. So he did not give his heart to the Lord that day. I don't know if he had a chance to do so before he died. When that accident happened he died at the scene. Who knows if he had time to repent and ask God to forgive him. I don't know if he had time to ask Jesus into His heart or not. He was too busy having a good time.

Jesus died for us because He loves us that much. We'll turn our back on Him because it is not cool to be a Christian. Maybe we are a football player, or a cheerleader. That is cool. If you are cool then it seems like everyone at school knows who you are. They cheer you on. Did you know that when one sinner gets saved, heaven and all God's angels rejoice? I would rather have that crowd cheering for me than any other crowd that there is. Hey, and when you hang around with God's crowd, you won't get into trouble. You'll be with the crowd that really loves you the way you are for real. They will care enough about you to keep you from making mistakes. They won't love you and leave you when something goes wrong.

I knew a girl who was a Christian girl in God's crowd. She started dating this guy who wasn't a Christian. She convinced herself that God had sent him to her so that she could help him. He was in the party crowd big time. Then

he started up with this line, “If you love me then you’ll \_\_\_\_\_”. Don’t ever fall for that line, no matter what they put there to fill in the blank. If a guy or girl ever uses that line, then wise up. If someone loves you for real, then they won’t want you to do anything that could destroy you. They won’t want you to do anything that could mess up your life. They will want to protect you. They won’t be in your face trying to get you to do something that could wreck your life. How did her story end? He had crack in his car to sell. She borrowed his car one day and was driving it. She got pulled over. She was caught with the crack. She faced prison time, and destroyed her life with a prison record. This happened right after she found out that she was pregnant. Life got real really fast. Don’t turn your back on Jesus. He is a true friend.

There is one lie that the devil loves to tell young people. It sounds like this. That can’t ever happen to me. If you decide to turn down God’s love so that you can do things that are not what He wants you to do, then look out, it can happen to you. Not only that, but it probably will happen to you. Don’t kid yourself. Make up your mind. Do you want God’s love or do you want a good time.

You might say to me, “But, Mrs. Haga, it is too late for me. I already have turned my back on God and sin has already messed up my life.” It is never too late. We’ll talk more about this in the chapter about forgiveness. There is always hope in God’s love.

God's love is a precious thing. How can you find God's love for you? I'm going to compare it to a friendship between two people for a second just to explain that. Let's say that you see someone at school. They seem kind of cool from looking at them, and you think to yourself how you would love to meet them and get to know them. Let's say you have a class with them, but you still really don't know them. Then somebody who knows somebody that knows them tells you that they are really cool. You have somebody's word for what they are like, but still you don't know for yourself. Then one day you sit next to them in class and you start talking. You find out a little about what they are like. Gradually as the year goes by you run into them more often. Then one day they really get into your world, and you open your heart and let them in. You get closer. You start trusting them to be your friend and you open up and share those things that you only share with people that are close to you. As time goes on you get to be a part of that person and they get to be a part of you. I know some people that I am blessed to say are my good friends. They have been my close friends for many years. I know some people who have good friends that they have been close to since kindergarten. That is a blessing. Good friends are special.

What does all this have to do with Jesus? You have read how Jesus loves you. You hear people talk about what He is like. You've heard Bible stories from the time you were a kid about how His disciples walked with Him and they



were true friends with Him. You read in the Bible what they said He was like while He was on earth. You have been to church and heard the preacher talk about God's love for you and how He has a better way of life for you. Maybe you've heard a lot of testimonies about people who have talked about what God has done for them. But still you haven't gotten to know Him for yourself. You haven't taken the time to sit down and talk to Him and find out what He is like. You haven't welcomed Him to come into your heart and into your life. You haven't let down the guard and let Him get close to you. When you welcome Jesus in, He will come in. Jesus tells us in His own words in Revelations 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." If you open the door, Jesus will come in.

Who else has done for you what Jesus has done? Who else will stick to you closer than a brother? Dare to open your heart and let Him in. If you haven't been saved, ask Jesus to come into your heart. He really will come in. He will make a difference in you and in your life when He comes in. Ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to wash away all the bad you've done. He can do that. Isaiah 1:18 tells us, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." One little boy described his being saved like this. "I feel like

someone took me by the feet and shook me upside down and got all the dirt out.” How true that is. Jesus can get the dirt out. We’ll talk more in another chapter about forgiveness. Why not give your heart to Him today? If you feel a longing to ask Jesus in your heart, and your heart seems like it is pounding out of your chest, then He is there knocking at your heart. Let Him in. He will come in if you will just welcome Him in. Ask Him to come into your life. He will make a difference.

If you have been saved, then get to know Jesus better. You don’t have to sit across the room from Him, go sit in His lap. Sit at His feet and lean in on His knee and learn about what He is like. In other words, get close to Him and let Him get close to you. Let Him in your world. Read the Bible and get to know Him better. The best place to start is by reading Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Especially John. Spend time talking to Him. Prayer is just talking to God. Just pour out your heart to Him. You don’t have to be formal. Just be yourself. After all, He loves you just the way you are. When you pour out your heart to Him, don’t be surprised when you get a super peace in your heart that lets you know that He heard you and He understands. And it is all going to be all right. Who understands you better than Jesus? He is right inside your heart. Who could know you better? When you have trouble standing up for what is right, and you give into the crowd, don’t run away from Jesus. Run to Him and ask Him to forgive you. Friends don’t walk out on

friends when they mess up. But friends do value their friendship enough never to take advantage of it. Show Jesus your love by what you do. When He impresses your heart to do something-do it. If your heart starts pounding and you get this dreaded feeling that you shouldn't do something, or that you shouldn't go somewhere for heaven's sake don't do that or go there. That is God looking out for you. He is trying to help you. The worst thing that you can do is to ignore Him. You don't really want those feelings to go away. Get to know Jesus. Try it you'll like it.

I want to close this chapter with a section about loneliness. When I started writing this, I had to ask God to remind me what it felt like to be lonely. It had been a long time since I'd been lonely. For close to 30 years, He has been my best friend. I could talk to him and pour my heart out to Him. When nobody else understood, I knew that He would. He was always there, the perfect friend. He never let me down. There were times when at that time I didn't understand what He was doing. But later on I could see how what happened was really the best for me. I could count on His love and friendship. The more that I got to know Him, the better I liked Him. There weren't any hidden secrets about Him. He never played two sides against the middle. He never was two-faced. If I was wrong, He let me know about it. He never took up for me if I was wrong, but when I asked His forgiveness, He was always there to forgive me and help me fix the mess I

made when I did wrong. He never has let me down. There aren't any people that I can say that about, because there aren't any perfect people. He is the only perfect friend that I have ever had. Here is a song about His friendship:

*Jesus My Friend.*

*Verse 1*

*I've got a friend even when I'm alone,  
A friend who will never leave me  
I've got a friend the Bible tells me so.  
I've got a friend He's Jesus.*

*Chorus*

*He is my friend even when the sunlight turns  
into night.  
He'll never turn me away.  
He'll even take me home one day.  
I've got a friend, He's Jesus.*

*Verse 2*

*I've got a friend who even died on the cross for  
my sins.  
And when I'm down, I know He'll lift me up  
again.  
I've got a friend, He's Jesus.*

With a friend like this, it is hard to be lonely. I know that loneliness is a hard thing to go through. We are social beings. We aren't made to be alone. We need someone to love and care for us. If we don't have that, then we get an empty feeling inside us. That empty

feeling is not only hard on teens, but it is hard for adults, too. Loneliness can cause all kinds of problems. I've known a lot of grownups and teens to ruin their lives because of loneliness. They jump into bad situations with other people trying to fit in. They fall into the wrong crowd and begin to do things that are wrong because they are afraid of being lonely. They get into a bad relationship with a boy or girl friend and compromise on what they believe in to keep from being lonely. Loneliness even causes some teens and adults to commit suicide. People kill themselves because they get convinced in their mind that no one cares for them. They get convinced that there is no one there for them.

Loneliness is a feeling that no one is there and no one cares for you or understands you. Everybody experiences it at some time or another in his or her lives. Some people have a worse battle with it than others. If we let it, it can destroy our lives. How do we fight against loneliness? I can remember a time when I really let loneliness destroy my life. I had not dedicated my life to the Lord. I was in the party crowd big time. If you aren't careful you can find yourself in with a crowd that really heart-deep cares nothing for you. They only care for themselves. That is the kind of crowd that I was in. Their lives were such a wreck that they couldn't get their own act together. Forget they're really caring about other people. One day I came to myself. What I mean by this is that one day I looked at my life for real. I had

compromised on everything I had believed in. I had wrecked my life. The worst feeling that I had was a terrible loneliness. There was no one there who really cared for me and I knew it. There was no one there to help me to put my life back together. I had no hope. That is when I tried to kill myself. When I did, I prayed, “God if you are real, then you can stop me from doing this. If you aren’t real then I have no hope. Please stop me.” He did through a miracle. I knew that He was real. I knew that I had hope after all. Gradually I began to know His love for me. I found a friend. He helped me pick up the pieces and put them together. I found hope. Best of all, I was never alone again. I found a friend that sticks closer than a brother. I found a hand that always reaches out to mine when I feel alone. I found someone who will never forsake me, who will be there for me even through eternity. I didn’t have to compromise to keep this friend. I didn’t have to give up my self-esteem so that he’d stick around. He never used me or abused me. His love was genuine and true. The more that I get to know Him the better he gets. He is the cure for loneliness.

There is another cure for loneliness, too. When you get saved, you get a family. All the people world over who have Jesus in their heart, like you do, will have a deep connection with you. Matter of fact, the Bible refers to Christians as being the “family of God”. My brothers and sisters in Christ are closer to me than some of my blood family. I am blessed

though that my sisters are all Christians, so they are double sisters, sisters in the Lord and sisters in the flesh. God's family will love you with His love. You will always find someone there who understands you. God's Spirit in their heart will be the same Spirit that you have in your heart. That makes a real closeness. It is hard to be lonely with such a huge family.

## **Chapter 6.**

### **What Does It Mean To Be Saved?**

### **How Can You Be Saved?**

I asked someone today if he had been saved. At first he said yes. Then he said that he had been saved lots of times. Then he said that he had been baptized and all that too. So he knew that he was all right with God. Then he said that he still messes up a lot. So he has to get saved again after he messes up. I wasn't sure, but I got the feeling that he had never really gotten saved permanently. I got the feeling that he really didn't understand what salvation was all about. What do I mean by that? How do you get saved? How can you be sure?

The Bible tells us in Romans 10:9-10, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." If it were that easy, why isn't the entire world on its way to heaven? If all you had to do was say it and believe it, then why does it seem so hard? If all you had to do was be baptized, then why did Jesus have to die for our sins? We could all just get to heaven by jumping in a river and have a preacher pray a prayer over us. Baptism is important, and the Bible does teach us that we need to be baptized, but is it baptism that saves us? What does it really mean to get saved?



When we get saved we ask Jesus to come into our heart. We believe that He does. We ask Him to forgive us of our sins. What then? The first thing I think of when you talk about getting saved is a commitment. Really two commitments. Jesus' commitment to us and a commitment that we make to Him. What is a commitment? When two people get married, they make a commitment. The Bible talks about God's people as being the bride of Christ. What if someone got married, but they never got to know the one they married. They never talked to them. They knew what to do was right, but always did whatever they wanted to. They didn't consider their bride. They didn't love them. They made no commitment to them. What kind of marriage would they have? It would be a rocky one. How do you make a marriage work? You make a commitment to that person that you are married to. They may not be perfect. You needn't expect that. But you make a commitment to love them and stand with them in spite of their weaknesses. When we make a commitment to the Lord, we know that we are making a commitment to stand by One Who is perfect. He also is making a commitment to stand with us, even in our imperfection. Salvation means making a commitment. We stop doing our thing and start doing His. We have talked about how we can't do this on our own. But when we get saved, God does a miracle in us that helps us to do what it is right. His Spirit comes into our heart. He changes us from the inside out.

I have seen such a remarkable change that came to people when they got truly and completely saved. Some people even looked so different that I didn't recognize them. They even looked different. Their faces lost the years that sin had etched in them. There was a change. Jesus had come into their soul. There was a change that had taken place in their heart that was so great that it showed on their face. I have gone back to some of those people years later and there was a sad change. They had lost their victory. They had lost the look of joy that Jesus put on their face when they first got saved. What happened? They had let the world steal Jesus out of their heart and out of their life. They had not given the Lord priority in their life. They had stopped obeying Him. They had stopped keeping their commitment. They had stopped keeping His Word. They began to stifle out the Spirit of God out of their life. They were doing their own thing their own way, and Jesus couldn't lead them. They no longer listened to God. Did they lose their salvation? They were still saved. They were no longer obedient. Would they get to go to heaven when they died? The Bible says that we have to be obedient to be able to go to heaven. We have to know that heaven is so sweet that we are determined to go there if it costs us everything to get to go. Why take chances?

A girl came into my office one day. I knew what she was getting ready to tell me before she opened her mouth. I could see it on her face. She had gotten saved. She was

bubbling over with joy. She had found God's love for real and it had changed her life. She was jumping up and down. She stayed like this for weeks. Then gradually little by little that joy began to fade. She took on a look that wasn't all joy. I knew what was going on with her. Something or someone was taking the place of Jesus in her life. He had stopped being number one to her. Later on she came in with a new boyfriend and introduced him. He had the look of the crowd that she had come out of. He looked like her old crowd before she had gotten saved. Both joy and peace had left her life. Jesus wasn't her love and her life any more. Something else had taken His place as number one in her life. I pray that this turns out well for her, but it doesn't look good. I am worried about what will come to her life next. I pray that she find the love of the One Who died for her. That she find out what is missing before it is too late, and that she run home to Him.

I knew a boy who had been pretty rough. He came from a family that didn't have much. He had gotten messed up with drugs. He was so rough that a lot of parents didn't want him to hang around with their kids. He had a bad reputation. He gave his heart to the Lord. God changed him. It was such a change and it was a change that stayed. He later became a youth pastor working in a church with young people. He has led many young people to the Lord. God is using him to help others to find the change in their life that God gave him. His

reputation has changed too. Now all the parents want him to hang around with their kids.

I talked to someone the other day that came into my office to tell me that she was pregnant. She had been going to church and had been excited about Jesus. She had led her mother to the Lord, and God was doing wonderful things in her family. She had the victory in her life, and was on top with God's hand in hers. What happened? I'm not sure, but I think that her job started keeping her out of church. She got wrapped up in other things, no time for Jesus. She got weak in the spirit. The Spirit of God is in our lives when we get saved. We can do things that strengthen Him in our heart, or we can do things that strengthen the flesh part of us. When we don't go to church, we don't have time to read our Bible, we don't have time to pray and spend time with the Lord, the Spirit of God in us gets weaker, and our flesh gets stronger. There are some things that we can do to strengthen God's Spirit in us. These are: praying, going to church, reading the Bible, thinking about God, spending time with other Christians, listening to Gospel music, letting God's Spirit move in our heart and life, obeying God. There are some things that we can do that cause the flesh part of us to be the strongest. These are: staying out of church, not reading the Bible, filling up our minds with everything but God, spending time watching TV instead of reading our Bible, being too busy to think about God, spending time with people who aren't saved, listening to every kind

of music except Gospel, avoiding letting God's Spirit work in our life, and doing our own thing instead of obeying God. What we do can either cause God's Spirit to rule in our lives, or it will cause our flesh to rule. If God's Spirit rules, then we will be strong in Him. If our flesh rules, it can only lead to trouble.

The Bible tells us in Romans 8:5-8, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit the things of the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." What this is saying is this. If all you do is mind the things of the flesh, and you forget the things of God, this will make you weak. You won't be able to do the things that God wants you to do. You won't be able to live for Him. You won't be able to please God. The things of the flesh are an enemy to the things of God. The things of this world that are wrong are enemies with God.

We are really scoundrels. We can't please God. This old flesh of ours is rotten. There isn't any good thing in it. That is why God knew the only way that we could be saved would be if we were able to get Him inside of us to help us to do right. So He made us with a built in container to hold Him. When He comes

in, then our flesh has some competition. Jesus is in us. We have to step back and let Jesus rule in our hearts and minds. We have to be willing to do it His way, and let Him make a change in us. It will be a change that will last.

We walk on the edge of a lot of things. I knew someone who had a shirt that said, "Doing what I can to get by." He lived that motto. He was a Christian. He didn't live it with all his heart. He hadn't really made that commitment. Serving God wasn't a priority in His life. He got into the wrong crowd. He started going places that he shouldn't with people that he shouldn't hang with. Last time I heard anything about this young man, he had just gotten out a mental institute. He had announced that he was gay. His life is a mess. Why walk on the edge of things. Either get in there with God or get out. Walking halfway in is a dangerous place to walk in. The Bible tells us how God feels about people who are halfway living for Him. People who walk on the edge and take chances, who live halfway for the Lord and halfway for the devil are called double minded. They are called lukewarm in the scriptures.

Revelation 3:15-16 tells us how God feels about this kind of people. This section of scripture was written for Christians, it was part of a letter that God gave John for the church. God told John to write, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that you wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew

thee out of my mouth.” That doesn’t sound like that person gets to go to heaven at all. How can you be spewed out of God’s mouth, and then get to go to heaven? If you are being lukewarm, if you are serving God one day, then living like the devil the next, then you are in danger of being spewed out of the mouth of God. It is dangerous to be double minded. James 1:8 tells us that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways. James 1:7 tells us, “For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.” We have to make up our mind whether or not we are going to make this marriage work. We have to decide which side of the fence that we are standing on. When we make up our mind, we have to stand there. The way to fall off the fence is to stand on it, or straddle it. If we realize that we are being double-minded, lukewarm, is there hope for us? Yes, the Bible says that God is married to the backslider. Someone who is a backslider is someone who is sliding back away from God. We need to run to Him. We need to go back to the place that we were before we started going backward in our relationship with God. God will be there

If your relationship with God was like a marriage, how would your wife or husband feel about you? Do you love God with the love that He has for you? Are you appreciating the price that Jesus paid for your salvation? Does it mean a lot to you? How much does His love mean to you? The Bible says that salvation should be a pearl of great price. Matthew 13:44-46 tells

about what heaven should mean to us. “Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Heaven with Jesus is going to be eternal. Is anything worth giving that up for? Why take a chance? Why live for God one day and the devil the next? Why walk on the edge trying to get by with whatever you can get by with? You may be a very cautious person, not taking a lot of chances. You may be someone who won’t gamble because you don’t want to take chances on loosing. Yet you gamble with eternity and you play games with your very soul. Live like you know where you are going. Live like you have found that pearl of great price, and nothing is worth taking a chance on loosing it.

How can you do that? We’ve talked about earlier how you can’t live this life on your own. But with Jesus in your heart, God’s Word to guide you, the church, God’s family, to help support you, the Holy Ghost to guide you, how can you lose. You just have to make up your mind which direction you are going in. Is it up or down? It’s as simple as that. We’ll talk more in a chapter coming up about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, how God’s Spirit can fill us in a special way to give us power to overcome the enemy, and our flesh. This will help us in a



powerful way to be able to live victorious. When we live victorious, things that get other people down won't get us down. We will be able to overcome fear, loneliness, depression, hate, and all kinds of things. The devil won't be able to destroy us, because we can rise up above him with God's help. We will realize that we can do anything that God wants us to do, and be what He wants us to be because we will be doing it through the help of His Spirit inside of us. We won't have to do it alone in our own flesh.

What about those times when it seems like all we can do is mess up? What about those times when our best is not good enough? A man named Paul (we'll talk more about him in a chapter coming up) said this. See if it sounds like something you might have said at one time. It is found in Romans 7:18-25, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will (to do better) is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would do I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do....I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my member. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus through the Spirit of God in us helps us through those

times when it seems like our flesh is too weak and the devil too strong. And in Jesus, when we do fail we can have forgiveness. Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. We'll talk about this in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7.**

### **The Power of Forgiveness**

When I was younger I had been saved since I was in the sixth grade. Or at least I had gone up to the altar in church one service and said a prayer that they told me to pray. But when I turned 18, I found out that my salvation wasn't much. I was pretty sheltered growing up. My parents raised us right. We were kept too busy to even think about getting in trouble. Then I went away to college. That was bad news. The first time I got stoned was the first time that I got drunk. (Hey, parents, don't be disturbed. That was over 30 years ago.) I was ready to have a good time and I wanted to find out about everything that this wild world has to offer. I did it all. In just a couple of years, I ruined my life. It isn't really that hard to do. Most of the time this happens without you trying to do it at all. My mind was fried from drugs. My self-respect was gone. I had let myself be used as a doormat, while looking for love in all the wrong places. The friends I'd sold out for turned out not to care about me or my life. I had been through things that left my heart torn up and shattered into little bits. I had ruined my future by flunking out of college. I had no hope. Until I met Jesus. I remembered Him from the stories I had heard when I was a kid in Sunday school. But one day, His nail pierced hand reached out for mine. This time I didn't pull back. I let Him in my heart and life for real.

I would like to say that everything from that moment on was instantly perfect. I can't say that though. The difference was that now I had hope. I knew that somehow God would help me fix the pieces of my life. I knew that Jesus inside of me could give me strength to change. I knew His Holy Spirit could come into my heart to give me power to overcome the life that I had before. I had a vision—a promise that God was going to use me to help other people that had been through some of the things I had been through. I found a new circle of friends who truly honestly loved me for real. I found power to overcome my old life and my old ways when I received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. We'll talk more about this in a chapter coming up. God changed me and changed my life. It didn't all happen instantly though. I had been the way I was for a lot of years. It wasn't easy to change it all in an instant. Matter of fact, He is still working on me today.

When we are young Christians, we are a lot like babies. When a baby is learning to walk, he will fall down a lot at first. If he doesn't quit trying, he will get better as he practices. Before long, he gets more confidence. Then it won't be long before he is walking all over the place. We never hear a baby say, "I am so stupid. I am too bad. I will never get this." He never beats himself up because he can't walk. Learning is a natural progression of things. You have to learn something new before you can get it and be good at it. In a way, being

a Christian is something like that. When you get saved, you are really stepping into a whole new world, a new way of life. There is a lot to learn. Good news. You have a wonderful teacher. God's Spirit will help you to learn the things that you need to learn.

I John 5:20 tells us, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." First John 2:27 tells us, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you ye shall abide in him." This isn't saying that we aren't to listen to anybody to learn from them. But it is saying that the Holy Ghost that anoints us will teach us about the things of God that are true. He will let you know if something is wrong or if it is the truth. We don't have to be afraid that we will believe in something that is wrong if we trust Him to lead us and we listen to Him.

Why then do so many people fall into things that are wrong? Because some people don't care whether or not what they believe in is true. They want to believe in something that is convenient to them. Maybe what they believe in allows them to do something wrong and get by with it. Maybe what they believe gives them an excuse to sin. There are some religions that allow you do to do whatever you want to and

still go to heaven. That is easier, that is convenient, but it isn't the truth. There is a right and a wrong, and if you continually do the wrong and you don't repent of it, you won't get to go to heaven. That is the truth. Those people who insist on believing in the wrong things even when God tries to get them to see the truth will not be able to go to heaven. Sometimes people fall into wrong beliefs because it is how their family before them believed. Or it was the tradition where they lived to believe in certain things. This won't get us to heaven. We need to be sure that we find the truth and walk in it. God will lead us if we let Him. If we let everyone else dictate to us what the truth is, and we won't find it out for ourselves, then we will get led down the wrong path. The Bible talks about the blind leading the blind, and all of them falling into a ditch.

My life was changed when Jesus came into my heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. But I wasn't completely and totally perfect all at once. My life was a work in progress. It wasn't easy to out run all the bad things I had been involved in. I would get up walking with the Lord, then all the sudden I'd fall flat on my face back in the same old rut I'd been in. I'd find myself back in my old life with my old circle of friends. The devil tried everything that he could to keep me from finding out that I could win over all of this. He'd send in old party buddies I hadn't seen for years. He'd whisper in my ear, "You need to help these people. Hanging around them for a

while may cause them to get saved.” Here is a big hint. Anytime that you feel like you need to hang out with a crowd who is doing something that God has shown you to leave alone, then that isn’t God who is leading you. It is the devil laying a trap to destroy both you and your friends. Let your friends come over to the winning side. You can’t reach them by crossing over to the losing side. Invite them to come to your side. Show them the change that God has made in your life. Witness to them. But don’t go join them on the losing side. That won’t convince them at all that you have anything in your life that they need. The Bible has some words of wisdom regarding whom we need to be friends with.

Second Corinthians 6:14 tells us, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” Verse 17-18 says, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” A yoke was a harness type thing that went around the necks of oxen or donkeys that were being used to work in the fields. Sometimes yokes went around two oxen or donkeys fastening them together as a team. Where one went, the other had to go. They had to work together, stepping at the same time, moving at the same time. That is what happens when we walk

closely with other people. Whether we mean for them to or not, they will have a huge influence on what we do. We can't be yoked with them, moving with them. Don't be yoked with people who aren't Godly. They will only get you down. You may think that you can help them, but they will only cause you to get down. God is wise when He says this in His Word.

In my days of sin, I did a lot of things that I knew better than to do. I did a lot of things that I hated myself for doing. That is a bad way to be. I know a lot of people who hate themselves. There are a lot of young people who do not like who they are and they have no confidence in what they can do. You can't get away from yourself. You always have to be with yourself. When you hate yourself that is a bad way to be. You can never really run away from yourself.

The thing that turned me around was finding out about God's love. I realized that the whole time that I had been out living like the devil, mocking God, spitting in His face knowing to do better but refusing to do so, He had been there. After I came back to the Lord, I could see how He had been taking care of me that whole time. He had kept me alive even though I had done some really dumb, dangerous things. He had kept me safe through some dangerous situations that I had put myself in. When you don't care about yourself, you will do stupid things. When you don't care about your life, you will do things that will put yourself in danger. He had taken care of me



through all of that. He had been there loving me the whole time. He had never left me from the time I was little. You see, God knew something. He knew that one day I would turn around and wise up. He knew that one day I'd give my heart and life to Him. He knew that one day I'd accept His love and friendship. So He stayed there helping me, even though I was running from Him.

The Bible tells us the story of the prodigal son. It is a story that Jesus told to teach his disciples about what God's love was like. You can read it in Luke 15:11-32. It is really a good story. Get your Bible out and read it. It is a story about a teenager that wasn't a lot different than you. It was set in a different place and time, but as a whole people are people. He was tired of living by his dad's rules. He was tired of having to do what his parents wanted him to do. He was ready to get out on his own and see the world. He knew that he was ready for whatever came his way no matter what anybody said. Parents in those days were probably a lot like parents in these days. Knowing parents like I do, I'd say that his dad argued with him trying to convince him to see reason. He refused to listen. So one day his dad just said, "OK. I'll give you your inheritance early. You can have what is coming to you and you are free to go." I'm sure that before that happened there was a lot of noise around that household. Then his dad just gave in. Let's talk a little now about parents. (Oh no.) Most parents will be there for you. There

is an old saying, “You can’t out run a mother’s love, or a dad’s love.” You are a part of them. You can’t understand that now, but one day when you have your own kids, you will be able to. When you hurt they hurt. My Mom used to tell me when she spanked me, “This will hurt me a lot worse than it hurts you.” I used to think, yeah right! She was telling me the truth. Your parents don’t want to see you hurt. They don’t want to see you get in trouble. They don’t want to watch you ruin your life by making bad choices. Usually, even though you may hate to admit it, they know a few things more than what you want to give them credit for.

You’d be surprised how many times through the years that I’ve thanked my mom for doing the things that made me the maddest when I was your age. Parents who care are parents who say no. Sometimes we have a hard time with our parents because we carry a chip on our shoulder the size of Texas. We go around daring them to knock it off. We want to prove to them that we are smart and that we can do things on our own. We want to prove to them that we can make the right decisions on our own without listening to them. We want to do our own thing, and excuse ourselves even when we really know deep inside that we shouldn’t be doing what we are doing. Those times are the times when we get the maddest when our parents bring up that we are going on the wrong track. Their bringing it up just makes us madder and more determined to do what it is they are telling us not to do. All they

are trying to do is love us. Let them love you. Let them care about you. Let them be parents. That is what they are there for. Relax. They aren't out to ruin your life. They want to help you, and they can, if you will just wise up and admit that there are some things you need to quit doing, and there are some things that you need to do that you aren't doing. Am I saying that they are perfect? No, we already talked about that verse in the Bible that tells us that nobody's perfect, except God and Jesus. Yes, they will make mistakes. Yes, they will have problems. I remember the first time it dawned on me that my parents were capable of making mistakes. I don't know why I thought that to be a parent you had to be perfect. That still doesn't change things. They still know things that you don't know and they can still help you a lot. Let them be parents.

Now sometimes parents are not perfect. OK hold on. I'll get back to the prodigal in a minute. Just hear me out on this. I know a lot of kids whose parents aren't there for them. Sometimes their parents may have such a mess in their own lives that they can't be there for their kids to help them. It's sad but sometimes parents get caught up in a lot of other things and they have no time for their children. They don't know what they are missing. I hope that they find out before it is too late. If you come from this kind of home, the best thing that you can do is forgive your parents, and keep on loving them. Give the hurt to Jesus. Let Him sort it out. I know more than one Mom or Dad who

has come to give their heart to the Lord and got saved because of the testimony of their son or daughter. They saw a change in their child when they got saved, and this led them to the Lord. If you hold on and keep loving them no matter what kind of problems they have, then you can love them to the Lord. Then God can change your family in a way you never thought possible. If you just hold on and keep loving them, and understanding them, God can change them and give you a whole new family.

OK, back to the prodigal. This guy's dad just gave up and gave in and let this boy leave. He gave him his part of his inheritance money early. He let him go and do his thing. Sometimes if you aren't careful, you can outrun a parent's love. You can worry them until they say go ahead and do your own thing and find out the hard way. Like the old saying goes, "If you don't listen, then you can just feel." That is what this dad did.

This young man took off to see the world. He partied big time. He rolled in the dough. He spent a lot. He lived the life he'd dreamed of. He had it made. Everything he wanted, he had. You know, he was the best in town. The crowd came to him. It is easy to buy friends. I've known people who tried to buy a girl or boy friend. They would spend their last dollar on them. Then when the spending stopped, the boyfriend, or girlfriend was gone. You can't buy people's love. You can't buy peoples' friendship. This kind of love or friendship is not real at all. That is what this

fellow found out. His money soon ran out. So did his friends. He was left in a strange place away from his family. He was all alone. He had nothing. Nobody cared. There wasn't any welfare. So he found the only job that he could find. He was a pig feeder. One day, he was so hungry that he found himself eating the slop with the pigs. That was when He came to himself. He knew that it was time to go home. Luke 15:17-19 tells us, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger: I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He said to himself that his father's servants had it better off than he did. He would go home, and at least if his father was mad at him for what he had done, he might let him come home as a servant. That was better than what he had now. The Bible tells us that his father saw him coming even when he was a good distance away. How could he see him when he didn't even know he was coming? His father had to have been going and standing there watching the road every day, hoping that he would come home. When his son returned, this father gave a big welcome home party, taking him back in like a son. He was home. He was loved.

I love that story because it reminds me of my own life. When I left God and the things of God, I had my good time. When my life got so

bad, I could no longer stand it, I came to myself like this boy in the story. When I came back home, my Father, God, had been there waiting for me all the time. He wrapped me in His love. God is talked about in the Bible as loving us with a Father's love. My heavenly Father welcomed me home. He forgave me for all I had done while I was way from Him. He wiped it away with His love. It was gone. Because He forgave me, I forgave myself. Because He loved me, I learned to love myself. That changed my life. I no longer hated myself.

What about you? Are you living where God wants you to live? Be real with Him. If you are not living where you should be, He already knows. He is waiting for you to come to yourself and turn around to head in the right direction. He knows where you are. You can't fool Him. Isn't it time for you to come back home? He has been there waiting for you the whole time, ready to welcome you back home.

## **Chapter 8.**

### **Forgiveness and Loving Yourself**

As I told you in that last chapter, I had done a lot of things that caused me to hate myself. That is a bad place to be in. Any time that you don't like yourself you are walking in dangerous territory. It doesn't matter what reason that you think that you have not to like yourself. Sometimes we don't like ourselves because we think that nobody else does. Or because a certain crowd of people don't accept us. Sometimes we don't like ourselves because we aren't perfect. We really get some weird ideas from TV and movies about what we need to be like. We see these perfect looking people and we put ourselves down because we don't look like them. We have to realize they don't look like that either. They go through a lot to come out that way. Who says we have to look like that to be happy any way? Do you remember those Ernest movies? There is one guy who became famous by being just plain ugly and stupid acting.

Maybe somebody in our life has hurt us in a bad way. Rejection can cause us to reject ourselves. Hey, do you see some kind of pattern here. Sometimes we put way too much importance on what we think that other people think. We like or dislike ourselves because of how other people react toward us. We need to do our best and be our best with God's help, and then let other people have their opinions. That can't affect who we are in God. We need

to become the person that He creates us to be. Then we can be contented with who we are. We don't have to constantly wrestle with who we are. What does who you are in God have to do with what other people think you should be like? God loves you like you are. When you find out about God's love for you, then you can love yourself. Besides, have you ever thought that someone didn't like you, and then found later that you had been wrong all the time? We don't know how other people think or feel. Sometimes you can't tell by how they act. So why go there. Be who God is making you to be and be free and happy in that. You are special. Unique. One of a kind. There is no one and never has been another individual exactly like you even down through time. God is so big and He loves diversity so much that there aren't any two people exactly alike. Even twins have some differences. Have you ever thought of the billions of people through time that have ever been born?

Now picture this. In all these people there is only one you. Amazing, isn't it? Why? Because God created each of us to be who we are. He doesn't want carbon copy people. He doesn't want people who are all trying to dress alike, act alike, talk alike, be alike. He wants you to be you. You see God created you. We didn't evolve from monkeys like evolution teaches us. One of the proofs that evolution is a lie is the diversity of people. We aren't all evolving so fast that everybody is different. We haven't evolved from person to person so that



everyone is different. We are different because an almighty creator made us each one to be different. We didn't arrive here by chance. We are all masterpieces, part of His master design.

So what if we aren't all alike. I'm a little on the pudgy side. I need to work on that, but I don't have to hate myself because I am that way. Who made up that rule that all of us have to be skinny to be popular anyhow? I've known some people who hated their natural curly hair. While other people go spend \$60.00 to get their hair permed because they don't like straight hair. Be who you are and be proud of that. When you love yourself, then you will find out that other people will love you. When you hate yourself, you have a chip on your shoulder that causes nobody to like you. The way to make friends is to be friendly. The way to find people that love you is to love others and treat them with respect, the same respect that you have for yourself.

So many young people sell themselves short, especially in relationships with the opposite sex. How many people do you know that messed up their life by getting tangled up with the wrong guy or girl? Do you remember before the mess started that they got into, how they would take up for that person saying they were the best thing that had ever happened to them. Then they got into trouble. Lots of times this happens because we don't respect ourselves. We don't expect other people to respect us either. We don't care enough about ourselves to stand up for who we are. We don't

find our identity in God, but we look to other people. We don't fill our lives with His love, but we try to find love elsewhere. Then we find ourselves being used and abused by people who really don't care about us at all. Find out who you are in God. Let him strengthen your character. Obey Him. Stay away from the things and the people who can only get you down. Then you can look in the mirror and say, "Hey, I like you. You may be a little fat, skinny, pimply faced, crooked teeth, curly, straight hair, dorky looking, but hey, I like you."

How did I change from how I felt about myself? I found God's forgiveness. Like I said in the last chapter I had done it all. I couldn't forgive and forget. Then I met Jesus. I learned about His love for me. I let Him come into my heart and I felt His love and peace. He began to change me into a person I was proud of. Most of all, He forgave me and helped me to forgive myself. That is one of the main reasons Jesus died on the cross. So you could be forgiven. Can you remember the last time that you did something really bad that you kept from your parents? They found out and then man was it ever on then. Both of you gnashed your teeth at one another for a while. But then you finally talked things out and you figured out that you were forgiven. Things were OK. Forgiveness is a good thing. Nobody can forgive you like Jesus. Here are some verses that tell us about God's forgiveness. Matthew 6:14 tells us, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your

heavenly Father will also forgive you.” This is part of the Lord’s Prayer. It tells us that if we forgive people around us when they do wrong to us, then the Lord will forgive us. This is important. There are a lot of people who hate someone who has done something wrong to them. That is called bitterness. Bitterness only hurts the people who are bitter, not the people who did the wrong thing. If you hate someone who has wronged you, you are the one who will suffer, not the person who did the wrong. We have to forgive. Sometimes that is hard. We can do it though if we let Jesus inside of us forgive. There have been times when I couldn’t forgive someone. I asked Jesus to help me to do so. Then I would feel His love inside my heart for that person. After all, He is in your heart. He can help you to have the right feelings that you need to have. It is important to forgive. Here are some more verses about God’s forgiveness.

Ephesians 1:6-7 tells us, “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” We have been made accepted in Jesus. He has made us acceptable in His eyes through His grace. We have forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of His grace. If you remember, grace means that we don’t deserve His love and goodness and forgiveness, but He gives it anyway. I John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to

forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This is so very important. Confession means that we admit that we did wrong. Then we have to repent. That means that we have to be sorry for what we did. Sorry enough not to ever do that again. Let’s put this down on the human level for a minute. Picture two kids out on the playground. One punches the other in the nose for no reason. Normally speaking, the other one is not likely to forgive the one who punched him. Not just after he is punched. Then let’s suppose the guy who did the punching begins to feel sorry for punching. He feels conviction. He begins to know that he did wrong. He admits that he did wrong. He feels sorry for doing this. Then he asks the other guy to forgive him. They can be reconciled again to one another, or brought back together as friends again.

That is how it is with God. First we have to feel God’s conviction, that feeling that oh brother we have goofed up. Then we have to feel repentance, sorrow for goofing up. Then we have to ask God’s forgiveness. Then we have to accept His forgiveness and forgive ourselves. Then we can be reconciled back as friends again. Let’s say that the guy on the playground who punched the other one made an excuse as to why he did that. What if he blamed it on the one he punched even if he wasn’t at fault? Would there be any forgiveness? No. To be forgiven we have to be honest and admit our mistakes. Lot’s of times though, we are so rotten that we don’t even

know when we do wrong. There are two things that will help with this. We have already talked about how God convicts us. He lets us know in our heart when we have done wrong. We will get this sinking feeling that we have messed up. Another thing that helps us to know when we do wrong is the Bible. The Bible has a standard to go by for our lives. We can read it and know right and wrong. God's Spirit will always keep us on the right path if we let Him. He will let us know when we are going wrong. We can count on that. We just have to be sure that we listen to His voice.

It took me a while to understand all this and accept God's forgiveness. It also took me a while to forgive myself. I knew that Jesus died on the cross to forgive everybody so that we could be saved. Somehow though I couldn't make all that personal, just for me. Then one day I realized that if I had been the only one that Jesus would have died just for me. I began to understand forgiveness like I had never done before. When I could accept God's forgiveness and love, I forgave myself. If God forgives you, why should you hold things against yourself? Let it all go. Place it in His nail-scarred hands and He will put it where it will no longer be remembered. You have His Word for that. Psalm 103:12 tells us, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Transgression is another word for sins. How far is the east from the west? They will never come together.

I know some people who try to take advantage of all this. Lets go back to the boys in the playground for a minute. Lets say that the one boy who was punched forgives the boy who punched him. Then lets say that five minutes later, he punches him again. Then he does the same things asking for his forgiveness. Then five minutes later, he does it again. On purpose. Is that boy obligated to keep forgiving this guy when he purposefully keeps punching him? Sometimes, though, we do God this same way. I heard a girl say, "I can cuss. I can drink. I don't have to do what my parent's want me to. I can do whatever I want to because God loves me. He will forgive me". Whoa. That is extreme, but that is how some people live. Jesus died to forgive us. Don't ever take the attitude that this wasn't special. That it isn't sacred. Don't waste one drop of his precious blood by doing your own thing even when you know it is wrong, then expecting Him to forgive you. That is wrong. If you really love Him, you'll do what He wants you to do. You'll live in a way that pleases him. John 14:15 tells us, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" You don't have to be perfect. God doesn't expect that. He already knows that you aren't. Just love Him enough to give him your very best. Try with all your heart. He will do the rest. When you do mess up don't run away from Him and hide. Run to Him. He loves you the way that you are.

We can count on God's promise to forgive us, but He doesn't just leave us there.

He sends His Spirit to live inside of us to strengthen us to be able to do what is right. The next chapter talks more about this.

## **Chapter 9.**

### **The Baptism of the Holy Ghost**

I did not even hear about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost until I was in my 20's. Like I said before, I was saved when I was a young girl. In my older teenage days, I rebelled against God and got tangled up in drugs and alcohol, and you name it. By the time I was in my early 20's, I had totally destroyed my life. When I rededicated my heart and life to God, He was my only hope. I needed help and fast. I needed power to withstand my past. I needed the power to stand against the enemy who was trying to destroy me. I needed all I could get. Praise God. When I heard about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, I definitely didn't run away from it. I was hungry to receive anything that I could, and I opened up my arms and ran toward it. If you haven't received the power of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, remember that it is for you. I pray that through these pages you run to it just like I did.

Trying to walk in the Spirit without having the Baptism of the Holy Ghost is like trying to race a 2006 sports car with a model T engine. You just won't have the power to win the race. I grew up not hearing about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. I grew up in an area that had been blinded and bound to think that this gift of the Spirit was not real. I was taught that when you were saved, you got all of God's Spirit that there was. I was taught that after salvation, you had it all. I grew up not



knowing a thing at all about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Through a miracle, God brought me into contact with a church that believed in the Baptism of the Spirit. After I received it for myself, no one could tell me that it wasn't real. It was the key that brought me victory over a life that had been bound by sin, drugs, and alcohol. The devil had worked overtime in much of my life to destroy me because he knew that I would one day serve God. Maybe you are going through the same thing. Maybe it seems like every time you try to get up, you get knocked back down. You know in your heart that you should walk up-right before God, but every time you take one step forward it seems you get knocked three back. You may be about to give up in defeat, which is exactly what the devil wants you to do. It may be that he sees that up ahead, you will bust his little kingdom wide open in some area. You may be sitting there thinking that it is hopeless. That there is no use to keep trying. You won't make it. The devil has you where he wants you. You think it is because you are worthless. It may be because you are getting ready to rise up and be what God has chosen for you to be. It is your choice. If you give up now, you will never know. Maybe the key for you to overcome is the same as it was for me-the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. When I first learned about it, I got it. I grabbed hold and didn't let go. I knew that this was the key for a victorious life and I turned it. Even though I had grown up hearing that it was not right, when it came time for me to accept it, I

knew I needed it. That settled that. Don't read about this and talk yourself out of thinking that it is real, and that it is not for you. God said it is, so let that be the end of that.

Now over 25 years later, I can say that no wonder the devil tried to keep me blinded. I have been working for the Lord full time for 25 years, and will continue to do so. Not in my own power, but in the power of God's Spirit. I had to be hungry enough to submit myself to allow God to do things His way. I had to take Him and His Word at face value. I had to receive the gift that He had for me. I have never regretted it. God will allow His Spirit to control only the things that we allow Him to control. When we say, God, I have decided to do it your way. Come and fill me up to the brim. Then we are ready for the Baptism of God's Spirit. He fills us up all the way with His Spirit. That is what the Baptism of God's Spirit is all about.

Here is what God has to say about it in His Word. We first read about it in Acts Chapter 2. Here we read that the disciples were all gathered in one mind and accord. In verse 4 it tells us, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." What was the outcome of this? These few who were hiding in fear after the crucifixion, became bold enough and so full of God's Spirit that they turned the world upside down. Without the Baptism, they would not have endured to start the church, and keep the Gospel that was

committed to us today. Verse 41 tells of the outcome of that day, “Then they that gladly received His word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” This didn’t stop here. We read about this throughout Acts. In Chapter 8, verses 14-17, these men received the gifts of the Holy Ghost. In Chapter 10, verses 44-48, the Holy Ghost is again on the scene filling the Gentiles. In Acts 19: 1-6, these men also received the gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost since they had believed. These men were already saved, but they had something in addition to salvation that they were about to receive. They answered, “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” In verse 6 the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied. I think of myself when I read their answer to Paul, “We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost.” I hadn’t heard, but God found me anyway.

How do you receive the gift of the Holy Ghost? I was blessed to find a church that believed this way. The congregation laid hands on me and prayed for me in the same way that Paul laid hands on the men in Acts 19:6. But I still didn’t receive it that night that they prayed. Several nights later, when I was by myself, the Holy Ghost fell on me and I was filled. I prayed in tongues for the first time that night. You can receive it through the prayers of others, or you can receive it through your own prayers.

It is a gift of God that He has given us to empower us against the battle of Satan. It is a gift that gives us boldness in our witness, like it did those on that first day. It is for you.

I have heard many people argue against the Baptism of the Holy Ghost being real. They argue that it is not for us today. When I hear this I know several things about those people. I know that they are ignorant of God's Word. In Acts 2:38-39 we read, "Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." I would say that means us too. I also know when I hear people argue that the Baptism is not for us today, that these people do not know God. I know that He wants the best for His children. He wants us to overcome and be victorious. I also know that we live in the last days, which has to be one of the hardest times to live on the earth. Why would God give a gift to help the early disciples, tell us about it, and then deny us the right to have it or make it so that it is not available to us who need it the most? That is not the God I know.

I think that one of the things that hinders people in receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is that it comes along with the gift of speaking in tongues. For many, that is a stumbling block. This is because the devil wants to scare people away from our being able

to pray in the Spirit, or pray in tongues. What it means when we pray in tongues is that the Spirit of God prays through us in His own language. He is praying directly through us using our vocal chords. We may not understand what He is saying, though sometimes He will allow us or others to interpret. Whether or not we understand, the devil knows when we start praying that something is being done to bind him and to loose the power of God on the scene. No wonder he works overtime to confuse people about this powerful gift. Have you ever wanted so badly to pray for someone but didn't know how to pray? All you could do was to say a general half way prayer, when you know you needed to do more. The Holy Ghost knows exactly how to pray in God's perfect will. When He prays through you that is a powerful prayer that will get the job done. Also, when we pray in the Holy Ghost it strengthens our inner man, Who is the Spirit of God in us. (Jude 20, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." When we are filled and consumed with the Spirit of God, and we allow Him to pray in us, we are submitted to His Spirit in a way that nothing else can do. We strengthen His Spirit in us. We submit our flesh and our flesh man takes second place in our life. With all that going on our flesh doesn't stand a chance. God's Spirit rises strong in us and we take on His likeness.

Now you may interrupt me here to say, what about the people who receive the Baptism

of the Holy Spirit and wind up turning their back on God, or they sin in a big way and take on a life of sin instead of a life with God? Just because you have the Baptism of the Holy Ghost it doesn't make you perfect. You still have your flesh man. If you have the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Ghost is still not allowed to control your life, then flesh will. That is why it is important to allow the Holy Ghost to move in you. Pray in the Holy Ghost daily. Don't hinder the Spirit of God when He starts to move in or through you, whether it be in church or at home. Allow God's Spirit to control. Then He will be there when you need Him.

One of the greatest stories I have ever heard about the power in the prayer of the Holy Ghost is this. The Holy Ghost moved on a man and began interceding through him. The man had no idea why, but he obeyed and yielded. God spoke to him to take note at what time this had happened. The next day he heard about a close friend who had been stabbed. That had happened at exactly the time that the man had prayed. The other man's life had been miraculously spared. Another time I heard about a man on a plane who had interceded through the Holy Ghost. After they landed, they were told of a mechanical failure that had nearly caused them to crash, but miraculously the failure had corrected itself. The man who had prayed had no idea, but God knew. Thousands of times I have heard stories about how the Holy Ghost had interceded by speaking in

tongues through those who had the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. The situation was corrected, the life was saved, the soul was saved, the person was delivered, or whatever need there was, it was met. There is no prayer that is more powerful than the prayer of the Holy Ghost Himself. If you do not have the gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, ask God for this. Seek it. The Bible says that when we seek God, or His gifts, we will find them. Who says so? Jesus. Luke 11:9, “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Read this section of scripture through verse 13. In verse 13 we read, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?”

If you haven't received the Baptism, ask for it. It is a gift, and God would love for you to have it. If you have received it, realize that just receiving the Holy Ghost doesn't mean that you have arrived. We still have to day-to-day walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We have to let the Holy Ghost rule and reign in our life daily. We have to walk in the Spirit to find the victory that God has promised us. It will give us power to find a salvation that sticks.

## **Chapter 10.**

### **Finding God's Plan for You**

Why are you alive? Do you have a purpose? What about a direction for your future? Are you just down here taking up space or do you have a reason to be alive? Who are you? Have you ever asked yourself these questions? If you have, then you aren't alone. Teenagers all down through time have asked these same things. Adults too. Humans have a built in need to be needed, to make a difference. I talk to a lot of young people. Hey, I've been working with young people for over 30 years. (Oops, I might tell my age if I'm not careful.) Along about the 10<sup>th</sup> grade a lot of kids get stuck in what I call the 10<sup>th</sup> grade blues. They don't see any point in going to school. It is just a drag. Why try? What is the point? They start just hanging around waiting for something exciting to happen. They don't think that they have a purpose and see no need to get a plan for one. Graduation is too far away and who knows, we might not make it that far anyway. This is a bad time in our lives. If we aren't careful we can get really messed up while we go through all this.

Another deadly time is our senior year. I can remember when I started thinking about my future and what I was going to do after graduation. I would get so scared that I would hyperventilate. How was I supposed to know what to do? I knew adults that still didn't know what they wanted to do. They weren't happy



with what they had gotten into. The words “being on my own” scared me to death. I never mentioned this to anyone. Matter of fact on the outside of me, no one could tell that this bothered me as bad as it did. I was too busy acting all macho on the outside. All I talked about was, I can’t wait until I get out on my own and nobody can tell me what to do. All the while, inside, I’d shake every time I said the words “on my own”. I wasn’t ready to be on my own and I knew it. I think a lot of times we get this a little out of proportion. We think that the day after we graduate, we are dropped like a ball in the end zone. Our parents walk out and we are expected to go through some kind of metamorphosis into an adult being. That is not real. The day after I graduated, I woke up in my home with my family, and I was relieved to know that they were still there, and things hadn’t changed that much. I got a job instead of going to school. I worked a while then I started back to school. (Haven’t gotten out of school yet. I’ve been going to school for 54 years. They won’t let me out. Don’t know when I’ll get to graduate.) I did have to get a plan for my life. For a good book, read my book *Who Am I and Where Am I Going*. It talks about finding God’s plan for your life.

We’ve talked about two rough times that teenagers go through. I’m sure that you’ll agree there are more than just two, but let’s talk now about these two. How can you get through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade blues and the 12<sup>th</sup> grade panic? It is amazing what getting a direction and a plan for

your life can do. Have you ever walked down a big dark room wandering where in the world you were? Then you realized where you were and got headed in the right direction. Then you found the light switch, and you really were able to move out with a purpose. When you got a sense of direction and purposed where you were going, you walked a lot surer and a lot swifter. When you finally could see exactly where your destination was, you were able to travel even better.

Life is a lot like that. The Bible tells us that when we lack a vision we perish. When we can't see where we are going, we can die. When our life has no purpose, then it is easy to lose our will to do our best. That is why being in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is so hard. When you are a freshman you are starting high school. That is scary, but cool. When you are a Junior, you know that next year you will be a Senior. That is cool. But when you are a Sophomore, it is easy to get caught in feeling like you are nowhere. Like you are halfway between here and there, and who know where that is. Grades start to slide. It is harder to care about doing your best. How do you get out of this? Get a vision. Get site of something that you are headed toward. Get a purpose. We've helped more than one person through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade blues by helping them to get a plan for their future. When they found that they really did have a reason to go on and do their best, then they did so. They had a place to go. The light was on. They had a direction and you know

what, when you start working on your future plans in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, it's not even scary at all when you become a senior. You already have a plan and a purpose. You have already been working toward your future, and when you get to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, you just keep on working on it. That takes a lot of the fear out of facing your future.

How do you find that purpose, that direction? I can recommend a perfect guidance counselor who is available at any time of the day or night to talk to you. He knows you personally. He may even know you better than you do yourself. He knows all your talents and gifts, even the ones that you haven't admitted to having. He knows all your peculiarities, those little things that are just you. He knows all about the job market and how to counsel you to find a career that won't leave you out in the cold without a job a year or even 10 years from now. He knows how to direct you to the right technical school or college, if that is what you need. If that is not what you need for your field, then He can help you find all the right contacts to get you started in whatever training that you need. He knows how to direct you to the very best jobs. He even knows how to talk your parents into agreeing with you if you take His advice. Sad to say, though, this person is often the last One Who we ask for advice. This Counselor is God. The Bible refers to Him as being the Great Counselor. No kidding. Isaiah 9:6 calls Him the Almighty Counselor. I think that the meaning of counselor here means one

who advises us in the direction of our life. A little more than just being a guidance counselor like at school. We can trust God to lead us in our life in every decision that we have to make. He is the great counselor. Why not trust Him with your future? God already has a plan for your life. It is a plan that is designed perfectly just for you. We have to find that plan and walk in it.

Do you remember the story of Daniel in the beginning of this book? He was captured and shipped away from his home and family. Why? God had a plan for his life. When you read about his life, you see how God used him. He influenced kings and whole countries. Does that mean that if you trust God to lead you, you might get captured and carried away from home? No. But if you let God have your future, one day you can look back and say, WOW, look what God has done with my life. If you don't you may only face miserable failure. What is another way to spell success? OBEDIENCE. Find God's plan and obey Him as He leads you. You will succeed. Guaranteed.

I can remember when I decided to be a teacher. I kept getting a feeling inside my heart really strong that was what I needed to do. I went to college. I messed up there and flunked out. I wasn't letting God lead me. I lost my direction and my purpose. When I rededicated my heart and my life back to the Lord, I got back on track. I finished college and I started teaching. I found my purpose and God's plan

for my life. Step by step He led me. I was willing to do it His way. When He told me to do something I listened and did what He told me to do. It didn't all happen at one time. I had to listen and do. One step at a time He led me. Every once in a while, I'd get stubborn and hard headed but He'd get me back in the right direction. I had a purpose. God used me to help others. I had a direction. I was walking in God's plan. The Bible says that God's Word is like a light giving us direction. Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." God's Word and His Spirit inside our hearts will pull us in the right direction.

How can you hear God's Spirit leading you? Do you hear God's voice booming from the heavens? Does He talk out loud, or how does He talk to us? What do I mean when I say that you have to listen to God's voice and obey Him? Have you ever gotten these definite feelings in your heart that you really, really, really should not do something? But you did anyway and you wound up in major trouble. Have you ever had a really strong impression in your heart that you should do something and you did? You found out later how glad you were that you did. That is one way that God leads us. His Spirit inside of us will speak to our heart if we will only listen and do. Wait a minute. What about those weirdoes that freak out and kill people and say that God told them to do it. You can bet on one thing. They were not saved. They didn't have God's Spirit in

their heart and mind. They got filled up with another spirit, the devil. Look where that got them. If you are saved, God's Spirit will lead you. If you are playing games with God, sinning one day and playing Christian the next, don't trust the voices that you hear. They probably will not be God.

When it is time to decide your future, you need to have a plan. When you make your plan, go to the number one counselor. He'll lead you. Can you be sure that He cares enough about you to help you? Does He love you enough to have a plan for you? He sure does. We can read about a lot of young people in the Bible that God had a plan for their lives even before they were born.

I can hear some of you saying this now, "But I am not special. I don't have anything that I can do to help others. I've tried to make a difference and I can't. I don't have any special gifts or talents like a lot of people have. How can God have a plan for me?" When I was your age I felt the same way. I couldn't see that I was special in any way. I couldn't see anything good in me at all. But still God had a plan for me. You see, you have to remember that Jesus is in your heart. God's Spirit is in you. That actually makes you someone pretty special, no matter how you feel about yourself. You are pretty remarkable. The Bible tells us that we can do anything. Philippians 4:13 tells us, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." On my own I might not be anything remarkable at all. But when Jesus

strengthens me, I can do anything. You have to stop putting your focus on who you are, and focus on God in you. With His help you can do amazing things. And you will. Don't settle for anything less than that. Don't consider yourself less than that. Jesus Himself lives in you. Find out His plan for your life. Obey Him. Look out world, you will make a difference.

## **Chapter 11.**

### **Which Direction Do I Take?**

Life is a journey. We talked about this some in the last chapter. It is a topic that is important enough though to deserve two chapters. This journey called life is like a road trip. It is full of twists and turns. There are lots of signs that say detour. Lots of situation that look like shortcuts will come up. Some roads are interstates. Some roads are little winding roads, dirt roads with washboard ruts and potholes and mud holes. Some roads look like major highways while they are really dead ends. Others look like great freeways that go to major cities, while they just wander in a circle.

How can you find the right road? How can you find the right direction for your life? There is only One who absolutely knows which direction, which road, you should take. He knows your heart. He knows your future. He knows what this world will be like in the future. He will lead you like a good Shepherd leads His sheep. He is smart enough to get you going in the right direction. So why do so many people mess up their lives? Why are so many Christians miserable in their lives? Why are there so many that are in bad situations? Let's look at this on a more human level and see if we can answer these questions. When was the last time that your Mom or Dad tried to get you do something that they knew was important for you to do. Or maybe they tried to get you to go in a different direction than the one that you



were headed in. But you wouldn't listen at the moment. Later on you wished that you had listened. That is the same way with God. God loves us. He has a right direction for our lives. If we fail to listen and do what he tells us to, then we mess up.

I hear a lot of people ask me this. They say, "Mrs. Haga, I don't hear God talk to me. How can I hear Him lead me?" Not long ago a young man was in my office talking to me. I told him that God could lead him in the right direction. That he could talk to God. He got all skeptical. I could tell that it was hard for him to believe this. I asked him if he had ever been saved. I asked him if he had ever asked Jesus to come into his heart. He said that he had never done that. Then I understood why he couldn't hear God's voice. Until this happens to you, it is hard to understand it. When you ask Jesus to come into your heart, He really does. You will know it when it happens. He changes you from the inside out. When He comes inside, He'll let you know things. You can feel Him directing you from the inside of your heart. You will get feelings that direct you. You'll hear a soft still voice inside your heart speaking to you. One of the problems though that you'll have with listening to God is that this isn't the only voice inside of you that you will hear. The devil can sit on your shoulder and whisper things in your ear too. He'll try to lead you in the wrong direction. Then your own mind is there too. It isn't always right in its thinking. Then there are all the people around you who are trying to get

you to go in a certain direction. With all this going on how do you make sure that it is God that is leading you?

When I was a young Christian it was hard for me to distinguish God's voice. I asked God to teach me how to tell His voice apart from all the others. He showed me this picture. I was upstairs in my house. I heard someone come in downstairs. I could hear them talking but I couldn't see who it was. At first it was a new voice that I didn't recognize. It was someone that I had never met before. Later on they came back. After they came back several times, I began to recognize that voice. It wasn't hard to tell them apart from all the other voices. Then eventually I recognized that voice every time that person came. The more we practice hearing God voice, the more we listen to him, the easier it will be to recognize Him. John 10:2-5 talks about this. This is in Jesus' own words here. "But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." From these verses we can see that we will know God's voice.

There is another thing that will help us to hear His voice. Have you ever had a day when you woke up ill and mad at the world? You

didn't even want to hear your parent's tell you what to do. You especially didn't want to do what they told you to do. Everything they told you to do, you did the opposite, just because. If we aren't careful we will do God the same way that we do our parents. We'll let this rotten attitude spill over into our relationship with God. If we have a hardheaded day, it is easy to get hard headed with God. If we want Him to direct us in the right direction, we have to listen and do what He says. He can lead us in the right direction all day long, but if we don't listen and do it, it won't help us at all.

There's one ruler to go by to measure for sure that the voice that we hear is God's. We have Jesus in our heart leading us through His Spirit in us. We have the devil trying to get us to go in the opposite direction. We have our own mind leading us. We have other people. Too much information. How do we tell them apart? One rule to use to measure which voice is God's is the Bible. If a voice is trying to get us to do something that is against what the Bible tells us to do, then we know that voice is not God's. That is why it is important for you to read the Bible so that you know the right direction. Next time that you feel confused about where to go, stop. Pray. Ask the Lord to lead you. When you feel like you are being pulled in hundred directions. Stop. Talk to Jesus. Then you will know the right way to go.

One of my favorite pictures is the one that hangs behind my desk in my office. It is the picture of Jesus with the sheep. It reminds

me that we have a good shepherd. The Bible describes Jesus as a Shepherd. We talked some verses in the last couple of paragraphs where Jesus describes Himself as a shepherd. A shepherd leads his sheep. He goes in front of them making sure that they go in the right direction that is safe for them. When they go in the wrong direction, it is because they stop following their shepherd. But he finds them and gets them going in the right direction. He is your good shepherd. He knows how to lead you. When you get hard headed and you don't listen, he'll get you back going in the right direction. When you mess up by heading on the wrong road, he'll stop you and turn you around. Trust Him to lead you. He loves you. After all He died to get you going in the right direction.

## **Chapter 12.**

### **Nothing but Dirt**

I had a young person say to me one day, “I just feel like nothing but dirt. Nothing is going right in my life. I can’t do anything right. Every time I try, I just mess it up. I’m almost ready to quit trying” I answered them and said, “Good. You are just now in the right place for God to use you. Feeling like dirt is a good place to be.” Let me explain. In the book of Jeremiah in the Bible, God told Jeremiah to go to the potter’s house in Jeremiah 18. While he was there he watched the potter at work. (A potter is someone who makes pottery out of clay.) The potter took a hunk of dirt, clay, and put it up on the potter’s wheel. He worked it, punched it, and beat it until it was soft. If you’ve ever made anything with clay, you know what I’m talking about. Then when it was malleable, soft, and able to be molded, the potter began to turn the wheel. While it turned, he shaped the clay and molded it. He worked with it until it became something beautiful. Instead of just being a clump of dirt, it became something that the potter could use. It had a purpose. It was just right for what it was made for. Sometimes we are just like a lump of clay. We are all just dirt. If you remember Genesis 2:7 tells us that God took dust and made man. The best that we can be on our own is just dust. When God gets done with shaping and molding us though we can be something beautiful. Just like the potter, He will work to get us to the

place where He can shape us. We have to yield to him. We can't be hard headed and refuse to listen to Him. We can't tell Him how to do it, and insist on getting our own way. We have to come to the place that we realize that we are just dirt, and we are willing to let Him have His way with our lives. Then He can shape us into a vessel that is beautiful with a God given purpose and a plan for our life. A lot of people never let this happen. They put limits on what they let God do. He puts them on the wheel and begins to beat them to make them soft so that He can begin to shape them. They jump off the wheel and refuse to let Him finish. They go around all lopsided and ugly because God isn't done. That is why there are so many ugly, lopsided Christians. They won't let God finish what He started. Here is a little song that talks about our being a work in progress.

### ***He's Still Working On Me***

#### *Chorus*

*He's still working on me  
To make me what I ought to be.  
It took Him just a week to make the moon and  
stars  
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.  
How loving and patient He must be  
He's still working on me.*

#### *Verse 1*

*There really ought to be a sign upon my heart  
Don't judge me yet, there's an unfinished part.  
But I'll be perfect just according to His plan  
Fashioned by the Master's Loving hands.*

So the next time that you feel just like dirt, remember that isn't a bad place to be in. It may be just the right place to be where God can work on you. When you feel that way, just ask Him to finish that work in you that He has started. Admit that your way isn't working. Let Him have His way in your life. Ask Him to be Lord of who you are.

The Bible talks about a man who was one of the most hated and feared men of his day. Matter of fact he was a Christian killer. He lived back in the time when Christianity was young. The established church of that day didn't believe that Jesus was the Savior. They didn't believe that He was the Son of God. A guy named Saul dedicated himself to destroy all the Christians who believed in Jesus. In his own mind he thought that he was helping God. He delivered Christians up to be killed and tortured. Here in Galatians 1:13 this guy tells us in his own words, "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it." Then in verse 23 he says, "But they had heard only that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." How did this Christian killer become a preacher? Who was this man? Today he is known as Paul. He wrote most of the New Testament. One day while he was traveling to capture a group of Christians, a light from heaven blinded him. God spoke to him. This changed his life. God changed his

name to Paul. He found himself on the potter's wheel. God shaped him and totally changed him.

A lot of people thought that Paul was nothing but dirt. Christians hated and feared him. It took a long time for them to trust him. He kept on trusting God to change him. He stayed on the potter's wheel until God was finished. He made the statement that the life that he lived, he lived by faith in the Son of God who had died for him. He learned to trust God to help him to be the person that God wanted him to be. He helped to start churches all over that part of the world. He later wrote letters to those churches. Those letters make up a third of the New Testament. Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, are just a few of the books that Paul wrote. I'm sure that there were days when Paul felt like he was just dirt. But he trusted God to work in his life. He let the Master Potter do His part. He received the gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost that gave him the power to overcome. We talked about that in the chapter about the Holy Ghost. Most of the verses that we discussed in that chapter were written by Paul. God used Paul in a mighty way. He can do the same for you. Even if you feel like you are just dirt.



## Chapter 13. I Can't Do This

Lot's of times when I have felt that the Lord was dealing with someone's heart to give their life and heart to Him, they would begin to start with the "I can't do this" statements. Here are some of the "I can't do's" that I've heard:

1. *I can't stand up for God when everybody else is headed in a different direction.*
2. *I can't be perfect and you have to be perfect to be a Christian.*
3. *I can't stop having fun, and when you get saved you have to stop having fun.*
4. *My boyfriend (girlfriend, whichever) won't go to church. I am afraid that if I get saved they won't like me any more.*
5. *I have a lot of friends that won't understand if I got saved.*
6. *Everybody will think that I'm weird.*
7. *I don't have time. I can't go to church. I have too many other things to do.*
8. *My family won't understand. They aren't Christians.*
9. *I don't know what I believe in enough to stand up for it.*

These are only a few of the “I can’t do’s” that I have heard. The best way to get rid of all these “I can’t’s” is to look at them. We might be able to turn them into “I can’s”. Let’s go back and take them one at a time.

1. *I can’t stand up for God when everybody else is headed in a different direction.* The Bible says that the road to destruction is really wide. The road to eternal life is really narrow. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” How many people do you know that are standing up for what is right? Most of the crowd is doing just what this verse says. They are heading to destruction. All the way from the beginning of this thing, Christians have been in the minority. That is how it will be until the time when Jesus comes back. One day, though, we not only will be in the majority, there will only be Christians left. Everybody else will be in hell. It hasn’t been easy to be a Christian down through time. But Christians have been strong enough to turn their world upside down for Jesus. We think that we have it hard here. When I went to Russia, it was just two

years after the fall of communism. I met Bible smugglers who had been beaten and imprisoned because they had brought Bibles into their country during communism. If you openly confessed being a Christian, you could be killed. You sure could be killed if you were caught giving out Bibles. Your family could be imprisoned, even if they were children. You can bet that being a Christian meant that you were in a minority. The in crowd definitely was not Christian. Then communism fell. They were free to be Christians. When I was in Russia, there was a huge revival going on. I went to one churches' Baptism service. Over 200 people were baptized at that service. This was one churches' service on one riverbank. All over Russia the same thing is happening. Church services usually run with hundreds attending, even some have thousands of people there. Why? Because when it wasn't popular, those faithful few dared to stand up for what they believed in even if it meant that they would have to die for it. You are probably thinking, "I don't have the courage to stand up for what I believe in. I could never be like those people." Those people told me how hard it was to do what they did. They were afraid, just like you. They were afraid that they would make a mistake. They trusted in

God to help them. He gave them the strength and courage that they needed. Read the story of Jesus' crucifixion. When He died on the cross there was only a handful of people who dared to stand up enough to be there with Him. There were only 5 of them that were mentioned. Four of them were women. There were 12 disciples that traveled with Him daily. There had been 124 disciples that had worked with Him. Where were they? They had run scared. But these same disciples eventually gave their lives to spread the Gospel around the world. If they hadn't been faithful to do what they did, we might not be Christians today. Of the 12 disciples, only one wasn't killed for following Jesus. The others were tortured, crucified upside down, beaten or stoned to death. Read what happened to many early Christians in Hebrews 11 verses 35-40, but it's not for the squeamish. How did these guys go from running scared to be able to stand up and go through all this? God's Spirit helped them. The Bible tells us that the Holy Ghost will give us boldness. We talked about in one chapter about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, how God's Spirit can fill us up. When that happens, we become bold to stand up for what is right. God will help us to make the stand that we need to make.

2. *I can't be perfect and you have to be perfect to be a Christian.* Hey, worse than that, you can't be perfect. The best that you can do for God is filthy rags in His site. He is so perfect that nothing you can do is good enough. Boy, that leaves us in trouble doesn't it. But there is good news. Being perfect is not a requirement for being a Christian. I knew one girl who wouldn't get saved because she thought that if she sinned after she got saved that this would be like blaspheming the Holy Ghost. That is a sin that has no forgiveness. She thought that if she messed up after she got saved that there wouldn't be any forgiveness for her. Some people think that you can only be forgiven a certain number of times, but after that you have to go to hell if you mess up any more. Some see God as a terrible being that punishes you every time that you mess up. Some people are afraid to get saved because they are afraid of God. They are afraid that they will mess up and God's wrath will come down on them. These things are not entirely true. God's wrath will come on you if you do not give your heart and life to Him. It will come down on those who know to do right but continue to purposefully do wrong without any repentance. God's wrath comes eventually to those who willfully do wrong even though they know that

they are doing so. God sent His Son to die for us to be forgiven. Why would He be full of wrath when we make a mistake? The Bible says God is love. You have no idea of how deep God's love is for you. There is an old song about God's love that goes like this: "So deep you can't get under it, so high you can't get over it, so wide you can't get around it, you can't get over God's love". When you get to know God and His love for you, you will know that He will keep you. He will be there for you. You won't have to perfect. He will love you like you are, but He will change you to become better than what you are. Yes, He expects you to do right, but He will give you what you need to be able to do right. With God's Spirit in your heart, with His help, with His Word to guide you, With His love, with His people to help you, how can you lose.

3. *I can't stop having fun, and when you get saved you have to stop having fun.* We've talked a lot in this book already about what fun really is. This is a backwards generation. The Bible tells us that in the last days people will be backwards. You are made to feel that bad things are really good. You are made to think that if you don't do what everybody else is doing, there is something wrong with you. Even if what

everybody else is doing is destroying their life. Look at the people you know who are messing up. Are they taking care of their future by avoiding stupid circumstances? Are they settling for friends that will only get them down? Where are they headed? You have to decide what fun really is. If it involves drugs, drinking, sex, cruising around looking for trouble until you find trouble, then can you really say that is fun. If it involves potentially messing up your life, then is it fun. I can remember that before I was saved, I thought that Christians were boring. That they never had any fun. When I got saved, I asked Jesus to give me an exciting life. He has done just that. I have gotten to travel all over the US. I've gotten to travel overseas. I've gotten to do a list of things that were dreams that I had when I was your age. I've gotten to do them all. Best of all, God has used me to make a difference in people's lives. I don't ever get bored. I stay busy working for the Lord. I get to talk with people from all over the world that all believe in what I believe in. God answered my prayer. Don't ever think that being a Christian means that you can't have any fun.

4. *My boyfriend (girlfriend, whichever) won't go to church. I am afraid that if I get saved they won't like me any more.*

Boyfriends and girlfriends. Love lives. Nothing can get more complicated to a teenager. Nothing can be as potentially harmful, and nothing can change you for the better as much as this one thing. Let's see. What would be a good match for you? Love is the number one thing to look for. Looks are fine, but that isn't everything. You need someone who will accept you like you are. Someone who will help you to become a better person. Someone that accepts you like you are but tries to get you to be a better person. Someone that cares about you and won't pull you down. Definitely someone that won't use you or abuse you. Someone that will treat you like you are special. You need to remember too that scripture that we covered in an earlier chapter about not being unequally yoked. This person needs to be a Christian. Someone that will go to church with you. (You have to be careful here though. Some people will pretend to be a Christian and start going to church because they think that if they do, you will like them. But it isn't in their heart. Beware of this. This kind of person will only get you in trouble.) Does that sound like your guy or gal? If not, then maybe it is time for a change. If when I say this, you can't stand thinking about losing this person, even if they don't meet these standards, then something is wrong. I know a lot of



young people who settle for someone because they are afraid that they can't find anyone. It would be better to do without anyone than to settle for someone who doesn't love you, someone who abuses you, or uses you. Love is something that is particular. Real love isn't something that just happens to you out of the blue. Real love won't be there for someone that doesn't love you for real. Be sure that what you feel for someone is real love. Tomorrow is another day, and there are other fish in the sea. Don't sell yourself short in a relationship that is going nowhere but down. Don't settle for someone who will pull you down. Don't let anyone use you. Guys are bad for letting girls use their billfolds. If someone constantly wants you to buy or do for them, then they may be more in love with your paycheck than they are in love with you. The wrong guy or girlfriend can mess you up worse than you are willing to pay if you aren't careful. Don't get in that seat. On the other hand, the right boyfriend or girlfriend can be a wonderful help to you. There are a lot of things more important than having a boy or girlfriend, though. Everybody acts like it is such a terrible thing to sit home alone on a Friday or Saturday night because you don't have a boy or girl friend. They act like it so terrible not to

have someone special to them. So they settle for an abusive relationship with someone that uses them like a doormat. Or they put up with drinking and drugs, and other things that they would never do because they feel like they have to have someone. Or they fall into a relationship with someone and they feel like they desperately need to hold on to this person. They are afraid to lose them so they do things to keep them that they regret. Being alone would be so much better than putting up with what a lot of people put up just to have someone. Sometimes we need to step back and really look at our relationship. Then we need to decide if that is what we want. We are not stuck. We needn't ever feel like this is something that we have to do. Go back and read the first part of this section where I described the boy or girl friend we need to have. Are you settling for less? If you are, then you need to remember this. Who loves you more than Jesus? Has your boyfriend or girlfriend died for you? Do they love you like you are and appreciate you? Do they care enough for you to want the best for you like Jesus does? Will they be there forever, can you trust them the way you can Jesus? He will be the perfect friend. He will never let you down. Are you letting Him down? Are you compromising with your relationship

with Him for someone who doesn't care for you near as much as he does? Its sad but so many times we walk out on a relationship with God to have a relationship with someone else. If you stay with God, He will help you to find someone who will be the perfect match for you. I have known the Lord to send a mate to someone that came from around the world just to meet them, and fall in love with them, marry them, and become their helper in serving God. God can find you the perfect person, just right for you. If you will let Him. By the way, which person will be the best match for you? Someone you meet at church, or someone you meet at a party? Let God lead you in your relationships.

5. *I have a lot of friends that won't understand if I got saved.* Let me share with you something that happened to me not long after I got saved. I was still trying to decide whether or not I should give up my friends. I was still hanging around with my old crowd, acting like my old self. Then one of my friends died. I knew that they died without God. I knew that they went to hell. I also knew that if I had been different I might have led them to the Lord before they died. You can't hang around with your old crowd, act like them, and make a difference in the lives of those you love.

How much do you really care about your friends: then stand up for what is right and let them see Jesus in you. Let them see something in your life that they want in their own lives. I had a dream back in those days that changed my life. I had been hanging around with my old crowd with the excuse that I wanted to help them to get saved. In my dream I was beside a river standing on a dock. My friends were drowning in the river. I had just gotten out of the water and I was still wet. I tried to pull one of them out, but since I was still wet I slipped and fell in and drowned with them. If I had waited until I had dried off, I wouldn't have slipped and fell in. I could have then pulled all of them out. We have to grow up in God and mature before we can help others. We have to know where we stand ourselves and stand there firm before we can pull out other people. There is a lesson in this. Care enough for your friends that you grow in God until they see Jesus in you. Then they will want what you have in your life.

6. *Everybody will think that I'm weird.* Oh come on, think about this a minute. The other day a guy told me that his friend had gotten in trouble at the public school. It was because he had gotten in a fight. What had started it? A boy with blue hair had tried to kiss him. And you are

afraid that standing up for Jesus and for what is right is weird? I see kids that dress all in black with black make up and fingernails. I see kids with blue and orange hair standing up on end. I see kids with so many ear rings and piercings, and tattoos that they look like something out of a National Geographic jungle cruise, and you are afraid by doing right that people will think you are weird. Anything goes. I have heard of orgies going on in the public school locker room. I have heard of satanic rites that some kids hold in graveyards. I have heard of parties where you name it, it goes. And you are afraid of standing up for what is right because if you do people will think you are weird? You are right about one thing. Most of the people around you will not be walking in this direction. We already talked about this. But just because most of the people are going to hell, does that mean that you need to join them?

7. *I don't have time. I can't go to church. I have too many other things to do.* Everybody is busy these days. I want to direct this one not only to teens but also to parents. I talk to a lot of people who say that they don't have time to serve God. They don't have time to go to church. They are too busy. Everything else in their life has a higher priority.

Then they come into my office really torn up because someone in their family has gotten into the wrong crowd and messed up their life. The problem started when the parents became too busy to be sure that their child had a right crowd of the right people, in church. Parents, sometimes we can get too busy to do what is right for our children. Too busy to be parents. Too busy to get our kids headed in the right direction with the right people. Then we act like it is all our kid's faults when they fall into the wrong crowd going in the wrong direction. If we don't establish a right direction, what other direction do we expect them to take? This is for both parents' and kids. Up is the best direction to take. When you just go with the flow, down is where you naturally roll. Decide which is the most important. What you have as a priority will be the thing that you spend the most time with. Dare to let God be number one in your life.

8. *My family won't understand. They aren't Christians.* I can remember the first time that I asked my Dad to go to church with me. I was so little that I crawled up on his lap to ask him. He said no. My mother took us to church when I was growing up. My Dad didn't go. We still went, even though he didn't go. All

my life, we went but Dad didn't go. I prayed for him to give his heart and life to the Lord for many years. There were times when I'd almost give up, but something would happen that would give me hope to keep praying again. When I was in my late thirties, my Mom called to tell me that Daddy had gotten saved. I am so glad that even though he didn't understand when I first started going to church, that I still went. Some of the most excited kids I have ever seen are ones who came in to tell me that they had led their parents to the Lord. If we do give our heart to the Lord, we will have one of the biggest influences on unsaved parents than anyone else in their lives. A word of advice here, if we come in and announce to our parents that we are saved, but we act like the very devil at home, then will we be a good influence on them? Here is a note to parents. I've had a lot of kids say, I would go to church, but my parent's won't take me. I wonder how many parents know that about their kids. They probably sit around at home thinking that there is no use to go because the kids won't go. Hey, when I was growing up nobody asked me if I wanted to go to church. My Mom expected it and we knew that there was no need to argue. Guess where we all are now. All my sisters and their families are in church.

Their children's kids are in church. There have been times when some of us may have headed in the wrong direction. But we always knew the right direction. After wandering around a bit we found the right direction. OK guys. I know this is supposed to be a book for students, not parents. But some of you are already parents. What direction are you leading those little ones? Be sure that they grow up in church so that they have a right direction to head for. The worst mistake you can make is this. I've heard lots of parents say, "I make sure that I put my kids on the church bus Sunday and send them to church". When you send your kids to church, but you don't go that only makes them feel that it isn't important enough for you to go. Why should they go? Is that really showing them a direction that they need to take?

10. *I don't know what I believe in enough to stand up for it.* Sometimes we don't know which direction to take because we haven't grown up going in the right direction. It wasn't hard for me to know which direction because I grew up headed in the right one. Yes, there are a lot of different beliefs out there. I wish that I could say that every Christian believes the same thing, but that isn't true. How did we come up with so many



different beliefs? God had very little to do with all that. Denominations are man made. They came about because people couldn't get along and agree. How do you know which way to believe? Be sure that you read the Bible. Let God's Spirit lead you and teach you. Let Him lead you to the right church. He can show you where you need to go. There are some denominations that are dangerous that you need to stay away from. There are certain things that we have to believe in. One is that Jesus was born of a virgin, meaning that God is His Father. Another is that Jesus was crucified. He died for us to forgive us of our sins, and that He was resurrected from the dead. That we will all be resurrected from the dead to live eternally in either heaven or hell, whichever one we have chosen to live in. That we can be saved by accepting Jesus as Lord of our life, by asking Him to forgive us, and by asking Him to come into our heart. That through the Holy Spirit He comes into our heart to help us to live a Christian life. That we will be forgiven if we ask God to forgive us. We don't have to go to anyone but Him. Jesus died to forgive us. There is a right and there is a wrong. The Bible sets standards for these. God's Spirit will convict our hearts of wrong. He will let us know when we are doing wrong if we

listen to Him. Jesus died to forgive us and we should never take that for granted. We should never get the attitude that it is Ok to sin because we know that He will forgive us. We need to know that there is a right direction and God can show us what that is. He loves us enough to keep us in that right direction if we only listen to Him. I have enclosed with this a copy of the statement of faith for our ministry. It shows what we believe in and gives scripture for each.

*Declaration of Faith--We Believe*

*The Bible to be the inspired Word of God. 2 Peter 1:20-21*

*In one God manifesting Himself in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. I John 5:7*

*That Jesus was born by a virgin birth. Matthew 1:20-23*

*That Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. John 3:16.*

*Jesus was crucified, and shed His own blood for our sin. Matthew 27:35.*

*That Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and has ascended to heaven, to the right hand of the Father. Matthew 28:6; Hebrews 12:2*

*In the bodily return of Jesus; first, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to Him in the air. Second, to reign on the earth a thousand years.*

*I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelations 20:6*

*In the bodily resurrection, eternal life with God in heaven for the righteous, and eternal punishment and torment in hell for the wicked. John 14:3; Psalms 9:17*

*That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and for one to be saved, that they must repent of their sins, confess with their mouth, the Lord Jesus, and must believe in their heart that God has raised Him from the dead. Romans 3:23; Romans 10:9-10*

*That one must be born again to inherit eternal life. John 3:3-6*

*In sanctification; by the blood, the Word, and by the Spirit. John 17:19-22*

*In Bible Holiness. Hebrews 12:14*

*The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance to be the initial evidence. Acts 2:4; Acts 2:38-39*

*In the nine gifts of the Holy Ghost for the believer. I Corinthians 12:7-11*

*That signs shall follow them that believe. Mark 16:16-20*

*That a Christian must have the fruits of the Spirit and love for the brethren.  
Galatians 5:22-23; I John 3:14-15*

*In water baptism by immersion in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost through the name of Jesus. Matthew 28:19-20 ; Acts 2:38*

*That one cannot join the church of Jesus Christ, but must be born into the church.  
Acts 2:47*

*Divine healing for the believer provided for in the atonement. I Peter 2:24*

*In the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints feet. I Corinthians 11:23-26;  
John 13:4-5*

*In the deity of Jesus. He is the Word that was made flesh. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and is alive for evermore. John 1:14 ;  
Revelation 1:18*

## **Chapter 14.**

### **I Guess It's Up To You Now**

It is kind of like when you were a kid. Remember that Lego set that you had. You had all the pieces you needed to make something really neat. Sometimes you made something that fit together really good. It stayed together no matter what. Sometimes, though, you didn't use all the right pieces. Before you could get everything together, it all fell to pieces. I pray that this book has helped you to get some of the right legos to help you build a strong life that will hold together no matter what happens. I hope that it helps you to understand some things that maybe you didn't understand before. And through understanding these things you find some strong building blocks for your life. I hope most of all that it introduces you to Jesus so that you can find His love. I hope that you can find His purpose for your life. I guess that the rest is up to you now. If we aren't careful we can just drift through life. We can fall into things and fall out of them. We can fail to put effort into the things that are the most important while trivial things eat up all our times. We know the right path to take, but if we aren't careful we can just travel in circles because at the times it seems easier.

The Bible talks about a man who was a mess. He looked in the mirror at his dirty face, his hair standing up on end. He thought to himself, "I am a mess." But he didn't stop long enough to straighten up his hair or wash his

face. If we aren't careful we can be like that man. We can listen to powerful words that can change our life, and never change anything. We can hear God's Word and never take it to heart. It won't do us any good. We can hear about how Jesus can be our best friend, but if we never ask Him to come into our heart and we never get to know Him, then how can He change our life. There is an old saying, talk is cheap. Action counts. Now that you know what you know, what are you going to do about it? I guess it is all up to you now. We have all the legos, but if we don't use them, and if we don't put them together right, we'll just have a mess.

Sometimes life is like a trip. We can get a map that is up to date with all the right roads. We can plan out our trip and mark the easiest route on our map. Then we can start out on our journey. What if we fold that map out and never look at it again. We could wind up in some strange territory. We could get lost and wander around for days. We could get on some roads that are so rough that we tear the bottom out of our vehicle just driving down them. We can run around in circles until we just give up and go home, back to where we started from, and never get anywhere. Or we can take out our map and follow the directions carefully. We can take all the right roads and arrive at our destination safe. God gives us a map to follow with our lives. He sets things up to help us as we go along. He has set up the church to lift us up and help us along. He set up His Word to

guide us like a faithful sign pointing always in the right direction. He sends us His Spirit to live in our heart to give us strength to travel and to point us in the right direction. He sent His Son Jesus to die so that when we get on sin's detour we can always find the right route again. I guess after all that there is only one thing left to say. The rest is up to you. I pray that when I get to heaven one day, that you'll be there, too.

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