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SIMPLE STEPS TO KNOWING GOD

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DEDICATION

God has blessed me with opportunities to share the truths of this book in many parts of the world. I have been thrilled to watch young people throughout Europe and Africa respond to these truths. I have observed many lives being changed.

I dedicate this book to those who have given me the opportunity to share and to those who have received these truths. I am especially grateful for the opportunities given to me by YOUTH WITH A MISSION and TEEN CHALLENGE.

It is my heart's desire that this simple book will continue to change lives everywhere it is read.

May God richly bless all of you who have blessed me!

Mel

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who have encouraged me to write this book. I am grateful for all of them. I want to list just a few here:

- My wife Verna has stood beside me and encouraged me in ministry for sixty-four years. Her encouragement and prayers have sustained me. When I felt like quitting, she was there to urge me to continue.
- My daughter Kay Morales and her husband Ed have always encouraged me to write. Their support has been of great value to me.
- My five grandchildren and their mates, whether they know it or not, have been an encouraging factor in this process.
- All those who have communicated to me that my past books have been a blessing in their lives.
- Thanks to Shirley Swagerty and Ken Harris for help with editing and layout skills.
- Finally, but never the least, I acknowledge that without God's help this book would never have been written!

PART I

Essential Knowledge Of God

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

PSALM 9:10 (NIV)

CHAPTER ONE



Our Destiny

To truly know God and to effectively lead others into such a relationship, it is necessary to understand what God has planned for our lives. This is OUR DESTINY.

Let's look at what the Old and New Testaments reveal about our DESTINY.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Then God said, "let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals" (Genesis 1:26).

God's purpose for the people he created was for them to live in and be the masters of all that he made. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, man's destiny was ruined and God removed them from the role of master of his creation. Instead man was subject to God's judgment. Now man was faced with a continual struggle against Satan and the world in which he lived (Genesis 3:15–19).

In Genesis chapter 12 we see that God is choosing Abram to be the father of his people and the channel through which God's destiny for man would be realized. Then the Lord told Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the

father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1–3). Three more times in the book of Genesis God affirms his promise to Abram (Genesis 13:14–17; 15:1–5; 17:1–8).

God's promise to Abram was sure to be fulfilled. Unfortunately Abram's (now Abraham), descendants were not faithful to God as Abraham was. The Old Testament is the story of God's people living a life that never fulfilled their DESTINY. It is a story best described as a people who followed a defeating cycle. They would SIN and then God would send them into exile where they were slaves of others. In their slavery they would be sorry and cry out to God for deliverance. Then God would be merciful and send them help. They never seemed to be able to fulfill God's expectations. God's prophets came with strong messages of judgment and also hope for the future. Some of these prophets revealed the true nature of God's people.

MOSES said, "Israel is a nation that lacks sense; the people are foolish, without understanding. Oh, that they were wise and could understand this! Oh, that they might know their fate" (Deuteronomy 32:28–29).

JEREMIAH wrote, Jerusalem has sinned greatly, so she has been tossed away like a filthy rag. All who once honored her now despise her, for they have seen her stripped naked and humiliated. All she can do is groan and hide her face. She defiled herself with immorality with no thought of the punishment that would follow. Now she lies in the gutter with no one to lift her out (Lamentations 1:8–9).

The prophet Malachi in the last book of the Old Testament gives us a sad commentary on God's Chosen People.

The Lord Almighty says to the priests: "A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. I am your father and master, but where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have despised my name!" (Malachi 1:6).

You have wearied the Lord with your words (Malachi 2:17).

There are also words of hope given by the prophets. Words that suggest that God still loves his people and that they will ultimately fulfill their DESTINY.

MALACHI

"Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:5–6).

ISAIAH

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will soon be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles. which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light—a light that will shine on all who live in the land where death casts its shadow. Israel will again be great, and its people will rejoice as people rejoice at harvest time. They will shout with joy like warriors dividing the plunder. For God will break the chains that bind his people and the whip that scourges them, just as he did when he destroyed the army of Midian with Gideon's little band. In that day of peace, battle gear will no longer be issued. Never again will uniforms be bloodstained by war. All such equipment will be burned. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace. His ever-expanding, peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David. The passionate commitment of the Lord Almighty will guarantee this (Isaiah 9:1–7).

JEREMIAH

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me. I will be found by you," says the Lord (Jeremiah 29:11–14).

God NEVER gave up on man. As we end the OLD Testament on words of hope, we are propelled into the New Testament where we witness God's provision for man to fulfill his DESTINY.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament opens with the promises of the prophets Malachi and Isaiah being fulfilled.

Isaiah had spoken of John the Baptist when he said, "He is a voice shouting in the wilderness: prepare a pathway for the Lord's coming! Make a straight road for him!" (Luke 3:4).

Here is a sample of John's preaching to the crowds that came for baptism. "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment? Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God" (Luke 3:7–8).

God's angelic messengers introduced Jesus to the world. The first announcement is made to shepherds on a Judean hillside.

That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory

surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!" Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors" (Luke 2:8–14).

It was John the Baptist who introduced Jesus to the crowd. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Soon a man is coming who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before I did'" (John 1:29–30).

Our heavenly Father also introduced Jesus in Luke 3:21–22 with these words: One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you."

With this profound introduction Jesus begins his ministry. We quickly see that he has come to restore people to their rightful destiny. After Jesus experiences the devil's temptation he goes into the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read from the prophet Isaiah's writing in the 61st chapter.

This is what he read that day: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come" (Luke 4:18–19).

When Jesus finished reading this Scripture he sat down and told everyone in the synagogue that "this Scripture has come true today before your very eyes" (Luke 4:21).

Immediately after this announcement, Jesus begins to *PREACH GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR*; he RELEASES THE CAPTIVES; he OPENS THE EYES OF THE BLIND; he FREES THE OPPRESSED; he announces that the *TIME OF THE LORD'S FAVOR HAS COME*.

In that familiar word found in John 3:16, Jesus promises that all who believe will have an intimacy with God and eternal life. John tells us that we can be a part of God's family. God will be our Father and Jesus our brother.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God (John 1:12–13).

Jesus chooses twelve men to be his intimate companions and to be later called apostles, men sent with his message to restore men to right relationship with God and to fulfill their destiny. When Jesus comes to the end of his earthly ministry he makes it clear that he wants all BELIEVERS to be a part of the restoration of man's destiny. He makes this obvious in the following passages:

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20).

When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right

hand. And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked with them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs (Mark 16:19–20).

"But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

It is Jesus who has defined our destiny and provided us with the instructions and means to fulfill it. Both the apostle Paul and Peter help us to more clearly see this destiny in a practical sense.

God's purpose was to show his wisdom in all its rich variety to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, they will see this when Jews and Gentiles are joined together in his church. This was his plan from all eternity and it has now been carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:10–11).

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

This theme winds its way all through the Bible. It is seen from Genesis through the book of Revelation. In Revelation we are told that our DESTINY will be fully realized when God's kingdom has come at the end of the age.

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years (Revelation 20:6).

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a

commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. So comfort and encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).

The glorious destiny that God has planned for us both here on earth and for eternity in heaven is dependent on our relationship with God. It is insufficient for us to have mere head knowledge of God. He invites us into an intimate relationship with him.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel said that the people who know their God will be strong (Daniel 11:32).

The psalmist David said that those who know your name trust in you (Psalm 9:10).

In the book of the prophet Isaiah we read that he received a personal revelation of the person of God that totally changed his life and ministry. At the end of his experience he offered himself to answer God's call (Isaiah 6:1–8).

In the New Testament the apostle Paul prays that the Christians in Ephesus will receive a new and deep revelation of God.

I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God (Ephesians 1:16–17).

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love.

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God (Ephesians 3:16–19).

The objective of the Gospels and Epistles is to bring us to an indepth knowledge of God so that we can realize the DESTINY that God has planned for us. The question that many ask is, "Can we really know God?" God's WORD will answer that question in the chapters that follow.

God has put a desire and need in our hearts to KNOW HIM. I have discovered that wherever I teach in the world this message resonates in the heart of the listeners. I have seen Africans respond with tears. All across Europe I have had both men and women respond by seeking to know God with all of their hearts. There is a God-given desire in us that needs to be awakened. HE IS WAITING for us to respond.

More than fifty years ago my wife, our little daughter and I were young missionaries to Liberia, West Africa. We were assigned to work and live among the Jeadepo tribe about three days' walk into the jungle. We were excited to live among and work with these precious people.

A few months after our arrival, while we were taking our afternoon siesta, there was a rap on our door. We were told that there was an elderly woman at our door who wanted to KNOW GOD. We eagerly went to our front piazza to meet this lady.

Our first view was of a person who was very wrinkled, with grey hair and dressed only in a loin cloth. When I looked into her face I saw emptiness. Her eyes had a faraway look to them. She seemed to be searching for something. Our hearts went out to her. When she was asked if she knew God, she replied, "I have been looking for God. I have looked everywhere. I have even been to church, but I can't find him." We eagerly shared with her that God was looking for her too. We then told her the simple story of the coming of Jesus to bring her salvation and to introduce her to her heavenly Father. I asked her if she wanted to invite Jesus into her heart and she replied with an enthusiastic yes. I then led her in the sinner's prayer and watched as the tears ran down her cheeks and she trembled in God's presence.

We were so excited and blessed to witness this salvation. However, when I asked her how she felt, she replied that she didn't feel anything. I was disappointed with her reply and wondered what to do next.

In the next few moments the Lord dropped his strategy into my mind. I asked her why she cried when we prayed together. She replied that she didn't know. I then told her that she cried because when she asked Jesus into her heart, he came in and touched her emotions. She then asked me if it was Jesus who caused her to tremble when we were praying. I told her, yes. Immediately her eyes showed life, hope and joy. She dropped to her knees and began to thank both God and us for what had just happened. She got up from the floor and walked from door to door in the village telling everyone she met that she had found God. Her seeking heart, and a loving and seeking God had met and her life was forever changed. She often came to greet us and thank us for leading her to God. I believe that God's destiny for her has been fulfilled.

CHAPTER TWO



God Pursues Us

In chapter one we looked at the DESTINY God has for man. We saw that it was God's plan from creation that man

- Would rule over his creation.
- Would enjoy an intimate relationship with God.
- Would have the assurance of eternal life.
- Would have the responsibility and privilege of sharing the Good News.
- Would ultimately reign with Christ (Revelation 20:6).

We saw the Old Testament close on two notes. First of all there is the note of the FAILURE of God's people to appreciate, accept and fulfill their DESTINY. In the second place we saw that God offered his people hope for the future. For hundreds of years the people saw nothing of significance regarding the fulfillment of God's promise to them. When the New Testament opens, God's angels, John the Baptist, and God himself announce that the way for the DESTINY of man to be fulfilled has come. We also saw that the DESTINY of man is linked to man's relationship with God.

Many years ago two books greatly influenced my life as I began to have a desire to know God in a more intimate way. *The Pursuit Of God,* and *The Knowledge Of The Holy* by A.W. Tozer greatly affected my life. *The Secret Of A Happy Christian Life* by Hannah

Whitall Smith was a book that significantly touched my wife's life. As the result of the influence of these books, we were put on the path of coming to know God more intimately. We are still on that path more than forty years later.

The message of the Bible has as its goal for man to come to know God intimately. Read again Daniel 11:32–33, Proverbs 2:1–5, Isaiah 6:1–8, and Ephesians 1:17–21. These passages show us God's heart for us. If we are to fulfill the DESTINY that God has planned for us we must come into an intimate relationship with God. We are aware that the original intimacy that man had with God was lost in the Garden of Eden. What we need to see is that it is God who is pursuing us in order to restore our relationship with him.

In the book of Genesis we read that Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and disobeyed God. After their disobedience, their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked. They immediately covered their nakedness with leaves and then hid themselves so that God wouldn't see them. In Genesis 3:8–9 we read these words:

Toward evening they heard the Lord God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. The LORD GOD CALLED TO ADAM, "WHERE ARE YOU?"

Adam and Eve are like all who have sinned against God. They were hiding from God. They heard the Lord walking in the garden but didn't want to face him. God could have written them completely off at this point, but instead he is calling their names. He is PURSUING them.

In Psalm 19:1–3 we read that it is God who is PURSUING us. The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after

night they MAKE HIM KNOWN. They speak without a sound or a word; their voice is silent in the skies, yet their message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to all the world.

The apostle Paul further highlights the concept that God is PURSUING us.

From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God (Romans 1:20).

His PURSUIT of man is clearly seen in his dealings with Israel. He speaks personally to Abraham (Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17). He also PURSUES Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. Later he chooses Joshua, Gideon and many others to come close to him. Throughout the books of the Kings, Chronicles and 1 and 2 Samuel, it is God lovingly PURSUING his people.

God calls and uses special men called prophets to appeal to his people to repent and to follow him. Here are some of their words: "Come now, let us argue this out," says the Lord. "No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

This is what the Lord says; "O Israel, my faithless people, come home to me again, for I am merciful. I will not be angry with you forever. Only acknowledge your guilt. Admit that you rebelled against the Lord your God" (Jeremiah 3:12–13).

The prophet Ezekiel tells the story of how God allows circumstances to come into the lives of his people so that they will wake up and turn to him. More than fifty times he writes these words: *Then they will know that I am the Lord.*

In Micah 6:3 you can hear the heart of God for his creation. "O my people what have I done to make you turn from me?"

The Scriptures that I have cited are just a few of the many that tell us that it is God who is PURSUING us. He desires us to have an intimate relationship with him so that we can fulfill the destiny that he has prepared for us.

The message of God's PURSUIT of us is even clearer and more personal in the New Testament. The Gospel of John tells us that God became flesh and lived among us. Jesus, who is God, came to make the Father known to us (John 1:18). Jesus said that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father (John 14:9); (Hebrews 1:1–3).

God has also given us his inspired and written Word. The Word PURSUES us and equips us to fulfill our destiny. The apostle Paul makes this very clear in 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

Jesus teaches us that when we believe the gospel and invite him into our lives we will receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *another counselor (John 14:16)*. Jesus declares that *it is for our good that he left this earth*. Why? Because God the Holy Spirit would live in us to minister to us and through us (John 16:7).

It is very apparent from God's perspective that he is desiring us to come close to him so that he can bring us into a relationship that fulfills his destiny for us. Is there anything that he asks us to do? Indeed there is.

It is God's desire that we would respond to his pursuit of us by turning around and seeking him. Solomon's words to his child in Proverbs 2:1–5 show us what God desires of us.

My child, listen to me and treasure my instructions. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure. Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God.

Moses gives a similar message to Israel.

From there you will search again for the Lord your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him (Deuteronomy 4:29).

The prophet Isaiah tells his listeners to seek the Lord (Isaiah 55:6).

The prophet Amos preaches, come back to the Lord and live (Amos 5:4–6).

Jesus is very clear with this message when he tells us to "seek the kingdom of God first." (Matthew 6:33).

The psalmist demonstrates over and over again the kind of response God is looking for from his people. Here are just a few of them.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and stand before him? (Psalm 42:1–2).

O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord. With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God (Psalm 84:1–2).

I long for the Lord more than sentries long for the dawn, yes, more than sentries long for the dawn (Psalm 130:6).

There were many throughout Scripture and history that responded to God's pursuit of them. Listen to the apostle Paul's heart:

I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:7–11).

It is very apparent from reading Paul's epistles that he had responded to God's pursuit of him with his whole heart. From 1966 to 1970, my family and I were missionaries in The Republic of South Africa. During those years of ministry my wife experienced a deep longing in her heart to know God more intimately. This desire began to consume her heart and thoughts. When we returned to the United States in 1970, this longing continued to grow in her. I was not aware of what was happening in her heart. I was very busy in ministry that I made my priority.

In 1971 we moved to California to be near our daughter and to

be involved in a very alive church. It was a church full of hungry people and where every Sunday people were coming to Christ. My wife's desire for God only increased in this atmosphere.

I returned home one day from my travels to find her weeping uncontrollably. I was very concerned and asked her what was wrong. She couldn't answer me, so I asked her many questions that she could answer by the shake of her head. The children were fine. Her Dad was not ill. She wasn't sick. I hadn't done anything to cause her grief. When she could talk she told me something that would have a great influence on my life and ministry. She said that when I was away she would often walk about the house working and weeping. She told me that when I was home she would go into the bathroom and run the water in the shower and toilet to drown out the noise of her crying. I asked, "But why?" She told me that all she knew is that she had a deep hunger in her heart to KNOW GOD. I didn't get it. I knew that she was God's child. She was working alongside of me in ministry and she loved the Lord. What more is there to know? Yet here she was weeping and crying out to know God more intimately.

That incident took place over forty years ago. Both of us have been on the path of drawing nearer to God ever since. He continues to pursue us and we in turn are seeking him. When his children respond to his pursuit by seeking him, something wonderful happens. Our lives are forever changed.

God is the PURSUER. He wants an intimate relationship with you. Out of the relationship will come the fulfilling of your destiny.

CHAPTER THREE



We Can Know God

In our last chapter we learned that God greatly desires that we know him in a personal and intimate way. We discovered that God is actually actively pursuing and inviting us into a close relationship with himself. It is also true that he desires us to respond to him by turning and seeking him. We looked at several examples of people who responded to God and who came to truly know him.

It is important to understand what the term KNOWING GOD means in a practical sense. There are many people who doubt that a human being can ever really know God. They feel that we can know some things about him, but never have an intimate relationship with him.

The Bible teaches that it is possible to have such a relationship with God. We likely will have to have our concept of God expanded. When it is, our destiny is being fulfilled.

God Is A Person

Because we can't see God, our concept of him is limited to a human being like ourselves or to a ghostlike being far removed from us. The Bible clearly attributes the traits of personality to God. The three traits that make us persons are intellect, will and emotion. We will see that God has all three of these traits.

In Genesis chapter one we see God's INTELLECT at work. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. In verse 26 of Genesis chapter one God said, "Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves." In verse 27 we read, so God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself. When we look at the achievements of man in the Arts and Sciences we are amazed. In the area of technology it is almost impossible to grasp the speed at which things are improved and changed. Man is proud of his intellectual achievements. It is obvious from the Scriptures that we have quoted that God is the source of all INTELLECT. In Job chapter 38 God makes it clear to Job that God is the supreme INTELLECT of the universe. Is God a person?

There is overwhelming evidence that God has a WILL. He makes decisions and initiates actions just as we do every day. The psalmist said *I know the greatness of the Lord—that our Lord is greater than any other god. The Lord does whatever pleases him throughout all heaven and earth, and on the seas and in their depths (Psalm 135:5–6).* In Genesis chapter one we observe God's WILL in action. Ten times we read, *God said* and then see creation happening. Throughout all of the Old Testament we see God at work among His chosen people Israel. He calls and equips leaders. He gives them his laws to follow. He leads them on a daily basis and calls them to accountability. His WILL is seen throughout the Bible. Is God a person?

When we look at the third trait that makes up a person, we sometimes can't imagine that EMOTION could possibly be attributed to God. May I remind you that we have emotion and we are created in his image? The Bible clearly shows us that God does have EMOTION and that he expresses it.

 Moses said, "but the Lord was angry with me because of you" (Deuteronomy 3:26). From this passage and many others we see that God expressed anger when his created beings rejected and disobeyed him.

- In Genesis 6:5–6 we see that God expresses sorrow. Now the Lord observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil. So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them. It broke his heart. It is incredible to realize that the God of the universe could sorrow over disappointment just as we do.
- It is also great to know that God experiences and expresses joy. Nehemiah told his people to stop weeping because it was a sacred day. He then told them to go and celebrate with a feast of choice foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength (Nehemiah 8:9–10). The prophet Zephaniah made this announcement to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! For the Lord your God has arrived to live among you. He is a mighty savior. He will REJOICE over you with GREAT GLADNESS. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs" (Zephaniah 3:16–17).

It is quite obvious that God has the traits of personality. He is a person and we, who are created in his image, are persons. It is inherent in persons that we can know each other. I can know you because we are both persons. It is equally true that because God is a person he can know us and we can know him.

There Are Different Levels Of Knowing A Person

In my thinking there are at least four levels of knowing another person. I believe that these four levels not only apply to our relationships with one another, but also with God.

 There is the INTRODUCTION LEVEL. This is when we meet someone and are introduced. We KNOW their names. We KNOW what they look like. We KNOW where they live. We KNOW what they do. This is all very basic information. We might think that we KNOW the person, but it is very superficial at best. When we are introduced to God by coming into a relationship with His Son Jesus, we are at this level. It is good and important but really only a beginning.

- Then there is the SOCIAL LEVEL. On this level we become somewhat friendly. We may go out to eat together, play games, attend social functions and go to church. After we are introduced to Christ, we move on to this level where we have a time of personal interaction with God by reading his Word and spending time worshiping and praying. This is real progress in our coming to know God and it is necessary.
- The next level is the GOOD FRIEND LEVEL. This is where we become close friends with someone. We enjoy their company and want to spend a lot of time with them. In the Old Testament we have the example of Jonathan and David. They were very close friends and made a deep commitment to each other. As Christians this level is seen by enjoying being with other Christians and loving to worship the Lord together. It is a vibrant and growing relationship.
- There is another level that few seem to attain in their walk with God. It is that INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP with God. The prophet Daniel told his people that there was a time coming when they would be faced with great difficulties, but that there would be a way to overcome. But the people who know their God will be strong (Daniel 11:32). The Hebrew word used here for know is the same word that is used in the book of Genesis where we are told that Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived a child. The word describes the most intimate relationship that two people on earth can have. It is talking about the marriage relationship where two people become one

physically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. This is the ideal in a marriage and certainly God's ideal for us in our relationship with him.

Getting To Know God Is A Process

The process of coming to know God begins like any other relationship where we are introduced to a person. The process continues by the gathering of facts and a time of interaction. Finally the two enter into a covenant relationship where they are one. Let me illustrate the process from my own relationship with my wife.

When I was a student in Bible college I was actively looking to find a suitable life partner. No one had ever told me how to do this in a godly way, so I did what I guessed every other young man did. I looked for someone that appealed to my senses. When I first saw her, I liked the way she looked and became very interested in knowing her better. After some weeks I got up the courage to ask her for a date. We went on an outing together with another couple. We spent the whole day together. We walked and we talked and enjoyed each other's fellowship. During that day we shared all about our families and friends. By the end of the day we were experiencing the emotions that two young people falling in love felt. I felt as if I certainly knew this young lady. We continued this relationship for several months and got to know each other as good friends. The time came when I was sure that she was the one that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. When I asked her to marry me, she responded with an enthusiastic YES. I was elated. (So was she.) A few months later we were married and began our lives together. Now we were embarking on the INTIMATE level. This is the level that Daniel talked about. It is more than a sexual experience. It is coming to KNOW the other person spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. I soon discovered that there were many things that I didn't really know about her. She made the same discovery

about me. Our preferences weren't the same. I didn't measure up to her father as a man. She really didn't cook as well as my mom. It was a time for us to adjust and to truly get to know and appreciate each other. After we were married about ten years, I did something that caused her to say, "I don't think I will ever get to know you." I thought the same about her. This has happened several times through the years. Now here it is over sixty years later and she never says that any more. She may think it, but I doubt it. We are at that stage where we seem to know what each other is thinking. In fact we now seem to be so much one that the differences have disappeared. We KNOW each other. We LOVE each other and appreciate who we are in Christ.

This is also a very real process in our relationship with God. It is a daily growing relationship. Just as it takes time to know another person, it takes time to truly KNOW God. Sudden revelations are rare. It is a lifetime of experience walking with God. There are the good times and the hard times. Job had good times and hard times. Here's what he said at the end of his testing: "I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You ask, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I. And I was talking about things I did not understand, things far too wonderful for me. You said, 'Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.' I had heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance" (Job 42:1–6).

Hopefully you will be able to come into a close relationship with God without going through the kind of testing that Job experienced. As I reflect on my life with the Lord I can say that I have had many hard tests, but that the Lord has been with me through them all. It is great to KNOW him as an intimate friend.

Five Valuable Sources That Help Us To Know God

- The written Word of God. His Word reveals his character, his mind and his ways. It is essential that we spend time reading and meditating in his Word.
- God is known by many different Names in the Old Testament. Each of those names reveals something about God's character. Acquaint yourselves with these names and the circumstances that surround them.
- Study the four Gospels that tell us about the life and ministry of Jesus. The way that he lived here on earth demonstrates God's character to us.
- Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to come and live in us. The Holy Spirit was sent to be our comforter and teacher. He was sent to live in us permanently and to control our lives. We need to invite him to do his work in and through us.
- The fifth valuable source is Life Experience. Life happens. The apostle Paul said that we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them (Romans 8:28).

Remember that our destiny is to KNOW GOD. This is why he pursues us. I saw a church billboard in Sweeney, Texas one time that said, **THE GOD YOU KNOW IS THE GOD YOU SHOW.** That is a true statement. May God help you to represent his true character.

CHAPTER FOUR



Value In Knowing God

We have discovered that it is possible to know God in an intimate way and that it is something that he desires and pursues. Immediately the question that comes to mind is WHAT VALUE IS THERE IN KNOWING GOD IN THIS WAY? In this chapter we want to explore what the Bible has to say on this subject.

There is value both to God and us when we have a personal relationship with him. God has designed his creation to have a relationship with himself. It is therefore reasonable to believe that it brings him and all heaven great joy when his creation comes into a close encounter with him. Jesus told a story about a shepherd that left ninety-nine sheep in the fold and went out to look for one lost sheep. When he found that sheep there was a time of great rejoicing. Then Jesus said, in the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away (Luke 15:7). When you think of the cost of redemption you have to know that God in heaven rejoices over every one who turns to him.

While the value to God is infinite, there is also great value to those who come to know God. Look with me at what the prophet Daniel said about knowing God. He predicted that God's people would be faced with great difficulties in the future and then told them but the people that do know their God SHALL BE STRONG,

and DO EXPLOITS. And they that understand among the people SHALL INSTRUCT MANY (Daniel 11:32–33 KJV).

There are three things promised here to those who KNOW God intimately.

- THEY SHALL BE STRONG. The context of these verses tell us that this is a political and spiritual battle that they face. We, too, face great spiritual battles in our lives. Sometimes these battles overwhelm us and we feel helpless. In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus tells us that the storms will come and that only those who have a solid foundation will survive. That foundation is our secure relationship with God. In KNOWING God we become participants of his strength. The apostle John said, But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won your fight with these false prophets, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world (1 John 4:4). It is possible for us to stand strong in any spiritual battle when we truly KNOW God. The writer to the Hebrews gives us a long list of people who faced the greatest of difficulties with God's strength (Hebrews 11:32–40). We can pray the words of David in Psalm 18:1-3: I love you, you are my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise, for he saves me from my enemies. It is blessed assurance to know that we are not alone, but that our powerful God is with us and in us as we face life's battles.
- THEY SHALL DO EXPLOITS. This refers to taking risks for God and doing daring deeds. Throughout the Old Testament we read of common men who did great exploits. There is David, Joshua, Daniel and Elijah among others who acted in faith and saw great things accomplished.

Because they KNEW God they could trust him to help them do the impossible. Jesus said, the truth is, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the father (John 14:12). We often read of marvelous things that God does through Christians in third-world countries. There are reports of great healings and other miracles. I believe the reason that these things happen there is because these simple people are uncomplicated in their faith. If God said it, they believe it. I remember a time in South Africa when I was challenged to act on my professed knowledge of God. I was the guest in a small church in a rural community. At the close of the service a man approached me and asked if I could come to his home and pray for his child. I took several African brothers with me and went to his humble home. When I entered the house I saw the father holding a child of about three in his arms. The little one was comatose and hot with fever. I looked into the worried faces of the parents and began to feel their concern. I asked those with me to join in prayer for the healing of this little one. When I finished praying I was aware that as I touched the child's head the fever was gone. I then looked at the father and said, "You may put the child to bed now and he will sleep the rest of the day and wake up tomorrow well." When I later thought about what I had said. I wondered how I could make such a statement of hope. It was several days before I was able to make contact with the pastor regarding this incident. I anxiously asked him what had happened to that little boy we had prayed for. His answer overwhelmed me. He said, "It happened just as you said it would. The little boy slept through the night and woke up well in the morning." I was amazed! I shouldn't have been, because the God that I know is that kind of God. He IS the God of exploits. When we know him we learn to trust him and act on his leading.

• THEY WILL INSTRUCT MANY. I believe that this means that we will be able to speak with Christ's authority. The apostle Peter tells us to speak as though God himself were speaking through you (1 Peter 4:11). Jesus told his disciples that he had been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Then he said, Therefore, go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19). In John's gospel Jesus told his followers that he was sending them just as he had been sent. He has given us the authority to teach. He has also given us the subject material. We have God's message given to us in his Word. His Word is powerful to teach and change lives. We also have the privilege to instruct others by the way we live. He makes us who we are. We become his message to others.

When we truly know God we have the ability to SEE as God SEES. The prophet Isaiah makes it very clear in his writings that as human beings we don't see as God sees. "My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). From this passage we can readily see that we only see from a human viewpoint. In Matthew's gospel Jesus tells his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem where he would be killed. The very human Peter, took Jesus aside and corrected him. "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22). You can appreciate Peter's heart. He loved Jesus and wanted to defend him, just as we would also do. Jesus responded to what Peter said with these words: "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God's" (Matthew 16:23). Is it possible to actually see things from God's perspective? The apostle Paul apparently thought so. In his letter to the church at Colosse he shared his prayer for them. So you will understand that since we

heard about you we have never missed you in our prayers. We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from his point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding. We also pray that your outward lives, which men see, may bring credit to your master's name, and that you may bring joy to his heart by bearing genuine Christian fruit, and that your knowledge of God may grow yet deeper (Colossians 1:9–10; Phillips Translation). In another place Paul tells us that we HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST. When we truly know God and have an ongoing relationship with him, we have his Spirit living in us. The Holy Spirit in us gives us the ability (to discern) to see things from his point of view. The better we know him the more we think like him.

The apostle Peter declared that as we come to know Jesus, our God and Lord, better and better that we would be the recipients of *EVERYTHING WE NEED FOR LIVING A GODLY LIFE*. In his second epistle, chapter one and verses two through four, we are told what we can expect.

- May God bless you with his special favor (grace) and wonderful peace. In the midst of the daily trials of life it is wonderful to know that we HAVE God's favor on our lives. When we truly receive his favor it is inherent that we experience his peace. Every week I am faced with God's people who are stressed out because of life. They have a platonic relationship with God, but have never known him intimately. They come to me looking for help. Paul tells us in this passage that when we know God we are able to receive his grace and peace.
- As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us EVERYTHING we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive HIS own glory and goodness! What an amazing promise that is. We so often struggle to live a godly life feeling that we are nothing but failures. Here we are told that through our knowledge of God we will

- receive HIS own glory and goodness. Because we truly know his character we can patiently wait for his promise to us to be fulfilled. He doesn't call us into an IMPOSSIBLE relationship but into a very real and loving one.
- In verse four we are told that *you will share in his divine* nature. When we are born into this world we share the nature of the parents who gave us life. When we are born into God's family we carry in us the nature of God who gives us spiritual life. The thought is overwhelming. We, human beings, can and do actually share in the nature of God. The closer we come to him the better we understand who we are in Christ.

In Romans chapter eight, the apostle Paul shares with us God's provisions for us that bring GREAT STABILITY into our lives. Many of us live our Christian lives like we are on a roller coaster. We are up and down, but rarely stable. I want to share three things that Paul teaches us in this chapter.

GOD INTERCEDES FOR US. And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will (8:26-27). In the 34th verse we read that Jesus is also pleading for us. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us. It is incredible, but true. To KNOW God is to know that he is on our side. Paul sums it up in verse 31 when he says, what can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? He intercedes for us and is our FRIEND.

- GOD IS AT WORK IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF OUR LIVES. And we know that he causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them (8:28). I love this verse. When I look back at sixty years of ministry I see God at work in my every perceived disaster. He was there in devastating times of illness. He was there in a serious automobile accident. He was there in time of great sorrow in the loss of my daughter. He was there when those close to me inflicted pain and hurt on me. He actually brought GOOD to me out of each situation. I am so glad that we can know God in this way. He is IN CONTROL.
- GOD LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY. To say that there is a lack of true love in this world is a gross understatement. We have a whole generation of people who have not experienced the basic love of family. Consequently they are not able to pass on love that they haven't experienced. The people I counsel are crying out for someone to love them. In order to LOVE we need to experience love. We need to know that we are loved. When we come to truly KNOW God we will know what it means to be loved. In Romans 8:35–39 we see what we have in knowing God. Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? Even the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep." No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able

to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Talk about STABILITY. With our eyes focused on Him we are stable in all of our relationships, for he cares for us.

Isaiah, the prophet, tells us that God is different than we are. Most of the time we act and talk very human. Why not? We are human beings. All of us have a desire to act and talk in ways that please God. In order for us to be able to do that, we need to KNOW what God would want us to do and say. When we know someone intimately we can predict how that person will perform in almost any given situation. We desperately need to know God's character so that we will be able to live our lives in ways that will please him. Hear what God says about himself in Isaiah 55:8–9.

"My thoughts are completely different from yours," says the Lord, "and my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

When I meditate on that passage of Scripture I immediately think of all the things that I said and did that didn't reflect the Lord's ways and thoughts. We can't do anything about the past, but we can look at the NOW and take steps to know God better so that we act and talk like him. It is likely that some of our religious traditions may need to die. I know that our value system will need an overhaul. Let me be specific.

"How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things. Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:23–24). We are so

- selective in what we make important in our lives that we often miss God's ways. Selfishness is choosy.
- In Matthew 13 Jesus gives his disciples a living demonstration of the difference between their thinking and his. He, God's Son, humbles himself and serves the disciples by washing their dirty feet. Servant's work was below their social status. They were of the elite twelve. He sees us differently than we see ourselves. We think that we are ENTITLED to certain things, but Jesus, who was entitled to everything, teaches us that in his kingdom we are to serve.
- In Isaiah chapter 58 God shows us that RELIGION is not enough. They delighted to worship; to hear the law read and preached, fast regularly and to act piously. God was not pleased with them because you are living for yourselves even while you are fasting. You keep right on oppressing your workers. Selfish living cannot please God. We have to know God in such a way that we will live his kind of life. He looks for PRACTICAL Christianity. Worship services are great, but God is looking for people who will walk in his ways.
- In Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount we are taught God's thoughts and ways on almost every area of life. He shows us God's thoughts on anger, forgiveness, marriage, love, giving to the needy, prayer, fasting and judging others. As we meditate on his words we begin to assimilate some of his ways and thoughts.
- Luke chapter 15 shows us how God views those who have not yet heard the Good News of the gospel. Jesus shares his father's passion with the illustrations of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Son. Everything is secondary to finding the lost. Our eyes need to be opened to be able to see beyond our comfort zone and share God's heart for the lost.

It is his desire that we would be partakers of his divine wisdom and knowledge. It is then that we will walk and talk like him.

John chapter four is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. Jesus is in Samaria resting at Jacob's well where he has a conversation with a Samaritan woman who comes to draw water. In the course of the dialogue they talk about worship. The woman's tradition wasn't the same as what Jesus taught. She was concerned with where the worship should take place. Jesus was concerned about something far deeper than that. He said, "Believe me, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father here or in Ierusalem. You Samaritans know so little ABOUT THE ONE YOU WORSHIP, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming and IS ALREADY HERE when true worshipers will worship the Father IN SPIRIT and IN TRUTH. The Father IS LOOKING FOR ANYONE WHO WILL WORSHIP IN THAT WAY. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24). There are many opinions on the subject of worship. To some it has to do with style and to others position. Jesus taught us that the most important thing is that we KNOW the one we are worshiping and that he is the focus of our worship. Worship means to give WORTH to the object of our worship. While we do receive benefit from worship, worship is NEVER about us. It is all about HIM. When we observe the scenes of worship in Revelation chapters 1, 4, 5 and 7 we see that all of the heavenly hosts and the saints of the ages are bowed before the God of the universe crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy." The quality of our worship can only be measured by our love and devotion to God. The better you KNOW HIM the greater the worship will be.

The apostle Paul assigns some titles to God that provide further value to us.

• He is THE GOD OF PEACE Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Essential Knowledge Of God

- He is THE GOD OF HOPE Romans 15:13.
- He is THE GOD OF PATIENCE Romans 15:5.
- He is THE GOD OF COMFORT 2 Corinthians 1:3.
- He is THE GOD OF LOVE 2 Corinthians 13:11.

As we come to know God better we are partakers of his PEACE, HOPE, PATIENCE, COMFORT and LOVE.

In this chapter we have seen tremendous value to our lives when we truly know God. I believe it is also important for us to understand that the God who is pursuing us receives glory when we know him intimately. It is our destiny to GLORIFY GOD.

Remember: THE GOD YOU KNOW IS THE GOD YOU SHOW!

CHAPTER FIVE



God's Essential Attributes

"Who else among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is glorious in holiness like you—so awesome in splendor, performing such wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).

Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among his people? You cannot stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing mercy. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean! You will show us your faithfulness and unfailing love as you promised with an oath to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago (Micah 7:18–20).

In our last chapter we learned that there is much value for those who come to know God intimately. After we have become children of God, through faith in his son Jesus, it is necessary to know what God is like. God's Word is our primary source for getting to know God's attributes. The above quoted passages by Moses and Micah open our minds to what God is truly like. When you read Psalm 104 you become aware of the greatness of our God.

When I talk about God's ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES, I am speaking about those attributes that belong to God alone. They are not found in anyone else-only in him. As we look at these seven

attributes you will be awed by how great God is. It will also fuel the hunger in your heart to know God better. Our destiny is linked to how well we know God.

SELF-EXISTENT

When we say that God is self-existent we mean that God is uncreated. He has NO beginning and NO ending. Everyone else in this world has had a beginning and will have an ending. The Scriptures are clear that God is self-existent.

- *In the beginning–God* (Genesis 1:1).
- The Lord is the everlasting God (Isaiah 40:28).
- You are God without beginning and end (Psalm 90:2).
- *I am the one who always is* (Exodus 3:14).

Because everything I know has a beginning and an ending, I have difficulty in grasping how great God is. I need to have a special illumination of this truth.

SELF-SUFFICIENT

Human beings cannot exist without certain things. We are dependent on our environment and social structure for these needs to be met. We MUST have air, food, water, light, rest and love to exist. God is complete and needs no one and nothing apart from himself. Jesus and the apostle Paul make this truth clear for us.

- The Father has life in himself, and he has granted his Son to have life in himself (John 5:26).
- He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn't live in manmade temples, and human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need there is (Acts 17:24–25).

It is a fact that without water we would die in a short time. A baby left alone and unattended would only live a very short time. We are created to be dependent. Our God exists apart from anyone or anything.

INFINITE

We all live with many limitations in our lives. We are limited by TIME, ENERGY, SPACE and STRENGTH. The older we become, the more we are aware of our human limitations. When we say that God is INFINITE we mean that he has no limits. The psalmist David discusses this attribute of God in Psalm 139. He comes to the conclusion that there is no one like God. When Solomon dedicates the temple he built for God to dwell in, he says: "But will God really live on earth? Why, even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Since God is INFINITE, then it is true that there are no limits

- To his PRESENCE
- To his KNOWLEDGE
- To his LOVE
- To his POWFR
- To his WISDOM
- To his MERCY
- To his GRACE

Because the apostle Paul was a believer and follower of the Infinite God he could say, for I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need (Philippians 4:13).

IMMUTABLE

God's character will never change. The writer to the Hebrew Christians said, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). The apostle James taught us that, whatever is good

and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he NEVER CHANGES or casts shifting shadows (James 1:17). The psalmist further emphasizes this truth with these words: In ages past you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. Even they will perish, but you remain forever; they will wear out like old clothing. You will change them like a garment, and they will fade away. But you are always the same; your years never end (Psalm 102:25–27).

Because of his unchanging character we are able to depend on him in every situation and are assured that all of his promises will be fulfilled.

OMNISCIENT

All knowledge that exists emanates from God. He is the source of all knowledge. God's Word makes it very clear that God is Omniscient.

- O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. Too great for me to know (Psalm 139:1–6).
- From his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:6).

Because God has all knowledge, he has the answers to everything that we need to know. In a practical sense he knows everything there is to know about:

- Mathematics
- Language

- Science
- Chemistry
- History
- YOU and ME. Destruction is certain for those who try to hide their plans from the Lord, who try to keep him in the dark concerning what they do! "The LORD can't see us," you say to yourselves. "He doesn't know what is going on!" How stupid can you be? He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you. You are only the jars he makes! (Isaiah 29:15–16).

OMNIPOTENT

Everyone who believes in God is aware that he is powerful. There are times when we face difficulties and suddenly our view of his power is limited. We often face challenges that are beyond us and wonder if God IS ABLE to help us. Look at what his Word tells us about his power:

- The Lord merely spoke and the heavens were created. He breathed the word, and all the stars were born. He gave the sea its boundaries and locked the oceans in vast reservoirs (Psalm 33:6–7).
- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).
- The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord splits the mighty cedars (Psalm 29:4–5).
- "I am the LORD, the God of all peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27).
- "I am the almighty" (Genesis 17:1).

As we read God's Word we are aware that there are NO circumstances that are too difficult for him. Throughout the Old

Testament we see him doing what men thought were impossible things. Jesus tells us that the Omnipotent God is with us ALWAYS.

OMNIPRESENT

The God we serve tells us that there are no limits to his presence.

- "Am I a God who is only in one place?" asks the Lord. "Do they think I cannot see what they are doing? Can anyone hide from me? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?" asks the Lord (Jeremiah 23:23–24).
- The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me (Psalm 23:1–4).
- For in him we live and move and exist (Acts 17:28).

He is always and everywhere present. We can't always feel his presence, but he is everywhere around us and in us.

What a mighty God we serve! One of my favorite African songs was sung with gusto by our Liberian Christians. It went something like this: What a mighty God we serve; what a mighty God we serve; heaven and earth adore him; angels bow before him; what a mighty God we serve. They would sing it over and over again while worshipping with all of their hearts.

When Abraham's eyes were open to see God for who he is, he built an altar and worshipped.

When Moses found himself in God's presence he took off his shoes and humbly bowed before God.

Simple Steps To Knowing God

When Isaiah saw the Lord HIGH AND LIFTED UP he cried out "WOE is me."

In the book of Revelation all of the Elders and living creatures fell on their faces before the Lord and cried out "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY,"

When our eyes are opened to see the Lord high and lifted up we will join the saints of the ages on our faces in worshipping the Lord. It is our destiny here on earth to know the greatness of our God and to have his attributes reflected from our lives.



God's Names Teach Us About His Character

In the last chapter we looked at what I called the ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES of God. Before we look at the attributes that are personal and relate to us practically, I want to look at some of the names of God. The psalmist said that *those who know your name trust in you* (Psalm 9:10). Our English word *God* simply tells us that he is a supreme being, but little else. Names in the Bible often indicate something about the person's character.

- David means beloved.
- Paul means little.
- Peter means a small rock.
- Ruth means friendship.
- Samuel means asked of God.
- Jacob means deceiver.

While each of these names describe something about the person's character, they do not give us a complete picture of the person. Names have limitations. To know Moses we need to know him as shepherd, leader, legislator, soldier, statesman, meek, impulsive and educated. No one name can convey all of that. The same is true of David. We would need to know him as king, warrior, shepherd, prophet, poet and musician.

How could one name adequately describe God? There are

more than eighty names for God in the Bible. Each name tells us something significant about his person. Most of the names used for God come as a result of his dealings with man. I want to look at some of these names so that our knowledge of God will be expanded.

ELOHIM

The name Elohim comes from the root word *El* and speaks of God's creative power. It is in this name that we see the essential attributes that we studied earlier. Here we see his self-existence, his self-sufficiency and see that he is infinite. Elohim is the plural form of El. In the first chapters of Genesis the plural pronouns us and our are used. God said, "let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves" (Genesis 1:26).

This name is used 31 times in the first chapters of Genesis.

- *In the beginning Elohim created* (Genesis 1:1).
- *Elohim said, "let there be light"* (Genesis 1:3).
- Elohim said, "let there be space between the waters" (Genesis 1:6).

God's creative power is seen throughout Genesis chapter one as He speaks everything there is into existence. God's written word to us begins with the revelation of him as Elohim, the God of creative power.

We do not serve man, but Elohim. He wants us to know him as the God that no one else can compare to.

EL SHADDAI

This name is translated as ALMIGHTY GOD. It tells us that he is sufficient to meet every need that we could possibly have. The name El Shaddai comes out of a conversation that God has with

Essential Knowledge Of God

Abram in Genesis chapter 17. Abram is faced with an impossible situation. His faith is actually in crisis. He has personally received some great promises from God. Look at them with me:

- He was told that he would be the father of a great nation (Genesis 12:2).
- He was told that his seed would be as the dust of the earth for number (Genesis 13:14–16).
- Later he was told that his seed would be as the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:1–5).

The problem is that Abram is now an old man and has NO child. He believed God, BUT where was the fulfillment of the promise? Abram decides to try and help God. He suggests to God that he would be happy if Eliezer, his servant, might be considered his heir. God said, "NO." Then with his wife Sarai's help, he takes their servant girl Hagar as a wife and has a child with her. God made it clear that this son of Hagar was not the one he had promised Abram. Abram's efforts at helping God were futile. In Genesis chapter 17, God appears to Abram with another message. Abram is now ninety-nine years old and his wife Sarai is ninety. They are well past the age of child bearing. BUT listen to God's message. "I am the Lord God Almighty (El Shaddai); serve me faithfully and live a blameless life. I will make a covenant with you, by which I will guarantee to make you into a mighty nation." At this, Abram fell face down in the dust. Then God said to him, "I will make you the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations! What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations. I will give you millions of descendants who will represent many nations. Kings will be among them" (Genesis 17:1–6).

Then God added, "Regarding Sarai, your wife—her name will no longer be Sarai; from now on you will call her Sarah. And I will bless her and give you a son from her! Yes, I will bless her richly,

and she will become the mother of many nations. Kings will be among her descendants" (Genesis 17:15–16).

Both Abraham and Sarah laughed at such news. Their reaction was, **IMPOSSIBLE!**

God responds by giving them the name of Isaac for the promised child.

Abraham and Sarah would soon understand the significance of that name, El Shaddai. The name was significant to them and to us. We have seen that the first part of the name, EL tells us that he is the creative God, the God of the IMPOSSIBLE. The second part of the name is equally significant. The Hebrew word *SHAD* refers to the female breast. God is telling Abraham and Sarah that he is the MIGHTY BREASTED ONE. The picture is that of a caring mother holding her newborn securely to her breast. There the little one is nourished, protected, comforted and assured of her love and gentleness. EVERYTHING that the newborn needs to exist comes from the mother.

God is telling them and us that he is the ALMIGHTY BREASTED ONE. He is totally sufficient for all of our needs. There is nothing impossible for him and he is assuring us that we can fully trust him.

In Genesis chapter 21 you can hear the cry of the promised baby Isaac. He is still EL SHADDAI. There is nothing too difficult for him.

JEHOVAH

The name Jehovah means TO BE or to HAVE BEING. It speaks of essential life. It is translated LORD in the Bible nearly 6,823 times. The name Jehovah is used with other names to teach us specific things about his character.

Essential Knowledge Of God

This name is first seen in a conversation God has with Moses. God has given Moses the task to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. He asks God what name he should use when he tells the Israelites that the God of their ancestors has sent him. Let's pick up the conversation in the book of Exodus between God and Moses.

God replied, "I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS. Just tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said, "Tell them, 'the LORD, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This will be my name forever; it has always been my name, and it will be used throughout all generations" (Exodus 3:14–15).

This name is not derived from God's works, but teaches us his substance. He has ALWAYS existed as LORD.

This name was also a very personal name and highly revered by the people. They held it in such esteem that they wouldn't speak it. The Hebrew word for Jehovah was YAWEH. They removed the vowels from the name and simply made it the unpronounceable word YHWH. When referring to Jehovah, the Rabbis would simply say THE NAME. The scribes would only use a new quill when writing the name. Immediately after writing the name they would destroy the quill. The name JEHOVAH was highly revered.

This name tells us that Jehovah is the God of Moral and Spiritual attributes. He is shown to be the God of Love who is ever seeking to restore his people. God uses the name Jehovah when he promises restoration to his people. God's words to Moses in Exodus 6:2–8 illustrate this aspect of his name.

And God continued, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, though I did not reveal my name, the Lord, to them. And I entered into a solemn covenant

with them. Under its terms, I swore to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living. You can be sure that I have heard the groans of the people of Israel, who are now slaves to the Egyptians. I have remembered my covenant with them. Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with mighty power and great acts of judgment. I will make you my own special people, and I will be your God. And you will know that I am the LORD your God who has rescued you from your slavery in Egypt. I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It will be your very own property. I am the LORD.'"

In the New Testament the apostle Paul attributes this name to Jesus. In Philippians 2:9–11, Jesus is declared to be LORD.

Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is a chorus that was very popular in worship services during the 1970s. It went like this:

He is Lord, He is Lord He has risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess That Jesus Christ is Lord.

I remember sitting in worship services in many countries of the world and hearing this chorus sung in languages I couldn't understand. But I did understand the power of the declaration that was sung. The faces of the participants displayed deep devotion to the LORD and their tears showed tender and submissive hearts to His LORDSHIP. The names that follow tell us some of the practical attributes of JEHOVAH our LORD.

JEHOVAH-JIREH

The word *Jireh* can be translated to see or to see to. We commonly translate this name as the LORD our PROVIDER. This name comes to us out of the experience that Abraham has in Genesis chapter 22. This is the story of Abraham's greatest test. Abraham's promised son Isaac was undoubtedly his most prized possession. It must have greatly surprised Abraham when God came to him and said, "Go sacrifice your son." Abraham has known God as the EL SHADDAI. He has experienced God's power in receiving this special son. NOW he is faced with the unthinkable. As we follow the story, we see that Abraham trusts God in a way that most of us would have great difficulty with.

The next morning Abraham got up early, he saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son Isaac. Then he chopped wood to build a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place where God had told him to go (Genesis 22:3).

Abraham exhibited instant and total obedience.

When Abraham, Isaac and the servants got near the place of sacrifice, Abraham said words that show great faith in his God.

On the third day of the journey, Abraham saw the place in the distance. "Stay here with the donkey," Abraham told the young men. "The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back" (Genesis 22:4–5).

When Abraham and Isaac started off on their journey, Isaac was carrying the wood for the sacrifice on his shoulders and Abraham carried the knife and the fire. Isaac asks the question that would naturally cause great emotion in the heart of any father.

"We have the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" What a gut-wrenching question for that father to answer. God had said that Isaac was the sacrifice, but Abraham said words of great faith.

"God will provide a lamb, my son" (Genesis 22:8).

We read that after Abraham built the altar and put the wood on it, he tied up his son Isaac and placed him on the altar. Then Abraham lifted his knife up to kill his son. At the right moment the angel of the Lord shouted to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" Now notice the rest of the story.

"Lay down the knife," the angel said. "Do not hurt the boy in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld even your beloved son from me." Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering on the altar in place of his son.

Abraham named the place The LORD will provide.

Just as the LORD saw Abraham's need and provided for him, so he will do for us as we learn to trust him. He is JEHOVAH-JIREH today.

JEHOVAH-ROPHE

This name for God comes out of Israel's experience as they leave Egypt, the land where they served as slaves. They had just miraculously crossed the Red Sea and traveled into the Shur Desert. For three days they had been without water when they came to a place called Marah. At Marah they found water, but it was bitter and they couldn't drink it. At this point the people turned against Moses and asked him what they were going to do for water.

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Moses cried out to the Lord for help and the Lord showed him a branch and directed him to throw it into the water. When he did, the water was HEALED and good to drink. After the healing of the waters at Marah, the Lord revealed himself to them as Jehovah-Rophe.

"If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and laws, then I will not make you suffer the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I AM THE LORD WHO HEALS YOU" (Exodus 15:26).

This revelation of God as Jehovah-Rophe didn't cure their self-centeredness and lack of trust. The psalmist said these words about them: How quickly they forgot what he had done! They wouldn't wait for his counsel! In the wilderness, their desires ran wild, testing God's patience in that dry land (Psalm 106:13–14).

The remainder of that Psalm describes a people greatly in need of a relationship with God. They continually slipped back into a mode of distrust of God and complaining. The real problem that they had was that they didn't really believe that God was good and that he loved them and would care for them. In fact it seems that they doubted whether God could actually help them. They forgot that he was EL SHADDAI and JEHOVAH-JIREH.

The provision of a branch to heal the waters at Marah pointed to a greater provision that God was to make for all humans. When he said, *I am the Lord who heals you*, he was speaking in the present tense. That means that he is STILL the Lord who heals you. That provision becomes a reality when we put our trust in Jesus. The apostle Peter confirms this thought for us.

He personally carried away our sins in his own body on the cross so we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. You have been healed by his wounds! (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus demonstrated the name Jehovah-Rophe, by traveling throughout Judea and Galilee healing all that came to him. They came to him paralyzed, blind, deaf, dumb and diseased. He healed them all. They came to him helpless and believed that he could help them. AND HE DID! AND HE DOES!

My friend Sergey works in the streets of Kiev in the Ukraine. Alcoholism and drug addiction are rampant in this country. In 2002 Sergey received a phone call from a young woman named Natasha. She informed him that she was pregnant and wanted to get an abortion. Sergey counseled her and prayed with her. She decided to have the child, a little boy she named Vladislav. Several years later she phoned again with the same story. She was pregnant and wanted an abortion. Again Sergey counseled with her and by faith told her that if she kept the child that he would find provision for her needs. Shortly after this a center to help women like her was opened in the Ukraine and they accepted Natasha into the program. She gave birth to a little girl that she named Victory. She finished the program and became part of the staff working in the center. In September of 2010 she was married to a Christian young man and they have established a Christian home. Praise be to JEHOVAH, our Lord who is the great PROVIDER and HEALER.

When we have a relationship with God through Jesus, our names our linked to HIS and we are partakers of his attributes in our daily lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Jesus Teaches Us About God

In the last two chapters we have looked at the ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES of God and at some of the names of God. We have come to the conclusion that our God is an awesome God and that our destiny is linked to our relationship with him. In this chapter I want to look at what Jesus teaches us about God's attributes that relate to our everyday practical lives. He teaches us that the God of the Old Testament is very personal and committed to relate to us where we live.

In the Old Testament, God shares some things about himself with Moses.

"I am the LORD, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness. I show this unfailing love to many thousands by forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion" (Exodus 34:6–7).

In these verses God is telling his people what they can expect in their relationship with him. It is a very loving description of a benevolent God.

In the New Testament, Jesus demonstrates these attributes by what he taught and by the way he lived his life.

HE IS COMPASSIONATE AND GRACIOUS

He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help (Matthew 9:36).

"I have longed to gather you" (Matthew 23:37).

"Come unto me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

Jesus said that his Father "is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked" (Luke 6:35).

When we look at the ministry of Jesus we see him demonstrate all that he taught about God. He ministered to the weary woman at Jacob's well in Samaria (John 4). He healed the weak woman who sought to touch his garment (Mark 5). He wept with Mary, Martha and the mourners at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:33–35). In Matthew 14:14 a vast crowd with many needs approached him and we see that he had compassion on them and healed them. On other occasions he showed compassion toward the poor and fed them (Mark 8:2).

I know that Jesus is the same today. I know that God lives in us by His Spirit. When we are faced with the same kind of needs that Jesus faced, his Spirit in us responds with compassion and grace. Millions of hours and dollars are given every year by Christians to meet the needs of the victims of disease, storms, recessions and war. This IS OUR COMPASSIONATE and GRACIOUS GOD IN ACTION through our lives. I am reminded of three great examples of COMPASSIONATE and GRACIOUS ministries that I have observed in my lifetime.

The first is that of David Wilkerson who responded to God's call to minister to the youth gangs of New York City. His book, *The Cross and the Switchblade* tells the story of a small-town preacher invading the jungles of New York with God's grace and compassion. The love of God that flowed through him changed the lives of thousands of young people worldwide. The ministry that evolved from David's answer to God's call is now in more than 100 countries of the world. It is called TEEN CHALLENGE. It is ever expanding and changing lives.

The second is a unique ministry to motorcyclists (mostly Harley riders). Marty Edwards was a pastor in California who answered God's call to reach this unreached people group. The ministry is called THE BLACK SHEEP. Hundreds are being reached in America as well as overseas because Marty answered God's call with compassion.

HE IS LOVING

In one translation we are told that he is ABOUNDING IN LOVE—it arises in waves. Like the waves of the ocean it comes and washes over us. The way that God relates to Israel in the Old Testament certainly illustrates his love. However, as we follow the life of Jesus in the Gospels we see how his love is manifested toward us personally.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector and considered to be a rank sinner by his peers. I am sure that he felt out of the loop. He was hated and was gossiped about. He certainly didn't feel loved and he felt lost. I like this about Jesus! He spotted Zacchaeus in a tree and stopped and called him by name. Then he invited himself to be his dinner guest. The crowd was aghast. Doesn't Jesus know who this man is? He is a lost sinner. Jesus knew all about Zacchaeus, and yet he still loved him. Jesus said, "and I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those like him who are lost" (Luke 19:10). He still loves those like Zacchaeus who are lost and searching to find their way.

On one occasion some parents brought their small children to Jesus to be blessed. The disciples tried to send them away, assuming that Jesus didn't have time for the helpless little ones. They were wrong. Jesus told them to bring those little ones to him and then he put his hands on them and blessed them. He loved the blind, the deaf and dumb, the crippled folk and the lepers. He not only had time for them, but he lovingly touched them and made them well.

The apostle Paul also was a recipient of God's love through Jesus. He declared with confidence that NOTHING can ever separate us from God's love (Romans 8:37–39).

In his letter to the Corinthian church he describes God's love.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance (1Corinthians 13:4–7).

It IS our destiny to be partakers of God's love and for God's love to be shared with the world through our lives. Many years ago I had the privilege of visiting the New Hope Leper Colony in Liberia, West Africa. What I observed has impacted my life to this day. New Hope Town was carved out of the jungle of Liberia. Nearly 1,000 lepers and their families were residents there. I heard them sing songs of hope. I observed the effects of leprosy on their bodies. I saw their pain and anguish. What I also saw was a lady missionary who had given her life to LOVE these people. They knew that they were loved. She demonstrated God's love to them. I worshiped with them in their chapel and was moved to tears as they lifted their hands and hearts to God. HIS LOVE makes the difference.

HE IS FAITHFUL

Jesus said that heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will remain forever (Matthew 24:35).

Jesus also said that he would be with us always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

To be faithful means to be reliable. When someone is faithful we are able to depend on what they say to us. In Psalm 89:8 the writer tells us that God is faithful.

O Lord God Almighty! Where is there anyone as mighty as you, Lord? FAITHFULNESS is your very character.

Jesus makes it clear from the above verses that we can DEPEND on his Word and presence. In 2 Timothy 2:11–13 the apostle Paul declares God's faithfulness toward us.

This is a true saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him. If we endure hardship, we will reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he CANNOT DENY HIMSELF.

When I reflect back on sixty years of ministry in 34 countries of the world, in every kind of circumstance, I can testify that God was FAITHFUL in every situation. There were times when I was weak in faith, but he was still faithful.

Because I know him as always FAITHFUL, I can live and work with confidence fulfilling the destiny he has prepared for me.

HE IS FORGIVING

The Old Testament is filled with instances telling of God's forgiveness. The classic example is that of King David. God considered David to be a man after his own heart. It must have

grieved God greatly when David succumbed to lust for Bathsheba and committed adultery with her. Then to cover up his sin he had her husband killed. That story is a black blot on the life and character of David. You would think that God would erase him and his memory from history. Not So! When David repented of his sin God FORGAVE and RESTORED him.

Jesus demonstrated that same forgiveness. In John chapter 8, Jesus is confronted by the religious leaders and challenged to condone their unforgiving spirits. They brought a woman that they had caught in the very act of committing adultery. They pointed out that the law required that she be stoned. They had the stones with them and were ready to act on his command. Jesus simply told them that the one among them who had never sinned was welcome to throw the first stone. They slowly disappeared and left Jesus alone with the guilty woman. I love the way he demonstrated God's forgiveness for all of us. He asked her if there was anyone who condemned her. When she replied that there was none, he told her that he didn't condemn her either and made it clear that she should no longer follow a sinful life.

Jesus also taught us about forgiveness when he told the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. After the son led a sinful life and wasted all of his father's money, he decided to go home and plead with his father to allow him to be just a servant. However, the father was waiting for his son to return. When he saw him coming he ran to meet him and forgave and restored him. That is incredible. It is God's forgiving heart.

Jesus said that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). You will remember that the apostle Peter denied the Lord three times during Jesus' trial. When he saw his failure he wept bitterly, the Scripture tells us. For me, this would be cause enough to fire him on the spot. He was a failure. You

Essential Knowledge Of God

could never depend on him again. BUT Jesus in John 21 gently restores Peter and invites him to *feed my sheep*.

It is our destiny to receive God's forgiveness through Christ's work on the cross. It is also our destiny to share God's forgiveness with the world around us.

I was teaching a group of young people who had been recently saved off of the streets of Los Angeles. There was a young African American lady in that class. I had just shared with the students God's message of forgiveness and that God desired that we would share that message with others. When I finished teaching I asked the students to wait in God's presence and to listen to what God would like to say to them. I told them that when they had something, they could come forward and I would pray for them.

We were all praying together and waiting for someone to respond. When I opened my eyes this young lady was standing before me weeping. I asked her to share what the Lord had put on her heart. She told us this story: "When I was a tiny little girl, my father abandoned my mother and me. I never knew my father and I hated him for doing this to me. Now I would like to forgive him. Would you pray that I could find my father so that I can tell him that forgive him?" I was moved deeply. She continued, "When I was just a very young girl my mother told me she didn't want me any longer and kicked me out of the house. I had nowhere to go and lived on the streets. I had to become a prostitute in order to support myself. Jesus has forgiven me. I want to forgive my mother, too, but I don't know where she is. Will you pray that I can find her?" By then we were all weeping. I put my arms around her and we wept together as we rejoiced in God's FORGIVING grace.

That's our DESTINY. We are forgiven and we are sent to forgive.

The ATTRIBUTES of God that Jesus taught and showed us: COMPASSION, LOVE, FAITHFULNESS and FORGIVENESS are shared freely with us. He not only asks us to share them with others, but empowers us to do so by giving us his Holy Spirit to live in us.

HE GIVES HOPE

All honor to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is by his boundless mercy that God has given us the privilege of being born again. Now we live with a wonderful expectation because Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. It is kept in heaven for you pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will protect you until you receive this salvation, because you are trusting him. It will be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad! There is a wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while (1 Peter 1:3–6).

Once you were wandering like lost sheep. But now you have turned to your shepherd, the guardian of your souls (1 Peter 2:25).

"Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know where I am going and how to get there" (John 14:1–4).

Earlier in this chapter we saw Jesus demonstrating the heart of God for us. We saw God as we observed Jesus sharing grace, mercy, love, faithfulness and forgiveness. To know God in this way helps us to see the destiny he has planned for us.

When you reflect on those passages of Scripture, you are aware that the teachings and life of Jesus are OUR HOPE. Hope is our destiny.

• We have hope because Jesus is our REDEEMER. This means that we have hope in spite of our past lives. The apostle Paul describes our past lives in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else (Ephesians 2:1–3).

This passage tells us that we were hopeless because of our sins. Paul says that we were doomed forever and under God's anger. BUT there is hope for us in Jesus.

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold and silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him for this purpose long before the world began, but now in these final days he was sent to earth for all to see. And he did this for you (1 Peter 1:18–20). In this passage Peter tells us that we were REDEEMED from the curse of God by the shed blood of Jesus. Our hope is in Jesus.

The apostle John emphasizes that our hope is in Jesus in 1 John 1:7. But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.

• The hopeless have hope. In Romans 3:25–26 the apostle Paul tells us that through faith in Jesus, God sees us as without sin–JUSTIFIED. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus. THIS is our DESTINY.

The writer to the scattered Hebrew Christians told them, and us: So also Jesus suffered and died outside the city gates in order to make his people holy by shedding his own blood (Hebrews 13:12). We are set apart unto God. We are different from the world we live in. It is lesus who makes the difference. It simply means that we BELONG TO GOD. This writer tells us that this new hope opens a whole new world for us. And so, now dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. This is the new life giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's people, let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19–22).

We have a fantastic HOPE in Jesus. We can LIVE in his presence daily and look forward to eternity with him.

I love that old hymn that was sung in my father's church when I was a boy. It is simply called REDEEMED. The message of the song is that we are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; Redeemed through his infinite mercy; his

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child and forever I am. The chorus echoed the message: Redeemed, Redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Redeemed, Redeemed, his child and forever I am.

• We have hope because Jesus is our SHEPHERD. This picture of Jesus gives us hope for as long as we live in this world. Peter wrote that *Once you were wandering like lost sheep. But now you have turned to your shepherd, the guardian of your souls* (1 Peter 2:25).

The psalmist David paints a beautiful word picture of this concept in his 23rd Psalm. His opening words tell us that *The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.* The rest of the psalm describes what our shepherd provides for us. It does include EVERYTHING that we will ever need.

Many years before Jesus came to earth the prophet Isaiah declared: He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young (Isaiah 40:11).

In the tenth chapter of the gospel of John Jesus tells us that he is the GOOD SHEPHERD. In studying this tenth chapter we discover what this shepherd promises us.

- 1. He calls his sheep by name. He KNOWS us v3.
- 2. He promises to LEAD us vv3-4.
- 3. He gives his sheep LIFE in all of its fullness v10.
- 4. He promises to LAY DOWN HIS LIFE vv11–15.
- 5. He promises us ETERNAL LIFE v28.
- 6. He tells us that no one can SNATCH us away from him v28.

Such promises cause us to have hope for the PRESENT and for the DESTINY planned for us. We not only have hope through his promises, but as we look at his ministry in the

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gospels we see that he demonstrates a practical hope. The gospel of Mark records this MINISTRY OF HOPE.

- 1. He sets the captives free (1:23–25).
- 2. He cleanses the leper (1:40–41).
- 3. He heals the paralyzed (2:1–11).
- 4. He raises a child from the dead (5:35–43).
- 5. He healed a woman with no hope (5:24–34).
- 6. He opened blind eyes (8:22–26).

This Jesus is OUR SHEPHERD. This shepherd is ALWAYS on the job looking out for his sheep. With him leading us we have hope and a glorious destiny.

We have hope because Jesus is our FUTURE. Throughout John chapter fourteen Jesus tells us about the destiny that God has prepared for us. We rejoice in the fact that we have been REDEEMED from our past and that now Jesus is our SHEPHERD. But life here on earth is short compared to eternity. No one has ever been there and come back to tell us exactly what to expect. We WONDER and SPECULATE as to what it will be like. Sometimes our hearts are troubled as we approach the end of this earthly life. Jesus gives us words that fill our hearts with HOPE. We have a destiny that is ETERNAL. Jesus says, "Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me" (John 14:1). Our hope is eternally linked to him through our TRUST IN JESUS.

"There are many rooms in my father's home" (John 14:2). "I am going to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

"When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that YOU WILL ALWAYS BE WITH ME WHERE I AM" (John 14:3).

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The apostle Paul talks about this future HOPE in his letters to the churches. In his mind the promises of Jesus are settled and sure. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 he sees us ALL caught away into the heavens to be FOREVER with the Lord.

It is all because of Jesus that we have HOPE that covers our past, present and future. This is a great comfort to our hearts and GIVES US A MESSAGE of HOPE and DESTINY TO SHARE WITH OUR WORLD.

PART II

Essential Response To God

I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be...I am focusing all my energies on this one thing.

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-13

CHAPTER EIGHT



Making Jesus Lord

This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man gloat in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken" (Jeremiah 9:23–24).

For we are not our own masters when we live or when we die. While we live, we live to please the Lord. And when we die, we go to be with the Lord. So in life and in death we belong to the Lord, Christ died and rose again for this very purpose, so that he might be Lord of those who are alive and of those who have died (Romans 14:7–9).

The Bible clearly states that we are created in the image of God. We have the traits of personality that God has and therefore it is possible for us to have a personal relationship with him. We have seen that God desires that we know him. In fact we see that it is God who actively pursues us, and that he desires that we in turn pursue him. The key to an intimate knowledge of God is found in how we relate to Jesus, God's Son. In order to respond correctly we need to answer some key questions. Jesus asked his disciples three questions:

• Who is the Christ?

- Who do men say I am?
- Who do you say I am?

We will answer these questions from God's Word.

WHO IS THE CHRIST?

In Paul's letters to both the Corinthian and Galatian churches he takes them to task because it seems they have drifted from the truth as to Jesus' identity. (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6–7). I believe that we need to be reminded again as to the truth regarding Jesus, as revealed in his Word.

HE IS GOD!

An angel from heaven confirmed this truth to Joseph with these words: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel [meaning, God is with us]" (Matthew 1:23).

Jesus told Philip in John 14:9, "Don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!"

The apostle Paul's words to the Colossian church tell us clearly who Jesus is. *Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't seekings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together (Colossians 1:15–17).*

It is evident from God's Word that Jesus is declared to be God incarnate. He came to earth to identify with man and to reveal

the attributes of God to us. Jesus isn't the founder of a religion, but is the God of the universe made real to us.

HE IS THE MESSIAH!

Throughout the Old Testament writings God had promised to send THE MESSIAH to save his people. He made this promise to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. The prophet Isaiah clearly states that God would send one who would have the titles of WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, and PRINCE OF PEACE (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Through the centuries the Jewish people have anticipated the coming of their Messiah. In fact, the Orthodox Jews are still looking for his coming.

The apostle Peter in his powerful message on the day of Pentecost declares that the MESSIAH has come. So let it be clearly known by everyone in Israel that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified to be both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

Jesus, the Messiah, has come to be LORD OF ALL. This message is for both the Jew and Gentile. Therefore, we embrace Jesus as our Messiah—the promised one.

HE IS SAVIOR!

Jesus states this truth clearly: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

It is on this verse that we place all of our hopes for this life and eternal life. It is God's promise to us.

In Acts chapter four, Peter is preaching Jesus to the religious leaders of his day. In his sermon he makes it clear that ONLY in Jesus is there salvation. There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them (v12).

Millions of people through the centuries have heard and believed this message. Millions more are hearing it every day and finding salvation.

HE IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH!

The church is NOT a building! The church is not a denomination. The true church consists of all those who have received and embraced Jesus as their Savior. Jesus said, *I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it* (Matthew 16:18).

The apostle Paul recognized that Jesus was the head of the church. In writing to the church in Ephesus he said, and the church is his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence (Ephesians 1:23).

All around the world, from north to south and east to west there are millions of believers who worship Jesus as the HEAD OF THE CHURCH.

HE IS LORD OF ALL!

The apostle Peter in his message to the house of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 states: I'm sure that you have heard about the Good News for the people of Israel–that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all (Acts 10:36).

When Cornelius and his family heard Peter's message, THEY BELIEVED and Jesus became their Lord.

Paul is convinced that Jesus is LORD OF ALL. He writes words to the church in Rome that equally apply to us today.

For we are not our own masters when we live or when we die. While we live, we live to please the Lord. And when we die, we go to be with the Lord, So in life and in death, we belong to the Lord. Christ died and rose again for this

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very purpose, so that he might be Lord of those who are alive and of those who have died (Romans 14:7–9).

Throughout the New Testament we see the message of the Lordship of Jesus being preached by Jesus and those he called. The disciples left everything to follow him. When they recognized who Jesus was, they gladly put him first in their lives.

It helps us to make him Lord of our lives when we see what he says about himself.

- 1. Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9).
- 2. I am the bread of life (John 6:35).
- 3. I am the light of the world (John 8:12).
- 4. I am the gate (John 10:9).
- 5. I am the good shepherd (John 10:11).
- 6. I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).
- 7. I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).
- 8. I am the true vine (John 15:1).

In the light of all that Jesus says about himself, we are brought to the place of choosing or rejecting him as the Lord of our lives. It is important to remember not only who he is, but what he has done FOR US. The apostle Peter wrote: For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold and silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Before we make this choice it is well for us to see what Jesus expects of us if he is to be our Lord. I find at least five things that we need to consider carefully.

- 1. "If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, more than your own life. Otherwise you CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE" (Luke 14:26).
- 2. "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).
- 3. "Don't begin until you count the cost" (Luke 14:28).
- 4. "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:34–35).
- 5. "So why do you call me 'Lord,' when you won't obey me?" (Luke 6:46).

That list is probably intimidating to some who are reading this. I think that Jesus meant it to be a standard that would challenge us to carefully make our choice. It grieves me to think of TODAY'S gospel as good news that requires ONLY a mental assent that I need a Savior without a commitment to follow Jesus. In order to illustrate what I mean, I will share with you MY STORY.

MY STORY!

I had the advantage of being raised in a Christian home. My father was a pastor all of my life. Both my father and mother were sincere followers of Jesus. They taught me early in my life to follow them as they followed Christ. I was literally raised in the church. In those days we had church twice on Sunday, Tuesday night prayer meeting and Thursday night Bible study. In the summer time we also had street meetings on a downtown corner on Saturday night. None of these meetings were optional for me! They were

REQUIRED. I never questioned that. It wouldn't have done any good if I had. Our church was set apart from most of the churches in our town. We were known as the FULL GOSPEL TABERNACLE. We believed the whole Bible and acted accordingly.

From a very early age I was a believer in Jesus and believed that someday I would serve the Lord in Africa. That doesn't mean that I was perfect! I soon discovered that my Christian life was marked by many ups and downs. I was sure that I belonged to Jesus and that my sins were forgiven. My problem was that I was influenced by the worldly culture I lived in. I was ruled by ME. What I wanted and envisioned for my life controlled my choices. Of course I remember asking the Lord to bless ME and to GIVE me what I wanted or thought I needed. In other words, I was IN CONTROL and desired the Lord to help me achieve my goals.

I lived this way all through my elementary and high school years. When I moved on to Bible college I was still IN CONTROL. As I looked for a wife I looked for a woman who appealed to my senses and who would complement my goals. In my stupidity the Lord was good to give me a godly wife who has stood by my side for the past sixty-four years of ministry. We began ministry together in 1951. We pastored many churches, served as missionaries in Africa and Europe as well as being involved in secondary education. It seemed to me that I had arrived when I was invited to be the academic dean of a Bible training ministry. In all of our changes, I was never satisfied. From all appearances I was successful, but down deep in my heart something was missing. I didn't know what it was. As I reflect on this period of my life I am aware that God was dealing with me and bringing me to a place where Jesus would become first in my life.

In 1971 the Lord spoke to me through my wife. I never expected that! We were preparing to move to Europe with my prized position. One morning she informed me that we would not be

going! I asked her why. I had traveled extensively, raising funds for the move, and was ready to go. Her answer was simple and profound at the same time. She said, "Because we are not spiritually fit for this ministry." In that moment I experienced two things. The first was that I was SHOT DOWN. Second, I recognized that she was absolutely right. Now I was faced with a decision that I never thought I would have to make. That day I resigned my coveted position and decided that I needed to work on being spiritually fit.

I had been in ministry for twenty years. I served all over the world. I thought I was successful and blessed by God. To admit that I needed God was the most humbling thing I had ever faced.

God continued his work in our lives by challenging us to read books that spoke deeply to our hearts. These books were revolutionary in our lives. About that time someone was directed to give me a cassette tape of the testimony of an Argentinian evangelist. One day, when no one else was home, I sat in our dining room listening to this man give his testimony in very broken English. He told how he had been very successful in the ministry and that he had been in demand worldwide to share his success formula. However, he was feeling very empty in his heart and dissatisfied. One day he opened his Bible to the gospel of Luke, and searched for something to speak to his hungry heart. In his search he read Luke 6:46. Jesus asks his disciples a very straight question. "So why do you call me 'Lord,' when you won't obey me?" At that moment he recognized that though he was highly successful, he was DOING HIS OWN THING. He had not made Jesus the LORD of his life. The successful ministry was his ministry. He had not asked the Lord for direction. He had set the course and asked the Lord to bless it.

In the next several weeks he stopped everything and set aside time to seek the Lord. He first of all asked the Lord to forgive him

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for being presumptuous and surrendered the control of his life and ministry to the Lord. He said that it was the beginning of a whole new life for him.

My immediate reaction was one of deep conviction. I saw myself in this man's testimony. I wept at my dining table that day, and asked for forgiveness and invited Jesus to be MY LORD. That was a new beginning for me. It changed my relationship with my wife, my family, my peers in ministry, and my whole view of future ministry. Now, forty-four years later, I am still following hard after my Lord Jesus.

It is my opinion that Jesus is calling all of us into this kind of a relationship with him. I see that often today's gospel message appeals to our senses. We have thousands of people who made a decision but have not become followers of Jesus. If we are to TRULY KNOW GOD, it must begin with recognizing Jesus as the Lord of our lives. It is our decision to simply confess that he isn't our Lord and then to invite him to take over. HE WILL! When he does you will enter into a very intimate and rewarding relationship with him.

CHAPTER NINE



Forgiving

The heart of the gospel is all about FORGIVING! In a previous chapter, Jesus taught us that God is a FORGIVING God. Jesus said, *God did not send his son into the world to condemn it, but to save it* (John 3:17). God offers forgiveness to all through Jesus' death on the cross. He asks that we in turn offer forgiveness to ALL who need to be forgiven.

There are many situations in life where broken relationships and offenses come. Sometimes it is a harsh word, a hurtful action, or even a misunderstanding that breaches our fellowship with others. The apostle James and the apostle Paul both give us good advice.

- Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law (James 4:11).
- Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you (James 5:9).
- For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if instead of showing love among yourselves you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another (Galatians 5:14–15).

Life tells us that the actions described above occur in the HOME, SCHOOL, WORKPLACE and even the CHURCH! If offenses are not FORGIVEN, they cause hurt feelings, bitterness, broken hearts, sorrow, anger, hatred, abuse, divorce, murder, war–and even church splits.

First of all we need to see what the Bible teaches about forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS IS A HUMBLE ACT. One of the hardest things to do in life is to swallow our pride and admit that we were wrong. The words, "I was wrong, I'm sorry, please forgive me," are some of the most difficult words we will ever say. When someone comes to us and humbly asks us to forgive them, we either forgive them or refuse. To say, "I forgive you" without strings attached is the godly thing to do. We are to forgive in the same way that God has forgiven us.

FORGIVENESS IS AN ATTITUDE. The apostle Paul describes this attitude in Ephesians 4:32. *Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.* Here forgiveness is linked with kindness and having a tender heart. The Holy Spirit who lives in us, constantly reminds us to have this kind of attitude. It is important to ask the Holy Spirit to help us to have a forgiving attitude.

FORGIVENESS IS AN ABSOLUTE. Jesus teaches this truth in Matthew chapter 18. He tells us about a man who is freely forgiven a debt that he could never pay. It would seem that such a man would be filled with gratitude and joy. But the man goes out and finds someone who owes him very little and throws him into prison until he pays in full. When the man who forgave him his great debt hears what he has done, he reverses his decision and turns the man over to the tormenters. Then Jesus tells us, *That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your hearts* (Matthew 18:35).

Jesus tells this story to teach Peter what forgiveness is all about. Peter asked Jesus, "How often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" Jesus responds by saying, "Seventy times seven!" (Matthew 18:21–22). It is important to note that Jesus is simply saying that there is NO LIMIT to FORGIVENESS. God's forgiveness toward us is UNLIMITED and we are to be just as forgiving as he is. Yes! FORGIVENESS is an ABSOLUTE. It must be TOTAL without reservation.

UNFORGIVENESS CAUSES SUFFERING.

- We can't receive the benefits of God's forgiveness when we refuse to forgive. Jesus said, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14–15).
- An unforgiving spirit affects every part of our lives in a negative way. It affects marriage, friendships, church, physical health, emotional health and spiritual growth. In studies conducted at Stanford University and the University of Wisconsin it was determined that FORGIVENESS is a key to physical and emotional health.
- Satan uses an unforgiving spirit as a tool to accomplish his purposes in our lives. The apostle Paul said, When you forgive this man, I forgive him too. And when I forgive him [for whatever is to be forgiven], I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us, for we are very familiar with his evil schemes (2 Corinthians 2:10–11).

I remember very well an incident that took place in the little church that my father pastored in Wisconsin. Two of the families in our church had some kind of a misunderstanding that I never understood. I do remember that they would not speak to each other, although they attended church every Sunday. They sat

on opposite sides of the church. Their anger affected the whole church. The Holy Spirit wasn't able to break through the tension that all of us felt. Everyone suffered because two families were unable to forgive. This situation continued for months. Satan used it to paralyze the whole church. If we are not aware and careful, Satan will use this tool to bring devastation into our lives.

FORGIVENESS OPENS THE DOOR TO GOD'S BLESSING.

- Matthew 5:23-24 teaches us that when we forgive and restore relationships we will experience TRUE WORSHIP. In fact, Jesus tells us that if we come to the altar to worship and remember that we have fractured relationships, we should leave the place of worship and make an effort to make wrongs right. Then and only then should we come and offer our worship. Go back with me to the little church in Wisconsin. One Sunday morning, while my father was preaching, the head of one of the families involved in the dispute began to weep. I was sitting nearby, listening and watching. After a time of weeping, he got up from his seat and walked across the church to the man he had the dispute with. He reached out, put his arms around him and asked him for forgiveness. The other brother responded with forgiveness. The two held each other and wept. The whole church became an altar of weeping before the Lord. That day healing came to the families and to the whole church. NOW we could truly worship.
- Mark 11:22–26 tells us that answers to our prayers are hindered when we are unwilling to forgive others. But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your father in heaven will forgive your sins too.

FORGIVENESS IS ESSENTIAL TO HEALING!

We have already seen that unanswered prayer can be the

result of unresolved problems in our relationships. The apostle James in his letter clearly states that our healing is dependent on working to restore broken relationships. *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results* (James 5:15–16). James tells us that the prayers of a RIGHTEOUS person have great power! He also makes us to know that a truly righteous person is able to pray for others. In order to be righteous and to sincerely pray for others we must have good and right relationships with everyone and with God.

It is possible that many of our physical and emotional problems stem from the fact that we are unwilling to make the effort to be reconciled with those we may have wronged and/or those who may have wronged us. We can't always repair broken relationships, but we can sincerely make the effort and then leave the result to God.

The apostle Paul gives us some great advice regarding life! *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, JUST AS GOD THROUGH CHRIST HAS FORGIVEN YOU (Ephesians 4:31–32).* You can never improve on that advice. JUST DO IT!

Let me give you a personal example. I served as the vice president of a discipleship school in the early 1970s. In the first year of our school we reached a time when our students were exhibiting behavior that certainly didn't match our discipleship teaching. There was much bickering between students and generally a spirit of rebellion toward the staff. Our staff met to consider what should be done to correct the problem. The president asked me to speak to the students in the next chapel service. My question was, "Why me?" He replied that he felt that I would have the answer. I went home deeply troubled. What would I say? I

prayed for the answer and it didn't come. The next morning he asked me what I was going to say and I told him I didn't know. He merely said, "You will think of something!" My thought was, thanks a lot. We went into the chapel service that I was leading. I loved to lead worship, but my mind was searching for what to say about the rebellion problem. We worshipped a bit longer as I didn't have my answer. Finally I heard the Lord whisper into my heart, "You are the problem!" Me? The problem? How could that be? He gently reminded me that I had a rebellious attitude toward my colleague, the president of the school. I quietly told the Lord that he was right and asked him to forgive me. We went on worshipping until the Lord said, "You need to make that right publicly now." I thought, "Oh no, what will the students think?" The pressure became so great that I finally shared with everyone that the spirit of rebellion seemed to have come from my spirit of rebellion against my leader. I then confessed my sin to my brother and asked for forgiveness. He quickly forgave me. Suddenly we had a spirit of brokenness fill the room. That day many lives were changed and a mini-revival filled our school for weeks. Our God of FORGIVENESS desires that we forgive as he forgives.

HOW DO WE FORGIVE?

There are seven things that we should do as the Holy Spirit leads us. I recommend that these be done. It is also necessary that we seek godly guidance where we feel unsure as to how to approach people that we have relationship problems with.

- Ask the Lord to give you a humble heart.
- Acknowledge your hurt and the hurt you may have caused others.
- Ask the Lord to help you understand how the other person may feel.
- Decide to forgive just as Christ forgave you.
- Decide to ask for forgiveness.

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- With God's guidance pursue reconciliation.
- Tune your heart to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

And finally, REMEMBER what Jesus said in Mark 11:25.

But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your father in heaven will forgive your sins too.

CHAPTER TEN



Submitting

This is a subject that goes deep to the heart! We are born with a nature that revolves around SELF. I heard a story about a little boy who didn't want to be told what to do by his parents. (Sounds like me.) As the family sat around the dinner table, this little guy wanted to stand on his chair. His father tried to get him to sit down, but it wasn't on this little guy's agenda. Finally the father put him down with great authority. The little fellow sat there pouting and thinking. Finally he announced with a very strong tone that while he was sitting down on the outside, HE WAS STANDING UP ON THE INSIDE. We smile when we read those words, but I wonder how many of us go through life sitting down on the outside to comply, but we are standing up on the inside.

Authority, submission and rebellion seem to be a part of life. Of course our problems with authority go back a long way. Isaiah 14:12–14, describe Satan's fall from heaven. "How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, 'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.'" In this passage Satan declares three times, "I WILL." It is Satan's purpose to rebel against God's authority and to tempt us to do the same.

- It was Satan that tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God's authority. As a result we are all born with the tendency to REBEL. We want what we want and when we want it (Genesis 3; Romans 6:12–18).
- Very often in the Old Testament we read how Israel's kings rebelled against God and led the whole nation into sin. Satan's influence inspired them to rebel. Solomon started his reign with God's blessing. God met with him twice and gave him WISDOM, WEALTH and PRESTIGE. But Solomon allowed Satan to turn his eyes from God to pleasure and lust, and his reign ended in disgrace.
- In the New Testament, Satan makes a frontal attack on Jesus. He uses the same strategy that he used on Adam and Eve. He appealed to Jesus' senses—his pride and appetites. Here Satan was defeated!

Satan is still actively seeking to destroy man's potential relationship with God. He seems to be more active today than he has ever been in history. Revelation 12:12 declares, "Rejoice, O heavens! And you who live in the heavens, rejoice! But terror will come on the earth and the sea. For the devil has come down to you in great anger, and he knows that he has little time."

I think that we are living in the middle of a great battle before Jesus returns to earth. Satan doesn't want us to understand what the battle is all about. If he can keep us ignorant he can hold us captive to his damnable principle of rebellion. So together we need to look at what God's Word tells us about the battle between SUBMISSION and AUTHORITY.

AUTHORITY DEFINED

Authority is defined as the right to command; the right to make laws and to enforce those laws. In both Romans 13:1–8 and 1 Peter 2:13–17 we are taught that all governments have been

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placed in power by God. We are also taught that rebelling against authority is equal to rebelling against God. The apostle Peter instructs us that for the Lord's sake we should accept all authority.

We discover in God's Word that there are two governing powers in the universe. There is God's government and there is Satan's government. Both God and Satan claim to be the final authorities. So we need to look at both claims in order to submit to the right authority.

- GOD'S GOVERNMENT is based on his rightful authority. God's authority stems from the fact that he is the creator of all things. The first chapter of Genesis begins with In the beginning God created...(Genesis 1:1). The apostle Paul expands on this premise by saying, Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see-kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together (Colossians 1:15–17). Government is HIS IDEA. Without government (authority) there is chaos. We have delegated authority in every level of life. It is God ordained. When authority is despised and refused, the result is anarchy. A good example of this is found in Judges 21:25. In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes. We are fast becoming a world where authority is despised and anarchy reigns.
- SATAN'S GOVERNMENT is based on rebellion against God as we saw in Isaiah chapter fourteen. Satan promotes self-exaltation and thereby refuses all authority. The result is a society filled with disobedience, disrespect, violence, hatred and terrorism. Satan appeals to our EGOS and

promises that when we are first we will have everything we ever wanted. We need to remember that when Jesus hung on the cross he uttered the words, "It is finished." What was finished? Satan's government and doom were sealed. The death and resurrection of Jesus assures us that only God's government and authority is eternal.

UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHORITY-SUBMISSION CONFLICT

GOD'S PURPOSE is to establish his authority in the heart of every person on this planet. In order for that to happen God came to earth as a man (incarnate) and lived a life of submission to his heavenly Father. Furthermore he died to deal with our sinful, rebellious natures. He rose again to guarantee that we will live eternally with him. Jesus made it clear that those who believe in him would be given the privilege of bringing this message to everyone in our world. Jesus said, "as the father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). It is his desire that all men would know that God Almighty is the supreme authority in this world. He also made it clear that he desires that everyone would invite him into their lives so that he would be THEIR LORD! Paul's words in Romans 14:7–9 define this clearly. For we are not our own masters when we live or when we die. While we live, we live to please the Lord. And when we die, we go to be with the Lord. So in life and in death we belong to the Lord. Christ died and rose again for this very purpose, so that he might be Lord of those who are alive and of those who have died. It can't get any clearer than that. The book of Revelation makes it clear that a day is coming when Satan will be finally defeated and God will reign supreme in this world. In chapter 11:15-16 angels are heard shouting in heaven, The whole world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and HE WILL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER. In chapter 20:10

we read that the devil, who betrayed them, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. This is God's strategy in the Authority–Submission conflict.

- SATAN'S PURPOSE is to try to establish himself as God. In order to do that, he has to lead a rebellion against all legitimate authority. This is why he is so hard at work in all of our lives. He tries to get children to rebel against their parents. He puts it in the hearts of students to rebel against their teachers. People everywhere rebel against officers of the law. He suggests to all of us that we HAVE OUR RIGHTS and no one should be able to tell us what to do. This spirit often spills over into the church. That is why we have church fights and splits. It is Satan's purpose that we should believe that our rights are supreme and we must fight for them. He makes it clear that we have the responsibility to REBEL AGAINST ANY AND EVERY AUTHORITY.
- THIS BATTLE IS THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES. Paul comments on this battle in Ephesians 2:1–3. Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else. This battle has always raged and we will face it until Jesus returns.

DEFINING REBELLION AND SUBMISSION

A REBEL is defined as a person who resists lawful authority. He or she is known by a defiant attitude. They are self-centered and

only want their will to be done. We have already seen that such a life leads to destruction. There are some classic Old Testament examples of destructive rebellion.

- Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1–24)
- Aaron and Miriam (Numbers 12)
- The nation of Israel (Numbers 14:31–33)
- Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:1–4)

In each of these cases of rebellion, grave consequences affected great numbers of people negatively. It is important to deal with any rebellious tendencies we have if we are to fulfill God's will for our lives. God doesn't tolerate rebellion. He loves the rebel and offers his love, BUT WAITS for us to admit the problem and seek his solution.

SUBMISSION means to SURRENDER. It is both an attitude and an action. It is seen when we yield ourselves to obey rightful authority.

- A submissive attitude is an ABSOLUTE. It will be seen in every area of our lives, even when we don't agree with the authorities over us. Jesus demonstrated this for us when he TRUSTED his heavenly Father and willingly came to this earth to pay the price for the redemption of all human beings. When we study the lives of the disciples of Jesus we see that they had to learn to have a submissive attitude. Jesus gives us the bottom line when he said, "And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do those things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29).
- The question of obedience has to be dealt with when we talk about submission. Obedience is very important and stressed throughout the Bible text. We will look at that further in this book. Submission to authority is ABSOLUTE,

but obedience is relative. There would be some who would disagree with this concept, but the Bible gives many examples of RIGHTEOUS DISOBEDIENCE. This kind of disobedience doesn't come from self-centered motives but from the Holy Spirit, and Scripture-centered principles. Look with me at some examples.

- 1. The prophet Daniel was told by the king that it was illegal for him to pray to his God. Daniel responds by continuing to pray as he had always done. He was thrown into the lion's den-but delivered by God (Daniel 6).
- 2. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were ordered to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's image. If they failed to do so they would be thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). The answer these three gave to the king indicates they were absolute in their submissiveness but relative in their obedience. "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, your majesty. But even if he doesn't, your majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."
- 3. The apostles Peter and John were told by the authorities to never again speak or teach about Jesus. Peter and John with submissive spirits disobeyed with these words: "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18–19).
- 4. Stephen, in Acts chapter seven, shows us what it means to have a submissive spirit. He could have continued living if he had just stopped preaching

about Jesus. Instead he chose to continue his divine calling and to demonstrate a submissive spirit to the authorities by dying at their hands. He further demonstrated his godly heart by falling to his knees as they stoned him and praying: "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" (Acts 7:60). In his last moments Stephen saw heaven open and the Lord Jesus standing at God's right hand. I believe that the Lord's hands were outstretched welcoming Stephen home.

I love these examples of men who were submissive to authority, but who made it a priority to obey God regardless of the cost.

Please be sure to understand that if an authority asks you to do something that is contrary to godly principles as revealed in God's Word, you are obligated to disobey with a SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE, trusting that God will honor your decision.

WHERE DOES THIS SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE COME FROM?

You can be sure that self-effort will never produce the kind of spirit that we saw in the examples given. You can try! But you will always fail. The selfish, egotistical nature that we were born with must be put to death. Jesus gave his disciples the answer to the question: "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your SELFISH AMBITION, shoulder your cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

The disciples received the words of Jesus and applied them to their lives. My favorite is the apostle Paul. He gives testimony to how to defeat rebellion in our lives. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

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The Bible makes it very clear that God has called us to have a part in this battle of the ages. In ourselves we most certainly will fail to have a submissive spirit. The fact is that the Lord not only calls us to be a part of this battle and to ultimately be victorious, but he MAKES IT POSSIBLE. HOW???

- He invites us to come to him.
- He invites us to humble ourselves and tell him how much we need him.
- He then sends his Holy Spirit to LIVE in us and to LEAD us in every step that we take.
- He assures us that one day soon we will be forever with HIM to rule and to reign with HIM.

If you find that you are a rebel, Jesus invites you now to come to him. HE IS WAITING!

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Sinning

We have seen that God desires that we put him first in our lives. He asks us to **make him our Lord**. That is the most important response we can make in the process of getting to KNOW him. We also saw that he desires that we **FORGIVE others in the same way that he forgives us**. In the process of getting to know God intimately, it is essential that we **deal with our inbred rebellion against authority and humbly submit**. These three responses move us along in our coming to know God.

Sin is the major problem in humanity. How we think about sin and sinning is essential in our getting to know God. We know that man is made in the image of God. We were made with the ability to make our own choices. We have a FREE WILL. God doesn't control our lives. He didn't create robots. God gave us INTELLECT and EMOTIONS so that we can respond freely to his appeal to us. It is also important to note, as we have previously seen, that God is pursuing us because he desires to have intimate fellowship with us (to know him). Sin separates us from fellowship with God

WHAT IS SIN?

Oswald Chambers said, "Sin is a fundamental relationship. It is not wrong doing, but is wrong being. It is deliberate and emphatic independence of God." Religion deals with SINS. The Bible alone deals with SIN. My view of sin was very limited growing up in an evangelical church. If you had asked me to define sin I would have given you a list of things that people did that didn't conform to my church's beliefs. High on that list was smoking, drinking alcohol, dancing, divorce, lying, swearing, stealing and fornication. Of course all of these NO-NOS were symptoms of a life that was being lived for self, but the real definition of sin wasn't included. We need to know what it really is so that we can respond in the right way.

- definition of sin. What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't the whole army of evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them and yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it. And even when you do ask, you don't get it BECAUSE YOUR WHOLE MOTIVE IS WRONG—YOU WANT ONLY WHAT WILL GIVE YOU PLEASURE (James 4:1–3). Selfishness is the SIN ROOT that produces every kind of evil act. The bottom line is that, like Satan, we make OUR SELF our God. We are blinded to this truth and therefore live our lives apart from intimacy with God.
- SIN IS REBELLION AGAINST GOD'S LAWS! The apostle John says, Those who sin are opposed to the law of God, for all sin opposes the law of God (1 John 3:4). Because we are a law unto ourselves we resist all other law. The apostle James said, Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it (James 4:17). We often fail to understand that God's laws were designed for happy living. God wants what is best for us.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

To help us to respond positively to the sin problem in our lives, we need to see the consequences that sin generates in all of life.

- Sin is a GRIEF and a DISAPPOINTMENT to God. In Genesis chapter six God observes the people he has made and he is GRIEVED and his heart is FILLED with PAIN (Genesis 6:5, 6). Now the Lord observed the extent of the people's wickedness, and he saw that all their thoughts were consistently and totally evil. So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them. It broke his heart. When we live for self apart from God we bring sorrow to our loving God.
- Sin brings SEPARATION from God. The apostle Paul, wrote, *The wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). The prophet Isaiah wrote, *Listen! The Lord is not too weak to save you, and he is not becoming deaf. He can hear you when you call, but there is a problem–your sins have CUT YOU OFF from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore (Isaiah 59:1–2).*
- Sin causes us to LOSE our INNER PEACE. "But there is no peace for the wicked," says the Lord (Isaiah 48:22). We often blame our anxiety and frustration on circumstances and people, but the true source is our sinful living.
- Sin brings BROKEN and STRAINED relations with people. Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled by others and became slaves to many wicked desires and evil pleasures. Our lives were FULL of evil and envy. We HATED OTHERS, and they HATED US (Titus 3:3). Broken families are the sad result of sinful lives.
- Sin brings physical deterioration. The story of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden tells us that the result of their sin caused all of mankind to suffer physically (Genesis 2–3). A life lived apart from God seeks to only

- satisfy one's selfish desires, and invites the results of sin into our lives. It is the law of cause and effect.
- Sin brings DEPRAVITY OF NATURE. Romans 1:18–32 gives us a picture of the downward slide of humanity that serves ONLY SELF. One only needs to walk the slums of our major cities to see humanity at its lowest. I like how the apostle Paul describes this condition. Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil nature. We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger just like everyone else (Ephesians 2:1–3). We blame the culture, the government, the economy and even the church for this condition. SIN is the culprit!
- Sin brings ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD. We have already seen that the wages of sin is death. The apostle Paul brings further clarity to this truth in 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9. He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction, FOREVER SEPARATED FROM the Lord and from his glorious power. That is a fearsome declaration, but that is what sin produces. It is an eternal result of a sinful life.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO THE SIN PROBLEM

It is important for us to know that sin is an affront to God. Sin destroys God's purpose for humanity. We have seen before that we are in an epic battle between the God of the universe and the usurper Satan. While it is true that God hates sin, it is also

true that God loves the sinner. It is hard for us to grasp this truth. Satan would have us believe that a Holy God could never love us sinful creatures. When we believe Satan we find ourselves in a continuous struggle to somehow perform well enough to please God. It is true that we are in this battle, BUT it is also true that God's character and Christ's provision provide EVERYTHING we will ever need to be victorious. Let us look at what the Bible tells us about God's view of us. Make sure that as you read this you apply it to your life.

- **HE IS THE GOD OF GRACE!** Grace simply means that God gives us what we don't deserve. We know that because we are sinners we deserve eternal separation from God, BUT GOD offers us total reconciliation with himself and wants to adopt us into his family. The apostle Paul says that it is by GRACE we are saved (Ephesians 2:8–10). He adds that this is GOD'S GIFT to us.
- **HE IS THE GOD OF MERCY!** Mercy is NOT GETTING what you deserve. Instead of having to pay for my sin, the Lord abundantly pardons me (Psalm 86:5). The young man, Titus, received this message from his mentor, Paul. He saved us not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Jesus taught this truth with the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. In this story Jesus illustrates both MERCY and GRACE.
- **HE IS THE GOD OF LOVE!** We live in a world where the word love has been grossly distorted. TRUE LOVE is the action we take toward others whereby we want what is best for them and are willing to provide it no matter what it might cost us. Of course this is best illustrated with the words of Jesus in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life."

The words of the apostle Paul to the church in Rome emphasize what Jesus said. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). Many of the young people that I have ministered to through the years, both in the United States, Africa and Europe, have never ever experienced true love. They have searched for love from family, friends and society in general and have come away empty. I have watched them as they listened to the truth that God loves them completely, just as they are. When the light is turned on in their hearts and minds, their damned-up emotions break and there is a flood of grateful tears. With the tears comes a healing that changes their lives. My friends, let me say this to you today: though you may look at yourself as a failure, one who does not love anyone including yourself, one who is sure that God could never love yoube assured today that as you read these words, God is telling you that he loves you and that he always will. (For assurance read Ephesians 2:4-5.)

HE IS THE GOD OF RECONCILIATION! I really love what the apostle Paul tells me in Colossians 1:13. For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us INTO THE KINGDOM OF HIS DEAR SON. We haven't JUST received mercy, grace and love-more than that we are now SONS and DAUGHTERS of God. The apostle John in 1 John 3:1-4 makes our reconciliation clear. See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are! But the people who belong to this world don't know God, so they don't understand that WE ARE HIS CHILDREN. Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. It is true that we are citizens in the country

- of our birth, but our first citizenship is in heaven. We are the children of God. That is RECONCILIATION.
- HE IS THE GOD WHO PAID THE PRICE FOR US! In 1 Peter 1:18–19 we read: For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. (Read Isaiah chapter 53.) There is NO WAY that any of us could pay the price to redeem ourselves. We ARE DOOMED to eternal punishment apart from the price that God himself paid. That is why I love the old hymn, "Redeemed how I love to proclaim it, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb." It is the only way! God's response to our sin is the giving of himself in LOVE on the cross two thousand years ago. It is incredible.

What about sin?

We have a choice. We can deny we need a Savior and die in our sins. Or we can humbly confess that we need a Savior and receive Jesus into our lives. At that moment we are born into God's family!



Repenting

When I hear the word REPENT, I immediately think of John the Baptist. The prophet Isaiah describes the ministry of John in Isaiah 40:4. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness: Prepare a pathway for the Lord's coming! Make a straight road for him!

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus emphasized John's message: *Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the kingdom of heaven is near* (Matthew 4:17).

I am sometimes disturbed by the fact that in our modern evangelical churches the concept of REPENTANCE is avoided. To preach repentance would offend seekers. However, John the Baptist and Jesus offended people for the right reasons. They preached a message that required a change of lifestyle.

Repentance involves a CHANGE OF MIND and a CHANGE OF ACTION.

A CHANGE OF MIND about sin is imperative. Sin is an affront to God, he hates sin. Sin has eternal consequences and separates man from God. Sin has been dealt with by Christ's death on the cross. The first step in repenting is to see sin as God sees it.

A CHANGE OF ACTION follows a change of mind about sin. There are three ingredients that are necessary in true repentance.

- We willingly TURN AWAY from sin.
- We willingly TURN TO God.
- We willingly OFFER OURSELVES to God-TOTALLY.

At the dedication of Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles 7:14, the Lord defines what it means to repent. "Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land." This definition covers all the bases.

To summarize, REPENTANCE means to change our minds and directions. The Bible has much to say on this subject. What is said about repentance applies to us if we are serious about following Jesus.

REPENTANCE IS THE PASSWORD INTO GOD'S KINGDOM

- Turn from your sins (repent) and turn to God, because the kingdom of God is near (Matthew 3:2; 4:17).
- I tell you again that unless you repent, you will also perish (Luke 13:5).
- Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God (Acts 2:38).

There are some who believe that as long as you believe in Jesus you have the assurance of a place in God's kingdom. You don't have to change your way of thinking and living. It is true that Jesus has paid the supreme price for our salvation, but it is also true that we must respond with a repentant heart.

THE EVIDENCE OF TRUE REPENTANCE

• **CONFESSION OF SIN.** But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he

prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

- MAKING RESTITUTION. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much" (Luke 19:8).
- **GETTING RID OF IDOLS.** If you are really serious about wanting to return to the Lord, get rid of your foreign Gods and images of Ashtoreth (1 Samuel 7:3).
- **PRODUCING FRUIT.** Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God (Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20).
- **EXHIBITING A BROKEN SPIRIT.** "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son" (Luke 15:21).

The examples of Zacchaeus and the prodigal son demonstrate what TRUE REPENTANCE is. Repentance is more than sorry tears, it is a change of one's whole style of living. It is living wholly for the Lord.

Another example of true repentance is seen when King David is confronted with his sin. In 2 Samuel 12:13 David said, "I have sinned against the Lord." In Psalm 51 David REPENTS:

- "Have mercy on me O God" (v1).
- "Wash me clean from my guilt" (v2).
- "Purify me from my sin" (v2).
- "Against you, and you alone, have I sinned" (v4).
- "O, give me back my joy again" (v8).
- "Create in me a clean heart" (v10).
- "Renew a right spirit within me" (v10).

God heard the prayer of David and he was restored. INDEED, repentance is the PASSWORD into God's kingdom.

REPENTANCE IS OUR CHOICE

Let me remind you that all of us have the same wretched condition. The Bible tells us that everyone has sinned. That means all are separate from God. Because of sin we are facing eternal punishment. There is no other way into God's kingdom apart from REPENTANCE.

Let me also remind you that God loves you and wants you in his kingdom. He loved you so much that he *gave his only son* to provide a way for you to receive forgiveness and entrance into his kingdom. He paid the price and only asks that you TURN FROM YOUR SIN and RECEIVE HIS PROVISION (John 3:16).

God's provision is his FREE GIFT, but it is our choice to receive or reject it.

REPENTANCE BRINGS JOY TO HEAVEN

Jesus makes it clear that when sinners repent, it affects heaven's atmosphere!

- "In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!" (Luke 15:7).
- "In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents" (Luke 15:10).

Jesus further illustrates this truth with the story of the prodigal son. When the son finally turns homeward after years of separation, the father is waiting and watching for his return. When the father sees the wayward one coming, he runs to him with great rejoicing. The son is welcomed home with a time of feasting and celebration.

Essential Response To God

Whenever I witness someone repenting, I find myself in tears of joy. I can't explain it, but it must be that part of heaven in me that joins the hosts of heaven in celebration.

There is NO SALVATION apart from REPENTANCE. When we are aware of who God is and what he has done, we are duty bound to respond by humbly bowing in his presence and simply praying:

Dear Lord,
I recognize that I am a sinner
and that I need a Savior. I thank you
for providing all that I need for salvation.
I humbly repent of my sins and ask you
to forgive me today. I readily accept
you into my life as both Savior and Lord.
I thank you now for the assurance of
My salvation. Amen.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Obeying

The whole of the Bible teaches that God expects people to respond to him with obedient hearts. The story of Saul, the first king of Israel, illustrates this truth. Saul was given a command from God to destroy the Amalekites. In fact, Saul was only partially obedient to God's command. The prophet Samuel had an audience with God and was informed that God was sorry that he had made Saul king. The reason for God's sorrow was that Saul was not loyal to God and blatantly disobeyed the commandment. The story continues with Samuel crying out to the Lord all night. When Samuel confronted Saul, he was quick to defend his actions. At the end of the story, Samuel asks Saul a question that should be asked of all followers of the Lord. "What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offering and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:10-11; 22-23).

In the New Testament, Jesus makes it very clear that obedience is an absolute. In Matthew chapter seven, he teaches us that the person who listens to his teaching and obeys IS WISE, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. He adds that a person who hears his teaching and ignores it is FOOLISH, like a person who builds a house on sand (Matthew 7:24–27). The illustration

ends with Jesus telling us that the house built on obedience stands the storms of life, but the house built on disobedience will fall.

In one of my favorite verses of Scripture, Jesus asks another question. He asks his followers why they call him LORD, and won't obey his teaching (Luke 6:46).

It is quite clear that disobedience will bring disaster into our lives. On the other hand OBEDIENCE brings God's favor and blessing. I believe that the life of Jesus is the best example of an obedient life. There are four things that we can learn about obedience from the life of Jesus.

IESUS ALWAYS MADE HIS FATHER'S WILL A PRIORITY!

Early in Jesus' life we see that his obedient heart was manifest by what he said to his parents and how he lived in his home.

- "But why did you need to search? You should have known that I would be in my Father's house" (Luke 2:49). His loving parents were frantically searching for their twelve-year old and never suspected that he had not left Jerusalem for home with them. I can easily identify with their concern. Any parent could. At that early age Jesus was already concerned with fulfilling his heavenly Father's will. An obedient heart makes God's will a constant priority.
- Then he returned to Nazareth with them and WAS OBEDIENT TO THEM (Luke 2:51). It was the will of God for this young Jesus to obey his parents. We have already seen that the followers of Jesus are to have submissive spirits that are always ready to obey all authority. We live in a society today that believes that submission and obedience are selective. It is important for us to remember that when Jesus is Lord we are obligated to gladly do the will of our Father in heaven. God's will is revealed to us in his written Word, and by the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

JESUS ALWAYS CHOSE TO DO THE RIGHT THING!

- But Jesus said, "it must be done, because we must do everything that is right." So then John baptized him (Matthew 3:15). I am sure that John the Baptist questioned Jesus' decision to be baptized. I also wonder why the Son of God needed to be baptized. This act teaches us that Jesus was setting the perfect example for us. He makes it clear that as his followers we need to ALWAYS CHOOSE TO DO THE RIGHT THING.
- "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). These two passages are taken from the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapters 5-7 Jesus gives us clear teaching on WHAT IS RIGHT. It is clear that if we are to be the SALT OF THE FARTH and THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD we must always CHOOSE TO DO THE RIGHT THING with God's help. God's Word clearly teaches us that when we commit to doing RIGHT, he helps us. The apostle Paul, when writing to the church in Ephesus said, for we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we CAN DO THE GOOD THINGS he planned for us long ago (Ephesians 2:10). Paul also tells us in Philippians 2:13 that God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power TO DO WHAT PLEASES HIM. Our human nature has its own agenda and often prefers to ignore God's commands. I remember so well that as a teenager I was tempted to make wrong choices. I also remember how the teachings of my father and the promptings of the Holy Spirit helped me to make THE RIGHT CHOICES.

JESUS NEVER AVOIDED DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES!

When I look at the life of Jesus I see that he never lived on easy street. He declared that he didn't have a home but was an itinerant teacher. Having been an itinerant teacher, I know that sleeping

and eating in different places for weeks on end was never easy. Early in my ministry, in the bush of Liberia, I was asked to travel along the coast to a village where we would minister to a group of Christian workers. When I think of the things we faced on that trip, I can only describe it as DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. We walked many miles through hot, humid jungle. At times we had to wade through deep mud. At other times we had to put our clothes on our heads and wade across rivers. When we arrived at the meeting site my bed was made up of two benches about twenty-four inches wide. One was higher than the other. There was no mattress. The food we were served was different than what I was used to. On the way back home I contracted a worm that invaded my leg and caused me much trouble. Then there was the threat of malaria. The circumstances were DIFFICULT! Would I do it again? Yes, a thousand times yes. WHY? Because I want to be obedient to the one who called me. Most of my life I have faced DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, but here I am eightyfive years old and still choosing to obey. Be challenged by the words of lesus!

- As the time drew near for his return to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). Jesus knew what he would face in Jerusalem. He would be denied, betrayed, arrested, spit upon, insulted and crucified. He could have called upon thousands of angels to deliver him, BUT HE RESOLUTELY SET OUT FOR JERUSALEM. He faced the circumstances with holy determination to do the will of the Father.
- "Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, Father save me from what lies ahead? But that is the very reason why I came! Father, bring glory to your name" (John 12:27–28). In the garden he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I WANT your WILL, NOT MINE" (Luke 22:42). We know that we will face difficulties in our lives, but with

the help that the Lord has promised us we can and will be victorious. An OBEDIENT HEART never AVOIDS DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, no matter what the cost!

IESUS PRACTICED TOTAL SUBMISSION TO HIS FATHER!

Earlier in our study we saw the importance of having a submissive spirit. We are aware that God's view of rebellion is that it is equal to witchcraft. In our OBEDIENT response to God we need to emulate Jesus who is our perfect example.

- "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me" (Luke 22:42). In this passage Jesus' humanity is seen. He had feelings. He could suffer pain. Like you and me, he preferred not to suffer pain. Notice that he said, "if you are willing, take this cup from me." Those are words of submissive obedience to his Father. Here we see that Jesus had complete trust in his Father's will.
- "Yet I want your will, not mine" (Luke 22:42). In the following verses we see him praying so fervently that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Submission is never easy for us. It wasn't easy for Jesus. It is a battle between our wills and the will of our heavenly Father.
- "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands! And with those words he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46). These words were spoken as he hung on the cross–fulfilling his Father's will. Because of his obedient–submissive heart we have forgiveness of sin and are part of God's family.

JESUS HAS SOME WORDS FOR US TODAY!

• "Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the kingdom of God your primary concern" (Matthew 6:32–33). He is telling us that we will

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have EVERYTHING we need when our priority is to put God and his kingdom first in our lives.

 "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life" (Matthew 16:24–25). Jesus demonstrated this kind of life and now he challenges us to GIVE UP! Submit to this wonderful HEAVENLY FATHER and be quick to always obey.

Jesus never said this would be easy, but he made it clear by his example and teaching that it is absolutely necessary. I, for one, am determined to work at putting aside my selfish life and let his will be done in me.

Please pray this prayer with me today!

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me so much that you gave your Son, Jesus, to be my door into your family. I also thank you that you have sent Jesus to show me the way out of myself and into an intimate relationship with you. I also thank you for your written Word that makes this new life clear to me. TODAY I choose to follow Jesus and to walk in relationship with you. Amen!

Conclusion

This book barely covers the basics of KNOWING GOD. It would take more than a lifetime to thoroughly research and understand this subject. Perhaps this simple study will create in you a desire to know God better and challenge you to make knowing God your priority. In Deuteronomy chapter ten, after God gave Israel two new tablets of stone with his commandments, he lays out for them HIS REQUIREMENTS. These requirements are part of our ESSENTIAL RESPONSE to God's revelation of his person and character.

The requirements are found in verses 12–17.

"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you?"

- He requires you to fear him.
- He requires you to live according to his will.
- He requires you to *love* him.
- He requires you to worship him with all your heart and soul.
- He requires you to *obey* the Lord's commands and laws.
- He requires you to *cleanse* your sinful hearts and stop being stubborn.

That is a challenging and powerful list! Moses ends this list of

Essential Knowledge Of God

requirements by giving us a powerful statement about our God: The Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and takes no bribes (Deuteronomy 10:17).

I want to close this book with some of the words that Moses and the children of Israel sang after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. In past years we sang a chorus taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Who else among the gods is like you, O Lord?
Who is glorious in holiness like you?
So awesome in splendor,
Performing such wonders?
(Exodus 15:11)

In verses 12–13 we hear this great company of people giving glory to their (our) God.

You raised up your hand, and the earth swallowed our enemies. With unfailing love you will lead this people whom you have ransomed. You will guide them in your strength to the place where your holiness dwells.

We used to sing an old song that finalizes the message of this book for me. I can't find the words, but I will share what I remember most!

When you KNOW HIM! When you KNOW HIM!
You will love HIM just as others do.
A happy morn will dawn for you! When you KNOW
MY JESUS TOO!

Simple Steps To Knowing God

If you do not know HIM today, simply tell him that you want to know him. He is even now waiting to receive you into his family.

If you know HIM, give him thanks and determine to know him even better!