

CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS

A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR A DISCIPLE

WORKBOOK

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Craig Caster



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Christian Foundational Truths

A Strong Foundation for a Disciple

Craig Caster

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)

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Christian Foundational Truths: A Strong Foundation for a Disciple by Craig Caster

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A special thanks to my son Justin for working with me on this book project.

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A Letter from the Author

Dear Disciple,

Two years into full-time ministry, I found myself amazed by the number of Christians I counseled who had a nonexistent daily devotional life and a naivety of basic biblical truths. After sharing my concerns with my staff following a morning prayer meeting, my secretary asked, “Why don’t you write a devotional that will help them?”

My head flooded with questions of doubt: Where will I find the time? Who would read it? Am I qualified to write a devotional? I’ve never attended seminary or Bible college and barely even graduated from high school.

As I began to pray, asking for guidance, the Lord impressed upon my heart to share the biblical truths that laid the spiritual foundation for me to know and trust Him. A lack of understanding and faith in these truths gives Satan a direct path into our minds to deceive, distract, and tempt us—inflicting fear and doubts about who God is and who we are as His children.

With this direction in mind, along with the consistent encouragement and support from my staff, I pressed on and labored through the process of creating this workbook. And now, twenty years later, I am amazed how God has used this devotional to impact thousands of lives throughout the world.

It is my prayer that this workbook will guide you into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and establish a solid spiritual foundation for your faith, helping you draw near to Him daily and walk in His righteousness. I also hope that when you finish this book, you will use it as a tool to fulfill God’s Great Commission to go and make disciples by asking the Lord to reveal someone in your life whom you can walk through it with.

Furthermore, I encourage you to read our three series, Marriage Is a Ministry, Parenting Is a Ministry, and Understanding Teens, to heed God’s wisdom as you tend to your spouse and children. You can find them on our website, www.FDM.world.

May you draw near to Jesus daily and become the disciple He has called and anointed you to be. Amen!

In Christ,

Pastor Craig Caster

Chapter 1

Jesus Christ the Son

I was raised by Catholic parents and attended Catholic school until sixth grade. I wasn't interested in religion as a child, but I did have a basic understanding of God. I believed that He was the creator of the world and that He had a son named Jesus, but I was somewhat in the dark about Jesus's origin. *Did God create Him? Did His life begin with the Virgin Mary?*

After sixth grade, I didn't pay much attention to religious influences. I didn't want to think about God or Jesus because I felt like They didn't like me. I was in survival mode, living by the impulses of my flesh and desperately trying to be happy. It was a dark period of my life. But then Jesus revealed Himself to me when I was twenty-one years old, and I received Him as my Lord and Savior. Several years later, I began to study the Word and was disciplined by mature, Christian believers. They helped me learn the doctrinal truths about Christ and why He came to this earth.

Lesson 1—Who Is Jesus Christ?

There are a variety of views on the identity of Jesus Christ. Some believe Him to be a great prophet or teacher. Others see Him as a humanitarian who lived and died long ago. What if Jesus asked you the same question He asked His disciples in Matthew 16? "Who do you say that I am?" (verse 15). How would you respond?

The Christian faith exists solely on the identity of Jesus, and the Holy Scriptures are the only place where His identity is revealed. Your entire life will be shaped by who you believe Him to be.

Jesus Is Our Creator

I think it's safe to say that most people who believe in creation, as described in Genesis 1:1, associate it with God. What if I told you that Jesus contributed to the creation of the universe? Would that surprise you?

Briefly write what you learn about Jesus.

Colossians 1:16-17

Hebrews 1:10

In these verses, we learn that Jesus played a prominent role in creation. He is an equal part of the Holy Trinity and has been since the beginning. Jesus created all things in and through Himself.

Next, we will see that His involvement with His creation didn't end at its origination. Everything requires His continual sustenance.

Jesus Is Our Sustainer

According to Hebrews 1:3, how does Jesus hold all things together?

Christ is not only the wise and powerful Creator of all things, but He also faithfully maintains His creation. He has been sustaining life since the beginning—before, during, and after His time on earth. He is, at this very moment, seated on His throne in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, upholding the universe.

As if being the Creator and Sustainer of life wasn't enough, Jesus also paid the ultimate price and became the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

<p><i>Sustain</i>—To give support to; to uphold; to maintain.</p> <p><i>Redeem</i>—To regain possession of by payment; to ransom, liberate, or rescue from captivity or bondage; to recover or deliver.</p>

Jesus Is Our Redeemer

What do Titus 2:14 and Colossians 1:13–14 say about our redemption?

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus voluntarily left His heavenly throne to live among His creation for the sake of becoming the worthy sacrifice. He did this to redeem humanity and reconcile us back to our original purpose.

Lesson 2—Why Did We Need a Redeemer?

You don't need to look far to find evidence that there is something instinctually wrong at the core of humanity. I find enough evidence by looking at my own heart. What do you see when you look at yours? Let's go back to the beginning to find the root of the problem.

It all began in the garden of Eden—the created paradise where humankind and nature lived in perfect harmony. It was a time when the Creator walked in perfect fellowship with His creation. Unfortunately, we can only imagine this utopia because something went terribly wrong.

Read Genesis 1:26. Whose image did the first created man bare?

Notice the terms *us* and *our*, which reveal God working with Jesus in the creation of the first man, who is later named Adam.

Read Genesis 2:15–17. What one prohibition did God place upon Adam? What would happen if he disobeyed?

Read Genesis 2:18–22. After giving Adam this command, God provided him with a companion, later named Eve. Now read Genesis 1:28 and write God's instructions for His image-bearers.

God made Eve for Adam to be his wife, and He instructed Adam to faithfully tend to all His creation. Everything was perfect, but then Satan entered the scene embodied in a serpent, as recorded in Genesis 3. He came like a thief to steal, kill, and destroy that which God had intended for Adam and Eve (John 10:10). Satan's first tactic was to tempt Eve to doubt God's goodness.

What did Satan ask Eve in Genesis 3:1?

How did Eve respond in Genesis 3:2–3?

Note that Eve was aware of the command that God gave Adam—a command given before He created her. Adam shared this decree with Eve, understanding the importance of God’s warning by faithfully sharing God’s law with his spouse.

What lie did Satan tell Eve in Genesis 3:4?

What did Satan say would happen if she ate of the fruit in Genesis 3:5?

What did Eve find alluring about the fruit in Genesis 3:6?

What did she decide to do?

What did Adam say and do when Eve offered him the fruit?

The first woman believed the Prince of Lies and doubted the goodness of her Creator, and the first man said nothing, following suit in disobedience.

Adam failed to heed God’s instructions to obey His commands and faithfully tend to his wife. He should have protected her and done everything necessary to make sure God’s will was accomplished. Adam and Eve believed Satan’s lies and sinned against God, doubting the consequences He warned them of—consequences that gravely affected the rest of humanity:

- Fellowship between God and His image-bearers broke (Genesis 3:8–10).
- God expelled humankind from the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23–24).
- The judgment for disobedience is death (Genesis 5:5).
- Adam’s sin spread throughout the human race (Romans 5:17–19).
- Humanity lost hope with no means to recover on their own (Ephesians 2:12).

We were created in the image of God; that is, we possess a mind capable of logic and rational thought and a heart to experience emotion and feel love. God gave us free will, but unfortunately we exercised our gift of free will to defy our Creator. As time went on, after the garden incident, things didn’t get better.

Briefly explain what God saw as He observed humankind.

Genesis 6:5

Exodus 32:22

Psalms 53:1-3

Humankind is hopelessly lost in sin. From the beginning, we turned away from our Creator and sought independence from Him—pridefully fulfilling the lust of our flesh. Nothing has changed today. Our disobedience to God causes all our pain, suffering, and sorrows of this life.

WHAT IS SIN?

ANY OFFENSE AGAINST GOD.

EXALTING ONESELF ABOVE THE CREATOR.

ANY DISOBEDIENCE OF THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD.

PUTTING ONESELF IN HIS PLACE AS THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY IN ONE'S LIFE.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Jesus Christ is the Creator and Sustainer of life. He came to earth to redeem mankind.

As you look at your own life and the world around you, do you agree with God's assessment of humanity and that our only hope for redemption is to turn back to God?

Lesson 3—How Were We Redeemed?

The Cross of Christ

How did Jesus Christ offer humankind redemption from their state of sin?

Ephesians 1:7

1 Peter 1:18-19

The Romans devised death by crucifixion, the most common torture routine for the lowest of criminals. It was a shameful and painfully slow execution. The Bible teaches that many of Jesus's fellow Jews rejected Him, His friends forsook Him, and the religious and government leaders condemned Him. He was mocked and scourged—beaten on His bare back with a leather whip that contained exposed fragments of metal. The Roman guards plucked out His beard and spat on His face. Then they stripped Him naked and gambled for His clothing.

Jesus, our Creator, was then nailed alive to the cross where He hung, dying, for six agonizing hours. For His first three hours on the cross, many passersby mocked Him, while others wept at the horror. During the final three hours, the sky turned black as the sins of the world were laid upon Him. On that day, over two thousand years ago, our sins were inserted into His death (Matthew 26:3-27:56).

Read Isaiah 53:3-6. Summarize what the prophet Isaiah said about the foretold Messiah.

Can you believe Isaiah spoke these words over six hundred years before Jesus died for our sins on the cross? Jesus's death was the fulfillment of this prophecy, pointing to Him as the true Savior.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Because of our sin, we owed God a debt that we could not pay. Jesus redeemed us and paid our debt by shedding His blood on the cross.

Read John 19:30. What were the final words Jesus said before He died?

Jesus Christ finished the work of redemption on the cross. After His death, Joseph of Arimathea placed Him in a tomb

where He remained for three days. But death has no power over Jesus.

The Resurrection of Jesus

According to John 20, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rose from the dead! Read 1 Corinthians 15:17. Why is His resurrection is so important?

The apostle Paul urges the Corinthians to understand that without Christ’s resurrection, there could be no forgiveness of sins or the promise of eternal life with God.

Read Romans 4:25. Why was Jesus raised from the dead?

Jesus placed our sins upon Himself at His death. His resurrection revealed His righteousness and gift of eternal life with God. Jesus conquered death, proving that He was a worthy sacrifice and that God accepted His life as our substitute.

Justify—To pronounce free from guilt or blame; to absolve; to treat as righteous; free from penalty of sin.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important to the Christian faith because without it, Jesus would be dead like an ordinary man. The promise of eternal life for His children would be empty, and He would not be God.

Why Did Jesus Go to the Cross?

It’s a simple question. The shepherd David asked God something similar in one of his Psalms. After considering the magnitude and power of God and all He has created, David asked, “What is man that You are mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:3-4).

Why did Jesus willingly go to the cross?

Romans 5:7-8

John 3:16

Can it be that simple? It is. Even though we can't fully understand the depths of His love and the value He places upon us, it is tangible and eternal evidence of God's limitless grace and mercy, which He bestows upon us.

Lesson 4—Saved by Grace

God had every right to extend His righteous judgment on the sins of this world, but instead, He extends mercy and grace. Read Ephesians 2:1–9 and summarize what you learn.

God’s grace and mercy are unearned and undeserved and are personified in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is new every morning and provides continued evidence of His unfailing love. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us more and nothing we can do to make Him love us less. His mercy withholds our deserved eternal separation from God. His grace gives the free gift of salvation through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Grace is a gift that we do *not* deserve, and mercy is not getting what we *do* deserve. Instead of His righteous judgment, God offers salvation to all.

Mercy—Forbearance from inflicting harm by punishment; disposition to exercise compassion or forgiveness; willingness to spare or help; a blessing regarded as a manifestation of compassion or favor.

Grace—Divine favor unmerited; a supernatural, free gift of God bestowed on humankind for their regeneration or sanctification; salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ; divine love; forgiveness for the repentant sinner.

WHAT IS SALVATION?

DELIVERANCE FROM THE POWER AND EFFECTS OF SIN.

LIBERATION FROM DARKNESS AND DELUSION.

DIVINE RESCUE FROM A DIVINE JUDGMENT.

PRESERVATION FROM DEATH AND ETERNAL MISERY.

How is salvation described in Romans 6:23?

According to Romans 10:11–13, who are saved?

Read 1 John 2:2. For whose sins did Jesus die?

Read 1 Timothy 2:4-6. Who does God desire to save?

Jesus Christ died for the sins of the entire human race. He desires all of us to call upon Him and receive His salvation from judgment and death.

Lesson 5—How Are We Saved?

One must know how to receive salvation. All false religions teach that only through works can anyone find favor with God and receive eternal life with Him. It is not by living a good life, loving others, and attending church regularly that God accept us. Write what you learn from the following Scriptures.

John 14:6

Acts 4:12

1 John 5:12

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

There is no other way for mankind to be saved from the penalty of sin except by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus. To reject the cross of Christ is to reject the only means of salvation. To not believe in Jesus is to remain hopelessly lost and guilty before God.

A personal relationship with God is extended to the world, but only on His terms. God made provision for everyone to enter into an intimate relationship with Him solely by the blood Jesus shed on the cross and believing in Jesus.

How Do We Receive the Gift of Salvation?

Write what you learn from these verses about receiving God's wonderful gift of salvation.

Mark 1:15

Up to this point, the Jews taught that one could have eternal life with God through the law and works. Then Jesus used the word *repent*. When used in the gospel before salvation, *repent* means to change one's belief from living by the law, or being a good person, to salvation through the cross by faith in Jesus Christ. For believers after salvation, *repent* means to ask for forgiveness for sins committed. To believe in the gospel Jesus

Repent—(Greek) To change one's mind.

taught means to believe in the good news, the glad tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ and the work He did.

Acts 16:30–31

The good news of the gospel is believing in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by our works, how many sins we remember, how sincerely we repented of our sins, or our ability to understand the four spiritual laws. No person can remember all their sins to repent or even show the degree of sorrow for the cost of those sins paid on the cross. As we are discipled and study the Word of God, we learn that all have sinned and need salvation through the cross of Christ, and all must learn how to grow spiritually and be transformed into His image.

Jesus did all the work for us to be saved and receive the gift of eternal life with Him. Believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior must not be minimized or trivialized, for it is the purpose of our creation and how we are redeemed. *To believe in Jesus* means to believe in the Jesus of the Bible,

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God's offer of salvation is free to all who will believe in Him.

not one a person makes up. Many people did not understand the deeper theological principles of the Christian faith when they believed in Jesus, yet they became secure in their salvation at that moment. Deeper teaching comes after faith, believing in Jesus as Lord and

Savior, because only by the Holy Spirit dwelling within, which happens after salvation, can they begin to understand and work out these principles in their lives.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Pray a simple prayer of faith to receive your Savior:

Lord Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. Forgive me my sins. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. Be my Savior and Lord. Thank You for Your grace and mercy, and for giving me eternal life. Take control of my life and make me the person and disciple You want me to be. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

When we believe in Jesus Christ, we have everlasting life!

You are cherished and beloved by your Creator. When you believe in Him, you are washed clean from the sins of your past and justified in a new life with Christ.

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

Condemned—(Greek, *krino*) To be judged, summoned to trial that one's case may be examined and judgment passed upon them.

What word describes the consequences for those who will not believe in Jesus Christ?

The good news is as those who believe in Jesus Christ, we will not be judged.

Lesson 6—What Does It Mean for Believers?

Believers Are Justified

Summarize what you learn from the following Scriptures.

Romans 3:23–26

Acts 13:38–39

Read Colossians 2:13–14. What did God do with our debt of sin?

According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, what do sinners become when they surrender to Christ?

**WHAT HAPPENED AT THE CROSS?
ALL OUR SINS WERE PUT ON CHRIST.
AT CONVERSION, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PUT ON US.
THE INNOCENT ONE PAID THE PENALTY.
THE GUILTY ARE SET FREE!**

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

When we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous in Christ.

Believers Are Born Again

Read John 3:1–8. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus he must do to enter the kingdom of God?

Read Ephesians 2:1-5. What changes are made to the believer who is born again?

Born again—Regenerated; renewed; having received spiritual life.

Eternal—Everlasting; without beginning or end; timeless; of infinite duration.

Believers Are Given the Gift of Eternal Life

What do you learn from the wonderful promises in John 3:16 and John 11:25-26?

Read 1 John 5:11-13, then rewrite verse 12 in your own words.

It is difficult for us to understand the gift of eternal life because of the reality that everyone dies a physical death. As Christians, even though our physical bodies die from illness, old age, or accidents, our spirits are immortal and will never die. In fact, we will be resurrected and given a new heavenly body that will not be subject to illness, old age, or death!

What truths do you learn about eternal life from 1 Corinthians 15:35-58?

Because God’s plan for our lives extends throughout eternity, we ought to cease striving for complete fulfillment in temporal things. God desires to bless our lives in this world, yet absolute happiness and satisfaction are not attainable until we arrive at our eternal destination in the presence of our heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

When we surrender our lives to Christ, He grants us the precious gift of eternal life.

Fellowship with God Restored

Read John 17:20-23 and summarize Jesus’s prayer for all believers.

We were created to live in fellowship with our Holy Creator. We defied His law and became unworthy to be in His presence; we were sentenced to eternal separation from Him with the penalty of death. Because of His love, Jesus Christ paid the price for our sin on the cross. He died so we could live. He rose so we could receive a new life in His righteousness. We are now worthy because Christ is worthy. Our fellowship with our Creator is restored because Jesus Christ's death and resurrection are enough.

Take a few moments to reflect on what you have learned in this chapter about Christ's love for you, His sacrifice for your sins, and His desire to have a personal relationship with you. What lesson has had the most significant impact on your faith? Explain.

You have completed the first chapter on your path as a disciple and have learned the doctrinal truths of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of our faith as Christians. I encourage you to keep going! In the next chapter, you will learn about what it means to live in a relationship with God as your heavenly Father.

Chapter 2

The Fatherhood of God

When you hear the term *father*, what comes to mind? Everyone on this earth has a biological father, and every father is unique; so that means everyone's experience with their father is unique. Some people have good fathers who do their best to raise their children well. Some people know only harsh fathers who are ignorant, unable, or unwilling to parent as God intended. Other people know fathers who are weak or passive, disregarding the loving leadership and training that God's Word instructs them to provide their children. Some people don't know their fathers at all because they neglected their responsibility altogether and abandoned their families. In this chapter, we will learn what true fatherhood is.

Lesson 1—Our Heavenly Father

No matter your experience with your earthly father, the Bible assures us that once we believe and receive Christ and His redeeming work, we are adopted by God and He becomes our Father. You will learn in this chapter that our heavenly Father is a perfect parent, faithful in His love and care, skillful to train, wise to guide, always available, and committed to raise you up to maturity.

Adopted into God's Family

In religious circles, all humankind is often referred to as the children of God. You may recall hearing a pastor or other religious leader claim, "We are all God's children." However, the Bible clearly teaches that though we are all God's creation, the fatherhood of God is not universal. Who has the right to call God "Father"?

Adopt—To take or receive as one's own; to approve of; to accept; to take by choice into a relationship as child, heir, friend, or citizen.

John 1:12

Galatians 3:26

Ephesians 2:8-9

Scripture provides a clear portrait of God's heart as a father in the story of the prodigal son. Read Luke 15:11-24.

When the son came to his senses, what did he remember about his father (verse 17)?

How did the son plan to approach his father (verses 18-19)?

How did the father receive him (verses 20-24)?

The depths of the heavenly Father's love toward us is unfathomable. As adopted members of His family, we are the recipients of His endless love, patience, and kindness.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Only those who have surrendered their lives to Christ can rightly address God as their Father. God sent His Son to redeem us, forgive our sins, and adopt us as His own children.

A Father Who Knows

Because our heavenly Father is also our Creator, He absolutely knows and understands each one of us individually and uniquely. David wrote many Psalms about God's intimate knowledge. Summarize the passages below. How well does God know you?

Psalm 71:6

Psalm 103:13-14

Psalm 139:1–6

Psalm 139:7–12

Psalm 139:13–18

God knew you before you were born and uniquely formed you in your mother’s womb. He chose your parents and ordained the circumstances in your life, whether joyous or difficult. Though you may not have known or acknowledged Him, He has watched over you, drawing you to Himself. He is your Creator, who knew you before you knew Him, and knows you better than you know yourself.

A Father Who Trains

As a loving Father, God desires His children to grow into strong, healthy, mature adults. He wants us to reflect His character, depending on Him for strength and guidance. Before coming to Christ, we were spiritual orphans—dependent on God, self-centered, and in the habit of indulging in sinful behavior. After accepting Jesus Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and given a new life through Him. But as newborn Christians, we are still accustomed to doing things our own way, relying on our own strength. We are not aware of how independent, sinful, and ignorant we are. But God in His infinite wisdom knows how to reveal these things in each of our lives.

God knows each one of us intimately. He knows what gives us great joy and what brings us deep sorrow. He understands each one of our unique temperaments—the weaknesses, strengths, and limitations of our personality. He also knows the temptations that entice us. As a wise Father, God takes it all into consideration as He works out His will in our individual lives, training each one of us to become spiritually mature.

God loves us just as we are, but it is precisely because He loves us that He will not leave us the way we are. What does 2 Corinthians 3:18 say about our image?

God begins a new work in His adopted children to train, teach, and instill the family likeness in them. He longs for His children to share in His holiness and to be transformed into the likeness of His Son.

Transform—To change the form of; to change in nature, disposition, heart, or the like; to convert.

Lesson 2—God’s Tools for Transformation

As a potter uses his hands and special tools to shape and mold a piece of clay into a beautiful vessel, God likewise uses His hands and tools to shape and mold our lives. If we yield to His gentle, yet firm, touch, He will reshape us into individuals of inner strength and beauty. God uses three primary tools in His transformation process: the Bible, trials and difficulties, and other people.

The Bible

We learn the foundational truths of our faith and grow in wisdom, knowledge, and belief by reading the Word of God daily.

Psalm 119:105. God’s Word is a _____.

Hebrews 4:12. The Word of God is _____.

Jeremiah 23:29. God’s Word is like _____.

Job 23:12. God’s Word is to be treasured more than _____.

Ephesians 5:26. God’s Word sanctifies and _____.

1 Peter 2:2. God’s Word is _____.

Read John 5:38–40. Why did Jesus reprove the religious Jews?

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:7–8)

Jesus instructed His disciples to abide in Him and His words—to immerse themselves in His teaching. We are not to simply read the Word out of a sense of duty or to acquire Bible knowledge. Our goal must be to know Jesus and His will for us more intimately, desiring to follow His instructions. As we abide in His Word, our desires begin to mirror His, revealing what we are to ask for, resulting in our lives glorifying our heavenly Father.

Abide—To sustain; to submit to; to continue to endure without yielding; to remain stable or fixed in.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The Word of God is a powerful tool that He will use to transform our lives.

Trials and Difficulties

What does God’s Word say about our trials and difficult circumstances?

James 1:2-4

1 Peter 1:6-7

Psalm 66:10-12

Our heavenly Father uses our difficulties to reveal our independence, expose our unrighteousness, teach us lessons, mature our faith, and bring us to a place of spiritual abundance. During our trials, we must rest in His grace, love, and tender care. If we do not adopt God's perspective, we will reject His disciplines and allow life's hardships to break us.

Recall a situation in your life, presently or in the past, when the Lord used difficult or painful circumstances to bring you closer to Him.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

If we are willing, God will use our trials to transform us into the image of His Son.

Other People

God places people in our lives to counsel and encourage us. He also places people, through disappointing experiences, to teach us to put our confidence in Him alone. What do you learn about other people in the following verses?

Proverbs 27:17

Romans 1:11-12

Psalm 41:9-12

2 Timothy 4:16-17

Who has God put in your life to encourage you in your faith?

Who in your life challenges you to be patient and loving?

Lesson 3—God’s Discipline

When you think of the word *discipline*, what comes to mind? It’s not typically a word that elicits warm feelings of love and nurture. Most of our experiences with discipline are coupled with images of a disappointed or angry parent. Discipline is difficult, uncomfortable, and sometimes painful. It’s not something we readily receive with open arms. And yet, the Bible tells us that God disciplines us.

It’s not particularly popular to preach on God’s discipline. Most people would rather focus on God’s love and forgiveness—the characteristics of God that make us feel good. But our loving, heavenly Father is not always interested in making us feel good. He wants us to *become* good, like Him.

Discipline—To teach; to train in self-control or obedience to given standards; to develop by instruction and exercise.

Read Hebrews 12:5–11.

Who does the Lord discipline (verse 6)?

What does this discipline prove (verse 8)?

Why does He discipline us (verse 10)?

What result does discipline yield (verse 11)?

God patiently and persistently purges the thoughts, attitudes, and actions that are not pleasing to Him, replacing them with the “peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Read Galatians 5:22–23 and list the fruit God desires to produce in our lives.

Summarize Philippians 1:6.

You have the assurance that God will transform your life to produce His good fruit. He is actively working to mold you into His image. But you must understand, you cannot passively stand by as He does His work. You have the responsibility to actively receive and submit to His discipline in order to be transformed.

God's transformation tools—the Bible, trials and difficulties, and other people—along with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, reveal our lack of Christlikeness, our ignorance of His will, and our independence from Him. Can you recall a time when you acted in a way that did not reflect God's loving nature? When you felt convicted while reading the Bible or listening to a sermon? Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit convict you after responding to a trial or a person in a sinful way?

God knows you fully and is aware of the areas in your life He is not finished transforming. But to experience change, you must accept His methods of transformation. As He reveals your sin nature through His transformation tools, you must confess your sin to Him, ask for His forgiveness, and seek forgiveness from those you may have sinned against. This is what it means to cooperate with God's discipline and is the only way for you to experience the transformation and spiritual growth God desires. It is an *active* participation.

What do you learn from 1 John 2:6 and Ephesians 5:1-7?

Are there areas of your life (thoughts, words, or deeds) that do not resemble Christ? As your lack of Christ's likeness is revealed through God's transformation tools, you must actively put them to death through repentance, prayer, studying the Word, and seeking accountability.

What do you learn from Romans 12:1-2 and Ephesians 5:17?

Do you know what the will of God is in all areas of your life (your relationship with Him, your spouse, your children, your family and friends, your finances, and others)? As your ignorance is revealed, you must actively seek the knowledge of His good and perfect will in all areas of your life through repentance, prayer, studying the Word, and finding a disciple to help you.

What do you learn from Romans 6:1-4, James 1:22-25, and 1 Peter 1:13-16?

Are you humbly yielding to God’s authority, or are you excusing ungodly behavior and disobedience? Have you placed your own conditions on whether or not you will obey? As your independence from God is revealed through His transformation tools, you must actively submit to His authority through repentance and ask Him for the humility and power to live a life of obedience. Seeking accountability can also be helpful.

Read 2 Peter 1:5–9 and summarize what you learn.

Your transformation will take time, but God is a good, patient, and faithful Father. He promises to finish the work He has begun in you. However, if you refuse to yield to God’s discipline, then you are asking for His scourging.

Scourging—To punish or afflict with severity; to chastise for sins or faults for the purpose of correction.

Read Hebrews 12:6. Why does God chasten and scourge His children?

God loves you unconditionally and wants to bless you beyond measure. But if you are unwilling to receive His discipline, you will not have the joy and peace He desires to give you. Instead, you will experience depression, fear, discontentment, unfulfillment, and doubt. Your life will lack the fruits of the spirit and begin to bear the fruits of the flesh.

Read Galatians 5:19–21 and list some of the fruits of the flesh that stand out to you.

When we experience God’s scourging, it is natural for us to blame other people or our difficult circumstances for the pain. It is a lie we believe that comes from Satan or even ourselves so we can avoid taking personal responsibility for our rebellion to submit to God’s discipline. It does not bring God joy to scourge His children, but if we are honest, we can admit that sometimes we need a measured amount of pain to motivate us to yield. Take comfort that your heavenly Father loves you enough to get your attention and finish the work He has begun in you.

Lesson 4—Promises of God’s Tender Care

Our heavenly Father is ready to assume full responsibility for the life wholly yielded and devoted to Him. We are surrounded by His watchful care.

Psalm 91:4. Above us are His _____.

Deuteronomy 33:27. Under us are His _____.

Psalm 34:7. We are surrounded by _____.

Philippians 4:6–7. Our hearts and minds are guarded by _____.

The love and care we receive from our heavenly Father are evident in His promises to provide us with His presence, His provision, and His protection.

The Promise of God’s Presence

Briefly write what you learn about God’s constant nearness.

Psalm 23:4

Psalm 121:1–5

Psalm 139:7–10

Hebrews 13:5–6

As God’s children, we are never alone. Our Father is ever watchful and always near.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

In His tender care, our heavenly Father is always with us.

The Promise of God's Provision

What do the following verses teach you about trusting God as your provider?

Matthew 6:25-26

Romans 8:32

Philippians 4:19

Read Matthew 7:7-11. According to verse 11, what kind of gifts will the Father give to those who ask?

God gives only good gifts to His children. Out of His love and wisdom, He often withholds what we ask and instead gives what He knows is best for us. These are opportunities to trust in His goodness and wisdom, even when we don't understand His ways.

Read Matthew 6:24-34. If God takes care of the birds of the air and the grass of the fields, then we must believe that He will certainly take care of His beloved children. We are instructed to not worry about these temporal things. In verse 32, we learn that those are the worries of the gentiles, which refer to those who do not know God.

What, if any, are the worries, concerns, or cares you have currently?

According to Matthew 6:33, what is the remedy for worrying?

We must seek God and make our personal relationship with Him our first priority. As we develop the habit of committing everything to Him and trusting Him in all things, He will enable us to overcome the sinful habit of worrying.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

In His tender care, our heavenly Father will meet all our needs.

The Promise of God's Protection

The Bible contains 365 commands to fear not. As children of the Almighty God, we can rest secure in Him. What do you learn about God's protection from the following Scriptures?

Isaiah 54:17

Psalms 91:1-12

Psalms 121:5-8

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

In His tender care, our heavenly Father guards and keeps us.

Our heavenly Father goes to great lengths in His Word to assure us of His discipline, protection, and provision. We must respond in faith, entrusting our lives and all our concerns into His keeping. While God's glory, power, and sovereignty are demonstrated in His creation, the depth of

His divine character is demonstrated in His fatherhood. God's love, patience, kindness, mercy, and goodness are revealed in His relationship with us, His children.

What do you learn about the character of God from the following verses?

1 John 3:1

2 Peter 3:9

Ephesians 1:3-6

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

As the adopted children of God, we become heirs of all that He possesses. What do the following verses say about the riches of our inheritance?

Psalm 50:10-12

Haggai 2:8

Read 1 Peter 1:3-4. Where is our inheritance?

How should the fact that you are an adopted child of God influence the way you see yourself?

I hope this chapter has helped deepen your understanding of God as your heavenly Father. The next chapter focuses on another gift from God, specifically reserved for those who repent and receive Christ Jesus as Savior—the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3

The Holy Spirit

I remember sitting in Catholic Mass and hearing the priest mention the Holy Spirit. I didn't know what it was, but I knew "It" was somehow important. The mystery surrounding the Spirit remained for the next fifteen years of my life. Even after I experienced a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit when I received Christ as Lord, I still knew nothing about *It*. Unfortunately there is a lot of confusion on the subject of the Holy Spirit in the church. Many believe "It" is an influence emanating from God or a power that God imparts to the Christian—a sort of Star Wars "force" that a Christian can tap into. As I began to learn what the Bible teaches about the Spirit, I soon realized *It* is a *Who*.

Lesson 1—Who Is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is as much a part of God as Jesus is, equal in power and glory, completing the Holy Trinity as they operate together as one. It is through the Spirit that God communicates to His children, revealing Himself and the deep sins of the heart. Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is eternal, omnipresent (in all places, at all times), omnipotent (all-powerful), and omniscient (all-knowing).

What do the following Scriptures say about the Holy Spirit?

Hebrews 9:14. The Holy Spirit is _____.

Psalms 139:7–10. The Holy Spirit is _____.

Luke 1:35. The Holy Spirit is _____.

1 Corinthians 2:10–11. The Holy Spirit is _____.

He also possesses defined personality traits that are revealed in the following Scriptures:

- He has a will (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- He loves (Romans 15:30).
- He grieves (Ephesians 4:30).
- He can be lied to (Acts 5:3).
- He jealously desires us (James 4:5).
- He can be quenched or suppressed (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

Christian Foundational Truths

- He is insulted by man's rejection of the Savior (Hebrews 10:29).
- He speaks (1 Timothy 4:1).
- He is the truth (1 John 5:6).

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The Holy Spirit is not an obscure cosmic power or mere influence. He is a divine Person. He is God.

Lesson 2—The Holy Spirit's Work

The Holy Spirit Gives New Birth

The Holy Spirit provides the means of receiving a new life in Christ. Jesus wanted His followers to understand the Spirit's regenerating work. Read John 3:1–8.

What did Jesus tell Nicodemus he must do to see the kingdom of God?

Jesus taught that every man and woman must experience two births to go to heaven—a physical birth (water) and a spiritual birth (by the Spirit). To help Nicodemus understand the Holy Spirit, Jesus likened Him and His work to the wind in verse 8.

- The wind blows where it wills, likewise the Spirit is sovereign and free, and no man controls Him. He works as He wills.
- The wind is invisible, yet powerful. You cannot see the wind, but its effects are visible. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is invisible, but evidence of His power is visible in an individual's life and situation.
- Finally, as air is life-giving, so also the Holy Spirit gives life.

What you learn about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives from the following verses?

John 6:63

Titus 3:5

The Holy Spirit Transforms Our Lives

The Holy Spirit is invisible, yet powerful, and comes to dwell and impart new life in the hearts of all believers. We cannot see Him, yet the effects of His presence are visible in our lives. It is His work to transform each believer into the image of Christ. What do you learn about the Spirit from the following Scriptures?

2 Peter 1:3-4

Ezekiel 36:26-27

1 Corinthians 2:12-16

One aspect of the good news in the Christian faith is that God is not asking us to reform or improve ourselves. By the indwelling Holy Spirit, God will change us from the inside out! We participate in this process of transformation by daily seeking intimacy with Him and cooperating with His discipline by the power of His Holy Spirit. As we draw near to God in personal devotion, He gives us His heart, mind, and very nature. We must daily surrender, submit, and cooperate with Him.

Surrender—To yield to the power or possession of another; to resign; to give up completely.

Submit—To put or place under; to commit to the discretion or judgment of another.

Cooperate—To act or operate jointly with another.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within each believer, to impart new life, and to transform us into the image of Christ.

Lesson 3—The Holy Spirit Is Our Helper

Hours before Jesus was arrested, He took His disciples to the upper room to partake in the last supper. John 13–17 gives an account of all that Christ taught them during their last meal together before His crucifixion. He told His followers about the Holy Spirit, whom He would send to them after He ascended into heaven. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit from the following passages?

John 14:16–27

John 15:26

John 16:7–15

Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be another Helper, who would be with them and *in* them.

How does the Holy Spirit help us?

The Holy Spirit helps us _____ (Romans 8:26–27).

The Holy Spirit is our _____ (Romans 8:14; John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit is our _____ (1 John 2:27; John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit teaches us _____ (Luke 12:11–12).

Lesson 4—The Fullness of The Spirit

As we yield to the Holy Spirit, He fills us. In Ephesians 5:18, this “filling” is compared to being intoxicated. As an individual consumes wine, they become influenced and affected by the alcohol. In a similar manner, as we surrender to the Holy Spirit, He influences and affects our lives. He purifies our thoughts, motives, and desires, resulting in the transformation of our behavior.

Read John 7:37–39. In verse 37, what two things did Jesus ask the spiritually thirsty to do?

What will then flow from their lives (verse 38)?

As we acknowledge our need (thirst), believe in Jesus, and receive (drink) from Him, He will fill us to overflowing. His life will fill and overflow in us!

According to Jeremiah 2:13, what two evils did Israel commit?

Rather than trusting God to fill them and meet their needs, the children of Israel abandoned Him, seeking other sources of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Are you aware of the self-made cisterns you have created? Describe how you try to find fulfillment apart from Christ.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit jealously desires our devotion. He is a gentleman and will not trespass our will or force our obedience. Jesus voluntarily offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. In turn, repentant, forgiven sinners should respond by voluntarily surrendering to Him. As we yield daily

to the Spirit, He will fill us up to overflowing. His living water will flow from within and produce fruit in our lives.

This fruit is described in Galatians 5:22-23. List the fruit below.

What specific fruit of the Spirit has been lacking in your life?

The measure of the Spirit's fruit in our lives is directly related to our degree of dependence on Him. Just as a fruit tree requires sunshine, water, and healthy soil to produce fruit, the child of God must be absolutely dependent on the Holy Spirit to bear His fruit. Ask God, right now, to have His way in all areas of your life and to fill your heart with the fruits of the Spirit.

The Gifts of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit not only produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, He also imparts spiritual gifts to us. The gifts of the Spirit cannot be earned; they are not merited for faithful service. They are not related to our natural abilities, personalities, or character traits. These gifts are granted to the body of Christ solely by the grace of God. Three chapters of the New Testament are devoted exclusively to the teaching of the spiritual gifts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12-14.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 11, to which members of the body of Christ will the Holy Spirit impart spiritual gifts?

What should be the main objective for exercising spiritual gifts? (See 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26.)

What is the result when the gifts of the Spirit are exercised with pride and selfishness or without love for the brethren? (See 1 Corinthians 13:1-2.)

Because of the potential abuse in exercising the gifts of the Spirit, many Christian churches avoid the subject altogether. What words of warning does Paul give in 1 Corinthians 12:1 concerning the gifts?

Edification—Building up; moral, intellectual, or spiritual improvement; instruction.

The gifts of the Spirit found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28 are listed below, along with additional Scriptures addressing each one:

- Words of wisdom (Acts 6:10)
- Words of knowledge (1 Corinthians 1:5; Romans 15:14)
- Special faith (Acts 3:1–16)
- Gifts of healing (Mark 6:13; James 5:14–16)
- Operation of miracles (Acts 5:12–15; Hebrews 2:4)
- Prophecy (Exodus 7:1, 2; Jeremiah 1:9; 1 Corinthians 14:1–5, 24, 25, 39)
- Discerning of spirits (Acts 13:9–11; Hebrews 5:14)
- Tongues (1 Corinthians 14:1–5; Acts 2:3–11; Romans 8:26, 27)
- Interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:13, 27, 28)
- Helps (Acts 20:35)
- Governments (1 Timothy 5:17)

The gifts of the Spirit are distributed to each member of the body of Christ. If you are aware, what are your spiritual gifts?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

As we yield to the Holy Spirit, He produces spiritual fruit in us, and our spiritual gifts are manifested.

Lesson 5—Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Summarize 1 Corinthians 6:17–20.

When we receive Jesus as Lord, we become one in spirit with Him as the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us! Our bodies become the dwelling place, or temple, of the Spirit as He provides us with the power to glorify God in our thoughts, words, and deeds. This is known as being filled with the Spirit or receiving the Spirit upon conversion.

In Scripture, we see a clear distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit upon conversion and being baptized by the Holy Spirit. They both come from the same source, the Holy Spirit Himself, but they have two different purposes.

What does Luke 1:15 say about John the Baptist regarding the Holy Spirit?

John was full of the Holy Spirit in the same way we are filled at our conversion. In Luke 3:16, what does John say Jesus will do when He comes?

What did Jesus teach His disciples about the coming upon, or baptism, of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:4–8?

Jesus was speaking about the day of Pentecost that took place according to Acts 2:3–47.

Describe the following events.

Acts 2:3-13

Acts 2:14-36

Acts 2:37-41

Acts 2:42-47

The apostle Peter documents another time when the baptism of the Spirit took place on the gentiles in Caesarea. What did Peter say about the Spirit in Acts 11:15-16?

Notice that Peter makes no distinction between the Spirit falling upon the gentiles and the baptism of the Spirit that took place at Pentecost. They are one and the same. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an outpouring of the Spirit's power in miraculous ways. Even though it can be perceived as out of the ordinary, it is not something to fear. Ordinary is not a characteristic of God.

The Spirit's baptism is also not something to emphatically dwell on. We are to worship and glorify Jesus but not seek after the manifestation of His power. In other words, we are to love the Giver and not the gifts. Peter did not plan on or ask for the Holy Spirit to fall upon the gentiles in Caesarea. That was God's plan for His purpose and glory. Always keep the motives of your heart in check.

Lesson 6—The Ministry of the Spirit

Just as Jesus Christ met the needs of His disciples during His earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit ministers to each yielded believer in very practical ways. This lesson focuses on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to be our Comforter, Companion, Convicter, and Counselor.

Comforter

He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.
(John 14:16 KJV)

The comfort that the Holy Spirit offers has two parts. When we are hurting or in need, He offers us the infinite tenderness of a mother but also empowers us with courage to withstand the trials and frustrations of life. The word *comfort* comes from the Latin word *fortis*, from which we get the word *fortify*.

Write about a personal experience when you have known either the tender or the strengthening comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Companion

I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

As Christians, we are never alone. However, the circumstances of our life often press upon us and cause us to feel very much alone. In these times, we can become extremely vulnerable to the attacks of the Enemy. We must draw near to God, believing the promise of His loving, caring presence, and retreat to His Word, allowing His companionship to meet our emotional needs.

Read James 4:7–10. How can you respond to loneliness, depression, or the attacks of the Enemy in the future?

Convicter

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin. (John 16:8 NASB)

Because the Spirit is holy, He will reproduce His holiness in us. *Holiness* means separated unto God. Any thought or action in our lives that is not holy grieves the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Thankfully, He does not depart from us in our unholiness, but instead, He convicts and speaks to us through our conscience.

Our conscience is our inner judge that warns and allows us to feel the Spirit's grief when we are contemplating or participating in sin. The Bible urges us to keep a clear conscience. If we learn to quickly respond with obedience and repentance to the Spirit's nudging, He will keep us from sin.

Describe a time when you experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Did you yield?

Counselor

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor. (Isaiah 9:6 NASB)

God counsels us through His Word, through godly people, and by the inward guidance of His Holy Spirit. As we spend time in God's presence, we will learn to hear His voice and discern His will. Many Christians neglect to develop intimacy with God through daily devotions and continue to stumble through life, missing the guidance and counsel of the Holy Spirit. See appendix B for recommended books to begin this discipline.

What situation are you dealing with today that you need God's wisdom for?

What promise does God give in James 1:5-6?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter in our difficulties, our ever-present Companion, our Convicter in times of temptation, and our Counselor when we need guidance and wisdom.

You now have a better understanding of the three personifications of God: God the Son, God the Father, and God the Holy Spirit. Together they make the Holy Trinity, one God in three Persons, equal in power and majesty. In the next chapter, you will learn what it means to grow into a mature Christian as the sanctifying work of Christ takes effect in your life.

Chapter 4

Spiritual Growth & Maturity

When I was thirteen years old, a friend of mine persuaded me to join his baseball team despite the fact that I had never participated in any organized sport, and my only baseball experience was the occasional bout on the school playground. On the first day of practice, I learned two things: I was terrible at baseball, and everyone else on the team was really good.

Over the next few weeks of practice, all I wanted to do was quit. I had the physical ability but didn't have any developed skills for the game. I found myself consistently feeling inadequate, but my friend encouraged me to hang in there. Over time, I began to catch, field, and hit the ball with more ease. I even received a trophy at the end of the season for "most improved" and had one of the highest batting averages on the team.

Growing spiritually and walking with God in obedience are also learned disciplines. Without knowing how to mature spiritually or by neglecting the process, a Christian will never fully experience the transformation and purpose God desires for them to have.

Lesson 1—Paul's Example

The Bible describes a new believer as a babe in Christ. Just as a healthy baby experiences the various stages of growth before reaching adulthood, the baby Christian should steadily progress on the path to spiritual maturity. It is tragic when a baby fails to grow and become a healthy, mature adult. It is likewise grievous when a Christian stops short of spiritual wholeness and maturity. Our heavenly Father desires all His children to develop into mature men and women of faith.

The life of the apostle Paul provides a great example for how to press on to spiritual maturity.

Paul's Salvation

Paul was a religious man from his youth, but he did not come to faith in Christ until much later in his life. What do you learn about Paul's life from the following Scriptures?

Acts 22:3

Acts 23:6

Acts 26:4-5

Galatians 1:14

Philippians 3:4-6

Paul's zeal for his Jewish religion and its laws were displayed most vividly in his persecution of the Christian church. He believed that persecuting Christ's followers was a service unto God, so he did it with a clear conscience. Summarize Paul's actions toward believers in the following Scriptures. (Note: prior to Paul's conversion to Christ, he was called Saul.)

Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-3; Galatians 1:13

Acts 22:4; 22:19; 26:9-11

Paul was a leading force behind the attempted destruction of the early church and a catalyst for the persecution of Christians. Because of this, many agree that his conversion to Christianity was one of the greatest and most important events in church history. Read the account in Acts 9:1-22 and briefly rewrite the story in your own words.

Paul first lived as a tyrant to the early church, but his encounter with Jesus Christ completely transformed him. Read his testimony in 1 Timothy 1:12-16 and write some of the key points.

Paul's Baptism

Acts 9:18 says that Paul was baptized right after he received his sight. Christian baptism is one of three ordinances that Jesus instituted for the church. Read Matthew 28:19-20 and write the three commands Jesus gave.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

These instructions are known as the Great Commission and are the responsibility of every member of the body of Christ. The disciple Ananias faithfully responded to the Lord's instructions and obeyed this commission by making Paul a disciple, baptizing him, and teaching him to mature and grow in his faith.

Baptism is a physical, public expression or declaration of what has taken place in the heart. The act of being submerged underwater symbolizes the death of the old life apart from Christ, and the ascension out of the water symbolizes being washed clean, born into a new life with Christ. When a Christian chooses to be baptized in obedience to Christ's word, it is a public declaration that Jesus died for their sins, was buried in a tomb, and rose from the dead. It is important to understand that baptism is not an act imperative for salvation, but it is an act of obedience responding to the salvation that has already taken place. Baptism is important because Jesus commanded it.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH
Baptism is a physical, public expression or declaration of what has taken place in the heart. God does not choose to adopt us into His family as His children because of any virtue of our own. It is only by His grace alone that we are chosen.

Paul's Service

Paul became an apostle and was an instrument in God's hand. He was sent out, impassioned, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish great things.

- Missionary and church planter—The Lord sent Paul on three missionary journeys into areas where the gospel had previously not been preached. He proclaimed Christ as the Savior and established many churches in these regions. Paul's missionary travels are recorded in Acts 13–21.
- Preacher and teacher—As was foretold, Paul preached Christ to gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Many believed in Christ while others mocked and persecuted Him. Examples of Paul's sermons are recorded in Acts 13:16–41 and Acts 17:22–34.
- Writer—Out of the twenty-seven books forming the New Testament, Paul was the author of thirteen, possibly fourteen, of them. These books were letters, known as the epistles, written to the churches he established on his missionary journeys.

Apostle—A messenger; one sent out on a mission, who derives his authority from the sender.

From a prideful religious leader and persecutor of Christians to a humble servant of the Almighty God, Paul's life is an example to all believers. Though few lives follow such extremes, all Christians, like Paul, have gone from darkness to light—from pridefully defying God's truth to humbly receiving His gift of salvation by grace.

What wonderful promise does God give to all believers in Ephesians 2:10?

Do you believe that God has a plan and purpose for your life?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Regardless of our past mistakes or failures, God's calling and purpose for every believer is to have a relationship with Him and to serve Him by serving others.

Lesson 2—Sanctification

The biblical term for the Christian's maturing process is sanctification. This word can also be defined as the process of becoming holy. Holiness is not a feeling or an experience, but rather a lifestyle in which the character of the Son of God is developed and lived out in the believer's daily life.

Sanctification—The state of being purified; process of God's grace by which the affections of men are alienated from sin and exalted to a supreme love of God and righteousness.

Read 1 Peter 1:14–16 and write the verses below.

The process of sanctification has three distinct aspects: initial, progressive, and ultimate sanctification.

Initial Sanctification

Initial sanctification is a position God bestows upon every believer. This standing bears no relationship to behavior. All believers are redeemed, cleansed, forgiven, justified, and made righteous through the blood of Christ at the moment of conversion. The Bible calls Christians saints, not because they are faultless or sinless, but because Jesus took their guilt upon Himself on the cross, rendering them blameless before God.

If you have received Christ as your Savior, you are sanctified.

Progressive Sanctification

Progressing in sanctification is entirely dependent upon the believer's daily decision to abide in Christ and receive His power. This ongoing process requires the Christian's continual participation. They must willingly surrender to God, desire His will for their lives, and cooperate with His training methods.

Every time we consciously offer or present ourselves to God, set our minds on things above, and walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are separating ourselves unto God, and therefore progressing in sanctification. This moment-by-moment victory should be ever-increasing as we become aware of our own helplessness and God's absolute power in our lives.

Ultimate Sanctification

This absolute and final sanctification will occur when believers are fully conformed to the image of Jesus Christ at His second coming. As long as Christians are in an earthly body, they retain a fallen nature that is prone to sin. However, they will be fully conformed to the image of Christ when they depart from this life and awaken in His presence.

Illustration of Sanctification

An expert of fine brass was searching through a pile of junk on the outskirts of the city when he suddenly spied an old, battered brass pot. It was dirty, stained, and beaten up, but his practiced

eye recognized a thing of value. He made his way through the junk and picked up the old pot and set it apart by itself. In so doing, he sanctified that vessel. This is sanctification in its initial application. Of course he must spend many hours cleansing, reshaping, and polishing the old pot, until it becomes a thing of beauty to grace his table. This process is sanctification in its second application.

Write an explanation of sanctification in your own words.

Jesus Christ sees every life as a thing of value, so much so that He paid the ultimate price to save all of humanity from destruction. Those who respond to His sacrifice with saving faith are set apart from the world for Himself. He then commits to cleanse, reshape, and polish each one of them, making a thing of beauty for His glory.

Jesus is faithful to complete the work He began in each one of our lives. Our part is to yield to Him daily. As we abide in Him and His Word and faithfully surrender to His will, we will feel His sanctifying hand in our lives and experience all He has for us.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God sanctified us when we received Christ as Savior and Lord. He continues to sanctify us as we walk with Him in love and obedience. One day, He will welcome us into His presence, and in that moment, our sanctification will be complete.

In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul expressed his confidence in the Lord's faithful commitment to the sanctification process. Read Philippians 1:6 and rewrite the verse below.

Lesson 3—Paul’s Sanctification

Paul was saved and set apart for service by Jesus Christ. His heart’s desire was to have fellowship with His Savior and to grow spiritually, becoming more and more like Jesus. Read Philippians 3.

Why did Paul willingly suffer the loss of all things (verses 7–8)?

What was the desire of Paul’s heart (verse 10)?

Paul was not interested in simply knowing about God. He desired to know Him intimately.

How do we come to know a person intimately?

Intimate—Close in personal relationship or association; familiar; closely united; pertaining to the innermost self.

What did Moses ask God in Exodus 33:13?

Moses shared Paul’s heart and desired to receive a deeper knowledge of God and His ways. How do you think you can come to know God more intimately?

In Philippians 3:12–14, Paul acknowledged that he had not yet become fully mature. He compared himself to an athlete running a race. He used three descriptive phrases to explain his efforts to make spiritual progress:

- “Press on” (commitment)

Press on—To use effort; to strive; to force or push one’s way through or ahead.

Lay hold—To seize, catch, grasp.

Reach forward—To strain after something; to make effort.

- “Lay hold” (endurance)
- Reach forward (personal effort)

Paul’s comparison of a Christian to an athlete reveals that spiritual maturity is the result of commitment and discipline. Salvation is free to all who will repent and receive Christ; however, maturity is a daily choice requiring effort and sacrifice. Just as casual athletes cannot excel in their sports, casual Christians will have minimal growth and transformation.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Spiritual growth and maturity require commitment, endurance, and personal effort.

Lesson 4—Hindrances to Spiritual Growth

For runners to finish a race strong, they must not allow anything to distract them from the finish line. Focusing behind them, on other runners, or even on themselves will only hinder their ability to reach the final goal.

In Philippians 3, Paul addressed three dangers that hinder spiritual growth.

Hinder—To keep back or behind; to prevent from starting or moving forward.

The Danger of Looking Back

According to Philippians 3:13, what two things did Paul do?

Based on what you have learned about Paul in this chapter, what events in his past do you think he needed to forget?

To forget, in this sense, does not mean to cease to remember, but rather to choose to put it behind. We must not allow past sins or hurtful memories to dominate our present and rob our future. We need to put them behind us and move forward in God's grace, forgiveness, and power.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, how does Paul describe himself and what Christ did for him?

How do you think Paul's service to the Lord would have been affected if he chose to focus on his past failures and sin rather than on the grace of God?

Despite being ashamed of his past, Paul knew that his freedom from it was found in Christ's finished work on the cross, repentance before God, and walking continually in the grace of the Father. He could then forget the past and press on, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

What in your life is hindering you from effectively running the race?

Perhaps God has used this chapter to reveal memories or present circumstances that are causing you shame. It may be someone else's sin committed against you or sin you committed. Both can make you feel unworthy of God's love and forgiveness and cause you to live in a prison of shame. Your heavenly Father is offering you freedom from your shame. He is asking you to commit your past to Him—to expose the sin and shame in your life and receive His guidance and healing so you can press on, free from the chains of your past.

Share these things with your mentor, accountability person, or prayer partner. How will you respond to this challenge?

Lesson 5—The Danger of Focusing on Others

How did Paul describe some of the people in his life in Philippians 3:2, 18–19?

As we have learned, Paul himself was an enemy of the cross in his earlier life. Once again, read Acts 7: 54–60 and describe the scene that Paul witnessed.

How did Stephen respond to his persecutors?

Read 2 Timothy 4:14–17. Describe how Paul responded to those who harmed and forsook him.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–33. Summarize the other offenses that were committed against Paul.

Paul endured many afflictions during his ministry, and yet he forgave his assailants. I imagine that he was greatly affected by witnessing Stephen forgive those who were stoning him to death. Especially considering that he himself played a part in Stephen's persecution.

When teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus instructed them on the importance of forgiveness. Summarize what you learn in Matthew 6:9–15.

What do you learn from Mark 11:25–26?

The Bible teaches that an offense against another is like a debt owed. The one who is offended can either forgive the debt or demand payment. This forgiveness is not dependent upon the offender's worthiness or desire to be forgiven; however, the consequence for choosing not to forgive is bitterness, which poisons the heart. As sinners, we owe God an enormous debt that we cannot pay. When we receive Christ as our Savior, our debt is graciously forgiven; the penalty for that debt being placed on Christ. How can we, who have been forgiven such a debt, refuse to forgive our offenders?

God continues to forgive us daily and commands us to forgive those who offend us. Write Luke 6:35 below.

Lesson 6—The Danger of Focusing on Ourselves

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul confessed that he had the potential for confidence in his own accomplishments. Read Philippians 3:3–6 and write what you believe Paul was expressing.

As a devout Jew, Paul believed that he was a good and righteous man. In Philippians 3:6, he stated that he was blameless according to the standard of his old life and religion. When he became a Christ follower, he understood the reality of his fallen condition and ceased putting confidence in himself or in his own goodness.

Self-confidence—Confidence of one’s own strength or powers; self-reliance.

Pride—A sense of one’s own worth and abhorrence of what is beneath or unworthy; unreasonable conceit of superiority.

Another term for self-confidence is *pride*.

According to Proverbs 16:18, what will always be the result of pride?

There are many ramifications for having a self-focus: self-centeredness, self-service, self-conceit, self-deceit, self-indulgence, self-seeking, self-reliance, selfishness, and ultimately self-worship.

Read James 3:13–16. What do you learn about selfish ambition from these verses?

According to Luke 9:23–24, what did Jesus say every believer must do?

What do you think it means to deny yourself?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

To make spiritual progress, we must keep our focus on the goal of intimacy with Christ and spiritual maturity.

Lesson 7—The Weight of Sin

A runner knows that excess weight will only hinder their speed and endurance during a race. Likewise, Christians must constantly be aware of the hindrance of the excess weight of sin in their lives. Sin hinders us from making spiritual progress because it distracts us from our goal of spiritual maturity, separates us from fellowship and intimacy with our heavenly Father, and quenches the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

How do Hebrews 12:1 and Proverbs 5:21-22 define sin?

God has made every provision needed to strip off and throw aside the entanglements of sin—to be restored to a right relationship with Him through reconciliation.

Reconciliation—Restoration to harmony or friendship.

Steps to Reconciliation with God

Step 1: Confess

To *confess your sins* means “to make acknowledgment of something private, hidden, or damaging to oneself”—acknowledging that what God calls sin is indeed sin. God wants you to agree with Him that your actions have truly been in opposition to His will and ways.

What is God’s response toward those who humbly confess their sins according to 1 John 1:9?

Step 2: Repent

To *repent* means “to feel sorrow or regret; to change one’s mind or one’s heart with regard to past or intended actions; to feel contrition for what one has done or omitted to do.” To request God’s forgiveness is your response to being broken, sorry, and repentant that your actions have been against Him and have hindered your heart’s fellowship with Him.

What did David say to God in Psalm 25:18?

If you have offended or sinned against another person, what does Jesus say you must do according to Matthew 5:23-24?

Step 3: Believe and Receive

This final step is crucial. Regardless of how you feel, you must believe He has accepted your confession and repentance and then fully receive His forgiveness. You have assurance in His Word that He is faithful to forgive, therefore you can press on with full confidence that your fellowship with Him will be restored.

What did Jesus say in Matthew 21:22?

We are weak in and of ourselves and will regularly fail to live by God’s standard of holiness. We will fall short of absolute love, kindness, patience, and forgiveness toward others. We have a natural bent toward selfishness with the potential to offend and be easily offended—to think more of ourselves and less of others and to judgmentally hold the people in our lives to a standard that we ourselves cannot attain. Therefore, we must practice these steps daily.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

As unnecessary weight slows a runner’s pace, sin in our life hinders our spiritual progress. We must choose to cooperate with God’s perfect training plan.

Lesson 8—The Believer’s Goals

Throughout Philippians 3, Paul wove the theme of his personal goal and the purpose for his life and existence. In verse 14, he described his goal and purpose as the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus,” which can be summed up in two words: Christ and heaven.

As you read the following verses in Philippians 3, allow the Lord to speak to you about your own personal goals and life’s purpose. Write your thoughts.

Knowing Christ (verse 8)

Being found in Christ (verse 9)

Knowing Christ’s power (verse 10)

Becoming like Christ (verse 10)

Heaven (verses 11, 20–21)

Paul willingly exposed his heart to his readers. He confessed and gave an account of his faults and weaknesses and boldly proclaimed his love for Christ and his passion for holiness and spiritual maturity. His life story is recorded for our encouragement and is an example for us to follow.

It is important to seek out and be discipled by a mature believer who will encourage your spiritual growth and hold you accountable. This type of authentic relationship will

Accountability—Liable to be called on to render an account; answerable for one’s conduct.

require you to be open, honest, and vulnerable. If you don't already have someone like this in your life, actively seek one out. Ask God to bring one to you. Contact your pastor or other church leader and express your desire for this type of encouragement and accountability.

Can you think of one or two people who might be willing to disciple you? Write their names below.

1. _____
2. _____

When will you contact them?

What has God encouraged you to do to "press on toward the goal"?

You now have a basic understanding of what it looks like to grow and mature in your spiritual walk with Christ. See appendix A for an outline of how to develop intimacy with God daily. The next chapter offers an in-depth study on the biblical principles of forgiveness and reconciliation. My prayer is that it opens your heart to receive the healing that Christ desires to bestow on your heart.

Chapter 5

Forgiveness & Reconciliation

Shortly after I received Jesus as Lord, He revealed to me the deep hatred I was harboring toward my father. Before I share more, I want to make it clear that my father was, and is, a good man who did his absolute best to raise me and my seven other siblings. I know now that he had no ill-will toward me or intentions to hurt me. He did not purposefully refrain from giving me what I needed from a father. Despite his best efforts, there were things he did, did not do, and said that caused hurt in me, which eventually grew into hatred toward him. The Lord communicated to me very clearly that I needed to go to my father and forgive him.

Many stories are similar to mine. Parental voids are a common cause for unexplained bitterness or resentment. God has designed each child with specific emotional and physical needs to be met by both parents. When any or all of them are compromised, voids are created in the child's life that manifest in the same way as emotional wounds. For example, a father is to provide godly leadership and a loving sacrificial pursuit of his wife and children. A mother is to provide a loving, nurturing environment and to honor and edify her husband. Both parents are to provide love, proper affection, and godly discipline to their children. If a child does not receive these things due to the ignorance or rebellion from their parents, abuse, or the trauma of divorce, their emotional well-being and spiritual development can be greatly affected.

Our family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and even strangers can leave intentional or unintentional wounds. Unfortunately, the people we love the most can leave the biggest scars. But we are not always the victim. We have the capacity to hurt others as well. Who is to blame? Is it you? Is it them? Is it God? In this chapter, we will find out what to do when people hurt you or when you hurt others.

Lesson 1—God's Sovereignty

Psalm 139:1-18 teaches that God knows each one of us intimately and that all our days are fashioned and ordained by Him.

What do we learn about God from Isaiah 46:9-10?

According to the Word, God is all-powerful and all-knowing. In other words, He is sovereign and omniscient.

This truth can be difficult to accept, especially for those who have endured many hardships and suffered at the hands of others. Why would a God who is all-powerful and all-knowing allow His children to suffer? This question plagues

Sovereign—Supreme or highest in power, superior in position to all others, having independent or supreme authority.

Omniscient—Having universal knowledge, knowing all things, infinitely wise.

the hearts of many people and can easily lead to distrust and bitterness toward God. After all, if He knows everything and can do anything, isn't He then responsible for all that happens?

If this question lingers in your mind, take a step back from your perspective for a moment. Imagine you are looking down on the earth from above. Recall what you have learned about God and His goodness. Do you trust Him?

God has given everyone the gift of free will. Mankind can either follow Him and do good or reject Him and do evil. Every choice bears fruit, whether for the good or for the bad. Both believers and nonbelievers alike experience the effects of their own choices and the choices of those around them. It is not difficult to accept the consequences for our own evil choices, but what about when we experience suffering because of someone else's evil choice? Or experience suffering seemingly out of nowhere?

If God were to intercede and stop mankind's ability to choose evil, then freewill would no longer exist. Likewise, if God shielded those who believe in Him from evil, allowing only good to touch their lives, then unbelievers would only be motivated to turn to Him for the guarantee of a life void of pain. Is that why you turned to Him? Have you expected God to give you an easy life and to shield you from all evil?

Man's Suffering

A man named Job in the Bible had a favorable life. He had a wife, kids, and a successful business with many employees.

Read Job 1:8. How did God see him?

Read Job 1:9–11. What did Satan say to God regarding Job?

How did God respond in verse 12?

God allowed Satan to bring evil upon Job through the loss of all his possessions, the death of his employees and children, and finally the depletion of his health. Job did not understand why God was allowing him to suffer so greatly. After all, he feared the Lord and lived righteously. Surely, he hadn't done anything to deserve such suffering.

What did Job ask God in Job 7:20?

As we can see over multiple chapters, Job agonized over the question, *Why?* He cried out to God and sought counsel from his friends. God remained silent for a time but eventually responded.

What did God say in Job 38:1-3?

God never answered Job's question. Instead, He asked questions to direct Job's attention to His power and glory displayed in His creation. God's questions took Job's focus off himself and his circumstances and gave him a broader view of God's sovereignty.

How did Job respond in Job 40:3-5 and 42:1-6?

It is a natural response to seek an explanation for our suffering. We, too, cry out to God like Job asking why. But one of the many lessons we learn from Job is that *why* is the wrong question. We should instead ask God, *What are You trying to teach me? What is Your will for me in this season of suffering?*

God is a loving Father who does not bring evil into our lives. However, He allows us to be touched by evil for His purpose and for our ultimate good. Ask God for the faith to trust Him. He will answer your prayer.

Lesson 2—Trials and Tribulation

Read John 16:33. What did Jesus teach His followers regarding trials and tribulations?

We are promised hardship and pain. There is nothing we can do to avoid tribulations, but we are responsible for how we respond to them.

Tribulation—Distress or suffering resulting from oppression, persecution, afflictions; a trial.

Read Malachi 3:3. What does God do through our trials?

We can allow our pain to harden our hearts toward God and others or surrender our circumstances to God, allowing Him to purify our hearts through the trials. Purifying the heart is similar to refining gold. As the gold is heated by fire, the impurities rise to the surface so they can be removed. God allows each one of us to endure suffering so we are refined and transformed into the image of Christ.

What does 1 Peter 1:6–7 say about our trials?

The more trials we experience, the more refined we become. Trials are the only way to test the condition of our hearts. Gold might look pure on the surface, but it may be filled with impurities at its unseen core. Our trials reveal what is lingering in the depths of our hearts. If we trust God in this process, our lives will permeate with the love, hope, and confidence of Jesus Christ.

Write Romans 8:28–29.

Verse 28 clearly states that “all things work together for good.” The key is faith. If we choose to believe God’s promises and trust Him amid our trials and tribulations, we will be victorious, and God will be glorified. Those who witness our conduct through our trials can see Christ’s work in our lives, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, they may see His reflection in us.

Job remained a faithful servant during his time of suffering which resulted in more trust, greater faith, and a deeper intimacy with God.

Read Job 42:11–16. How did God provide Job comfort for his suffering (verse 11)?

What was the rest of Job’s life like (verses 12–16)?

Job refused to blame God for his suffering and trusted Him through his pain. Job’s trust in God left no room for bitterness to settle in his heart. Job’s faith allowed him to receive comfort from his heavenly Father through his family and friends. God also rewarded Job’s faithfulness with twice as much as he had before. This does not mean that all suffering will lead to abundant earthly blessings. On the contrary, the only thing guaranteed in this life is hardship. But no matter what suffering, trials, or tribulation we experience presently, we have the promise of an eternity spent in the presence of God where there will be no more tears or suffering.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–4. How can your experiences be used to help others?

There are times, says Jesus, when God cannot lift the darkness from you, but trust Him. God will appear like an unkind friend, but He is not; He will appear like an unnatural Father, but He is not; He will appear like an unjust judge, but He is not. Keep the notion of the mind of God behind all things strong and growing. Nothing happens in any particular situation unless God’s will is behind it, therefore you can rest in perfect confidence in Him. —Oswald Chambers

God has an eternal plan: good will prevail and all evil, suffering, and sorrow will cease. We can choose to harbor bitterness toward those who have caused us pain, or we can place our faith in a sovereign God and forgive the offenses and failures of others.

When you accepted Christ as Savior and Lord, you put your trust in Him for your eternal destiny. You must also trust Him with your past experiences and present circumstances. He alone can comfort you in and through your trials and give you the strength to respond to them righteously. He alone can make good out of the bad and restore relationships that have been broken. Your obedience to God's Word amid your suffering will give you peace and bring praise, honor, and glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-7. How does this verse apply to your circumstances?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God's Word tells us that He will use our trials and tribulations to transform us into His image and prepare us to comfort others with similar experiences.

Lesson 3—Why Forgive?

When I felt the Lord impress upon my heart that He wanted me to forgive my father, I immediately resisted. I wrestled with God for several weeks, not wanting to let go of my bitterness. Why would I forgive him? He's never apologized to me. Does he deserve my forgiveness?

When a debt is forgiven, the rights to payment are surrendered. If I forgive someone who has wronged me, I give away the freedom to continue being angry and resentful toward them. I also give away the freedom to seek retribution. I let go of my own power and absorb the loss myself. True forgiveness is undeserved, unmerited, and free. It is not just or fair. So why forgive?

Forgive—To give up, to resign, to cease to feel resentment against on account of wrong committed, to absolve, to pardon.

God commands forgiveness. What did Jesus say in Luke 6:35–37?

What are the characteristics of God's chosen people in Colossians 3:12–13?

Obedience to our heavenly Father is not optional. If we pick and choose which commands of God to obey based on our own desires, we will live unfruitful, ineffective, and spiritually barren lives.

Those who forgive bear the image of Christ. What was Jesus's prayer in Luke 23:34?

As Christians, we have the privilege and calling to carry the name of Christ to the lost. The term *Christian* means "little Christ." We must be willing to walk as He walked. Christ came to this earth to bring forgiveness to the guilty, demonstrating the ultimate act of forgiveness on the cross. He commissioned the church to continue proclaiming forgiveness to the world. If we are to bear His name, we must forgive those who have offended us. What is the purpose of forgiveness?

Forgiveness breaks the cycle of blame and suffering.

If we are honest with ourselves, we would admit how painful it is to continually blame someone for their offenses. It is arguably more painful than the offense itself. It is also painful for the

offender, especially if they desire to make amends. Extending forgiveness can be difficult because it does not settle all questions of blame and fairness; ironically, such questions become irrelevant once forgiveness has been extended. Forgiveness offers the way out of strife and allows a relationship to start over.

The life of Joseph, recorded in Genesis 37–45, provides a beautiful demonstration of the power of forgiveness. If you haven't read Joseph's story, I suggest you do. Joseph was misunderstood, mistreated, betrayed, abandoned, and even sold into slavery by his own brothers. Regardless of everything he endured, he refused to allow the root of bitterness to take hold of his life. Shortly before being reunited with his brothers, after years of separation, he testified to the healing work that God had done in his life by naming his first son Manasseh and his second son Ephraim.

Read Genesis 41:51–52. What do these two names mean?

To *forget*, in this sense, does not mean to cease to remember, but rather to let go—to cease to let the memory of hurtful things control your present life. Joseph endured terrible circumstances because of his brothers. Instead of seething in bitterness toward them, he allowed God to heal his broken heart during the long years he spent alone in Egypt. Joseph's fruitfulness was directly related to his forgetfulness. He chose to trust God with his feelings, emotions, and his past. When given the opportunity, he extended love, forgiveness, and grace to his brothers.

Read Genesis 45:5–8. What did Joseph say to his brothers?

Read Genesis 45:15. What did Joseph do?

Joseph did not blame them or demand an explanation; he simply offered them mercy and forgiveness. Forgiveness cleared the way for Joseph and his brothers to be reunited and begin a new relationship.

Forgiveness relieves the burden of guilt in the offender.

Read Genesis 50:15. What did Joseph's brothers fear?

How did Joseph respond in Genesis 50:19-21?

The brothers would have carried their grief and guilt to their graves, but Joseph extended forgiveness to them. Unearned and undeserved, his forgiveness removed their guilt and restored their relationship. Does this sound familiar?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God commands everyone to forgive. Those who obey bear the likeness of His Son and allow healing and reconciliation to begin.

When sin entered the world, we were doomed to live in our guilt and shame for eternity. But God extended His hand in forgiveness by sending Christ to remove our guilt and restore our relationship with Him. Do you deserve the forgiveness you have received through Christ?

Lesson 4—The Cost of Unforgiveness

While forgiveness is free, the alternative is costly. To refuse to grant forgiveness is choosing to maintain the right to demand payment for wrongs done. Unwillingness to forgive results in bitterness and resentment.

Resentment clings to the past, reliving it over and over. Like picking a scab, resentment prohibits wounds from healing. Bitterness is a poison that affects everyone it encounters. If there is bitterness in your heart, it has affected and will continue to affect every relationship you have. The only antidote is forgiveness.

What does Hebrews 12:15 say about bitterness?

Bitterness roots itself in the heart and grows to produce bitter fruit that causes trouble, defiles relationships, and hinders the growth of the good fruit God desires to produce in our lives.

Read Ephesians 4:31. What evidence is present in the heart of someone clinging to bitterness?

The Fruit of Unforgiveness

Are any of the following attributes evident in your life? Put a check mark next to the ones you identify with.

- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Self-pity
- Emotional instability
- Anxiety, tension, and stress
- Health problems
- Eating disorders
- Lack of trust in relationships
- Lack of intimacy in marriage
- Sexual dysfunction
- Judgmental and critical of others
- Ultra-sensitive and easily offended
- Absence of peace and joy
- Broken fellowship with Jesus

Bitterness—The state of being harshly reproachful; characterized by animosity or cruelty.

Resentment—The state of feeling an emotion, a feeling of indignant displeasure because of something regarded as a wrong, insult, or the like, often mingled with animosity, enmity, hatred.

Wrath—Violent anger; deep and determined indignation; often resentful rage, fury.

Anger—Vexation; a strong passion or emotion of displeasure.

Evil speaking—Speech that is hurtful, corrupt, offensive, unpleasant; producing calamity, sorrow, distress.

Malice—Ill-will; the state of mind manifested by an intent to commit an unlawful act; harmfulness.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Unforgiveness leads to bitterness, defiles other relationships, and troubles the human heart.

Jesus shared a parable with His disciples regarding the consequences for those who refuse to forgive. Read Matthew 18:21-35.

What was the master's disposition toward his servant in verse 27?

How did the servant treat his fellow servant in verse 28?

According to verses 34, how did the master respond to his servant's unwillingness to forgive?

What did Jesus warn in verse 35?

Think on the cross and the forgiveness and salvation we have received from Christ. How can we receive His forgiveness and yet refuse to extend forgiveness to others?

This parable does not teach that a born-again child of God will experience eternal ruin if he or she is unwilling to forgive; however, it does teach that they will be imprisoned by their unforgiveness—stuck in a constant cycle of reliving past pain. Is it possible to be free from the pain caused by ourselves and others? How are we supposed to live in harmony with others in a world full of sin and brokenness?

Lesson 5—How to Relate to One Another

Love Thy Neighbor

The Bible provides clear instructions on how we are to relate to one another.

Read Matthew 22:37–40. According to Jesus, what are the two greatest commandments?

Jesus Himself said that our love for others is equally as important as our love for Him. Which one do you find easier? Of course that question is rhetorical. Loving someone who first loves you perfectly and unconditionally, to the point of giving up His life in your place, is not difficult. But loving people who consistently fail you, who love conditionally and imperfectly, and have unintentionally or deliberately caused you pain? Is that easy?

Summarize 1 John 4:19–21.

The first point we learn is that our love for God is a response to His love for us. The second point is that loving God includes loving others. You cannot claim love for God without also loving the people He has put in your life.

Read Romans 13:8–10. What stands out to you in these verses?

As a Christian, you owe your neighbor love. Have you considered that? You are no longer in debt to your sins because Christ paid that debt on the cross. But by receiving His salvation, you take on the debt of loving your neighbor. You might be thinking, *Surely my neighbor doesn't include this person or that person. After all, look what they did to me!*

Summarize Matthew 5:43–48.

Who can you withhold your love from? The answer is no one. You have a debt to love everyone. Why?

Write 1 Corinthians 6:20 below.

You are to glorify and reflect Christ to everyone with no exceptions. Lingering thoughts or behaviors toward others that are unloving or not Christlike are inexcusable and require repentance both toward God and the person.

What did Jesus teach in Matthew 5:23–24?

When do we go to the altar? This is referring to our fellowship with Jesus—our time in prayer and worship and any acts of service done in His name. Jesus taught how important our relationships with others are to Him. It is not something He takes lightly, and nor should we. If there is anyone that you need forgiveness from, or anyone that you need to forgive, Jesus is instructing you to reconcile with them at this very moment.

Reconciliation

God’s heart desires to restore all that has been broken since the fall of mankind. It is the reason why Christ came to this earth—to bridge the chasm between God and His creation caused by sin. Through Christ, the relationship between God and mankind is reconciled.

A reconciled relationship with God is the greatest gift we will ever receive and the greatest desire of God’s heart, but this restoration is just the beginning. Read Ephesians 4:31–32. What is God’s desire for our relationships with others?

Reconcile—To restore to friendship, peace, or favor again; to bring back to harmony; to regain; to restore communion.

Many Christians are harboring bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness toward someone. It is easy to conclude that these feelings are a logical emotional response to the pain they received. Perhaps the person who hurt them hasn’t suffered enough for what they did or hasn’t taken enough responsibility for their behavior. They may try to justify their wounded condition and seek sympathy from others for the hardships they endured. Can you relate?

The degree to which I am able and willing to forgive others is a clear indication of the extent to which I have personally experienced God my Father’s forgiveness for me. —Phillip Keller

Consider the relationships in your life, both past and present. Is there anyone who you are unreconciled with? Anyone that you have hurt or offended? Anyone who has hurt or offended you? Who comes to mind?

If you feel that there is bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness in your heart, but you are not sure of the source, write your thoughts below.

It is important to understand that forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. Forgiveness can be given to anyone who has caused you pain, but godly reconciliation is for previously existing relationships that have been broken. Reconciling with strangers or casual acquaintances is not necessary.

There are also some reconciled relationships that will require wise boundaries. Forgiveness and reconciliation do not give the other person the freedom to treat you disrespectfully or harshly. Some people who have hurt you may continue to cause emotional or physical pain after you have forgiven them. Establishing boundaries for your emotional and physical well-being is essential. Successful reconciliation will be accompanied by peace and kindness, but unwise reconciliation will lead to further hurt and turmoil. If you need to, seek counsel from your pastor or mature Christian friend to help establish wise boundaries for your reconciled relationships.

Lesson 6—Steps to Forgiveness

If You Need to Be Forgiven

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any unreconciled relationships in your life that have been affected by your sin. Keep in mind that you may not be currently aware of how you have caused pain to others. If the Holy Spirit reveals your sin in any of your relationships—past, present, or at some point in the future—you must humble yourself and follow these steps.

Step 1: Confess your sin to God and ask Him to forgive you.

Read 1 John 1:9. How does God respond when we confess our sins to Him?

Read Psalm 103:12. What does He do with our sin?

Take a moment right now to cry out to God, asking Him to forgive your specific sin. By faith, accept God's absolute forgiveness and cleansing. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with His love and to provide the strength and willingness to obey the next step.

Step 2: Humbly apologize to the person you have wronged and ask for their forgiveness.

One of the most powerful phrases in the English language is "I was wrong. Please forgive me." If you are able, I encourage you to share these words face to face. It may be more difficult, but it is usually more effective. However, due to logistics, you may need to share them over the phone or in writing via any of the appropriate modern communication outlets. Do not let your pride, distractions, or other obstacles delay this act of obedience.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God's Word commands us to go to anyone we have offended and humbly ask for forgiveness.

For more support, ask a trustworthy Christian friend to pray with you and to hold you accountable to follow through in reconciling with those you have wronged.

If You Need to Forgive

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anyone in your life whom you may be harboring bitterness toward. To allow God to bring healing to your heart, you must humble yourself and follow these steps.

Step 1: Ask God for the strength to obediently forgive.

What do you learn from 1 John 5:14 and Matthew 21:22?

God promises that if you ask “anything according to His will” in faith, then you will receive it. A heart of forgiveness is a characteristic that God desires to give you, but you must ask for it. It does not come naturally and at times will be extremely difficult, but God will be faithful in His promise to give you the strength you need to obey.

Step 2: Communicate your forgiveness.

The word *forgive* is a verb, meaning it requires action. It is not a passive, verbal expression done in solitude. It must be given to someone specific, like giving a physical gift. Think of it like giving someone a pencil. If I say to myself, *I give Peter this pencil*, but I don’t physically give Peter the pencil, did I give Peter the pencil? Obviously not. I do not need to wait until I feel like giving Peter the pencil to give it to him. I also do not have to wait until I think he deserves the pencil before I give it to him. The fact is, God commands that I give Peter the pencil. The ball is in my court to either fully live in obedience or continue harboring bitterness, keeping the pencil to myself.

Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do; therefore, you must not try to stand alone. Seek out the support and accountability of a mature Christian friend to obediently surrender to God’s command to forgive.

Forgiveness is not an emotion. . . . Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. —Corrie ten Boom

Step 3: Ask for forgiveness for harboring bitterness.

The sin committed against you does not justify unforgiveness. Refusing to forgive, harboring bitterness and resentment in your heart, is equally sinful and must be repented of for authentic reconciliation.

In some cases, due to logistics, cost of travel, safety to you, or the ability of the other person to be quiet long enough to let you say what you need to say, a letter, email, or telephone call may be the best way for you to communicate your forgiveness.

Keep these points in mind when speaking or communicating in writing:

1. You are doing this out of obedience to your heavenly Father who loves and cares for you. He wants you to be free from the bondage and oppression you have been experiencing as a result of the hurt and unforgiveness in your heart.
2. You do not need to rehearse every detail of the offense done against you. If it was blatant sin, your offender is most likely aware of the details. There are circumstances when the offender may be unaware of the hurt they caused. This is common in relationships between parents and their children. Even in these circumstances, keep it brief. Providing a detailed explanation of all the reasons why you need to forgive is not important.

3. Do not try to compel others to own up to their offenses. God has called you to obey, not to be a prosecuting attorney, jury, or judge. Your healing will come from God because of your obedience, not from the other person who may or may not take ownership of their faults.
4. Keep it short. In most cases, due to the high level of emotions, it is easy to say things that are not planned that may undermine the purpose of the meeting, letter, or conversation.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God's Word commands believers to humbly forgive others who have offended or wronged them.

If the Holy Spirit has revealed to you someone you need to seek forgiveness from or someone you need to forgive, claim it openly now and specify a date that you will contact them by. Seek accountability to hold you to your commitment to obey God's commands on forgiveness and reconciliation.

Lesson 7—Maintaining Your Commitment to Forgive

For those of you who obediently respond to God’s commands on forgiveness and reconciliation, it is important to understand that the act of forgiving or seeking forgiveness marks the start of something new. We are not computers. There is no “refresh” button, or “control-alt-delete” for our minds and behaviors. Maintaining your obedience will require self-control, discipline, and a humble reliance on God and His Word for His transformation to continue to take place in your heart.

To the Forgiven

To humble yourself enough to admit your failures before God and those you have offended or wronged is a beautiful testament of the power of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. But God is not finished with you yet. You may feel the impulse to repeat your offense and continue to hurt others. That is where your fight begins.

To the Forgivers

Reflecting God’s heart by letting go of your bitterness and resentment, forgiving the offenses of those who have hurt you, brings honor and glory to the heavenly Father. But God is not finished with you yet. You will be tempted to remember the pain your offender caused. Resentment will try to once again take root in your heart. That is where your fight begins.

The people you have hurt, or the people who have hurt you, may continue to be a regular part of your life. And though God has had a major victory in you, that does not mean that they have changed. They may continue to harbor bitterness and resentment toward you, or they may continue to hurt you. Your flesh will want to react in the same prideful and selfish way it is accustomed to.

But what are we supposed to do with our former selves according to Ephesians 4:22-24?

You must stop responding to people as you once have and actively “put on the new” person God is transforming you to become. He will be faithful to produce His fruit in your life if you continually surrender to Him moment by moment. Keep in mind that your obedience is not so the other person will change. Your obedience is a response to the change God is making in you.

Write Philippians 1:6.

What if the person who I am forgiving does not want to reconcile the relationship? What does Romans 12:18 say about your part in keeping peace?

You are only responsible for your part of reconciliation. You cannot place any expectations or requirements on the other person. Regardless of their position, you must obey God by asking for and giving forgiveness. If the other person refuses to grant you forgiveness, or if they do not acknowledge their wrong toward you, God will still bless you for your obedience and pour out His peace, grace, and mercy on your life. You will still experience His freedom from your bondage regardless of the other person's response.

Use this prayer as a guide:

Lord Jesus, I pray for the strength to trust You in these circumstances. Help me to remember that I am doing this for You. I do not look to _____ for anything but place my life in Your hands. I pray for reconciliation with _____, but I know that I can only do my part. I pray for _____ to surrender to You that You might be glorified. I trust you entirely with the results. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

What if the person I need to forgive is deceased? Can I still forgive them?

Bitterness in the human heart lives on long after the object of that bitterness has died. Forgiveness is the only antidote and always requires action. The principles remain the same. Begin by confessing your bitterness for the deceased person to the Lord. Then tell the Lord that you are no longer holding their faults or offenses against them, and instead, grant them forgiveness. I encourage you to verbalize your forgiveness out loud in the presence of a trusted friend or pastor.

Use the following prayer to help guide you:

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross and forgiving me for all my sins. I agree with Your word that I must forgive this person for the hurt they caused me. I ask You for the strength to obey and speak these words of forgiveness. I forgive _____ for _____ (be specific). I ask You to take away my bitterness and forgive me for holding on to this bitterness for so long. In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

One Final Thought

When I finally obeyed the Lord and forgave my father, and gave the bitterness and hatred I was holding in my heart for him to God, I quickly experienced the freedom and blessing that followed. God wants the same for you. Your ability to forgive others or seek forgiveness from others is

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God's Word tells us to continue in obedience to Him regardless of the responses or actions of others.

directly related to your experience with God's forgiveness. A readiness to forgive and receive forgiveness is part of the indication that we have truly repented, received God's forgiveness, and given our lives to Him. A surrendered heart toward God cannot be a hard heart toward others. Humble

yourself before God, obey His commands on forgiveness, and be set free from the bondage of guilt and resentment.

The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving. . . . When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us. —Lewis Smedes

I pray that this chapter has been a helpful guide for you to receive the freedom God desires to give you through forgiveness and reconciliation. It is not easy, for we have an adversary who tirelessly strives to keep us from experiencing the freedom we have in Christ. The next chapter focuses on the unseen battle that rages in the spiritual realm and will equip you with the biblical weapons you need to combat our Enemy.

Chapter 6

Spiritual Warfare

My sons and I would often play paint ball when they were young. If you are not familiar, paint ball is a game where you use an air rifle to shoot your opponent with small, plastic balls filled with paint. If you get hit, you're out. There are a lot of war techniques you can use to overcome your opponents. One of the best tactics is stealth—quietly sneaking behind your opponent, undetected, using the element of surprise. *Fwap!* Getting hit stings and without the proper protection may leave a welt the size of a quarter. Those who decided to only wear a tee shirt would often show up with a lot more protection for the next game. But what if the stakes were much higher than a small welt? How would you prepare for the battle?

We live in a physical world and are easily preoccupied within the physical realm. The history books are filled with nations warring against their enemies for several reasons. On a personal level, we see our enemies as other physical beings whose words and deeds, in varying degrees, cause harm and destruction. The maniac driver on the freeway, the slanderer spreading rumors and lies, the cheater, the thief, the rapist, the murderer—these people are the physical enemies we can see and touch. But there is an unseen Enemy in the spiritual realm who is far more dangerous than anything you can see, touch, and feel, and God wants you to be prepared.

Lesson 1—The Unseen Enemy

Ephesians 6:12 specifies the most dangerous threats we wrestle with every day. What are they?

The Word of God teaches that our real enemies are not physical, but spiritual. Whether you are consciously aware or not, you are engaged in a spiritual battle that rages on around you. Unfortunately, you do not have the luxury to “opt out” of the fight. The battles do not wait for your voluntary participation. You are, at all times, on the front lines of war. You can either stand firm in the light of the Word, submitted to God to fight against the attacks of the Enemy, or surrender to darkness and experience the pain of defeat.

Does this sound overly dramatic to you? I understand if it does. An unseen war with a spiritual Enemy who is fighting to entrap you in darkness and sway your heart toward rebellion against God seems a bit “out of this world.” But this war is not contingent upon whether or not you believe in its existence. In fact, the Enemy would prefer that you remain ignorant of his presence. The easiest prey is the one who believes there is no predator. But how do you fight an enemy you cannot see?

The first step in preparing for your daily battles is to better understand who and what you are fighting against.

The Origin of Satan

Most people understand that the devil represents all things evil. He is often humorously depicted as the little red guy on your shoulder with horns and a pitchfork who tries to persuade you to do bad things. The reality is he is terribly more cunning and ominous than that. But where did he come from? Summarize Colossians 1:16 and Nehemiah 9:6.

Read Genesis 1:31. What did God say about His creation?

There is nothing in existence in both the physical and spiritual realms that God did not create, and Scripture teaches that God deemed everything He created to be good. This means even Satan was created by God within the spiritual realm, and he was initially created to be good. He was among the heavenly hosts of angels in God's kingdom. So what happened? Read Jude 1:6 and 2 Peter 2:4. What do these verses say about angels?

First Timothy 3:1-7 speaks of the character that should be indwelt in a person who desires to be a bishop in the church. What warning is given in 1 Timothy 3:6?

The devil, who was first good, became condemned because of his pride. It is believed that when Satan was an angel, he desired to be like God, to become equal or greater in power and to be worshiped as king. It is no wonder that he also tempted Eve in the garden of Eden with a similar notion in Genesis 3:5 saying that she "will be like God."

What did Satan ask of Jesus after offering Him all the kingdoms of the world in Matthew 4:9?

Satan became jealous of God's ultimate power and worthiness of worship. His pride and rebellion against God became his downfall. Read Revelation 12:7-9 and Luke 10:18. How did God deal with Satan's pride?

Satan, referred to as the Dragon, was cast out of heaven along with the other angels who followed him. Read Revelation 12:3-4. How many angels were cast out with Satan?

The book of Revelation is filled with figurative language and symbolism, and many scholars and Bible commentators have spent countless hours studying the meaning behind each verse. It is believed that Satan, "the Dragon," took one-third of the angels, "the stars," with him to earth. These fallen angels are known as Satan's demons who go about doing his evil works. The Bible does not provide a specific timeline for when the fall of Satan took place. It seems to have happened sometime between the last day of creation and when he appeared before Eve as a serpent.

Many Bible commentators believe that Satan's fall is also documented in Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:12-19. The Isaiah passage is specifically a prophetic word for a Babylonian king, while the Ezekiel passage is a lamentation for the king of Tyre. Although we cannot know for certain if Satan is also the subject of these passages, there is a clear parallel between the words given for these two kings and Satan's fall. Perhaps Satan himself was influencing or indwelling these kings during the time of these passages similar to when he indwelled Judas Iscariot before he betrayed Jesus in Luke 22:3. After all, the curse of mankind's sin gave Satan a foothold to wreak havoc on this earth.

Lesson 2—The God of This Age

How is Satan described in the following Scriptures?

John 14:30; 16:11

2 Corinthians 4:4

Ephesians 2:2

What you need to know is that Satan is a powerful foe who skillfully influences the world and its inhabitants to rebel against the Creator. He desires to tarnish everything God first created to be good. How is he described in 1 Peter 5:8?

Satan—The great adversary of man; prince of darkness, the devil.

Devil—The adversary of God, although subordinate to Him and able to act only by His sufferance; the personal supreme spirit of evil and unrighteousness; the tempter.

Satan and his demons are literally roaming about the earth in search of prey to devour. According to 2 Timothy 2:25–26, what is the state of those who live in opposition to God?

Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ are defenseless against the Enemy. Mankind is no match for him. He is stronger and wiser and can overcome anyone relying on their own strength apart from Christ.

The Inevitable Defeat

Satan is the enemy of God and God’s children, but it is important to understand that he is not the counterpart to God. He is powerful, but he does not possess all power. He is cunning, but he does not have all wisdom. He is able to wreak mass destruction, yet he himself will be destroyed.

What did God say to the serpent in Genesis 3:15?

Read Hebrews 2:14. How did Jesus defeat Satan?

According to Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10, what is Satan's ultimate destiny?

Satan and his demons are fighting in a war they've already lost, and they are soberly aware of the fact. Christ's death and resurrection dealt the final blow to Satan's power—the fulfillment of God's prophetic word that the "Seed" of the woman would bruise Satan's head.

Read Matthew 28:18. Who has all authority?

Matthew 8:28–32 documents an interaction between Jesus and two men who were possessed by demons. What did the demons say to Jesus upon His arrival?

The demons knew exactly who Jesus was, and they feared Him. They had to ask for His permission to enter into the herd of swine that was nearby. How did Jesus reply in verse 32?

With one word, Jesus Christ cast the demons out of the possessed men. Read Mark 1:23–27. What did the witnesses observe about Jesus in verse 27?

Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth, and He will return someday soon to send Satan and his demons into hell to live in torment forever. But until that day, we must heed Peter's exhortation to be "sober and vigilant" to combat the attacks of the Enemy.

Lesson 3—The Wiles of the Devil

Satan's end is drawing near, but it has not come yet. How much longer does he have? Read Matthew 24:36. Who knows when the end will be?

Satan does not know how much time is left; therefore he tirelessly and relentlessly sows seeds of rebellion in the hearts and minds of as many people as he can before his end.

Blinding the Lost

What are the tactics of Satan?

2 Corinthians 4:4

Matthew 13:19

2 Corinthians 2:11

2 Timothy 2:26

Satan first and foremost does all he can to blind mankind's mind from the truth of the gospel. Unfortunately, there are many false substitutes for the truth for him to choose from. What did Jesus say about the way of life versus the way of destruction in Matthew 7:13-14?

There is only one way to life, and that is through Jesus Christ. All other pursuits are meaningless and end in death. Satan is well aware of this fact. He doesn't need to manipulate mankind into a hoard of murderers and rapists to claim victory over their lives, though he encourages some to follow those paths. He doesn't need an army of Satanists to do his bidding, though he welcomes their praise and worship. He simply needs to blind the hearts and minds of mankind from the message of the gospel. Anything else is sufficient for him. But how is he able to keep mankind from the truth? Write 2 Corinthians 11:14.

This is precisely why Satan is so terribly dangerous and how he has been able to fashion the ways of the world. He is a master at disguising his evil as "good," and those who reject God and the righteousness and authority of Jesus, are completely vulnerable to his manipulation.

What word is used in Genesis 3:1 to describe him?

What must we stand up against according to Ephesians 6:11?

Crafty—Skillful at deceiving others; ingenious; wily; cunning.

Cunning—Cleverly deceitful; keen; possessed of intelligence.

Schemes—To form plans or designs; to accomplish by clever contriving.

Wiles—A trick or stratagem intended to ensnare or deceive.

According to 2 Corinthians 11:3, why does Satan lie and scheme?

Jesus Christ is King, and He offers salvation and everlasting life to all who believe in Him. Satan strives to blind as many people as he can from this simple truth, and he has masterfully manipulated this world to aid in his agenda.

Lesson 4—The Ways of the World

What is the state of the world according to 1 John 5:19?

What does John 15:18–21 say about the world’s opinion of Christians?

The “god of this age” has infiltrated all the systems of this world. Politics, economics, education, fashion, entertainment, and secular philosophy are all under his evil influence. He even successfully manipulates many churches and other religious institutions. It’s no wonder that this world is full of darkness. What does Jesus say about the deeds of mankind in John 3:19–20?

What warning is given in Colossians 2:8? How does this verse apply to you personally?

The Bible warns that the ways of this world will be appealing to many people. Read the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:1–20. What is the meaning of the seeds sown among the “thorns” as explained in verses 18–19?

We live among many “thorns” on this earth. If Satan cannot possess a person’s soul, he will strive to possess their affections by distracting them from the kingdom of God using the trivial things of this world. What are the trivial things of this world that distract you?

Read 1 John 2:15-17 and list the three things this world has to offer.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Lust of the Flesh

We have been created in the flesh and currently live in the flesh. Our flesh has natural, God-given desires. We hunger for food, we thirst for drink, we long for companionship, we desire sexual intimacy, and we find pleasure in various forms of entertainment. Our God-given fleshly desires are not sin in and of themselves; after all, God created them. But the fulfillment of these desires become sinful when we seek to satisfy them outside of the will of God.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH
To lust after the flesh is to seek fulfillment from sin.

The apostle Paul lists the evidence of those who are imprisoned by the lusts of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. List them below. Are any of these things evident in your life?

I am sure you have heard the phrase, “the devil made me do it,” or “God made me this way.” It is human nature to place the blame for our sinful desires or actions on anyone other than ourselves. But according to James 1:13-14, what is the true source of our temptation to sin?

Read Mark 7:21-23. What comes from within our own hearts?

Your sinful desires come from within yourself; there is no one else to blame. And the Adversary, the devil, will use your weaknesses to tempt you to fulfill your desires outside of the will of God, just as he did to Eve in the garden of Eden. Read Genesis 3:6. What was the first thing Eve noticed about the forbidden fruit?

Satan did not make Eve desire to eat the fruit. Her desire came from within her own heart, or rather, in that specific moment, her stomach. You can imagine hearing Eve's stomach growl with hunger. Her flesh wanted food, and Satan merely suggested to satisfy her hunger with the forbidden fruit. Eve had hundreds of other food options to choose from that God generously provided her, but she wanted the one God said to stay away from.

Lesson 5—Lust of the Eyes

What was the second thing Eve noticed about the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:6?

Not only was the forbidden fruit able to fulfill Eve’s hunger, but it also looked like it would taste amazing. Perhaps Eve thought it would taste better than anything else she had ever eaten. What “forbidden fruit” looks good to you?

King David fell victim to the lust of his eyes as well. Read 2 Samuel 11:2–4. What did he do?

I would argue that there are more people looking down from their “roofs” today than in any other point in history. With the creation of the internet and the technological advances of computers and mobile devices, along with the development of many social media platforms, the lust of the eyes has never been more accessible, more appealing, or more addictive. Everything the world has to offer can be seen from the palm of your hand at any moment. The demons need only to whisper the word “look.”

Write Exodus 20:17.

David looked upon a beautiful woman and coveted sexual intimacy with her, then he abused his power as king and took what was not his to take. It’s easy to recognize David’s sin because this story repeats itself every time someone looks at pornography or lusts after another man or woman who doesn’t belong to them.

<p>Covet—To desire possession of; to desire sensuously; to long inordinately for something that is another’s.</p>

What did Jesus say regarding sexual lust in Matthew 5:28?

Sexual immorality is almost always rooted in the lust of the eyes, but what are some other examples of the things of this world that our eyes can lust after?

What does Jesus say about our eyes in Matthew 6:22-23?

Pride of Life

What was the third thing Eve noticed about the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:6?

Satan convinced Eve that she could receive the knowledge of God and become like Him apart from His will. And therein lies the crux of humanity: the pride of life. Pride is the root of all sin—the source of rebellion against God’s supremacy. Pride seeks to exalt oneself above all others and asserts oneself as the ultimate authority. Romans 1:20-25 describes those who have fallen victim to the pride of life. How are they described?

In short, the world teaches that God is unnecessary, that His authority is nonexistent, and that you are the center of the universe. Therefore, life is whatever you want it to be. You decide what is good. You decide what is true. Your body is your own and your fleshly cravings are meant to be satisfied however you see fit. That is precisely why the things of this world are appealing. If you are honest, you would admit that your flesh wants to believe this message. And you openly choose to believe this message every time you willfully sin.

The pride of life can also hide itself in things that are not inherently sin. What are some examples of worldly achievements that people may take pride in?

What does 1 Timothy 6:10 say about wealth?

This is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. You may have heard that “money is the root of all evil,” but that is incorrect. Money only leads to all kinds of evil if it is loved. It is important to understand that worldly achievements are not sinful. Graduating with academic excellence, becoming an Olympic gold medalist, receiving a Nobel peace prize, winning an Oscar, developing a successful business, and so on, are all good things. But if these good things become ultimate things, if they become the source of personal identity or worth, if they are achieved through deceit or other sinful means, if they are desired or sought after for self-gratification and exaltation instead of for the glory of God, then they fall under the category of the sinful pride of life.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

As believers in Christ, we have three formidable foes which we must always be on guard against: (1) the systems of this world, (2) our fallen nature of ungodly desires, and (3) the devil.

Are you seeking worldly achievements for your own pleasures and glory? Or are you honoring God by practicing excellence with the gifts He has given you?

Lesson 6—The Attacks of the Enemy

There are few things Satan hates more than Christians, for they are the ambassadors of the One he hates most of all. If you have given your life to Christ, Satan cannot take away your salvation. You are under the protection of the Almighty and have been declared righteous by His sacrificial blood. But you must be aware that the devil will do everything in his power to rob you of peace and thwart the Father's plans for your life. He will set up traps to destroy your character and keep you enslaved to the lusts of your flesh. As believers, it is imperative to be aware of these traps.

How is Satan described in John 8:44?

What is Satan called in Matthew 4:3?

What is Satan called in Revelation 12:10?

These verses reveal the different ways the Enemy attacks Christians. His spiritual arsenal consists of lies, temptations to sin, and condemnation or accusations. Describe Satan's subtle attacks from the following passages:

Matthew 16:21-23

John 13:2

Acts 5:3

The following commentary on 2 Corinthians 11:14 from *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (studylight.org) provides clear insight into Satan's covert tactics.

Satan does not carry on an open warfare. He does not meet the Christian soldier face to face. He advances covertly; makes his approaches in darkness; employs cunning rather than power, and seeks rather to delude and betray than to vanquish by mere force. . . . Satan does not openly appear. He approaches us not in repulsive forms, but comes to . . . lay before us some temptation that shall not immediately repel us. He presents the world in an alluring aspect; invites us to pleasures that seem to be harmless, and leads us in indulgence until we have gone so far that we cannot retreat.

You must remember that Satan is smarter than you. You cannot outthink him. If you face him alone, you will lose every time. He knows the quickest ways into your mind and the vulnerable places of your heart, and that is where he attacks most frequently.

What do the following Scriptures say regarding our hearts and minds?

Jeremiah 17:9

Proverbs 4:23

Satan knows that if he can manipulate your thoughts and feelings by his lies and temptations, then he can influence your behavior. If you fall into sin, he quickly attacks your mind and heart with accusations and condemnations to oppress you.

Oppression—State of being weighed down; a sense of heaviness or obstruction in the body or mind.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God is asking His children to voluntarily refuse to identify with this world and to live according to the principles of His kingdom.

This cycle will continue again and again until you heed the instructions of God and stand firm in the Word and in the power of His might. God has provided you the means to have absolute victory over Satan's attacks and the lusts of your flesh. You need not be defeated, deceived, or destroyed.

Lesson 7—Victory in the Battle

Genesis documents Satan’s first attack on humanity, and humanity lost. What does victory look like? Matthew 4:1–11 documents a time when Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. In verse 2, we learn that Jesus had gone forty days and nights without food. You can imagine how hungry and weak He must have been.

How did Satan first tempt Him in Matthew 4:3?

Satan first tempted Jesus by encouraging Him to give into the desires of His flesh, to satisfy His hunger for food. How did Jesus respond in verse 4?

Read Satan’s second temptation in verses 5–6. Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself off of the temple, expecting God to send angels to catch Him. In other words, he wanted Jesus to revel in the pride of His position. How did Jesus respond in verse 7?

Read Satan’s third temptation in verses 8–9. Satan tried to entice Jesus through the lust of the eyes and promised to give Him all the kingdoms of the earth if He would bow down and worship him.

How did Jesus respond in verse 10?

What did Satan do in verse 11?

How did Jesus respond to each of the temptations He received?

Jesus used the Holy Word of God as a weapon to combat every temptation the Enemy attacked Him with and to resist every desire of His flesh. What does Psalm 119:11 encourage you to do?

How is the Word described in Hebrews 4:12?

The Word of God is described as a sword. It is our main offense against Satan's attacks and the temptations of our flesh. Jesus combated the lies of the Enemy with the truth. How would you go about hiding God's Word in your heart? What does Joshua 1:7-9 teach?

It will take discipline to study Scripture daily, to meditate on the truth and to put to memory the passages that will aid you in your fight. A soldier's proficiency with a sword is determined by their focus, dedication, and practice. The same is true with the Word of God. Meditate on it day and night, commit it to memory, and put what you learn into practice. Only then will you have a strong offense and be able to cut down the lies of Satan. But you also need a strong defense.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

As we abide in an intimate relationship with Christ and walk in the Spirit, we will have victory over our flesh and sin.

Read Ephesians 6:10-11. Where does spiritual strength come from?

How do we stand against Satan?

The Armor of God

Ephesians 6:14-17 lists six pieces of spiritual armor that a believer must put on to have victory over the attacks of the Enemy. Write them below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

What additional instruction is given in verse 18?

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

God has guaranteed His children absolute victory in their spiritual battles as they walk in the complete armor He has provided.

Prayer is the most powerful tool we have as Christians. We have a constant and direct open line of communication with God, who has all authority over heaven and earth. On every occasion and in all seasons, we must have intimacy with our heavenly Father through prayer.

Lesson 8—Christ Is Our Advocate

What do Romans 8:13 and Galatians 5:17 say regarding our flesh and the Spirit?

As a Christian, you have two opposing natures dwelling within you—the spirit and the flesh. Your flesh is your sin nature—your “old self,” or as Scripture says, your “old man.” The habits, desires, thoughts, and reactions are in opposition to God’s righteousness and seek independence from Him.

Read Romans 6.

What died with Christ (verse 6)?

What did your old self die to (verses 2, 6, 10, 11)?

From what are we now freed (verse 7)?

What does God instruct us to do in our struggle against sin and our sin nature (verse 13)?

Romans 6 teaches us that before coming to Christ, we were slaves to sin. What must we be enslaved to now in order to have victory over sin (verses 16–22)?

Rewrite Galatians 2:20 in your own words.

Jesus atoned for all your sins on the cross. Your sin nature was crucified and buried with Christ, and you now have a new life in Him! But Satan will attempt to oppress you in the freedom you have been given. You will still experience the temptations of the Enemy and of the flesh. The Accuser is patiently waiting for an opportunity to strike and hurl condemnations against you to the Father, just as he did with Job. But you are not alone.

What does Hebrews 2:18 say about Jesus?

Jesus knows the temptations you face and understands the desires of your flesh. He even knows how the Enemy will attack before it happens.

What did Jesus say to Peter in Luke 22:31?

Again, we see that Satan needs permission from Jesus before he attacks. What did Jesus say in verse 32? Notice Jesus's words: "and when you have returned to Me." For Peter to return to Christ, he would first need to leave Him. Peter confidently claimed that he would go with Christ to the death in verse 33, but how did Jesus reply in verse 34?

Sure enough, Luke 22:56-62 documents Peter's betrayal. Satan asked Jesus for permission to sift him like wheat, and Jesus granted it to him. Why does Jesus allow us to be tempted by the Enemy?

Write Luke 22:32.

Satan no doubt desired to destroy Peter's faith and oppress him with grief and shame for betraying Christ, but Jesus had other plans—"And when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

What does 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 say about temptation?

Read 1 John 2:1-2. Who is our Advocate?

Advocate—One who pleads the cause of another; one who defends, vindicates, or espouses any cause by argument; a pleader.

What did Christ do according to Colossians 2:14-15?

Everything that Satan can accuse you of, and condemn you with, has been dealt with on the cross. Christ's death and resurrection disarmed the Enemy, and he is now at the mercy of the King of Kings. Jesus is sitting on His throne at the right hand of the Father advocating on your behalf. Your victory is completely in Jesus! But as long as you draw breath on this earth, you have a choice in every moment to either walk in the light or walk in darkness.

Lesson 9—Walk in the Light

Think about darkness for a moment. What is it? Is it not simply the absence of light? The only way to achieve complete darkness is to extinguish all sources of light. Ephesians 6:12 describes Satan as the “ruler of the darkness of this age.” What do the following verses say about light?

1 John 1:5

John 8:12

Psalm 119:105

The darkness of this world is the absence of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. That is where the Enemy rules. Paul was once under his evil influence, dwelling in darkness. On the road to Damascus, on his way to persecute Christians, Jesus confronted him and changed his mission. What did Jesus say He was going to use Paul for in Acts 26:17-18?

God’s light illuminates the darkness of this world. His light has reached you.

Write the following verses in your own words.

Colossians 1:13

Ephesians 5:8-9

You have been saved from the darkness of this world by the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. You bear His light, but you are not immune to darkness. What does Luke 11:35 encourage?

What does darkness fear according to John 3:20-21?

The one and only threat to darkness is light—the exposure of the unseen. You have been saved through faith, but the Enemy and this world will continue to entice you to willfully step into darkness. Deliberately disobeying the Word of God is stepping out of His light and opening yourself up to demonic attack. It gives Satan a foothold that he will take advantage of. Is there unconfessed darkness in your heart that you have kept hidden?

What does 1 John 1:6-7 say about fellowship with God?

This is your fight—your daily battle, moment by moment. You are to combat the forces of darkness by putting on the armor of God and humbly submitting to His Word. Meditate on James 4:6-10 for a few moments. How has this passage convicted and encouraged you?

What instructions are given to successfully combat the attacks of the Enemy and the lusts of the flesh, and to walk in the light of God?

Romans 12:1-2

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

Philippians 4:6-8

2 Timothy 2:22

Galatians 5:16

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Though we have a powerful enemy, we have an all-powerful God who exercises absolute authority over Satan and guarantees our safety as we put our trust in Him.

One Final Thought

As believers living for Christ in a fallen world, we will continue to experience spiritual warfare. However, God has promised that we can stand firm in His victory and not be defeated by Satan or the lusts of our flesh. God will be faithful to keep us from falling and will deliver us safely to His presence in our heavenly home. The next and final chapter focuses on what Scripture reveals about the end of time.

Chapter 7

Death and the End Times

It is a natural human response to both fear and be intrigued by the unknown. Conversations about life after death can be fascinating as well as terrifying. The afterlife is a popular theme for many movies and television shows. Autobiographies written by those who claim to have died and then returned to tell their story often become bestsellers. Mankind has a collective interest in what lies beyond this life, because the reality is everyone dies eventually.

There are numerous philosophies regarding the afterlife and what happens in the end times because most civilizations throughout history agree that life does not end after death. There seems to be something instinctual inside every individual believing the human soul is eternal. With all the differing afterlife philosophies, it is easy to be selective. We choose to believe the one that is most appealing. But how can we differentiate between the philosophies of truth and those of delusion?

Lesson 1—Discerning Truth

What warning is given in 1 John 4:1?

How can we discern the Spirit of truth according to 1 John 4:2-3?

God's Word is the foundation upon which all truth stands. In John 14:6, Jesus Christ proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus stated in John 10:9 that He was the door: "If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." The test of truth is Jesus Christ.

Is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaimed? Is confession of sin, surrendering to Christ, and obedience to His teaching exhorted? Rewrite the warning in Galatians 1:6-9.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. What has God placed in our hearts? Who can find out God's work from beginning to end?

God has placed eternity in our hearts, but we live in a temporal world confined by time. The concept of eternity and the mysteries surrounding the end times are difficult to fathom with our finite minds.

It is impossible to unravel the works of God by our own intelligence, but He has given us the Bible to reveal some of His mysteries. What does the Word of God say about death? What happens after we die? What does Scripture teach about the end times?

Note: It is important to understand that there are differing interpretations of these Scriptures within the body of Christ. But I encourage you to heed Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 1:10–31 and do not allow these differences to cause contentions between you and other believers. Humbly seek Scripture and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for understanding, and always glorify God.

Sheol

The human body is a temporary tent for the soul, or spirit, of an individual. But as the life of the body comes to an end, what happens to the soul? Jesus told a story in Luke 16:19–31 about two men—a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus.

Where did Lazarus go after he died (verse 22)?

Where did the rich man go after he died (verse 22–23)?

What was Hades like for the rich man (verse 23–24)?

What was Abraham's bosom like for Lazarus (verse 25)?

What separated Lazarus and the rich man (verse 26)?

Hades, also known in Scripture as Sheol, is the place where departed spirits go after death. The Hebrew word *Sheol* is sometimes translated as "the grave," "the pit," or "hell" depending on the context. It seems there are two compartments in Sheol, which are separated by an impassable gulf. On one side is a place of torment reserved for those without faith in God,

<i>Hades</i> —The abode of the dead; the place of departed spirits; Sheol.
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while the other side is a place of comfort reserved for those with faith in God. But where is Sheol located?

There is a prophecy in Ezekiel that foretells the death of the Egyptians and how they will join the other wicked rulers in the depths of Sheol, referred to as “the pit.” Read Ezekiel 32:18, 24. Where is Sheol located?

The book of 1 Samuel documents King Saul’s supernatural encounter with the departed spirit of the prophet Samuel. Read 1 Samuel 28:1–19.

What did the medium woman see (verse 13)?

Where did Samuel say Saul will be on the following day (verse 19)?

The spirit of Samuel informed Saul that he would die the next day and join him in Sheol.

What did David say about his future death in Psalm 16:9–11?

It seems that David understood he was going to be in Sheol after he died, but he had hope because he trusted God would not leave him there. He had faith he would eventually be in the presence of God for eternity because God would not allow His Holy One, Jesus, to see corruption.

Lesson 2—The Power of Sheol Destroyed

We know that Jesus was dead for three days and that His spirit must have been separated from His earthly body. But where did His spirit go? The Bible does not give a detailed explanation of Jesus’s whereabouts during His death, but some key verses provide us clues.

Where did Christ go after His death according to Matthew 12:40?

What did Jesus say to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43?

Who did Jesus preach to according to 1 Peter 3:18–20?

What does 1 Peter 4:6 say regarding the dead?

What did Jesus say of Himself in Revelation 1:18?

From these Scriptures, it seems that Christ, having the “keys of Hades,” went down to Sheol into the compartment of Abraham’s bosom, here being referenced as “Hades.”

It was from there that He preached to the spirits across the gulf in the place of torment (1 Peter 3:18–20), as well as preaching the gospel (revealing Himself as the Messiah) to the spirits who were with Him in Abraham’s bosom (1 Peter 4:6).

What did Jesus say when He appeared to Mary shortly after His resurrection in John 20:17?

Describe what you learn from Ephesians 4:8-10.

These verses seem to rule out the notion that Jesus was with God during His death. It is more likely that He “descended into the lower parts of the earth,” into Sheol, to preach to the spirits and then led the godly out of the clutches of death where “He led captivity captive.”

Jesus’s death and resurrection will always be the most pivotal event in the history of the universe. Everyone who died before Christ’s resurrection was bound to one of the two compartments of Sheol. But after Christ’s resurrection, the power of death in Sheol was destroyed.

What prophecy was given in Hosea 13:14?

What does Romans 6:9 say about Christ?

According to John 10:17-18, what did Jesus have power over?

According to 1 Corinthians 15:19-22, what did Christ become for those who died?

The godly spirits in Sheol could not ascend into the presence of God until the Holy Lamb shed His blood to pay for and cover their sins, in essence, becoming their first fruits. The ungodly spirits in Hades will remain there until the final judgment, but the godly spirits who were in Abraham’s bosom are now with Jesus in heaven.

Read Philippians 2:5-11.

What did God give Jesus after His death on the cross?

What three specific areas will bow to the name of Jesus?

What should every tongue confess?

All inhabitants of heaven, earth, and the depths of Sheol will bow down to the name of Jesus. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The Death of the Believer

Now that Christ has conquered death and is seated at the right hand of the Father, what happens to the spirits of the believers who die according to the following verses?

2 Corinthians 5:8

Philippians 1:23

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

When Christians pass from this life, they are immediately ushered into the presence of Jesus in heaven.

Since the resurrection of Christ, the spirits of all believers who die go directly to be with Jesus in heaven. They no longer go down to Sheol, because Christ has already paid the price for their sin.

What do the following passages teach about the death of the righteous in Christ?

Hebrews 2:14-15

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Psalms 116:15

Proverbs 14:32

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, there is no need to live in fear of death or hopelessly grieve over saved loved ones who have passed away. Rather, be diligent to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who are perishing without the knowledge of His saving grace, for the end is drawing near.

Lesson 3—The End Times

There are many passages in the Bible that provide prophetic insight into the final days. Scholars and commentators have poured over Scripture attempting to decipher all the mysteries surrounding the end. As I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, it is important to understand that there are differing interpretations within the body of Christ regarding the timeline of the specific events that will take place in the end times.

Instead of taking time to examine each interpretation, it will be more beneficial to look generally at the Scriptures surrounding each major event: the Antichrist revealed, the great tribulation, the rapture of the church, the second coming of Jesus Christ, the millennial reign of Christ, the righteous Judge, hell, and the new heaven and new earth.

The Last Days

How will we know when the end is near? What do the following passages say regarding the world's temperament during the last days?

Matthew 24:3-8

Matthew 24:9-14

2 Timothy 3:1-7

2 Peter 3:3-4

1 John 2:18

Timothy describes the condition of some of the Christian churches in the last days. What do you learn from the following verses?

1 Timothy 4:1-3

2 Timothy 4:3-4

It is sobering to recognize how familiar some of these descriptions are today. It is true that these characteristics and events have always existed in most time periods, but their frequency and intensity will increase as the earth prepares for the second coming of Christ. I would argue that these attributes are more prominent today than in any other time in our history. And their intensity will only increase as time progresses. But how will we know when the end has begun?

According to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, who must be revealed?

Lesson 4—The Antichrist Revealed

Who is the Antichrist? The book of Daniel in the Old Testament is filled with biblical prophecy. At the time, Daniel did not know what the prophecies meant, but many years later, God inspired John to write the prophetic book of Revelation, which brought some clarity to Daniel's prophecies.

Read Revelation 13:1-5.

What did the Dragon give to the Beast (verse 1-2)?

What did John see on one of the Beast's heads (verse 3)?

What happened to the wound (verse 3)?

How did the world react to the miraculous healing (verse 3-4)?

How long did the Beast's authority continue (verse 5)?

In chapter 6, the Dragon who is mentioned in the book of Revelation is Satan. The Antichrist is known as the Beast. Revelation 13:2 states that Satan gives the Antichrist his power and authority to rule on earth. At one point he suffers some sort of mortal wound, but then is miraculously healed. The world responds by worshiping him.

Daniel 9:26 refers to "the prince who is to come," who we now know is the Antichrist. Read Daniel 9:27. What will this "prince" first do?

What will he do in the "middle of the week"?

According to this prophecy, the Antichrist will make, or strengthen, some sort of peace treaty with Israel and the surrounding nations. But in the “middle of the week,” he will break the treaty and commit some sort of abomination.

According to Revelation 13:5–8, what will the Antichrist do after forty-two months?

How does 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 describe the Antichrist’s actions?

These three passages (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 13:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:4) are all speaking of the same event. What did Jesus call this event in Matthew 24:15?

The abomination of desolation is when the Antichrist will enter the temple and claim to be God. Daniel references this event taking place in the “middle of the week,” while Revelation states it will take place after forty-two months. Evidently, each one-week period in Daniel’s prophecies equal seven years.

Read Revelation 13:11–17.

What does the other beast make the earth do (verse 12)?

How does the other beast convince the world to worship the Antichrist (verse 13–14)?

What happens to those who do not worship the image of the Antichrist (verse 15)?

What does the Beast force each person to do (verse 16–17)?

How does Revelation 16:13 refer to the other beast?

Read the prophecy in Daniel 8:23–25 and describe the Antichrist’s reign.

Satan (the Dragon), the Antichrist (the Beast), and the False Prophet (the other beast) will rule on this earth during a time known as the great tribulation. The book of Daniel prophesied that this period will last seven years. Revelation provides a detailed explanation of the extraordinary events that will occur during this time.

Lesson 5—The Great Tribulation

How does Jesus describe the tribulation in Matthew 24:15–22?

What does the prophecy found in Daniel 9:24 say about the purpose of the tribulation?

The seventy weeks (490 years) prophesied by Daniel refer to the nation of Israel's reconciliation with the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Sixty-nine of the seventy weeks have already taken place. Israel rejected Jesus as the prophesied Messiah, and to this day they are still waiting for their Savior to come. Once the Antichrist is revealed, the last week (seven years) will begin.

The great tribulation is the specific seven-year period in which the unbelieving world will reach the peak of their unrighteousness, the nation of Israel will acknowledge and receive Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and God will pour forth His wrath and judgment upon those who reject Him. The most graphic description of the tribulation period is found in the book of Revelation. Many Christians are hesitant to read this book because it is often difficult to understand, but according to Revelation 1:3 and 22:7, what promise does God give those who read this book?

The following is a general outline of the events that will take place during the tribulation.

The Six Seals

In Revelation 5:1, a scroll that is sealed with seven seals is introduced. As the chapter proceeds, the seven seals are broken one by one, and the events of the great tribulation unfold. As each seal is broken, great catastrophes and demonstrations of God's wrath and power begin to be poured out upon the earth. Follow along starting in Revelation chapter 6.

- The false Christ comes to conquer (verses 1–2)
- Peace is taken from the earth (verses 3–4)
- Famine (verses 5–6)

- Death by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts (verses 7–8)
- Christian martyrs call out for vengeance (verses 9–11)
- Terror and environmental disasters (verses 12–17)

The Seven Trumpets

The breaking of the seventh seal in Revelation 8:1 is followed by silence in heaven then a series of seven trumpet sounds. As the angels sound the first six trumpets, the earth continues to experience the wrath of God until the seventh trumpet, which announces the coming reign of Christ. Follow along in Revelation 8:2–9:21 and 11:15–19.

- One-third of the earth burns up (8:7)
- One-third of the sea becomes blood (8:8–9)
- One-third of the rivers are made bitter (8:10–11)
- The moon and one-third of the stars are darkened (8:12–13)
- Tormenting creatures are released from the bottomless pit (9:1–12)
- One-third of mankind is annihilated by an invading army (9:13–21)
- Thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and hail storms (11:15–19)

The Seven Bowls of Wrath

At the blast of the last trumpet, another series of judgments is poured forth, which is described in Revelation 16 as seven bowls filled with the wrath of God. Follow along through the chapter.

- Sores appear on those who bear the mark of the Beast (verse 2)
- The sea becomes blood and all sea life is killed (verse 3)
- The rivers and springs of water become blood (verse 4)
- The sun scorches men with fire (verse 8)
- The kingdom of the Beast becomes darkened (verse 10)
- The Euphrates dries up to prepare for the coming battle (verse 12)
- Lightning, thunder, a great earthquake, and hail storm (verses 17–21)

The Battle of Armageddon

As the sixth bowl of God's judgment is emptied, the great battle of God is ushered in, known as the battle of Armageddon (16:13–16). The Antichrist and the kings of the earth will gather their armies together to battle in a war against Israel and God Himself.

According to Revelation 16:17, what words are proclaimed from the temple of heaven when the seventh bowl is poured out?

The end of the battle of Armageddon is followed by the long-awaited second coming of Jesus Christ. Before discussing this glorious event, I want to first introduce one of the specific eschatological beliefs about the rapture of the church.

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The tribulation is a seven-year period when God will pour forth His wrath upon those who have rejected His Son.

Eschatology—The doctrine of the last or final things, such as death, resurrection, immortality, the end of the age, the second advent of Christ, judgment, and the future state.

Lesson 6—The Rapture of the Church

The rapture refers to an event when Jesus Christ will snatch His church from the earth and bring them into His presence. What does 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 say will happen?

The phrase *caught up* is the Greek word *harpazo*, which means to be snatched away. The Latin equivalent is the word *rapio*, which is where the English word *rapture* comes from.

There is debate within the body of Christ regarding when the rapture takes place. There are generally three schools of thought:

- Pre-tribulation—rapture takes place before the tribulation period
- Mid-tribulation—rapture takes place in the middle of the tribulation period
- Post-tribulation—rapture takes place after the tribulation period

Each of these views use Scripture to support their claims but have differing interpretations. The reason for these differences is that the Bible does not give a clear timeline for all the events that will take place in the end times. Despite these differing timeline theories, they all agree that the rapture *will* take place.

What did Jesus teach in John 14:1–3?

I believe there is more scriptural support for the pre-tribulation view compared to the other two views. What do the following verses teach about the rapture?

Matthew 24:36–44

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Revelation 3:10

I believe that the pre-tribulation view best encompasses God's character and His desire to spare the righteous from the wrath to come. Regardless of when the rapture specifically takes place, the fact remains that Jesus Christ will return and gather His church into His presence.

The Glorified Body

The soul of the believers who die after the resurrection of Jesus but before the rapture are separated from their physical bodies. Their bodies remain on earth while their souls join Jesus in heaven. But something miraculous will happen when the rapture takes place.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:49-58.

Whose image will the believer bear (verse 49)?

What will happen to the believer (verses 51-52)?

What will the believer "put on" (verse 53)?

What is "swallowed up" after this transformation (verse 54)?

At the last trumpet, the bodies belonging to the souls that are in heaven will be raised incorruptible, and together with those who are still alive on earth, will be transformed "in the twinkling of an eye" and receive the glorified bodies prepared for them. Temporary, earthly bodies are made from the dust of the earth, but glorified bodies will be incorruptible and immortal, suited for eternal life in heaven.

What will these glorified bodies be like according to 1 John 3:2?

The glorified bodies of believers will be like Jesus's glorified body after His resurrection. What attributes of Christ's body are revealed in the following passages?

Luke 24:31

Luke 24:36-43

John 20:24-29

Whether the rapture takes place before, during, or after the tribulation, believers will be with Christ in their new glorified bodies as He prepares to descend to the earth once again.

Lesson 7—The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

The second coming of Jesus Christ will be one of the most dramatic events of all time. Christ’s first coming to earth was marked with lowliness—born in a stable in an obscure village to a poor virgin and heralded by common shepherds. His second coming will be a full display of His awesome power and glory. As the battle of Armageddon rages, Christ will make Himself known to the entire world.

Read Revelation 19:11–21.

How is Jesus described upon His return (verses 11–13)?

How are those who follow behind Christ described (verse 14)?

What will Jesus strike the nations with (verse 15)?

What is written on Jesus’s robe and thigh (verse 16)?

What happens to the Antichrist and the False Prophet (verse 20)?

What happens to all who reject Christ (verse 21)?

The “armies in heaven” mentioned in verse 19 consist of the believers who have previously been raptured and transformed.

According to Revelation 17:14, what are “those who are with Him” called?

According to Jude 14-15, who does “the Lord” come with upon His descent?

Christ will come to the earth with His church to execute final judgment upon those who reject Him. Write what you learn about Jesus’s second coming.

Matthew 24:27-31

Acts 1:11

Zechariah 14:1-4

Revelation 1:7

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

After Christ gathers His church to heaven at the rapture, the believers will receive their glorified bodies and accompany Him as He returns to the earth for His second coming.

The Millennial Reign of Christ

After Jesus conquers His enemies, He will set up His kingdom on earth. Read Revelation 20:1-6.

What happens to Satan (verses 1-3)?

Who lives and reigns with Christ (verse 4)?

How long will this period last (verses 4–6)?

Satan is bound and chained in the bottomless pit while Jesus rules on earth with His saints for one thousand years. What do you learn about the millennial period from the following passages?

Isaiah 2:1–5

Isaiah 11:5–10

What did the angel Gabriel tell Mary in Luke 1:31–33?

The millennial reign of Jesus will be a fulfillment of a great number of biblical prophecies. It will be a time of great peace, joy, and comfort, but it will not last forever. Read Revelation 20:7–10.

What will happen at the end of the thousand years (verse 7)?

What will Satan do after he is released (verse 8)?

What happens to those who are deceived by Satan (verse 9)?

What will be Satan's final sentence (verse 10)?

This passage in Revelation reveals that there will be many people who will choose to defy Jesus during the millennial period, even without the influence of Satan. Once Satan is released, he will gather the defiant together to forge one last final attack in an attempt to destroy Christ and His people. But God will destroy them with fire from heaven and send Satan to join the Antichrist and the False Prophet in the lake of fire for eternity. And then comes the last and final judgment.

Lesson 8—The Righteous Judge

According to Acts 17:30–31, who has God ordained to be the righteous Judge?

Why does Jesus say His judgment is righteous according to John 5:30?

Read Matthew 25:31–46.

What will Jesus do with all the nations gathered before Him (verses 32–33)?

What will Jesus say to those on His right (verses 34–40)?

What will Jesus say to those on His left (verses 41–46)?

Ironically, all paths do lead to God. Every man will stand before the Creator and either be humbly clothed with the righteousness of Christ, or naked, guilty, and condemned in their sins. There are, again, some different beliefs within the church regarding Christ's judgment. Some hold to the belief that the Bible speaks of multiple judgments from Jesus that will take place at different times. Others believe there is only one judgment that takes place at the end of His millennial reign.

Despite these different beliefs, the fact remains that Jesus Christ is the righteous Judge, and all will stand before Him to receive their sentence.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

The Judgment Seat of Christ is believed by some to be the first judgment reserved only for the

saved. It is believed to take place at some point after the rapture of the church and during the great tribulation period. It is not a judgment of condemnation, because Jesus paid the price for sin on the cross. All who have received Him are pardoned from their sin. Rather, it is a judgment of each individual's faithfulness and service.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

Who is the foundation for all believers (verse 11)?

What sort of things can you build on the foundation of Christ (verse 12)?

How will your work be tested (verse 13)?

What will the results be (verses 14-15)?

According to 1 Corinthians 4:5, what will Jesus bring to light?

What do you learn from 2 Corinthians 5:9-11?

Do you recognize anything in your life that you may be building upon that will not withstand the test of Christ's fire?

All the secret motives and desires of the heart will be laid bare before the righteous Judge. Everything done through selfish ambition, unrighteousness, and pride will burn away to ash. But the humble acts of selflessness and obedience in service to the King will remain and be rewarded accordingly. What is rewarded in following passages?

2 Timothy 4:7-8 Reward: The Crown of _____

James 1:12 Reward: The Crown of _____

1 Peter 5:4 Reward: The Crown of _____

According to Revelation 4:9-11, what do the twenty-four elders do with their crowns?

Any reward or honor will pale in comparison to being in the presence of Jesus Christ!

Lesson 9—The White Throne Judgment

The White Throne Judgment is believed by some to be reserved only for the unrepentant sinners and will take place after Satan is sent to the lake of fire at the end of the millennial reign of Christ.

Read Revelation 20:11–15.

What will those who reject Christ try to do when the judgment begins (verse 11)?

How will the dead be judged (verse 12)?

Where do the dead come from (verse 13)?

What happens to those who are not written in the Book of Life (verse 14–15)?

Every soul that is awaiting judgment in the depths of Hades and all who have been consumed by the fire of God in the millennial-end battle will stand before the One they have rejected and will receive their sentence.

How will the judged respond to Jesus according to the following passages?

Romans 3:19

Philippians 2:9-11

Every mouth will be silenced in the presence of the almighty righteous Judge. All will acknowledge Him as Lord and receive His verdict.

Hell

It is becoming more and more common for Christians to reject the biblical doctrine of hell. Many reason that God is a God of love and would never send anybody to such a terrible place of torment for eternity.

What do you learn about God's heart from the following passages?

1 Timothy 2:3-6

2 Peter 3:9

God is indeed a God of love and does not want anybody to go to hell. That is precisely why He provided a way of escape. Read John 3:16-21.

Why did God send His Son (verses 16-17)?

How are people condemned (verses 18-20)?

The sobering truth is that people choose hell for themselves by rejecting the Savior. Jesus is the righteous Judge, and if sinners refuse to repent and receive His forgiveness, they will be

condemned to pay the penalty of their sin for eternity. Those who reject the doctrine of hell must ignore the teachings of Jesus. Summarize the words of Christ in the following passages.

Mark 16:15-16

Matthew 13:40-43

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH
Christ taught that whoever rejects Him will face condemnation and judgement.

According to Scripture, hell is a real place and is reserved for those who reject the Savior. But those who have received salvation through Jesus Christ have their names written in the Book of Life and will be in the presence of Jesus for eternity.

What does Jesus say about heaven in the following passages?

John 14:1-3

John 16:22

Lesson 10—A New Heaven and a New Earth

When the millennial reign of Christ has ended, Revelation speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. Read Revelation 21–22 and fill in the blanks.

- The first heaven and first earth _____ (21:1).
- There was no more _____ (21:1).
- Heaven is a place where God _____ (21:3).
- God will _____ (21:4).
- There will be no _____ (21:4).
- God makes all things _____ (21:5).
- The one who thirsts _____ (21:6).
- He who overcomes will _____ (21:7).
- Heaven is brilliant, like _____ (21:11).
- The wall is made of _____ (21:18–20).
- The twelve gates are made of _____ (21:21).
- The streets are made of _____ (21:21).
- The temple in heaven is _____ (21:22).
- Heaven is illuminated by _____ (21:23).
- The gates will never _____ (21:25).
- The citizens are those who _____ (21:27).
- In heaven, there is a river of _____ (22:1).
- There is a tree of _____ (22:2).
- There is no _____ (22:3).
- There is a _____ (22:3).
- In heaven, we will _____ (22:3–5).

Everything about heaven reflects God’s holiness and glory. All the inhabitants of God’s household in heaven will live eternally in absolute peace, security, and fulfillment in His presence. Never again will there be fear, sorrow, suffering, loneliness, or hardship. Praise be to God!

FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

Heaven is a place that God is preparing for all believers. All the inhabitants will finally enjoy absolute love, joy, peace, freedom, fulfillment, and a right relationship with God and others.

Conclusion

I hope this chapter has provided you with some clarity about what the Word of God says regarding death and the end times. You may come across alternate interpretations from different pastors, commentators, or theologians about Sheol, the rapture, the tribulation period, and so forth, but do not allow the differing opinions on these subjects to trouble you. Look to the Holy Word for truth, and humbly

submit to the ultimate authority and omniscience of God. You are in His mighty hands, and everything that will take place in the end is under His control. Abide in Him and His Word every day. Pursue righteousness, share the gospel, and look forward to the glorious return of our Savior Jesus Christ!

Appendix A

Developing Daily Intimacy with God

The greatest gift received through salvation is the ability to have a close, dependent relationship with God. There is nothing He desires more from you.

Set aside time.

Choose the best time of day (morning or evening) and commit to a daily devotion with God. Don't set yourself up for discouragement with a goal you will not be able to keep. Start small, and then add time as you grow. Begin with fifteen minutes each day.

Choose a book of the Bible.

Read one chapter (or less if it is a long chapter) or a few verses, and meditate on it. In addition, you may also want to read from a daily devotional book. See *Appendix B: Recommended Books* for suggestions.

Pray.

Pray specifically over the truths you have just read. Ask God to reveal how they apply to your life. Pray for the humility to submit yourself to His authority and to respond in obedience.

Listen to Him.

Spend a few minutes in silence, just listening. This may be uncomfortable at first. We live in a time of constant distractions and are not accustomed to sitting quietly. Persevere and God will be faithful to speak to you. Remember that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in you and can minister to you in your thoughts.

Keep a journal.

Record your prayers, experiences, ideas, or reflections to keep for private use. Write what verses mean to you and anything the Lord speaks to your heart.

Pray again.

Be intentional about your prayers. Use the ACTS method to guide you:

- *A—Adoration*—Worship and praise God.
- *C—Confession*—Confess and repent of any known sins.
- *T—Thanksgiving*—Express gratitude for God's blessings in your life.
- *S—Supplication*—Humbly make requests for your needs and the needs of others.

Close by asking God to help you to know and acknowledge His presence throughout your day.

Appendix B

Recommended Books

While many excellent books are available to deepen your relationship with God, we recommend the following to guide, teach, and challenge you.

Discipleship Books

Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King

Man to Man by Charles R. Swindoll

Marriage Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster

Men of Courage: God's Call to Move Beyond the Silence of Adam by Dr. Larry Crabb

Parenting Is a Ministry series by Craig Caster

Understanding Teens series by Craig Caster

Devotional Books

Daily Experience with God by Andrew Murray

Drawing Near: Daily Readings for a Deeper Faith by John F. MacArthur

Every Day with Jesus: First Steps with New Believers by Greg Laurie

Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God by Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King

Meet the Bible: A Panorama of God's Word in 366 Daily Readings and Reflections by Brenda Quinn and Philip Yancey

Moments Together for Couples by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers

On the Other Side of the Garden: Biblical Womanhood by Virginia Ruth Fugate

Our Daily Bread, simple digital and printed devotionals at <https://odb.org/>

Self-Confrontation by John C. Broger

Streams in the Desert by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman

The Love Dare Day by Day: A Year of Devotions for Couples by Stephen and Alex Kendrick

The One Year Book of Psalms by William J. Peterson and Randy Petersen

Devotional and Discipleship Resources for Teens

Bad to the Bone: Fifteen Young Bible Heroes Who Lived Radical Lives for God by Miles McPherson

Bible app by YouVersion (available on Apple and Android)

BibleProject podcasts and videos, <https://bibleproject.com/>

Growing Little Women: Capturing Teachable Moments with Your Daughter by Donna J. Miller, with Linda Holland

Josh McDowell Daily Devotions, subscribe online at josh.org/resources/youth-family/daily-devotions/youth/

Talksheets by David Lynn (various books for junior high and high school)

Youth Devotions by Josh McDowell

Relationship Books

For Men Only by Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn

For Parents Only by Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa A. Rice

For Women Only by Shaunti Feldhahn

For Young Men Only by Jeff Feldhahn and Eric Rice with Shaunti Feldhahn

For Young Women Only by Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa A. Rice

Lady in Waiting: Becoming God's Best While Waiting for Mr. Right by Jackie Kendall and Debby Jones

Praying for Your Future Husband: Preparing Your Heart for His by Robin Jones Gunn and Tricia Goyer

The Power of a Praying Wife by Stormie Omartian

Talking about Sex

How to Talk Confidently with Your Child about Sex by Lenore Buth

More Than Just the Talk: Becoming Your Kids' Go-To Person about Sex by Jonathan McKee

Appendix C

Glossary

These definitions are taken from *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition Unabridged, G & C Merriam Company (1939).

abide: “To sustain; to submit to; to continue to endure without yielding; to remain stable or fixed in.”

To develop an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and live a life of victory, we must abide in Him—talk to Him in prayer, meditate on His Word, and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

See Psalm 91:1; John 15:4–10.

accountability: “Liable to be called on to render an account; answerable for one’s conduct.”

As members of the body of Christ, God calls each one of us to have accountability with one another for the purpose of encouragement, protection, exhortation, and correction.

See Luke 9:10; Romans 14:12; Galatians 6:1; 1 Peter 4:5.

adoption: “To take or receive as one’s own; to approve of; to accept; to take by choice into a relationship as child, heir, friend, or citizen.”

When a sinner repents and receives Christ as Savior and Lord, they are adopted into God’s family and become one of His children. They are granted access to the Father and share in the divine inheritance. The indwelling Holy Spirit confirms in their heart that they are a child of God.

See Hosea 1:10; John 20:17; Romans 8:14, 15, 17.

apostle: “One sent forth; a messenger; one of the twelve disciples of Christ, specially chosen as his companions and witnesses, and sent forth to preach the gospel.”

Jesus Christ called the twelve disciples to Himself and then sent them out into the world to do His will and fulfill His plan.

See Matthew 28:18–20; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1.

born again: “Regenerated; renewed; having received spiritual life.”

Every human experiences a physical birth, but when a sinner repents and accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they are born again by the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit comes to live in their heart, imparting to them the very life of God.

See Ezekiel 36:26, 27; John 3:1–8.

condemnation or **condemned:** “Pronounced to be wrong, guilty, worthless, or forfeited; sentenced to punishment, destruction, or confiscation.”

Every human is born into sin, guilty of transgression, and deserving God’s punishment. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sin of the world and carried each man and woman’s guilt to the cross, thus pronouncing all believers innocent and justified.

See Romans 5:16–18; 8:1; 13:2.

confession: “To make acknowledgment of something private, hidden, or damaging to oneself.”

When a believer is convicted by either the Word of God or the Holy Spirit about their thinking, motives, attitudes, or actions that are not pleasing to God, the correct response is confession. Genuine confession will be followed by repentance.

See 2 Samuel 12:13; 1 John 1:9–10.

conviction: “A strong persuasion or belief; the state of being convinced of error or compelled to admit the truth.”

Only the Holy Spirit can produce conviction of sin in the heart. Conviction by the Holy Spirit urges the humble believer to confession and repentance.

See Psalm 32:3–5; John 16:7–8.

discipline: “To teach; to train in self-control or obedience to given standards; to develop by instruction and exercise.”

Nobody naturally develops spiritual maturity and godly character. The gracious Lord uses discipline in each believer’s life to teach, train, and grow them into a mature, righteous child of God.

See Psalm 86:11; Hebrews 12:5–11.

edification: “Building up; moral, intellectual, or spiritual improvement; instruction.”

Jesus Christ came to earth to bring man into a relationship with His Father. Likewise, believers are called to encourage one another to grow in their dependence on Christ and develop spiritual intimacy with the Father.

See Romans 15:2; 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26; Ephesians 4:29.

fellowship: “A state of being together; community of interest, activity, or feeling; companionship of persons on equal or friendly terms.”

True Christian fellowship is both giving to and receiving from one another. It is focusing on Jesus Christ and the common unity of sharing and participation in His body (the church). Fellowship among believers is a result of intimate fellowship with the Savior.

See John 17:3, 21; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 John 1:3–7.

glorify: “To bestow honor, praise, or admiration, to esteem; to shed splendor on.”

The life of a believer glorifies God when they turn from unrighteousness and live in submission to God’s will, in obedience to God’s Word, and in love with the Savior.

See Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Revelation 15:4.

grace: “Divine favor unmerited; a supernatural, free gift of God bestowed on humankind for their regeneration or sanctification; salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ; divine love; forgiveness for the repentant sinner.”

Grace is the goodness of God to the undeserving, the forgiveness of sins granted entirely out of His kindness, completely noncontingent on any merit of the person forgiven.

See Lamentations 3:22; Romans 5:1–2; 6:14–15.

humility or humble: “State or quality of being humble in spirit; freedom from pride and arrogance; lowliness of mind; act of submission or humble courtesy; not proud or assertive in spirit.”

Humility is the opposite of pride and is an attribute of God's character. God is high and great, yet He lowers Himself to be concerned for the well-being of His creation. God pours forth His grace upon the humble.

See Psalm 113:5-6; James 4:6.

intimate: "Close in personal relationship or association; familiar; closely united; pertaining to the inmost self."

Jesus Christ died on the cross to make a way for mankind to be made right with God and share in an intimate relationship with Him.

See Proverbs 3:32; John 15:15.

justification or justify: "To pronounce free from guilt or blame; to absolve; to treat as righteous; free from penalty of sin."

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. God is the Holy Judge and will render to each person a verdict of justified or condemned. God's children are pardoned, or justified, in Christ.

See Isaiah 53:11; Romans 3:28.

mercy: "Forbearance from inflicting harm by punishment; disposition to exercise compassion or forgiveness; willingness to spare or help; a blessing regarded as a manifestation of compassion or favor."

God is rich in mercy, kindness, and good will toward the miserable and afflicted. Though all mankind is guilty before God, deserving of His judgment, He extends mercy to all who receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

See Exodus 34:6; Ephesians 2:4.

pride: "A sense of one's own worth and abhorrence of what is beneath or unworthy; unreasonable conceit of superiority."

Pride is the opposite of humility. Pride is self-righteousness, self-seeking, self-reliance, and independence from God. It is putting faith or trust in oneself and one's own abilities. God resists the proud.

See Proverbs 11:2; 16:18; Isaiah 2:17; 1 John 2:16; James 4:6.

propitiation: "To appease and render favorable; to conciliate; to atone; the self-sacrifice and death of Christ viewed as appeasing divine justice and effecting reconciliation between God and man."

God is holy and vehemently opposes evil. The wrath of God is His just and holy anger directed at the sin of the world. When Jesus Christ gave His life on the cross, He took upon Himself all the sin and unrighteousness of mankind. His blood sacrifice satisfied the wrath of God. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. All who confess their sin to God and accept Christ as Savior and Lord are forgiven and receive God's grace rather than His wrath.

See Psalm 7:11-13; 1 John 2:1-2.

reconciliation or reconcile: "Restoration to harmony or friendship; to restore to peace, communion, or favor again."

The Word clearly teaches that sinners are enemies of God and are deserving His wrath. Christ dealt with the enmity between mankind and God by dying on the cross and putting

away the sin of the world. Jesus has made it possible for a sinner to be reconciled to God.
See Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

redemption or redeem: “To regain possession of by payment; to ransom, liberate, or rescue from captivity or bondage; to recover or deliver.”

Since the garden of Eden, mankind has been enslaved to sin. Jesus Christ redeemed mankind back to God through His death and resurrection. Believers are liberated in Christ, while nonbelievers continue to be held in slavery to sin.

See Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18–19.

repentance: “To feel sorrow or regret; to change one’s mind or one’s heart with regard to past or intended action; to feel contrition for what one has done or omitted to do.”

When a believer is truly sorry for their sin, they will confess the sin to God, turn from it, dedicate themselves to God, and walk in His grace.

See Matthew 3:8; Acts 26:20b; Ephesians 4:28.

righteous: “Doing that which is right; just; upright; equitable; especially, free from wrong, guilt, or sin; virtuous; worthy.”

According to Scripture, the righteous are those who walk with God. Fallen sinners are made righteous by Jesus Christ. He graciously imparts His righteousness upon those who receive His salvation.

See Genesis 6:9; Romans 5:19.

sanctification: “The state of being purified; process of God’s grace by which the affections of men are alienated from sin and exalted to a supreme love to God and righteousness.”

God sanctifies the believer at the moment of salvation. He continues in the sanctification process as the believer walks with Him in fellowship and obedience. Sanctification will be complete when the believer meets the Savior in eternity.

See 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 John 3:2.

sin: “Transgression of the law of God; disobedience of the divine will; moral failure; an offense.”

Sin is any offense against God’s Word, authority, goodness, wisdom, justice, or grace. Sin proceeds from a rebellious heart or a deceived mind and is acted upon in attitude, thought, word, or deed.

See Psalm 51:4; 1 John 3:4; Romans 14:23.

sovereign: “Supreme or highest in power, superior in position to all others, having independent or supreme authority.”

God is sovereign. He possesses supreme power, unlimited wisdom, and absolute authority over everything He created.

See Psalm 139:1–16; Daniel 4:35; Revelation 4:11.

transform: “To change the form of; to change in nature, disposition, heart, or the like; to convert.”

As we walk in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, He transforms our lives to reflect His image and character. We will be completely transformed to reflect His glory when we enter eternity with Him.

See 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2.

transgression or transgressor: “Sin; a violation of a command, a law, or one’s duty; one who breaks a law, or violates any known rule or principle of rectitude.”

God established His standard of righteousness in the Ten Commandments. Those who violate His commands become transgressors, deserving of death. Jesus Christ came to earth to fulfill the law, to bare mankind’s sin on the cross, and to secure justification to all who believe in Him.

See Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 5:17; Romans 5:18; 7:12; Hebrews 2:2.

A Letter to the Disciple

Dear Disciple,

As we close this discipleship workbook, I encourage you to reflect on all you have learned about what it means to live in faith as a Christian. I pray that this study has helped guide you into a mature, developing relationship with Jesus Christ and that it has opened your eyes to God's design for discipleship.

The church is losing sight of the Great Commission that Jesus has called *all* believers to obey. More and more Christians are growing ignorant of what the Great Commission is. Churches around the world are distracted, focusing on their own inner programs or missions without equipping their members to obey Jesus's clear command. But you are no longer ignorant of the command Jesus has given you:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. (Matthew 28:19–20)

I implore you to obey His command to become one of His disciples. As you grow and mature in your faith, pray for the wisdom and discernment to know when you are equipped to disciple another in their faith. When you are ready, open your eyes to the people God has placed in your life, and actively seek out those whom *you* can disciple. This workbook can be a helpful tool to aid in your obedience.

Family Discipleship Ministries also offers multivolume workbooks about marriage and parenting to align you with the wisdom and instruction provided by the Word of God. Marriage Is a Ministry series and Parenting Is a Ministry series are both helpful tools to aid you in bringing glory to God through your family. They can also be used to disciple others. These materials can be found on our website, www.FDM.world.

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

Your brother in Christ,

Pastor Craig Caster

About the Author

A fool. A student with dyslexia. A high school graduate with a third-grade reading level. An ignorant husband and abusive father. All described Pastor Craig Caster at one time in his life, but God had a different plan for him. Despite Craig's fear of public speaking, God called him to full-time ministry in 1994. He stepped out in faith without formal education or a seminary degree. He was ordained in 1995 and has since written four books; disciplined many men; counseled hundreds; led countless to Christ; and taught thousands through marriage and parenting seminars, men's retreats, and pastors' conferences throughout the United States and internationally. All by the grace and power of God.

Although Craig gave His life to Jesus in 1979, his transformation started when he began to abide in Jesus and His Word daily. He truly believes Jesus desires a close relationship with each one of us. His life is forever changed because he pursues this relationship and is completely dependent on Christ.

Be Encouraged

If you are struggling to trust that God can work in and through your life, be encouraged by Pastor Craig's story. Don't let your past sins, learning disabilities, fear of teaching or speaking, or lack of education stop you from being obedient to the call of God on your life. God desires to make you His disciple, and if you are married or have children, He wants to form you into a spouse and parent who honors Him. His grace is amazing and limitless. He loves you and desires to be glorified through you.

God's Promise to You

Thanks be to God for His abundant promises and provision. Meditate on His promises from the words of "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ."

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:1-8)

About Family Discipleship Ministries

Family Discipleship Ministries (FDM), a nonprofit ministry established in 1994 by founder and director Pastor Craig Caster, strives to support, educate, and train the body of Christ to minister to families through a discipleship model. To accomplish this goal, FDM offers workbooks, supporting videos, and online materials for individual study, small groups, home-group study, and one-on-one discipleship. They conduct seminars on discipleship, marriage, and parenting.

FDM's ministry goal is to exhort, train, and equip leaders of Christian churches to develop a vision for discipleship and provide biblically solid workbooks to help them minister to their church families. Since 1995, thousands of people have completed the marriage and parenting classes, and hundreds of churches across the United States and abroad have ministered to their congregations using FDM materials. Their ministry also helps many families through free online resources found at www.FDM.world.

FDM actively ministers internationally in countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Cuba, Mexico, Africa, Singapore, Japan, and China. Find out more at www.FDM.world.