

A Moment In the Word

Volume One



Short, challenging messages for personal growth,
family devotionals or group study.

G. Brent Riggs

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The Bible warns us that the cares of this world can squeeze out our time for God. We see this very plainly today in our "need" for short devotional messages that only take a few minutes to digest. I'm often perplexed to hear how hard it is "to find time to study and pray" when people can find time for hours and hours a day of "screen time".

So, if dwindling time for God is a problem, am I contributing to it by writing a book full of short devotional messages?

I had to ponder that seriously but, in the end, I think I'm just accepting reality... and hoping that even though the thoughts in this little book are short, they are substantive and serious.

It's my hope that these quick devotionals will lead people to deepen and lengthen their time for God and His precious Word.

That's why I've included questions and thoughts to meditate on at the end of each message.

I trust you'll find these useful and a blessing for your personal growth, family time or Bible study groups.

A handwritten signature in a cursive, stylized font that reads "Brent". The signature is written in a dark grey or black ink and has a soft, light grey shadow cast beneath it, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.

About the Author

Brent Riggs is an author, teacher, artist, and businessman with many published titles and large growing audience online.

He is a married father of eight and loves the simple life of small-town Oklahoma.

You can find out more about Brent at www.BrentRiggs.com or www.seriousfaith.com.

Brent's oil paintings and lessons can be found at www.thepaintingteacher.com

Some of My Other books

(all my books are at www.brenttriggs.com/stuff):



Terrorist To Evangelist

The True Story of Cornelius Kenneth McClinton

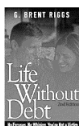
Born into abject poverty and lower working-class Belfast, Kenny McClinton became as hard-core as the life he was forced to live. From a violent, drunken father to abusive boys homes, from the Navy to a sadistic prison, from terrorism to salvation... this is Ken's remarkable and gut wrenching story of how the Lord rescued him from a life not worth living.



Sinners In The Hands of An Angry God

A Modern Rendition By Brent Riggs

[Visit the website](#) A modern version of one of the greatest sermons of all time. Sadly, and tragically, uncompromising preaching about HELL is unpopular today. They say "you shouldn't try to scare people into Hell. "Who says? Certainly not God, Jesus, or the Apostles. The Bible has far more to say about Hell than Heaven.



Life Without Debt

No Excuse, No Whining, You Aren't a Victim

How to get out of debt, how to stay out of debt; the truth about the credit industry; how to save money, how to reduce expense; timeless principles about personal finance.



SeriousFaith Questions & Answers - Vol. 1

The Guide Full of Christian Common Sense, Biblical No Nonsense & My Spiritual Two Cents

This guide teaches the new Christian there is a serious need today for serious answers to serious questions about the Bible & Christianity. Almost 500 pages of answers and advice!



Essentials of Christianity

The Guide for New Christians or Those Who Just Never Got Around to Learning the Basics

For the new or uneducated Christian - the fundamentals of the Christian faith. A MUST KNOW collection of knowledge for all Believers.



Internet Pornography

The Guide That Teaches You How to Discover and Deal with a Porn Problem

Internet porn is destroying churches, marriages and individual lives. Find out how to discover porn, and then how to help someone deal with it.



Knowing The Will of God

The Guide That Teaches You How to Confidently Determine God's Will in Your Life

An incredibly useful topical guide to Bible Verses; Brent Riggs Bible messages, quotes and more; over 200 pages.

A Moment In The Word

**Short, challenging messages for personal growth,
family devotionals or group study.**

The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news! 'Nuff said.

Mark 1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

We used to see people out on the streets with signs saying "Repent, the Kingdom of God is at hand!" but our culture has successfully gotten those people labeled as religious lunatics by default. Even genuine Christian's kind of shy away in embarrassment.

Tragic. The world is descending rapidly into a sinful free for all ("as in the days of Noah") and all signs point to Jesus soon return but to announce that or talk about makes you a fruitcake.

Chalk one up for Satan.

Think It Over: When was the last time you seriously thought about how near (soon to come) the end of this age is? Have you ever warned any unbelievers of this reality? Why not?

You complete me; a famous movie line, but what REALLY is our source of completion?

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We look in a lot of different places to make up for what is missing, to finish what is lacking or fill what is not full.

The real reason we fall short emotionally, spirituality and relationally is the S.I.N. disease (a shortfall of holiness). Only by God's grace, His spirit and His Word can we perfect our holiness... in other words, "complete me". Sin in our lives is directly proportionate to our imperfection and incompleteness as persons.

In our verse we find several things to complete us: promises of God we can always count on; cleansing spiritually by asking God's forgiveness; and following the Spirit of God who guides us into all things righteous. Mix thoroughly with the "fear of God" and you are on your way.

Fear of God? Don't hear that talked about much in these ear-tickling days but it is simply an admission of who God is, a respect for His power, and an acknowledgment of our accountability to Him.

“You complete me...” A human can never really do this for us perfectly, but God can.

Think It Over: Where are you looking for “completion” in your life? Achievement, pleasure, money? Have you ever really considered if “completeness” is attainable on your current path? If not, might want to change it to the only path that leads to true perfection.

Stop... when is the last time you sincerely said "Thank you Lord"?

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

There are a lot of Christians in the world today who truly have it BAD... I mean prison, lose your job, take your kids, cut off your head, burn down your house bad. Chances are, if you are reading this, you've got it pretty good compared to those who are truly suffering.

How often do you thank God that you don't have to worry about severe persecution? Beyond that, how often are you truly and thoughtfully thankful to the Lord for food, water, clothes and a bed out of the rain? Or are we all just too consumed with how we should make MORE money, have MORE stuff, a BIGGER house, MORE free time, MORE entertainment, more, bigger, newer, faster, better.

Don't get me wrong... I'm not against "stuff". Every blessing we have is a gift from God to be enjoyed and used for His glory (James 1:5). Far too often, we forget that all we really need in life to be happy is peace (salvation), food, clothes, water, family, friends, love and a dry place to sleep.

Think It Over: When was the last time you were simply thankful for those basic needs being met... and that's it. Content and thankful. A long time? Ever? Take five seconds right now and pray "Thank you Lord... I'm not hungry, thirsty, naked or homeless. And I don't have to worry about Hell. That's enough. Thank you." Now go find someone who doesn't have those things and meet some real needs.

American liberty is rapidly slipping away but there is another liberty that can never be taken by man or government.

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

We hear a lot of rhetoric and lip service about "liberty" today but any casual student of history, government or politics recognizes that true liberty has diminished dramatically in American. Liberty is robbed by politicians seeking power, and citizens trading responsibility for government handouts or false security.

Our liberty as citizens can come and go based on what other people do. Our liberty as Christians was purchased by Christ and guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. It is the only TRUE liberty available to us that cannot be taken away, though sadly, lots of Christians try to rob other Christians of theirs.

What is liberty? It is enjoying the freedom of following our conscience and God's will for our life, realizing it is not the same for everyone else. It is the joy of having a personal choice for those things God has not specifically given a command about. God may allow me freedom in areas that He convicts you to avoid. God may say "No" to me where He has said "Yes" to you. Jesus paid for our

liberty, don't let anyone rob you of it. Don't rob others of theirs.

Think It Over: Do you understand what Christian liberty is? Do you know what the Biblical guidelines are concerning liberty? Do you rob others of their liberty by expecting them to live exactly like you? Do you allow others to rob you of your liberty by Christian peer pressure or legalism?

At the dawn of each day, there are new mercies and compassion from Him who is Faithful and True.

Lamentations 3:22-23 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

This is my favorite verse in all of Scripture concerning "life".

It tells me I get to start over every day. No matter what I messed up, no matter what I failed to do, no matter how discouraging today might be, I get to start over tomorrow with fresh new mercy from our faithful God.

It tells me I don't have to worry about tomorrow. God is faithful. He'll be there with a fresh refill of mercy and compassion. Today has enough to deal with. I don't have to be anxious about the future because of my steadfast Lord.

It tells me to hang in there and don't give up because I just have to get through today. Just get through THIS day. You can handle one day. Do the best you can. Do what you think is right. Make the best choices you can. Follow God's leading with a clear conscience. Just for today. Tomorrow you get a new try.

Think It Over: Can you do anything about yesterday? Can you control tomorrow? Do you believe God's promises? Then get busy living TODAY, forget the past, put the future in God's hands.

Fruitcake: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

More and more these days Christians are characterized as a bunch of fruitcakes. In reality, a lot of Christians aren't nearly fruity enough.

How do you know an apple tree? Has apples on it. How do you know a strawberry plant is a good strawberry plant? It bears good berries.

If you're life is bare of Christian fruit, you have two options: either you are not truly a Christian, or you are a spiritually unhealthy Christian.

Think It Over: examine your life... do you see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness? You know a true Christian by the kind of fruit their life produces.

Angry? Hot temper? Maybe it's YOU not them. Maybe YOU are the reason you sin all the time.

Proverbs 29:22 An angry man stirs up strife,
And a furious man abounds in transgression.

Have you ever known an angry person? Someone who is constantly riled up about something? It's always someone else's fault isn't it? It's never them, it's the other jerk, the other idiot, the other person who wronged them or gave them a reason to be mad.

Maybe that angry person is you. Maybe the common denominator in all the turmoil is you? Takes a big person to admit it.

Wherever anger is common, sin is common. One follows the other like a caboose follows a train engine. If you are that angry person, do something about it. If you know a person who is angry all the time, steer clear of them.

Think It Over: is turmoil and anger a consistent part of your life? Do you honestly believe it's always the fault of the other person, or something out of your control? You cannot begin to change the situation until you admit that anger is a personal choice. Learn to be a thermostat (set your own

temperature) rather than a thermometer (letting your circumstances set your temperature).

In the dark? Need some light in your life? I know a never-ending source of light.

John 12:46 I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

Darkness is growing in this world. Violence, hatred, death, disease, corruption... hardly a day goes by current events don't remind us of the gathering storm clouds of an increasingly Godless humanity.

Maybe it's all much more personal for you. Sickness, financial struggles, betrayals, criticism... whether a global scale or personal, the darkness can close in.

Good news! Christians need NEVER live (abide) in the dark! The lights might dim or go out occasionally but it never has to stay dark (abide). Jesus lights the entire dark world or your personal dark world... hope for suffering, blessing for sacrifice, joy for hard times.

Think It Over: If life seems "dark" to you all the time who changed? You or Jesus? It's not because the Light has dimmed or been snuffed out. You might be far away from Jesus or have your back turned on Him. Did Jesus lie? If you are abiding in the darkness of life, there is One Way you can change it permanently.

Are you involved in sin you feel you have no choice about? You're wrong. You do. Jesus understands your weakness. Go to Him.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The difference between all other religions and Christianity, is the Personal, Knowable, Caring Savior, Jesus Christ. He lived as one of us. He died as one of us. He was tempted and suffered more than any one of us.

He knows. He cares. He understands. On top of that, Jesus makes the astounding promise that He will never allow us to be tempted to the point where we "have no choice" (1 Cor 10:13). That's the good news.

The bad news is... everytime you give into to temptation you do it by your own choice. Ouch. The sooner we admit that and quit the deception of "I have no choice..." the sooner we can deal with our moral and spiritual failures.

Think It Over: Do you have a sin in your life that you claim publicly or privately you have no power over... you have no choice but to commit this sin? You are deceiving yourself. Jesus sympathizes with

how difficult it is for you but he definitely has given you an "out" that you have chosen to ignore.

Are your words pure? Are your thoughts an abomination? It's your choice each day which path your mouth and heart takes.

Proverbs 15:26 The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord,
But the words of the pure are pleasant.

We don't acknowledge sin today as a culture. Sadly, even the Church doesn't talk about sin much. It doesn't sell books.

We excuse sin, we give it gentle and innocent labels that don't condemn us. We blame it on something outside of us. That's a shame because all it does it delay or distract us from dealing with sin in our lives.

The sinful thoughts of the Christian cost Jesus His life even though forgiven. The sinful thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to God (something that disgusts Him, something He hates). Sinful hearts and sinful thoughts produce sinful mouths (Luke 6:45).

If you've got a potty mouth, a critical mouth, an angry mouth or a wicked mouth, it comes from one place: your wicked heart. Don't excuse it, blame it on some "thing" or some "one" ... admit it, and fix the source by asking for forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and renewing your heart (Romans 12:2).

Think It Over: My grandpa used to say “when you squeeze a lemon, you get lemon juice”. Whatever is in your heart (mind) comes out of your mouth when the pressure is on. Change your heart, change your mind, change your mouth. That's the only way it works.

Be perfect, Jesus said. Take it up with Him if you don't like it.

Matthew 5:48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

If there is one thing we can all agree on, we aren't perfect. But here is plain Scripture telling us "you shall be perfect". Is God setting us up for failure?

Never. This kind of perfection come in two flavors: today and tomorrow.

Our goal for today is to be perfect. We may never have a single day where we really are perfect (sin free in word, thought, motive and deed)... but every day our GOAL is Godly perfection which can be summed up this way: a little more holy and a little less sinful. Jesus is our example. Our daily perfection is the genuine desire and effort to be more like Christ (He must increase and I must decrease – John 3:30).

"Tomorrow perfection" is a promise made only to Christians. The day we meet Jesus face to face we will become genuinely perfect in all ways: sin free, a new ageless body, a new creation with no curse. Real perfection. Eternal perfection.

So... we "shall be perfect" today by doing our best to imitate Christ in all ways; and we "shall be

perfect" tomorrow (eternity) not just in effort, but in reality.

Think It Over: some think they are "perfect" simply because they deceive themselves. They measured themselves against others who are imperfect. Others don't really think about striving for holy perfection, it's just not that important. How about you?

Christians are routinely asked “Is Christianity the only Truth?” We don't have to answer, the Bible answers repeatedly and clearly.

John 1:9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

That's just a couple of verses from a long list that plainly states 1) the Bible is true and 2) it is the ONLY truth delivered to us supernaturally by the One who created us (a few more: 2Tim 3:16-17; John 17:7; 2Pet 1:20-21; Psa 19:7; Psa 119:160; John 10:35).

Satan has always created confusion about Truth trying to make the Bible just another “holy book”, no better or worse than other religions.

The Bible alone has withstood thousands of years of the most intense scrutiny and skepticism only to be proven true and right every single time it touches on the topics of history, science, archeology, geology and cosmology.

What's more, the Bible stands with rival concerning prophecy (foretelling the future). Unlike vague predictions such as those by Nostradamus, the Bible has dozens of specific, detailed prophecies written hundreds-to-thousands of years in advance, all of which came true to the last letter. No other “holy

book" even attempts to present detailed prophecies. Only the one true Creator God of Time and the Universe, who exists in all times in eternity can tell His finite creation what will happen in the future.

If we found a book written in 600 B.C. that accurately recorded every NFL football score from 1950-2050, would we have any reason to doubt it as "NFL Truth"? Of course not, but then again, "NFL Truth" does call you to be accountable to Holy God like the Bible does.

Any objective person who studies fulfilled prophecy in the Bible can reach no other conclusion: the Bible is divinely inspired, it must come to us from outside our finite limitations of time and space, and if all the prophecy in it is true, everything in it must be true.

Don't be intimidated by political correctness and our culture. Boldly declare the Bible as the only source of eternal Truth, divinely delivered to us by our Creator who wants us to know TRUTH and live by it.

Think It Over: How often do you hesitate or compromise your response when asked if Christianity (or the Bible or Jesus) is the ONLY truth? There is a lot of cultural pressure to not be "judgmental" but why should Christians deny what the Bible claims about itself, and let people believe

a lie? Don't be a coward. Stand up for the Truth,
and declare it with boldness.

Commands are a good thing; a light to show you the best way to live. They are light that dispels darkness.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life,

As humans we naturally look in all sorts of places to "find out what to do and how to live". It's natural and good to want direction, guidance, mentoring... a search for a meaningful life. That's why we have a huge self-help industry, "life coaches" and endless people offering their insights (like me!).

There is only one perfect, unchangeable, completely trustworthy place to find this guidance and that is God's own Words (and a true mentor is only as good as the degree to which they communicate God's Truth to you). People often characterize God's commands and instructions as fun-killers and old fashioned. That's nonsense.

Our Creator knows (and has told us) exactly the very best way for us to live to have the most happiness, the greatest purpose and continuous joy. We just think we know better.

God's commands are a light in a dark world. His instructions are the true way to a fulfilling,

meaningful and regret-free life... the life you have been searching for.

Think It Over: Where are you looking for advice and wisdom about life? It's both tragic and puzzling that we (even most Christians) ignore/neglect the VERY WORDS OF OUR CREATOR and replace them with a bunch of a worldly, rah-rah, self-esteem, therapeutic, humanist nonsense and then act surprised/disappointed when it doesn't work.

Consider what great love God lavishes on you... love you did not deserve.

1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

“Behold! What manner of love!!!” “Behold, what manner of love?” “Behold what manner of love...”

You can read that statement many ways. What an extraordinary love God shows when he calls you and me – rebellious, flawed, sinful and inconsistent you and me – His own child! We become strangers to the unbelieving world when we actually live like one of God's children.

“Behold what manner of love” is not just a proclamation but a question as well - a question for us to ponder, answer, and discuss. It's a fantastic question to center a Bible study or small group around. It should solicit multiple answers from every person, many of which you will never have thought of.

Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, being rich in mercy, **because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses**, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have

been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (emphasis mine)

1 John 4:10 **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us** and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
(emphasis mine)

Think It Over: have you pondered “what manner of love” is a love given to those who deserve exactly the opposite? Have you ever meditated about “what manner of love” is bestowed on us when we did not love God, were justly condemned for eternity, and violated God's holy standard? What manner of love indeed!

Did you know Jesus died for you when you were absolutely undeserving and powerless to do anything to save yourself?

Romans 5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

It is one of the amazing truths of Christianity that God loved us, died for us and reached out to save us even when we didn't deserve it, couldn't earn it and absolutely had no strength (ability) to do anything to pay the penalty for our sin against a holy God.

Doesn't matter if you agree, believe or respond, you have sinned against your Creator, and you WILL be held accountable for it, and justly condemned. That's the bad news you cannot avoid... no more than you can stand on train tracks with fingers in your ears and eyes closed while ignoring the train about to run you over. Do so at your own peril. You've been put on notice.

The good news is, God paid the penalty for you. God the Son, Jesus Christ, became a man, lived a perfect life, and stepped up to take upon Himself the penalty for sin that every person except Him owes to God. YOUR penalty, and mine, has been paid. It was a free gift that God gave humanity

even when humanity in no way deserved it. That is LOVE.

Think It Over: Do you in any way think you deserve God's favor or deserve your salvation because you are a "good" person? Have you considered you were ungodly and helpless, and Jesus died for you anyway? How thankful are you for that fact?

Do people know you are a Christian? Should we go around announcing it?

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are
My disciples, if you have love for one
another."

Let's see if I can reword the verse more simply: "By this all will know you are My disciples: if you have love for one another." Nope, doesn't get any simpler than that.

While there are certainly plenty of appropriate situations that call for us to voice our faith, overall, your life should testify of your Christianity by the demonstration of love towards others.

Especially your fellow Believers. "If you have love for one another"... does that mean everyone? In a general sense, yes, but more specifically, the world knows we follow Christ because we LOVE other Christ-followers.

Think It Over: Honestly... do you truly love other Believers? Not just in word or concept, but in attitude, service, time and energy? Do you love them only as the opportunity arises, or do you actively seek ways to love them? Show the world your love for Christ by your love for His disciples.

Don't "lean on my own understanding"? Isn't that what we do automatically?

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

First, we lean on our own understanding naturally... by default... automatically. It's human nature. Second, deep down most of us believe "our own understanding" is just fine. After all, honest people don't think "I know I'm wrong about this but I'm just going to go with it anyway". So what's the deal then?

Here's the deal: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The heart (your mind, your thinking) can be terribly self-deceived. Unless your mind is constantly refreshed, informed and guided by God's Word, it can absolutely fool you. It can feel right, appear right, and scream "IT'S RIGHT!!!!" but be plainly misled, misinformed and flat out wrong.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and when your own understanding lines up with God's Truth, then you can be sure about it.

Think It Over: No one wants to admit our "own understanding" may be flawed, deceived, ignorant or flat out wrong. It takes spiritual courage to admit

this possibility (and yet when you finally do, it's a tremendous blessing because you start to depend on the Lord).

Do you feel imprisoned? Emotionally? Financially? In relationships? The Lord can set you free...

**Psalm 146:7 Who executes justice for the
oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.**

Freedom to prisoners... there are lots of ways to be imprisoned. Financial stress, emotional distress, betrayal, hopelessness, disease, persecution – the iron bars of the mind can be even more destructive than physical bars.

Here's the rub though: a lot of our prisons are of our own making. Bad decisions, sin, spiritual cowardice, emotional frailty... we've become a lukewarm, spoiled and wimpy lot for the most part. Much of our whining and oppression are due to fleshly expectations of an easy life and ever-increasing abundance. The only way out of that prison is to learn what true contentment is from Scripture, and mature your way spiritually to freedom.

Other types of imprisonment are outside of us and very real: sickness, disease, persecution, evil. The bad news is, there's not a thing in the world we can do to avoid those. The good news is – FOR CHRISTIANS ONLY – is that God uses all our circumstances to bless us, grow us and bring us closer to Him. There is no circumstance or

temptation the God does not provide the strength to endure.

For those, we are only imprisoned when we fail to let the Lord free us but the Lord can only free us when we humble ourselves and depend wholly on Him.

Think It Over: Are your oppressions and imprisonment because of your own choices (fleshly expectations that are not being met)? The Lord can free you from those by renewing your mind with His Word. Is your imprisonment from sickness, sin or evil? The Lord frees us by giving us hope, courage and strength.

**Feel like evil is attacking you today?
Wish you had a bodyguard? If you are
a Christian, you do.**

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful,
who will establish you and guard you from
the evil one.

It's a scary thought to face the evil in this world
without protection and yet most do. Christians
however, do not. The Lord protects them.

That doesn't mean they get to escape the bad
things in life whether physical or emotional... it
means that no matter what happens, the Lord has
our back. He's watching over us. No matter how
bad things get, we are still destined to a home in
Heaven and everything will work out for our good
even if we don't understand it or see it. The Lord will
never let us endure something He does not give us
the strength to endure. We will never face evil
temptation without a way of escape.

It's a tremendous joy to know Jesus is our
bodyguard. It's a tremendous tragedy to think of
the vast majority of humanity who have rejected His
protection and love.

Think It Over: God doesn't promise to keep us from
evil but He does promise to protect us no matter
what. "Protection" is hope, joy, peace, blessing and

eternal perspective no matter what life throws at us.
Have thanked the Lord for protecting you?

Feeling weak and powerless? Maybe you're looking for strength in the wrong place.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

We look for strength in a lot of places: physical fitness, positive thinking, pleasant circumstances, self-focused therapy, money, sex, drugs, bravado... but real strength is found outside of anything we are, or have, or can do.

Christians are the sole beneficiaries of real strength because real strength is found in only one place: "the power of His (Jesus) might". What is Jesus "might"? It is His essence, who He is inherently, His eternal attributes, His nature, His power.

Jesus is God. Jesus is Eternal. Jesus is Creator. Read Philippians 2. Jesus is All-Everything (Powerful, Knowledgeable, Present). That's real power... and when we give our lives over totally to Him, the Lord supplies us with all the power and strength needed to live a JOY-FILLED life. Joy is knowing the Truth about life and eternity and transcends circumstances. "Happiness" comes and goes with circumstances.

Think It Over: You need never feel weak or powerless or at the mercy of life's ups and downs. If you are looking for strength anywhere but "in the

power of His might" you'll eventually be disappointed.

Do you hate evil? No, not just in words or in concept. Do you HATE sin? Does it show by your thoughts, choices, words, and deeds?

Psalm 97:10 You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.

Conceptually, we know evil is...evil. Intellectually we give ascent to the Bible's warnings and characterizations of wickedness. But do we REALLY hate sin (manifested evil)?

"Hate" is a word that gets thrown about casually today but in reality it is a very harsh, awful word. It means you wish something was dead and gone, destroyed, condemned for eternity with no hope. That's why Jesus likens "hating your brother" to murder (Matt 5:21).

"Hate" is supposed to be our attitude towards sin. We HATE it. We loathe it, it disgusts us. We wish evil and wickedness were eternally cast away. It's easy to think that about evil in general, or the wickedness of others, but what about YOUR sin, MY sin?

Do you really hate YOUR sin? Your mouth might say "yes" but how about your thoughts, your language, your choices, your schedule, how you spend your

money? Talk is cheap. If you truly hate evil (personal sin) then it will show in all aspects of your life.

Think It Over: Hate.... HATE sin. Do you? Or do you just dislike it a little because it makes you feel guilty or ends up with some bad consequences occasionally?

**Do you KNOW that you KNOW that you
KNOW you have eternal life? Why not?
God said you could.**

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

"I'm not sure..." That is a very common answer from Christians when asked if they REALLY KNOW without any doubt they are going to spend eternity in Heaven.

Some don't know for sure because their life is anything but Christ-like and, rightly so, they have no real relationship with Jesus which is the first ingredient in being confident about eternity. Or maybe they have withheld some part of their life from God where they refuse to obey God.

Some don't know because they've grown up with the idea that losing your salvation is as easy as forgetting to ask forgiveness for a sin you committed. Now, whether or not you believe someone can renounce their faith in Christ, or forfeit salvation by living in continuous, unrepented sin (that's a whole other doctrinal question), this is different than believing every sin you commit is the potential loss of eternal life until you "get all 'fessed

up". That's just unbiblical bondage. Saved, unsaved, saved, unsaved... of course you can't "know you have eternal life" if you think like that.

The fact is, God says specifically and plainly "that you may know you have eternal life". So either God was lying or exaggerating OR that's what He meant. What separates Biblical Christianity from all other religions is the fact that YOU CAN KNOW you are going to Heaven.

What keeps us from "knowing" is sin and disobedience which erodes our confidence in Christ. What allows us to know is "believing in the name of the Son of God" which is authenticated by our hatred of sin and our obedience to Christ.

Think It Over: If you are a Christian and you don't know for a fact you are saved and going to Heaven, the first place to look is always the same for everyone: sin that you are ignoring in your life. What part of your life, works, morality or obedience are you withholding from Christ? There's your answer.

Do you long for something reliable? That will never change or go away? That can be trusted all times no matter what? I found it.

Mark 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

One really frustrating thing about life is how unreliable it is... circumstances, friends, family, jobs, the economy, politics... you can't trust anything to be predictable and consistent (except that everything consistently unpredictable).

Friends abandon, family betrays, the economy tanks, politicians lie, things are great one day and crappy the next. That's "life". Totally unreliable. We long for predictability, consistency and trustworthiness but there's only one place it can be found.

God's Word is Truth. It never changes. It never bends to culture or majority vote. No matter what the circumstances, the Word of God remains true, steady and unmovable.

It's a shame so many people have never read it. It's a shame so many Christian hardly read it.

Think It Over: Most people spend all their time, energy and life on stuff that is unreliable while

giving little time and effort to the one thing they can trust. How about you?

Don't envy people who get ahead by any means less than generous, honorable, humble and Godly. Their success is temporary at best.

Proverbs 3:31 Do not envy the oppressor,
And choose none of his ways;

Life seems unfair when people who are mean, dishonest, greedy or manipulative seem to get all the breaks and enjoy things we can only dream of. We see arrogant, self-absorbed people waste their blessings and take for granted abundance that never comes our way.

We should never envy them. We should never give in to the temptation to choose the same path just so we can get ahead. It's the expected part of a sin-cursed humanity that evil, godless and less than honorable people appear to get ahead and have it all. But it's all an illusion that will either end in this life, or the next. Don't be tempted by it, bothered by it, or jealous of it.

As well, don't be envious of those who seem to enjoy a more blessed life who actually ARE good, honest and loving folks. Be happy for them. Applaud their blessings. You can never be truly content or ready for more blessings from God if you are envious of those who have more, whether evil or upright.

Think It Over: We live in a country where wealth envy, discontent and jealousy is relentlessly used to make people angry and covetous either to get them to buy something, or vote for someone who will – by force – take something from one person and give it another. Don't be part of this evil. Be content. Choose righteousness.

Everyone is looking for gains... gains in the stock market, gains in their career, and gains in lifestyle. Want some real gains?

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

God promises "great gain" if we are Godly and content. Simple formula, difficult to achieve... not because God made it hard but because we are a very discontent and ungodly people.

GODLINESS: submitting "self" to God. God's ways, His plans, His purpose, His standards. Not mine.

CONTENTMENT: Being satisfied that God knows what is best and has us right where He wants us at the moment while directing us towards where He wants us to be tomorrow.

The world wants us to be ungodly. Sin, lust, selfishness, pride – evil is not considered a personal right beyond all judgment.

Our culture wants us to be discontent. Politicians, marketers, Hollywood and business keeps us convinced we are not getting what we deserve (and supporting them will get us there).

GREAT GAIN = Godliness + Contentment. Simple math.

Think It Over: If you can't define "Godliness" and "contentment", or evaluate it in your own life, you have no hope of the great gains God promises from them. If you can define them but they don't define you... no great gains for you either. God's promise is on His terms.

**Everyone is looking for the fountain of youth
but it can only be found in one place, or more
accurately, in one Person.**

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

In the movie "Braveheart", William Wallace says
"Everyman dies. Not everyman really lives."

Sounds good but it's not Biblical. First, not every man dies (Enoch, Elijah, those who are alive when Jesus returns). Second, every man (person) does "live" ... forever. Just depends on where.

Jesus reminds us that for those who place their faith* in Him, even if they die (symbolically through a life of suffering/sacrifice, or literal physical death), they will live forever. In the spirit of what Wallace says, the only people who REALLY live, are those who live for Christ.

****Faith**? Think of it like this. I can believe that a parachute exists. I can believe what it was made for and has the potential to be used for. FAITH is when I add trust to my belief, put on the parachute and jump out of plane. It is only then that I've truly put my "faith" in the parachute. In the same we can believe who Jesus is... we can believe in His message that He can save us. But we only have*

faith in Jesus when we add trust to the belief and put our eternal destiny in His hands.

Holy Grail? Fountain of Youth? It's not an object, it's a Person... Jesus Christ. Want to live forever? Die today. Die to Self, die to sin, die to pride, die to any effort to save yourself. Though you may "die", you shall "live".

Think It Over: Have you ever considered how opposite everything is when you compare the world's ways versus God's way? Want to live? Die. Want to be first? Go to the end of the line. Want to prosper? Be a giver. Want to be lifted up? Bow down.

Feel alone? How? God watches over you when you come, when you go, when you stay, and when you leave; He watches always and forever.

Psalm 121:7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.

Many people feel all alone. In the midst of co-workers, family events, even big churches... they feel alone.

Sometimes it is self-imposed because they make no effort to reach out to others because they are fearful, or shy, or hurt, or insecure... or maybe they are one of the "takers": people who always expect from others but never give.

Sometimes people feel alone because they don't fit. Some life event has put them in an odd category that just doesn't easily match up with others. In those cases, other people avoid you because it's uncomfortable, or they just don't really know how to be around you. This is common after divorce, cancer, death or losing a job.

Sometimes people are lonely because they are looking for companionship, purpose, meaning and fulfillment in all the wrong people or things.

Loneliness is a by-product of the sin curse. We once had perfect fellowship with God and loneliness did

not exist. For those who turn to God on His terms, they will enjoy an eternity where loneliness cannot happen. For those who reject God, an eternity of utter loneliness awaits them.

Think It Over: God never leaves us. If you feel lonely today perhaps you have walked away from Him or turned away from Him. There is only one Person who will never leave you or betray you.

Go outside. Look up. Look down. Look around. Do you see the work of God's hand proclaimed? No? Maybe you need some spiritual eye surgery.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Not long ago I was sent a video. In this video was a crowd, clapping and amazed. On the stage was a row of top designers, engineers, programmers and scientists.

They had built a mechanical bird that resembled a real bird... it flapped it's wings and moved it's tail like a real bird. They launched the bird out to fly over the crowd who cheered in appropriate wonder.

When compared to a real bird, the mechanical bird has only the tiniest fraction of its capabilities and features. The real bird is infinitely more complex, functional and adaptable (even the smartest humans can barely scratch the true complexity and architecture of a living animal).

Rightly so, the team that built the bird received much congratulations and admiration. What's puzzling to me is this: it takes a team of the world's best engineers, programmers and scientists to

DESIGN a mechanical bird with only fraction of the beauty and ability of a real bird... and most likely those same scientists, and most of the cheering crowd will adamantly declared the REAL bird just happened by accident over a long period of time, the product of random mutation and chance.

They would laugh at anyone who said their comparatively simplistic project bird just "happened" by random process and time... but condemn others as ignorant and superstitious if they declare a Great Designer (God) created the very birds they modeled their mechanical bird after.

Think It Over: Can anyone said "blind faith"? Can anyone say "hypocrite"? This is the foolishness you have to embrace when you foundationally reject the existence of God. *"Our mechanical bird required a team of scientists, engineers and programmers... but real birds just happened by random chance and time (because we don't dare admit God exists)."* What a shame. Their own incredible work is their own personal proof of God's existence and they still ignore it. Just sayin'.

Go outside. Look up. When's the last time you scanned the sky hoping to see Jesus on the horizon coming back for you?

1Thessalonians 4:16-18 (ESV) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

As Christians we often discuss the concept or belief that Jesus will return at any time, but how often do we look up in the air actually expecting Him? How much has His imminent return actually affected how you live your life, how you think?

If you were told "sometime in the next year, a man will come walking down your road with one million dollars in cash to give to YOU but you have to be watching and available when it happens", how often do you think you would look out the window to see if he was coming? How excited would you be? How much of your thoughts would be consumed with expectation? How would you alter your life to accommodate it?

This is exactly the situation Christians are in except it's not a million bucks, it's a prize worth eternally more. Walk outside and look up.

Think It Over: We often talk about, teach about and think about Christian truths but it's much less often that it actually changes how we live and think.

God has a special compassion for the broken-hearted and crushed; if you find yourself at the bottom today, the Lord is near.

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

It was providential that this verse was next on my list today. I experienced a great example of this verse just this week.

I spoke with a family who had given up their daughter for adoption about 7 years ago because of severe financial hardships. It was a truly a situation of a parent making a tremendous personal sacrifice so that her child could have a better life. I can't even imagine how hard it would be to let loose of one of my small children, possibly never seeing them again but knowing it was an unselfish act of love for them. Broken hearted.

For the first few years the adoption organizations of their country would send a regular update about the child's welfare. Then they stopped. When the mother inquired, she was told there is no information, do not try to find or contact your daughter. Crushed.

For three more years the mother and family grew increasingly sad about never seeing or hearing the daughter again. She told me that a few days ago

she an intense dream about her child and she determined to beat on the doors of the officials again and try to get information. While she was doing this, a close friend of hers got on the Internet armed with a single clue, and through a series of blessed coincidences from God, came upon a Facebook page that she was sure was the adoptive family. She contacted that family via messaging and they responded "yes, you have the right family!"

The adopting family had lost all contact and information about their daughter's biological family on the other side of the world. They had absolutely no way of knowing who or how to contact anyone. So all they could do was wait and hope their daughter's biological family would someday find them online. It took many years but that day had come.

I'm reminded of this as I write today because the biological mother was genuinely broken-hearted at the thought of never hearing/seeing her daughter again. Even her own mother (the daughter's biological grandmother) said she had only one wish before she died: to hear from the granddaughter one last time. God gave her that desire of her heart.

The love of the mother was so real, the sound of her daughter's voice over the phone led her to collapse on the floor in uncontrollable tears of joy.

God heals the broken hearted. When you have experienced this for real, it is unmistakable.

Think It Over: Often what we are broken-hearted about is trivial and selfish. That's not what this verse is about. The Lord is near to those who love Him, are humble, who acknowledge Him as Lord, and whose hearts are broken. While this verse is primarily speaking about salvation, it certainly has application to those events in our life that crush us and break our heart. And one last note: while the Internet and social media has many ill effects and much of it is a moral sewer, thank God for technology that can bring loved ones together no matter how far apart on this planet.

God is compassionate above all; He responds when we sincerely cry out for help. He does not delay. When He hears, He answers.

Isaiah 30:19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; You shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; When He hears it, He will answer you.

Unlike flawed humans who sometimes don't hear us, can't hear us or purposely choose to ignore us, God is always listening and ready to respond. There are some conditions to God's "hearing" though that most Christians are not taught or do not consider...

- Sin must be confessed (2Chron 6.26; Psa 66.18; James 5.1; Prov 1.28)
- Unforgiveness must not be present (Mark 11.25)
- We must be asking for the right reasons (1John 5.13-15; James 4.3)
- We have to have faith in Christ (John 15.7)
- We ask in Jesus name for His glory (John 14.14)
- We have to be obedient (1John 3.22)
- We must ask God in belief (Mark 11.24)
- You must be treating your spouse in a Godly manner (1Pet 3.7)

Upon meeting those conditions though, God promises to hear, be gracious and answer. It will be

HIS answer which often does not match what WE want to hear. So we have to be ready to accept whatever answer comes from the Throne.

We understand that a good earthly father would never ignore the sincere cries for help from their children. How much more will a Heavenly Father respond to the heartfelt prayers and tears of His children?

Think It Over: Only Believers in Christ enjoy the priceless treasure of knowing that God listens, hears and responds graciously. Many Christians do not avail themselves of this unique privilege and sadly, unbelievers can't even begin to imagine it.

God is never slow about keeping promises; not by HIS definition of slow. By our definition? Sometimes, yes. I'll stick with God's version.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God keeps His promises. On His timetable. Sometimes we mistake His timing for a lack of attention, or a "no" answer when really it is our own impatience at work.

First we need to make sure there is no sin that is hindering our prayers. And, we need to pray according to God's will for our life. We need to determine to trust His answer even if it doesn't fit what we want or understand.

Past that, we simply adjust to God's timing. If God has made a clear promise in Scripture, then have no doubt that He will be faithful... just know that God will fulfill His Word in HIS best timing, not yours.

Think It Over: We think a few hours or days is long wait. We think years of waiting is God not paying attention or caring. God is eternal. A MILLION years

is a blink of an eye to Him. Learn to be aware of
and trust God's timeframe, not yours.

God is working in you but we fight Him a lot by trying to work our own thing.

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

What a war we fight inside. As Christians, God lives in us but our old sin-cursed flesh fights Him tooth and nail for control. If we would simply submit to Him in all things, He would accomplish both His will and pleasure in our lives.

We think "I can't help myself" ... but you can because God is living in you. We think "I have no clue what God wants me to do" but you should because God is at work in you.

We claim not to know God's will but there is no reason to. God dwells in you to fulfill His will. We struggle with understanding what will truly bring joy and purpose in this life but you don't have to. It is God's pleasure to fill you with joy and purpose.

Think It Over: God is working IN YOU right this very moment. Do you believe it?

God will supply every need you have ACCORDING TO HIS riches in Christ, and that's the trick: our needs according to Christ.

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all
your need according to His riches in glory
by Christ Jesus.

Too often that verse is used as some sort of "God is
a genie in a bottle" spiritual trick verse to teach
people the Lord will supply you with all your needs...
ACCORDING TO YOU.

Well that's not the meaning at all. Philippians is a
book that teaches us about humility and service
pointing out that Jesus was the ultimate example,
giving up everything for nothing, trading the throne
room of Heaven for a filthy manger.

By the time you get to this verse in Paul's letter to
the Church in Philippi, the real meaning is this: as
you choose to live a life of humble service and love,
as you face the inevitable persecution that will
come to every Christ-follower, as you battle a world
given over to sin and wickedness... don't worry.
God will supply you with every need according to
His riches in glory by Christ. God will supply you with
everything you need to live the life He wants you to
live (your real "best life" by the way not some top
ten book-selling, fleshly version of it).

God supplies you not primarily for YOUR benefit (though it certainly is) but for the real prize: to glorify His Son.

Think It Over: We are marketed a lot of silly and shallow Christian prosperity and therapy that would make God nothing but our own personal Walmart and BFF. Discard this spiritual immaturity and embrace the real life God has for you that is one of genuine humility, service, love and joy.

Have you ever done any PURE and FAULTLESS Christianity? Do you know what it is? If not, you should give it try.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

One of the greatest joys I have is to give to an orphanage and to help local widows. Why? Because I don't have to wonder if my motives are pure.

They can't repay me. They can't give me some advantage. As for the orphans, they may never even know me. That's why it is "pure and undefiled"... helping those for whom there is no hidden agenda for you; it's only for their good and God's glory. It's also a picture of salvation: helping someone who cannot possibly help themselves which God did for us.

Want to do something good today? Want to do something heartwarming, true and pure? Want to invest in something that will repay in blessing both in this life and eternity?

Help some orphans have a life they could have never hoped for. Do something kind and helpful for a widow who has no one to depend on.

Think It Over: What about the last part of the verse, being “unspotted”? That is talking about keeping the dirt and stains of an evil world off of you. How can you do that? Well, that’s a much longer answer but one way is to engage in truly good works... like taking care of widows and orphans.

Have you prepared your mind today? Have you set your hope? Do you long for fully revealed grace? Are you self-controlled?

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

"Gird up the loins of your mind..." I dare you to run around today saying that to everyone you meet. You'll probably get a collection of stares, laughs and maybe a straightjacket.

What does it mean though, "gird up your loins"? Sounds like something you need to get a shot for at the doctor's office, but it's not. Without giving you the whole background you could say it today as "tie up all your loose ends" or "secure everything in anticipation of the work at hand" or "remove any obstacles that will inhibit what you need to do". It means deal with the spiritually loose ends of your mind and emotions; correct any wrong thinking (with the Bible as your rule of thumb); get out of the way any thoughts or emotions that hinder your spiritual race; don't let anything exist in your life that will you to stumble in your Christian walk.

What are some of those things? Ignored or indulged sin, unresolved anger or bitterness, ungodly attitudes, conversations that are not uplifting and a

blessing. They could also be situations or habits that hinder your faith; friendships or activities that trip you up spiritually.

Tie up, secure, deal with, fix ("gird up") anything that will get in the way of your full holiness, service and devotion to Christ today.

Think It Over: Most of us Christians just "wing it" every day in our spiritual walk and don't give much thought, planning or action to it. Front to back, the Bible continually speaks of our Christian journey being one of purpose, willful choices, hard work, alertness, planning, diligence and full effort. ACTION, not passiveness. How hard do you work at living out your faith?

Have you reasoned with anyone lately? How about reasoned concerning salvation? Did you tell them their sins are like scarlet?

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

We live in an unreasonable time. With the out-of-control growth of the language of "tolerance" (which is completely intolerant of any idea that is different from its own) and the decline of people's ability to disagree civilly, the amount and intensity of unreasonable people has grown dramatically.

When we finally do take the opportunity as Christians to reason with unbelievers, it is now common to present a feature-rich, personally-beneficial, "what's in it for YOU" Gospel message. We just want them to say "yes!", even if it's built on emotion and the expectation of superficial blessings.

If you notice from our verse, there are two sides to the Gospel story. There's the feel-good side that your sins will be "white as snow" (forgiven) but there's also the bad side: your sins are "red like crimson". That means you have blood on your hands... you are guilty and owe a debt to your Holy

Creator. Modern evangelism leaves that part out which is a big injustice to the unsaved world.

They need to hear the good news AND the bad news. In fact, good news is not even good news unless you have bad news to compare it to.

Think It Over: When was the last time you reasoned with someone about salvation? Did you give them both sides of the story? Have you ever stopped to consider: how can someone know they need a Savior if they don't know they need to be saved from something? Why would someone need to hear about going to heaven if they don't know and believe they are going to Hell? Bad news, then the good news.

**How about some mercy, peace and love?
How about some in abundance? Yeah, me
too. Only God offers it, but on His terms.**

Jude 1:2 Mercy, peace, and love be
multiplied to you.

There are all sorts of things multiplying today that we could do without. Immorality, violence, cheats, thieves, corruption, heartache, sickness... seems like there is multiplied bad news, bad times and bad stuff. Signs of the times...

Aaaaah... [insert long relaxing deep sigh here]... what a joy to be a Christian and be sure that no matter what life throws our way, God also has plenty of mercy, peace and love just for you, must for me... multiplied exponentially. Sadly, those who ignore God reject this blessing and miss out; but for those of us who acknowledge our Creator and give Him rightful place in our life, we have "mercy, peace and love MULTIPLIED".

Think It Over: As a Christian you should live transcendentally (above circumstances). You should live with an eternal perspective (eyes on the Heavenly prize). We don't get to check out and skip the hardships of life but unlike the lost world, every circumstance has a purpose, answer and blessing.

How do you live a pure life? Obedience. Obedience is the key to many things like assurance and growth. Simple but powerful.

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

How do you live a pure life? Obey. How do you live a holy life? Obey. How do you live a disciplined life? Obey. How do you live a regret-free life? Obey. God.

We don't like "obey" because our culture is all about "ME": the flesh, impulsiveness and self-focus. Obeying God is the complete opposite.

If you obey God about morality, you'll live a pure and healthy life. If you obey God about being a holy and separated from the "world", you'll be less sinful and mature spiritually. If you obey God in your choices and daily living, you'll avoid bad habits that take your life the wrong direction and hurt you. If you obey God in all things, you'll have nothing to look back on in regret.

Think It Over: Obedience is the primary indicator of true salvation. A person who cares not, and does not obey show evidence they are still enslaved to their flesh and master of their own life. For Christians, obeying God shows our humility, our gratefulness,

our intelligence and ultimately the genuineness of our faith.

How do you use your gifts? Graciously and freely? Or grumbling the whole time? We should use our gifts to serve others.

1 Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

We are too busy. Me too. It can take the joy out of being hospitable. Just the thought of cramming in another dinner, or inviting someone over may be a source of even more stress for a lot of people.

The easy answer that "life coaches" and sugary, folksy preachers throw out to us is "just slow down, enjoy life... blah, blah, blah". That sounds great but for most people it simply isn't realistic. Kids, sports, church, school, work... life is full and some best-selling, sun-shiney advice isn't going to magically change things nor should it. THIS is our life in this time in this culture.

So what now? The answer is to obey Scripture no matter what our situation. If you choose a busy, full life (and you do CHOOSE it, no one forces it on you), then the solution is to obey anyway: be hospitable without grumbling. Be hospitable with a good attitude, a thankful heart, with expectations of enjoyment and blessing.

The command is "be hospitable without grumbling" not "be hospitable without grumbling if you have

an easy going life with lots of time for others and everything in your life is roses and puppies". Obedience is the primary indicator of true salvation and always a source of blessing, especially when it involves a sacrifice on our part.

Think It Over: While life is very full and busy for us these days, that doesn't mean we don't actively consider pruning things from our life especially if we can verify that an activity or obligation is keeping us from serving the Lord.

**How do you view the truly poor?
Not the “welfare-I-don't-want-to-work”
poor, but the genuinely poor? It matters
what you think.**

Proverbs 17:5 He who mocks the poor
reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at
calamity will not go unpunished.

A lot of people are skeptical about the “poor” today (in Western culture) and for good reason. Our culture has created an entire class of “poor” that are rich beyond belief compared to the TRULY POOR of the world today or the TRULY POOR of history.

Our “poor” have iPhones, flat screen TV's, cigarettes, tattoos, fancy tire rims, designer clothes and expensive game consoles. Add that to the buffet of government handouts and it's often hard to feel charitable towards our entitlement-minded “poor”.

But... what about the truly poor? Widows without family and no income? Orphans? Families whose financial lives have been destroyed by a catastrophic illness or injury? The husband/father who is working three jobs very hard to feed his family but through no fault of his own simply cannot make a higher income? The genuinely disabled (as

opposed to our millions of “disabled by lifestyle choices”)?

Our attitude towards the authentic poor, the truly destitute, says a lot about our heart. When we lack compassion towards them it reveals that we are not thankful the Lord has chosen to bless us, for all we have that is good comes from God. When we laugh at those who suffer true poverty, we invite retribution from the Lord who disdains such haughtiness and pride. When we simply don't care about the poor (never even think about them or notice them) it exposes a lack of spiritual maturity that acknowledges God's grace (because any one of us could be truly poor by the end of the day due to some catastrophic event).

Think It Over: It is a real skill and exercise of maturity today to judge which “poor” truly deserve your help as opposed to simply enabling and encouraging laziness, victimhood and the entitlement mentality. Whenever the opportunity to be generous towards the truly poor presents itself, don't hesitate, and be generous. The Lord sees and will bless you for it.

**How have you treated your enemies lately?
Fed them? Drinks? Heaped any burning coals
on their head? No not the revenge kind...**

Proverbs 25:21 If your enemy is hungry,
give him bread to eat; And if he is thirsty,
give him water to drink;

Even Hitler treated the people he liked well... as long as he liked them. Being kind to those you feel favorable towards is not a test of character. It's how you treat your enemies that shows your true nature.

How do treat those who betray you, lie about you, take from you, slander you, try to drag you down? When you are faced with choosing retribution or kindness, revenge or compassion, payback or charity, you are faced with the exposure of the true quality of your heart and revelation of your perspective on life... is it temporal or eternal? Is it selfish or humble? Is it forgiving or vengeful?

Listen, it is NOT easy to be kind, forgiving or charitable towards your enemies. It is brutally hard but the blessings of it are many and eternal.

Think It Over: Few Christians raise themselves to the elite heights of spiritual maturity that is involved in blessing your enemies, forgiving them and praying for their welfare and salvation. It's one of the hardest Christian attributes to attain because it fights against every ounce of your flesh, emotions

and pride. You can only do it when you ignore your emotions and CHOOSE to do so... specifically determining to take action in direct contradiction to your emotions and your natural tendency.

Humility, gentleness, patience, love; these are the traits of those walking worthy of the Christian faith. Are you walking worthy?

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

Humility: a modest and realistic opinion of one's true status... not the ego-centric, me-focused, self-esteem nonsense that is so common today. It's recognizing 1) your true nature and 2) where that leaves you compared to a Holy God.

Gentleness: not the effeminate emasculation of males or the politically correct lack of conviction for females but rather an authentic compassion and empathy for others, and the caring touch of a servant's heart.

Patience: remember patience? It's been replaced with impulsiveness, instant gratification and lack of self-control. Patience... waiting... for the right time in the right way for the right thing.

Love: love can be defined today as various combinations of sex, pleasant emotions and your current state of happiness (circumstances). True love is based in choice, sacrifice, commitment and obedience to God.

Think It Over: To walk worthy of your salvation, these four characteristics are foundational. How do you measure up?

I hear from people every day in awful and heartbreaking circumstances. We have a God who can restore our joy and uphold us.

Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

Life can rob you of your joy. I'm not talking about momentary circumstantial happiness. I mean your JOY, and any good feeling about being alive.

Divorce, job loss, sickness, betrayal, injury, misfortune... the "thief comes to steal, kill and destroy" (the Bible says that specifically about Satan, but but "life" can be a real thief at times too, huh?)

For Christians, no matter what life throws at us, we have a sustainable, renewable, impregnable, predictable, dependable, transcendent, faithful source of joy: the fact that we are saved.

I mean really... stop and think about it. Does it REALLY matter how bad this life gets? It's not fun to suffer loss or hardship or persecution, but compared to E-T-E-R-N-I-T-Y, this life is a blink, a wisp, a vapor, a moment, a flash. Then comes Eternity which will be endless joy. Endless is a very complex word in the original Greek. It means... .. endless.

If you need some JOY NOW , think about salvation and the eternity that awaits you... and joy will be restored by our Generous Father who gives us all good things!

Think It Over: E-T-E-R-N-I-T-Y: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:4

I love life and want to see good days. How about you? Is there a way to do that? The Bible says there is...

1 Peter 3:10-11 For "He who would love life,
And see good days, Let him refrain his
tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking
deceit. 11 Let him turn away from evil and
do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.

Life coaches, personal growth gurus, success and motivation celebrities... the world looks for "good days" in lots of places but rarely from the Good Book, the only place it can be found (if you want it to last).

Want to love life and see good days? Control your mouth. It's the cause of most problems for most people.

Want to love life and see good days? Hate evil, turn away from it. Look for good things to be involved in.

Want to love life and see good days? Be a person of peace. Actively seek it. What does that mean? That means do everything within your reasonable power and opportunity to be at peace with others. You can be at peace by being patience, kind, offering forgiveness, seeking forgiveness, being unselfish and generous.

I guess that's not enough for a top selling book or excitement-filled seminar.... But it's enough if you want to love life and see good days.

Think It Over: In what ways are you seeking to love life and have good days? Ever tried giving the advice from the Bible a shot instead of Oprah, Phil, Zig or Joel?

**If you love Jesus, obey Him, period.
Obedience is the single highest authentic
indicator of true saving faith.**

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

The Christian life as presented today is mostly "what God can do for YOU!" complete with promises of a blessed life, God's "best" for you and of course material prosperity. The Bible however is more about obedience not personal prosperity. Over and over in Scripture the clearest and most often declared proof of genuine salvation is OBEDIENCE (particularly the Book of 1st John).

What does "obey" mean? It means doing what God says no matter how you feel, no matter what you've experienced, even if it doesn't fit your plans or expectations, and regardless if you understand or agree.

Why? Because obedience exposes much about us: gratitude (for being saved); humility (understanding our status compared to God's); trust (you obey God trusting He knows what is best) and faith (truly living out your professed Christianity).

Think It Over: How many parts of your life can you say "I know what the Bible says, I know what God wants, I know what God commands but because of _____, I'm not going to obey." If obedience is a primary indicator of genuine salvation, what does a continued refusal to obey indicate? An absence of salvation? Or a Believer in danger of God's discipline? Could be either.

In a world increasingly hostile to the pure & exclusive Truth of the Gospel, you can rest assured God's grace continues to spread.

Colossians 1:6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Christianity takes a beating physically and verbally every day. Open season. Say whatever you want about them no matter how untrue or insulting, you get applause. Every time there is a mass shooting or tragic event, the first blame gets pinned on Christianity in some form or fashion. Then when that accusation is proven false, you never hear a retraction. Never fails...

Gays, Muslims, minorities, other religions suffer (real or made up)? Front page news! Christians slaughtered, raped, kidnapped, robbed? Crickets chirping.

Christians shouldn't be surprised by this. America has given God the left foot of fellowship and after decades of being shown the door, God has obliged us in many ways. Persecution and the deterioration of society/order/goodness/civility is a given at this point (ironically and predictably THAT gets blamed on Christians too).

Never fear and never be surprised by this. Jesus told us that the world hates Him, and it will hate us too. Doesn't matter. Doesn't affect our salvation, our eternity, our rewards or the fact the winner has already been declared: GOD.

Think It Over: Christianity will flourish, it will transform lives, it will save souls, it will bring hope to the hopeless, life to those who are surrounded by death. The only question for YOU is: will you hang in there and be a part of God's plan or bail out when the going gets tough?

In principle, some people are chased by misfortune even if they have temporary success; prosperity pursues the righteous.

Proverbs 13:21 Evil pursues sinners, But to the righteous, good shall be repaid.

NOTE: Every time I write something about a common cultural issue, someone thinks I'm writing this about THEM. This came up in Bible study last week. I NEVER write things pointed at specific individuals. I have over 400 Bible verses already picked out and were put in an UNCHANGED order a couple of months ago. I just take the next one in line each day. This one came up today. Any coincidental similarities related to any individual I know is just that: coincidental.

In a Bible study recently (spurred by some of our current cultural issues) we discussed how misfortune, crisis and trouble seem to follow certain people. To clarify before I continue, I understand that bad things can happen to ANYONE even if they are doing everything "right". Not talking about that.

I'm talking about the person who surrounds themselves with those who are always in personal turmoil; people who have a victim mentality, always blaming others and circumstances for their current woes; people who have an entitlement mentality (versus a mindset of personal

responsibility); people who constantly make impulsive, lazy, short term and fleshly decisions then act indignant and surprised when they aren't rescued by somebody else (those selfish, greedy people just won't do their fair share!).

We have a culture today of a few people (and still shrinking) who take full responsibility for their life, make sacrifices, practice discipline and live frugally only to be accused by the masses of being greedy, uncompassionate, and "lucky". That same group then applauds (and votes for) governing powers who will take money from the responsible and reward the irresponsible. Notice I did not say "the poor". The TRULY poor - whose poverty is not because of laziness, foolishness or impulsiveness - deserve to be cared for and helped up.

The lazy, undisciplined and irresponsible do not. Misfortune hounds them at every step... but it's never their fault. And someone else should pay for it. Or else.

Personally, I'm pretty sick of it.

Think It Over: If your first reaction is to start calling me names (especially those that end with "phobe" or "ist"), most likely you are part of the problem. Take responsibility for your life. Help those who are truly in need (widows, orphans, the sick, the injured... those such as a family where I live who is about to lose a husband and father of five to cancer... those are the people who deserve help).

If you are in the group of “misfortunates” I’m talking about, then here is my advice to you: quit asking for help, take responsibility for your own life, start making sacrificial decisions that will lead you a better life where you can begin to be part of the “help others” community and not the “help me” mob.

In Western culture it is very hard to even understand this command much less live it. We pass over it easily & pretend to comply.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Be content.

What's that you say... you don't need a newer, nicer car? You don't need a bigger house? You don't have to have THIS SEASON'S newest fashions? If you judge by our culture, apparently you do, and not only that, you DESERVE all those things. That's the relentless drumbeat of materialism and the marketing message served up millions of times a day by every electronic screen.

What is covetousness? It's wanting what you don't have because you are not content with what God has currently provided; or because someone else has more than you; or because you think you deserve more than you have.

Coveting is not "success" or "achievement" or even just simply having more "stuff". Nothing wrong with any of those. It's the constant dissatisfaction with what you have, jealous of the blessings of others, believing you aren't getting what is "fair" or what you "deserve" (what we really deserve is a

lesson for another time). It's the inability to be truly joyful when viewing the success/blessings/recognition/rewards of others and deep inside believing YOU should have those things too (or instead of them).

Be content with what you have. Why? Well first of all because God commands it. Second, when you are discontent with what you currently have, it robs you of the joy of anything you gain subsequently. Third, discontent is the "dangling carrot" disease of materialism... never satisfied, always one step away from being cured.

Being discontent has NOTHING to do with what you do or don't have. It is a spiritual mindset. The content person can never be robbed of their contentment, and the discontent can never be content no matter what they have.

Think It Over: The writer of Hebrews (Paul) gives us the secret to contentment: Jesus will never leave our side. Who cares WHAT we have. Contentment comes from WHO we have... regardless of our bank account, material wealth or temporal security. That's why the poorest of our world can be happy with the simplest things of life... and the richest of our world can be miserable in the midst of opulence.

Is your life dark today?

Shine the True Light on it..

John 1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Life can be dark often, and in many ways. Personal circumstances can range from difficult to tragic. The economy can be a big concern. Relationships can be in turmoil. Cultures can deteriorate into increased evil. The ways that the light of life can be dimmed or snuffed out are seemingly endless.

It only takes a little bit of light to brighten things up though. Think about the nature of light. You can be in massive cavern devoid of any light, and single spark or flame will light up much of it, and can be seen from far, far away. "Life light" is the same way... just a little goes a long way.

The source of light is important to. Whereas a change of circumstances represents a flicker that quickly and inevitable goes out again, the "light" (hope, blessing, purpose, spiritual clarity, etc) that comes from God is a solar flare in a dark world. The darkness of an evil world, the darkness of hopelessness, the darkness of hard circumstances... all are dispelled by the life-giving, hope-giving, purpose-giving, strength-giving light of God.

Think It Over: People turn to false religion, human ideas and short-term self-gratification looking for a little light in their life. That's like trying to fire up wet wood with an old match... like a flashlight with dead batteries. You can't find real light from the wrong sources. There is only one true source for a powerful, life-giving, darkness dispelling light: Jesus Christ. That will have NO meaning to you and sound foolish if you've never put your faith and hope in Him.

Isn't it amazing, & sad, that our Creator sent LIGHT into our world, and still most of the world chooses pitch black hopelessness.

John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The world is dark. Darker in some places, getting darker in even more.

What is darkness? Evil, wickedness, betrayal, lies, oppression... it's growing everywhere. Seems there is no longer a single place or culture on Earth that is not growing in darkness, be it morality, violence, persecution or poverty.

So what to do about it? First, Christians understand that this is the natural tendency of the human race. Those who reject God and the Bible believe humans are basically "good" while Scripture clearly tells us that is opposite of the truth. In reality, apart from God, man is desperately wicked, continually seeking evil. You certainly would not learn this from the never ending list of Christian ear-tickling books that promote the same "self-esteem" and "you're a good guy" we find in humanist theory, but the history of humanity gives irrefutable and relentlessly repeated evidence that the Bible is indeed absolutely correct.

Understanding this reality, the Christian then recognizes that “darkness” presents an opportunity to shine the Light. When you walk in a dark room, or the electricity goes out, or you find yourself outside in the pitch dark, what is your first thought, impulse or inclination? Shine a light, right?

Why isn't that our first and strong desire when it comes to spiritual darkness? It should be. Shine the Light.

Think It Over: When is the last time you shined spiritual Light into a dark life, situation or culture? By the way, why do capitalize “Light”? Do you know what I'm referring to when I do that?

It's nice to be on God's side. No matter what we face, no matter the odds, we know that God fights for us and we must not fear.

Deuteronomy 3:22 You must not fear them, for the Lord your God Himself fights for you.'

In the past year more and more people tell me how fed up, mad, discouraged and ashamed they are of what is happening in America. Many of them just want to "check out" and ignore it all. Can't say I blame them.

While we may get very tired of how confusing, unfair, backwards and ungodly everything is becoming, we (Believers) never have to fear, be anxious or lose hope. The "tolerant" crowd is now anything but tolerant, and it is increasingly open season Christians. We know that persecution will come (even though we don't want it, nor should we) and we know our fight is with the powers of darkness that are really work.

There is only one answer for us: You must not fear them, for the Lord Your God Himself fights for you.

Think It Over: We win. Never forget that.

Jesus made Himself NOTHING for us; how hard is it for you to make yourself NOTHING for other people in order to serve them?

Philippians 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

We don't live in a culture where being "nothing" is encouraged or honored. To be "nothing" in this context means putting someone else first; it means not looking out for number one; it means not pounding your own chest and saying "it's all about me!".

Entertainment says "look at me!". Hollywood says "love me!". Sports say "I'm the man!". Politics says "What's in it for me?". Even many "Christian celebrities" make it all about them (their popularity, their enrichment, their adoration). No part of our culture says "be nothing for the sake of others" except a very small and rare fraction of Christ-followers who have not only learned this truth, but taken the step of faith to give it a try. It's not

enough to simply nod your head in agreement in Sunday School... you have to actually make the sacrifice in real life.

The rewards are eternal and guaranteed. Empty yourself for sake of another and see if you don't find riches beyond anything this world can offer.

Think It Over: It's not an all or nothing thing. Just carve out some part of your life here and there where it's NOT about YOU. There's always plenty of time to care of "Self".

These are Jesus' own words, so call Him intolerant and judgmental if you want. Hear ME, believe in ME, I AM the Only Way.

John 5:24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

We live in a “tolerant” culture that is anything but tolerant. “Tolerance” today as used by the various groups screaming for it is defined as: “we accept any one who promotes our lifestyle choices and aggressively criticize, marginalize and criminalize any person or group that even hints of opposition”.

In reality, the kind of “tolerance” demanded today is not just plain old tolerance (ie. “live and let live”)... you must promote, normalize and educate all of society (especially children) according to their agenda or you have not been tolerant enough and must be condemned.

If you really want to get down to it, what “tolerance” really means today is the acceptance of any and all immorality, sinful behavior or atheist beliefs no matter how wicked, deviant or destructive; the hatred of America; and the rejection of God, specifically Christianity and the belief in eternal justice and Jesus Christ.

No wonder people hate Jesus (and without hesitation use His name in the most vile and insulting ways). The fact remains, by Jesus' own words, He is utterly intolerant declaring Himself the Only Truth, the Only Way, the Judge and the Giver of Life. And it is that intolerance that allows us to anchor to an absolute Truth for all eternity.

Sadly, most of humanity will only see the "intolerance" (as if intolerance is always a bad thing) while ignoring His monumental love of humanity that cost Him an excruciating death, and His ultimate sacrifice that resulted in the offer of eternal life, even to those who hate him.

Think It Over: The offer of eternal life is extended to all, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him might have eternal life. So while you're accusing Jesus and His followers of intolerance, remember that YOU are being offered eternal life too... on His terms. How intolerant. How monumentally loving...

Lack self-control? All of us do to some degree. A lack of self-control is like an unguarded home. Self-control protects us from sin.

Proverbs 25:28 Whoever has no rule over his own spirit, Is like a city broken down, without walls.

“Rule over his own spirit...” Translated: self-control.

“A city broken down with no walls...” that's a description not very familiar to us today but is perfectly clear to most of humanity. Historically, when people gathered to live in a community they had to construct walls around their location to defend against those would come to steal, kill and destroy. City walls were required to protect those inside.

Self-control is like “city walls for the soul”. Self-control protects us from people, circumstances, temptations and the powers of darkness that come to steal, kill and destroy us spiritually and morally.

Self-control is the ability to reign in, temper and deny your emotions, desires or fleshly impulses in exchange for what is best long term. We live in a culture that worships a lifestyle of doing whatever you want, whenever you want, as long as your

immediate lusts, feelings and desires are fully indulged.

Turmoil, drama, crisis... it is no surprise that this describes the lives of those who lack self-control. They are cities without walls.

Think It Over: Whether it's you, or someone you know, how many times have you seen this truth played out? Those who lack self-control are constantly in circumstantial crisis and spiritual deterioration, yet the idea of having self-control is completely objectionable because it would mean denying short term gratification. Often, there is only one thing that changes this kind of person: PAIN. When the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing, they may finally build some city walls.

**Life & light... The hope & joy that comes
with feeling alive and on the right path.
You can find true life and light in one place.**

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was
the light of men.

Light and life. Just the phrase stirs up feelings of
growth, joy, hope, happiness and energy.

Jesus is all those things and infinitely more.

He is the light of hope in a dark and dreadful world.
He is life in the midst of death and disease. He is
light that exposes evil, wicked intent and lies. He
offers life for all eternity when we are faced with
certain disappointment and death in a sin cursed
world.

Make no mistake... apart from Christ there is only
darkness and death. It may be camouflaged in a
dim light, or temporarily disguised to fool you but in
the end, without Jesus, there is no life, there is no
light. Only death, despair, hopelessness, futility,
blindness and total darkness (emotionally, spiritually
and ultimately physically).

With Christ, nothing in this dark and dying world can
take away our light and life (truth, growth, joy,
energy for life, hope, and eternal reward).

In Jesus is Life. He is the light for all who will turn to Him.

Think It Over: Life is hard. I cannot even begin to imagine facing this life without the hope, light and life of Jesus. Jesus gives us purpose, reason, truth and direction. Jesus allows us to live ABOVE the circumstances of this life because we know that NO MATTER WHAT happens today, our eternal victory, destiny and reward is already won, and waiting for us. Life and light...

**Loved any enemies today? Prayed for
anyone who has persecuted you? Yesterday?
This year? Ever? How come?
Don't have any enemies?**

**Matthew 5:44 But I say to you, love your
enemies, bless those who curse you, do good
to those who hate you, and pray for those
who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

This is one of the hardest commands to follow for Christians. It's easy to nod your head in agreement when you hear it in a sermon. It's comfortable to discuss in Sunday School in communal piety. It's very spiritual to advise someone else THEY should be blessing their enemies and praying for them.

But when the rubber meets the road and enemies come-a-callin' at OUR door, MY door, YOUR door, well the excuses and the justifications start bubbling up like a witch's cauldron.

"You don't understand what happened..." "I know the Bible says pray for my enemy but I just can't possibly bring myself to do it for THIS person..." "It's a waste of time praying for them, they are beyond ever changing". And on and on we go.

It could be the ex-spouse, the politician, the business partner who cheated us or the heavy-weight gossip at church spreading lies about us...

what's easy in concept ("bless those who curse you") becomes seemingly impossible in practice ("pray for those who persecute you"). And we think because it feels impossible that alleviates our responsibility to obey. We get a Godly pass.

Think It Over: We often confuse the DESIRE to obey with the CHOICE to obey. The Bible doesn't say we have to FEEL LIKE blessing and praying for our enemies. It says we must CHOOSE to do so. Your emotions are secondary, real yes, but secondary. Obedience is the evidence of genuine faith and salvation. To obey one of the hardest commandments in all of Scripture is strong evidence of strong faith.

Many people get the best of others simply because it is within their power to do so. Taking advantage of someone weaker is wrong.

Proverbs 22:22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Nor oppress the afflicted at the gate;

Whether an individual, a business, a culture or a government, exploiting the weak, poor and sick is despicable. And yet, the frequency and severity of it is growing.

Why? Respect for life, law and goodness is plummeting. The government enslaves the poor with entitlements in order to enrich and empower politicians. Government-sanctioned exploitation naturally leads to the governed following suit. There is no end to scams, financial traps and get rich quick promises. Lotteries, high-interest credit, casinos, payment plans, no money down... all designed to relieve those who can least afford it of their little bit of resources.

Christians should never be part of any business/industry/plan/scheme/effort that exploits the poor and financially ignorant. As much as possible we should be a help through education, advice and mentoring.

Think It Over: Christian leaders should be teaching true Biblical financial discipline and principles, not foolish and fleshly “health and wealth” nonsense. “Money” is a frequent topic in Scripture but it's not a message of indulgence. It is a message about giving, God's providential care, discipline, stewardship and contentment.

Need some marching orders? Need things simple? Watch... stand fast... be faithful, be brave, be strong. Any questions?

1 Corinthians 16:13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

I often get questions or hear Christians talk about how hard it is to figure out how to live the Christian life. Truth is, it's not hard to KNOW, it's hard to DO.

Today's verse, in typical Apostle Paul fashion, punches home a simple yet profound list concerning the Christian life.

Watch: be alert, be on guard... Christianity is not passive. Like a soldier on guard duty, there are multitudes of enemy out there who would like nothing better than to see you destroyed in all ways: physically, financially, spiritually and emotionally. The enemy isn't passive... they don't take a break; they don't sleep in battle. Christians often do to their demise.

Stand fast: literally means to drive a stake in to something. What? Into "the faith". Not YOUR faith (which is often taught today). Drive a stake into THE FAITH. That means the Truth, the Bible, the Word, Christianity. It is your rock, your foundation, your measuring stick, your standard. Anchor to it, tie

yourself to it, cement yourself to it... drive a stake into the Faith.

Be brave: there is a lot a spiritual cowardice in Christianity today. We let the world tell us what is right and wrong and somehow reinterpret (or ignore) Scripture to fit. We let the culture silence us about holiness and Hell. We let political correctness marginalize us with relentless condemnations of "judgmental" and "intolerant". Be brave, God is on your side. Be brave, you've already be declared victorious. Be brave, Truth is on your side.

Be strong: God gives us everything we need by His divine power to be spiritually and emotionally healthy, vibrant, active... STRONG. Avail yourself of what Jesus has already provided. A weak Christian is a Christian relying on their own strength. A strong Christian knows strength is only found in the resources God provides.

Think It Over: Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. If you need it simple and clear, there you go.

No matter what happens, what tragedy, what calamity, what valley, the righteous always have a place of refuge. The wicked do not.

Proverbs 14:32 The wicked is banished in his wickedness, But the righteous has a refuge in his death.

The wicked never escape their wickedness. No matter how much it seems they get ahead, have fun, skirt the rules, get away with things or profit from their sin, they never escape the unbreakable law: you reap what you sow. The wicked never escape their wickedness.

So who is wicked? If we asked a hundred people we would get a thousand different answers. So we don't ask finite and fickle humans, we turn to what is unchanging: God's Word. The "wicked" are anyone who disregard God and live life following their own version of goodness or selfishness. They don't care about God or they don't believe in God or they don't acknowledge God or they aren't accountable to God (in their mind).

The wicked are not just criminals or corrupt politicians or crooked business men. The wicked are anyone who lives their life thumbing their nose at God (sometimes while putting on a show of religious hypocrisy that fools those around them). That means the wicked can also include soccer moms,

church staff, teachers, professionals or charities... doesn't matter what they look like on the surface, God knows the truth. The wicked can never escape their wickedness no matter what how nice they dress up their lives and deceive people around them (and sometimes themselves).

On the other hand, no matter how hard life gets, how evil life gets, how chaotic life gets, the righteous always have a safe place: GOD. The righteous are those who live a life accountable to God no matter what their status or station in this world.

Think It Over: Choice... 1) inescapable wickedness or 2) a guaranteed place of safety. It's both sad and shocking that the vast majority of humanity choose wickedness when God has offered a refuge to anyone who wants it.

Overcome, overcome, overcome... a single word that can define the daily Christian life. Overcome the world, your flesh, evil.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The world is evil and getting worse. It's open season on Christians. Just today I read that ISIS is raping, torturing and chopping up Christian girls, taking videos of it, and then sending movies and body parts to their family, taunting them.

In America, there is tolerance and patience for all... except Christians. You can say anything you want about them. Hollywood can portray them as hypocrites, perverts, liars and nutcases and win awards for their brave cutting edge work. From every corner of our culture we are labeled: racists, homophobes, bigots, haters, islamophobes, anti-women, etc.

It's tempting to respond with a taste of their own medicine. Sometimes it would just feel good to smack the crud out of some of them wouldn't it? Don't misunderstand, if I had to take up arms to protect my family and country, I would with no hesitation. If I had to pull the trigger to keep one of those ISIS animals from raping my daughter, I'd pull it until I ran out of bullets. But defense of country and protection of family is different from revenge.

As Christians we are never seek revenge, paybacks for personal gratification. That is overcoming evil with EVIL. No matter the personal discomfort or cost, we need to respond as Christ would respond. It takes discernment, wisdom and maturity to know what that response is.

Think It Over: It's ironic that Christians of all people on earth are generally honest, benevolent and good citizens yet if you listen to the media, we are trouble making scoundrels of the worst hypocritical sort. Our duty is to continue to be good, continue to love, continue to demonstrate the patience and mercy of Christ even when our feelings scream for some retribution.

Peace... everyone is searching for it but there is only one TRUE source of lasting peace for troubled and fearful hearts.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The world is a scary place. Life can be very troubling. Dealing with this sin-cursed world and flesh is anything but peaceful. Sounds hopeless doesn't it?

Apart from Jesus it is. Apart from Jesus, life goes something like this for the vast majority of humans: you're born, life sucks, you die. Pretty depressing. Apart from Jesus it certainly is.

With Jesus, there is peace. We live above life's turmoil and out of reach of temporary trials and hardships because we live anchored in our Lord's promises about this life and the next. With Jesus, we live with an eternal perspective knowing this life is VERY brief and eternal life awaits. With Jesus, we don't fear because we believe that no matter what happens in this life, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ and our future home in Paradise with Him.

With Jesus... peace. With Jesus... no troubled heart. With Jesus... no fear.

Think It Over: I'm amazed that multitudes of humanity reject Jesus given the choice. Life stinks and you die versus peace and eternal life. Hmmm, I'm thinking. I'm further amazed that people who do choose Jesus often return to their fear and troubled hearts instead of remaining hopeful and steadfast in His promises.

People don't keep promises anymore. God keeps His for one thousand generations. I think I'll put my trust in Him instead of man.

Deuteronomy 7:9 "Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

Whether politics, academics, sports or business, it seems like broken promises and lies are not only "no big deal", they are almost expected. How many times have you heard: "EVERYONE lies...".

Politicians lie so much it's a joke, and it's not even news or a reason not to vote for them. Students routinely declare that cheating is a must and when the goal is "graduate" instead of "learn", who can blame them? Athletes and teams cheat because losing comes at such a high cost and a lack of character means there is no conviction or guilt involved.

Movies and sitcoms treat lying as if it's normal and only wrong "when it hurts someone else". Even worse, it's a joke. I can't count the number of times I've seen lying treated as humor on TV.

Promises today are only to be kept if it remains advantageous personally to do so. Otherwise, tough luck. Even in business, years ago I quit having

clients sign contracts because I realized that paper promises mean nothing to someone who wants to break that promise... and honest people don't need to sign a contract assuring honesty. Not an approach taught in business school but it works for me.

Honesty (keeping promises, telling the truth) is a character trait, a value. It exposes the condition of the heart, mind and spirit of both the individual and the culture.

Think It Over: There is a reason why "LIAR" is at the top of every big list of sins in the Bible. Lying corrupts every part of human character. "LIAR" is so awful to God because it is everything He is not, and He is against. Satan is the Father of Lies. God is Truth and incapable of lying.

Share in the suffering of the Gospel? Really? Isn't that pretty much opposite of preaching we hear today about the good life?

2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,

There is a real disconnect between Scripture and what you see on the Top Ten shelves at Christian bookstores. If we were to evaluate Christianity by the bestsellers list, we would determine it is all about having your best day, prosperity, abundance, divine health and personal happiness... but when you read Scripture the Christian life is about sacrifice, taking up your cross, suffering for Christ, persecution and denying Self.

What's the deal? Does God want us to be miserable? Hasn't He read Marketing 101 and figured out that suffering and sacrifice isn't nearly as promotionally feasible as prosperity and happiness? Can't we get more people on the Gospel train if we are selling tickets to abundance and blessing?

The Truth is this: GOD KNOWS what kind of life leads to the most blessing, reward and satisfaction. God also knows that following our Savior comes at a

price and the price paid becomes part of the reward we receive in Eternity.

What we give up now, we see returned forever exponentially. It's a better investment than gaining all the riches or "happiness" (usually defined as "ease, comfort and lifestyle") that can be obtained in this life. The Eternal Stock Market is infinitely bullish but your investments must be made in THIS life.

Think It Over: The therapeutic, self-interested Christianity of today that is so popular (and sellable! Does that tell you anything?) is in direct contrast to the sacrificial, self-denying and eternity-minded message of Scripture.

Sin always leads to death; sometimes its SLOW coming, but it always comes. There is only way one to have victory over it...

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sin in your life has one outcome: death. Death of happiness, death of a clear conscience, death of fellowship with God, death of spiritual and emotional health, death of relationships, death of peace... and sometimes actual physical death directly related to the consequences of your sin.

We do no favors by ignoring the reality of sin, ignoring God's warnings about sin and pretending that personal "freedom" to do anything we desire (code for "unrestrained immorality") without interference or judgment from others or society is somehow a blessing rather than the curse it really is.

We are told incessantly by the current culture that "love" is allowing any and all behavior, choices, ideas and activity blessed by zero moral restraint or standards. This is the EXACT OPPOSITE of true love. True love tells the truth about the consequences of sin, the outcome of immorality and the inevitable conclusion of unrestrained sin: death.

Don't be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever seed you plant, that's the harvest you will reap.

Think It Over: We have sold a lie to our culture. Love is not the freedom to live any way we want, do anything we want, sin anytime we want. That is not true love or true freedom. In reality, that is a life of bondage, loss and death. If you truly love someone, have the moral and spiritual courage to tell them the truth. Our only victory over our sinful nature is first to admit the truth and then turn to Jesus who died to give us victory over sin.

A Common Response: I Don't Believe God Exists Because of All the Evil We See Around Us, A Loving God Would Not Allow This

Romans 1:18-20 The anger of God is against all the evil deeds of men who in their wickedness bury and silence the truth about God. That Truth has been made evident to all people ever since the creation of the world; the complexity, design, magnitude and order of Creation clearly shows God's eternal power, divine nature and existence. Whoever denies God is without excuse or defense. (*Paraphrased - BR*)

One of the most common declarations we hear from professing atheists or casual agnostics is along the lines of: "I don't believe in God because of all the suffering and evil. If God does exist, he can't be good if he just sits back and does nothing."

Case closed, conversation over for most people because the vast majority of people, even Christians, cannot respond effectively. While a short little devotion like this won't even scratch the surface, let me just give you some random thoughts off the top of my head to think about.

- **Evil exists because free will exists.** A true relationship of love cannot exist if the choice not to love doesn't exist. Evil is what results when free will is exercised against perfect love that God

created originally. God did not create robots programmed or forced to love Him and do good. God created us as agents of free will, able to choose good or evil, love or rebellion. You cannot truly love, obey or do good unless there is a genuine choice involved.

- **Evil is the deficit of anything that is not perfectly good.** To the extent it falls short of perfectly good, that is the degree to which some act or choice is evil (from a human perspective). Cheating on a school test is a "little evil" compared to murder which is very far away from being good. All "less than perfectly good" acts are evil, but as humans we see degrees of evil. Something is built into our spiritual knowledge that some evil is more evil. People don't say "I can't believe in God because there are people who shoplift bubble gum". They say "I can't believe in God because there are people who rape and murder little children...." Morality and degrees of consequences are built into the universal knowledge in every human heart.
- **Evil is one of the strongest PROOFS for the existence of God.** As finite humans, we understand the need for justice and accountability. If someone rapes and murders your little daughter, then the existence of our moral outrage and need for justice is a proof of the existence of the child's father. The wickedness of humanity in all its mind boggling severity and volume, is irrefutable proof for the existence of final accountability and justice by Someone Higher than us because we all know and believe that every vile and evil act should "get what it deserves" in the end. Humanity is

incapable of justly punishing all wickedness, and indeed, we see truly evil people appearing to get away with unspeakable wickedness all over the world. What follows is a divinely-originated and common conclusion for most that "in the end, they will pay, you reap what you sow, if not in this life, the next". Where did that moral outrage and need for justice come from? The animal and plant kingdom have no sense of morality and judgment... only humans do. Why? Because we are created in God's image... evil is one of the strong proofs of God's existence because of unique sense of morality and judgment. We understand a human Judge who must (and should) rightly punish a murderer. How much more then does that sense of justice prove their must be an Eternal Judge who presides over all humanity for all time?

- **Evil proves that a transcendent form of "good" exists.** You cannot have evil without having good to compare it to. Otherwise, evil would just what we would consider "normal". "Good" is not subject to human opinion... rape is evil, feeding the hungry is good. Man didn't determine that; it is part of our spiritual nature. We just "know it" (the divine law of our Creator God written on our heart). That does not exist in the animal kingdom in any form, so it proves something is different about humans, something that could have never "evolved". "Good" transcends mankind. It is not subject to a people with hardened hearts or seared consciences who might declare they think murder or child molestation or thievery is good. Even if 90% of the world declares and genuinely believes "rape is good", does that make it good? Of course

not, we still know rape is evil (which begs the question for America: even if five Supreme Court Justices and 40% of society declare that murdering babies in the womb is good, and a human right... does that mean in reality abortion is not evil?) Where did "transcendent good" come from? The existence of transcendent "good" proves God exists, and evil is only evil compared to that "good". If a "transcendent good" exists, then it stands to reason it must come from an Intelligence/Person/Being that is transcendent (above humanity) as well. Morality cannot come from inanimate material. Morality only exists in intelligent, self-aware moral beings.

- **Whatever exists does indeed exist because God allows it.** God is sovereign... so the fact that He allows evil (albeit temporarily) then BY DEFAULT means evil will be used to accomplish His will and bring Him glory despite humanity's motives. The spiritually blind cannot understand that. They cannot fathom of GOD who allows evil (even briefly) and in His infinite power and knowledge, uses that evil to display His sovereignty, love and glory. It is a very small (and idolatrous) view of the God of the Bible when humans dictate what God should and should not allow.
- In reality most people who say "I can't believe in God because of evil..." are just **parroting talking points and easy excuses that most Christians cannot defend.** It is a quick way to end any conversation about God, sin, eternity and accountability. The truth is, the Bible tells us that people KNOW the truth down deep, but they

suppress it so that they can pursue the very sin and evil they say proves God doesn't exist.

Once we understand how and why evil exists, and accept that God is sovereign, then we are left to discover HOW God uses evil to make "ALL THINGS [even evil] work together for good to those that love Him" (Romans 8:28). Some examples for you to think about: to warn us about the consequences of evil, to humble us and show us our need for both a Savior and a Protector, to strengthen us because we all grow in the face of adversity and suffering, to provide opportunities to help others and empathize with them, to demonstrate His power and love when we see God give people blessing and victory despite even severe evil.

Think It Over: "I can't believe in a god would allow evil or send people to hell". Good, me either. That God doesn't exist, so don't waste your time believing in it. The true Creator God is far more powerful and loving than all of mankind's wickedness and hatred. He is full capable of fulfilling His will, accomplishing His plan and displaying His glory despite evil. THAT is GOD you can believe in.

Considering Divorce?

Malachi 2:16 – “For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce...”

I get a lot of emails and questions. Frequently it is about marriage and divorce. I thought I would revisit the topic today since it remains prevalent even in Christian homes. If you know someone thinking about divorce, or even in the middle of one, send this to them.

I am frustrated, but not surprised, over the confusion and lack of understanding concerning Biblical teaching on divorce. Scripture is pretty straightforward about the topic but sound teaching is beaten down by a culture that has not only accepted divorce for just about any reason but wants to treat divorce as not really all that big a deal. Predictably, this is exactly opposite of God's instruction on divorce. I want to present a straightforward explanation of what God says about divorce and remarriage.

You Can Always Find What You Want to Hear

Like any sensitive cultural or religious hot topic, you can go out and find any number of websites, churches or professed Bible teachers who will tell you what you want to hear. Do you want permission or approval for divorce? There are plenty of Christian preachers, authorities and writers who

can explain away the clear Word of God and leave the door wide open for divorce on whatever grounds suits your need. You'll find all sorts of definitions for "adultery" and all manners of Biblical interpretation that give just about anyone permission to divorce (or remarry).

- You'll find teaching that is the equivalent of "God does not want you to be unhappy, go ahead and get divorced and if it's wrong, God will forgive you".
- You'll find religious authorities who will tell you there are a long list of behaviors and circumstances that are tantamount to breaking the marriage covenant therefore qualify for divorce.
- On the other end of the spectrum, you'll find those who are cold and hard about divorce for any reason and apply an extreme legalistic (often hypocritical) standard to marriage and remarriage.

Of course the most common response to divorce in Christianity is simply that it is ignored either because "it's none of my business" or "the problem is so big we cannot do anything about it anyway".

- Divorce is seen as culturally acceptable and something the church should simply not be all that concerned about.
- You could extend this towards the complacent and casual attitude towards sin in general, especially sexual sin such as fornication, adultery or homosexuality.

Let's look at a straightforward and clear presentation of what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. Your choice is either to take the Bible at face value, or entertain endless interpretations and personal opinion that fit cultural norms and personal preferences.

God Hates Divorce

It is paramount to establish up front God's opinion of divorce. Unlike humans who throw the word "hate" around casually, we must understand that when God says he hates something it means the Creator of the universe despises it so much that he wishes it did not exist (and won't in eternity).

- Malachi 2:16 – "For the Lord God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously." (NKJV)

God hates divorce because it does violence to the relationships in the sacred institution of marriage which is the foundation of humanity.

- Marriage brings stability, security, structure, and health and is the means by which mankind continues and increases its existence.
- Divorce destroys the very bedrock of what the Creator has designed.

- Besides the question of sexual sin, this is also the greatest argument against the proponents of homosexual unions.
- God hates divorce and God hates anything that destroys or corrupts the most basic and primary relationship he established for his creation.

It is clear from Jesus own words that God only allows divorce because of man's sinfulness and the hardness of our hearts:

- Matthew 19:8 – He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. (NKJV)

It is only because there are certain situations and consequences that arise from sinful choices that God allows divorce – even though he hates it. The clear and simple teaching of Scripture is there are only two reasons God allows us to divorce: adultery and abandonment.

Divorce on the Grounds of Adultery

We hear great debate and long discussions concerning the definition of “adultery.” However, I think this is much like hearing former Pres. Bill Clinton ask “what is the definition of ‘is’”? Unless we are looking to complicate the issue or to explain it away, we are compelled to except the definition in its simplicity. Adultery is a married person having sex with someone other than their own spouse. That always brings up a bunch of “yeah, but...”

responses and I am only going to cover one of them since it is commonly presented as grounds for divorce.

- "Yeah, but didn't Jesus say that even lusting after another woman is adultery?"

Yes he did, but this is within the context of speaking about purity and his standard of morality.

- If divorce was allowed by God each time a married person is guilty of lust, at some point every marriage would be eligible for dissolution.
- I would venture to say that there is probably no one who has ever gone their entire married life and never lusted once, even if just slightly and for a single moment.

So obviously Jesus is not saying that lust (which in terms of sin is equivalent to adultery) is grounds for divorce. The physical act of adultery is. Great discernment is needed and wise counsel should be sought in cases where a spouse's unfaithfulness involves pornography or an intimate emotional/romantic relationship with someone else. Consider the simple clarity of these verses:

- Matthew 19:9 – And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (NKJV)
- Matthew 5:32 – But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to

commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (NKJV)

Divorce on the Grounds of Abandonment

The second biblical allowance for divorce is when a non-Christian spouse abandons the marriage.

- 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 – But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (NKJV)

When a married Christian has been abandoned by an unbelieving spouse and reconciliation is refused, God releases the Christian from the responsibility of that marriage. The unbelieving spouse that has abandoned the marriage is a covenant breaker.

- However, as long as there is a reasonable chance for reconciliation then the Christian's responsibility is to pray for the

- repentance and salvation of their spouse and reconciliation of the relationship.
- Once it becomes obvious that reconciliation is never going to occur (this may happen quickly or may take a while depending on the circumstances) the Christian has grounds for Biblical divorce.

The prudent Christian will seek the advice and counsel of mature Believers to help them know when reconciliation is no longer possible.

The Christian and Remarriage

In all cases of Biblical divorce, a Christian is only permitted to remarry another Christian. This hardly even needs explanation. The reality of divorce and its subsequent heartache should be enough to teach any Christian they should only consider remarriage to someone who shares their Godly convictions about it. Just in case we need further direction, the Bible is clear:

- Mark 10:11 – So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. (NKJV)
- 1 Corinthians 7:39 – A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. (NKJV)

It is obvious when you take the verses that describe the two reasons God allows divorce in context that both of these verses just listed could say “unless you’ve been Biblically divorced” or “if you’ve been

Biblically divorced." A Christian who has been divorced on biblical grounds is free to remarry only another Christian. If the person you're going to marry has been divorced, they must have been divorced on biblical grounds as well. If either party was on Biblically divorced and the marriage occurs anyway, both are guilty of adultery because in God's eyes one or both of them is not free to remarry.

- Christians who ignore God's clear word on divorce and remarriage are subject to church discipline as clearly outlined in Matthew 18:15-17.

The reality is that today very few churches will ever enact church discipline or even seek to know the details of a divorce or remarriage... but that does not excuse us from being responsible.

- It is up to the spiritual leaders of each church to guard the sanctity of marriage by proclaiming the clear Word of God on the matter of divorce and remarriage.
- It is the responsibility of each individual Christian to take God seriously concerning divorce and when contemplating remarriage.

For either leaders or individuals to ignore what God says simply because our culture proclaims divorce to be a casual right with minimal consequences, does not remove the consequences of violating God's word.

Don't be deceived, God is not mocked... whatever we reap we will sow and that includes violating God's word when it comes to divorce and remarriage.

Divorce and Remarriage Before Becoming a Christian

A foundational principle of Christianity is that we are to live our Christian lives starting at the point we are saved. Whatever circumstance or situation we find ourselves in, we are to live out our Christianity as God's word becomes known to us.

- If you become a Christian and you're married to an unbeliever, you are not to seek a divorce because your spouse is not saved.
- As a Christian you are called to live a Christian life and to stay in your marriage as long as you're unbelieving spouse does not abandon the marriage.
- By your example and prayer perhaps your spouse may come to know Christ.
- If you become a Christian and you have already been unBiblically divorced and remarried, you are not to seek a divorce and try to return to the first marriage as a way to correct your mistake.

A second unBiblical divorce is not the answer to fixing the first.

- The moment you are saved is the moment God holds you responsible to keep his Word.

- That would apply to whatever marital situation you are in at that time.
- If you become a Christian while divorced and are not remarried, then it would seem a reasonable attempt to reconcile the first marriage is in order.

If your previous (still unmarried) spouse refuses an honest effort to reconcile this would seem to be equivalent to them abandoning the marriage in which case the Christian would be free to remarry another Christian.

If you were unbiblically divorced and your spouse has already remarried, as difficult as it is, it does not appear the Bible allows for your remarriage.

A Word about Biblical Divorce

Remember that God hates divorce. Even if you have Biblical grounds for divorce, you must keep in mind how much God despises it.

- Even when adultery or abandonment has occurred, our automatic response should NOT be to seek a divorce.
- There should always be an open door for repentance and reconciliation of the marriage before divorce is sought.
- The Christian who is secretly hoping for adultery, or is glad it has occurred because it gives them an “out” from the marriage, is not being faithful to God's viewpoint on divorce.

- God hates divorce and so should we. If we truly hate divorce, then we will seek it as an honest last resort.

While adultery and abandonment are among the most painful of emotional experiences, we must not forget the power of repentance and reconciliation. God can and often does restore marriages that have been torn apart by adultery or abandonment if both parties truly seek forgiveness and God's healing.

About UnBiblical Divorce

The forgiveness available through the shed blood of Jesus Christ covers any sin. While we applaud the repentant drug addict, murderer or thief, uncompassionate and legalistic Christianity often looks down their nose towards divorce. This is an understandable yet regrettable backlash to the casual attitude our culture has about divorce.

However, we must never make the mistake of constraining God's forgiveness for any sin that is truly repented of even if we fear grace may be abused.

- If a person has been unBiblically divorced, if they repent and genuinely seek forgiveness from God, God will grant it.
- A true sign of genuine repentance is that reconciliation will be sought if remarriage has not occurred.
- If remarriage has occurred then repentance over both the unBiblical

divorce and the unBiblical remarriage should be present... and the Christian should apply God's standards to the current marriage.

- There is nothing in Scripture to suggest or imply that a person should seek to leave a current marriage because the remarriage occurred unBiblically.

It is a very difficult situation to be an unBiblically divorced Christian and realize that remarriage is not an option. There is no denying how hard this can be yet we know that God will honor our faithfulness to his Word.

There are those that teach that once a Christian in this situation has either

- 1) sought reconciliation and been denied or
- 2) the other spouse has remarried,

... they now are divorced on the biblical grounds of abandonment.

While this may indeed be true in some cases, great caution should be exercised in this situation and spiritual counsel sought from mature and faithful believers. There are many questions to consider and the divorced Christian is in a fragile dilemma where their own heart can easily deceive them. A Christian should never take remarriage lightly and should wisely seek the godly advice and opinion of multiple mature believers and their Christian

leadership before considering remarriage to make sure they are not violating God's word.

In a Nutshell

In summary, the Bible's teaching on divorce and remarriage is this:

- There are two allowances for biblical divorce and that is 1) adultery and 2) abandonment by an unbelieving spouse.
- Divorce should be a last resort after reconciliation and repentance is sought.
- If a Biblical divorce occurs the Christian is free to remarry another Christian only.

If salvation and/or genuine repentance occurs after a divorce, reconciliation should be sought if neither are remarried. If remarriage has already occurred, the Christian should not seek to leave their new marriage. If the former spouse is remarried and the Christian is not, then the new Christian is free to remarry if the divorce was on Biblical grounds.

- In all instances of approved remarriage, it can only be with another Christian.

That is the plain and clear teaching of Scripture. The typical response I hear at this point is "it's plain and clear to YOU, that's your interpretation." In reality, this can be the response to ANY interpretation of Scripture so each Christian must read God's words for themselves and decide whether or not what the Bible simply says, is what the Bible simply says. The

Scriptures we find concerning divorce and remarriage are straightforward and not complex. A few simple verses tell us plainly what God thinks about divorce, the reasons he allows divorce and who a Christian may remarry if Biblically divorced.

Sadly, if you want to find a Christian authority who will tell you it's okay to get divorced or remarried (regardless of your situation), you will easily be able to find one. As well, you can simply get divorced and/or remarried and most likely no other Christian or church will show any concern or question it at all. Even if they do, you can simply move to the church down the street and no one will care. That is a sad commentary on the state of church leadership, Biblical teaching and discipline.

The point is not to run around interrogating everyone about their marriage or even their divorce but if we have absolutely no concern for God's standards, especially if God has called us to Christian leadership, then why have standards at all?

- If God gave us clear teaching about divorce and remarriage then it is our responsibility as Christians to hold each other accountable to those teachings.
- We don't do it to be legalistic or to stick our nose in other people's business, we do it because we want God's best not only for our own marriage but for our community and the Church as a whole.

- God's instructions on divorce and remarriage are not ambiguous, confusing or complex. It is a simple matter of whether or not we want to except God's standards... or simply do as we please.

One the most common and saddest things I hear today is: "well, God doesn't want me to be unhappy and you don't understand my situation. I know the Bible says it's wrong to get divorced in my case but God will forgive me."

- This mindset is encouraged by the fact that a person can proceed and simply change churches, or never even be questioned at all by the church they are in (or by any Christians who know them personally).
- In our era of "personal rights" and "it's none of your business what I do", it's very hard for most people to grasp the idea of any sort of accountability or church discipline.

But... that doesn't change our responsibility to God's Word.

God can and will forgive anyone truly repentant of sin concerning divorce and remarriage. No question about that. But it does not remove the awful consequences divorce is inflicting on our homes, communities and churches.

Social media brings many friends but is that good? Can you really have hundreds or thousands of friends? What's a real friend?

Proverbs 18:24 A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

There are some things about social media I really love. It's put me in touch with old friends. I've been able to keep up with distant family.

On the other hand, it can also be a source of constant interruption and the obligation to respond to a lot of "friend's" requests, messages and invitations. If you aren't careful, it can also become a replacement for actual deep and meaningful friendships that require personal investment (time, energy, emotion, etc). We can easily be fooled into thinking online popularity equates to loyalty, intimacy and belonging when it rarely if ever does.

What's more, what we see and experience online with people is usually far from the reality of their actual life. You are getting only the filtered, keyboard, photoshopped version. It's like only getting to see someone with their hair done and best clothes on rather than fresh out of bed with cowlicks, bad breath, no makeup, unshaven, scratching their butt.

To have real friends, you must be a real friend. Being a real friend is a commitment and a sacrifice. That's why over the course of our life the number of true, lifelong, genuinely intimate friends can usually be counted on less than your own fingers.

Think It Over: Are you a real friend to anyone? Do you have any real friends? If no, why not? Is there something you're hiding, something you're scared of? Are you waiting for someone else to make the effort first?

Sometimes we need a clean slate, a fresh start, a new beginning. God can clean your heart & give a right spirit if you ask.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

One of the blessings of the living the Christian life is the "do over". God is the GOD of the "do over". And thank God He is!

It is one of the amazing privileges of being a Christian. No matter how many times we mess up, get off track, make the same mistake, fall to the same temptation, as long as we are truly sorry, as long as we sincerely turn away from our sin, as long as we have a genuine desire to return to a life of holiness, God will forgive our transgression, clean our hearts, and rebuild, refresh and strengthen our broken and discouraged spirit.

"Now, therefore," says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. Joel 2:12-17

What Joel is saying is this: don't ACT like you are sorry for sin on the outside if your heart isn't broken

over sin on the inside. Turning from sin to God originates must begin deep in the heart and flow outward to our lifestyle and behavior. Rend (tear) your heart, which means to be demonstrably broken hearted over your sin and the destruction/grief it has caused.

God is merciful, slow to anger, ready to give you a clean heart, a new start, a strong and steady spirit. He's just waiting on you to really want it. He's waiting on you to really NOT want your sin.

Think It Over: When is the last time you thought long and hard about how spectacularly awful sin is and the destruction it has brought to your life, your family, and humanity in general? Have you ever truly been broken hearted over your sin? Do you routinely ask God for a clean heart, a clean start every day?

The best part of waking up, is Bible in your cup; mind over mattress; no Bible, no breakfast; the early bird gets the blessing.

Psalm 143:8 (ESV) Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Clichés don't make a spiritual life but they can be good reminders about what is important.

While it is certainly no hard fast rule, there is a common thread through success, maturity and discipline that seems to connect with the quiet early morning hours. The predawn solitude when God can be heard before life gets loud. Early morning hours before a side of procrastination shows up with breakfast; when plans for the day are made proactively instead of reactively.

There's something satisfying and rewarding too when you the most important things in life (spiritual) are taken care of first – first energies, first available hours, first priority – instead of inconsistently with the last gasps of an exhausting day.

I have to finish by admitting most people aren't "morning people". I get it. At least I get it that most people claim that... I don't actually believe that's some genetic truth. That doesn't change how often we see success and discipline a common trait of

early risers; spiritual maturity and Biblical depth that come with a consistent morning routine.

Think It Over: Many people claim they are “not a morning person” but my response is always “how do you know?” Most have never tried. It takes time to acclimate to waking early and change your internal body clock. What I find most often is that people don't want to give up screen time late at night to go to bed earlier. There's always a price to pay for success, spiritual or professional.

The Law reveals sin. Jesus came to fulfill the Law not get rid of it.

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

The Law. We don't talk about it much in modern Christianity although in Scripture it is one half of the total Biblical equation: The Law and The Gospel.

Repeat after me: The Law convicts, the Gospel saves. That is the message of the Bible encapsulated. We present the Gospel (most of it anyway, Hell is not mentioned much either) with all its blessings and rewards which results in a lot of people saying, "sounds like a great deal to me, I'm in!" However, the Gospel is meaningless without the Law. Really? Let me explain.

The Gospel is a message of salvation. Salvation means to "save" someone from something. If you don't know you need to be saved, then why would you really want/need a Savior? You don't - unless it's been packaged with a lot of tempting benefits (a great life, blessings, God's favor, health, wealth, prosperity, you "best day yet", etc.).

Let me ask it another way... if I ran up to you and said "I have the cure! You can be saved!", you would think I was nuts because you don't even believe you are sick. So if I modify that with "I have

the cure and if you take this cure, you will be prosperous, happy, favored and showers of blessings will rain down on you!"... you might go for that even though in your own mind you aren't even sick.

The real Gospel message that results in a true saving response is "you are spiritually sick, you're headed for eternal death and I have the cure!". That leads to the obvious and appropriate demand from the hearer for PROOF that they are spiritually sick and need to be cured (saved), thus needing a Savior (the essence of the Gospel message).

That's where The Law comes in - otherwise familiar to us and boiled down to the list known as "The Ten Commandments". The Law exposes our true nature and proves the existence of our spiritual disease.

Thou shalt not lie. Ever lied? You're a liar. Me too.

Thou shalt not steal. Ever stolen, even one thing? Yeah me also, fellow thief. Jesus said if you lust after someone it's the same as committing adultery because you've done the deed in your mind and heart (and you would do it physically if you truly believed you would never get caught or have consequences). Adulterer! That's just three commands and we've all broken probably ALL ten.

We can go ahead and add blasphemers (taking God's name in vain or using it casually), idolaters (making something more important than God) and

murderer (if you've ever hated someone). Lying, thieving, adulterous, murderous idolater...

You see? The Law exposes, proves and confirms that we all have the "S.I.N." disease and need a cure. The cure is the Gospel. We owe God a just penalty for our wickedness (eternal death) but Jesus – here's comes The Gospel – died in our place to pay that penalty for us.

The Law convicts, the Gospel saves. The Law demonstrates we just deserve condemnation. The Gospel is the free gift of God that saves us from that condemnation.

That's why Jesus said He didn't come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, to complete it, to give the solution to what it exposes in humanity.

The Law convicts, the Gospel saves. Give the whole story to those you love and they will understand WHY the Gospel is THE GOOD NEWS!

Think It Over: Do you leave out the "The Law" when you talk to someone about Jesus? Do you leave out any mention of Hell and eternal condemnation? Do you think someone really is responding to "salvation" if they don't understand they need to be saved from something? Is not avoiding Hell and eternal separation from God a genuine motivation to respond to the Gospel? Of course, it is. Learn to present the entire message of Scripture: The Law convicts, The Gospel saves.

The shadow of death... we can face the worse in life with NO FEAR and be comforted.

Psalm 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

We could go deep into the specific meaning of "the valley of the shadow of death" in context of the verse and author but for the sake of this moment in the Word, let's take the relative view.

What is perceived by each person to be their "valley of shadow" is relative to their experience. If the worst thing that has ever happened to you is someone called you "ugly", then that's a big deal for you because it is the worse emotional trauma that you have dealt with in your life.

As we grow older, mature in Christ and experience deeper "valleys", we must learn to be patient, understanding and compassionate towards those who have not yet endured suffering or hardships as intense as our own. If you have suffered the agonizing death of a child from cancer, not many people would argue that losing a job is as traumatic; but if losing that job is the worse you've ever experienced, then that loss is devastating. It's relative to our experience, so don't smirk at or shrug off someone who is in a "valley of shadow" that to you seems like no big deal. It takes maturity to

recognize when someone is melting down over something childish or petty versus recognizing that their "valley" is simply relative to their life experience.

I remember one time sitting in a Bible study at church a few years ago when we were in the darkest hours of our daughter's battle with cancer. It was horrible. She was suffering to the point where half the time we wanted her to live, and half the time we would have welcomed death to relieve her agony. In that Bible study, someone was in tears, sharing how some people at their job were talking behind their back and telling lies about them. My first response in my own heart was "big deal... that's nothing". I was immediately convicted by God, and reminded that you cannot dismiss the emotional suffering of others simply because they have not experienced trials as great as your own. For them it was a huge, gut-wrenching "big deal" because it was one of the worse things they had endured in their young life.

That's the first lesson I want you to consider. The 2nd is that there is no "valley of shadow" too deep that God is not there to comfort and guide you through it. If you are enduring insults from others (too often from other Christians which hurts even more), or you just found out your spouse is cheating on you... God will comfort you and see you through.

If you are dealing with lies told about you, or grieving over one of your children who has decided

they don't care about that "God stuff" anymore... God is by your side helping you walk through it. If you have lost your first job, or lost your home and all you own to a fire... God knows and cares and is there for you. If you are lonely and discouraged, or have been betrayed by the person you trust the most, God understands your sorrow and has compassion and grace in abundance waiting for you.

Think It Over: The "valley of the shadow of death" is relative to our experience. Whatever is the greatest hurt or trial we have ever suffered, that becomes our "valley" for that time in our life. Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, no matter what circumstances are the ingredients, you have no reason to fear, no reason to lose heart. God is with you. God is your staff (your help, your support, your protection). God will comfort you. You need only to draw close to God.

The Word become flesh. Have you stopped to think about that? The eternal Jesus, one with God, became a man. How astonishing.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

We learn in John 1 from the very first verse some astonishing facts about Jesus.

He was God. He was with God eternally. He created everything. NOTHING was made that He didn't make, including all creatures of flesh.

Then we find in v.14 that Jesus became the very flesh He Himself had made. Remarkable, mind-boggling, beyond comprehension. God became human. If that doesn't "wow" you, it should. If that doesn't "wow" you, ask yourself "why doesn't it?"

Jesus became a man in every real measure of the word. He grew, He learned, He loved, He had emotions and physical needs. He was one of us. He dwelt among us. He lived a life just like you, just like me. And we beheld His glory.

It's easier for you and I to see His glory now because we are on the other side of all that His life accomplished. His life of grace. His life of Truth. His life of sacrifice. His life of love.

Your “words” are not you, but they represent the essence of you. God gave us His word in written form, our Bible. The Bible is not “GOD” but it represents all He is. Jesus is not just God’s preserved words, He is the Living Word... all that God represents yes, but actually, literally, truly one in essence and person with the Father. JESUS IS GOD.

Think It Over: The Apostle John wants you to know right from the opening verses who Jesus truly is. He doesn’t wait for you to discover it as you read the book. Read the opening few verses of the Gospel of John. Pause.... Meditate on them. Get a clear picture of Jesus Christ, Son of God... God. Then read the book of John with that understanding. Astonishing.

The world today puts so much focus on wealth; wealth is amoral, neither right nor wrong. It is what we do with it & how we get it.

Proverbs 28:6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity; Than one who is wicked in his ways, though he be rich.

Books like Ecclesiastes tell us that being good does not always equal good fortune. We live in a sin-cursed world, and often righteous people are poor while evil people are rich. Despite the TV "health and wealth" preachers, there is no Biblical promise that Christians prosper (financially) by some divine right.

It is an understandable temptation to be confused or even jealous when immoral, superficial, Godless people seem to have all the finer things in life, while hardworking, God-fearing righteous people struggle to make ends meet.

Let's be honest. Money is important. Money is useful. Money brings a lot benefits. It is a perfectly natural desire to want more money. For Christians, there is the very real desire that money opens up more ways we can invest in God's kingdom, and of course, that is a good thing.

Still, we have to be honest about money. James tells us that we ask God for more because... why? Because we want to use it on our own selfish desires. We often try to deceive ourselves and present God with a holy reason in our prayer for more income but deep down, we really want it to spend on our own comforts, pleasure and personal fulfillment. The Bible exposes true motives.

It's a spiritual tension. On the one hand, money is a blessing from a God, a good gift (something else James tells us). God gives it to us so we can live life, enjoy life and thank Him. On the other hand, it takes discernment, discipline and focus to keep money from becoming our focus in life, and our distraction spiritually.

Wealth is not holy or wicked. The hands that hold it determine that. Better to be poor and stay close to God, than rich and embrace the world.

There is nothing inherently "Godly" about being poor either. We can be poor and prideful and sinful and neglect the Lord. Our verse in Proverbs reminds us that "money" does not make us righteous, or prove some special favor or blessing on us by God.

Think It Over: It's what we do with money – how we use it, give it, spend it and invest it in God's kingdom – that determines whether we walk in integrity or live in wickedness. Don't be consumed with getting more money, knowing that most of the time, our true motive is too simply use it on our own

pleasure. Focus on “getting more God” and the Lord will take care of giving you whatever money He knows you need to live in His perfect will.

Humanity hasn't changed. Neither has God.

Deuteronomy 7:9 “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

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Every day the news brings some new twist, concern, disaster, heartache... something to cause an uncertain world to seem even more uncertain.

You know what? It's nothing new. We just hear about it today a thousand new ways, and a thousand times faster than in the past. Life has always been uncertain. There have always been wars, poverty, epidemics, terrorists, evil men, crime and oppressive governments. Nothing has changed.

Man hasn't changed since the first sin committed by Adam. His heart (and through him all humanity – Romans 5:12) became desperately wicked, seeking all manners of ways to cheat, hurt, lie, steal, violate and kill (Jeremiah 17:9; Genesis 6:5). It's been downhill ever since. God warned us clearly of what sin would bring: death (Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

So that's some cheery news huh? Well, there is some good news. Good News. While man has NOT changed, NEITHER has God! In spite of the havoc that saturates humanity from the overflow of wicked hearts, God still remains compassionate, merciful and faithful.

God warned us we would die if we rejected Him and now we are all in the same hopeless condition. The greatest expression of His love and mercy is how God has rescued us from the ultimate consequence of evil: death. But God's rescue comes on HIS terms, not ours. That's that problem people have with it. We want to dictate terms to God but the "creature" has no right to demand or command the "Creator".

Mercifully, the rescue has been offered: repent (turn away from) your sin (whatever is not what God wants), and place your faith (belief + trust... like you believe a parachute exists, but you have to trust it and put it on, then jump out of the plane) in Jesus to save you from death. Repent of your sin, place your faith in Jesus. That's salvation from eternal death on God's terms. There are no other terms. None.

"What death?" you may ask. The rightful and just death that comes from being liars, thieves, murderers, blasphemers, adulterers, etc. "NOT ME! I'm a good person..." you may respond. Don't feel alone, most people think that same thing. Ever told a lie? What do you call someone who lies? How

many lies does it take? Ever stolen, anything at all, even time from your employer? Ever hated someone? Jesus said hate is murder in your heart. Ever lusted? Jesus said that is adultery in your heart (because you've already done the deed in thought and would physically as well if you thought there were no consequences). Ever take the Lord's name in vain, use it irreverently or as a cuss word? "OMG, no!" you say.

Side thought: *ever wonder why people don't say "Oh My Hitler!" or "Satan damn you!"? Why is only the names of God and Jesus, our Creator and Savior, used as cuss words and irreverent exclamations? It is the wicked hearts of sinful people expressing their rejection of God who holds them accountable for their sin.*

That's four or five of the Ten Commandments... we could do the rest but no need. We are all liars, thieves, adulterers and blasphemers by our own admission and choices. I'm good? You are good? No, clearly not. Quite the opposite just as the Bible reveals to us. I deserve my just and right penalty of eternal death for giving God the middle finger and being my own "god", doing what I want, justifying and enjoying sin. All who reject God the Creator proclaim themselves to be their own god.

God is faithful and keeps His promise for thousands of generations. What promise? The promise to rescue us from our wicked hearts, our sin and our eternal condemnation. Aren't you glad your

merciful Creator (and He is your Creator, admit it or like it or not, doesn't matter) hasn't given up on you?

Think It Over: If you are reading this today and you have not humbled yourself before God, asked forgiveness and placed your obedient faith in Jesus Christ, God is still trying to get your attention before it's too late. You could be dead a thousand ways before the sun goes down. Then it will be too late. What is more important than eternity? What sin or selfish desire NOW is worth being lost for ETERNITY? Download my new book, "It Matters What You Believe" to consider this more. This might be the most important day of your life.

<http://www.seriousfaith.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Brent-Riggs-It-Matters-What-You-Believe-PDF.pdf>

There is no need to envy what others have. It is meaningless, and a waste of time. Be content with God's provision today.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Advertising has a goal. To make you discontent. I've developed advertising and marketing for a couple of decades so I'm in on the secret.

Your car is not new enough, feature-packed enough and doesn't make you look as young, cool and successful as the newest model. You should be discontent with your car even though it is perfectly functional and transports you wherever and whenever you need comfortably.

Someone decided that your clothes are out of style and make you look less than hip and fashionable. Even though your current wardrobe is barely worn, you should be discontent because the same people who make the clothes and profit from them get to declare every year what is "in style".

Your house isn't big enough or nice enough. You don't have all the cool toys that you deserve. You don't make enough money. You don't have all the things that make you hip, cool, successful, in style, in touch and part of the "in" crowd.

Discontentment. It is the fuel that powers materialism. Without advertising, product endorsements, celebrity pimping and cultural peer pressure, most of us have everything we need to be content: food, water, a bed, clothes, transportation, communication, entertainment... yet for some reason we need more, bigger, better and newer because we are pushed a thousand ways every day into being discontent with what we have. Most people don't even realize it.

My wife and I have a modest home on an acre of land; we drive 6-10 year old cars with lots of miles; we have clothes that aren't expensive or the most fashionable. My oldest son was sitting out in my backyard with me the other day and said, "you got your own little slice of heaven Pops". He was right. A home, food, clothes, vehicles, some grass to run around on, clean water, air conditioner... what more could we need? Contrary to commercials, why do we "deserve" more? "You deserve..." is the most favored phrase in advertising to drive discontent, and coupled with our natural selfishness, becomes the crack pipe of materialism.

I think of what my son said every time I see a huge expensive home I know I'll never be able to buy. I think of it when I see people driving by in brand new cars I can't afford. I think of that whenever I see people dropping off their old clothes at Goodwill while dressed in really nice brand name clothes from this year's coolest fashion trends.

I think of that everytime a commercial reminds me I'm not cool or successful but that can change if I'll just buy something from them. I think of that when envy rears its ugly head and makes me wish I had more of something that I see someone has.

Contentment. It's a choice not based on what you have but how you think.

Think It Over: Being content comes with the right perspective. This life is short, unpredictable and temporary. Your money and possessions can disappear a thousand ways by the time the sun goes down. Most people spend every day of their lives being discontent... just one more purchase, one more dollar, one newer and bigger thing away from happiness. Like the carrot dangled in front of the donkey, always tempting you, always close but ultimately unattainable. Contentment isn't about what you have, it's a spiritual and mental maturity that originates in gratitude to God for He has blessed you with NOW. I have food, water, clothes and bed to sleep in. What is there to be discontent about? My own little slice of heaven...

There is no need to fear life. God does not give us a spirit of fear but one of security and love where we can call God Father.

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

No Fear. A popular bumper sticker but nothing but false bravado unless backed up by a transcendent and divine knowledge from God's Word that tells us what the future holds, and that we are safe and secure in God's hands.

Otherwise, you have MUCH to fear. A life without the blessed assurances of God and the gift of eternal life is an existence ruled by unpredictable circumstances of which only one thing is for sure: if things are not bad now, just hang on, they will be soon. Even worse, there are a thousand ways you could die this very day and spend an eternity separated from your Creator who loves you, but also demands an accounting of your life.

Fear! Fear! Fear... that's the truthful message for those who don't know God. For those who do: NO FEAR! God the Father is not surprised by a single event in our life and there is nothing that can remove you from the security of His gracious and all-powerful hand.

Think It Over: Do you proclaim the false “No Fear!” the world offers? Or the true “No Fear!” that only comes by placing your faith and trust in Jesus who died to save you from your sins and reserve your place in Heaven NO MATTER WHAT happens in this life? That is the only true “no fear” available to us.

There is NO need to fear, ever. Don't be discouraged either. You have all the help and strength you could ever need.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

If only I had more money. If only I lived in a safer place. If only the economy was more stable. If only the politicians I agree with were in office. If only I knew that I would never have a heart attack or get cancer. If only I could be sure my spouse will never cheat on me or leave. If only my kids would grow up to be good kids.

If only there was never a reason to fear... then for sure, I would never fear. Sorry, doesn't work that way.

There is plenty you could be fearful of in this sin-cursed world but for those whom God loves, **there is no reason to fear any circumstance of this life.** God is with you. God will strengthen you. God will see you through. God will hold you up, walk with you and see you across the finish line. Don't fear, don't be discouraged... there is no reason to for He is your God.

Think It Over: Of course this gift is only for those who love God and have placed their faith in Him. The magic words are “be merciful to me a sinner” which indicates you realize who you are, who He is, and that He is your only hope to pay your debt to Him. For those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus, there is no reason to fear for **I AM** is with us.

This is not a very peaceful world and it is becoming less peaceful all the time. Why? Because the Prince of Peace is ignored.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Peace. Most everybody wants it but few seek it in the only place it can be found. Over the course of human history countless peace treaties have been agreed to, only to be broken. In fact, being eventually violated is the only thing we can be sure of about a peace treaty.

We make peace in our families and relationships knowing that it is simply a matter of time before that fragile peace is once again shattered.

People wonder why but ignore the true answer about why peace is elusive. The Truth is, it starts with the fact that we as individual sinners are not at peace with God. Until we make peace with God on His terms, we have nothing but a temporary and fleeting chance to make peace with each other, or to have peace in our lives.

True peace starts with making peace with God. That is only done by accepting who He is, admitting who we are, and coming to a place that can best

be summarized by this simple phrase: God be merciful to me a sinner.

Once we have peace with our Creator, we now have the Prince of Peace empowering us to make peace with others, and enjoy true long-lasting peace in our own lives regardless of circumstances.

Think It Over: Seven words. Seven words that divide all humanity ("God be merciful to me a sinner"): those who have spoken them to God in sincerity, and those who have not. The former has peace, the latter does not, and cannot.

Purpose in life? Feeling discouraged or weary? Here's some thrilling encouragement.

2 Corinthians 1:21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God,

For those in Christ (that the folks who have said to Jesus 'be merciful to me a sinner' and placed their eternal trust in Him) they have been established and anointed by none other than the Creator of the Universe. Okay, so what? What does that even mean?

Established: to be recognized and accepted

Anoint: to confer a divine or holy purpose

So to amplify the verse you could say: "As Believer in Christ, the Person who recognizes and accepts you as well as gives you a divine and holy purpose is God Himself". Wow. If that doesn't do something for you, I don't know what will.

Think It Over: How does it change your life knowing that God Himself establishes and anoints YOU? It's more than a group thing talking about all Christians. It's personal. He establishes YOU. He anoints YOU. Does your life reflect that awesome privilege?

Want peace? Jesus told you what you need to know to have peace? How do I know? He said he did. Check it out...

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

"That you may have peace". Either it's true or Jesus is a liar. Let's assume He's not a liar. So what is the source of this peace?

Jesus is the essential source obviously but He communicated it to us in words: "these things I have spoken to you." What things? Well, I'm not going to make it that simple for you. Go read for yourself. If you want true peace in your life no matter what is going on around you, it's worth a few minutes of your time.

Think It Over: Hint: life is tough and difficult times will come. Especially for those who follow Christ. What can bring us peace during these times? Read the rest of John 16.
Think It Over: Hint: life is tough and difficult times will come. Especially for those who follow Christ. What can bring us peace during these times? Read the rest of John 16.

What is the one thing everyone longs for?

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It's been said that what we all have in common our need for love, longing for friendship, looking for acceptance, hoping for recognition, finding peace etc; a constant restlessness to make up for what is lacking in this sin cursed world.

I believe you could sum up what everyone longs for with one word: "rest".

Rest from investing in friendships only to have them fall apart. Rest from wishing you were loved unconditionally or without having to earn it. Rest from struggling with sin. Rest from the inevitable betrayals and disappointments of life. Rest from physical ailments. Rest from working hard for income only to see it taken away thousand different ways. Rest from all the ways that life falls short of what it is was originally meant to be when God created us.

Even the Apostle Paul himself - who was granted a visit to Heaven - struggled with the desire to find rest in the Lord's presence but knowing there was still more to do in this life. That is the great hope and gift that Jesus gives us by His sacrifice: the gift of eternal rest. Sadly most people will not accept His gift because they don't like the terms and conditions.

Jesus said, "Come to me all of you who feel burdened with life and I will give you rest." Has there ever been a person who at times is not heavy laden? It seems the older you get the weight of life accumulates and you understand the heavy burden that is allotted to us all compliments of the sin curse... and long ever more earnestly for eternal rest.

Rest. Sure sounds good to me.

Think It Over: I empathize with those who don't know of the rest Jesus offers both now, and in eternity. How inevitable it is that life will very often become "heavy laden", sometimes a crushing. Understanding this is 1) temporary and 2) eternal rest is the Lord's gift to us, certainly makes the burden more bearable now.

Eternal glory? There's a price to pay first.

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

"After you have suffered for a while..." You won't hear that preached in the "what's in it for me God?" Christianity that has infected much of western culture. We just want to hear about "our best day", blessings, prosperity, favor, abundance, etc. Biblical teaching on suffering does not build huge affluent churches.

Regardless, the Bible has much to say on the topic and guarantees suffering for the faithful even to the point of clearly telling us: if the Master suffered why is it surprising that His followers will?

- 2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...
- 2 Corinthians 4:17: For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
- James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.
- John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this

world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

- 1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.
- Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

That's just a small sampling of Scripture on the topic. It says something about our modern Biblical mindset when Scripture has so much to say about suffering, and we say so little about it.

We suffer because the world hates Jesus. We suffer because we proclaim a single path to salvation. We suffer because declaring something sinful convicts those who indulge. We suffer because we still live in sin-cursed bodies and a sin-cursed world.

We suffer a "little while" then comes perfection, security, strength, peace and reward. It is a small price to pay for our eternal salvation which we did not deserve, could not earn, and cost Jesus His all.

Think It Over: I have often encouraged people to consider this... if you are not, or have never,

suffered in any way because of your faith, you should question the validity or depth of it. True faith in Jesus, obedience to God and devotion to Christ will always cost us – ridicule, loss of opportunity or freedom, rejection, scorn and sadly at times, physical persecution even to death. The Cross cost Jesus everything. Taking up your cross and following Him has a cost as well.

We don't hear much today about being serious and alert. We just hear about having fun and being care free. There is a reason.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant;
because your adversary the devil walks
about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he
may devour.

The main topic of most Christian teaching today is "what does it do for me"; why? That's what sells books and fills churches. Biblical teaching on living a serious life, keeping careful watch out for sin and spiritual dangers, and being on guard for Satan is not rah-rah "Jesus will improve your life" stuff.

And yet, the message to the Church all through the New Testament is to be on guard, be alert, be watchful, be careful, be cautious, be spiritually aware, be serious minded, avoid worldly and trivial time-wasting pursuits, run from sin and wickedness. If you only took cues from books and preaching today, you'd think God's primary concern for us was our feelings, our pleasure, our entertainment, our satisfaction and our very focused self-consideration.

Be sober: to be solemn, serious, sensible and mindful. Of course you could extend this to mean avoiding drunkenness too (or any mind altered state), but it's much deeper than that. It's an

awareness of the seriousness of sin, and the imminent return of the Master which could come at any moment. If you knew, or truly believed, that Jesus was returning today, would you waste your day on trivial, worldly, fleshly nonsense? No. It would focus you on what is important, and what needs to be done. Soberness.

Be vigilant: to keep careful watch, to be alert, to be on guard. It is a state of readiness to take full advantage of every opportunity for righteousness, and state of alert to avoid all potential evil. Like a vigilant soldier on guard duty who is ready to fight the enemy and come to the aid of his allies.

Think It Over: Be sober, be vigilant... why? Because the most powerful being God ever created went rogue. He and his pals are prowling the earth looking for those they can devour and destroy. The easy targets are those who are engaged in the silly, foolish and trivial; and those who they can catch off guard. Is that you?

We get a lot of guarantees & have little trust they will be kept. But there is one guarantee that will ALWAYS be kept.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

“Ninety-day money back guarantees”. “Established in 1851”. “Sealed with a kiss”. “Giving you our very best”. The world throws around a lot of marketing lingo and often, we have no reason to think they will honor it. Sadly, it's often the same with our jobs, friends, family, co-workers and – shamefully – fellow Christians. Of course we understandably have almost zero trust in the guarantees and promises of politicians/government.

But there is one source we can place our full faith, trust, hope and confidence in: God. In our verse, Paul refers to the works of God the Spirit in our lives:

Establishes – sets in place, secures, determines without fail, firmly grounds, sovereignly declares

Anoints – this is not some special anointing but the common anointing for all Believers (1 John 2:20, 27) whereby we are each specially and particularly empowered and prepared to fulfill our service for Christ

Seals – in ancient history a “seal” was an authentication of identity and authority. We still see it today in such things like a notary seal. The seal prevented tampering, forgery and unauthorized use. God seals and protects us for His purpose.

Guarantees – more specifically a down payment. The Spirit indwelling the Believer is the down payment on eternal salvation and security in Christ. It is a pledge, a promise, a voucher by none other than God Himself whereby we are declared saved and righteous by His authority. We are purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ on an eternal layaway plan!

Think It Over: In this sin-cursed world, no amount of promises, contracts, lawyers or laws keeps someone from not honoring their word, breaking an agreement, or ignoring a guarantee. We just have to live with that fact for the time being. But, praise God, Believers in Jesus can confidently believe in ALL of God's promises from salvation to peace to joy to His daily care. Not a single promise, guarantee or seal of God will ever fall short, be neglected, get compromised or fail. Not one.

**We have to trust that evil will end someday
— for good – lest we be tempted to give up or
join evil.**

Psalm 125:3 For the scepter of wickedness
shall not rest on the land allotted to the
righteous, Lest the righteous reach out their
hands to iniquity.

Sometimes evil is so relentless, so tiring, so draining that we are tempted to just give up. We live in that type of culture today. While the rest of us wake up and go to work, raise families, help others, worship and live life, there is a segment of our society dedicated to tearing down everything good, everything Godly, everything disciplined, everything wholesome.

It's their purpose, their goal, their life. They rise each day and every decision, plan and action is geared towards accomplishing their goals of crumbling all things righteous. A sampling of those destructive causes would include but are certainly not limited to: removing all moral constraints, tearing down the traditional family that is the building block of humanity, confusing people about religion, convincing us we are the product of random chance no better than animals and foundational to it all, creating a lawless environment where each person is a law unto themselves.

Judges 17:6 In those days ... every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death.

Every day we see this tireless assault on righteousness. Everyday we see the double standard and hypocrisy. Every day we see another brick removed from the wall of healthy, stable, law-abiding, God-fearing, loving respectful kind-hearted society. We see the wall crumbling, sometimes slowly, sometimes at alarming rate... but always crumbling.

God anticipated this. He said "you reap what you sow" but also gave us verses like Psalms 125:3 that reminds us WE WIN. In the end, evil will not prevail, so don't be tempted to give up, or join the dark side. The Lord God Almighty Creator of Heaven and Earth is with us and has already declared that THE RIGHTEOUS PREVAIL in the end.

Think It Over: One thing the forces of darkness do to their credit: they are RELENTLESS. They live every day with a single purpose. Their "cause" is their life. Everything else revolves around that. Ironically, that's how Christians should live but we are too often doing Mark 4:19 instead. Look it up.

**Even though we have not seen God,
we know Him if we know Jesus.**

**John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time.
The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom
of the Father, He has declared Him.**

Have you ever considered that you will never see a physical form of "God the Father"? He exists only as light, pure glory in the form of light. But you will see God in physical form someday either 1) welcomed by Him if you are saved, or 2) to bow your knee and be condemned by Him if not.

You will see Jesus who is "God the Son", God manifested as human, existing in glorified physical form. Like Him, someday we – those who have placed their faith in Christ - will have our glorified eternal body. Just as Jesus walked and talked and ate and drank as a real person after rising from the dead, God will give us a new and perfect, sin-free body when Jesus returns to the earth to get us. You will be you, I will be me... just in perfection: no sin, no disease, no death, no pain.

As a bonus, God will then dissolve this current heavens and earth, and re-create it... giving us back our home that was lost the day Adam and Eve sinned and caused the first creation to be corrupted.

No one has “seen” God in the sense of seeing God in bodily form. Never will. But if you have repented of your sins, and cried out for God’s mercy offered through His Son Jesus, then you’ll know God the Father through the perfect reflection of Him through His Son.

Jesus had “declared” God – in other words seeing Jesus is seeing God. Jesus is the perfect representation, reflection and manifestation of the God the Father.

Think It Over: We get so attached to THIS world and this life. Why? It’s all so fleeting, fragile and temporary. We could lose everything today including our life. Are you prepared for that? We live every day of this life doing what God would have us to do knowing that it will all be over in a whisper of time and then eternity. The older I get the more I understand the dilemma of the Apostle Paul who was torn between this life (continuing to serve God now) and the next life (being with God and Jesus forever).