

The passage we are going to be studying over the next several weeks is

Proverbs 2:1-11

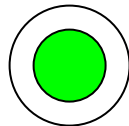
My child, listen to me and treasure my instructions. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of good sense to the godly. He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of justice and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise planning will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe.

Are you tired of what seems to often be just a one way dialogue with you crying out and praying to God and there seems to be just silence on the other end of the line? Are you frustrated at not knowing whether or not God is even listening to you, must less responding to what you are saying? Maybe you are facing some very important decisions in your life and you just want Him to tell you which way to go: either to the right or to the left. Maybe you are a person who wants to do what God wants you to do, but you are not sure how to get His attention.

Honestly, for me there are times where it all seems so ridiculous and like everything is some big test and trial and only if I get it just right, then maybe God will respond. But I have learned that what I just described is flat out wrong; it is a misunderstanding and a misperception of God, who He is, how He relates to us, and what He wants from us.

I am going to spend the next few weeks talking about the God who speaks and my intention is to explain to you and how He wants to talk to you about everything in your life. As we talked about last week, He knows you, He knows everything about you, He even knows your thoughts before they are formed, and He knows what you are going to say before you say it. He is the God who loves you. He is the God who is always thinking about you and He is the God who wants to lead you in all things and talk to you about all things. But His voice and His leading in our lives always comes by way of relationship.

For those of you who have been here from the beginning, I started Pathway by talking about what it is that God desires from us – the answer is simple – it is relationship. We were created for the very purpose of being in union and fellowship with God. And we are only complete when we find ourselves in Him. And although sin damaged the fellowship we once had with God, He desires each of us to be restored to Him and to have everything that caused, and continues to cause, a separation removed. God knows that we are never safer, never more protected, never stronger, and never more satisfied than when we are locked inside of Him in a deep, open and intimate relationship.



Take a look at the screen, this simple graphic of two circles is what I am going to be using over the next few weeks to describe the various places that we find ourselves with God in terms of our relationship with Him. In this graphic we have the smaller circle, which is meant to be us, and it is in the center of the larger circle, which is meant to be God. This is the place we want to find ourselves, completely enmeshed in Him, safe and secure with God surrounding all that we do and all that we are. This circle within a circle depicts what I would call the perfect relationship! The ideal! This is where we want to be.

Clearly, however, so few of us find ourselves in this place. So we need to ask ourselves why? Well, from the perspective of what it takes to have a healthy, vibrant and successful relationship – and I mean any relationship with God or each other – there are some essential factors that need to be present. For example: a **mutuality of interests**, a strong **attraction**, **honesty**, **loyalty**, and, and of course, **respect**. Let's look at each of these elements. I want to focus you on the fact that God has undeniable done His part, and He continues to do His part, to enable us to have a successful relationship with Him.

Mutuality: Jesus became like us. He became flesh so that He could experience all that we have experienced. He became a man in order that we can have a “high priest” who is sympathetic of our weaknesses and our temptations. He knows what we go through, He has gone through it. He knows how we are tempted, because He was tempted in all things. He knows pain, because He endured such incredible hostility. He knows love because He poured out His love on mercy on all those He came into contact with. Therefore, when it comes to taking an interest in all that is important to us, He did it and He lived it.

Strong Attraction: He loves us so much and is so attracted to us that He was willing to leave His place with the Father and come in the form of flesh so that He could have a relationship with us. He values intimacy with us above even His own life. That is an attraction, this is a love, that we cannot even comprehend.

Honesty: is perhaps one of the most important aspects of a relationship. Honesty is the basis for trust, which is critical to the success of any relationship. If someone deals with you out of lies and partial truths, then that relationship is really a sham and that person cannot be trusted. The relationship is built on a shaky foundation. You cannot trust yourself to that person without a strong likelihood of getting hurt and damaged. The one thing about God is that He has always been totally honest about who we are without Him and who we can be with Him. He has never sugar coated the reality of our spiritual condition! We are hopelessly sick and hopelessly lost without Him. Sometimes, His brutal honesty hurts, and we really don't like it. In fact, we don't like to be honest with ourselves, but inside we know that all that He says is true: all that He says about us, all that He says about Himself, and all that He says about what our lives can be like.

Loyalty: If we don't have loyalty in a relationship, we will never feel safe and secure and the relationship is always in question. But for His part, God's loyalty to us is in large part incomprehensible. He has never let go of us. Think about it, because of our sin and our rebellion, each one of us deserves death. But still He offers us the free gift of eternal life to everyone who is willing to believe. He offers everyone the opportunity to be His child and to be in permanent relationship with Him. Even when we have betrayed Him, denied Him, avoided Him, ignored Him, and just flat out rejected Him from having any substantial part in our day to day living, He has never turned His head away from us and He has kept His hand extended for us to grab—and it's still there extended to you.

Respect: In a relationship respect is experienced on a couple of levels. First it is an attitude and a mindset that honors another's wishes, their individuality, and personhood. Second, it is followed up by actions that are in support of the attitude. Fundamentally, we want to know that someone cares for us and considers us important by their willingness to care about the things that we care about and to not just try and force their will on us in areas where we are uncomfortable. But it does not matter what words someone may say to us if their behavior stands in contradiction, and their choices demonstrate an underlying disrespect. Both must be in alignment for there to be respect in a relationship. God has always been consistent in His dealings with us. First of all He never forces Himself on us. He merely makes His offer of life, love, peace and freedom available to us. But He always leaves the choice to us. He respects us enough that He will leave the choice of life and death, heaven and hell, to us. We are free to choose Him and we are free to reject Him. In addition, because He knows all things about you and about me, He knows what is important to us and He knows our deepest areas of need. And as loving Father, He is always ready to fill those for us. He cares for us, considers us, and thinks about us constantly. And with regard to His actions, He demonstrated His love

and respect for us by sending His only Son so that we might have the opportunity to be complete and to be restored to life.

So from the perspective of relationship, we must ask ourselves: has God done His part? Has God paved the way for us to experience the best, most marvelous relationship possible? I think we would have to say yes! There is really no basis from which we can criticize God in terms of His consistently doing all that He said He would do. But there is **still** something missing from this list of what it takes to have a successful relationship: that is deep, open, and frequent communication.

In the same way that God has done His part in securing the possibility for us to have a complete and fulfilled relationship with Him, He is also the God who speaks and communicates with you. He is always attempting to connect with you in order that you might be able to hear His voice, follow His leading, and receive His instruction and His wisdom for your life.

So you may be wondering how I can make such a bold claim on behalf of God, claiming that He speaks to all of us. After all, your experiences with God are probably a bit different. In fact, sometimes from our perspective, it seems that God does His best **not** to communicate. It often seems that He likes to keep His will a secret and it is up to us to search the heavens to find it; and if we don't, well too bad for us.

But let me assure you, the problem of our inability to hear God, understand His voice, to know His leading and His direction, and our inability to experience the fullness and completeness of the relationship is not because God is not doing His part, but it is because we are not reciprocating in this relationship in the way we should.

The fundamental reality is that for a successful relationship both parties to the relationship must be engaged at somewhat equal levels; and those five essential aspects of a successful relationship must be shared.

- We are also required to have a **mutuality of interests** with the things that interest God and the workings of His kingdom.
 - *Matthew 6:33*: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
 - *2 Corinthians 13:8*: "Our responsibility is never to oppose the truth, but to stand for the truth at all times."
- We are to have a **strong attraction** to Him because of how amazing, marvelous, beautiful, and indescribable He really is.
 - *Psalms 29:1-2*: "Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in holy array.
 - *Psalms 99:5*: "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; holy is He.
- We are to be **honest** with Him but first we must be honest with ourselves – for we cannot really be honest with Him unless we are honest with ourselves. We must accept the reality of our spiritual depravity and how we are just not capable of the wisdom that is needed to run and control our own lives. We need to be honest with how large our pride is, as we have continued to try and do it on our own despite our ever present failings. We must be honest with how much we need Him in everything.

- *2 Corinthians 13:5*: “Examine yourselves to see if your faith is really genuine. Test yourselves. If you cannot tell that Jesus Christ is among you, it means you have failed the test.”
- *John 15:5-6*: “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.
- We are to be **loyal** to His interests and to the overall relationship – we are to give ourselves only to Him and we are to forsake all others.
 - *Romans 6:12-13*: “Do not let sin control the way you live, do not give into its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.
 - *2 Corinthians 5:15*: “He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead, they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them.”
 - *1 John 2:24-25*: “So you must remain faithful to what you have been taught from the beginning. If you do, you will continue to live in fellowship with the Son and with the Father. And in this fellowship we enjoy the eternal life he promised us.
- We are to **respect** and **honor** God with not only our attitude, but our choices and our behaviors – our lives, in all respects, need to honor His authority in our life.
 - *Galatians 5:25*: “If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.
 - *Ephesians 4:21-24*: “Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God’s likeness – righteous, holy, and true.
 - *Philippians 2:5-7*: “Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. Through he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form.

I am sure that all of us have been in a relationship where we really care and love someone and we give and give to them but they just won’t reciprocate. It does not matter how much we give, it does not matter how much we love, it does not matter how much we try, how much we change for them, they just don’t want it; and there is nothing we can do to alter their desire. Those are painful experiences and very hard to get over. But think of the parallel: this is how we act toward God. This is how we treat His attempts to draw us to Him and to be showered in His love and embrace. This is how we react to His marvelous promises of life, peace, rest, freedom, and abundance. And no matter how much He has done to give us the opportunity to be complete in Him, we simply act like we don’t want it.

The funny thing is that then when life gets really messed up, complicated, and we are in pain, or we have to make a critical decision that will greatly impact our future, all of a sudden we really want God to talk to us and we want Him to be there for us. But when we don’t hear anything from Him, when we want it, we complain as if it is His fault and He is just refusing to speak to us.

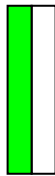
However, instead of looking in the mirror and understanding that we are not doing our part of building and investing in this relationship, like spoiled children we blame Him and say things like: God does not speak to me; the Bible really does not work, I have tried it but I felt nothing and nothing really changed. It all stayed the same. And so we live in frustration and for the most part desperation. This can be depicted in the following diagrams.



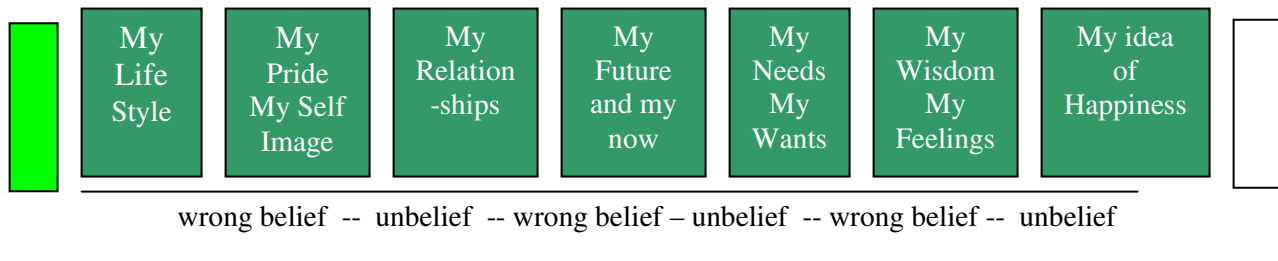
The first one has us barely a part of the relationship. We have removed ourselves from being within His circle of protection. Yes, we are still connected, but we have pushed ourselves as far out as possible and are off doing our own thing. The other picture has us part in and part out of the circle of God.

It's no wonder that from our perspective it seems that He is not talking to us. The reality, however, is that we are not in the position to hear from Him. We have built so many walls and barriers to a good, healthy, and successful relationship, that His voice is lost. I will use another diagram to take another look at what is happening when we push ourselves out of the circle of God.

Lets first start with the ideal and then that will help us understand where we often are at. In the ideal we are side by side with God and there is no separation between Him and ourselves. In fact, from a distance when you look at us, we look like one person. Unmistakably ourselves; yet, at the same time unmistakably God.



But when we are not willing to identify with a **mutuality of interests**, when our attraction for God wanes, when we are not **honest** with ourselves in terms of our absolute need for Him and we believe that we can do ok on our own, when we switch our **loyalty** away from Him and instead invest it in ourselves, the things of this world, our friends, our family, our jobs, our careers, our future, our relationships, our rights, our desires, our dreams etc., and, when our attitude, our choices, and our behaviors do not reflect a **respect** for His authority in our lives and we live to please ourselves and listen really only to ourselves, then there are so many things that prevent us from clearly hearing His voice. Its not that He is not talking, it's that we cannot hear Him because everything that we have placed between us and Him separates us and filters and mutes His voice.



The good news is that despite what we do, God never stops being God and so He never stops doing His part to have a restored relationship with each of us. He never stops His part of offering His grace and His mercy towards us so that we can come to Him in the fellowship of love. He never stops loving us – never! His love is eternal and His love is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

But you must understand, if you are going to hear His voice, if you are going to know His wisdom for your life, if you are going to receive and experience all the promises that God has made to you, you are going to have to do your part to make this relationship mutual. **You simply must do your part!**

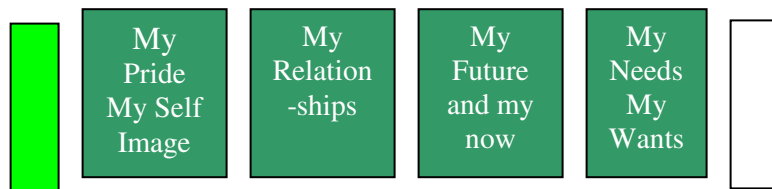
Underlying each one of these areas that we have allowed to come between us and God is some manner of wrong belief and unbelief in the things God has said about Himself, and who He will be for us, and who we are without Him.

For our part of this relationship, God desires complete dependence and trust – our willingness to believe the truth about Him. This circles us all the way back to the very first teachings I gave about Faith. Everything is about faith – the willingness to take God at His word and to actively believe the truth: to base all that we are and all that we do on all that He has disclosed to us about Himself. He has said that He is sufficient for all areas of our life and when we understand that and when we are willing to believe it, we will be doing our part.

For His part of the relationship, God promises that if we invest in and develop a relationship with Him – through believing the truth – that we will be able to know His will in all things, that He will guide us, lead us, direct our steps, and He will give us His wisdom so that we will know the right course of action all the time, every time. What an amazing exchange. Going back to Proverbs 2 lets read what it says in verses 5-11:

...you will gain knowledge of God. For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of good sense to the godly. He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of justice and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy.

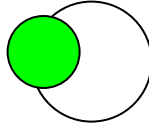
So if we want to hear the voice of God in our lives, if we want to have His wisdom to know the right course of action to choose each and every time, our goal is to eliminate the barriers of wrong belief and unbelief that stand between us and God. As we learn what God desires, as we learn what He has to say about each area of our life, and as we understand how faithful He has been towards us, and we start to trust him with our life, the barriers start being removed. And with every barrier that is removed, His voice becomes louder and clearer and our ability to discern with clarity what He is saying to us improves because we have simply moved closer to Him.



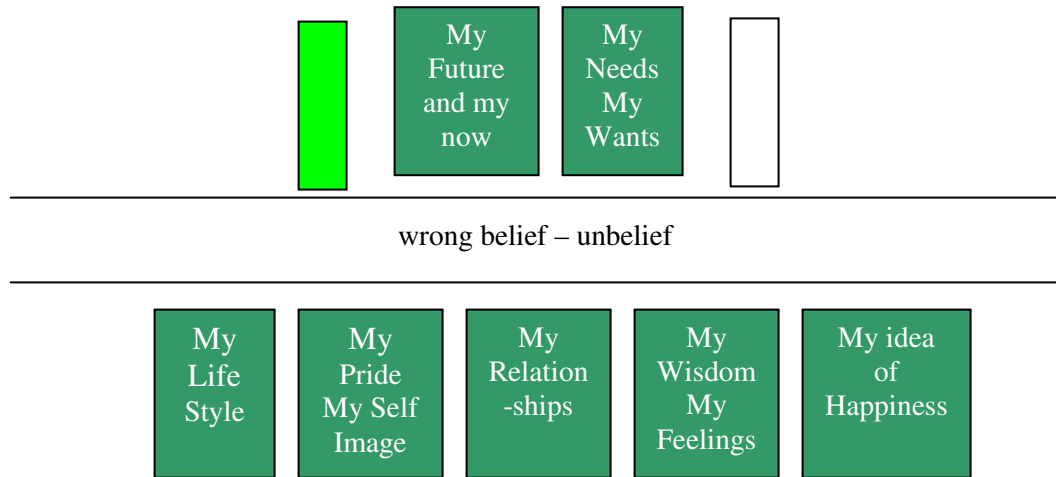
wrong belief -- unbelief -- wrong belief – unbelief



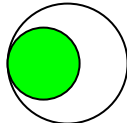
And with each area of wrong belief and unbelief that we remove, we begin to move closer and closer into the circle of protection and covering that can be ours in God.



And so we continue the process. As we grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit focuses our attention on these areas of wrong belief and unbelief, and as we choose to believe the truth, we become closer and closer to achieving the level of intimacy and oneness that Jesus desires us to experience with Him.



And before you know it, you will find yourself safe and secure in His arms of love. And you will be able to hear his voice, discern his leading, and you will obtain His wisdom for your life; and that knowledge will fill you will joy. No more fear about decision making, no more fear about did you do the right thing or not, you can know that you made the right decision.



Remember, Jesus is about relationships. It is Jesus’ heart that we are one with Him, fully enmeshed in His circle of love and protection. The following passage that we are going to look at comes from a prayer that Jesus made to His Father on the night before He was crucified. He had His disciples gathered close and in their presence He prayed:

John 17:13, 17, 20-21

"But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves... Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth... "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

This is the heart of Jesus and the heart of the Father – that we are one in Him. So to start this journey towards oneness and to fully experience life lived within the circle, let’s look at the very beginning of our passage in Proverbs 2

Proverbs 2:1-4

My child, *listen* to me and *treasure* my instructions. *Tune* your ears to wisdom, and *concentrate* on understanding. *Cry out* for insight and understanding. *Search* for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure.

This is the path that has been set before us. This is the path to knowing the wisdom of God. This is the path to hearing His voice. Over the next few weeks we will be diving deep into understanding this process and how we can listen, treasure, tune, concentrate, cry out, and search. Remember, His promise:

Jeremiah 29:13

You shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

But He will be found in the context of relationship. He will be found in our doing our part to make this relationship mutual and shared. In fact, as we understand this process whereby we listen, treasure, tune, concentrate, cry out, and search, we will find that this is the process of making the relationship mutual – of our fulfilling the five essential aspects to a healthy, vibrant and successful relationship. We will also find that this is the processes whereby we learn what it means to fear the Lord. So I invite you back to learn how you can hear and know the voice of God in your own life.

Let's Pray

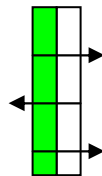
We are currently in a study talking about the God who speaks. I began this series a couple of weeks ago by declaring that God desires to speak into your life and lead you down the paths that He has chosen – paths that take you closer to Him. In addition, God wants to give you the wisdom that comes **only** from Him – the wisdom that you need to understand what is right, just, and fair and the wisdom to know how to **find** the right course of action every time. In other words, you can know and understand the will of God for your life. What we are to do with ourselves, what we are to be, is not to be left to some game of chance and speculation, it is not to be subject to some role of the dice or discerned through some “sign” in the sky. God says that we can live with confidence, with conviction, with purpose, and know that we are walking in, and fulfilling, the very works that God has appointed for each of us to fulfill.

By way of review, we talked about the fact that God **most often** speaks to us and leads us in the context of a mutual relationship. We talked about the five aspects of a relationship that must be present in order for there to be a healthy, vibrant, and sustaining relationship where communication can be mutually exchanged and understood. Those five aspects are:

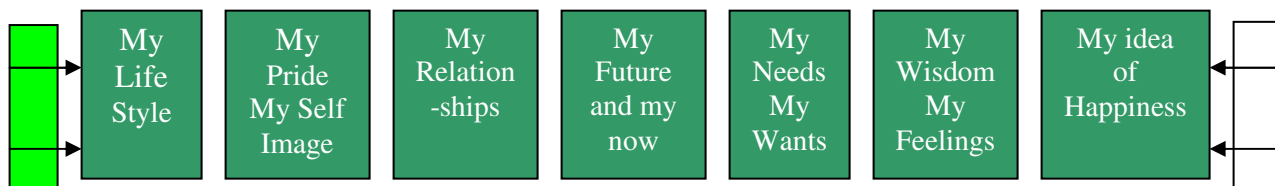
- A mutuality of interests;**
- A strong attraction;**
- Honesty;**
- Loyalty; and**
- Respect.**

As we studied previously, God is always doing His part, and has always done His part, to meet these relational needs for each of us. But the reason so few of us are able to hear the voice of God and understand His leading in our lives is because we rarely reciprocate; and so there is little mutuality in this relationship. We have placed so many things between us and God that they block and drown out His voice in our lives. Yet, when we need Him, when we really need help, when we need direction and guidance, we all of sudden turn to Him seeking answers. Then we find ourselves distraught, confused, and dismayed as to why we are not hearing His voice. Then comes the sad part, we usually point the finger at Him and blame Him for not coming through for us. We begin to doubt the veracity of the word of God and we don’t really believe that God really will talk to us. As a result, we make decisions based on our own wisdom, all the time crossing our fingers just “hoping” we got it right. But there is always this lingering doubt – an insecurity that fills our being.

It is imperative that we understand that when we are close to God and in a tight mutual relationship, there is very little that separates us. We have a oneness and a unity and the flow of communication practically is unhindered.



However, when we are not doing our part, when we are not reciprocating in the key areas of a relationship, then all manner of things that are in our lives prevent us from properly hearing the voice of God or understanding His leading in our lives.



With that said, it should be clear that in order for us to hear the voice of God and receive His wisdom for our lives, we need to focus ourselves on developing a mutuality in our relationship and removing all that is in our lives that cause interference and obstruction to our unity and oneness with God. So tonight we are going to talk about what it looks like from our end to reciprocate the efforts that God always puts forth towards our relationship.

Let's go back to our text in Proverbs Chapter 2.

Proverbs 2:1-11

My child, listen to me and treasure my instructions. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of good sense to the godly. He is their shield, protecting those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of justice and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise planning will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe.

Tonight we are going to focus only on the first 4 verses. These verses establish the pathway or the method for us to reciprocate in our relationship with God. But before we jump into that, when I talk about reciprocating in this relationship, I want you to think tangibly and practically – but not in the sense of going out and trying to do something for God – trying to be holy or righteous – that is not what I believe God has in mind when He asks us to reciprocate in this relationship. But I want you to think tangibly and practically because God is a living being and He is someone to be in relationship with in a real and practical way. He is not our big genie in the sky that grants our 3 wishes when we rub the lamp. He is not like a big vending machine that when we decide to pop in our quarter, we get something from Him. No! He is alive and He desires intimacy. This means that He wants us to spend time with Him, He wants us to want to want Him, He wants us to cultivate a deep relationship just like we would with anyone with whom we fall in love with.

Each of you know that if you spend on average less than 10-15 minutes a day with a person and if all you talk about is what is important to you and what is bothering you, and what you need, you will never really know that person. You won't understand what makes them tick, what makes them happy, what grieves them, and you will not know how to love or to be loved by them. You end up with a one-sided and self-centered relationship. You expect the other person to be there for you, but what about your part?

The reality of life is that to make any relationship of love really work, and sustain, there requires some level of ongoing and real time – day in and day out – investment in the other person of your time, your passion, your thoughts, your emotions, your secrets and even the most mundane aspects of your life – for all of it is important to one who loves you. If you want a relationship of love to last and be fruitful, you must entrust all of who you are to the other person. Further, you must be willing to be there, to be available, and be willing at a minimum to listen to what the other person has to offer and has to say – you must be willing to give the other person air time or there will be no mutuality. You must take an interest in what interest them. This is the essence of reciprocating.

The Holy Spirit says: My child, **listen** to me and **treasure** my instructions. **Tune** your ears to wisdom, and **concentrate** on understanding. **Cry out** for insight and understanding. **Search** for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure.

We must **listen** to what the Holy Spirit is saying and we must totally value and **treasure** His instructions for our lives. A literal translation of the Hebrew says that we are to take and hoard the words of God: we are to grab them and receive them within our being and protect them. Get the picture: we are to be like starving people that

come across the very food that we need for our life and we are to take it – take it and hoard it – so we never find ourselves without. We are to consume the word of God and keep it hidden in our hearts so we can always have it to call upon.

God’s instruction for our lives, God’s wisdom, is the most valuable thing we can find. It is far more valuable than anything we can possess. This brings to mind the story of King Solomon. When he became King of Israel, God came to him and asked him what he wanted and said that He would grant Solomon’s request. But in His prayer, Solomon did not ask for silver or gold, power or authority, or a long life for himself; rather, he asked that God would grant Him wisdom and an understanding mind to rule as king. Solomon was humble enough to know that he did not have what it would take to rule the nation. Thus, he placed the highest value on the wisdom that only comes from God and that which is found in the word of God. God was so impressed by this selfless prayer, that in addition to the wisdom that He requested, God also gave Solomon riches and honor galore.

We have to remember that, spiritually speaking, we are impoverished and completely in need. We cannot save ourselves, we do not have the wisdom to guide our own lives, and we do not have the foresight or the power to come up with the right answers. We may get lucky from time to time – but even then we are just judging by external circumstances and we really do not know if we have chosen the right paths for our lives. We must understand that God alone has the foresight, the knowledge and the power; and God alone has the words of life. In John 6:63-64 Jesus said:

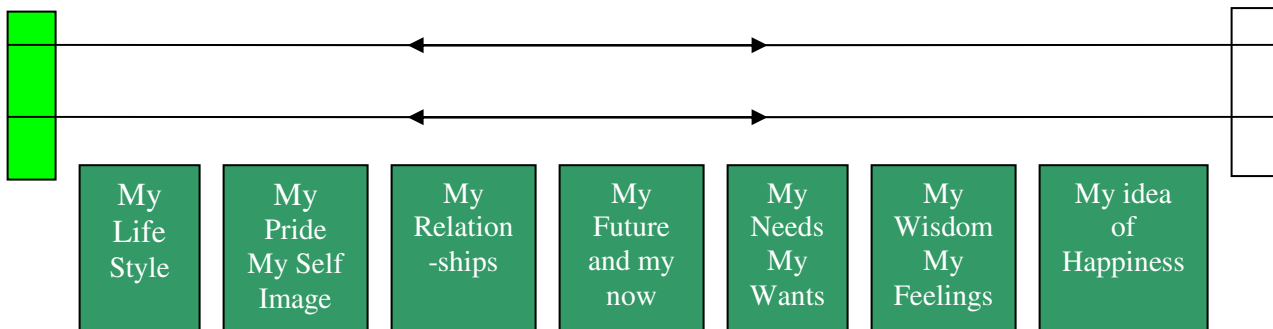
John 6:63-64

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

If his words are life, then we must listen to him and treasure those words within our heart.

Then the Spirit says that we are to **Tune** our ears to wisdom. We are to focus the ears of our soul to His voice. It’s like tuning a radio where the station is hard to pick up: you keep playing with the dial until you get a clear signal and all the interference is gone. As I am sure everyone has experienced, there is practically no way to get an appreciation for a song when the radio has tons of interference and static. In fact, instead of bringing joy and brining pleasure, it is actually annoying and brings tension and stress into our bodies. We become as irritated as the static is irritating. This is how it is with our pursuit of God. This means we have to be willing to eliminate from our minds anything that brings distraction and static, anything that keeps us from focusing and tuning the ears of our spirit to the voice of the Lord. We must continue to dial it in and continue to fine tune and never be ok with the static and never be ok with all that we allow to interfere with His voice. We must push it all down and push it all out of the way, for it brings nothing but stress, tension and trouble into our lives. We must have no tolerance for any of the self-isms that tend to dominate our thoughts and our emotions.

This **diagram** is intended to illustrate the clarity of the back and forth communication that can be ours when we push our self-isms out of the way. There are relatively no hindrances to the flow of communication and in this place we are able to hear and discern the voice of God and His leading in our lives.



Next, we must **concentrate** on understanding. In listening and tuning our ears, that represents what takes place in our spirit, but now we get to something much more tangible – what takes place in our minds. In the Hebrew, it basically says that we are to use our intelligence and with skillfulness, discretion, and reason, we are to be focused on understanding. This means that if we want wisdom, if we want the knowledge of God, then we are not to be casual with God and His word, we are not to be in a take it or leave it kind of mindset. When we push down all that distracts and interferes with us hearing His word, then we need to concentrate on it, apply our minds and our intelligence and work at understanding what He says about Himself, about us, about our lives and about His will for our lives.

I love this about God. Christianity is not for the ignorant and the blind fool who just believes in some outdated religion. In fact, in Isaiah 1:18 God says: “Come now, and let us reason together”. God is not afraid of any man or the limited reasoning capabilities of any man. God is supreme and His knowledge and wisdom are infinite and cannot be discovered by anyone without God’s willingness to open the windows of His wisdom to that person. God puts out the challenge: if you think you’re smart, if you think you have understanding, then come reason with me and I will convince you beyond a shadow of a doubt that not only do I exist, but my words are true and my words are life. So concentrate on understanding me and apply your mind to my word, and you will live.

Next, we must **cry out** for insight and understanding. This is a cry of distress, a scream of absolute need for help. The Hebrew relates this to a cry similar to when someone is accosted. In other words, we are to absolutely know how desperate our spiritual condition is, and how inadequate we are on our own –without the help of the Holy Spirit – to figure out God and understand Him and to receive His leading in our life. We are helpless and at great peril when we rely **only** on our own wisdom. This is a spiritual fact. That is why we must cry out and yearn for insight and understanding. The Apostle Peter says it this way:

1 Peter 2:2

You must crave pure spiritual milk so that you grow into the fullness of your salvation. Cry out for this nourishment as a baby cries for milk, now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.

When a baby is hungry, everyone knows it. A baby cries out of pure need and helplessness. In the same way we are to yearn, desire, crave, ache, covet and hunger for God’s words of life. And, we are promised that if we cry out for insight and understanding, that the Holy Spirit will teach us and reveal to us the wisdom that comes from God.

1 John 2:27-28

But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you so you don’t need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you all things, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie. So continue in what He has taught you, and continue to live in Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:12-13

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

And finally, we reach the last of our relational duties when it comes to reciprocating in our relationship with God. We must **Search** for them (for insight and understanding) as you would for lost money or hidden treasure.

If you want to have the wisdom of God that will direct you in all things, you must be willing to pursue it with everything that is in you. All else must be considered worthless. Think of it this way. What you would do if someone told you that hidden somewhere in your house is a single stock certificate worth over \$20 million dollars? I, for one, would tear my house apart inch by inch until I found it. I would consider my house as worthless knowing that once I found the money, I could build a house that makes my current place look like rubbish. Nothing would stand in my way—not work, not my family, not my friends. Nothing! I would find it! I would give it my all.

Another way to look at this is through the life of a Professional athlete. Athletes obtain their status through hours and hours of untiring and relentless work, finely honing their skills. That is close to what the Spirit is describing. We are to yearn for the prize and put in the effort so we can taste of the victory. And because the Spirit lives with in us, we have the ability to search and keep on searching, but first, we have to be willing to consider all else worthless. The great news is that God promises that, if we are willing to pursue Him with that level of intensity and rigor, we will find Him and know Him – insight and understanding will be ours.

Jeremiah 29:11

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

James 4:7,8

So, humble yourselves before God. ... Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you.

The Spirit is always calling us to come, but few are willing to listen, and few are willing to dedicate their all to learning, knowing, and understanding it. We want the path to be easy. We want to throw a few “sincere” prayers up toward heaven, so God will come through for us. But that is not the path. In day-to-day practice, the pursuit of God is not just a quaint past time or curiosity to be entertained. No! It requires (1) an abandonment of your own wisdom, and (2) a resolute decision that you won't stop seeking until you discover the wisdom of God in such a way that you know how to **find** the right course of action for your life every time.

By way of example, I want to once again consider Solomon. Even though God answered his prayer and opened the windows of His wisdom to Solomon's heart, Solomon did not receive it as a direct deposit into his account. No Solomon still had to mine for it, he still had to search it out and dedicate his life to understanding and applying the wisdom he was given. Look at what Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes:

Ecclesiastes 1:12-13

I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem. I **devoted** myself to **search** for understanding and to **explore** by wisdom everything being done in the world.

Ecclesiastes 1:16-17

I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them." So I **worked hard** to distinguish wisdom from foolishness.

Solomon worked at it. He dedicated his life to knowing and applying wisdom. The whole book of Ecclesiastes documents his study of every aspect of human life and his search to understand all that the wisdom of God had revealed to him. With that being said, if even Solomon in all his wisdom had to search for it, seek it out, concentrate on it, study it and discern the differences between wisdom and folly, so must we. We must reciprocate!

I want to bring this all the way back to the 5 aspects of a strong and healthy relationship. When we **tune** our spirits to the voice of God, it is our way of showing that we have a *mutual interest* in hearing what He might have to say and it evidences the fact that we are not just approaching this as a one way only relationship. When we **receive** His word into our hearts and **treasure** His commandments, we are showing that we are *strongly attracted* to God and to the beauty, the power, and the magnificence of His word. When we realize our spiritual poverty and **cry out** to God in absolute helplessness, we are finally being *honest* with ourselves, and are finally dealing in reality about our inability to know how to lead and conduct our lives. In so doing, we are finally being honest in our relationship with God, and finally dealing in truth. When we **search** for insight and understanding, and we don't stop until we find it, we are demonstrating our *loyalty* to God and our loyalty to His word. Finally, when we **concentrate** on what wisdom is saying and **incline** our heart to understanding, we are showing that we respect the authority of His voice in our life. Furthermore, we are giving him the basic dignity and respect of listening to Him while He is speaking. However, we show the ultimate respect when we are willing to turn off all distraction and all interference, and listen **only** to His voice.

As each of you know, there is no shortcut to a good, healthy, and sustaining relationship. We have all filled out lives with shallow or superficial relationships. We have also experienced relationships that are just based on the physical connection and not much more. All of it, in the long run, is so unsatisfying and unfulfilling. In order to truly know someone and accept them and in order to be truly known and accepted, we must work at the relationship. There must be some level of mutuality and reciprocity.

This is one point that is so important – it is so crucial for us to grasp and believe. Yet, I have felt that I have not been able to really convince very many people of its validity. It seems that no matter what, when it comes to God, we still want a short cut we still want different rules. But I am going to say clearly, in no uncertain terms, there is no short cut. The rules of relationships don't deviate. We must reciprocate!

The good news is that what God asks of us is really simple – it just so happens that it grates against everything in our bodies and in our mind and emotions. But still it is really simple. It is to actively believe the truth: to dedicate ourselves to understanding and knowing Him. That is it! He has not asked us to go on a yearly trek to some city thousands of miles away to find him; or to go and wash in some river to be cleansed; or to go and master our flesh and deprive ourselves of everything that brings pleasure and satisfaction in this life; He has not asked us to seclude ourselves away in some isolated land where it is just us and God; he has not asked us to inflict pain on our bodies as a way of showing our allegiance and loyalty; and He has not asked to go and destroy our lives and the lives of others in order to get special privileges in heaven.

No! He has just asked us to search for Him and to search for Him with our entire heart, our mind and our soul. He wants us to make Him the object of our passion and our desire – He wants to be our priority above all else. And He promises that if we continue and continue to search for Him in this way, that we will find Him. He promises that we will find understanding, that we will gain the knowledge of God, that His wisdom will enter our heart, that we will understand what is right, just, and fair, and we will know how to *find* the right course of action each and every time.

But there is also a warning that I must deliver. God is calling you to know Him, but at some point, He will leave you to walk the path that you have chosen. He will always be calling, but overtime you will have put so much distance and so many obstacles between you and God that His voice will be nothing more than a mere cloud of illusion, a ever so faint memory somewhere in the back of your mind. If in your folly you choose your own wisdom and reject the wisdom of God, remember, He will always respect your right to choose. He will never force you – He will let you do what you want and He will let you go your own way. I want to close by reading a passage from Proverbs 1.

Proverbs 1:20-33

Wisdom shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square. She calls out to the crowds along the main street, and to those in front of city hall. "You simpletons!" she cries. "How long will you go on being simpleminded? How long will you mockers relish your mocking? How long will you fools fight the facts? Come here and listen to me! I'll pour out the spirit of wisdom upon you and make you wise.

"I called you so often, but you didn't come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention. You ignored my advice and rejected the correction I offered. So I will laugh when you are in trouble! I will mock you when disaster overtakes you — when calamity overcomes you like a storm, when you are engulfed by trouble, and when anguish and distress overwhelm you.

"I will not answer when they cry for help. Even though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me. For they hated knowledge and chose not to fear the LORD. They rejected my advice and paid no attention when I corrected them. That is why they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way. They must experience the full terror of the path they have chosen. For they are simpletons who turn away from me — to death. They are fools, and their own complacency will destroy them. But all who listen to me will live in peace and safety, unafraid of harm."

I pray that none of you will experience this – the terror of being left to your own wisdom. I promise it is not sufficient and it is not the pathway to peace and safety. For me personally, I would rather not be on this side of God's demonstration of "respect". I don't want Him to leave me to my own devices. I want His wisdom. I need His wisdom. I know that I am only safe and secure, and unafraid, when I choose to listen to and treasure His voice and His words for my life.

Let's Pray

We have been talking about the God who speaks. Our text for this study has been in Proverbs 2:1-11. The basis of this study has been relationship: God speaks to us and leads us in the context of a mutual relationship. However, as we have studied, most of the time the relationship is not mutual and it is not reciprocal: God does His part and we usually don't. This is obviously a problem; and it is the root as to why so many people really do not know or experience God in a deep and intimate way: where there is oneness and unity – where two become one.

Therefore, in order for us to really get to know God and to be able to hear His voice and know how He speaks to us and how He leads us, we need to approach Him as we would any relationship of love. In order for a relationship of love to be meaningful and successful, there needs to be a mutual value for value exchange. So we have been talking about this whole concept using the 5-key aspects to a successful relationship, which are: mutuality of interests, strong attraction, honesty, loyalty, and respect. Last week, we focused on the first 4 verses of Proverbs 2 and looked at how we can do our part and fulfill these requirements with regard to our relationship with God. We discovered the following:

We are to **Tune** our spirits to the voice of God. This is our way of showing that we have a *mutual interest* in hearing what He might have to say, and it evidences the fact that we are not just approaching this as a one way only relationship.

We are to **receive** His word into our hearts and **treasure** His commandments. In so doing, we show God that we are *strongly attracted* to Him and to the beauty, the power, and the magnificence of His word.

We are to **cry out** to God in absolute helplessness. We are to be *honest* with ourselves and with God about our spiritual condition and our need for His wisdom, His leading, and His voice in our lives, for we are helpless and wholly incapable of leading our lives down the right paths. We have no foresight into the future and we have no power to change it. Only He has the ability and the power – which is why we are in desperate need of Him.

We are to **search** for insight and understanding as if we are searching for hidden treasure. We are to search as if we are searching for the most valuable thing we can find. Through these continual efforts, we demonstrate our loyalty to God and His word.

Finally, we are to **concentrate** on what wisdom is saying and **incline** our heart to understanding. We are to show respect for the authority of His voice in our life, and give him the dignity of listening and focusing on what He is saying to us.

That basically sums up the process of how we complete our relational responsibilities. But the question still remains – how do we accomplish this – how do we begin this process of tuning, receiving, treasuring, crying out, searching, and concentrating. Well it all begins with the word of God. When the Spirit says: “listen to me and treasure my instruction” we cannot just walk away and say “cool – I think I will go find a cozy spot and listen to God”. We have to find the very source of His instruction and the containment of His wisdom. Sure we can find God revealed in and through many things: poetry, songs, nature, science, great writings of wise men, the marvels of the universe etc, but His instruction and His wisdom is revealed in His word. The word of God is God's chosen vehicle and primary method for revealing to us His heart, His ways, His desires, His likes, His dislikes, His personality, His character, and His wisdom for our lives. All that we need to know about God He has disclosed in His word. All that we need to know to live our lives has been disclosed to us in His word.

For those of you who have been around Christianity, I am going to approach this quite a bit different than you probably have been taught. This is not going to be some lecture and sermon that waves the Bible around and tells you that you must read your Bible. Yet, it is going to be just that -- a sermon that waves the Bible around and tells you that you must read your Bible. The distinction is going to be in the why.

If the Bible is the word of God, then it is our very source and our treasury of all that we need to know about God; and, therefore, it has the right and the place of authority over and in our lives. However, if the Bible is not the word of God and is just a collection of history, cool stories, and creative analogies and metaphors, then its place and authority in our lives is naturally suspect and questionable.

Therefore, one of the first questions we need to address is whether or not the Bible is the word of God. Was it written by men who were inspired and led by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what the Spirit wanted them to write, or is the Bible just a creation of man?

I know that here in our city, and many other areas in the world that consider themselves to be spiritually enlightened, the Bible is considered to be an interesting text, but not altogether authoritative. It is more linked and attached to religion, and a somewhat impotent religion at that, and not so much as the voice and instruction of the living God. In fact, if you carry it around, you are quickly dismissed as being unenlightened and probably a cold hearted, cruel, legalistic, and un-loving person. Sadly, that perception is not entirely ungrounded. Most people who consider themselves to be “spiritually advanced” beyond the wisdom of the Bible have usually come face to face with a cold hearted, cruel, legalistic and un-loving presentation and demonstration of the word of God. And because those who claim they hold to the Bible as truth do not seem to produce the love of God in any real, culturally significant, and practical way that proves to others that God exists, the Bible gets minimized and even trivialized in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. We hear the following types of descriptions of the Bible and questions regarding its validity:

1. The Bible is just a product of legend and fanciful tales written to inspire and to provoke, but it is not to be taken literally as truth; it’s just filled with general principles and a philosophy for living a good life.
2. You know what they say history is written by the winners and like with most writings it is written for political purposes and to push an individual’s or groups agenda – it is written by mere men with a purpose.
3. There is not enough evidence or proof for me to believe that it is somehow supernatural in origin.

With that said, I am going to start by giving you a few reasons that the despite what we have seen in the lives of those who call themselves Christians, and despite what modern spiritualist and humanists say, there are real reasons to trust the Bible as authoritative in our lives – both spiritually and practically. There is significant historical and cultural data and facts upon which we can rely that should cause us to seriously consider the Bible to be exactly what it claims to be – the very words of God. The Bible is unique, it is unlike any other piece of literature and so I am going to focus you on four fundamental distinctives of the Bible that sets it apart from any other piece of literature every written.

First of all, the Bible was primarily written by those who were participants in the events and who themselves had first hand knowledge and experience with the subject matter. For example, the New Testament was written within 60+ years after Jesus died. The last recorded writing was by the Apostle John, who was one of the original twelve and trusted 3 of the inner circle of Jesus. This final letter was written sometime between the years 90-97 AD – Jesus died in 33 AD. My point is that the writings were relatively contemporaneous with the events; thus, there would have still been many people living (those who supported Jesus and those who opposed Him) who would have been able to attest to the veracity of what was written. If it was mere legend and fanciful tale, with His miracles being nothing more than exaggerated hyperbole, it would have been immediately exposed and invalidated.

In writing to a man of position and prominence, Luke writes:

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

The gospel of Luke, which was written about 30-40 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, says that he carefully investigated all the claims, all the stories and what he documented was based on eyewitness accounts so that the **exact truth** might be known.

Paul, who wrote the majority of the New Testament, wrote most of his letters 15-20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. In writing his letter to the Corinthians he said that many people had seen the resurrected Jesus, more than 500, and that most of them were still alive. In other words, he was telling those at Corinth that if they doubt anything he is saying that they could go and validate it with actual witnesses. And there was enough controversy over this man Jesus that they did not have to look very far to investigate and validate the claims.

It is also important to note that all these writings were extremely public. They were not some private collection or "personal reflections on the Messiah" or a private journal of current events – they were broadly circulated throughout all the churches in Asia minor and Jerusalem. Neither Paul, Luke, John or any of the other writers would have been able to circulate their letters so publicly if they could have been easily proven wrong and invalidated by actual eyewitnesses.

You must also take into account the political and religious climate of the day. The Jews were hell bent on crushing Christianity and the Romans were hell bent on keeping peace. As a result, they were constantly persecuting the early believers – in fact, they followed Paul every where he went, from city to city, and incited riots against him. He was often beaten, lashed, imprisoned, yet at no time did anyone submit any evidence that he was teaching something false. In fact, there was never any verifiable testimony given at any of Paul's legal hearings. They had no legal basis to do anything to this man, but they wanted him shut down and stopped. So they brought in witness who gave generic testimony saying things like: "I heard him say something against the temple or against the sacred law". But it was all fabricated and they could never corroborate it with two or three witness which was the standard of the law and they could never prove anything with facts or hard evidence. All of Paul's legal woes were based on trials of great exigency for political purposes, but never once was evidence put forward to prove or contradict what he was teaching.

Also of extreme significance is the fact that the deity of Jesus – which is so often attacked by modern scholars, spiritualists, and even novelist, is clearly documented in the New Testament. In the second chapter of the letter to the Philippians, Paul quotes from Isaiah 45:23 in the Old Testament and applies that verse to the deity of Jesus. He says that God highly exalted Him (Jesus), and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. I raise this issue because this brings to light the fact that the deity of Jesus was a belief that was taught in the early church, and it was the very basis of belief amongst all the churches. It was not a teaching that was fabricated some three hundred years later at a council ordered by Constantine where the church leaders – for political reasons – decided to elevate the status of Jesus from that of a great man, a great prophet and teacher to that of God. No, that is preposterous and it is a modern myth proffered by those who are either uneducated or purposefully manipulative in their agenda to discredit the Bible. I believe it is the later since what they say is not supported at all by scripture and what is so obvious to even the most casual reader of the Bible. This passage also gives veracity to the Old Testament. In fact, every writer of the New Testament relies on the Old Testament as their primary proof text. Jesus Himself quoted the Old Testament over and over again in all His discourse. It was the very foundation of His ministry and it was the very language of His life – it is what He spoke. He brought the words of the Old Testament to life – He gave us its true meaning – the way in which we should understand and apply its truths.

Secondly, the writings of the Bible do not do a very good job of advancing any individual or group politics. Most of what is written is too contrary to what would be expected of someone playing their political cards. I mean there is no softening of the truth. The Bible explains God's intervention in the lives of humans with all their failings. Unlike most legend and fantasy which tends to highlight and focus on the amazing characteristics of their heroes, the main participants in the Bible were extremely flawed human beings and its greatest heroes were the biggest failures. But the Bible lays it out the way it was, and the Bible does not try and sugar coat and glamorize its heroes. Even with Jesus. If you were writing to try and politicize or advance some cause, would you really write that Jesus was crying in the garden and asking God if there was a way He could get out of the

whole cross thing. Or would you record that Jesus cried: Father why have you forsaken me. You would not do that it shows too much weakness and vulnerability. That is not heroic or epic in style.

Further, if I was a first century writer just making up something up in order to convince others to follow my way (for political, economic, or any other purpose) why would I record that the original witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus were a bunch of women. After all, in those days women were not even allowed to testify in court, their words were inadmissible due to their low status in society. So if I had my own agenda that I was trying to convince others to follow, to write that a bunch of women were the primary witnesses would be sheer stupidity and cultural suicide. But the Bible sets forth this fact because it was the truth. And consistent with His life and legacy of refusing to follow the cultural norms and religious standards of the day, Jesus first revealed Himself to women. My point is that if the Bible was written to consolidate power or to push some political agenda, the writers would have never written the things that they wrote.

Third, the history is just too detailed to be a fabrication. You can look at any ancient literature and quickly see the difference between the Bible and say the mythology of the Greeks. Those writings were fantastic but they did not contain the in-depth details of its characters. I challenge you to go and read any of the major Greek myths; you will see this to be true. In comparison, the Bible provides painstaking detail about everything and practically everyone. What we know as realistic fiction, which is what we have today in most of our literature, is something that is relatively new to the world of literature, and it was not something ever a part of ancient writings.

Fourth, many can accept the fact that the writers of the Bible wrote down the “truth” from their experience, but to claim that it is the words of God and is the truth, is something entirely different. After all, if it was written by men, would it not be inherently corrupt? Well, God anticipated this kind of argument so He decided to encode a way to test the veracity of the Bible in practically each and every book. And keep in mind, just so you get the magnitude of this self-encoded test, the Bible is a collection of 66 separate writings by at least 40 authors written over a span of 1,600 years on 3 continents, in 13 different countries, in primarily 3 different languages, and it was written by people from all kinds of professions: shepherds, kings, soldiers, princes, priests, fisherman, scholars, historians, businessmen, and common laborers. With that kind of variation and expanse of participants, the possibility for human error is beyond probable -- it is more than guaranteed unless you take into account the supernatural intervention of God. That is why what I am going to be explaining to you next is even more fantastic than it sounds.

The Bible is filled with predictions – or prophecy as we call it. People who wrote about something sometimes hundreds of years in advance; and yet we find it fulfilled in exacting detail. I know, anyone can make predictions; but having those predictions fulfilled is vastly different. And unlike Nostradamus or many of the other so called spiritual prophets who made generalized and mostly incomprehensible predictions – kind of like most of the modern horoscopes – the Bible sets forth its predictions in a way that even the most cynical person can track and validate. For those of you who are inclined towards math and the law of probabilities, the mathematical aspects of the predictions in the Bible are simply out of this world. What we have documented in the Bible is a mathematical impossibility if it were not for the supernatural intervention and authority of God.

For example, what is the likelihood of a person today, predicting the exact city in which the birth of a future leader would take place over 700-years later – well into the 28th century? That is what the prophet Micah did. Further, what is the likelihood of predicting the precise manner of death that a new, unknown religious leader would experience, a thousand years from now – a manner of death that is presently unknown and not practiced, and which will remain unknown for hundred of years? Yet, this is what David did in 1000 BC when he indicated that the Messiah would be crucified. Then there was Daniel who 530 years before Christ predicted the exact day that He would ride into Jerusalem on the donkey and would be hailed as the Messiah – the day we celebrate as Palm Sunday.

In fact, the entire book of Daniel is so alive with predictive history! Daniel did so well in prophesying the 400 years after he lived that many non-believing historians have gone to great lengths to try and discredit his writings. The book of Daniel claims to have been written during the time of the first Babylonian exile through the establishment of the Persian Empire (606-536 B.C.) However, so called experts have claimed that the book of Daniel must have been written “after-the-fact” and was just written under this pseudo name of Daniel. That is

the only way they could explain how Daniel accurately foretold world history. In fact, for years, experts believed that Daniel was written in the late second or early third century. They point to the fact that portions of Daniel were written in Hebrew and Aramaic. This would have been highly irregular and so they believe it was written by different people during different time periods; again, all after-the-fact. You see the problem that these unbelievers have is that Daniel predicted accurately the rise and fall of the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek empire of Alexander the Great, and the Roman empire. He even points out the untimely death of Alexander the Great and the division of his empire among his four generals! And then he goes into exacting detail about the life of the last general of the Seleucid kingdom – Antiochus Epiphanies. Daniel describes in detail his battles, his political intrigue, his marriage, and all his activities in the land of Israel – including the time he set up an idol in the temple of the Lord, which we know as the abomination of desolation.

But if it was truly written after the fact in the second or third century, such that it could historically document the exact day of Jesus “triumphal entry into Jerusalem,” then why did Jesus quote from the book of Daniel as recorded in Matthew 24:15 where He comments on the abomination of desolation as mentioned by the prophet Daniel. So if Jesus had this material to quote from, how could it have been written after the fact?

Secondly, the activities of Antiochus Epiphanies in the land of Israel happened in 167 BC; yet, in 1947 -- 8 copies of the book of Daniel were found as part of the Dead Sea Scrolls which are dated somewhere around 250 BC – well before some of the events that Daniel wrote about. In fact, all of the Old Testament, with the exception of the book of Esther, was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery. The number of copies indicates that Daniel was a safely guarded and important book. In fact, the entire book, except for parts of chapter 9 and 12 were discovered intact and not surprisingly it included both the Hebrew and the Aramaic portion of the text. This throws cold water on the idea that the book of Daniel must have been written after-the-fact. It adds absolute credibility to the fact that Daniel was given supernatural knowledge by God to predict several key world events – in exacting detail.

Ok, if that was not overwhelmingly convincing -- for the truly cynical we will look now at the predictions made in the Old Testament about Jesus and His life, His ministry, and His manner of death. The Old Testament contains over 400 prophecies which were fulfilled by Jesus in His first coming.

You have to stop and think how outrageous this is given the number of authors, the various languages, the time span over which the predictions were made and the various locations recorded in the Old Testament. If you were to try and fulfill even 25 of these prophecies, how could you manipulate everyone and everything around you to fulfill the exact details of the prophecies, especially in light of the fact that so much of what is needed to be fulfilled is out of your direct control or your ability to influence?

For example, how does someone "arrange" to be born in a specific family and a specific lineage? In a specific city in which their parents don't actually live? How does one "arrange" their own death - and specifically by crucifixion, with two others at your side, and then "arrange" to have their executioners gamble for His clothing (John 16:19; Psalms 22:18)? How does one "arrange" to be betrayed in advance for a specified amount of money? How does one "arrange" to have the betrayer give back the payoff and then have the priests use that money to buy a potters field. How does one "arrange" to have the executioners carry out the regular practice of breaking the legs of the two victims on either side, but not their own? Finally, how does one "arrange" to escape from a grave, which is heavily guarded by Roman soldiers, and then appear to people after having been killed? You try it. Go ahead, be beaten and then flogged with 39 lashes by a whip laced with glass and metal, and then be beaten some more. Then carry a huge cross out of a city up to a hill. Then get yourself crucified on that hill and hang there on the cross for 6-hours. Then have a roman guard thrust a spear in your heart. Then let someone embalm you and place you in a tomb and roll a 2,000 pound stone in front of the opening. Then when you catch your breath, get up, roll away the stone, beat up the entire Roman guard, escape with your life, and then show up at the home of your disciples. Try it! I am sure you can do it!

You see it may be possible for someone to fake one or two of the messianic prophecies, but it would be impossible for any one person to arrange to fulfill all of them. I have a chart with just 30 of the 456 of

prophecies that Jesus fulfilled which lists both the Old Testament prophecy and the New Testament description of the fulfillment. We will go through these quickly.

The Messiah must...	Prophecy	Fulfillment by Jesus
Seed of a woman	Genesis 3:15	Galatians 4:4
Descendant of Abraham	Genesis 12:3	Matthew 1:1
Descendant of Isaac	Genesis 17:19	Luke 3:34
Descendant of Jacob	Numbers 24:17	Mathew 1:2
From tribe of Jesse	Genesis 49:10	Romans 15:12
Descendant of David	Jeremiah 23:5-6	Matthew 1:1
Be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1 ; Luke 2:4-7
To be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Luke 1:26-27, 30-31
Slaughter of children	Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18
Flight to Egypt	Isaiah 40:3-5	Matthew 2:14-15
Be adored by Kings and great persons	Psalms 72:10-11	Matthew 2:1-11
Be annointed with the Spirit of God	Isaiah 11:2 , 61:1	Matthew 3:16 ; John 3:34 ; Acts 10:38
Be hated without cause	Isaiah 49:7 ; Psalms 69:4	John 15:24-25
Be undesired and rejected by His own people	Isaiah 53:2 , 63:3 ; Psalms 69:8	Mark 6:3 ; Luke 9:58 ; John 1:11 ,
Be plotted against by Jews and Gentiles together	Psalms 2:1-2	Acts 4:27
Be betrayed by a friend	Psalms 41:9 , 55:12-24	Matthew 26:21-25, 47-50 ; John 13:18-21 ; Acts 1:16-18
Be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:16
Have his price given for a potter's field	Zechariah 11:13	Matthew 27:7
Be forsaken by His disciples	Zechariah 13:7	Matthew 26:31 , 56
Be struck on the cheek	Micah 5:1	Matthew 27:30
Be spat on	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67 , 27:30
Be mocked	Psalms 22:7-8	Matthew 27:31 , 39-44
Be beaten	Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67 , 27:26 , 30
Be thirsty during His execution	Psalms 22:15	John 19:28
Be given vinegar to quench that thirst	Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27:34

Be considered a transgressor	Isaiah 53:12	Matthew 27:38
Have no bones broke, but his side pierced	Psalm 34:20 , Zech 12:10	John 19:32-34 , 36
Be buried with the rich when dead	Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60
Be sought after by Gentiles as well as Jews	Isaiah 11:10 , 42:1	Acts 10:45
Be accepted by the Gentiles	Isaiah 11:10 , 42:1-4 , 49:1-12	Matthew 12:21 ; Acts 10:45 ; Romans 15:9-12

The mathematical probability that a person could fulfill even the 30 prophecies listed here are astronomical, yet Jesus did it. To get a feel for the probabilities involved, consider this. The odds of Jesus fulfilling only eight – just eight -- of the Messianic prophecies is 1 out of 10¹⁷ (a one followed by 17 zeros). This is equivalent to covering the entire state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep, marking one of them, mixing them all up and having a blind-folded person go anywhere in the state they want and select the marked one at random the first time.

In other words, any person who minimizes or ignores the claims of the Bible is scientifically foolish. Now if you take just 48 of the 456 known prophecies that Jesus specifically fulfilled, it’s been calculated that the probability of one person fulfilling all of these is 10 to the 157th power. To give you an example of how large that number is we can look at the practice of modern encryption. The modern rules require any password or key to access encrypted material to be of at least 12 – 8 character digits, or approximately 96 integers. This is considered virtually impossible to break. That means that anything that is 10 to the 157th power is absolutely impossible – and that is just for one person to fulfill 48 of the prophecies. But Jesus fulfilled an additional 408 – that is incomprehensible.

And look at this next table; it sets forth the number of authors of just these 30 prophecies and the years before Christ in which they wrote.

Author	Year’s B.C.
Moses	Approx 1,300
David	Approx 1,000
Solomon	Approx 1,000+
Isaiah	740-701 BC
Jeremiah	640-586 BC
Micah	750-686 BC

With that much of a time gap between each other, with the number of authors for just these 30 prophecies, and with that much time before Christ, how is it even possible for this to be a clever plan executed by a group of people trying to pull off the greatest fraud in history? It can’t. The math, the facts, and the data do not support such an inference.

So my point is that the Bible is filled with mathematical impossibility that can only be understood in light of its spiritual origin and its Godly authenticity. Besides, the Bible makes no bones about the fact that it was written by mere mortals. It does not try and claim that it was delivered out of the sky by some angel. Rather, God used men as the vehicle for communicating His word; which again, makes it all even more fantastic. Given the fallibility of man and the inherent corruptibility of man, makes it even less likely that these authors who lived and wrote from all these different countries could have predicted all these things and have them fulfilled by one man.

Then there is the issue of accuracy and people who claim that the Bible we have today is filled with all sorts of errors and we cannot rely on it. But consider that the Book of Isaiah that was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls proved to be word-for-word identical to our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% variation consisted primarily of obvious slips of the pen and spelling alterations that made no impact on content or doctrine – there were absolutely no substantive differences.

Look at this example that compares Chapter 53 of Isaiah as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls with the oldest Hebrew text that we know as the Masoretic Text.

Of the 166 Hebrews words in Isaiah 53, only 17 letters in the DSS differ from the Masoretic Text. 10 letters have spelling differences. 4 letters have stylistic changes. 3 letters added a word for “light”. But not one of these 17 letters impacted any traditional Biblical teaching. By the way, Isaiah 53 contains the prophecy regarding Jesus’ life and death. This example forcibly demonstrates the accuracy with which scribes copied sacred texts, and it should bolster our confidence in the Bible’s textual integrity. Besides, the pool of data from which to determine accuracy is overwhelming compared to other ancient literature that we so readily adopt as fact. Look at this next table:

Historical Manuscripts:

<i>Document</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Early Copies found so far</i>
Homer's Iliad	800 BC	643
Works of Herodotus	480 BC	8
Plato's Tetralogies	427 BC	7
Caesar's Gallic wars	44 BC	10
New Testament	50 – 95 AD	25,366

With this many early copies floating around, if there were textual issues and accuracy concerns, it would be widely apparent. We do not base our beliefs on some isolated discovery, but on a plethora of information and data. As we discussed the other week, God is always inviting us to come and reason with Him and use our intelligence; for the evidence and the proof that He has provided is nothing less than overwhelming. When you look at this data, I am shocked and appalled by the fact that intellectuals, professors, scholars are all so willing to quote the works of Herodotus as authoritative on Greek History, yet they scoff at the integrity of the Bible.

I want to close by quickly looking at what the Bible says about itself:

2 Timothy 3:14-17 – Paul writes:

But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. ***All Scripture is inspired by God*** and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

2 Peter 1:16-21—Peter says:

For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming again. We have seen his majestic splendor with our own eyes. And he received honor and glory from God the Father when God's glorious, majestic voice called down from heaven, "This is my beloved Son; I am fully pleased with him." We ourselves heard the voice when we were there with him on the holy mountain.

Because of that, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. Pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a light shining in a dark place — until the day Christ appears and his brilliant light shines in your hearts. ***Above all, you must understand that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophets themselves or because they wanted to prophesy. It was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God.***

If the Bible contains the words of God, If the Holy Spirit inspired and moved these writers to communicate the exact thoughts and words of God, then we must pay attention. We must not be ignorant. We must not foolishly ignore the facts and the shocking data that exists. We must give heed to its voice. We must consider it the most valuable and exotic treasure we can ever find. This book contains the words of God that were breathed into the men who wrote on His behalf.

I believe God is absolutely brilliant. Just pondering what we studied tonight is so mind boggling. And God is asking you to not be ignorant. He asks you to come and reason with Him because He has given you reason to believe. In fact, the Bible says that it is a fool who scoffs and says there is no God. It is a fool who rejects the wisdom that God offers for their lives– the wisdom to know how to find the right course of action every time – the wisdom to know the will of God for your life.

We must be willing to open up this book and read it, tune our spirits to what it is saying, concentrate on it, and incline our minds to understanding what God is trying to communicate for our lives. We must search it out and discover the riches of the treasures that are contained within.

Finally, we must consider the Bible as authoritative in our life – both spiritually and practically. Next week, we are going to talk about what that means – how we give the word its proper place and authority in our lives.

Let's Pray

We have been in a series based on Proverbs 2:1-11, and we are talking about the God who speaks. We have discovered that God primarily speaks through relationship – relationships that are based on some level of mutuality and co-participation. God has, and always will, be faithful to do His part – we need to practice reciprocating in this relationship.

He asks us to do our part by being willing to remove and push aside all the self-isms and “me-isms” that build barriers between us and God and which create static and noise that drowns out the voice of God in our lives. He asks us to *tune* our spirits to His voice. To *listen* to what He is saying and consider his voice precious. We are to *cry out* to Him for insight and understanding – knowing that the wisdom that God offers – the direction for our lives -- can only come from Him: He is the only source for this kind of instruction. Therefore, we are to *search* for insight and understanding like we would search for lost treasure. And as God begins to reveal Himself to us, we are to focus, concentrate, and discern what His wisdom is telling us. We are to incline our hearts to understanding all that God has for us. If we reciprocate in this manner, God says that He will:

- Pour the spirit of wisdom upon us and make us wise (Proverbs 1:23).
- He will grant us a treasure of good sense (Proverbs 2:7)
- He will protect us (Proverbs 2:7)
- We will understand what is right, just and fair (Proverbs 2:9)
- We will know how to find the right course of action every time (Proverbs 2:9)
- He will direct our paths (Proverbs 3:6)

This is what we can expect if we are willing to mutually engage in our relationship with God. He will speak, we will hear, He will guide, and we will follow.

Now, the primary means through which God speaks to us is in the Bible. This is the word of God spoken by the Spirit into the lives of those who wrote it; and it is our treasure chest of the wisdom of God – our source from which we are to search for insight and understanding.

Last week we talked about the divine origin of the Bible and why the Bible can be trusted as the inspired word of God and have a place of spiritual and practical authority in our lives. The data, the facts, the historical and cultural context, and the mathematic probabilities regarding the veracity of God’s word are overwhelming. If any of you missed last weeks teaching come see me and I can get you a MP3 of it.

I felt it was important that we first address and overcome the common logic, scientific, and cultural objections that many people have to someone like me who stands up and says that the Bible should have a place of spiritual and practical authority in your life. So tonight we are going to move from the court room and the laboratory where we have spent our time discovering evidence and facts, and move to a discussion of authority.

If the Bible is the indeed the word of God and contains His thoughts, His ideas, His perspective on life and eternity, and His wisdom, then we need to pay attention to what He is saying. We need to give His words the place in our lives that the God of the universe, the creator of all things deserves.

After all, when it comes to our lives and the foundations for who we are and what we believe, we often open up our minds and our hearts to the words and ideas of people that we admire or who we think are authorities on a subject matter: it could be your favorite professor, your grandmother, your mentor, your favorite author, or anyone. But who can speak more authoritatively into and for our lives than the very one who created us. If you remember our study on God’s love in Psalm 139:1-18 we found out that God:

- Knows everything about us;
- He charts the path ahead of us and tells us where to stop and rest;
- He knows where we are at every moment;

- He both precedes us and follows us;
- He knows what we are going to say before we say it;
- We can never get away from His presence;
- He made us and knit us together in our mother's womb;
- His workmanship is marvelous;
- Every day of our life is recorded in His books; and
- His thoughts toward us are innumerable; they outnumber the grains of sand.

I think it is highly rational to conclude that **He** is the only one who is in the position and completely qualified to speak authoritatively into our lives.

But let's now talk a bit about God and this concept of authority. God's authority plays itself out in multiple layers and multiple levels throughout our lives and throughout time itself. For most of us when we think of authority we think of power, control, and some form of coercion or threat. And I guess at a global/cosmic level this definition is accurate for some because ultimately God is going to have His way with this world – there will be a point in time where He does bring His judgment and perfect order to this world. For those on the wrong side of this event, it will mean an experience with ultimate power, control, coercion and even judgment. But for others, it will be the beginning of new life: a new existence under the rule and leadership of Jesus Christ.

But on a practical, day to day level, I would like to challenge these traditional notions of authority by giving you insight into the heart, character and purposes of God. In order for us to get the right understanding of Biblical authority, we need to understand what God is doing and has been doing throughout all of time. From the time that man sinned and the fellowship between God and man was severed, death, decay, and corruption, entered the world. This is true on an **individual** level, as the hearts of man are fundamentally wicked. Jeremiah says:

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?

We can see the corruption, we can experience it, but we really cannot understand it, control it, tame it, condition it, or transform it. This reality of this corruption is evidenced all over this world throughout all time; from the petty selfishness in our most intimate relationships to the brutality of nations and the genocide we see happening all around us. This death, decay and corruption are also seen at a **cosmic** and **global** level. As a result of sin, the earth itself, along with all of creation, was cursed and has had to exist under the unbending rule of corruption and decay. For example, because of sin God cursed the earth and as a result man has always had to struggle to scratch a living from it (Genesis 3:17). Paul, in the book of Romans explains this condition:

Romans 8:18-23

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us.

Everything has been subject to the curse, but at the same time, everything is looking forward to the day when God implements His ultimate plan of redemption and once again brings all creation under His order, His rule, and His kingdom. You must understand that God's plan has always been to redeem man and creation from the curse and from the evil that was introduced into our world.

On a global/cosmic level, there will be that day when Christ returns to earth as the King and He will establish His rule on this planet and He will bring an ultimate end to sin, death, and decay. When this happens, the prophecy in the book of Hosea, as quoted by Paul, will finally be fulfilled in its entirety:

1 Corinthians 15:54-57... then at last the Scriptures will come true: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. How we thank God, who gives us victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The power of sin, the power of the curse, and the kingdom of evil will ultimately be defeated. But until that time comes, God is working His work of redemption on an **individual** level, one life at a time. It is through this lens of God's redemptive plan that we should form our view of God, His role in our lives, and what He allows to happen in our lives.

Keep in mind, the act of redemption involves God purchasing us back, exchanging His life for ours, His blood for the curse, so that we can be free and once again participate in His kingdom. His goal is to bring many children into this kingdom – and create a great family of believers. As both John the Baptist and Jesus declared, the kingdom of God is at hand. It is here, it has arrived. And God is calling us to come to Him, follow Him, and become part of this kingdom. In exchange, He will remove the power of the curse and cover us with His blood. He will literally redeem us – or buy us back -- from the power of sin and death.

We talked about this before in the context of those who come to Jesus to accept Him and follow Him as both Savior and Lord. When we choose Him in this way, we are made into a new creation – we literally become new persons for the old life that was bound to sin and bound to the curse is subdued and its control is broken. Through Christ's redemptive work on the cross we are given the opportunity to turn the reign and authority in our lives over to this new creation that is submitted to the rule and authority of the Holy Spirit. Look at these excerpts from 2 Corinthians 5:14-19 where Paul describes this reality.

2 Corinthians 5:14-20

Whatever we do, it is because Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for everyone, we also believe that we have all died to the old life we used to live. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. ... What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.

This is His plan, this is His redemptive work and it is in this light and in this context that we are to view the word of God – it is the pathway, it is the containment of the wisdom that we need to not only experience this redemptive work of salvation, but to have that work finished and completed in us though God's ongoing efforts to teach us how to live no longer for ourselves – out of our old man – but to live for Him in the new creation. It is in this context that the "authority of scripture" is put into effect. This is the good news: Jesus has defeated the powers of evil and has begun the work of new creation in our lives all of which will ultimately culminate in a complete redemption of all creation.

With this idea of redemption and God's ongoing redemptive work of love and mercy in our lives, it should start to alter how we have traditionally viewed the Bible and positioned ourselves in relationship to the Bible.

For many the Bible has been viewed as merely a rule book – as a static representation of the rights and wrongs, the good and the bad and the ultimate arbitrator, or court of appeal, for the on-goings of humanity. In

this context the Bible looks a lot like a gavel and its judgment is usually meted out in justice and not in mercy, in rule and not in love, in division and not in unity, in pain and not in power, in flesh and not spirit. This view is the embodiment of “religion” and the problem with this view is that it has no life, it has no power; it is just a hard, cold, and objective book of rules. It’s like taking a wonderful garden and paving it over. Sure it is clean and there are no bugs or weeds and the cement is easily swept up, but there also is no life and the beauty and the wonderful fragrance of the garden is lost and swallowed up in a huge cold slab of gray.

I find it very distressing that we have established and handed down throughout the ages our own definition of what we mean by the “authority” of the word of God and we have for the most part ignored what the Bible says about itself.

Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

The word is alive. The word is active. It is not static, it is not cemented in place, it is not some historical monolith that we look to and bow down in front of in ignorant obedience. In the Greek, the verb “living” is in the present active tense. That means that right now, today, as I am speaking, the word of God is moving in and through each of you bringing its light into your life working out what it was sent to accomplish. If you are willing to give the word of God its place of authority in your life, if you are willing to submit to its leadership – not because of fear, not because of coercion, not because of the gavel, but because the word was sent to do a work of redemption, a work of love and mercy in your life – then it will pierce down to the very sinews – the very connections that make you who you are – and it will expose the thoughts and intentions of your heart – for nothing is hidden from His sight. He will expose it all – not to hurt you, not to embarrass you, but to show you what you need to push it aside, to show you what you need to do to remove the static and the barriers that interfere with His voice, His leadership and His love in your life.

One other critical truth that this verse in Hebrews is communicating is discovered when we glance at the Greek. What we have translated as the “word,” as in the “word of God,” is the Greek word “logos”. Logos means the “expression of thought” or the expression of God’s very mind. In this respect, it is the message from the Lord delivered with His authority and made effective by His power. Look at these verses in the gospel of John:

John 1:1,2 and 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Do you understand what this means. The word of God is the culmination of the wisdom of God, the perfection and beauty of God, and the power of God all expressed in and through the person of Jesus Christ. He is it; He is the logos! He has always existed and has always been with God and He became flesh! That is why Paul says:

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 and 30

but we preach **Christ** crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ** the power of God and the wisdom of God. ... But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who **became to us wisdom from God**, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.

All of it – the sum of everything – God’s heart and His purposes are expressed in Jesus through the “**word**”. The two are inseparable they are one. When we talk in Proverbs about God giving you the wisdom you need for your life – in effect He is giving you a greater piece of Himself represented and expressed in and through a deeper understanding of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Think about it – when you **tune** your ears to Christ, when you **concentrate** on understanding Christ, when you **cry out** to Jesus, when you think about Him, when you **search** for Jesus as you would for lost treasure, you will find the most valuable and precious treasure any of us can possess – a real time, fully functional, in depth relationship with the living wisdom of God. That is why He says that **then** we will know what is right, fair, and just, and we will know how to find the right course of action every time. Because the answers, the knowledge, the power is all wrapped up in Jesus Himself. And if we are in a mutual relationship with the one who loves us, He will pour His wisdom into our hearts.

Because the word is living and active, it is always working, and it is always moving to accomplish the redemptive purposes of God. Let’s look at this passage in Isaiah.

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. "For you will go out with joy And be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. "Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up, and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up, and it will be a memorial to the Lord, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off."

What Isaiah – through the Spirit of God is saying – is that God’s work of redemption – of removing the curse and freeing us from the power and bondage of evil will be accomplished through the vehicle of the “**word**” of God. The thorn of sin, the nettle of evil will be removed and in its place will be the cypress and the myrtle. What you might not know is that the cypress is powerful and steadfast and virtually immovable and can handle almost anything that nature throws at it. The reason is that its root ball is 12 inches in diameter for each 1 inch of actual tree. So instead of a thorn bush that dries up and gets blow around by the wind, in God’s redemptive work, He will use the word of God to make you steadfast, immovable and able to endure.

He identifies us with the myrtle tree for a couple of reasons. It has been argued that the myrtle is one of the most ornamental and shapely trees and has always been considered as one of nature’s works of art. In the Bible it also is metaphorically used to symbolize Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God, the place of God’s favor, the apple of His eye. So again, as His word goes out in your life, He will make you into His work of art, His poem, His beautiful one – His new creation, the dwelling place of God that embodies and expresses the perfection of Jesus Christ. It will be accomplished. It will not fail. His word is sent with a purpose and it will not return to Him without accomplishing the very purposes for which it has been sent out.

But note, Isaiah says that it will be accomplished in those who **sow** and those who **eat**. This is very similar to what is said in proverbs 2:1-4 and what we studied previously in John 6. If we let the word of God be planted in our hearts – if we receive it and treasure it – and if we eat it as if it is our living manna – our very bread of life, and if we actively believe the truth -- allowing the word of God to have its place of living authority in our lives – then it will do all that God has promised it will do, for it is living and active.

You might still be wondering about the connection between the Bible and Jesus. Let me tell you a little story from the gospel of Luke. After Jesus died, His disciples were shocked, disillusioned, and to say the least, disheartened. All that they had hoped for – the one who was to redeem Israel was dead and buried – their dreams were crushed. Clearly, their understanding of what Jesus came to do was imbedded in Jewish messianic and nationalistic fervor; and they missed what was explained by the prophets of old. On the 3rd day after His death, 2 of His disciples had left Jerusalem and were walking to the town of Emmaus which is about 7 miles outside of the city. They were walking along talking about all that had happened when suddenly a man came and joined

them and asked them why they were having such intense conversation and why they looked so concerned. This man was Jesus Himself, but they did not recognize Him. It might be that in His resurrected body He looked different, maybe they just had impressed in their heads the torn apart, beaten and mutilated Jesus and so they could not even make a correlation between this man and their most recent memories. Or, maybe Jesus just supernaturally veiled His identity. But regardless, they responded by telling this man that Jesus was dead and they had believed that He was Messiah and was going to be the one to free Israel. If only they knew who was standing with them. Jesus responded to them and said:

Luke 24:25-27

"You are such foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted by the prophets that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his time of glory?" Then Jesus quoted passages from the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining what all the Scriptures said about himself.

Think about the magnitude of what Jesus said. The entirety of the book was written about Him and reveals Him. Jesus is the central character of the Bible and we see Him and His work of redemption in each of the characters and all the stories in the Bible. Its like looking at this broad landscape or viewing this amazing painting and realizing that everything in the scene has a purpose. Nothing is random – it is all connected and it is all pointing us to the face, the character, the nature, and an expression of Jesus. The entire Bible climaxes in this one man and what He did to bring to you – and to bring to me – the power to change our minds, our hearts, and our lives – the power of redemption. Only a living word can do that. Only an authoritative word can do that.

It is not a coincidence that Jesus did not just quote these apostles some historical fact or rule of law to correct them in their error. He did not bring out the gavel and judge them for having missed the truth and having sinned by their unbelief and misinterpretation of the coming of the Messiah. No he enlightened them, He opened their eyes, He brought light into the darkness, and He breathed new life and understanding of the word of God into their beings. His words were active and were powerful and they brought about transformation in their hearts. These disciples said to each other:

Luke 24:32

"Didn't our hearts feel strangely warm as He talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

And then, do you know what they did? We are told in the very next verse that they turned around and went back to Jerusalem with the other disciples. The living and authoritative word of God fundamentally changed them. No longer were they turning away in shame, hurt, embarrassment, disappointment and despair – a redemptive work had been done in their hearts and they immediately returned to their friends with joy and a message of good news that "The Lord has really risen". Going back for a moment to what Isaiah said:

Isaiah 55:12

For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands

The redemptive work of the authoritative word of God brings about new life. It brings about joy and it brings about utter transformation. The word picture here is that the creation which is held in bondage to sin and the curse will itself break forth in transforming praise as God accomplishes His redemptive work in and through your life. This is powerful!

Finally, I want to close with this idea that the authoritative word of God brings us life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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

way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

I want you to first focus on that word *inspired*. In the Greek, it literally means God breathed, or the breath of God. As oxygen is what gives life and power to the blood, and to our very existence – for without it we are dead – the breath of God or the oxygen of God, gives life and power to our very existence – and without it we remain spiritually dead. His word, the logos, the divine expression of God, the very embodiment of Jesus Christ, is our life. And therefore, His word is useful to teach us what is true and it teaches us to do what is right – for it is “**the**” authority; it is “**the**” truth. It is God’s very provision to ensure that we have everything we need for this life – everything we need to experience all of Him. Remember, He is the very wisdom of God and it is when we grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ that we will be able to participate in the divinity of God.

2 Peter 1:3-4

As we *know* Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness! And by that same mighty power, he has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will **share** in his divine nature.

To experience the fullness of Christ, to escape the pain and the destruction that sin unfolds in our lives, we must know Jesus better and better. We must **tune** our ears to what He is saying. We must **receive** His word into our hearts. We must **incline** our hearts toward understanding. We must **cry out** for Him. We must **search** for His wisdom as we would for lost treasure. This is the only pathway to life, power and all of his rich and wonderful promises. And that life is found in the very embodiment of Jesus Himself – the word of God.

And that is why we should give the Bible the place of ultimate authority in our lives. It is not just a historical document. It is not a compilation of cool stories. It is not fantasy, fiction, mythology or legend. It is not the hardened gavel and merely a tool to be used as the ultimate arbitrator of right and wrong. It is life. It is living. It is active. It is useful. It is the wisdom of God. It is His thoughts and His mind. It is Jesus; and as such, its word is incontestable and is the ultimate authority.

As Isaiah said, if you sow the word of God in your heart, if you eat the bread of life that comes forth from what you have sowed, God, through the scriptures, will bring about His kingdom in you life and He will call you and shape you in to a new person, a new creation – His poem and His lovely work of art.

This is why I read, this is why I study. I want to experience all of Him. I want His wisdom for my life. I want each of you to be able to experience Him in and through my life. I encourage you to open up your Bible and read, and let the living active word of God have its place of practical and spiritual authority in your life.

Let’s Pray

We have been talking about the God who speaks and in this context the last couple of weeks have been specifically focused on the Word of God as that is the primary method for God speaking. First we talked about why we can trust the Bible to be exactly what it says it is: the living Word of God. We focused on the historical, cultural and mathematical data that provides us overwhelming evidence and confidence regarding the veracity of the Bible. Then last week we talked about the authority of the Word and how due to the fact that it is living and active and is purposed to complete the redemptive acts of the Father, it should have a place of spiritual and practical authority in our lives. It is not just a rule book. It is not to be used as a gavel and the court of arbitration for human behavior. It is to have its place of authority in your life so it can work to transform your mind and your nature into the character and nature of Christ. It is living and it is powerful and it always fulfills the purposes for which God sent it out. However, it is looking for those who are interested in sowing the word in their heart and eating of the produce.

The Bible is a collection of 66 separate writings by at least 40 authors written over a span of 1,600 years on 3 continents, in 13 different countries, in primarily 3 different languages, and it was written by people from all kinds of professions: shepherds, kings, soldiers, princes, priests, fisherman, scholars, historians, businessmen, and common laborers. Yet it is one consistent and continual message about God's love for us and His desire to be in relationship with us. But it is also the map, the guide book to getting us to our desired destination: an intimate open and communicative relationship with God.

In this regard, think of it like this. If you are going to take a trek to some remote lake located high up in the Andes where few people have ever gone, you are going to need a pretty detailed map and possibly even some global positioning technology to ensure that you don't get lost. You are also going to probably need to find some trip information from those few who have reached there and if possible even talk to them. You going to need to study their route, study their mistakes and what was it that made it possible for the few to reach the lake and so many others to fail on their venture. You would also want to understand what gear they took and why.

Sure, you can try to do the trip without that information, but your chances of success and your chances of reaching this remote lake are slim.

And not only that, it is not just a matter of finding this gorgeous lake, but you are also putting your life, and those who you will travel with, in great jeopardy and taking risks that you really don't need to take. It would be very wise to get extremely familiar with the territory, the weather patterns, as well as all the potential dangers on the route. It sure would be helpful to know what type of predators you might meet along the way: whether wild animal or human.

But you would never go unprepared – that would be insanity. Especially if you had available to you the perfect tried and true information that would guarantee not only that you would reach your destination, but that you also would make it home safely.

The Bible is a lot like that. It is our perfect guide to what it means to have a relationship with God. The kind where He talks to us, and we listen, He instructs and we follow. The Bible contains not only the detailed map, but it is filled with testimony of lives of real people who have made it and the masses of those who have failed. And if you were to take the time out and study these people, their lives, their backgrounds, what we know about their personalities and their circumstances, the cultural, political, and financial pressures of their day, I believe you will find out what their relationship to God was like and more importantly, why.

This type of study is not just for the cool reading or the historical and cultural information, but these stories have been given to us as (i) individual examples of people struggling to know their God, (ii) as illustrations of the broader landscape and picture of Jesus doing His work of redemption in and through their lives, but (iii) also for encouragement. Real people, real lives, real troubles, and a real God who invaded time and space to be involved and to intervene in the daily affairs of men and women just like you and me.

If you are willing to apply any form of analysis, a study of these lives will give you insight into your own personal journey toward God and why or why not you are achieving success in terms of growing in intimacy with God.

So I am claiming that this book is the perfect guide. It is the faultless roadmap. It is the only way to intimacy with God. If you recall, from the very first week I have said that faith – or actively believing the truth –

is the only way to be in relationship with God for it is the only way to be in alignment with His heart and His will. The writer of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 11:6:

And without faith it is impossible to please God

But the faith that is pleasing to God comes from one place and one place only – by the Word of God. You cannot work your way into a right relationship with God. You can not buy your way in. You cannot stumble across the path and get lucky. And you cannot try and muster up faith. Rather, we are told in Romans that faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ

So over and over again, we find that the Word of God is the key – it is the pathway to knowing God; and therefore, I want to take some time to help you understand why it is the “way” and why we should dive into it, read it, study it, consume it, and as we studied in Proverbs 2:3-4, grab for it and hoard the Word of God in our hearts.

Tonight we are going to look at Psalm 19:7-11 as our reference.

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight to life.

Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever.

The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.

They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold.

They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.

They are a warning to those who hear them;

There is great reward for those who obey them.

The law of the LORD is perfect

Nothing in this world can truly make a claim of perfection. I did a search to see if anyone or anything has made a legitimate claim to perfection. I found one man – the Maharaj Ji. At the age of 13, this boy stepped off a plane in New York, in 1971, to be greeted by hundreds who had come to see the one acclaimed by many as the incarnation and the Lord Himself. He made the claim that he was perfection. This young man had thousands of followers. A few years later he was going to bring together such a great gathering at the Houston Astrodome that he said he was going to usher in a new age – a new era. Well it was a huge bust leaving the multimillion dollar organization in debt. This did not go over well. So he busted up his following, dropped his hindu trappings, changed his public image and is more comfortable in western business suits than he is in religious robes, broke

his vows of celibacy and married his secretary, and travels around the world in his private jet talking to a remnant of followers and living off his father's big trust fund.

As should be expected, nothing in the realm of humanity can stand the test of perfection – all fail. In fact, in Psalm 119:96, David said that he has seen a limit to all that claims perfection, but he says there is no limit or no ending point to the commandments of God – they are perfect.

Unfortunately, like the word love, we use this word “perfect” so inadequately – in fact, if we were to be true to its definition, the only appropriate object of this word would be God and all that comes from God.

In the Hebrew, the word we have translated as perfect means entirely complete in all aspects. There is nothing wanting, no lack, it is of complete integrity – meaning there are no weak spots, and there is no stain or blemish.

Only God and His Word can fit this description. The Word of God is perfect because it is not marked with human frailty. As we studied over the last couple of weeks, we found out that all scripture is supernatural in origin. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says that it is God breathed – literally placed into the minds of the persons that He used to record His word. The Apostle Peter told us that we should pay close attention to all that the prophets wrote and we should have great confidence in their message for no prophecy of scripture came as a result of the prophets own desires, but it was the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak from God. (2 Peter 1:19-21).

A perfect Word from a perfect God—nothing else compares.

The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy

This is a hard one because so much of how we filter God and filter His Word is through our eyes and our experiences, which are extremely limited, and extremely subject to human frailty and error. Often, we do not even seek to really understand what God has said and what His will is for our lives. If we were really honest, there is a big piece of us that just expects God to do our bidding. And when we don't get what we want, when we want it, we tend to want to blame Him and we think that His Word is not trustworthy. We are not very introspective and rarely do we take a step back and honestly and objectively examine where we are, what we are doing, and why. We reluctantly look in the mirror and hold ourselves to any form of personal accountability.

With that said, is the Word of God trustworthy? Can you depend upon it? Will God let you down?

What person do you know that has not disappointed you? Anyone? If you can think of someone, then all that means is that you probably don't know them very well. For it is part and parcel with our humanity. We simply will always disappoint. By nature we carry around some element of untrustworthiness. This is because when it comes down to it – at the core of who we are – we are all some what self-protecting and survivors and will choose to guard, protect and care for ourselves before we will someone else. That is why the Bible says that the greatest example of love is when someone is willing to lay their life down for their friend. It has happened, but it is such an unusual and rare occurrence for that kind of self-less act in the overall realm of humanity because it contradicts our very survival mechanism.

But God on the other hand is always trustworthy. He does not operate on the basis of survival and self-protection. He is never threatened. He is sovereign and He is all powerful. Thus He can cause to come to pass everything and I mean everything that He desires. Nothing can stand in His way. If you are willing to open up this book and read it from cover to cover, you will find that:

- God always does what He says He is going to do and no one can oppose or reverse His actions (Isaiah 44:12-13)
- Everything He plans will come to pass (Isaiah 46:10)
- With Him there is no variation or shifting shadow (James 1:17)
- He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8)

He may not always do what we want, when we want it, but you can be assured that He will always do what He says and always do what He wants. That is sure. That is fixed. And it is something you can depend upon.

In addition to our notion of being dependable and reliable, I also find it interesting that in the Hebrew that root word that we use to get the idea of “trustworthy” means to parent or to nurse. In other words, the Word of God will act in a large part like a gentle and loving caretaker. If you are willing to listen to His voice, the Word of God will:

- Give you wise advice (Psalm 119:24)
- Be your constant guide (Psalm 119:98)
- Will comfort you (Psalm 119:52)
- Teach you good judgment and knowledge (Proverbs 2:6)
- Provide you understanding (Psalm 119:104)
- Illuminate the paths and direction you should take in your life (Psalm 119:105)
- Grant you a treasure of good sense (Proverbs 2:7)

Just like a loving Father, God will help you mature and grow up. He will provide the advice and direction you need to make the right choices for your life: relationally, professionally, financially, and so on. I dare you to test God and His word. I dare you to begin the pursuit of knowing Him.

2 Samuel 22:31, Psalm 18:30

The word of the LORD is tested;

I dare you start reading and start making His Word your priority. I know, that if you do – just like all the stories of the men and women who looked to God to be their life – that you will find beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Word of God is tested, it is tried, and it is trustworthy

The commandments of the LORD are right

When we hear this phrase, we think of right verses wrong and once again we start to think of the Bible as the gavel of judgment and the ultimate arbitrator of human behavior. And although it has that connotation, in the Hebrew this word literally means straight, or to make straight. Like a plumb line, it is the mark or the path; it is the trail with no meandering. In effect, it is shortest distance you need to travel to meet your goal. If you are willing to follow His Word and let it be the plumb line for your life, you will discover God in His fullness.

Be honest, most of us don't like a lot of what God has to say in the Bible and we refuse to let it be our plumb line, our pathway, because we think it encroaches on our fun and is more of a barrier to our enjoying and experiencing life than it does to bring us life. We tend to think its rules and advice are outdated and maybe, just maybe, it was applicable to those who lived thousand of years ago, but it is not really for us today. Our wisdom, our knowledge and our experiences have grown far beyond the ancients. Our world is unlike what anyone else – ever – has had to deal with.

Come on, you have to be real. If you just read the first 10-pages of this book, you will find that from the git go, from the very beginning, people did not want God to encroach on their business and they absolutely refused

to follow His wisdom. In fact, almost everyone from every generation through all time, in all civilizations, has refused to follow the Word of God as their plumb line for life. You are not unique. You are not living in some new and enlightened age that makes you different from those in the past. Sure our tools, and our books, and our toys have changed, but as people, we are pretty much the same. Each of us is essentially following the patterns, the practices, and the wisdom of our ancestors.

Let me let you in on a little secret that is blatantly obvious. Their ways were disastrous to themselves, to their culture, and to society at large. They thought that the wisdom that they needed for life was within their own grasp – was within their being and if God and other religious people would just leave them alone they could access it. But History from every society that has ever been recorded proves one thing: they were wrong! They did not have the wisdom that they needed to find peace, or to find anything of sustaining value. History is a tragic tale of raw humanity: lies, deception, politics, power, war, poverty, genocide, servitude, and if I were to really try and create a list to detail the lives of the men and women who lived before us, we would all be totally depressed.

The reason why History is such a sad tale is that the wisdom that man looks for to guide his life is not found anywhere here on earth. It is not accessible in the realm of humanity. Everyone, throughout all time, has sought a higher wisdom but they keep coming back to the same well and drawing from the same waters of human reason, logic, experience and emotion. This water is corrupt and its effect in the lives of humanity is equally corrupt.

Wisdom, true wisdom, is supernatural and it comes from one place and one place only. In fact, without the intervention of the Holy Spirit in our lives to enlighten our minds to the ways of God, we could not even begin to discover, or understand His wisdom. Look at what Job says:

Job 28:12-14; 21-24

"But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding? No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living. 'It is not here,' says the ocean. 'Nor is it here,' says the sea...**For it is hidden from the eyes of all humanity.** Even the sharp-eyed birds in the sky cannot discover it. But Destruction and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of where wisdom can be found.' "God surely knows where it can be found, for he looks throughout the whole earth, under all the heavens.

This is the very reason that the history of humanity is replete with attempt after attempts to bring order, peace, and love to this world; and yet has failed and will always fail. That is why no matter how hard you try to make it on your own, to follow your own intellect, your reason, your experiences and emotions, you will always crash and burn, just like your ancestors before you. I know you don't like to hear this kind of teaching and I am sorry that it does not puff you up and make you feel all wonderful about yourselves. But we must be honest and we must be real. We are not perfect, we are not trustworthy, and we do not have the wisdom to lay down the guidelines or the plumb line for our lives.

Only God has the wisdom and He grants it. He proportions it out to those who **listen** to Him and **treasure** His instructions. Who **tune** their ears to wisdom and **concentrate** on understanding. To those who **cry out** for insight and understanding and **search** for them as for lost money or hidden treasure. Yes, He will open the window of His wisdom to those who fear the Lord. And because He has said this, then it is something you can rely on. Just like you can rely on the fact that no matter how hard you try to come up with the wisdom you need to manage your life, you will be unsuccessful – Why? Because He said so! He is God and we are not. He has the foresight and the power, we do not.

The commands of the LORD are clear giving insight to the eyes

If you have ever tried to make it through the first 5-books of the Bible, or through any of the books of the prophets, it is unlikely that you will walk away saying that the Word is clear. In fact, if you read Ezekiel or the

book of Revelation, you might walk away thinking these authors used some serious hallucinogenic supplements. It is anything but clear. After all, even Jesus spoke in parables, all the time, and He did this to keep the real meaning of the things He was saying hidden and available only to the few.

But before you say: ahha...the Bible has an error. Look deeper at what is being said. Jesus Himself gives us some insight.

Matthew 11:25-27

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

The Word of God, the teachings of Jesus are so clear and so easy to understand, that intellectual infants can understand them while those who believe they are wise and intelligent stumble over His truths. The learned declare such things as there is no God, we have no need of God, God fits into this nice little box of religion that we can fully explain, or God is inside everyone and other such humanistic concepts. Well for these intelligent and wise people, the truth is hidden from their eyes. They remain in darkness. They are still drawing from the well of humanity and drinking the same corrupted waters of human wisdom.

But to the infant, the one who is humble in mind, the one who declares that he is just a human with all the limitations and frailties of a created being; and is therefore in desperate need of God – to that man or woman – the Word of God will open up like a beautiful flower and their eyes will be illuminated and all will become clear.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Jesus, the living Word, the very expression of God, is the light and He shines in darkness. This means that He comes to you in your place of need; He comes to you when you are not even aware of how badly you need Him. And in your place of darkness, He begins to shine and He calls to you and says please come to me and I will give you life. Remember a couple of weeks ago we read in Proverbs 1 that wisdom calls out to you and says: come here and listen to me! I'll pour out the spirit of wisdom upon you and make you wise. Do you understand? God is offering you the living Word and His call is clear and unmistakable. If you are willing to listen and follow, He will illuminate your eyes and give you an understanding of the Truth, visibility into that which is supernatural, and insight into the mind of God. Listen to how Paul explains this to those at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away (*as Job said, God's wisdom cannot be found in this world*); but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written,

Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. *(do you remember our discussion of the new creation. When you give you life to God and decide that Jesus is your Savior and Lord, God gives you the Holy Spirit to live in this new creation. And it is from this place that Lord shares with you His thoughts and His mind).* Paul continues:

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that He will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

That is quite an audacious claim by Paul – to have the mind of God and to speak the very wisdom of God. But this is the same claim that can be realized by everyone who has accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The Spirit of God will reveal to us not only the thoughts and the wisdom of God but also His will for our lives. This is our opportunity – this is our privilege. And the wonderful thing about this truth is that of all people on this earth, we can be infinitely unique – special beyond all compare. In comparison, those who do not have the Spirit of God are left to their own limited and frail devices. They are still trapped in their darkness drinking from their muddy well.

But you and I can have the mind of Christ. We can understand what God has for our lives for as we have been studying in Proverbs 2:6-7 the Lord grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of good sense to the Godly. Wisdom, knowledge, understanding, good sense – all of this rightfully belongs to every child of God.

Using Jesus' terminology, every "infant" of mind can participate in the divine. Jesus was not cutting anyone down and He was not asking anyone to be stupid or uneducated. He was merely saying that even a child can understand that they are a sinner and they need a Savior. Even a child can understand that they are absolutely dependent upon their parents to survive, on a day to day basis. Obviously, this correlates to our relationship with God – we are to approach Him as a child in need.

If you are willing to make the living Word your very life, God Himself will make His thoughts, and the supernatural Word of God, clear in your heart and in your mind. Your eyes will be illumined.

The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair

This phrase is merely another way of saying that we can depend on the Word of God for it is stable and is therefore unmoving and unchanging. We do not have to worry about God pulling a fast one and changing the nature of the game. His law, His Word is above our circumstances and it is above time. The Word of God will endure – there is no end to its effect.

Because Jesus is the very embodiment of the Word, you can trust that the Word of God is not something that is just for this generation or that generation. It is not something that only applies to those in the first century. Yes, it applied to them, but it also applies to us; and it will apply and be ever so relevant to the people who live 1,000 years from now. It is sure; it is stable. It is also fair – meaning that it is completely righteous. The Word of God is good. It is not going to mislead you. It is not going to lead you down a path of error. There is not darkness in the Word, it is light and it is good.

The Value:

Psalm 19 also talks about the value of following the Word and the wisdom that God wants to give us. David says that it is:

More desirable than gold, even the finest gold;
Sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb;
It revives the soul;
Makes wise the simple;
Brings joy to the heart
Gives insight to life;
Is a warning to those who hear them;
And great reward for those who obey them.

Job says that, in reference to the wisdom of God: "It cannot be bought for gold or silver. Its value is greater than all the gold of Ophir, greater than precious onyx stone or sapphires. Wisdom is far more valuable than gold and crystal. It cannot be purchased with jewels mounted in fine gold. Coral and valuable rock crystal are worthless in trying to get it. The price of wisdom is far above pearls. Topaz from Ethiopia cannot be exchanged for it. Its value is greater than the purest gold. (Job 28:15-19).

And Solomon, in Proverbs 2 and 3 says that the wisdom of God:

Is your shield and your protection;
Is the guardian of your path;
Will watch over you and will keep you safe;
Will keep you from evil people and those whose speech is corrupt;
Will save you from immorality;
Will give you a satisfying life;
Will allow you to find favor with both God and people;
Will give you a good reputation;
Will guide you down delightful paths that are satisfying;
Is a tree of life to those who embrace her; and
Will make happy those who hold her tightly.

This is goodness. And this can be yours. This is the benefit of trusting in the Lord with your whole heart and seeking Him in all you do; refusing to depend on your own understanding.

Our Response:

When you were a child your parents or care-takers gave you instructions for life to help you make it through your day to day existence. Looking back, some of it was obvious due to the immediacy of the feedback, like: don't play with electrical sockets, don't drink the toilet water, and don't pull the dogs tail. And some of it was of it was less obvious due to the fact that sometimes it takes time for us to realize the magnitude of our choices and to experience the magnitude of the pain and regret. But I know that right now, many of you can remember some of that instruction and would trade anything if you could go back and listen and follow because you were willing to trust what your parents had to say verses just stubbornly going your own way. Many of you now know that your parents actually had some good advice and your ability to make the decisions for your life on your own has been somewhat suspect.

I have to ask each of you a very important question? I ask this not for the purpose of provoking some kind of guilt or playing to some kind of religious duty, but by way of provoking honest and sincere thought. Do you consider yourself so "intelligent" and so "wise" that you are willing to continue to live in darkness and drink from the well of your own intellect, experience, and emotion? This is a legitimate question to those of you here who are Christians and those of you who are not. Think of the importance of what we are dealing with here. We are not talking about some social cause, we are not talking politics, and we are definitely not talking religion. We are talking about your life – your eternity – your participation in the divine -- and the fact that God and His wisdom is calling you to come and take from Him and learn from Him. He is calling you to abandon the foolishness of self-pride, self-sufficiency, and self-reliance and He is asking you to take of the living Word and let it breathe light and life into your being. He wants to share Himself with you and He wants you to participate in His goodness.

I found something interesting in my studies. The first 5-books of the Bible are referred to as the Hebrew Torah. This word torah is a combination of two words, but it really just means precepts or statutes; and thus the idea of this word Torah applies to the entire Word of God. In the Hebrew, the root word of Torah "yarah" means to flow like water. You might be wondering why I think that is cool. Well, I just do. No not really, I think it is cool because Jesus – the living Word, the embodiment of all the precepts and statues of the Father, said in John 7:38 that if anyone would follow Him, from Him would rush torrents or rivers of living water. This brings us all the way back around to the fact that the Word of God not only refreshes but it gives and sustains all life.

So why do we love our darkness? If the Word of God is perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, true, and fair and if His wisdom is more valuable than anything we can possess – then why do love our darkness? Why don't we make the pursuit of God our absolute priority in life.

Is it because the responsibilities of this life are too large? Sure we have to go to school, we have to work, and we have to take care of the basics, but these do not make up our life. These activities do not define who we are. We should be defined by the life of Christ, the living Word, the logos, being manifested in our bodies. Nothing else really matters. All else will burn and will one day be turned to dust. All your achievements and accomplishments will eventually be lost to time. Similarly, all your relationships will eventually fade away. But what we are talking about has eternal value here and now.

Maybe it is because God just seems too intangible. But I can assure you, that His Spirit in your life can be both tangible and real. His voice in the spirit of your mind is unmistakable. His wisdom guiding your steps is practical and essential. And although His Word is supernatural in origin, we can read it, we can meditate on it, we can study it, we can make it our own – for it is living and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that each of us may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16). It is also as substantial. You know how you feel after a big meal, your body stops craving. This is exactly how the Word of God feels within your being when you take it in and digest it into your spirit you feel satiated, complete, and in alignment with God.

Maybe it's because you are religious and unwilling to do your part to really reciprocate in your relationship with God: the tuning of your ears, the searching, the crying out for all of Him. Keep in mind, if you read this Bible outside of a relationship with God where His word has practical and spiritual authority over your life, and where you are pursuing Him with all your heart, mind, and soul, then there is a big chance that instead of wisdom, instead of life, instead of understanding, you are just going to have a lot of knowledge. It will be to you

not much more than a religious icon, a history book, a philosophy book, a book of poetry, a book of really cool stories, and a container of the law. But you will miss out on the life that it has to offer.

I am sure there are many other reason why we don't drink from the well of the wisdom of God, but it all comes down to our unwillingness to believe that our well is muddy and can never offer us the goodness, the safety, the security, and promises that God says comes from His wisdom. With the life and the light that is freely offered to us by God, it is so sad that so many people love their darkness and demand to be left alone to walk the path that billions have walked for generations – the path of certain uncertainty, the path of danger, and the path that will leave you with only you.

As for me, personally the Word have God has been tested in my life and it is sure, it is trustworthy, it is perfect, and it is worth believing. If you could talk to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Daniel, Solomon, and so many others, they would say the exact same thing – it has been tested, it has been tried, and it has remained true.

Therefore, I want to continually drink from the well of the living water. In fact, like Jesus said, I want that water to gush and pour out from my life so that I can be used to refresh and bring life to those who are in darkness and who are drinking from the muddy waters of humanity. The Word of God is the only thing that truly satisfies. The Word of God has passed the test of perfection.

I invite you to open you bible and with the heart of a child begin to read. Listen to what God is saying and treasure His instructions. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure. Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. ... Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy.

Let's pray.

We have been talking about the God who speaks. In quick review, we talked about the fact that God primarily speaks to us through a mutually involved relationship where God is our priority and He is our primary source for finding who we are and all that we need. All He asks is that we seek Him out and search for Him with all our heart, mind, and soul. You see, God always wants to talk to us and lead us down the right paths for our lives, but so often we allow so many things to come between us and God that His voice is often drowned out in the noise and the static in our lives.

Next we studied the data (cultural, political, historical, and mathematical) as to why we can believe that the Bible is the Word of God. And why the Bible should have a place of spiritual and practical authority in our lives. If you remember, this idea of authority is not to be viewed primarily as a hammer of judgment but the Word of God has been sent out to bring the work of God's redemption to all of creation. And it is this redemptive work that can bring you a new life, a new heart, a new mind, and a place in eternity, secured with God. That is why the Word of God should have its rightful place of authority in our lives.

Then last week we studied why we should open this book and begin to read it from cover to cover. We found that the Word of God is perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, true, and fair; and if are willing to sow the word in our hearts, like a farmer sows the seed, then God will spring up His wisdom in our hearts. In fact, He will open us His storehouse of wisdom and pour it into our hearts. And the Bible tells us over and over that God's wisdom for our lives is more valuable than anything else we can possess. The Word of God and the wisdom of God protects us, guards us, leads us, watches over our lives and keeps us safe, it keeps us from evil people and those whose speech is corrupt, it saves us from immorality, it allows us to find favor with God and with people, it gives us a good reputation, and will make happy those who hold her tightly.

With that as our background, tonight we are going to talk a bit about the primary way God talks to us. I intend to lead you down a path that will connect some of the dots from our prior teachings – that way it will all hopefully start to come together in a way that is practical and tangible for you to implement.

But keep in mind, the one unifying factor of all these teachings on the God who speaks is the fact that it all starts, continues and is completed in relationship. Nothing truly happens outside of a fully committed relationship with God. In fact, all His wonderful promises are experienced only in a real time, day in and day out, relationship.

The Practical Word

With that said, the primary way God talks to us and even leads us is through His Word. The Word of God comes to us with tangible instruction and its impact in our lives is very practical. If you are willing to do the work to hide the Word of God in your heart, it will:

- Give you wise advice (Psalm 119:24)
- Be your constant guide (Psalm 119:98)
- Will comfort you (Psalm 119:52)
- Teach you good judgment and knowledge (Proverbs 2:6)
- Provide you understanding (Psalm 119:104)
- Illuminate the paths and direction you should take in your life (Psalm 119:105)
- Grant you a treasure of good sense (Proverbs 2:7)

When thought of this way, the Word of God can be viewed as a natural invasion of the supernatural in our life. It is tangible – you can buy a copy almost anywhere and you can pick it up and read it. Further, it is practical, in that it addresses everything we need for life and godliness. In fact, you will never find a book that contains both the spiritual and practical wisdom as is found in the Bible. It is absolutely unique and it has stood

the test of time. That is why the writers of both the Old Testament and the New Testament put such a high priority on the Word of God. Culturally, it was the very fabric of their society and it was at the core of all that they did.

You have to understand, they found that the Word to be extremely practical for day to day living. If you take it into your heart, it will arm you and equip you with the information, the strategy, the common sense, and the judgment to navigate through this life. That is why Solomon exhorts us as follows:

Proverbs 6:20-23

My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; Bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life

And in the New Testament, Paul says:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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

The Word of God – the Bible – is to be at the center of our life and it is to be at the very core of all that we do. But you cannot approach it as some static recording of historical and religious events or even as a religious practice or spiritual discipline. You simply won't get where you want to go. And although God entices us with the promises of wisdom, peace, rest and an abundant life, we cannot approach the Word of God as if wisdom, peace, or abundance is the end in and of itself. The Word of God is our map to a relationship with the Father, it is our detailed guidebook, and it is our living witness to those who experienced a vibrant and intimate relationship with God; which, by the way, must be the goal. He must be the end point. Wisdom, peace, love, protection, or any of the other promises that God makes to us are merely the benefit of the relationship.

Think of this way. In a marriage, sex generally is a huge benefit of the relationship; but it is not the substance of the relationship. And if any man approaches his wife as if the main reason they are together is for her to engage him sexually, then I can tell you that relationship is not going to be healthy, it is not going to be vibrant, it is not going to last very long. And the very benefit which that man had hoped for, I guarantee you, will be cut off or extremely marginalized. Marriage is first and foremost about relationship – about learning to love, honor, adore, respect, serve, and take interest in your spouse. And it is from a place of relational fulfillment that the “benefit” of marriage freely comes – at least the kind that is physically, emotionally, and spiritually fulfilling.

Throughout the Bible, marriage and even sex are used as word pictures for our relationship with God. In fact, we are called the bride of Christ, we are His betrothed, and one day we will be united with Him. But until that day arrives, we are to be busy getting to know Him, and learning how to love, honor, adore, respect and take interest in Him. If that is our aim, if that is our goal, and if that is our primary purpose for living, then we will come to know Him in the intimate meaning of the word “know.” And the benefit of “knowing” Him will be that He will grant us His wisdom, and He will lead our lives and speak into our lives, so we will know how to find the right course of action every time. He will provide us His peace and His love.

However, if you come to Him merely to get from Him, then your practical experience with His promises will be significantly marginalized. And not only that, you must have a level of consistency in your efforts to know God. Intimacy with God is not a one time occurrence. You don't ever get to that place where you master

God and know all there is to know about Him. Let me go back to the marriage example. We are told in the Bible that men and women were created in God’s image – each different but each representing aspects of the character and nature of God. Well guys, in that regard, when you get married, if you are ever dumb enough to think you have your wife figured out, let me warn you now; you are going down and going down fast. Believe me there is no end to her complexity. Just when you think you think you have her down and can predict how she is feeling or going to react, she re-writes all the rules and looks at you like – of course, don’t you know that is the way it is. And you sit there shaking your head, entirely confused, wondering what in the world is going on. That is a lot like it is with God. There is no end to His complexity and our entire life can be filled with a fascination of who He is and how He thinks and why He does what He does.

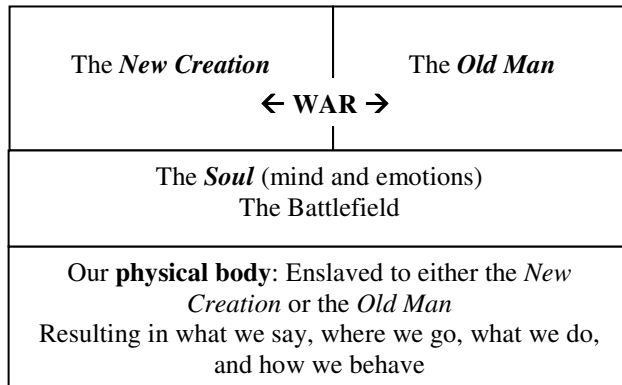
I want to make one additional point with this marriage analogy. If you get selfish and stop paying attention to your spouse and you stop doing your work to pursue the desires and interests of that other person; and, instead focus on what matters to you: whether it is other relationships, children, hobbies, ministry, work, or whatever, you will find that all that wonderful benefit will over time begin to disappear.

That is exactly how it is with our relationship with God. If you want to consistently receive His leading for you life, His wisdom for your life, and experience His peace, then you need to be very attentive to your relationship with Him and you need to pursue Him every day. He needs to be your *priority* and He needs to be your *authority*. And if He has both of those places in your heart and your mind, you will reap the benefit of a transformed life.

To tie together the last few weeks, the writer of Hebrews tells us that the Word of God is living and active and Isaiah told us that the Word never goes out without accomplishing the redemptive purposes for which it has been sent. Therefore, if you are willing to give God and His Word that place of spiritual and practical *authority* in your life, and if you are willing to make it the *priority* of your life, then it will constantly work to transform your heart and your mind such that you become a vehicle, a living vessel, through which the Holy Spirit will disclose to you the mind of Christ -- then you will know how to find the right course of action every time.

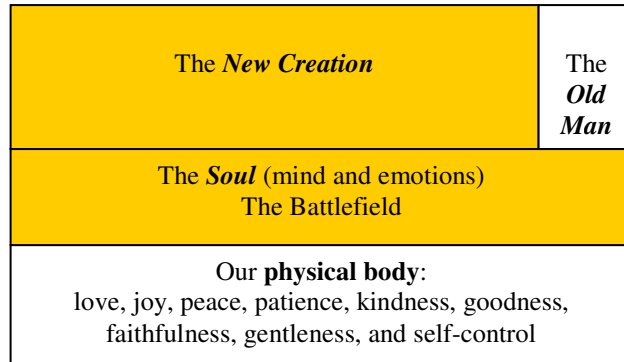
I am going to use a couple of diagrams to help make my point. For those who have experienced the miracle of the new birth, you have been imbued with an aspect to your being which is called the New Creation. This part of you is created in the image and likeness of Christ – and according to Ephesians 4:24, it is holy and it is perfect! This is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit – this is the place where communion and fellowship with God takes place.

The Old Man, on the other hand, is anything but holy and perfect. He is filled with all that makes man uniquely man; and he stands in constant opposition to God. In fact, we are told that the Old Man is always hostile – sometimes the hostility is passive and at other times it is full on aggressive, but the antagonism is always present. In Galatians 5, we are told that the Old Man and the New Creation are in an embittered conquest for your heart, mind and body and that your choices are never free from this conflict. And the battlefield for this war takes place in you mind and emotions.

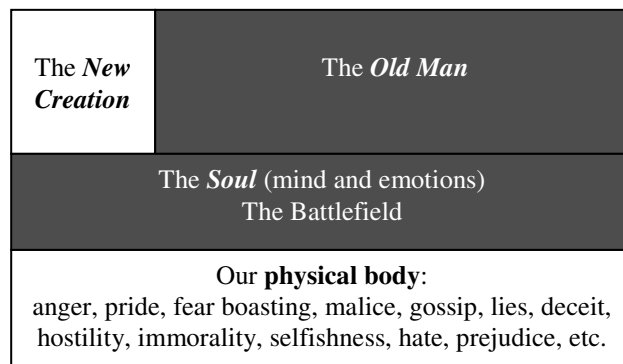


Ok, if we have this war going on inside of us, we need to understand our part in this conflict. We must understand what sways the battle to either side. And this is important because there are real consequences to the

outcome of the war. For example, if the Spirit is in control of our thoughts and emotions, then the benefit of being in that level of intimacy with God is that from our lives the Spirit will produce such wonderful things as: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.



If however, the Old Man dominates our thoughts and emotions and he sets the values and priorities of our life, then his influence and corruption will flow from our minds through our bodies and we will experience the grossities of his character and nature: anger, pride, fear, boasting, malice, gossip, lies, deceit, hostility, immorality, selfishness, hate, prejudice, etc.



With this concept in mind, and this constant tearing back and forth, I would like to take a look at just 2 verses that are deep and rich in meaning and will give us insight to this battle. To properly understand these verses, however, we are going to have to dig a bit into the Greek and into the underlying construct of the words. I am also going to incorporate both the New Living Translation and parts of the New American Standard Translation to help us get the best understanding.

Romans 12:1-2

And so dear brothers and sisters [*by the mercies of God*], I plead with you to give [*present*] your bodies to God. Let them be living and holy sacrifices—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

[*And do not be conformed to this world*] Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do and you will not how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

Romans 12:1 calls us all to action, and there is an overwhelming sense of urgency in its request. First, I believe that it makes a plea to those who have never accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is saying that the path to knowing the will of God for your life is through His Son, and only through His Son.

You might be looking at the words of verse 1 and wondering how in the world I can come to that conclusion.

Well, the idea is that when we consider what God has done -- the fact that He sent His only Son to this earth to die for our sins -- and when we consider that Jesus endured so much hostility and suffering for our sake, just so He can make us His own and provide a way for us to be in relationship with God, we should move in haste to give ourselves to Him completely.

But notice it says that we are to give our bodies as a holy sacrifice. That is an adjective that cannot describe the Old Man. A person who has yet to surrender their life to Jesus is wholly incapable of offering a holy sacrifice. The Old Man is corrupt and is at odds with God and can never be a friend of God.

It is only through the miracle of the new birth that we can offer up to God anything that is holy and acceptable – it is only through the New Creation that we have become worthy and are able to offer ourselves up to God.

That is why it says that it is only by the *mercies of God*. It is His hand, His miraculous work of the New Creation; and it has nothing to do with our own worth or merit. We can only stand before God by His mercies – by what He has done for us through dying on the cross for our sins. It is all from Him, by Him; and, therefore, we are to offer it all up to Him.

In the same way that it is a plea to unbelievers to accept Jesus, it is also a call to action to those who are believers to give themselves completely to God; and it is an admonition to stop living a double life. We are to remember all that God has done for us and how great of a sacrifice He made. We are to remember how privileged we are to be recipients of His mercy. His sacrifice is to be our motivation for giving ourselves to Him. I love the way Peter takes this idea of realizing who we are and what God has done for us and says it in a way that, for me, has always motivated me in my pursuit of God.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Therefore, and I mean therefore, because we have received mercy, we are to reciprocate in this relationship and give ourselves entirely to God. In fact, it is not a suggestion; it is an imperative – a command. In Romans 12:1, the tense of the verb “to give” or “present” indicates that from beginning to end we are to actively and continually give ourselves to Him. This is the only way to sustain a relationship with God and to enjoy the benefits of that relationship.

We are to give our bodies to God. Some people get a bit tossed by this word “bodies” and think that somehow we need to discipline ourselves and force our bodies to submit to God. This concept has led to people to such bizarre behaviors as whipping themselves to punish and repress the desires of their flesh, and others to isolate themselves into communities– rejecting all that is pleasurable and desirable to the flesh. But that is entirely wrong. Remember the diagram.

The <i>New Creation</i>	The <i>Old Man</i>
← WAR →	
The <i>Soul</i> (mind and emotions) The Battlefield	
Our physical body : Enslaved to either the <i>New Creation</i> or the <i>Old Man</i> Resulting in what we say, where we go, what we do, and how we behave	

Our physical bodies are already enslaved to their master: either the New Creation or the Old Man – and there is no amount of physical discipline that can overcome their control. Our actions are determined by their rule.

In the Greek, this word “bodies” actually means our entire living being – our heart, our mind, our soul, and the physical body that encases all of it. All of it must be presented to God, continually and regularly as a living sacrifice.

Now, let’s talk about the idea behind this word “sacrifice. In our culture, we really have a hard time connecting with that word. In the days of old, this idea of sacrifice had real meaning. In some cultures, like the Jewish culture, a lamb or a cow was killed, and its blood poured out, as a symbol of an exchange – their lives for ours. In other cultures, people actually sacrificed the lives of their children or their enemies in order to make a similar exchange: blood for favor from the Gods. So the idea here is that there must be an exchange. This idea is going to be critical as we get to the next concept of our being either “transformed” or “conformed.”

Let’s now look at verse 2

[*And do not be conformed to this world*] Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do and you will not how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

We are literally commanded not to be hammered or fashioned into the image or appearance of the world. Because we are God’s children, the Father wants us to look and to act like His children. He does not want us looking or acting like illegitimate children of another father.

Also, the verbs “conformed” and “transformed” are both in the present, passive, imperative form. This means the following:

- *Imperative*: This is a command. We are *not to be* conformed and we *are to be* transformed.
- *Present*: This means the action is something that is to be done now—no waiting.
- *Passive*: This means that the actual transformation is done for us and to us, and is not a direct result of our power, effort, or capabilities.

In other words, if you present yourself to the world, then the world will squeeze you into its image – it will force you into its mold. It does not matter how strong or tough you think you are. ***This is a spiritual and practical reality.*** If you present yourself to the world, it will inundate you with its thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors. If, however, you present yourself to God, then God will do the work of transforming and bringing

you into conformance with His image. Whether you present yourself to the world or to God, either way, the work will be done to you.

Romans 6:16

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?

Most of us believe that we have some element of control over our lives and are the masters of our domain. We are convinced that even if we make ourselves open and vulnerable to the things of the world, we can walk away unscathed. We have somehow convinced ourselves that we can play with fire and not get burned. But that is not the case. If we make ourselves open and vulnerable to the ways of the world, we will find that, over time, we become enslaved by it. We will not be able to control this conforming power. It will control us.

Let me illustrate this point. Have you ever noticed that when people become really good friends, they start sounding a lot alike? Over time, they even start to pick up a lot of the same mannerisms, inflections, and body movements, and little phrases that they say. Most people don't decide one day that they will start doing things like the other person. They just find themselves doing it. Sometimes, I start to laugh at myself when I say something or have an expression on my face that comes from one of my close friends, and when I do, for a split second, I have this sense of the person being right there with me.

So we must be careful! The more we hang around the world, the more we will start to look like it. One day, we will look into the mirror and realize that we have traveled so far down the path of the world that we struggle to see the image of our real Father. *Do not be deceived!* You will become enslaved to whomever you present yourself.

We have all gone through those stages in which we are infatuated with worldly things: it could be sex, substances, getting drunk, getting high, an obsession with the music, movies, philosophy, religion, money, success, and so on. The list is quite endless. But we must understand that those who belong to the world, and have not experienced the miracle of the new birth, generally hate us looking like our Father. They have no tolerance for the Light and are flat out repelled by the character and nature of Christ. His ways cut across and against all that they believe and all that they want to do. Therefore, they insist on hammering us into their image, and wanting us to do what they do and behave like they behave; and they are quite aggressive about it. I am sure you have felt the intensity of the hatred for the Light. And if you try to live a life on this campus that is set apart and is dedicated to God, you will experience persecution for your beliefs. It is guaranteed.

But God hates what those things in the world do to us. He talks about it in 1 John 2:15–17; James 4:4. It causes separation in our fellowship with Him; and on the practical side it works against our ability or our chances of having healthy and loving relationships, marriages, and children. It feels good for the moment, absolutely, but it all works against us. Therefore, out of love and out of mercy, God desires to save us from the damage and the pain. Thus, He commands us to present ourselves to Him so He can renew our minds and fashion us according to His image.

Remember, the verb “transformed” is in the passive tense. Therefore, if you start to spend time with God, as you would your best friend, soon you will start sounding like Him: sharing His inflections, emotions, reactions, and thoughts. Before you know it, your thoughts will start to align with His Word. It will happen to you.

Let me step back for a second. I want to emphasize something here that is of critical importance. If we are going to be in a relationship with God and experience the benefits of this relationship, then we need to ***remain*** in fellowship with Him. You cannot really sustain a best friend relationship with anyone if you rarely see them or talk to them. In John 15:5, Jesus said:

John 15:5

”Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who *remain* in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

We must *remain*. It is not enough to feel good about reading your Bible and spending time with God when you can fit it in, or when you are finally ready for it – you must always *remain* in that place of intimacy, fellowship, and communication. And the impetus or the reason is what Jesus said: that apart from Him we can do nothing. In other words, we must approach the Word of God, and any time we spend with God, with a fundamental belief in our inability and His ability. That is why we must *remain* in fellowship with Him every single day – for the reality is – whether we realize it or not – we are 100% dependent upon Him for our every breath. In fact, the New Creation exists and finds its very power through relationship with God.

If you are in any form of intimate relationship with someone and decide not to talk to them for a few days or a week, believe me it will be awkward when you try and sit down and “talk” it will be strained and rightfully so – you have been a jerk. You have spent your time thinking about yourself and have not even considered the other persons’ feelings or needs.

Yet, for some reason we don’t apply this practicality to our relationship with God. We go off and do our own thing and when we want to “get right” with God, we come to Him and expect Him to be our dancing monkey and make us feel good, and make us feel happy, make us feel His presence, and we expect Him to make everything better – no matter how long we have been gone and how much in our lives we have screwed up. We expect Him to fulfill His “promises” and when it does not happen when we want it, we think this all bogus and we venture back out to figure it all out on our own. But that is such foolishness. That is not how relationships work, to enjoy any benefit, they must be regularly maintained. And if you were to truly realize your spiritual and practical neediness, you would understand that this is not an option. You must spend time with God for He is your life.

For me, this has become such a reality. If I don’t fellowship with Him during a day, I miss Him. My spirit groans to be connected with Him – I cannot handle that feeling and I can’t wait to sit down and read my Bible and just enjoy Him. And when I do that, He fills me up and I feel satisfied; it’s amazing.

I want you to keep something in mind -- **remember the diagrams** -- this is a zero sum game. It is a war. There is no acceptable level of compromise. Diplomacy does not work. This is a conquest. Each side is engaged in a take-over attempt for your mind and your emotions – and ultimately your body. And which ever side you open yourself up to and allow to influence your mind will win.

Don’t fool yourself. If you present yourself to the world and all the things of this world, you will quench your New Creation and his life in your being will be like a flickering candle in the wind. But if you present yourself to God and remain with Him and in Him, the New Creation will rule and dominate, and its life in your being will be like the Sun. These are two unbending principles or dualistic truths. If you spend time with God, He will transform you; but if you spend time with the world, it will conform you. This is the *exchange*, this is the sacrifice: the life of the Old Man for the life of the New Man.

The Mind of Christ

Remember, last week we read in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 how Paul claimed to have the mind of Christ and to be speaking a wisdom that is not of this world. He claimed to speak in effect a special language – He used spiritual words that can only be understood by those who are spiritual. This was another way of saying that:

- He constantly presented Himself to God as His servant;
- He daily spent time with God as his priority; and
- He gave the Word of God its rightful place of practical and spiritual authority in His life.

And, as a result, God transformed his mind to receive the thoughts, ideas, values and the very wisdom of God. It's as if the Holy Spirit cleaned out all the junk and all the attachments and receptors that were previously trained to receive the thoughts, ideas, values and the wisdom of the world. With those removed, Paul was an open vessel, a living sacrifice. The Holy Spirit, living in the New Creation ruled and reigned in Paul's heart, mind, and emotions – and therefore was able to live in and through Paul's body. That is why Paul, with unabashed confidence, was able to tell the believers at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 4:16

Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.

Like Paul, in our humility and in our neediness, we must fix our hearts and minds on being continually in fellowship with God. We must read our Bibles knowing that it is through this book that we will find true relationship with God. We must spend time with people who love Him and thereby experience that part of Jesus that is expressed in and through their New Creation. We must talk to Him and pray – seeking His will with our voice, seeking His heart with our requests. We must worship Him with our spirits and honor Him for who He is. In summation: we must seek Him with our entire heart, mind, and soul.

In addition, we must make the *exchange* – we must turn from the world and reject the cries of our Old Man. And this is where most of us get stuck. This is where we start to drift and walk away. But no matter how you try and sugar coat it, in order to be in that place where you receive the benefits of a relationship with God – on an ongoing basis – you must walk away from your love of the world. You must realize that its path may promise fun and happiness, and its taste may be sweet to the bite, but its poison will destroy you. Some of you know all too well what I am talking about. That is why the book of Proverbs tells us that the path of the world is the path of foolishness, the path of destruction and death.

You must be willing to let the Word of God be your *authority* and let its wisdom be your guide; and you must be willing to *prioritize* the Word of God in your life over and above all else. You must let the Holy Spirit clean out and remove all the attachments that you have not only to the ideas, values, wisdom and priorities of the world, but also from the level of intimacy you have with those whose God is the world. It does not mix. Paul says that we are not to be unequally yoked. Our intimacy, our heart, our tender places are to be reserved exclusively for God and for those who love Him.

It is amazing, when God clears out those points of attachment and those receptors, the ability for the world, or for any one to control you is laughable. They cannot get a grip. You are free.

This is the pathway to relationship with God. This is the pathway to experiencing the promises of God. There must be an *exchange*. God is not sitting up there waiting to do our bidding when we finally we decide we are ready for Him. But He is there waiting to cultivate and build an intimate and perpetual relationship with Him where His life is expressed through yours. He is waiting. He has paved the way with the blood of His Son. And when we remember all that He has done for us, all that He suffered, we **MUST** give ourselves to Him and let Him transform us into His image.

Let's pray

We have been on a journey exploring what it means to be in relationship with God; and specifically discovering how God speaks to us. What we have been finding out is that our ability to hear the voice of God, and know His will for our lives, has everything to do with our willingness to *remain* in fellowship with Him. Last week we focused on two verses: Romans 12:1-2.

Romans 12:1-2

And so dear brothers and sisters [*by the mercies of God*], I plead with you to give [*present*] your bodies to God. Let them be living and holy sacrifices—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

[*And do not be conformed to this world*] Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do and you will not how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.

The main thrust of the teaching was that God desires us to offer ourselves up to Him – completely! Actually, desires so understates the reality. We are commanded to give ourselves to Him – it is not a suggestion or a recommendation, but it is a command that is based on the fact that Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father in the seat of ultimate authority. In fact, immediately preceding this verses Paul says:

Romans 11:36

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

He is all! Everything exists by Him and for Him. In Colossians 1:16-17 we are told that He is before all things and by him all things are held together. It is from this place of ultimate authority that He mercifully commands us to present ourselves to Him, without hesitation or reservation. Then in verse 2 of Romans 12, He sets forth an unbending reality; a practical and spiritual truth that is never compromised.

If you present yourself to the world, if you open up you mind and your emotions to the thoughts, ideas, values, desires, and passions of the world – if that is what occupies your time and attention – then the world will conform you to its image. It will force you into its mold and its work will be done to you. This will not be something you can control. The Spirit of God will be quenched in your life and you will look like and resemble everyone else and lose the distinction that you are to have as a child of God. Keep in mind, presenting yourself to the world does not just happen as a one time event; rather, it happens over time. As you involve yourself more and more in the thoughts, ideas, activities, and relationships in the world, you slowly start becoming numb and dull to the things of God and the world starts hammering you and forming you into the person that it wants you to be. At first it tastes great and is a lot of fun, but the payback is hell, literally hell. The enemy has his way with you, and your Old Man leads you down paths of damage and destruction.

If, however, you present yourself to God, then He will transform you into the image of His Son, and your New Creation will rule and reign in your life and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit will be undeniable. Again, the transformation will happen to you. You just have to be willing to present yourself – or open up your mind and emotions to the thoughts, ideas, values, desires, and passions of God. But in order to do that, in order to know the mind of God, you have to spend time with Him by reading the Word of God. The Word is our primary method for knowing God's heart, His ways, His thoughts, His passions and it is the primary vehicle for hearing His voice. If you (1) spend time with Him, (2) if you pray to Him, and (3) if you build your inter-personal relationships, and reserve the intimate pieces of who you are, exclusively for those who are in fellowship with God, then you will come to know and experience Him. You will also get the benefit of being in relationship with Him and you will know how to find the perfect will of God for your life.

It should be clear by now why we are to be in the Word of God, we have spent a lot of time discussing that point. It should also be clear that we are to actively make choices for our lives that are in alignment with the Word of God. That is the process whereby our knowledge becomes living faith. In addition, talking and

communication is a natural part of being in any relationship; thus if you want to foster a deep relationship with God, you have to talk to Him and be willing to listen to Him. We call this prayer. But tonight I want to focus on the 3rd point I brought up; that stickler about our inter-personal relationships. This is a huge stumbling block for most people and an issue that often completely restricts their ability to *remain* in fellowship with God.

So let me ask the question, why is it so important that we reserve intimacy and deep friendship exclusively for those who love God? There are a few reasons. First of all, when we open ourselves up emotionally to someone, then we naturally become vulnerable to that person. Their ideas, their point of view, their perspective, all of sudden seems to have a heightened place of authority in our mind. This is largely because if we are going to be in relationship, then we must show some level of deference to that person. If there is not some level of reciprocity and respect, then there will not be much of a relationship. That is just common sense.

Therefore, if their thoughts, ideas and perspectives are not founded on the Word of God and a relationship with God, then, by default, you make yourself vulnerable and allow the thoughts, ideas, perspectives and values of one who is beholden to the world's system to have a place of "relational authority" in your life. And if you *remain* in that relationship, then it will have its corrupting impact on your heart and mind; and it will work to conform you and shape you into the image of the world. You must understand, this is just the way it happens – this is an unbending spiritual truth. You cannot think that somehow you are strong enough to prevent this from happening.

I cannot tell you how many people I have talked to and counseled who simply refuse to follow this instruction. They think that some how it is different for them. They meet a guy or a girl and they become infatuated and totally taken by them. They think that person is so nice, so cool, and so fun to be with; yet, they don't even seem to care if that person is even a believer, much less someone who really loves Jesus. As a result, they naturally take the next step and begin to form a real relationship with that person. They start to develop some level of intimacy and emotional connection – and at times even physical connections. This is the slippery slope that is very hard to come back from, and over time you will be conformed and you will compromise the truth that God has given you.

It is ludicrous to think that we can go against the wisdom of God and actually believe that for us it will somehow work out ok. Yet, in our pride, we reject all that we have learned from history and all the shattered lives we can read about in the Bible, we reject all that God says about relationships and being united with unbelievers, and we just try to do it our way. But our way does not work and it will never work. We will always be the one to get hurt.

God loves us. Remember that. His instruction for you is always based on His love and passion for you. He knows that you will either be conformed to the world or transformed into His image, all depending upon where you invest your time and what you allow to influence your mind and emotions. You have the opportunity to know and experience true life in Him. Alternatively, you can follow after the world and its system and experience a painful existence outside of the fellowship, protection, and care of the Father.

Let me stop for a moment and talk about this idea of being in relationship with unbelievers. This comes from a verse in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 6:14-15

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

The Greek literally says do not be unequally yoked. It has been translated "bound together" to fit our understanding since we really do not connect with such agrarian based language. But still the idea that the original language had in mind provides a very powerful word picture. If you were a farmer, and needed to plow a field you would never hook together, under a common yoke, animals of different type, size, or strength. If you

hooked together a cow and a donkey, the cow would overpower the donkey and it would be virtually impossible to plow a straight trough in a field. That is the same if you hook up two cows and one is big and strong and the other is small and weak. Your field will be a disaster and your ability to care for, nurture, and water a field that is all crazed out will be difficult; and it will impact the fruitfulness of your harvest.

Do you get it? That is what happens to us. And like the farmer, we cannot control it. The bigger animal will **always** overpower the smaller. We will be pulled astray and overpowered by the world and our life will look like an out-of-control mess. That is why we are not to be bound together with unbelievers; it messes us up.

Now before you get the wrong understanding, I am not talking about mere friendship; this word picture is describing an emotional and intimate form of connection with a person who is under the influence and control of the world. It obviously cannot mean that we are not to have any friendships or relationships with unbelievers, or else we would have to all move to some isolated monastery and that is not the will of God.

We know that we are to be the salt and light bringing Jesus to an unbelieving world. We are His ambassadors of the good news: the life changing news of Jesus' death and the forgiveness of sins, His resurrection and our new life in the Spirit, His soon return to this earth and our promise of spending eternity with Him. We have been commissioned to bring this good news to unbelievers. Therefore, we must be in relationship to those in the world, and we must share with them the love of Jesus as that is expressed in and through our lives. We are to care for those that God brings in to our lives, but we are not to become emotionally vulnerable to them.

Our personal expressions of intimacy, the insides of who we are, are to be shared exclusively with believers. As it is said: what intimacy has light with darkness? The implied answer is none. What intimacy has Christ with a demonic idol? Again, the answer is absolutely none. Therefore, this is one of those issues that from God's perspective is not debatable and does not fall into some category of situational negotiation just because we have convinced ourselves that our circumstances are unique. That is why romantic involvement with an unbeliever almost always leads to a compromised life.

Please understand this instruction comes to you because God loves you. He is not trying to ruin your fun. Yes, God loves the world, and that is why He has commissioned us with the good news that we are to share with unbelievers. But first and foremost, He loves and wants to protect His children. So this instruction is wisdom for your life and it is protection for your soul.

Most Christians who are unequally yoked in a intimate relationship with an unbeliever, and experience a disconnect in their fellowship with God, do not find themselves in that place because they were busy sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. It is not because they were standing for truth and desiring to lead that person in the truth. Rather, most people who become unequally yoked find themselves in that place because they were **not** bringing the good news of Jesus Christ into the relationship – it was not their priority. In fact, their commission, their assignment, their ambassadorship gets stuffed in their back pocket and they venture into these relationships because they are pulled away by their emotions and the desires of the flesh. That is it – plain and simple. The reality is that for just long enough, they stopped presenting themselves to God and opened up their mind and emotions to the thoughts, ideas, values, and passions of the world; and their Old Man jumped at the opportunity.

If you let the light of Jesus live through you, do you know what, that light will repel the darkness? There is no fellowship between light and darkness. You walk into a room, you flip that switch and what happens – light floods the room and the darkness is gone – the light and the darkness don't merge and the room does not become some shade of gray. The light prevails. Thus, the only way that the darkness can have its way in your life is if you walk into that room and refuse to flip the switch. You know where the switch is, you have access, but you are the one who must still decide to flip it on and leave it on. It will not happen automatically.

The point being, that our relationships to those in the world must be relationships of light. They must be focused on our brining light into their lives. That does not mean that we are constantly walking around grabbing

people by the collar and telling them that they must have Jesus – now! But it does mean that we live by the light. From beginning to end, we are to actively and continually present ourselves to God which creates a natural boundary of protection in all of our relationships. We are to enter into all relationships seeking the wisdom of God as to how He wants to use us to bring light into that person's life. Sometimes that is a slow process and we are to just befriend a person and take the opportunities God gives us to love them. Sometimes God may want us to just throw it right out there and tell them how much Jesus loves them. But either way, the basis of that relationship must be the light. That is the only way we know we are protected, and that is the only way we do not risk jeopardizing our fellowship with God.

What ever you do, don't underestimate the power of relationships. Don't underestimate your vulnerability to those to whom you give yourself and open yourself up to emotionally. It is powerful, it is real, and it can either lead you to the wisdom of God or to separation from your fellowship with God.

Now, if a person is a believer, if they have Jesus as their priority, then by building a relationship with this person, you will get a chance to experience Jesus as He lives His life in and through that person. And the more that other person is surrendered to Jesus and their New Creation is in control, you will get to share and experience more and more of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit through that person. This is a valuable key to our sustaining a walk with God and *remaining* with Him.

This idea of being unequally yoked can also be applied to our relationship with believers who have given themselves over to the world. This again calls for wisdom. Let's go back to our two charts. Both of these charts represent someone who has experienced the miracle of the new birth and has the Holy Spirit of God living in their lives. But the chart on the right represents someone who has in effect forgotten what God has done for them, and set aside the authority that the Word of God is to have in their lives, and subsequently presented themselves to the world. They have been hammered and fashioned to into the image of the world. Their Old Man is in control and the fruit of their life is represented by such things as: *anger, pride, fear boasting, malice, gossip, lies, deceit, hostility, lust, immorality, selfishness, hate, prejudice, and so on*. It is ugly. The Holy Spirit is quenched and marginalized to such an extent that His voice can hardly be heard and His power is restrained.

In reality, except for the fact that their salvation is secured and reserved in heaven, they act like they have never experienced the presence of God – they act like what Paul calls natural men – men of flesh. The world rules in their life. Therefore, I believe that the admonition to not be unequally yoked similarly applies to a believer that is living from their Old Man. If you have fellowship, intimacy, and make yourself vulnerable to such a person, you will be burned. Your field will be trashed and your harvest will be greatly impacted. So the fact that someone gave themselves to God, claims to know God, grew up as a Christian, or whose parents and siblings are Christians, does not open up the doors for us to enter into a place of relational intimacy. The issue is whether or not God rules in their life. We must look at the fruit that is being produced from their field.

Unless the love of God prevails and flows through that person's life, they will never be able to care for you, protect you, help you, or love you in the way that God wants you to be loved. They can't, it is impossible. They are men or women who live by the dictates of the world and are driven first and foremost by their selfish needs, and not by the truth of the Word of God. They will throw you under the bus in an instant if it means protecting themselves.

Contrast that with a person who has continued to present themselves to God. This is represented by the chart on the left. This person is not perfect, and this person still struggles with their Old Man and still deals with sin. However, this person has fundamentally refused to fellowship with darkness and has let the Word of God have its place of **priority** and **authority** in their life. They believe the truth as God has communicated it in the Bible, and their choices are in alignment with that truth. This person *remains* in fellowship with God. As a result, the Holy Spirit's power is unleashed in their life, and He not only speaks to them but He also leads that person in the way they should go. As Romans 12:2 says, the perfect will of God is proved out in their lives. And note, the fruit that comes from their life is the fruit of the Holy Spirit; therefore, their relationships are marked by love

and selflessness. Such a person will be able to care for you, protect you, help you, and love you in the way that God wants you to be loved. Why? Because in reality, God will be the one loving you as He lives His life in and through that person.

Does this make sense? Do you understand?

Now I must similarly caution you to be wary of those who are trying to live in the middle and trying to have it both ways. They are in a war being pulled back and forth between the world and God and they really do not even understand what is happening to them. They are like Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: one moment loving and kind and in fellowship with God and the next selfish and self-serving. They are very confusing to be around and again, wisdom says that you are running a big risk when you open yourself up to such a person and become vulnerable to their ways.

The <i>New Creation</i>	The <i>Old Man</i>
← WAR →	
The <i>Soul</i> (mind and emotions) The Battlefield	
<i>Our physical body</i> -- what we say, where we go, and what we do: Like doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One moment loving and kind and the next selfish and self-serving	

Personally, I believe that those who try and get the “best” out of both sides are probably the most miserable people on the earth. They love the world and are fascinated with the things in the world and all that entices the flesh; but at the same time they know it does not honor God. They also know that it hurts not only themselves but those in their life who really care about them. But still they find a way to push past that reality, they work hard to dull their conscience, they shut the door on the voice of God in their lives, and they grab for any fun, enjoyment, temporary pleasure, or distraction they can seek.

Yet, deep inside their conscience is marred and they experience the full weight of sin in their heart and their emotions. They experience bondage instead of freedom. In fact, if they were honest with you, they would tell you that their ability to even really enjoy the flesh is limited because there is this other part of them that is incessantly calling them back to the light. They are tormented inside. They come to church, they open up their Bibles and they even worship God because they know that is what they are supposed to do. They know that God loves them and they want to love God, but they don’t want to give up the world. As a result, their life is unpredictable and chaotic. They are ruled by guilt, duty and impulse, and they have no peace. They can talk about God, they can tell others to come to God, but their own lives are marked by anxiety, worry, fear, and unrest. In addition, they are not even very good friends, they are just so unreliable and irresponsible. They leave a wake of pain and damaged relationships wherever they go. It’s as if they are always swimming upstream. Putting in a lot of effort but really making no progress in their life.

So again, don’t be fooled by someone just because they come to church, call themselves a Christian, and even possibly carry around a Bible. Look at the fruit that comes from their life. Build intimacy with those whose fruit comes from the Spirit of God – with those who love. That is the only way to be safe. Otherwise you put yourself and your ability to *remain* in fellowship with God at great peril.

Now, I want to back up to a comment I made earlier so I am not misunderstood. Walking with God is a process. It is a journey of believing the right things about God and learning to love God more and more as you learn more and more about His character, His nature, and His love for you. It is a life filled with struggles,

failures, and mistakes; but it is one that is to be continually redirected to the redeeming work that the Holy Spirit wants to effect in our lives. It is a life that that is to be evidenced by our willingness to continually offer ourselves up to God as a living sacrifice and conversely refuse to be conformed to the world.

With that said, we must have wisdom as to where a person is in terms of their walk with God. We must be careful to reserve intimacy for those who truly are in love with Jesus. Paul puts it this way:

2 Timothy 2:22

...Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

The pursuit of Jesus is to be the basis of our relationships. If God is at the center of our life, our conversation, our activities, and our pursuits, then you and I are going to experience Him not only individually but through each others lives. And it will be both fascinating and marvelous. It will be safe, it will be secure, and you will find that you have the freedom to really love and be loved.

I am asking you now, for your own sake, to please listen to wisdom. Let your time and your activities be first and foremost dominated by a pursuit of God. Let the Word of God have its place of *priority* and *authority* in your life. Live by it. Study it. Take it into your heart. Believe it. It is good, it is wonderful, and it will give you life. Learn to talk to God and share with Him all that is going on inside of you. Learn to listen to Him and to what He might be saying to you and where He wants to lead you. And pursue faith and love and peace with those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. Reserve your intimacy and your close relationships exclusively for those who love Jesus, and are on the path of seeking Him with all their heart, mind, and soul.

Then you will know what God wants you to do – how to find the right course of action every time – and you will know how good, pleasing, and perfect his will really is.

And please don't forget, you are in a war – a battle for you mind and emotions. A zero sum game. If you open yourself up to the ideas, thoughts, values and behaviors of the world, it will conform you into its image and your life will be marred by the fruits of the flesh, and the voice of God in your life will be quenched. But if you choose to believe the truth and open yourself up to the ideas, thoughts, and values, of God, He will lovingly transform your heart and mind into His image. You will hear His voice and know how He leads you. And your life will bring light to others, and you will be known by His love.

Let's pray.

Romans 12:1-2

And so dear brothers and sisters [*by the mercies of God*], I plead with you to give [*present*] your bodies to God. Let them be living and holy sacrifices—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

[*And do not be conformed to this world*] Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do **and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.**

I was ready to move on from the text we have been studying in Romans 12:1-2 in our discussion of the “God who Speaks,” but I have felt compelled to drill in on the final statement in these verses. We have talked at length about how if you present yourself to the ideas, thoughts, values, and behaviors of the world, and if you refuse to let the Word of God have its place of **priority** and **authority** in your life, then the world will conform you into its image. And the fruit that will come from your life will be nothing less than rotten.

Alternatively, if you **present** yourself to the thoughts, ideas, and values of God, and if you let the Word of God have its place of **priority** and **authority** in your life, then He will transform you into His image and He will change how you think. He will do His redemptive work in your life through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Your life be filled with light and your and relationships will be marked by His love

In that regard, last week we talked about the fact that part of presenting yourself to God practically requires you to limit the relationships where you share intimacy exclusively with those who are on the journey of pursuing God with all their heart, mind and soul. Paul puts it this way:

2 Timothy 2:22

...Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

The reason this is important is because relationships are powerful and the emotional attachments we make with people can strengthen and encourage us in our pursuit of God or they can tear us away from God with the effect that we become desensitized to the ways of our flesh and the desires of our Old Man. Anytime we enter into a relationship we make ourselves vulnerable, at some level, to the other person. And if their thoughts, ideas and perspectives are not founded on the Word of God, then, by default, you make yourself vulnerable and allow the thoughts, ideas, perspectives and values of one who is beholden to the world's system to have a place of “relational authority” in your life.

I know that this idea of not being “unequally yoked” or “bound together” with unbelievers is not popular and seems some how cold and callous. But remember, this instruction comes by way of the wisdom of God and His love for you. He knows that when you make yourself vulnerable to the things of this world, including relationships, your ability to remain in fellowship and intimacy with Him is greatly jeopardized.

With the last few weeks of teaching then as our background, I want to focus on the very last sentence of Romans 12:2, and actually the last thought of the last sentence. Since we first started studying this topic of the “God who Speaks,” I have been talking about the wonderful benefit of being in an ongoing and sustainable relationship with God is that we actually discover and can know God's will for our lives. But I have realized that in and of itself that is not necessarily compelling for all of you. It is for some – there are those who want nothing unless it is in perfect alignment with the will of God for their life. Its not that they are different from you or I, but they have learned that His will is good, pleasing, and perfect.

However, there are those who are still convinced that they are in just as good of a place to determine the direction and paths for their life as is God. Now, you may not necessarily voice that, but actions speak louder

than words. For example, the teachings over the last couple of weeks have been very intense and have really put forward a serious challenge to what we do with ourselves on a day-in and day-out basis. But it would be my guess that these teachings have had some but overall little play in your hearts and minds. Yet, what those teachings called for was a radical transformation of what you believe, what you think, where you invest your time and activity, and with whom. If taken seriously, all of this should have caused cataclysmic type changes.

Now I am not saying this to give you a guilt trip – not at all. But I am trying to draw attention to the fact that if we were absolutely convinced that the pathway to God, the will of God, and all that God asks of us in this relationship, was good, pleasing, and perfect, that some, if not all of us, would drop everything to go His way.

Instead, we dig in our feet and hold our ground believing that we can make it on our own. Besides, the things He asks are personally quite difficult. After all, He wants us to prioritize our life so that He gets our first and our best in terms of our attention and quantity of time devoted to pursuing Him. He wants us to constantly be in His Word and let it have the place of ultimate authority in our lives where we follow its leading and its direction. He wants His Word to settle in our mind in such a way that it replaces and removes all that is not in alignment with God. He wants us to push aside the things of the world and anything that draws us away from keeping Him as the priority of our heart, mind, and soul. He wants us to adjust all the personal relationships in our life so that we bring His light into each and every relationship we have. Basically, He wants all of us. He is a jealous God and He wants a oneness, a unity, a completeness between Him and each of us.

As referenced in Romans 12:1, considering the fact that Jesus left His place of glory to come down to earth in the form of man and suffered a brutal and cruel death at our hands, is this really too much to ask? The will of God is good, pleasing, and perfect, but the path is a path of exclusivity – total devotion to God. You must be willing to let go of all that you hold on to and all that you think has value; and, instead, present yourself completely to God. Jesus put it this way:

Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds were following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, "If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters — yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And you cannot be my disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow me.

"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay the bills? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of funds. And then how everyone would laugh at you! They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and ran out of money before it was finished!'

"Or what king would ever dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors and discussing whether his army of ten thousand is strong enough to defeat the twenty thousand soldiers who are marching against him? If he is not able, then while the enemy is still far away, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace. So no one can become my disciple without giving up everything for me.

Jesus offers you everything – Romans 8:32 says that He will freely give you all things that come from His hand. Luke 11:13 says that He will give you an entire outpouring of the Holy Spirit if you ask Him. 2 Peter 1:3,4 says that He has given you everything you need for life and godliness. He has called you to receive His glory and goodness. And by the same mighty power, He has given you all of His rich and wonderful promises. But in exchange He asks for everything – absolutely everything! He wants you to hold on to nothing that you think you need, nothing that you think you deserve, nothing that you think you want; He wants it all. Notice, that Jesus says that even the most intimate and powerful of human relationships must take a second seat to the place that God wants in your life. If Father, mother, wife, children, and siblings all must have a lower priority in your life than God, then what place do you think friends and casual relationships in this world are to have?

Why is it that we have this upside down and inside out? Everything else seems to have a higher priority than God's Word and His ways. This out not be so. God is calling for a radical move on your part. God is calling you to choose something that is so outrageous and which will put you in a category of the few who are His heroes of faith.

I love the stories of how Jesus chooses His disciples. Just consider how Peter (Simon) and His brother Andrew, James, John, and Matthew (Levi) responded to Jesus.

Mark 1:16-20

One day as Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother, Andrew, fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out to them, "Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and went with him.

A little farther up the shore Jesus saw Zebedee's sons, James and John, in a boat mending their nets. He called them, too, and immediately they left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired men and went with him.

Mark 2:13-14

Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that gathered around him. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax-collection booth. "Come, be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

Can you believe it? They literally heard the words of Jesus and dropped everything and followed Him. They dropped their work, they left their families, Matthew even put his own life at risk by walking away from one of the most important government jobs. But each of these men decided in their hearts that nothing, absolutely nothing, was more important than being right with God.

Every day God asks us to make a similar choice: to be His disciple. To drop all that we consider of worth, to reject our own wisdom and our own ways, to leave behind the choices, behaviors, and relationships that are not in alignment with His will. Everyday He says: come follow me.

I find it very convicting that none of these men responded by first asking Jesus what was in it for them. And Jesus did not offer them any promises, He did not make any guarantees, He just said come follow me; and they followed. Keep in mind, they were not stupid. They knew what it meant to be a disciple – this was a deep and ingrained tradition in Hebrew life. All the great Rabbis choose a select group of students to study under them. But it was not like anything we have today. These students lived for their Rabbi and devoted themselves entirely to learn everything they could from that man: all his ways, his ideas, his thoughts, his habits, his behaviors – all of it. They never left his side because to them success at being a disciple meant that they became just like their Rabbi. They desired to be transformed into his image. Does that sound familiar? They presented themselves to the Rabbi and became like him. There was great glory and goodness in that achievement.

We may not have that pattern and that tradition ingrained into our culture, but Jesus has made us promises, He has made us guarantees, He has given us insight into the journey and He says it is good, pleasing, and perfect. Should we not similarly drop everything and come follow Him. Should we not similarly be the radicals of our age and live a life that is contrary to everyone else? Should we not be His disciples – the unique chosen ones?

Why do we insist on living a life that is essentially a blur -- a life that that is non-distinct; and one that basically melds together with everyone else who chooses the world above the Word of God?

I think the answer to the question is obvious. The paths of God, although they are good, pleasing, and perfect, require a cost that so many of us have just been unwilling to pay. We don't like what He asks of us, and so we tend to ignore what He has said and push it out of our mind, and just move on with our lives. But going

back to Luke 14, Jesus said: “And you cannot be my disciple [or you cannot be transformed into my image] if you do not carry your own cross and follow me.” That means that His path is the path of the cross. In the same way that Jesus literally carried His cross and gave up everything for us on that hill, so are we to follow and emulate Him in everything. That is what it means to be a disciple: to follow in His footsteps and to pattern our life after His ways.

The cross was an instrument of pain, torture, humiliation, and total submission. It was only used on the lowest and vilest of criminals. The cross was the way for the Romans to eliminate any threat to their ordered society. And one thing for sure about crucifixion, everyone dies. No one survived the cross!

In this light, the cross speaks to us of how worthless, treacherous and vile our Old Man really is; which is why the fruit that comes from his life is of no real benefit to us. The cross is our way of “putting Him to death” and rejecting all his thoughts, values, ideas, philosophies, behaviors, and all His ways of thinking. It is our way of eliminating threats to a God ordered life – a life that can follow the pathways that He has set before us. But it requires us to make radical and drastic choices against the ways of our Old Man.

Tonight, I want you to seriously consider whether or not you have truly answered that call; whether you are a disciple of Jesus or just part of the larger crowd observing His ways. He is calling you. He wants you. He has made you promises. Please come follow Him. His path is good, pleasing and perfect.

Now what does it mean that His paths and His will for you are good, perfect and pleasing? Do you think that means a life of health, wealth, and prosperity? If you do think that – don’t! It may be, but most likely not. The journey of God is not without peril, danger, discomfort, and difficulty. After all, we live in a fallen world that is corrupt through and through. Our promise of perfection awaits us in eternity.

It is **good**, however, because God knows not only each step of the journey but also the destination. We have no idea what lies ahead and we cannot declare, with any credibility, that the path we chose for our life is a good path. At best, we can just look at the circumstances and apply our limited predictive ability to the facts as we see them, and then just cross our fingers hoping for the best. But we don’t know and we can’t know. Only He knows.

It is **pleasing** or agreeable because it is in accord with the will of God; and, thus, our spirit and our new creation inside of us are at peace knowing that we are doing exactly what He wants us to do. *Ephesians 2:10* says that we are God’s masterpiece, His work of art, a perfect poem written by His hands; and He created us new in Christ so that we can do all the good works that He planned for us to fulfill from the beginning of time. Like a brush in the hand of a master painter, we can move in perfect harmony and perfect peace with His will and the results will be a work of beauty for everyone to admire.

It is **perfect** because it is the only path that provides the shortest journey to our destination – being made into a disciple.

Romans 8:28,29

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. **For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**

If we present ourselves to God, there is nothing that will keep us from achieving our ultimate goal – being transformed into the image of our Master. It will happen it is guaranteed. That is why His path is **perfect**: nothing can separate us from His love and His desire to pour all of Himself into our life. The things the world throws at us, no matter how wonderful or how tragic, are unable to stop this process. As we are transformed we become one with Him, we look like Him, we sound like Him, and His ways become our ways. In so doing, we fulfill Jesus prayer in John 17: “I in them and you [Father] in me, all being perfected into one.” This explains why we can hear God’s voice, know His mind, and His will for our lives – we become one with Him. That is

what Paul was communicating in 1 Corinthians 2, a passage we have studied at depth in the past. Go back and read it with this background in mind.

Please understand that what I have been talking about – this God who speaks – is not to be understood as a metaphor and I am not telling you some fanciful tale to dupe you, it is real. It can be ours. It is not some new “way” or some new “technique,” it is the only way – the way that God has revealed to us. God is found in relationship. God is found when we become one with Him. God is found when we leave it all behind, take up our cross and follow Him. God is found when we are willing to learn everything we can about Him just so we can have the privilege of being called His disciples. And the God who speaks will lead and direct your life.

I am going to change directions here a bit and take you on a little journey. I am going to tell you the story of the great exodus. What you might not know is that this story is not just history; it is also a comprehensive word picture of the Christian life. Through it, I hope to crystallize these ideas of being a disciple, presenting yourself to God, and following His good, pleasing, and perfect path. We will go through the story and then come back to discuss the key players and the metaphors God uses to provide instruction for our lives.

The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. They served at the whip of their masters and their lives were meaningless except to do the will of those who held them in bondage. Any disobedience was met with firm and strict punishment. The people cried out to God and He heard them. The time that God had established for the Israelites to be in exile was finished – 400 years had passed – and it was now time to keep His promise to Abraham and return his children to the land of their fathers.

God called upon a man named Moses to lead His people to freedom. Moses was an Israelite raised in Egypt as part of Pharaoh's household, but he left it all behind and fled to Midian. But now God was calling him to return. A lot happened between God and Moses, a lot of fireside chats around the burning bush, but eventually Moses and His brother Aaron came to Egypt and demanded that Pharaoh let the children of Israel go. Of course, Pharaoh refused as the Israelites were a critical part of their economy. So through a series of unbelievable miracles God broke the will of the Egyptians. But it was the final miracle that literally delivered the death blow. God told Moses that He was going to send an Angel to kill every first born in Egypt – whether human or animal. But the Angel will pass over any home that is swathed with the blood of a lamb. So Moses instructed every Israelite to sacrifice a lamb and place its blood on the mantel of the door. When the angel of the Lord came to kill all the first born, it passed over every house with the blood and left its occupants alive.

After that tragedy, Pharaoh let the Israelites go. Millions of people left and they took the riches of Egypt with them. God provided a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night that moved and led them in the direction that they were to go. But God did not lead them by way of the Kings highway, along the coast, which would have been the shortest route to the Promised Land. Rather, He led them through the Sinai to the Red Sea, where this great body of water stood as an absolute barrier to their travels.

Back home, Pharaoh did not like the idea of being bested by a bunch of nomadic tent dwellers, and he did not like the fact that his god's were mocked and humiliated. So in absolute hardness of heart, he gathered up all the armies of Egypt and chased down the Israelites who were unarmed, backed up against a great body of water, and were sitting ducks to be picked off by the skilled fighting machine of the Egyptian army. The people were terrified and just knew that it was all going to be over – they would be remembered for the shortest lived exodus on record. But suddenly the cloud and the pillar of fire repositioned itself between the Israelites and the Egyptian army and kept them at bay. God told Moses to place his staff in the water and watch the hand of the Lord move to deliver His people.

Moses did what the Lord told him and as soon as the staff went into the water, the waters were divided and this great body of water separated and created a roadway between two walls of water. And amazingly, the ground was not muddy or impassable, but it was dry and the people took off and made a b-line for the other side. As they safely passed through the water, the cloud moved and once again went before the people. Standing safely on the other side, they could see the fear in the Egyptians eyes as their lunatic Pharaoh commanded them

to go after the people. Now, of course he was not so crazy as to go himself, but he was more than committed to send his army. As they obeyed, God closed this gulf and the walls of water came tumbling down on the Egyptian army and they were no more. Yet, every child of Abraham made it through.

They traveled through Midian (modern day Saudi Arabia) and came to the Mountain of God. It was here that He gave the Ten Commandments and the Law to Moses. God called Moses up to the burning bush to give him the law but Moses was gone for a long time. The people thought that he must have died. They felt abandoned by God and all alone. They were afraid, so they built for themselves a cow made of gold and declared that this was the god who led them out of Egypt. What a mistake. This was a big no-no and violated rule Number 1. So Moses came down from the mountain and was shocked and appalled that they had built, and were worshiping, an idol. In fury, he broke it apart, melted it, chastised the people and went back up the mountain to spend some more time with God. This next time he came down he said that God Himself was going to talk to them and bring His word. It was a terrifying scene. People fled from the voice and the presence of God. If anyone of them even touched the mountain they would instantly die. So they people begged God not to talk to them directly but let Moses speak to them.

After all this drama, God told Moses to take the people to the Promised Land. It was not an exceptionally long trip geographically, but a little over 2-years had passed since they left Egypt and it was now time to go for the reward. The Cloud and Pillar of fire led them step by step through the wilderness. Whenever the cloud would stop, the Israelites would make camp and when it lifted they departed.

The Israelites had built a tent or a tabernacle outside of the camp where Moses would go and talk to God and receive instruction from the Lord. He would then enter the camp and bring a word to the people; but his assistant Joshua never left the tabernacle. He stayed in the place where God's presence was to be found. During one of these visits, Moses was given specific instruction for worship – it was all very intricate. However, two priests – Nadab and Abihu – thought that they new better and they tried to worship God by presenting a kind of incense that God did not authorize. As a result, fire came out from the presence of the Lord and instantly consumed them.

During the journey, God provided manna for people to eat – just enough every morning that each person was satisfied and had enough to eat for the day. But the people began to complain. In fact, specifically, it was the foreign rabble that was traveling with the Israelites who began to crave the foods and delicacies of Egypt and demanded meat. Soon this attitude infected the lot and they were all complaining. God responded a couple of ways. First, we are told that fire from the Lord raged among them and destroyed all those on the outskirts of the camp. But then the Lord provided meat. Quail fell into their camp. For many miles in every direction there were quail flying around about three feet above the ground. People were elated and they spread the quail out so that everyone could eat, but while they were eating, the anger of the Lord again burned against them and the trouble makers who craved the meats of Egypt were all killed by a severe plague.

Shortly after this they arrived at the outskirts of the Promised Land. God told Moses to send 12 spies to explore the land. These men went throughout the region and came back with a report. Yes, the food was amazing and the land was fertile, but the cities were large and walled, they had war machines, and giants lived in the land. 10 of the spies gave a negative report and advised against going into the land. However, Joshua and Caleb came back full of excitement and ready to enter the land and take what God was going to freely give them. However, despite their amazing deliverance from Egypt and all the miracles during the journey through the wilderness, the people still did not see things through eyes of faith. They viewed their circumstances through eyes of fear. They relied on their own wisdom, logic and emotions and refused to enter the land.

God respected their wishes and instead sent them on a 40-year journey through the wilderness until every person above the age of 20 died – everyone who rejected the path and provision of the Lord. God simply would not let unbelief share in the inheritance. It was a long 40-years waiting for everyone to die. The journey was fraught with all the depressing realities of living in a desert. Yet, God still worked His miracles and continued to provide. We are told that even their clothes and sandals did not wear out. At one point they found themselves

without water. They thought God was going to just let them all die. But once again, God came through. Moses struck the rock and waters gushed out. All the people and their livestock drank their fill.

At the end of the 40-years, everyone of the original cast had died except for Joshua and Caleb. They were the only two who God preserved and allowed to enter the Promised Land. These two men began their journey by faith, they continued their journey by faith, and God honored them before all the people.

As far as the other survivors, there were between 2 to 3 million people, similar to the original count, but they were different. They believed that God would fulfill all His promises and they were ready to take all that God was going to freely give them. Sure they would have to fight, they would have to go against the enemies, and they would have to do things that went absolutely contrary to common sense, logic, reason, and sound emotions. They would have to live by faith; and that is exactly what they did: trusting God to fulfill His word exactly as He said. As a result they conquered and possessed the Promised Land.

Let's do a quick analysis of this story:

Egypt: represents this world's system to which we were enslaved and held in a merciless death lock of bondage.

The Blood of the Lamb: represents the blood of Jesus. Those who choose to follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be covered by His blood; and death will have no power over him – but he will live eternally in the presence of God.

The Red Sea: represents our conversion or baptism by the Spirit of God whereby we leave Egypt – never to return – and say goodbye to the world's system. This is symbolic of our new birth in Christ and our rejection of the world.

The Cloud and the Pillar of fire: represent the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we are willing to follow and stay manically focused on His will, He will lead us and tell us where we are to stay, where we are to go, when, and for how long.

Moses: represents those who bring the Word of God and teach about His ways.

The Ten Commandments and the Law: represents the perfect way of God. The law reveals God's unbending requirement for perfection; and, therefore, our obvious need of a savior – one who can fulfill this requirement on our behalf and thereby make us perfect.

The Cow of Gold: represents everything in our lives that we place before God: all that does not derive from faith, but satisfies our need to have something tangible to hold on to.

The terrifying scene: represents the judgment of God and how the law – although perfect – was without mercy and held all against its standard of absolute righteousness.

Nadab and Abihu: represent those who refuse to worship God in spirit and in truth and instead insist on doing it their own way. A person may have the appearances of being a Christian, but if they refuse to follow God's path and the obedience of faith, their fellowship with God will be cut off.

The Foreign Rabble: represents the unbelievers who we let into our lives and to whom we make emotional and intimate connections. And because our God is not their God, they influence us toward compromise and they interfere with our pursuit of God. They insist on pointing us back to the world and what we could have if we would only stop all this god nonsense.

The Wilderness: represents a place that God deems necessary to take each believer. The wilderness gives us the opportunity to learn to live by faith. In this dry and barren place, we are given the opportunity to let go of ourselves and our ways and rely on His provision. In the wilderness, God demonstrates His faithfulness and teaches us that He can be trusted in and through all things. But if we reject His provision, we can linger for years and years in that place and eventually we will just die in this wilderness. Sadly, this has been the destiny and the experience of most of those within Christianity.

The Manna: represents the Word of God and our daily provision for our lives.

The Rock and the Water: represent both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. For from Him, the Spirit flows and gives life to all who are willing to drink.

The Quail: represents a picture of our wanting what we want and not being satisfied with His provision. Yet, at the same time it also is a picture of God's willingness to sometimes give us what we ask for, which can both be a blessing from His hand and a plague on our lives, because it was not His perfect will.

The Promised Land: in its ultimate fulfillment, represents our eternity with Christ – our life in the new heaven and the new earth – absolute perfection forever. But it also means that place in our Christian life where we venture out and live a radical life of faith – doing the amazing works that God has set before us – that we may yield the full benefit of walking in the Spirit of God.

Joshua and Caleb: represent the heroes of faith. Two of the approximately 2-4 million people that left Egypt, crossed the river, ate of the manna, drank of the living water, followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and were willing to present themselves completely to God and live by all that God promised.

The first two to four million: represent all those who similarly left Egypt, crossed the river, ate of the manna, drank of the living water, followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, but were unwilling to believe that God would do everything that He promised. They lived by fear and by what they believed to be true based on what their minds could comprehend and what their logic could conclude. They did not live by faith. Sure they were along for the ride and were part of God's chosen, but they never participated in the benefits of living by faith. Sadly, they all died in the wilderness – every one of them died because of their unbelief. This is the experience of the nominal Christian.

The second group of two to four million: represent those who are the children of faith. A revival so to speak of people to whom God has proven Himself; and are therefore willing to do what He says, go where He goes, and put their trust in the conquering hand of the Lord. These people live by faith. Sure they have to fight the enemies, the giants, and deal with the natural dangers in the land, but they also get to live in homes they did not build, cities they did not construct, and eat from the fruitful fields that they did not have to plow. God goes before them, God stays next to them, and God covers them from behind. They are safe and secure – even when all the tangible facts indicate the contrary. He leads them to victory.

I went through this remarkable story not only because it is like a cool movie, but the entire cast of characters speaks to us today. No – they scream to us! They declare that the only way to live is to live by faith, in a full-on radical giving of yourself to the One who can be trusted with your life.

You should go through each character I mentioned and do a self analysis. Have you left Egypt and crossed the river? Are you part of the original cast of followers who traveled through the wilderness and experienced God but never tasted of the good fruit of the land? How many golden cows do you have hidden in your heart? Have you let the foreign rabble into your life? Are you craving your old life in the world? Are you trying to worship God on your own terms? Are you dying in the wilderness? Or are you feasting on the daily bread of the Word of God and are you drinking of the living water of the Spirit of God? Are you a Joshua or Caleb – one of the few radical heroes of faith? Are you willing to be part of the remnant that live by faith and who follow Joshua and Caleb into the Promised Land?

I hope you understand that leaving Egypt is not enough. Accepting Jesus as your Savior is just the start of the Journey. You can still spend your life traveling through the wilderness in a dry and parched land where you ultimately just wither and die. Yes, you are part of His chosen; and, yes, you get to experience His involvement in your life, but it is so marginalized and not His good, pleasing and perfect will. Instead, you can push through the wilderness and venture into a life of faith. That life will be difficult, dangerous, and it most likely won't make sense to those who decide to stay in the wilderness. But it is the path that is good, pleasing, and perfect; it is the will of God. It is where you will get to know God and see Him in action. It is a fascinating life. But it requires you to listen to His Word, and in the obedience of faith, follow it with all your heart, mind, and soul.

Are you willing to respond to Jesus as He says: "come follow me?" Are you willing to drop everything and be His disciple? He has proven Himself, now He is calling you to follow Him completely without reservation, without hesitation.

His path is good, pleasing, and perfect because it is the path to the Promised Land. It is the path of the radical and the few heroes of faith. It is the path of those who are transformed into His image.

Psalm 32:8-9

The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

Let's Pray

We have been talking about some very difficult topics on this journey to discover how God speaks. What we have discovered is that for the most part, God has agreed to talk to us and lead us, but we are the ones who must be willing to listen. We must be in a relational position with Him such that in the normal course of life, we can hear His voice and understand how He leads our lives.

Tonight I want to retrace a bit to make sure that you have a clear understanding of what I have been communicating. Often, when someone brings a message, the audience filters the words through their own experiences and their own prejudices, emotions, and suppositions; and, as a result, people walk away thinking that they heard something which might not have been what the speaker was communicating. And because these topics have been so personal and intense, I do want to be understood.

I have talked quite in-depth about the practical aspects of positioning yourself to hear the voice of God. We have used Proverbs 2:1-11 and Romans 12:1-2 as our primary texts, and over the last 3 weeks we have focused on the issue of what happens when you present yourself to the world versus when you present yourself to God. In Romans 6:16, Paul provides the answer: you become a slave to whomever you present yourself. This idea is then reinforced in Romans 12:2 where Paul says that we will either be conformed by the power and influence of the world, and molded into its image, or we will be transformed into the image of God. This is just one of those unbending spiritual principals. It will happen regardless of your intentions, or even your awareness that it is happening.

By presenting oneself, I mean your willingness to open your heart and your mind, and thereby become vulnerable, to the thoughts, ideas, values, perspectives, attitudes, behaviors and relationships of either the world's system or to the Lord.

At a first glance, it may seem that the impact of either being conformed or transformed is directly proportional to how intensely you embrace one side or the other, but that does not capture the entire reality of what is happening within your being. If you think that for the most part you present yourself to God because you don't do anything really bad, even though you reserve a few areas that you are not going to surrender to Him thinking that in those areas the world has something better to offer you, your life will not be, for example, an ongoing static representation of the percentages – you will not be 75% in the image of God and 25% in the image of the world.

You have to remember, there is a war going on for your mind and emotions. What might start out as 25% will be constantly working to take over and possess more and more of your being – it will be like an insatiable hunger screaming out for more. Compromise to the desires of your flesh and to the world's system is like a poison that unless treated, or abated, will spread to your entire system. Before you know it, your compromise will be great and your fellowship with God will be shipwrecked. This is an unbending spiritual principal.

Furthermore, contrary to what most of us believe, there is no safe middle ground. God asks you to present yourself to Him completely. Therefore, a non-decision in an area of your life is a decision. It is just a matter of time before that decision is expressed in and through all that you do. So do not deceive yourself thinking that it is ok to hang out in the middle – there is no middle! This is a spiritual principle and it will hold true regardless of what you believe about it.

I also want to make clear that these spiritual principles that I keep mentioning are unbending and we are to view them similar to how we would view many of the natural laws of this world, like gravity. For example, I have been told that every year many people die over in Eldorado Canyon as a result of free climbing. Apparently, they thought their mental discipline and their physical skill was enough, and they did not believe that gravity and the mountain could get the better of them. Most of us hear of stories like that and although we may feel bad, we also think that those people are fools. Especially considering all the people who now have to deal with this tragedy and find a way to survive without their mom, dad, brother, sister, spouse, or friend. It's foolishness.

This is how we are to view the spiritual principles of God. We can attempt to go against these truths, but the impact will be real, and real people will be hurt as a result of our choices.

It takes a level of spiritual maturity to understand this and a mature mind to believe it. Most of us here are college age and above and we do not want to be considered or treated as children. In fact, we would be greatly offended if someone talked to us though we were still a child. With that said, and regardless of our age, we are still wired in such a way, through years and years of conditioning, to think as a child, especially when it comes to God and His instruction for our lives. We often view Him as this authoritative figure that is laying down the law; and, therefore, we internalize most of what He says as black and white, good and bad, yes and no, and behavior based instruction that leads to either punishment or approval. As a result, we tend to mistakenly relate to God out of a law based relationship – the kind that we had before we became a believer.

Let me explain this. Prior to receiving Christ, God's relationship with us is essentially one of law. We have all violated His perfect law; and, thus, are destined to reap the full eternal consequences of such violation. Where there is law there must be complete adherence to the tenets of the law or else there is judgment. But the sad reality is that no one can keep the law. Romans 3:23 tells us that all men have sinned; thus, all men are under judgment. This kind of relationship is what I call vertical in nature and authoritative– there is no mutuality of interests and no fellowship. It is very black and white – obey or else! In the light of law, we stand rightfully condemned before the judge.

But when we give ourselves to Christ, the fundamental structure of our relationship with God is changed because Jesus was judged, condemned, and punished on our behalf. Thus, our relationship is no longer vertical and based on law, but it is horizontal in nature and based on love; where God comes along side of us, instructs us, and is there to lead us down the paths that He has determined.

It is from this place of a loving relationship that God gives us His instruction about the world, flesh, sin, and so on. He instructs us because He loves us and knows what will be best for our lives. He is the one who established the spiritual principles and He knows the impact that our choices will have not only in our own lives but also in the entire chain of people to whom we are connected.

But this kind of horizontal relationship requires some level of maturity on our part. We cannot view things with the mind of a child and expect to succeed. Honestly, a vertical authoritative based relationship is less complicated to live under, which is why we try and take God and shove Him into that parental role where everything is simple and clear: it is right or wrong, good or bad, do or don't do. This type of relationship does not require wisdom or any maturity – just simple obedience to what you are told. It is this kind of relationship that works well with children because they do not have either the capacity for rational choice or a mature understanding of the down stream – long term – consequences of the choices they make. Everything is based on the immediacy of their circumstances and the immediacy of the feedback they get for their behavior. This is very similar to how an animal is trained; and, if we were honest, this is how we so often choose to relate to God.

But that is not the kind of relationship that God has chosen for us. We are not like children running around without knowledge or the limited capacity to rationally choose the truth. And in our lives, the consequences of going our own way are not always immediate, for unlike a parent God does not spank our hands each time we do something wrong. In fact, we should all by now be fully aware that many of the consequences of the choices we make are latent and the full weight of the impact is not realized at the time we choose to follow our own way. Therefore, God asks us to stop thinking like a child and to stop acting like a child; and, instead, consider the wisdom that He has offered for our lives. He asks us to choose to follow His instruction not because He tells us to, or because He is the big bad God in the sky, or even because it's the law; rather, it's because He loves us and unlike the paths we choose for ourselves, the paths He will lead us down will be good, pleasing, and perfect. However because our relationship is horizontal in nature, He merely asks. He does not force us to obey like a good parent does his child. He gives us the choice. Like a person who goes free climbing, we are free to gamble with our lives.

For example, if you want to yoke yourself to an unbeliever, or to a believer who has given himself to the world, and if you choose to be intimate with someone whose **passion** and **priority** is NOT God, then you are free to go for it. You are free to reject God's wisdom any time you want.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13

You may say, "I am allowed to do anything." But I reply, "Not everything is good for you." And even though "I am allowed to do anything," I must not become a slave to anything.

In this passage, Paul says that in Christ we are free to do all things; but please understand not all things are profitable. In other words, we may be free to make our own choices, but there are real consequences: emotionally, physically, psychologically, spiritually, and relationally. Again, this is why we need wisdom and a mature mind. If you present yourself to the world, or to the desires of the flesh, in any manner – through relationships, ideology, values, philosophy, behaviors, attitudes, and so on, it will have a corrupting and detrimental impact on your life. That is a fact. This is an unbending spiritual principle. But, nevertheless, we are free to choose.

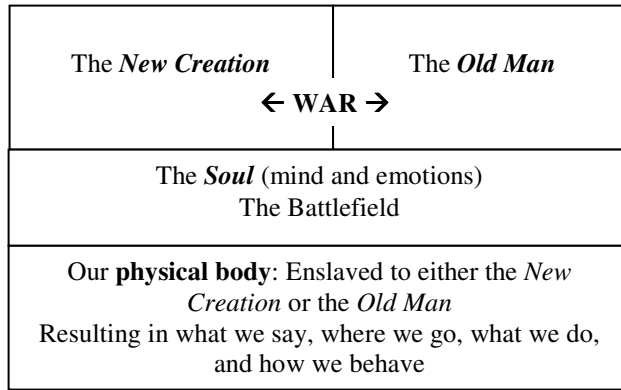
I believe that each of you know, if you dig deep and are honest, that the choices that you have made to pursue your own wisdom for your life, and to exercise your freedom to do what you want, have not lead you to peace, rest, or a healthy emotional and psychological state. In fact, many of you, myself included, find yourself in a very difficult place living with consequences that if you could, you would go back and undo the choices you made; and, instead, choose to listen to the voice of God.

I think now is a good time to talk about solutions. What are we to do if we find ourselves in this place where we have not listened to God's voice, His leading, or His instruction for our lives, and we are living full on in the middle of the consequences of our choices? Maybe you find yourself in relationships or with addictions, behaviors, and attitudes that are just not right. Maybe the damage that has ensued is great and wide spread and you have hurt the very people who love you. Once again, this is where the wisdom of God and a mature mind comes in to play. This is where you must stop; and in humility seek God as to how He desires His redemptive work to be expressed in the midst of your situation. Remember, God is always busy doing His work of redemption; but rarely does He snap His fingers and just change our circumstances. Rather, He works to transform your heart and your mind in the midst of your circumstances. He may or may not do the same to those who are in your life – there is no guarantee – but He does want to change the way you think; and, as a result, change the behaviors you choose and the paths you walk.

He fundamentally wants to restructure all the relationships in your life: whether those are to a person, a habit, an addiction, or to a lifestyle. He wants you to reject your own wisdom and no longer, in any form or manner, present yourself – or make yourself vulnerable – to the thoughts, ideas, values, perspectives, attitudes, behaviors and relationships of those whose affection is principally tied to the world system. He wants you to present yourself to Him and He will transform you; and in so doing, you will learn to hear His voice and you will learn to understand how He leads you. The result being that He will guide you through your difficult circumstances and He will teach you all that you need to know in order to deal with the people, the problems, and the mess that came from following your own way.

John 14:26 and 1 John 2:27 say that He has given us His Spirit to teach us all things. We need to be willing believe His wisdom and instruction for our lives and follow it with our heart, mind, and soul and take action accordingly. Yes, we must take action! It is the only way to undo all that we have done. It is the only way to breathe life into our desire to follow God. **It is the way that belief is transformed into faith.**

Let's go back to our charts that we have been using.



Galatians 5:17 describes this relationship.

Galatians 5:17

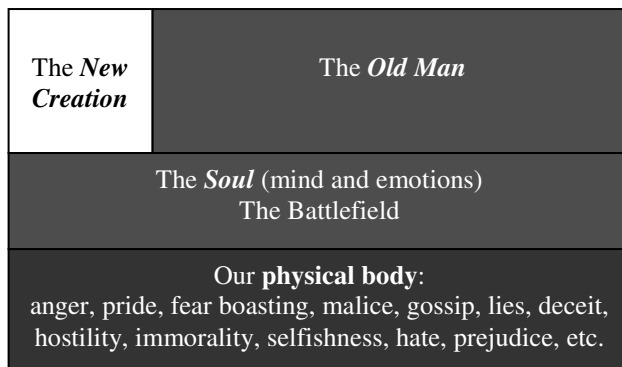
The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.

That is why we are told in the immediately preceding verse:

Galatians 5:16

So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

But if you reject this counsel and live according to the desires and dictates of your Old Man, your life will look somewhat like this chart.



If you find yourself in this place where the Old Man is in control of your life, then your physical body will literally be addicted to the behaviors that flow from this connection. It is how the Old Man is able to overcome reason and sensibility and keep you in this place. Have you ever wondered why your mind and your emotions can be fully aware of, and even repulsed by, the damage you are doing to yourself and to your relationships; yet, you seem powerless to choose different behaviors? It's as if you are compelled and enslaved to continue with the behaviors, attitudes, and patterns that you have established in your life – you are stuck!

Romans 6:16

Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master?

So by the time that the Old Man is fully expressed in your behaviors, you have temporarily lost the battle for your Soul. The process kind of goes as follows: you first present yourself to the world and the Old Man begins to inundate your mind with his thoughts, values, and justifications; and he literally pushes aside or trivializes the thoughts and values of the New Creation.

Romans 8:5, 7-8:

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

The Old Man then takes control of your mind and emotions and controls the way you think; then he controls what you do, what you say, where you go, and so on.

Interestingly, I have found that the entry point is almost always relationships. This makes sense since it stems from our overwhelming need to be connected and to feel a part of others. Think about it, practically we start to identify with a group of people – whether they are really friends or just people we associate and hang out with – and we involve ourselves in their interests: it could be music, partying, an activity, a sport, a philosophy, or even some social movement. Whatever that is, it is the connection point and what keeps the group together. Over time, we start to give ourselves to them and start to follow their behaviors and patterns. Before you know it, they are the ones to whom we identify ourselves. And our flesh becomes engaged and the things we do, the things we say, the places we go are indistinguishable from anyone else in that group.

Once the mind is converted, the body at first follows but then something changes and the body moves into the lead role and begins to fulfill all the demands of the Old Man. The control of our lives moves away from the mind and the emotions and is seeded deep within our fleshly desires. And in many ways we are like animals doing and reacting to all that is happening around us; and no matter how much we want to, we just can't seem to find our way out of the habits, addictions, and behavior, to which we are enslaved.

At this point, you may try and do religious things to escape this place, like go to church or read your Bible, but it will all seem so powerless and void of life. All the promises of God for victory over sin, and more important that personal connection that you may want with God, all seems so illusory. And as a result, many people give up and give in thinking that the Bible must not be true; when in actuality, you are ironically proving out everything that it says.

Did you know that the Apostle Paul found himself in this exact situation? He describes his experience as follows:

Romans 7:14-24

The law is good, then. The trouble is not with the law but with me, because I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master. I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.

I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?

As I was explaining, at the stage that our bodies are compelled to follow the dictates of the Old Man, we are under total domination. So what is the answer, what is the way out? Paul answers that:

Romans 7:25

Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yes, as always, the answer is in Him. Romans 7:4-6 explains that because of what Jesus did on the cross, the Old Man no longer has the right to hold you in its power. When you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, you became united with Him and the power of your Old Man died on the cross. Any control that your Old Man currently has is because you have freely surrendered yourself to him as a slave for obedience. This was done through your willingness to present yourself and make yourself vulnerable to the thoughts, ideas, attitudes, relationships and behaviors of the world. The Old Man has no power in and of himself; it was all broken at the cross. What this means is that you can reverse the process and undo the grip that the Old Man has on your life.

Romans 8:12-13

So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish, But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you *turn* from it and its evil deeds, you will live.

Do you understand what Paul is saying? We have absolutely no obligation to our Old Man. We don't have to follow the desires of the flesh. I don't care what you feel or how much power your situation has over you; you have no obligation to it whatsoever. This is one of those unbending spiritual principles! We are not animals, we are not senseless children.

Look at the last line in the verse: "But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you *turn* from it and its evil deeds, you will live". The word *turn*, is a verb in the present indicative form. Meaning you must now take certain and definitive action. You must stop doing what you are doing. You must immediately reverse the process. That means you must start with your physical body and work backwards up the chain in order to unwind the entire process. You must literally, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, stop all the behaviors, addictions, and habits that are in opposition to the wisdom and instruction of God.

That word *turn*, in the Greek, literally means to mortify or to put to death. In other words, by choosing actions that are in direct opposition to those of the flesh, those that your body craves, you will be effecting a death blow to the Old Man's control in your life. But if you don't take immediate action now, if you keep choosing to do what you have always done, then his grip will tighten around your throat.

I have been studying a form of fighting called Krav Magaw. The basic technique requires you to always deal with the immediate threat first, in an explosive and aggressive action, and then you are free to proceed with the fight on your terms. For example, if someone comes up and starts to choke you, the most important thing is to be able to breathe, for it does not take long for someone to incapacitate you through cutting off your air supply. Your first priority is breathing. Your second is creating just enough room to maneuver. Therefore, you focus on the weakest point – the attacker's thumbs – and you explosively pluck at their grip. It requires virtually no strength, just an instant and sudden move to their weak spot. This move gives you just enough room to breathe and to be able to turn and proceed with an aggressive attack to get absolute control of the confrontation and completely eliminate the threat.

That is how we are to think of this process of undoing the grip of the Old Man. If we try and wrestle and fight while his grip is still around our throats, we may put up a good struggle and even get in a blow or two, but eventually we will lose. If you stand there passively waiting for him to stop choking you, you will lose. If out of fear of you panic and frail about, you will lose.

You must explosively strike at his weakest spot – which is at the point of our behaviors – and thereby give yourself enough breathing room so you can proceed with your aggressive attack to once again **give** control of your mind and emotions to the Holy Spirit.

But if you never loosen his grip, you will never be able to regain the ground you have surrendered. Just because his power to enslave you against your will has been broken, it does not mean that he is not going to fight like a crazy man to remain in control. Your Old Man does not want to be relinquished to his rightful place on the cross. He wants freedom and he will do all he can to keep his death grip on your life. That is why your part has to be a direct and explosive attack at the weakest link, the last part of the process. You fundamentally must reverse your behaviors.

- If you habitually lie, stop lying.
- If you are engaged in immorality, stop doing it.
- If you are addicted to alcohol or drugs, stop using.
- If you are in a relationship that does not honor God, get out of it if you are single; and if you are married, establish boundaries that enable you to avoid any corrupting influences.
- If you have places where you like to hang out but which feed your desires, then stop going there.
- If you are addicted to pornography, stop looking.
- If you are selfish then stop obsessing on yourself.

I know that this sounds trite and elemental and even somewhat ridiculous, but it is the only way. If you don't believe me, then just try it and you will find, by the power of the reaction from your Old Man, that what I am saying is true.

If out of simple faith and belief in what God has said, or even if just because you are willing to take a chance on what I have been teaching, you make a death blow to one of the core actions that has enslaved you, I guarantee you that your Old Man will respond. He will flood your mind and your emotions with all sorts of fear based irrational “out of control” thoughts. He will amplify your cravings and desires for the very thing you turned from, and he will also push you hard-core to the other strongholds that he has established in your life. He will not let go easily. That is how you will know that what I am saying is true.

The Old Man knows that if you break his control over your behaviors, then his power center is destabilized and he is at risk of losing control of your mind and emotions. And if that happens, then the Holy Spirit once again has the upper hand in this battle.

If you break the bondage over your behaviors, the next step is to immediately begin to present yourself to the Lord. It's at this point that you should inundate yourself in the Word of God and restructure your life and relationships around the spiritual principles we have discussed. Then you will know and personally experience the redemptive power of the Lord.

Romans 8:2

For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death.

Remember, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your Old Man urges you to do. If you **turn** from him – take decisive and certain action now to mortify or to kill him – you will live and experience the peace of God. This means that the constant raging of the Old Man will be quenched to nothing more than a whisper. Continuing in Romans 8, consider the trade off that Paul puts before us:

Romans 8:5-6

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.

For those of you who have predominately led your own life by your own wisdom, please consider this trade off. You have tasted of the sting of sin; you have tasted of its power over your mind, your emotions, and your actions. You know how ugly it gets, the pain, the sadness, the emptiness, the depression, the hopelessness, the damaged relationships, and that sense of isolation. Why let your Old Man control your mind; it makes no sense? Wouldn't you rather experience life and peace? Wouldn't you rather have the Holy Spirit control your mind and in turn share with you the thoughts of God, such that you will **know what God wants you to do** (you will know His will for your life) **and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.**

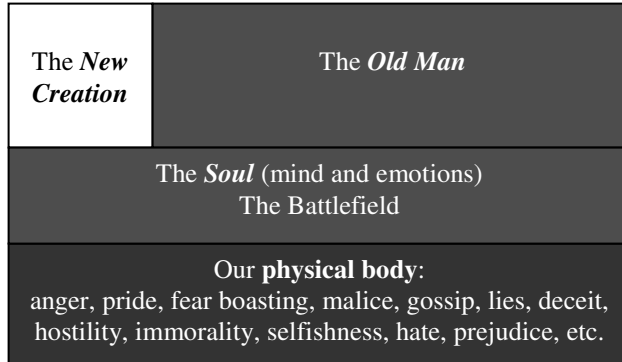
It is time to stop thinking and acting like senseless children. It is time to step up to the mature mind and work within the horizontal relationship which God has brought you into. It is time to experience, for real this time, the presence, the redemptive power, and the peace of the living God. It is time to position yourself to hear His voice so you can follow His leading. It is time to make Proverbs 2 a reality when it says:

Proverbs 2:9-11

Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise planning will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe

Let's Pray.

We are on part 5 in our study of How God Speaks. We have focused on how we are to position ourselves to hear Him as He speaks to us – how to be in relationship with God in such a way that knowing His will and understanding how He leads us is a natural part of our life. Last week we dealt with the issue of what do we do when we find ourselves in the place where we are under the power and influence of our Old Man and are essentially enslaved to his ways. That place where our behaviors are deeply rooted in all manner of worldly expressions -- and the presence and power of God in our lives is so very hard to find.



This is a sad place to find ourselves in any area of our life: it is dark, it is destructive, and the impact to our fellowship with God is overwhelming. The New Creation, the place where the Holy Spirit lives in and operates through us, is quenched to such a small area of our life that His ability to impact our life is practically negligible.

We also talked a bit about the “process” – how we got to such a place; but we talked about the process in the context of our need to strike aggressively and continually at the weakest point of the Old Man’s control, our behaviors. If we can break his control over our behaviors, then we have a chance at turning the tide on the battle that ensues for our mind and our emotions.

Tonight, I am going to talk about the beginning of the process and what we need to do to ensure we don’t end up under the control and domination of our Old Man. Based on what we have studied, if the Old Man is controlling our behaviors, then it is obvious that we have presented ourselves to the world in some significant manner. However, if we narrow our attention to just that stage of the process, we will not get to the root of the problem; and, therefore, we will not understand the real cure. We must unwind the process back another step. Something took place within our hearts prior to our presenting ourselves to the world, something that opened the door for us to be deceived and live part of our life in darkness.

And it is this first step that is the very root of the sin that we allow in our lives. Most of us have been trained to think that the sin in our lives is the behaviors in which we participate that do not honor God and which are not considered righteous. In fact, for the most part, Christianity has spent its energy focused on teaching people not to “behave” badly because it is sin. Sadly, however, judged by the pathetic results, these efforts have been futile and not many people have stopped sinning. Can you imagine, all the energy spent throughout the centuries trying to combat sin? I believe that for the most part this energy has been misdirected and wasted because few have really understood the Biblical perspective of sin. As a result, so few have learned to live in freedom from sin versus being a slave to sin.

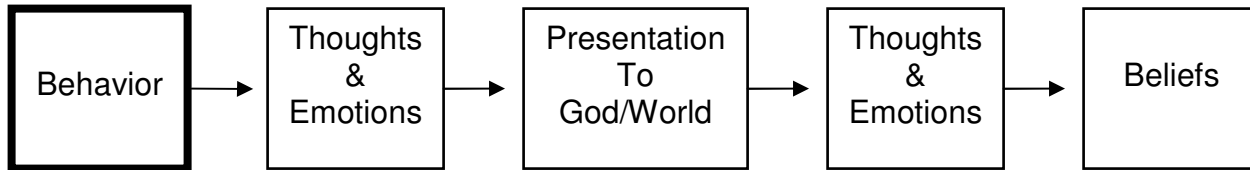
Whether we are talking about God honoring behavior, or behavior that we consider to be blatantly “sinful,” either way, I want you to understand that we are taking about the tail on the dog – the step in the process. Our behaviors are merely the fruit or the expression of a reality that has already transpired some where further up the process.

If you noticed, last week when I talked about “stopping” and absolutely cutting off the behaviors to which we have become enslaved, not once did I mention the issue of “sin” and your need to stop sinning. This was very purposeful, because I do not believe that the Bible teaches that controlling our behavior is the way to stop

sinning. Rather, when we stop, absolutely cut off, and refuse to continue in the behaviors to which we have become enslaved by the Old Man, we are actually undoing a destructive process; and we are breaking the death grip that the Old Man has on our lives. We are destabilizing his powerbase that is rooted in the desires of our flesh; and, as a result, we push the war back up to the battlefield of the soul (which is our mind and emotions). At this place in the process, the Holy Spirit can once again have a foothold from which to battle the Old Man.

However, to have ongoing victory, we have to unwind the process beginning from the end and continue to unwind until we get back to the point of departure where the Old Man first started to take control of our soul. This place of departure is where sin is birthed in our life.

Starting from the tail, from the end of the process, a simple representation will look as follows:



Now clearly, we are pretty complex beings and this simple chart does not capture all of the drama and the entire dynamic that takes place, but bear with me and work with me on the concept. With this as our model, to reverse the process we need to obviously first stop the behavior. Once we are able to break the Old Man’s control on our behaviors, then we can address the issue of our thoughts and emotions. This is where the real battle is played out. This is where we can either have victory or once again be thrown into the mastery of the Old Man and the addictions of our flesh, whatever they may be.

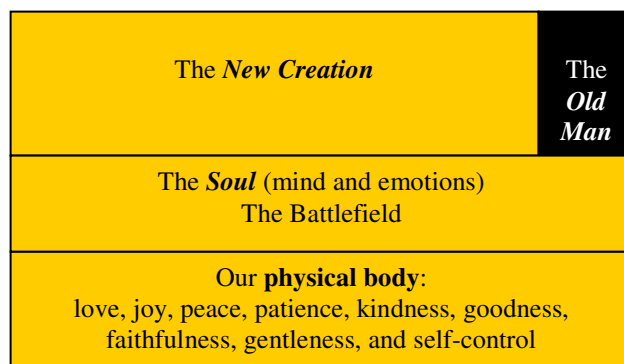
We know the truth and at this stage we must let our thoughts be dominated by the truth. This is a choice. The Old Man cannot compel us to accept the thoughts, values, ideology, and relationships of those in the world. We have the power and the ability to choose.

The fulcrum to our success – our getting back to the place where the New Creation is in control of our being – lies in the area where we must reject the world and choose to present ourselves to God. We must set our minds on the things of Christ.

Colossians 3:1-3

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.** For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

As I said before, we know the truth, but at this stage we must remember where we find the truth. We find it first and foremost in the Word of God; and, secondly, by being in fellowship – or in deep relationship – with those who cling to the truth with their entire heart, mind, and soul. If we are able to take that step, present ourselves to God, set our minds on the things above, then the Old Man will once again be marginalized and he will have to – in effect – get back on the cross.



If we continue to present ourselves to God, He will transform our thoughts and renew our mind. Our stability and our strength will once again be rooted in our beliefs. We will bear the image of Christ in our being as Christ Himself, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, will live through us.

Now, let's reverse this diagram and start from the beginning.



What I am attempting to portray is that, fundamentally, everything comes down to what we believe. All else that plays out in our lives flows from this starting point. In fact, we can introspectively look at our own behavior, and how we interact with others, and fairly easily determine if we believe the truth. Our behavior is window that sheds light on our true beliefs.

Now, I know that there will be people who will disagree with me and want to make this more complex, but it's not – this is really a binary reality. Either you believe the truth as found in the Word of God, or you don't. And this is where we come back to the issue of sin – for sin is found in the “don't! Look at the following verses:

John 8:58

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

John 14:6

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

John 1:1, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 16:9

The world's sin is unbelief in me.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Romans 14:23

...and whatever is not from faith is sin.

Let me summarize these verses and connect the dots. Jesus is! He is the great I AM – the one who has always existed and in whom all things exist! He is God! He is the truth and therefore all that He says is true. He claims to be the very Word of God, the very expression of all of God's thoughts. As such, this notion is one of complete and exhaustive exclusivity. It is important that you take in and absorb what I just said. Jesus' claim to the truth is one of exhaustive exclusivity. That means there is no room for anything or anyone else to stake a claim on the truth. And how do we know if someone believes the truth? They act on it. It is lived out in their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

The implications of this are earth shattering to our western culture and the philosophical underpinnings of our society. That means that we do not live in a relativistic world where each person is free to define the truth for themselves. I know that is the popular theory of those in this current generation, but it is a bold face lie. Jesus defined the truth as Himself.

Therefore, if you do not believe some aspect of what He has communicated to us in the Word of God, then there is an element of unbelief in your heart; and Jesus has called that unbelief “sin.” Further, it is clear that faith, without which we cannot please God, embodies our willingness to believe the truth: for the writer of Hebrews says that we must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who seek Him! We must believe that He is the living God who has always existed and from whom all truth is derived. Paul then caps off this thought in Romans by declaring that whatever is not of faith (whatever is contrary to the truth) is “sin.”

Do you understand what I am communicating? Our behaviors are merely an expression of the sin to which we have already succumbed way back at the beginning of the process. And the amount of control the Old Man has on our lives is a direct result of how many places within our being that we have yielded to either wrong belief or unbelief. This is our sin.

This should explain why all our attempts as a religion to purge sin from our midst have failed. We have been trying to fight a fight that really does not exist. We have been fighting the fight of behavior believing it to be the pathway to God and the pathway to righteousness; however, this is illusory and will always result in failure.

The battle for our soul is one over belief. Are we going to believe the truth as given to us in the Word of God, or are we going to believe something else. This is the battle we are fighting whether we realize it or not.

So what are the enemies to our believing the truth? Why do we so readily adopt other realities and convince ourselves that they are truth? It is important that we know the answers to these questions and understand the dynamic of what is taking place behind the scenes so we know how to battle.

We Are Tempted to Sin by Our Lust!

James 1:13-16

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and *enticed by his own lust*. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Normally when we hear the word lust we think it refers to sexual enticement – that is just how we have used the word in western society. But in this context it refers to the process whereby we place our heart or set our desire on something other than God, in any area of our life.

So temptation comes when out of want, need, desire, attraction, fear, or even boredom, we entertain the possibility that there is some other truth, other than God, to which we can hold onto and live our life by. We are tempted by either unbelief (our unwillingness to believe all that God has revealed to us in His Word), or wrong belief (a twisting of the truth such that that the things God has said become more palatable to our tastes, our will and our desires).

The temptation itself is not sin. **Hebrews 4:15** says that Jesus was tempted in all things – all things as we are – yet He was without sin. So don't freak out over either the volume or the rapidity of the temptation towards wrong belief and unbelief. We are always tempted by the messages of the world, by the desires of our Old Man, and by the enemy. It is when we let that unbelief or wrong belief take root in our mind and heart that it starts to conceive and give birth to sin. Then once we “take action” on that wrong belief or unbelief, our lust brings forth sin into our life; and it instantly starts its decaying process that leads to death – which is separation from our fellowship with God.

By “take action” I am referring that point in time when we make a decision based on the unbelief or wrong belief. By the time sin is expressed in our physical body, we have already made the decision within our heart. Sometimes the time between our choice and what is played out in our bodies is a nano-second and sometimes it takes much longer to exhibit itself, but the sin occurs at the time that we choose to reject the truth.

For example, most of us do not believe that God will actually talk to us and lead us in the day-to-day affairs of our life. Those doubts are the beginning of the temptation. God tells us that if we want to hear His voice, we need to seek Him with our whole heart, mind, and soul, and we need to wait on Him to answer us. That is the truth as revealed in the Word of God. Therefore, when out of unbelief and wrong belief, we begin to think that we have the ability to guide our life, and that we have the wisdom to determine the paths that are best for us, this redirection of trust and security away from God, and towards ourselves, is lust carrying us away from the truth. Then when we decide to reject God’s counsel and take it upon ourselves to be our own solution, or to find our own solution to the issues in our life, lust has conceived and gives birth to sin. And if we continue down this path where we give little to no consideration to God’s instruction, it will eventually condition us in such a way that we won’t even know how to find His path and we will have no idea how to hear His voice – that is the death that we experience: separation from fellowship with God.

Another example is when we choose to ignore those unbending spiritual principles and we just go and do what we want to do regardless of what God has said on the matter. We talked quite a bit about the warnings God has given us regarding having intimate relationships with those who are not believers or with those who claim to be Christians but are living in such a way that God is not the priority or the authority in their life. Therefore, when out of need, attraction, desire, want, or even boredom, we reject this counsel and move forward in these relationships, we place our desire on something and someone other than God; and we surrender ourselves to sin.

Temptation is Fueled by Our Pride!

One of the key nutrients that our lust feeds on, and which significantly contributes to this process of birthing sin, is our pride. In the Greek, this word we translate as pride means to be high minded or to be clouded, wrapped up in, or enveloped with smoke. These Greek ideas are so rich in implication. To be high minded means that we have placed ourselves in a position of authority that is far above where we actually have rights to be. A few other words that capture this idea are: arrogant, lofty, conceited, haughty, and egotistical. But it is all a smoke screen. There is no real substance behind claim of authority. It can be easily swept away by a small breeze – it is all a puff of smoke.

Anytime we reject the counsel and wisdom of God for our lives – whether directly (by not seeking and waiting on the Lord) or indirectly (through our negligence and being unaware of how much we need Him in our lives) – we place a higher authority and priority on our own wisdom and our mistaken perception that we can manage our life on our own. Seriously, how can we – created beings – have any leg to stand on when we are comparing our wisdom to the wisdom of the one who is outside of time and who can see the beginning from the end. That is why God, in no uncertain terms, strongly warns us against thinking higher of ourselves than we ought.

Isaiah 50:10-11

Who among you fears the LORD and obeys his servant? If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the LORD and rely on your God. But watch out, you who live in your own light and warm yourselves by your own fires. This is the reward you will receive from me: You will soon lie down in great torment.

God knows that every time we attempt to control our own life and determine our own course that we will fall and we will get hurt.

Proverbs 11:2

When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom.

This is the reason God hates pride. It is not that He takes offense that we are trying to lift ourselves up above His place of actual authority – that is laughable; we have no ability to impact God in that way. Rather, He hates pride because He loves us so much and He knows how foolish we are and how much risk we take when we go and try and warm ourselves by our own fire.

Proverbs 8:13-17

"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate. Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, power is mine. By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, all who judge rightly. I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me."

You must remember, at the root of all of God's thoughts and actions, and all His instruction for our lives, is His love, passion, and care for every one of us. Look at what He says: "counsel is mine and sound wisdom," "I am understanding," "power is mine." The implication of each of these statements is that they can be ours; He freely offers them to us. We can abound in counsel, sound wisdom, understanding, and power. We can know how to choose the right course of action every time. He will share with us His mind, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can walk in His truth if we are willing to diligently seek Him, listen to what He says, and believe! Remember the scripture we studied last week:

Romans 8:12-13

So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish, But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you **turn** from it and its evil deeds, you will live.

We are under no obligation to yield to the temptation of wrong belief and unbelief – none whatsoever. By the **power** of the Holy Spirit – His power that He freely offers to us – we can blow away that smoke screen of self-importance, self-sufficiency, self-indulgence, and self-protection. If, however, because of our pride we choose to yield to temptation, we will perish. But if we reject the temptation, reject our pride, and choose to believe the truth, we will live! That is a promise and another one of those unbending spiritual principles.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

We simply must reject all that stands in opposition to the truth. It is not from the Father and it will bring us great harm. Don't be deceived any longer by your high mindedness and the light that glows from your own fires.

The Enemy's Floods Us With Lies!

We have talked about our lust and our pride, but there is another major player that is deeply involved in this battle. This player is dead set on our destruction, and he plays for keeps. We are usually unaware of his presence or his involvement in this "process" we have been talking about, and quite frankly, that is exactly what he wants – for us to be unaware. He is about intrigue, lies, and deception. And if he could have it his way, we would never have insight into his affairs and his role in our lives; he would be glad to just work quietly behind the scenes. I am talking about the devil whose name is Satan.

Yes, there is a real devil and he does have a massive army of angelic warriors that do his bidding. The Bible actually has quite a bit to say about Him and his role in our life. First and foremost, you must understand that he is our enemy. He hates us and He wants to destroy us. In making reference to the devil, in **John 10:10**, Jesus said that the "thief" – which is a metaphor for Satan – comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. He is a thief and is

purposed on stealing the truth away from our hearts: he wants us to believe a lie. He then wants to use that lie to effect our death and destruction.

The only real weapon that Satan has in his arsenal to use against believers is the lie. The Bible says that his lies are like flaming arrows that he unleashes into our life. And if those arrows stick, they release their deadly poison. Sometimes that poison is fast acting and the impact is immediate, and sometimes it is a slow release kind of poison that takes its time in acting. But either way, unless treated its impact is certain.

So what do we know about the devil? First of all he was an arch-angel and one of God's most marvelous and beautiful creations. He was one of heaven's worship leaders. The story of his pride, his fall, and his doom is told in Isaiah 14:11-16; Ezekiel 28:2; Daniel 8:9-11, and Revelation 20.

Satan was so magnificent that he was tempted by his own pride. He rebelled against God convincing 1/3 of the angelic host to follow him. He convinced himself, and those who followed him, that He could make himself like God. Understand, that is the power of pride. Don't underestimate what you are capable of. Here Satan was in the presence of God, he was one of the most important angels that God created, he was privy to the power and amazing works of God, yet, in his heart he believed he could be like God. The cloud of deception that our pride is capable of is simply unimaginable.

It is sad, but that is the same lie – that same cloud of deception, that he tells us today: “you don't really need God, you can be like God.” And droves of people, Christian and non-Christian alike, swallow this lie.

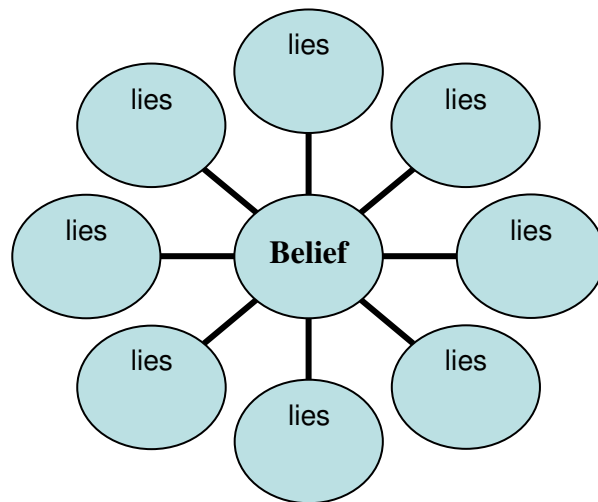
As a result of his rebellion, God removed Satan from his seat of authority in heaven and cast him down to earth where he now wreaks havoc on mankind.

He is referred to as the dragon and serpent of old – yes, the same serpent that deceived Eve. He is also is referred to as the king over all the sons of pride; and we are told that his heart is as hard as a stone. But he is our adversary. We must be aware of his activity if we are going to defend ourselves from his attacks and walk in truth. A little run down on his activity so you are no longer unaware:

- He accuses us and condemns us
 - Zechariah 3:1; 1 Timothy 3:6
- He tempts us – for example, he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus
 - Matthew 4:1-11; John 13:2
- He lies to us
 - John 8:4
- He deceives us and disguises himself as an angel of light
 - 2 Corinthians 11:14
- He ensnares people in his traps to do his will
 - 1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:26
- He deceives us with power, signs, and false wonders, and all the deception of wickedness
 - 2 Thessalonians 2:8, Revelation 12:9; 20:7
- He hinders our process and disrupts our work
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:18; Matthew 13:25-43
- He oppresses people
 - Acts 10:38

- He steals the word from our heart before it has a chance to take root so that people will not believe
 - Luke 8:12
- He schemes how to hurt and trick us
 - 2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11
- He is an instrument that God utilizes to wreak havoc on our lives
 - Job 1-2; 1 Kings 22:19-23; 1 Samuel 16:14
- He is our adversary and prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour
 - 1 Peter 5:8

That is quite a laundry list of activity; yet, it is surprising that most of us are so unaware of his involvement in our lives. The devil is real and he wants to steal from you, kill you, and destroy you.



So he sends forth his lies in an attempt to get you to succumb to wrong belief and unbelief. He tells you that you don't really need God, at least not in the dramatic way that the Bible describes. He tells you that you are able to do it on your own – you can be like God. He tells you that you are really a pretty good person, so why worry about all this intense stuff that Steve has been throwing at you week after week. He tells you that you don't really need the Bible, that it is outdated, filled with errors and is just flat out boring to read. He tells you that God is not really interested in you, does not really love you, and can care less about the details of your life. He tells you that you have time, there is no rush; you can get right with God later on when you are done enjoying yourself. He tells you that God is a kill-joy and just wants to ruin your life. He tells you that everyone within Christianity is a hypocrite, a failure, and why would you want to be identified with that lot. He goes on and on and on tempting your mind and your emotions to reject the truth. He tries to stimulate your lust and place your desire on anything, or anyone, other than God. He attacks and bombards the center of all that controls your life: your beliefs.

James 4:6-8

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Despite all the efforts of the enemy to crush us, we are to deal with this adversary in the same way we are to deal with our lust, our pride and anything else that tempts us to reject the truth in favor of wrong belief and unbelief. **We are to draw near to God – we are to let His Word have its rightful place of priority and authority in our life!** This takes us all the way back to our study in *Proverbs 2*. We are to treasure His instruction, tune our ears to His wisdom, concentrate on understanding, yearn and cry out for insight and understanding, and search for them as we would search for lost money or hidden treasure.

If you follow this instruction, the enemy's power in your life will be muted and the devil will flee. The cloud of pride will be blown away, and your lust will be redirected to the truth.

Proverbs 3:5-8

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths. Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn your back on evil. Then you will gain renewed health and vitality.

We must forsake everything within us that says we can be like God and we can have the wisdom to direct our own lives. This is how we battle. This is how we stay away from the sin of unbelief and wrong belief. This is how we guard our hearts and our minds. This is how we have victory. This is how we retard the decaying process of sin in our lives. This is our remedy. This is our solution. This is the pathway to experiencing all the wonderful and marvelous promises of God. This is the pathway of faith and the pathway to true life. This is how we know and experience the love of the Father. This is the pathway to having a vibrant, powerful, and wonderful relationship with God where we hear His voice and understand and follow His leading in all areas of our life. This is true Christianity and this is to be our life.

Let's pray.

This is the 6th study on How God Speaks. What we discovered in the first couple of weeks is that God always speaks to us but the real issue at hand is whether or not we are ready and willing to listen. The question we should constantly be asking ourselves is: are we in a position, relationally, where we can hear the voice of God and understand His leading in our lives or are there too many things that stand in the way of our fellowship with God? Each week we have focused on how we can position ourselves such that we have continual, ongoing, vibrant, and real-time fellowship with God.

Whether you realize it or not, you are engaged in a war – a battle for your Soul: the domination of your mind and emotions and ensuing control of your body. On the one side of this battle is the enemy who entices your Old Man. On the other side is the Spirit of God who dwells within and works from the New Creation. This war is about truth versus error, belief versus unbelief. The outcome of this war, on a moment-by-moment basis, impacts your ability to *remain* in fellowship with God and hear His voice in your life.

There are many factors that significantly impact the outcome of this war. Last week we studied 3 of the major players which tempt us to depart from the truth and fall into the sin of wrong belief and unbelief. They are:

1. **Lust:** anything or anyone on which we place a higher priority than God; and to which we give our heart, emotions, affection and attention.
2. **Pride:** when we place a higher authority and priority on our own wisdom for our lives than we do God's wisdom.
3. **The Devil:** our enemy whose goal is to steal, kill, and destroy; and who uses the lie as his key weapon with which to attack us.

Tonight, we are going to explore a bit deeper in to number 3 and explore how we are to engage in war against the devil. Last week we ended with this scripture in James:

James 4:6-8

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Clearly the battle strategy has 3 parts: we are to submit ourselves to God (our heart, our mind, and our soul); we are to resist the devil and all his attempts to lie, deceive, and steal the truth from our lives; and we are to pursue God vigorously. We have spent a lot of time studying what it means to be in submission to God and to pursue Him, so tonight we are going to study the battle tactics whereby we can resist the devil and cause him to flee.

In this passage in James, the verb “resist” is an active imperative – it is a command. We are not to think that this is something we do only when things feel dark and scary; rather, this is something we are to be doing at all times. The verb is in the aorist tense which means that this is to be our life, from the moment we wake up to the time we go to sleep – from beginning to end – this is to describe what we do. Yet, for most of us, we are hardly even aware of the battle. We are so focused on the spinning of this world, that we all but lose touch and are unaware of what is taking place in the spiritual realms. Tell me, how is it possible to battle a foe if we have no idea that he is there? How can fight a war if we do not even realize that so much of what we have to deal with in the physical, psychological, and emotional areas of our lives is rooted in the spiritual?

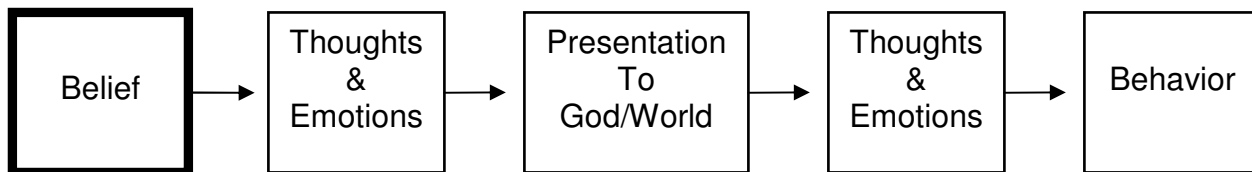
First and foremost, we must understand that we are fighting a spiritual battle and this battle is not fought against enemies we can see, but it is against spirits: Satan and his minion of demons. For reference, when I say the “enemy” or the “devil” I am being inclusive and incorporating both Satan and his demonic hordes.

Ephesians 6:10-12

A final word: Be strong with the Lord's mighty power. Put on **all** of God's armor so that you will be able to **stand firm** against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.

I know this sounds like some scary movie, but believe me, it is real. The enemy comes against us and his methods, his devices, his tricks are uniquely crafted to deceive our minds and tempt us to move us from a place of trust and dependence upon God and place our trust and dependence upon anything else as long as it is not God. I really do not understand how he does it, I have no idea how or where the spiritual, the metaphysical, and the physical intersect; but the enemy is able to penetrate our minds with thoughts and ideas that stand in opposition to God.

Last week I presented a simple model to explain how we are wired. Using this simple diagram, I pointed out that everything comes down to what we believe. All else that plays out in our lives flows from this starting point. Our beliefs are either rooted in the truth, as God has revealed it in the Word of God, or they are formed by a myriad of other factors, such as our experiences, our culture, our heritage, our education, and so on.



It is this area of our beliefs where the enemy focuses his attack. His **goal** is simple: *get us to believe something other than the truth*. He knows that **when** we base our choices, our thoughts, and our decisions on a lie (no matter how real that lie is to us), it will penetrate our being and over time play itself out in our behaviors and enslave us to its power and control. The enemy's **method**: *anything is fair game to accomplish the goal* – remember this is a no holds bar war and the devils lies come **in** many forms and **through** many forms.

An Attack on the Truth and Our Knowledge of the Truth

The enemy will always directly attack your belief in the truth of the Word of God. This is because he knows that the truth operates as a complete bar to his ability to operate in your life. If you believe the truth, his lies will fall powerless and his attacks will be impotent. This is one of those unbending spiritual principles. Thus, the enemy schemes to find ways to cause you to deviate from the truth. If you are not familiar with the Word of God and if the scriptures have not been burned in your heart and mind, it does not take a lot for him to trick you. He can hit your mind with any lie and wrap that lie around the little bit of truth that you do know, and lo and behold you are ready to follow his path of deception.

For example, when he tempted Eve, he used the truth – the very words that God communicated to her, but because Eve did not hold the word of God close to her heart, she was easily deceived. Let's quickly look at this interchange:

Genesis 3:1-5

Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures the LORD God had made. "Really?" he asked the woman. "Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?"

"Of course we may eat it," the woman told him. "It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die."

"You won't die!" the serpent hissed. "God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil." The woman was convinced.

First Satan challenges the truth through a question that is meant to entice not only her appetite for the good fruit, but her appetite for truth. You can almost hear his cynical sounding voice ("Really?") as if to imply that it was all nonsense. Eve's response indicates that she did not really know the truth, she just knew about the truth. God did not say she could not touch it but only that she could not eat it. You may think that this is a trivial detail, but you must understand that when we do not know the Word of God, we leave ourselves dangerously open and vulnerable to the devil's deceptions. Here, Satan took advantage of this opening and immediately responded with: "You won't die." And sure enough, when she touched the fruit she realized that the serpent spoke the truth – she did not die. But the problem is that she was comparing her wrong belief regarding what God had actually said with what Satan said. Thus, based on that error, she believed the rest of what the devil told her and she ate the fruit believing a lie.

For people who do know the Word of God, the devil has to be more subtle in his attack and come to you with the truth but he adds a slight amount of error in application or intent. For example, let's look at his attempt to deceive Jesus.

Matthew 4:1-3; 5-7

Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil. For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry.

Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He orders his angels to protect you. And they will hold you with their hands to keep you from striking your foot on a stone.'

Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'Do not test the Lord your God.'"

The devil knew that he would not be able to get a way with a misquote or a twisting of the scriptures, so instead he accurately quotes Psalm 91:11-12; but he takes that verse out of its proper context and attempts to entice Jesus to act on it (this is very similar to what we hear coming out of mainstream Christianity when it comes to issues of faith, prosperity, healing, holiness, discipline, sin, and so on). Jesus' response to the devil demonstrated that His understanding of the truth would not allow even a deviation in purpose or intent. Jesus used scripture to clarify scripture. He used scripture that is very easy to understand to bring light or to properly interpret scripture that is somewhat difficult to understand. Jesus saw the trap and He sprung the trap, all the while keeping Himself clear of its impact.

This is one of the reasons I have encouraged you to dig into your Bible and to know the truth. If you are not armed with the scriptures as your resource, then the enemy can easily play with you and wreak havoc on your life. It is clear that the enemy knows the scriptures and he is skilled at picking them apart, twisting them, and using them inappropriately. Therefore, in order to have victory over the enemy, we must not only know the truth but we must understand the truth. Remember all our earlier teachings, understanding only comes as a result of seeking the Lord as you would hunt for lost treasure, tuning your ears to His instruction, concentrating on understanding, and crying out for insight and instruction. Do you see the way that all of this is tied together? To remain in a place of fellowship with God where you can hear His voice and understand His leading in your life, you must be able to resist the devil's temptations. And to be prepared to do that, you must know and understand the Word of God.

The Enemy Strikes in Our Area of Need Tempting Us to Take Control

The enemy also comes at us when we are weak and most vulnerable – physically, emotionally, and mentally – and he tempts us to take matters into our own hands. Let’s look again at the temptation of Jesus:

Matthew 4:1-4

Then Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted there by the Devil. For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry.

Then the Devil came and said to him: "If you are the Son of God, change these stones into loaves of bread." But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.'"

Jesus had fasted for 40-days and 40-nights and his body was absolutely wiped out. If you have ever followed the stories of prisoners who go on hunger strikes, you know that by the end of their demonstration their bodies are powerless; they are like limp rags with virtually no strength left in them. That must have been how Jesus felt after this time of fasting. Notice that the devil did not tempt him during this fast and during the time that Jesus was set apart focused on seeking the Lord. He came to Jesus afterwards, when He was at His weakest and most vulnerable. What was the temptation? Was it really about food, about hunger, about Jesus performing His first miracle? I believe this temptation was about control: was Jesus going to trust that His Father was going to take care of Him or was Jesus going to venture out with the gifts, talents, and capabilities that the Father had given Him, and solve His own problems. After all, the need was great and the gifting was certain. He could have done it. But instead of taking matters into His own hands, Jesus basically replied by saying that He will only do what His Father tells Him to do regardless of His need, His weakness, or His desire. He will not take one step to assert His own control over His life.

We see this principle lived out over and over in Jesus’ life.

John 4:34

Then Jesus explained: “MY nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work...”

John 5:30

But I do nothing without consulting the Father. I judge as I am told. And my judgment is absolutely just, because it is according to the will of God who sent me; it is not merely my own.

The take away here is that no matter where we find ourselves in this life. No matter how beat up, worn-out, exhausted, frustrated, or weak we have become as a result of the circumstances in our life, it is absolutely critical that we stay maniacally focused on what God tells us to do and only do what He has instructed us to do. Often when our life is not going the way we want, when God does not seem to be providing in the ways that we expect Him to provide, when His wisdom does not seem to result in any immediate benefit for our lives, and when we are in pain and are desperate for an answer, we are easily tempted to succumb to wrong belief and unbelief. In this condition, we tend to walk away from seeking His Word and His instruction for our lives, and we just do what we want and follow our own wisdom. We start to manage our life by our needs, our wants, and by pain management (basic survival mechanisms). This is the trap that the enemy has set. It is therefore critical that we *remain* in fellowship with God so that we never lose sight of His leading regardless of how rough and difficult our life may be.

The Enemy Fans the Flame of Pride

I believe the enemy’s most powerful temptations come by way of our pride. If you remember the story from last week, it was Satan’s pride and his wrong belief that he could become like God that led to his demise. This is the same lie that the throws at you and I by tempting us to believe that we actually have the ability and the

wisdom to lead and guide our own lives. The devil tells us: we are to be something in this world and we are to get something from this world; that power, position, and authority are all within our grasp if we just reach for it; that each person determines their own fate and our choices determine our future; that if you want to be successful then do and think the following..., if you want wealth, then do and think the following..., if you want love and acceptance, then do and think the following... and so on. Going back to Eve, look at the core of his temptation.

Genesis 3:5-6

"You won't die!" the serpent hissed. "God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil." The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit."

You can be like God! This is the same silly lie that the devil told himself before his fall. Mark my words, we are not and can never be the Lord of our own life. God holds all things in His hand and the only wisdom we can have is the wisdom that He will give to us as a result of our *remaining* in complete dependence upon Him. Remember the warning in *Isaiah 50:10-11*. As soon as you start to warm yourself by your own fires and follow your own light, watch out for devastation will come into your life. This is one of those unbending spiritual principles.

The enemy tried to trap Jesus with the same temptation.

Matthew 4:8-11

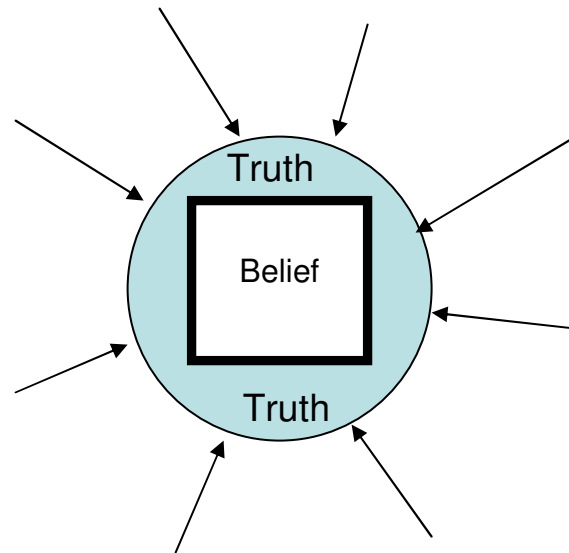
Next the Devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will only kneel down and worship me."

"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God; serve only him.'"

Then the Devil went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus.

After tempting Jesus with error and weakness, the devil then tempts Jesus with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life – the very core of pride. Satan knew that God told Jesus that one day He will rule all nations and be the King over every created thing. So Satan offered him the same deal but with even greater benefit. Forget the cross, forget the torture, rejection, and betrayal – you can have it all **NOW** if only you will bow. You can be king and you can be Lord of this earth **NOW** if only you will take a knee. But Jesus was unwilling to venture outside of His Father's will and timing for His life. Besides, Jesus sole purpose for becoming a man and coming to earth was not just to ultimately rule the Nations, but He was also assigned the job of being the ultimate sacrifice in order to restore mankind to the Father – to provide a way by which you and I can enter into deep and intimate fellowship with the entirety of the Godhead. This purpose would have been thwarted if Jesus would have opted for the short cut; if He would have allowed His desire for power and authority to have a higher priority in His life than His desire to do the will of the Father.

It is so easy to be puffed up by our own sense of purpose and our own sense of importance. But it is all illusory. We are but dust, just specs in the universe. Our value, our importance, our worth comes only from our position with the Father. We must reject all attempts by the devil to tell us differently. We must be willing to submit all of what we are, and all of who we hope to be, to the Father's will and timing, only do what He tells us to do.

Our Defense and Our Offense

I love the way Jesus shut down the devil. He dug in, drew a line in the sand, and declared that he was not going to move from His place of dependence on the Father no matter what trick the devil tried to pull. I want you to notice Jesus' method of warfare. With each temptation, He let His belief in the truth – or His faith – be His shield of defense, such that the temptations of the devil fell powerless at His feet. He also let the Word of God be His weapon of offense. Because Jesus stabbed back at the devil with the truth of the Word, he shut down each temptation and gave the devil absolutely no room to try a second attack in the same line of temptation. The devil had to keep trying new strategies to trick Jesus as the Word of truth became an absolute bar to his efforts. We are to follow this pattern of warfare and vanquish the enemy. Protected by the truth, we can turn and say to the devil: “no” – “be gone, get out of here!”

Let's go back to Ephesians and look at the entire passage.

Ephesians 6:10-18

A final word: Be strong with the Lord's mighty power. Put on **all** of God's armor so that you will be able to **stand firm** against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.

Use **every** piece of God's armor to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be **standing** firm. **Stand your ground**, putting on the sturdy belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News, so that you will be fully prepared. In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.

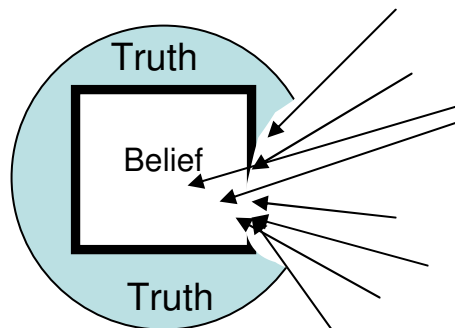
This passage uses a warrior and his armor as a metaphor for our spiritual battle. Notice, all the protection is about the truth – believing the truth. We are to be calm and still our feet resting in the peace that comes from the fact that we have been united with God and there no longer remains any division – sin and death have been conquered (Romans 5:1,2). We are to stand in the righteousness that God has imparted to us in the New Creation: the new person that was created in God's likeness – righteous, holy, and true. (Ephesians 4:24). We are to cover our head (our thoughts and emotions) with the truth that if we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we have been saved, our position in heaven is reserved, and there is nothing that the devil, or anyone else, can do to change that reality. Your inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God for a salvation to be revealed in the last days (1 Peter 1:3-5).

We are to take up our shield of faith (our willingness to actively believe the truth); and with it we are to extinguish all the lies that are shot at us by the devil. We are to brandish the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Practically, what does this look like? I have learned that when a thought is presented in my mind and it encourages or instructs me to do, **feel**, or believe something, the first thing I am to do is compare it to what I know to be true from the Word of God. Clearly, if it blatantly stands in opposition to the Word, I can be sure that it is either from the enemy, the world, or my own desire. Then, as we are instructed in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, I am to punish the disobedience by pushing the thought out of my mind and refusing to entertain it any further. However, if it *does* align with the Word or is neutral in the sense that the Word does not specifically address it, then I examine what it produces in my spirit. If it produces rest, peace, pure desires, gentleness, mercy, good fruits, and is without hypocrisy, then I know that it is from God. These are the fruits that we experience when we depend on the wisdom that comes from above. On the other hand, if it produces a sense of unrest, anxiety, worry, angst, anger, fear, jealousy, selfish ambition, arrogance, and disorder, then I know that it is earthly, natural, and demonic. (The reference for this is in James 3:13–18.) This is how we use the shield of faith to destroy every lofty thing raised up against the true knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Notice one other piece of armor that was mentioned is the sturdy belt of truth. Some translations and the Greek actually say: gird your loins with the truth. The belt was a very important piece of a warriors outfit for it held all other critical pieces together and protected the core of the warriors' strength – his loins. So why is it that for the most part within Christianity, we have played fast and loose with the truth? Why have we not dedicated ourselves to knowing and understanding it? We think that if we have a little quiet time and spend our 10 to 20 minutes reading the Bible and if we go to church and listen on and off to what is being said, that we are doing our part. I don't mean to offend you, but that is non-sense. You are in a war for your very life. Your belief in the truth of the Word of God is your only shield of protection, the truth is your only weapon of warfare; therefore, you must know it and understand it: it is how we fight and it is how we win.

I heard a preacher on the radio the other night saying that since we have been given all authority over the devil (Luke 10:19), we just need to turn to him and rebuke him and command him to be gone: "get away from me Satan – be gone." This is ridiculous and the same twisted logic and reasoning that the enemy tried to pull on Jesus when he quoted Psalm 91:11-12 and told Jesus to jump from the temple. He took one scripture out of context and tried to get Jesus to act on it. Mark my word, you can yell and scream as loud as you want at the devil, you can tell him to be gone until you are blue in the face, and he will just stand there laughing at you sending a flurry of flaming arrows towards you thoughts and emotions. The way that verse in Luke is to be understood is in light of the instruction we are given in warfare. We do have authority over the devil and he will flee when we have clothed ourselves with **all** the armor of God and when we pick up our shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit and **resist** His attack. Then He will flee!

Ephesians 6 says that we are to put on **all** of God's armor and use **every** piece of it to resist the enemy in the time of evil. If you fail to believe the truth in any area, you leave your body unprotected and you leave a gap where the enemy can then focus his attack.



This is why it is critical that you know the truth, understand the truth, and believe the truth. This is no game, this is real. The enemy is not out to trip you up and laugh as you stub your toe. He is out to steal, kill, destroy, and like a lion, devour you. He wants to shipwreck your faith and make you his slave; and by your undoing, cause many others to doubt the Word of Truth.

I have a question for you. For those of you who have started to really pursue God and make Him your priority, have you not become more and more aware of how real this war is and how the enemy comes after you with ridiculous thoughts that attempt to first distract you from the truth and then entice you to do something in opposition to the truth? If you are not aware of this reality, that just means that you have not become a threat to the enemy and so he keeps you where he wants to keep you through subtle and hidden warfare. But just venture out to seek God. Just begin to desire truth and he will show his face and you will experience this onslaught of ridiculous temptation. The good news is that we have been fully equipped. We have been given the weapons, the armor, the authority that comes directly from God, and the Spirit of God to help us. Further, we are backed by an unbending spiritual principle: if we resist the devil, he will flee.

One thing I have always found interesting is that the whole purpose of putting on our armor and brandishing our sword is that we might be able to **stand firm** and be unmovable. We are not told to go out and seek a fight. We are not told to advance and move into the enemy's territory. We are told to **stand firm**. This word picture reminds me of scenes from movies like Troy and 300 where the soldiers draw their battle line, they dig in, they grind their feet into the ground and they put their shoulder forward under the protection of their shield, they have their sword or spear in their other hand and they resist each wave of the enemy's onslaught. They do not move! They hold their ground knowing that their life and the lives of others are at stake.

This is the kind of war we are in. Yes, it is unseen. Yes, we don't know what our enemy looks like. Yes, it all takes place in the spiritual and metaphysical realms. Yes, we have only little insight in to what is really at stake. But we know the enemy's purposes; we are not ignorant of his schemes and his strategies. We know that we are fighting for our spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health. We know that we have been given everything we need, and we know that we can win!

Ephesians 6:18

Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Stay alert** and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.

We need to wake up and be alert. This is not the time for being lax, for taking it easy and thinking that the devil will just go away; he won't. You are in a war and as long as we are here on earth there is no safe middle ground or neutral zone. The only hiding place of safety is under the full and complete armor of God.

Wake up to the fact that Satan is not just about evil spells and scary places, witches and terrifying demons. He is about lies, deception, subtlety, and anything and I mean anything that will cause you to deviate from the truth. **2 Corinthians 11:14** says that he will even cloak himself as an angel of light, make himself look as religious as you need him to look, and feed you all the truth you need, as long as you are willing to follow him into his trap. You must be alert; you must be aware.

Back to Wrong Belief and Unbelief

Last week, I said that our battle is all about wrong belief and unbelief. I said that if the enemy can tempt us to take action – make a choice – believing something about God, or about ourselves that is not true, then he has his opening and he begins his relentless attack until either we resist him and cast him out or we succumb to the sin of wrong belief or unbelief, and he makes us his slave in that area of our life.

Although I have been talking about having victory in this process, I am not down playing the many good reasons we have for choosing to succumb to unbelief and wrong belief. I have experienced them all: fear, horrific personal circumstances, doubt that God will be to me who He says, pain, loneliness, insecurity,

confusion, depression, and the seemingly randomness or cruelty of the events in my life. But regardless of the reasons, and all the sympathies surrounding those reasons, it still amounts to unbelief and wrong belief which by definition opens me up to the schemes of the devil. That is one place I do not want to be.

That is why we are to *demolish everything*—all the speculations, assumptions, and conjectures—that have been raised up against the true knowledge of God. We must take all our thoughts captive and compare them to the truth. If our thoughts do not line up with the truth, we must “punish all disobedience,” or remove those thoughts from our minds and banish them from our being. We must be diligent to apply our faith and give no opportunity for wrong belief and unbelief.

To accomplish this feat, we need to either align our emotions, logic, and reasoning with the truth of the Word of God, or we must separate from the battle the power that our emotions, logic, and reasoning have over us. This is very hard. When the enemy attacks at the level of our emotions, say for example, our insecurity, the time between the temptation, our thoughts, our decision, and our reaction, can be a split-second. As a result, we can feel like we have no control over those emotions. But that is not the truth – it may **feel** like it, but it is not the truth. It just means that we need more and more of the mind of Christ which can train us, prepare us, and give us the insight and the wisdom to not only identify, but rebuff all the attacks of the enemy.

Discovering the mind of Christ requires a renewal of our minds so that we no longer think or react in the manner of our Old Man. This brings us back around to our teachings on Romans 12:1-2 and Proverbs 2:1-11. I hope you understand and can now clearly see how all these teachings are intricately linked and. They must all be taken as a whole.

Temptation Through Friends and Loved Ones

As a final note, beware of the fact that an attack from the enemy can come *through* many forms. Yes, it can come by way of thoughts, emotions, events, and experiences, but it can also come by way of our closest friends and personal relationships – even fellow believers. Adam was tempted by his wife. Peter, one of the three in the inner circle of Jesus’ confidants, tried to convince Jesus that He was not to die. Jesus turned to Peter and said:

Matthew 16:23

... "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

And it was Judas, one of the twelve, which betrayed Jesus to the Jewish authorities. Remember, a believer who is living from his Old Man has by definition made himself open and vulnerable to the enemy; and, therefore, can be used as a tool in your life to deceive and trick you. You must be alert and have discernment: is your friend, your loved one, your confidant, or your family member, setting their mind on God’s interests, or man’s?

Remember, be alert. Don’t be taken off guard just because something comes to you by way of someone you love and trust. Discern the voice of God. This is a battle for your Soul. This is a battle you can win!

Let’s pray

Matthew 7:13-14

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

This is the 7th part of in this series of “how God speaks.” As we discussed, our ideal, or our goal, is to be in a place, relationally, with God where we hear His voice and are able to discern His leading in our lives. Another way of saying this is that if we have a level of depth and intimacy with God – in the same way we would with our best friend ever – then God will freely disclose to us His will for our lives and like Jesus we will be able to declare that we only do what our Father tells us to do, we only say what He tells us to say, and we only go where He tells us to go. Can you imagine how much strength, comfort, assurance, and stability there would be in your life if this is how you lived? Can you imagine the confidence that would come from knowing you are doing exactly what it is that the Creator of the Universe had determined that you were to do? You would be immovable and no one, absolutely no one, would be able to judge you, tell you what to do, or control you. You will experience true freedom! All you have to do is become best friends with God – that is it – simple, right?

Well, although, it is simple in concept, it is extremely difficult in practice. The reason is that we have to deal with a 3 on 1 battle. On the one side of the battle field, we have the New Creation empowered by the Holy Spirit, but on the other side, we have our Old Man, the World and its corrupt self-seeking system, and the enemy, or the Devil. 3 adversaries that work in unity and which are literally hell bent on destroying your life and leaving you empty, lonely, wanting, and in absolute despair. These 3 adversaries continually tempt you with empty promises and lies. They offer appetizers of pleasure and fulfillment, but once you take a bite of their fruit, you find out that not only is it rotten, it is infested and leaves you deathly ill.

Let’s get back to Matthew 7, I find the word picture that Jesus uses to be extremely tangible and it really helps me grasp His point. There are two roads, and two gates of passage. These roads don’t cross and they don’t join – they are forever separate. One is extremely difficult to find and once you enter through the gate and start down the road, it stays narrow and by the sound of it, there will only be a few people walking down this path. So there is a good chance that this path might get a bit lonely at times, and there might even be a serious risk of falling off this path. But it is the path that leads to life – the only path that leads to life. It is clear to me, however, that most people do not understand either the journey or the destination. They underestimate how critical it is to stay on this path, and to not deviate, and so when they take a look at its narrowness and how few people are on the road, they are discouraged from taking this path.

The other path, however, is easily discovered and its gates are thrown open for anyone to walk down. It’s like a super highway. There is no trouble merging on to that road for all you have to do is follow the crowd – it does not matter where you look (in front of you, behind you, to either side), you will have company to join you on this journey. The road is extremely broad so you don’t have to worry about falling off or getting lost.

It is clear to me, however, that if so many people are on this road that they really do not know its end point or comprehend the severity of its destination. For some reason they must be convinced that it leads some where else – after all how can so many people be in error? But the reality is that this road has one outcome, one destination, one end – devastation and destruction.

There are two paths that we can choose – both with fixed destinations. Jesus, therefore, instructs us to choose wisely and enter through the narrow gate. In the Greek, this verb “enter” is an imperative in the active and aorist tense. In other words, our God, our Father, and Jesus our Lord has commanded us to enter through the narrow gate – it is not a suggestion. Therefore, if you are on the broad path, you are outside of the will of God and living in complete disobedience – there is no other way to cut it. In addition, the tense of the verb indicates that we are to not only enter through the narrow gate but we are to stay on the narrow path continually. This is to be our life, our journey, and is to be current and ongoing continual existence.

With that said, the question for tonight is which road are you on? On you on the broad road that leads to destruction or the narrow road that leads to life?

Now for those of you who have been around church for a while, you are probably used to hearing this verse used as one of those scriptures that separates believers from non-believers. The fact is that there are few who are willing to enter into the gate of salvation through Jesus Christ and there are all the rest who have decided that the road of religion, the road of spiritual experiences, the road of science, the road of secularism, the road of atheism, and the road of humanism is far more comfortable and far more interesting than the exclusive "I Am" path of Jesus Christ. And at the first layer of understanding, this is a proper interpretation of this verse. The broad road leads to destruction, both temporal and eternal. Temporal in the sense that you live outside of the protection and covering of God and are essentially traveling a road under full exposure to the elements and the 3-adversaries that want to steal, kill, and destroy you. Eternal in that when you die, you will spend eternity separated from God (and from those who love God); and, thereby, receive the same judgment, condemnation and destination that has been reserved for the Devil and his fallen angels.

Revelation 20:10; 15

Then the Devil, who betrayed them, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever...And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.

And, by way of clarification, the fact that so many are going that direction does not mean that it will be a big fun party with all your buds. The Bible speaks quite harrowing of this destination as a place of great wailing, gnashing of teeth, and ceaseless torment; a place of isolation and desolation. Trust me; this is not a place you want to be at the end of your journey. That is why Jesus was very specific with His instruction:

Luke 13:24-29

Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, ' Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, ' I do not know where you are from.' "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from me, all you evildoers.' "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out.

So the door is narrow that leads to salvation. There is no other way to enter than through Jesus Christ. There is no other way by which man can be saved. It does not matter how good you are, how loving you are, how charitable you are, and it does not matter how sincere you are in believing what you believe. There is one narrow gate.

John 14:6

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

"No one" literally means no one. I am sorry to tell you, there is not a special exemption for you, or for anyone else. The only way to heaven, the only way to the Father is through Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in Romans 10:9-11:

Romans 10:9-11

For if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed."

And Peter emphasized this point when he said:

Acts 4:12

There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them."

So the first layer of application to *Matthew 7:13-14* is to be understood in the context of believers and unbelievers – those who enter the broad way of both temporal and eternal destruction, and those who enter the narrow gate of Jesus Christ and find a sure destination to the Father.

But we should not limit our understanding to the first layer and we should try to comprehend the fullness of what Jesus was communicating. Going a layer deeper, we can evaluate this verse in the context of life within the community of believers. Understood in this context, however, we need to go back to some of our earlier teachings and remember that a believer can live a life under the domination and control of the Holy Spirit, and thereby walk the narrow path, or they can live under the mastery of the Old Man, and thereby walk the broad path.

First of all the way is narrow and few find it. Within the larger spectrum of Christianity, most people are tied to the religion and are tied to all the trappings that come with a religion; but, few have found true life in a narrow pursuit of friendship with God. Again, we are looking at all this in the context of positioning yourself such that you can hear the voice of God and know His leading in your life. Few have found that reality and experienced it on an ongoing basis. I know that many people have had their moments with God where they were connected and heard His voice, but those moments, for the most part, have been few and far between. In fact there is a good chance that the connection had more to do with God being merciful and loving than it did with the person being positioned relationally to hear His voice.

The way is broad and many are on the path of what I would call cultural Christianity – or the Religion of Christianity. Many have been raised in church, gone to Sunday School and Bible studies, summer camp, fellowship groups, discipleship groups, small group studies, and have been part of various para-church organizations, and so on; but few have found that place of rest and confidence where God's wisdom has entered their hearts and they know how to find the right course of action for their life every time. This path is broad and many are on it. But once again, it is the path that leads to destruction. Now let me clarify, this is not referring to eternal destruction – for if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then your salvation is reserved in heaven and is protected by the power of God (*1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:13*); rather, this is referring to a temporal destruction. By this I mean a life that is separated from the direct leading and direction of the Holy Spirit, and one where a person strives to live their life by their own logic, reason, experiences, and emotions. The deception of the enemy and resulting denial comes in the fact that all the while they think they are ok with God because they do certain religious practices and functions (read their Bibles, go to church, and so on) and they do not understand that they are predominately being ruled and controlled by their Old Man.

Romans 8:5-14

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.) ...So, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it and its evil deeds, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

The implications of this verse are quite staggering, and should make the cultural Christian quite uncomfortable. In terms of practical day-to-day living, if you are controlled by the Old Man, then you are hostile to God; and, thus, have not positioned yourself as a friend – one to whom He is willing to reveal His secrets and His plans. Thus, absent His mercy, there is no way you are positioned to hear His voice and know His leading: you are like a stranger and worse than a stranger, an enemy. There is no way you can ever please God in this place, it does not matter what you do. **You are on the wrong road.** James says it this way:

James 4:4-5

You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God. What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful?

What a horrifying thought: we can actually be enemies of God. Sure, I can understand this in the context of a non-believer, because they have not entered through the narrow gateway of Jesus Christ. But how can that be said about believers? James makes it perfectly clear – there is no middle ground. As a community of believers, we need to stop living in denial and deception. If you are fixated on this world and your desires are fundamentally drawn to the things of this world, then there is a good chance that you are not a friend of God.

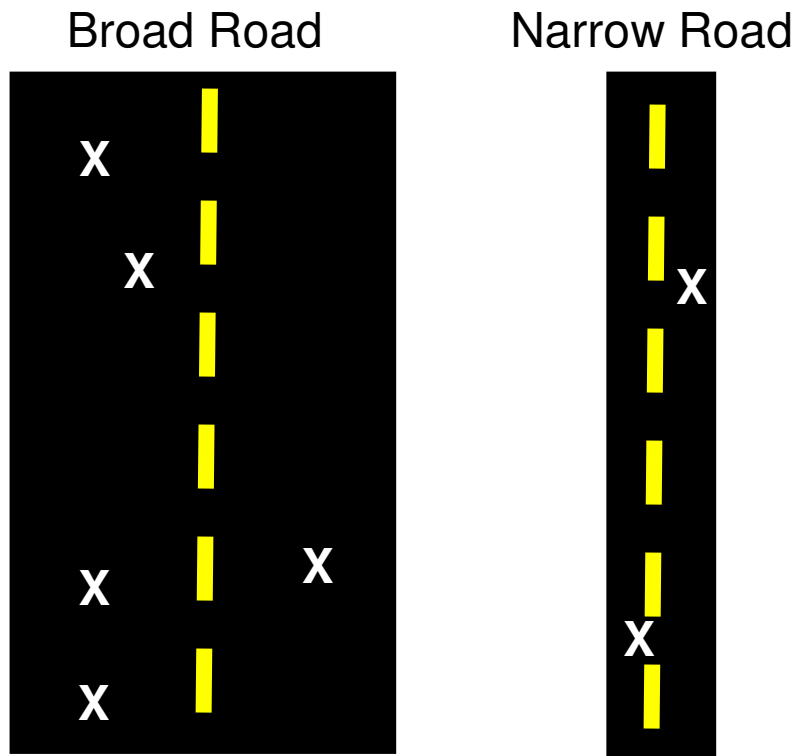
Do you remember how we started this study on How God Speaks with the 5-essential elements of a successful relationship? Well one of those elements was that there must be a ***mutuality of interest*** of both parties in the relationship in order for there to be any kind of unity and oneness. Let me tell you, God has no interest in the things of this world and He wants us to similarly take no interest in it. That is why we are told that we are just traveling through this place and we belong to another life altogether. In Christ, we have died to the elemental things of this world (***Colossians 2:20***), so why do we so often live like what the world has to offer is the most important thing to us. Think about where you spend your time, think about what you put into your mind and what it is that entertains you. Think about how much time you spend seeking to please yourself and find fulfillment. Compare that to the time you spend seeking the Lord as your sole ***priority*** and ***authority*** in your life.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

And, here is the skinny, if you continue to just do what you want to do, living life your own way by your own wisdom, seeking your own pleasures, then you will in effect perish – your New Creation will be quenched and you will be under the cruel mastery of the Old Man and the voice of God will be seem to be so far and distant from where you are at.

Over the last couple of weeks we spent a lot of time talking about how the Devil deceives us and tempts us with his lies. In that vein, he is very active to ensure that you stay on this broad path that leads to separation from the Father. Look at this diagram.



We have two cheesy graphics representing the broad road and the narrow road. Tell me, does it really matter where you are on the broad road? Do you think you are any better off if you are at the front, the middle, the side, or the way down the road. Some of the practical consequences may be different, but honestly, it really does not matter. The fact is **you are still on the wrong road** and it still leads to destruction and damage in your life. Remember, there is no intersection and no cross over – either you are on the broad road or the narrow road.

Similarly, it does not really matter if you suddenly stop everything and try to “clean up” your life. For example, you may have experienced some very painful consequences of walking in the flesh, and so you want to be a little more cautious and a little more weary this time. So you back off and start trying to do things “right.” You may begin to read your Bible because you have been told over and over by me and others that you need to - - that it is what God expects. You have been told that it will help keep you safe. Well there is truth in that; but again what is the problem? **You are still on the wrong road!** You may decide to exit a relationship you have had with someone who is not a believer, or exit a relationship with a believer who is totally given over to the world, but what is the problem? **You are still on the wrong road!** It does not matter that you stopped and decided to hang out and get busy doing religious things in an attempt to get right with God – **you are still on the wrong road!**

I cannot emphasize this point enough. The enemy does not want you to get off the broad road, so he tells you that it is ok to stop and get busy trying to get “right.” He has told his lie over and over and over again and so many people believe it; and, as a result, they stay on the wrong road. So if he is going to continue to lie over and over, I am going to continue to speak the truth over and over. I am sorry if at times I sound like a broken record but the only way to battle and defeat a lie is with the truth. So I must keep telling you the truth. Stopping on the road, changing your behaviors, performing religious deeds and religious activities is not the same thing as getting on the right road with the right values and the right beliefs.

In the early church, there were those teaching that it is ok to substitute religious duty and deeds with a walk on the narrow path. They said that you must be circumcised in order to be a friend of God. This concept is very similar to what we are talking about. But Paul clearly says that this is ridiculous.

Galatians 6:15

It does not make any difference now whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people.

This is the litmus test – are you walking according to the Spirit in the New Creation or are you still following your old sinful nature and its desires. It does not matter if you are doing religious ceremonies, duties, or things that you think will make God happy, the issue is only about the Spirit versus the flesh. So don't be too proud of yourself for stopping and trying to “get it right” this time. Have you been changed into a new and different person? Are you on the broad road or the narrow road? These are the questions you should be challenging yourself with – all else is just another deception and another denial.

Let me try and explain the difference. A person on the broad road who is “trying to do it right” really does not have a core value shift – they still pretty much love to do what they have been doing all along, they just are tired of the consequences or tired of being nagged by someone like me. But a person on the narrow road fundamentally has new values, new beliefs and they loath all that is in the world; their interest in the things have this world have long since died. Looking at the broader passage in Galatians 6, Paul talks about this value shift that happened in his life:

Galatians 6:14-16

As for me, God forbid that I should boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of that cross, my interest in this world died long ago, and the world's interest in me is also long dead. It doesn't make any difference now whether we have been circumcised or not. What counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people. May God's mercy and peace be upon all those who live by this principle. They are the new people of God.

Fundamentally, when the Spirit is in control of your life and your New Creation is dominating your Old Man, then even your base desires change – all things become new and you no longer live for yourself, but the love of God controls you and you live to do His will. (*2 Corinthians 5:14-17*).

Those who are on the broad path try to force a new way of life and in effect try to force righteousness. They may have some success in terms of stopping or limiting certain behaviors, but **they are still on the wrong road!** If you hang around someone who is trying to “fix it” they are often not very nice people – they still are in a huge battle and they are often quite frustrated by all the desires that wage war against their spirit. If you could take a slice out of their soul you would see nothing but turmoil, confusion, and unrest. This is demonstrated in the fact that they strive extra hard and take great pride in their small successes, and they want you to be equally as proud of them. But what is the problem? No matter how hard they try, **they are still on the wrong road!**

In contrast to the striving and all the hard effort, those who live by the Spirit – who walk down the narrow path – will naturally produce the nature and character of God. Why? Because they are friends of God and He gives Himself to His friends.

Romans 8:32

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

The narrow road is the road of faith – the road of believing the truth. The narrow road is the road of surrender and one where a person adopts as their own the desires, attitudes, and perspectives of God, as revealed in His Word, and reject the value system that this world offers. Practically, those on the narrow road hold on very lightly to the things of this world. They see it for what it is and they understand that this world is passing away, and all that will remain and all that will endure will only be what God has done in and through them. They live for eternity and not for the here and now – they live by every word that comes from the mouth of God; they live to do the will of God.

Paul perfectly captures this reality when he declares:

Galatians 2:20-21

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

My paraphrase of this verse would be: “I have decided to get off the broad road – never to return – and to walk the narrow road; and as long as I am living, I will stay on this road for Christ Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, lives in and through me; therefore, I will actively believe the truth as revealed to me by God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” I think that is quite an accurate paraphrase.

So again, I need to ask you: are you on the broad road or the narrow road. I ask this question referring to both layers. If you are not a believer, then the path you are on leads to both temporal and eternal destruction. If you are a believer then you must be willing to honestly appraise yourself and determine whether or not Christ is living through you or whether your Old Man is predominately the one that others meet. Do you actively believe the truth as revealed in the Word of God – are you living by faith? Or do you live by the rule and dictates of your lusts, desires, emotions, logic, reason and personal wisdom? Are you on the narrow road that leads to life or are you on the broad road that leads to destruction.

If you are on the broad road, please understand you do not have to stay there. If you are not a believer, I encourage you to come talk to me and we can pray for Christ to come into your heart and make you into a new person. And if you are a believer, but have lived for the passions and desires of this world, you do not have to spend another moment of time in that place. You have been made new. You are a new creation. You just need to submit yourself under the wisdom of God and fundamentally reject you: all your rights, all your ways, all your reasoning and all in which you have tried to find value and meaning. Instead, you can find your complete identify, and I mean complete identity, in the fact that you have been born again into the kingdom of God and the creator of the universe is your Father. You can find joy in the fact that you are part of the few – the people chosen of God. Therefore, seek God with your whole heart, mind, and soul, for without Him you can do nothing. Let God and His Word be your **authority** and the absolute **priority** of your life. All else must fall below this truth.

If you get on this narrow road, then you will be a friend of God.

Psalms 25:14

Friendship with the LORD is reserved for those who fear him. With them he shares the secrets of his covenant.

As a friend and as a Father, He will talk to you. He will lead you. He will guide you down this narrow path. There will be nothing for you to fear, for He will be your light in the darkness, your provision of all that you need, your help when the road is scary, and He will be your way. In addition, He is also the best traveling companion ever. I implore you, stop living as an enemy that is hostile to God, become His friend and experience the fullness of His love, passion, and desire for you.

Let's pray.

Week after week we have been talking about how we are to position ourselves relationally with God in order to hear His voice and understand His leading in our lives. In that regard we have a few more practical issues to cover which we will get to over the next few weeks, but for tonight I want to talk about what it is like to actually hear His voice and some of the ways in which He talks to us. But you must keep in mind, everything starts, continues and is completed within the context of a fully committed relationship with God. All of His wonderful promises are experienced within a real-time, day-in and day-out mutual relationship where we are completely dependent upon Him to lead us, guide us, direct our paths, light our way, and give us the strength to walk in the direction He sets for our lives.

The Word: His Autobiography

I remember my brother whet through a spell where he was absolutely fascinated by Winston Churchill. He read many books about the man and was able to recite all sorts of funny and intriguing stories about Churchill and he used to even imitate his voice with a cheesy English accent. My brother would talk about Churchill's amazing diplomacy, his political dealings, his strategic abilities during the war, and how he handled the Russians and the Americans and so on. Once I challenged some fact about Churchill and I was quickly put in my place. My brother jumped all over that and told me I was wrong, and explained the real facts about Churchill. My brother acted as if he actually knew the guy, was his personal friend and advisor, and really understood his mind. I had to chuckle, but through all his reading and research, my brother felt he was quite an expert on Churchill and in many ways identified with his leadership skills, his strategic thinking and overall bravado. That is what is so wonderful about studying history and reading biographies. We can actually get to know someone whom we never met. A biography opens a window into a person's mind, their heart, their attitudes, their passions, their personality, and their positions on all sorts of aspects of life, whether religious, political, or professional. A biography also tries to give us details of how a person approached even the most mundane facets of day-to-day existence. But there is still a degree of separation because the author is writing about someone else; and no matter how close they were to the subject, they never could really know that person's mind, inner thoughts, and true workings of their emotions. That is why an autobiography is even better: you get the facts straight from the horse's mouth. When the facts and details are penned by the very person who lived and experienced them, you know that the author does not have to make conjectures or assumptions about the subject matter. This gives the reader a higher level of confidence and potentially even a greater association or identification with the person they are studying.

Do you realize that we have in our possession an autobiography about God? And since we know that those who penned the text were inspired by the Holy Spirit (*2 Timothy 3:16*), we know that it is 100% accurate.

2 Peter 1:20-21

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The Bible is a compilation of all that God has chosen to freely disclose to us about Himself. This means that by reading and studying the Bible, we can actually discover all the aspects and intricacies about The Father, the Son, and the Spirit that they have chosen to reveal to us. The Bible gives us insight into their personality, their passions, desires, creativity, the way they think, the intensity of their emotions, their likes, dislikes, how they interact with both mankind and other aspects of their creation (the angels, the devil, the demons), and how the Godhead is one and works together in complete unity. Through the Bible we can get a view of leadership and authority, service and duty, success and failure. We are instructed how we are to interact with each other, the world around us, and to God.

God's autobiography is filled with everything that we need in order to truly **understand** how to live by faith; it has all that we need to know in order to walk as Jesus walked.

I am sure many of you have been told to read the Bible for many reasons, but I want to make one thing perfectly clear: the main reason we are to read the Bible is to get to know all we can about God in order that we

might develop a deep relationship with Him, a deep understanding of who He is and how much He loves us. As we begin to accept His unconditional love, and believe that it is directed to each of us as individuals, then we are to reciprocate those affections and choose to align our thoughts, our actions, our passions, our desires, and our behaviors with those of the One who loves us more than we could ever imagine. It is through this process of identifying ourselves with Him that we actually begin to **understand** Him, to know His mind, and to speak His words.

When you fully comprehend that God, the creator of all things, and the ruler overall things, is passionately in love with you and desires you, and wants to be in deep intimate relationship with you, the hope is that you will desire the same thing. Just like when you meet a boy or a girl with whom you have amazing chemistry, you just want to know everything about them: where they came from, what their family is like, what are their values, what they like to do, what entertains them, what hurts, them, and so on. In fact, one of the most interesting times in a relationship is when both parties are singularly focused on knowing all there is to know about the other person. It is a time of great discovery and it is also a time when both parties start to make adjustments in their own desires and habits in order to better line up with those of the person they love. This is the kind of response God hopes we have when we truly understand that He gave up His life just so we can get to know Him and have a relationship with Him. Besides, God is so big and so vast, we can spend our entire life seeking to know Him and understand Him and it will still not be long enough.

Desiring to know God in His fullness is both the impetus (our motivation) and the process by which we allow God's Word to have **priority** and **authority** in our lives. We give it **priority** by cherishing the fact that we are so lucky to have insight and visibility into the mind of God; therefore, we spend time in it, we consume it, and we eat it as if it is our very bread of life. We give it **authority** in our life by choosing to follow it; choosing to let it be our reality; and choosing to say nothing, think nothing, and do nothing that is not in accord with God's ways and His direction for our lives.

I want to give you a little practical example of how to do this – how to take a passage from the Bible and identify with Jesus, and let His Word be your authority and the basis by which you live your life.

Romans 6:1-14

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was. Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life. We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. He died once to defeat sin, and now he lives for the glory of God. So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.

Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to its lustful desires. Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace.

So let's take a look at this table and do the compare and contrast of these verses in Romans and see how we are being instructed to follow exactly the reality that Jesus experienced.

Should we continue to sin?	No because since He died, we also died to our sinful nature
Because Christ was raised from the dead ...	We can live new lives – we can be new and different people by living from the New Creation
There is no longer any power in sin or death. He was raised from the dead and all power now resides in Him.	We were also raised from the dead when we accepted Christ – that was our baptism – our identification with His death and His resurrection. Thus, sin and death similarly no longer has any power over us. We have been set free. Therefore, we don't have to sin – it is a matter of choice.
Jesus Christ has new life	We will share in His new life both in eternity and right here and now as we can walk in the New Creation that has in effect been raised from the dead.
He died once to defeat sin and now lives for the glory of God	Since He lives for the glory of God so should we. His glory in and through our life should be our obsession. We should consider ourselves dead to sin and able to live for the glory of God – it is not a hope, a dream, a fantasy, something for someone else; we are able to live this way and experience this for ourselves!
Since we have new life we are to use our body to do what God wants us to do	We are free to follow God's will and free to let our body be in complete submission to His ways

This is how we are to compare and contrast and analyze the Word of God. We are to constantly search out what Jesus experienced, what God has expressed, and discern how that applies to us and our day-in and day-out reality. Then we must walk in it. It is not enough to do the homework, to do the analysis; we have to be willing to align everything within us to the truths that we discover. Sometimes His voice to us is blatantly obvious – like this instruction from Paul, but other times it is a bit more layered and requires us to seek it out in order to understand how God deals with an issue throughout the entirety of the Bible. That is the only way we can be sure that we understand God's heart on a matter.

Let me explain what I mean by layers and in so doing I will use another metaphor to explain the metaphor. There are certain truths that God has given us that He likens to the milk that a baby drinks: the very base level of sustenance that a child needs to start their maturation and development.

1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Examples of milk would be some of the basic tenets of Christianity:

- God is God and we are not;
- God is comprised of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;

- God is perfect and we are not; we are all sinners;
- God sent His Son Jesus, born of a virgin, to come and be the perfect sacrifice for our sins;
- Jesus lived a sinless life and freely offered Himself up to die because He loves us and wanted to provide a way for the fellowship between man and God to be restored;
- Jesus died in the flesh and then rose again in the flesh after 3-days;
- Jesus promised that He would come again and establish His kingdom on this earth;
- If anyone confesses with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that He rose again, they will be saved;
- Upon salvation, God will give you His Holy Spirit to live within you; and
- That without Him we can do nothing, but with Him we can do all things.

Now these are some of the basic truths to which we are all to hold. However, we all know that if a child stays on milk they will never mature to adult hood. They will get sick and well it will be ugly. A child needs to quickly move from milk to solid foods and eventually to meat. This will provide them the nutrients they need to grow into a healthy strong young person.

Hebrews 5:11-14

Concerning him [Jesus] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

So there is a depth to the Word of God that allows us to know Him more and more with the result being that we mature and grow up in our faith. For those who are not believers and for those who remain as children, these layers seem like mysteries – hidden truths. But the great thing is that if you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you have been chosen to understand these mysteries – they are not intended to be secrets. Jesus always taught in parables. He did this to create a separation, so to speak, between those who really want to know God and those who just want to get something from God. When communicating the parable of the sower and the seeds, He capped off that story with the statement:

Mark 4:9-12

And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven."

The point I want to make is that it is appointed for us – those who believe – those of us who have spiritual ears to hear and spiritual eyes to see – to understand and to know God. It is not to be a mystery to us. What is said in the Word is all for us; all that God has chosen to freely give to us – but it is still up to us to search it out and to understand. A child is just fed by his parents and only has to swallow, but an adult, in one way or another, works for their food. Similarly, we must be willing to put in our work, read our Bible, and dig for truth, desiring to know all that there is to know about God.

Further, He has given us the Holy Spirit to teach us. He has not left us to our own devices – thank goodness! Rather, He gives us the Holy Spirit to live within us, and it is the Spirit that will teach us all things.

1 John 2:26-27

I have written these things to you because you need to be aware of those who want to lead you astray. But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is

true. For the Spirit teaches you all things, and what he teaches is true — it is not a lie. So continue in what he has taught you, and continue to live in Christ.

Now sometimes He teaches you though someone like me – someone whom the Spirit leads and gifts to teach the Word. But what I do here on Sunday nights, or when we get together one-on-one, is to be the desert – the after dinner treat, but it is not to be your main course. You are to have a steady and healthy diet of solid food on your own. As you study your Bible, you will find that there will be many times when the Spirit will open up your ears and your eyes and He will give you **understanding** of His heart, His thoughts, His ways, and His desires for your life. Keep in mind, **understanding** the Word of God is different than having knowledge of the Word of God. We can all gain knowledge. We can open up the text and read and proclaim His truths; but in that scenario, it will have no real *priority* or *authority* in our lives. We will stay mere children with child-like thoughts and child-like behaviors, and never reach the strength and maturity of adulthood.

Understanding of the Word of God is a gift from God. He is the one who opens up Himself so that we might know Him – and He does that to His friends: to those who fear Him. Remember, as we studied in Proverbs 2:1-11, when we search for Him as we would for lost treasure; when we seek out insight and understanding; when we cry out for it; when we tune our ears to His voice and concentrate on understanding, then...

Proverbs 2:5-7

Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of good sense to the godly.

It all comes from Him and it is a reward or the result of seeking Him with our entire heart, mind, and soul. And God does not hold back – He will give us all the insight, wisdom, and understanding that in His wisdom He knows we need in order to **know** how to find the right course of action every time in our lives (Proverbs 2:8-9) (note: that does not mean that we will find it, we will just **know** how to find it).

But in order to participate, in order to be eligible for His insight, wisdom, and understanding, we have to draw near to God. And when we do our part He promises that He will do His part. **James 4:8** tells us that if we draw near to God, then He will draw near to us.

In summary, God will speak to us through His Word. It is the one place that we can find all that we need to know about Him. When we know His heart, His ways, His thoughts, and His desires, we can then begin the process of aligning our life with His. When we take our thoughts or our emotions and hold them in comparison to the truths we find in the Word of God, and when we reject anything that is in our mind or our hearts that is not consistent with those truths, then we will begin to **understand** God and we will begin to walk as He walked and experience what He experienced. We will become so identified with God that His Word will become our reality.

The Word is Living.

I have said over and over again that the Word of God is living and active. I want to explain that so you understand practically how that has played out in my life and in the life of others and how you will likely experience the Word if you begin to devote yourself to knowing and understanding it.

There are times when I am reading the Word and a certain set of verses just pops off the page – they come alive as if God was speaking right to me and wants to make sure that I understand exactly what it is that He wants to communicate to me at that moment. For example, I have told many of you that God has had me on a very difficult and painful journey that is now in its 7th year. But God in His mercy did not just plunge me into this journey unaware, He told me exactly what He was going to do to me through many verses. But the first one

that He used to prepare me for this journey was *Psalm 103* and the first one that He used to warn me of what was coming was *Psalm 107*.

I remember I was on an airplane traveling somewhere for business and I was just reading my Bible like I normally do. Just so you know, my personal practice is to read through the Bible from beginning to end over and over again. I don't tend to jump around or look for something cool to read – I read it all. Well that night, I was just doing what I normally do and I happened to be in Psalms. I got to Psalm 103 and portions of it just came alive to me and it was screaming to me from off the pages.

Psalm 103:1-14

Praise the LORD, I tell myself; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, I tell myself, and **never forget the good things he does for me**. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He ransoms me from death and surrounds me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! The LORD gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly. He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious; he is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love. **He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does he deal with us as we deserve**. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. **He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west**. The LORD is like a father to his children, **tender and compassionate to those who fear him**. For he understands how weak we are; he knows we are only dust.

Sure this Psalm is beautiful and filled with wonderful truths, but more than that, I knew these scriptures were specifically for me – I did not know why, but I knew I was supposed to hold on to what they said. I took careful note and continued to read. I will get back to this Psalm in a moment and explain why I have bolded certain text. Anyway, I read Psalm 104, 105, 106 and it was all just normal reading but then I arrived at Psalm 107 and I started to realize why God first spoke to me through Psalm 103. Overall Psalm 107 is a bit confusing. It segments certain groups of people and how they relate to God and how God relates to them. I had read it so many times before and it really meant nothing to me – I just passed on through. But this time it totally came alive to me and I knew I was supposed to slow down and take in what it was saying. Unlike before, this time as I read I understood exactly what it was talking about – especially when it got to the description of me and what was going to happen in my life. The way the Psalm breaks down is that it first describes those who are on a quest for truth but for some reason look everywhere else for that truth except with God. Then it describes those who know the Word of God but are totally rebellious and reject the truth to live the self serving life that is focused on satisfying the flesh. Next, it describes those who are foolish and are starving because they have been given all the delicacies of God but have refused to eat. Finally, the next segmentation applied to me – one who was busy serving God. This section of scripture described something that was very unusual, unnatural and quite horrific.

Psalm 107:23-30

Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; they have seen the works of the LORD, and His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet, so He guided them to their desired haven.

I knew instantly this was talking about me. I was that sailor doing business on great waters. I was the one always very busy in ministry and I saw firsthand how God worked in the lives of so many people. He even allowed me to see and experience some amazing events that can only be attributed to the wonders of God. And then He told me what was coming. He was going to throw my life into such an incredible storm that although I am considered to be an experienced sailor – someone who has walked with God and suffered with God – this

was going to be an experience like no other. This storm was going to be so intense and so dramatic that I would literally freak and cry out in abject misery and distress. Just to give you a feel, in the Hebrew, that word “misery” comes from a root word that means: to spoil or destroy by breaking to pieces, to make something good for nothing. This was not going to be a pleasant journey.

I would stumble around like a drunken man, like someone who had no control over their life and was just being tossed to and fro. The Psalm indicated that He would continue the storm seemingly without end and eventually I would be at my wits end. In other words, I would stop fighting, stop resisting, stop trying to figure it out, stop demanding an explanation, and literally be at the end of myself with absolutely no strength left within me to help myself, protect myself, care for myself or even provide for myself. The good news is that He also told me that one-day He would stop the storm, calm the waves, and I would once again be glad, and that then He would lead me to my desired haven. So apparently there is to be a good ending to all the tragedy that has happened in my life; and believe me, I am looking forward to that day.

Shortly after I received this Psalm 107, He gave me *Lamentations 3* which provided gruesome detail of what this storm would look like.

The net of it all is that He did exactly what He said He was going to do, in exacting detail – not one item was missed. However, in the midst of the tragedy that ensued upon my life, I was able to go back to *Psalm 103* and realize why He first gave that Psalm to me first. He wanted me to know up front that this was not about punishment for my sins; this was not about His anger for anger sake; in fact, He wanted me to know that He does not deal with me on the basis of sin – my sin was thrown as far as the East from the West. What a blessing this Psalm became to me. When I was stumbling around like a drunken out of control man, I was able in large part to just let it happen and rest in the fact that He was not mad at me, He was not grieved over me, and He was not just doing things to punish me because of how inappropriately I handled various things that came against me. Rather, He had already forgiven me and His purposes were entirely different than I could imagine. He wanted me to understand in advance that when it was all said and done, this was going to be a good thing for me because He is tender and compassionate to those who fear Him.

Throughout this storm, Psalm 103 was like a cold drink of water in the midst of living hell. **The Word came alive to me and then I lived the Word.** That is how it happens. I believe that the Word is the primary way that His voice comes into your life – His voice of instruction, correction, teaching, reproof and training for you life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

If the Word of God becomes your life and your sustenance, then it will speak to you quite powerfully, clearly and directly.

Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

If you make the Word of God your *priority*, and if you let it be the ultimate *authority* for all you say, all you do, and everyplace you go, if you identify with Christ and align your life with His, and walk as He walked, then I guarantee you that you will experience how living and active the Word really is. You will know how God speaks to you and instructs you. You will gain wisdom and understanding and you will know how to differentiate between the voice of the Lord, the voice of the world, the voice of the enemy, and the voice of your own desires. Further, if you **understand** the truth, you will be able to smack down the lies of the enemy and the

devil will not be able to launch an effect attack against you by twisting and perverting scripture either in content or in meaning.

As I close, I want you to understand that the *key* in all of this is your response to the love that God has shown you. Will you respond by just wanting, taking, and demanding – expecting God to be your personal genie in the bottle? Will you respond with disinterest or a sense that you have plenty of time to deal with God? Will you be despondent and not believe that all that God has promised can be yours? Will you ignore the fact that God knows you intimately, loves you, cares for you, and jealously desires to be with you? Will you respond with pride and rebellion, believing you have your life under control? Will you respond with arrogance thinking that you don't really need all this God stuff? Will you respond with duty and obligation and thereby work hard to be a good Christian? Will you respond with conceit and desire for knowledge so you can be lifted above others who just are not as smart or intelligent as you are? Will you play religion and just go through the steps and motions so you seem to fit in and belong? Will you play religion in an attempt to appease your guilt? Will you harden your heart and let the Word of God have no place to land within you?

Or will you respond to God's interest in you? Will you be drawn to the fact that someone – the Great God in Heaven – the only one who really matters – actually loves you and wants to spend every moment of every day with you? Will you accept the fact that He finds you valuable, precious, and more than desirable than His own life? Will you let His love woo you and stir within you a passion for Him and a desire to know Him? Will you be drawn to His beauty and His magnificence? Will you love Him in return? Will you take an interest in all that He is interested in? Will you desire to know His mind and His heart?

Your response is the key. There is one right way to relate to God – out of love, desire, and passion. If you need a reason to love Him, then stare at the cross and contemplate how God sent His own Son to die for your sins. Can you imagine, we are told in *Isaiah 53:10* that God took great pleasure in crushing His own Son simply because He knew that after that terrible event, you and I would be able to experience Him, to know Him, to love Him, and to have deep fellowship with Him? For this it was worth it all.

I implore you to respond to this love with love. I encourage you to open your Bible and read God's autobiography and learn all there is to know about the one who loves you the most. Believe me, you will not be disappointed. If you come to Him in this manner, He will begin to talk to you and He will disclose Himself to you.

Let's Pray

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do and He will direct your paths.

Psalm 73:24-26

You will keep on guiding me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

Here is a standardized test question. How are these two verses similar and yet different?

1. Well we can see in the first verse there is a contingent or conditional promise. God will direct your paths upon certain conditions. You must seek His will in all you do and you must refuse to rely on your own understanding. Instead, you must be willing to trust – or actively believe – all that He says.
2. In the second verse, we have the first verse come to practical life. However, in contrast to the first verse, the author starts with a non-conditional statement; rather a statement of fact: “You will keep on guiding me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.” And why can this author make such a bold statement of fact? Because it is clear from the rest of the text that he trusts in the Lord with all his whole heart and he does not lean on his own understanding, and he seeks the Lord’s will in all he does. Therefore, he knows that the Lord will guide each step with His amazing wisdom and will lead him down the path that is good, pleasing, and perfect.
3. This is evidenced by the intimacy and desire in the author’s language:
 - a. “whom have I in heaven but you?” That is clearly a rhetorical question. The answer is no one. There is no one else but the Lord for this man.
 - b. “I desire you more than anything on earth.” He clearly has made God both His *priority* and ultimate *authority* in his life, and now everything within him yearns for more and more of the Lord.
 - c. “My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart.” Because the Lord is both his *priority* and *authority*, it does not matter what may come against him in this world, he is going to find his strength, security, and peace from his relationship with God.
 - d. “He is mine forever.” What a beautiful bold statement of relationship, connection and intimacy. God is mine forever.

This is the 9th teaching on “How God Speaks”. I have been making the point that God wants to speak to you. He wants to guide you with His counsel. He wants you to discover His will for your life. He wants the Word of God to come alive to you and be the primary vehicle through which He speaks into your life. But His voice, His guidance, and His Word will come into your life only in the midst of a mutual relationship where you have devoted yourself to know all that you can about the God who loves you.

Jeremiah 29:13

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

Proverbs 8:17

I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me.

So we must do our part. We must seek Him, we must search for Him, and we must not stop until we find Him. The good news is that God actually makes this part fairly easy, for everything that we need to know about Him, He has revealed to us in His Word. In fact, we can look at the Bible as God's autobiography which provides us our own personal view into His mind, His heart, His emotions, His wisdom, His passion, His desires, His likes, His dislikes, and His ways. It is also the one place where we can begin to grasp just how much God loves us and is willing to open Himself up to those who diligently desire to know Him.

With all this detailed information available for us to grab a hold of, we don't have to guess or wonder where we stand in relationship to God, we don't have to have any insecurity; we can know Him and He can be ours – our portion and our inheritance forever.

But don't forget, seeking the information and even obeying it is one thing, but believing it and letting it be your life it is quite another. Many people have knowledge but few have faith. Merely, being a master of the information will not bring you to that place where you hear His voice and He guides your life. Many people strive for obedience and are very good at keeping the rules, but still never experience the abundant life that Jesus promised. Following a religion is absolutely different than being in an intimate relationship with God. **Do not be deceived!** Abiding and living by the rules of the religion of Christianity is intrinsically different than Christ living in and through your life. You can find religious people all over the broad path, but you will only find those who are truly in love with Jesus on the narrow path.

That is why His voice and His guidance will become so clear to you when you refuse to trust in yourself and refuse to rely on your own understanding; and, instead, place your trust in Him and in all that He has chosen to reveal to you from the Word of God. Another way of saying this is that you must walk by faith. You must align your life, your mind, and your emotions with God's. You must fall in love with Him and desire relationship, connection, and intimacy with Him.

Last week we talked about how the Word of God is living and active and how God uses the Word to speak into our lives. When God brings His voice to us through the Bible, whether in the form of instruction, correction, reproof, or direction, it is extremely tangible. A verse or a set of verses will jump off the page and you will know through the Spirit that God is talking to you. But as we discovered in the verses above, in addition to speaking to you directly from the Word, He also leads and guides those who truly are in love with Him.

I am sorry but there is no comforting scripture for those who have not devoted themselves to knowing and loving God. If you are hanging out on the broad path, I wish I could tell you that you can have confidence that the Lord is guiding your steps, but I can't. I know He has mercy when you call out to Him for help. But I believe it is entirely different to have the privilege to live day-in and day-out with the peace, the security, and the confidence of knowing that in all that you do, God is purposefully leading and directing your steps. That is a great place to be, especially considering the alternative.

Remember, there are many voices competing for your mind: the voice of the world, the voice of the enemy, and the voice of your Old Man – your fleshly nature. For most of your life these voices have been the voices that you have relied upon to be your guide and to help establish your course in life. Thus, you recognize these voices and they have a clear and easily accessible channel to your mind. And for many of us, our minds are already trained and conditioned to hear and obey. It is like a pavlovian response. That is why that in order to hear how God speaks to you through the New Creation, in order to have confidence that He is guiding your life, you must set aside all that comes from your Old Man, all the values and beliefs that this world throws at you, and you must be fully clothed in the armor of God in order to render powerless the lies that the enemy targets at your mind and emotions. When the clutter is clear, when the Spirit of God is the one who rules and reigns in your body, when you are focused on allowing God to be glorified in all that you do, then you will be able to hear and **understand** God's leading within your New Creation.

This form of God speaking is more indirect than a verse that comes alive to you, but still it is just as tangible. The voice of God within in your New Creation is altogether different than those other voices. It first and foremost deals with what God wants for you life, not what you think you want for your life or what you think God wants for your life. It is a sure and unequivocal voice that centers you on the path He wants you to take. God has a path that He has uniquely chosen for you; and if you are willing, He will always lead you down this path. As we are told in *Romans 12:1-2*, this path is good, pleasing, and perfect. In addition, it is safe. If you make the decision to traveling down the narrow path of faith, it may seem difficult, at times it may even seem impossible, but keep in mind, God promises to hold you and keep you in His hands. Sure you may stumble around and you will have your struggles, after all you are still trapped in a body which has been compromised by sin, but you will not fall or slip off the path.

Psalm 37:23-24

The steps of the godly are directed by the LORD. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.

Psalm 37:30-31

The godly offer good counsel; they know what is right from wrong. They fill their hearts with God's law, so they will never slip from his path.

If you delight yourself in the Lord, if His Word is your *priority* and the ultimate *authority* in your life, then you don't have to worry about what the future holds. You can rest in the fact that each and every day your Lord holds you in His hands and is going to be the one to move you in the direction that He wants. It should be so comforting to know that He knows everything that is going on in your life, both internally and externally. The thought of that to me is so amazing; it's like when Jesus said in *Matthew 10:29-31* that all the hairs on our head are numbered. God wants us to realize how serious He is about us. He wants us to understand that He knows us through and through; and, yet, He still loves us. The whole thing is simply amazing!

When you are on the narrow path, you do not live a life that is unnoticed where you have to beg God to pay attention. No! He sees you. He is there delighting in every detail of your life, and by His hand He guarantees that you will not fall off the narrow path.

Honestly, this is such a fantastic claim that it takes a lot of training in righteousness and maturity to rest in this truth. By training in righteousness, I mean that since the Lord is our righteousness (*Jeremiah 23:16*), the more and more we know Him, experience Him, trust Him, and are intimate with Him, the more we will be tuned to His voice as He speaks within the New Creation; thereby, giving us confidence in His leading.

As part of your training, I believe that it is extremely helpful to familiarize yourself with the ways in which God has consistently acted toward those who seek Him and love Him. I encourage you to open your Bible and read the stories of Noah, Job, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Deborah, Gideon, David, Daniel, Ruth, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Peter, James, John, Paul and so on. During times of confusion, doubt, and stumbling, these stories will be a strong source of encouragement as you remind yourself over and over of all the ways in which God is faithful to those who love Him. It helps you shore up your defenses and fight the temptation to be overcome with fear and doubt.

Every where you turn in the Bible you will find someone who has decided: that they will stand alone; go against the flow; that they will not follow the convention of the day; that they will reject the wisdom of man; reject the religion of man; and choose instead to listen only to the voice of God. And boy did God ever speak to them and guide their every step when they sought Him!

Some of these men and women had lives of total victory and some of total devastation, but they chose to be set apart for God and were **satisfied**. By this I do not mean that they were always happy and thankful for their lives; that would be foolishness to think such a thing because quite often their circumstances were simply awful. But they knew they were in the center of God's will and they knew that there was no other place for them to be.

It is what gave so many people the strength to say in the midst of brutal persecution: “Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.” Jesus and Paul talked about this as a peace that is both supernatural – not of this world – and beyond comprehension.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Would you like to live with this kind of **satisfied** mind, regardless of the circumstances in which you find yourself? It is a tough road, but it is worth it! This kind of satisfaction comes when you live a life by faith – actively believing the truth and aligning yourself with the thoughts, desires, attitudes, and behaviors of Christ. That is why I continue to press this point over and over again: the ability to hear God’s voice and **understand** His leading in your life is found in the context of relationship and knowing God. Look at this verse in Jeremiah where God addresses the so called prophets who claim to speak from God.

Jeremiah 23:18-19

But can you name even one of these prophets who knows the LORD well enough to hear what he is saying? Has even one of them cared enough to listen?

Can you imagine that even those who are “professionals” in ministry and the ones we think would “know” the ways of the Lord can find themselves merely playing religion and not positioned to hear the voice of God? They may know Him on the intellectual level but they do not **understand** Him. In this passage, it is clear that those prophets never submitted to His rule and control in their lives. In fact, they did not even care enough to listen when He spoke. They had their ways, their ideas of how things were to be done, and how God was to manage life; and so they did not care to inquire of His ways. They thought they were in the “know” because they had the position and the title, but in reality they were fools and they were blind and deaf.

In the same way, regardless of how you were raised, or how long you have gone to church, each of you have to step back and be honest with yourself and ask: “am I positioned to hear the voice of God?” “Do I even care to listen to what God might have to say for my life?” “Do I really know Him and **understand** Him?” “Am I truly in love with Him?” “Do I spend time with Him and seek to discover all there is to know about Him?” “Am I experiencing the peace that Jesus talked about?” “Am I **satisfied** knowing I am in the middle of God’s will?”

If your answer is no, then know this, God is calling you to come to Him and to get on the narrow path and walk His way.

Jeremiah 6:16

So now the LORD says, "Stop right where you are! Look for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.

The old, godly way, will lead you to peace. So stop right now! Don’t take another step down the broad path. If you are an unbeliever, make the decision to enter through the narrow gate of Jesus Christ; and make the decision to accept Him as your personal Lord and Savior. If you are a Christian who predominately lives by your Old Man, or if you find yourself constantly going back and forth between your Old Man and the New

Creation, and you still trust in yourself to be your strength, your help, and your source of wisdom, stop it! Surrender! Believe that He loves you so much and wants to be intimately involved in every aspect and detail of your life. Reject the broad path of self and follow Jesus in all that you do.

The sad thing about this passage in Jeremiah is that it is followed by verses **17-21** with Israel's answer to God's pleading. They said no; that's not the road we want. We won't pay attention to those who are teaching the truth! The Israelites chose to walk on the broad path and it led them to certain destruction. Don't be like the Israelites. Their story has been recorded so that you might learn from their experiences and choose to walk down the old godly way where God Himself directs your steps.

Proverbs 16:1

The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

I want to make a quick, but very important point here. Being on the narrow path, and having the Lord guide you and direct your steps, does not mean that you are mindless. God works within His creation. He gave us a mind to think and emotions to help us in the process. So as we are working through this life, we are free to dream, plan, strategize, analyze and contemplate what the Lord wants us to do. That is part of the seeking, exploring the possibilities and searching for Him. We can develop plans, but we must also be willing to wait for His answer. In discussing this kind of life, Paul told the Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:1,2; 10; 15-17

Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins...Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord...So be careful how you live, not as fools, but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do.

So as you plan the details of your life – big or small -- you must seek Him out and be willing to wait for the answer that comes from Him. He does not invite us to try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord, or to try and understand what the Lord wants us to do, in order to trick us. No! He wants us to do our part in this relationship – to seek Him – and then He will impart to us His wisdom and His understanding and we will know how to find His will (***Proverbs 2:1-11***).

Now I want to shift direction a little bit. I want to talk to those who are on the narrow path. Whenever I get in discussions about discovering the will of God, I always say that first and foremost God's interest is in you being conformed to the image of His Son and reflecting His glory. ***That is His goal and that is our destiny.*** Let me explain, before we are Christians the Bible says that we have a veil that covers our minds and prevents us from seeing and experiencing God's glory. The veil metaphor comes from the story of Moses. Moses would enter the tabernacle of God and when He came out His face would be shining with the glory of God. He would deliver a message to the people and then veil his face until the next time he went before the presence of God. He veiled himself because he did not want the people to see the glory fade away for their minds were already hardened and they did not understand the truth. We are told that this veil over our hearts can only be removed by believing in Christ (***2 Corinthians 3:7-18***). We pick up this passage in 2 Corinthians in verse 16.

2 Corinthians 3:16-18

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken away. Now, the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, he gives freedom. And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

The veil has been lifted for a purpose. We are to reflect God's image and the glory of the Lord is to shine from our lives. That is why God works all things in our lives toward that single purpose.

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Understanding God's purpose for our life should help us shift our perspective of life in general. If you are on the narrow path, all things that happen in your life are allowed by the hand of God for the purpose of conforming you to the image of Christ; in order that you will follow Christ's example in everything you do. Please keep this truth in mind. It will save you a lot of gray hairs if you both understand and believe this truth. It really is like the panic button. When the pressure is getting too much because so much seems out of control in your life, you can rest on these verses and remember that He has you in His hand, He is not letting go, and all of this is for the purpose of drawing you closer into Him so you can reflect His glory.

“And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.” It's as if each time we take an area of our life, our thoughts, or our emotions and align them with Word of God, we reflect more of the Lord's glory because the New Creation has gained additional territory in the battle with your Old Man. As a result, we shine with a greater intensity and those around us know that we have been set apart for God.

Seeing as this is our purpose for living, you can approach it one of two ways. You can choose to get there by believing the instruction that God gives you or you can learn by experience.

By instruction, I mean that you can choose to believe the truth. You can examine the Word, see how the truth played out in the lives of those who followed it and those who rejected it, and choose to align your heart, mind, and soul to it because you have become convinced through the Spirit that all that God says is true. On the other hand, you can learn by experience. By this I mean that God will allow you to stumble around still trying to do things your own way; and, although He won't let you slip from the path, you will learn that all that God says is true with a vengeance. You will come to learn how inadequate you are to lead and control your life and you will learn how much you need Him in all things.

Learning by instruction is by far the easier choice. Yes, it will absolutely bring forth some level of discomfort in your life as you voluntarily choose to restructure your relationships, and all that is in your life that does not align up to the Word of God. Depending upon your starting point, this can cause quite a reaction in your life and in the lives of those who are involved in your daily dealings. But its destination is life and peace – peace now. In other words, you can be **satisfied**.

Learning by experience, however, is an extremely painful route. In this place you are unable to have peace and you are unable to have rest. Believe me, it is no fun to wrestle God – His arm is too big and He always wins; it's just a matter of time. I have wrestled with God plenty, and it has taken me years to learn that it is easier to believe than it is to demand my own way.

For example, last week I talked about the storm that God brought into my life over 6-years ago. This storm tore my life apart from one end to the other. I can honestly say there is not one relationship in my life that has not been radically altered by this experience. But in the midst of all the turmoil and destruction, I did not care that God had some purpose for allowing this and bringing it into my life. I was mad. I was furious at God for the ways I was treated. I knew that it all came from His hand, and in my mind that made it worse. He told me:

Isaiah 45:6,9,11

I am the Lord, and there is no other. I am the one who creates the light and makes the darkness. I am the one who sends good times and bad times. I the Lord, am the one who does these things...Destruction is certain for those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot ever argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, “stop you are doing it wrong!”...Do you question what I do? Do you give me orders about the work of my hands?

I was so upset at God that even this verse did not back me down. My life was already being destroyed so I figured why hold back. Besides, He was supposed to show me how much He loved me, not how powerful He is and how much He could torture me. But still, despite my anger and my resentment, the turmoil continued day-after-day and it was so ridiculous. In fact, if I tried to write it down or explain it, few would believe that it was true. I defiantly fought with God. I argued with Him, I demanded that He give me an explanation, a timeline, a guarantee that it would soon be over, and I criticized all the ways that He was handling me. I did not like the paths He chose for me and I did not see how they were good, pleasing, and perfect. After all, they felt like anything but good, pleasing, and perfect. And God just kept the storm coming and coming, wave after wave seemingly without end.

Finally when I was at my wits end, I stopped fighting. I stopped demanding from God. I stopped accusing Him and mischaracterizing His heart towards me. In the midst of all that chaos and living hell, I actually started to believe that He really did love me and that He chose me for something special. I started to understand and grasp why my suffering was necessary. I began to realize that I was being unplugged (to use a Matrix metaphor) or set free from the bondage of self, the bondage of religion, and the bondage of wrong belief and unbelief. I started to hear His voice so clearly and understand why He needed to shake me lose of so much that was not of Him.

As a result, I started to look at the waves a bit differently. They had not stopped, but I was no longer reacting to them by writhing in self-pity and despair. I started to see what God was creating and how He was molding me into a new person with a new assignment for me to fulfill. He taught me about Him in order that I might carefully teach others. Yes, I stumbled and I stumbled greatly. I reeled and staggered like a drunken man – just like He said I would – but I did not fall. He held me up and faithfully kept me on His path. He even told me the following:

Isaiah 43:10

But you are my witnesses, O Israel!" says the LORD. "And you are my servant. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God.

Isaiah 30:20-21

Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and affliction for drink, he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes, and you will hear a voice say, "This is the way; turn around and walk here.

In the midst of my adversity, as I was battered by the ferocious waves that shattered my life, God Himself began to teach me about living by faith and about walking in the Spirit of God. He showed me how the Religion of Christianity has strapped people with burdens of duty, sin, and religious behavior that will never lead to freedom or to a true **understanding** of the heart and mind of the Lord. He chose me to know Him, believe Him, and understand that He alone is God. In other words, He convinced me I am definitely not Him. I do not have the wisdom, knowledge, strength, foresight, or capacity to rule my own life and lead myself down the good paths. Only He has that ability. That is why I must stay, or **remain**, connected to Him in a close intimate and dependent relationship – for I have learned and I am now fully convinced that without Him I can do nothing.

Isaiah 48:12-13; 16-17

Listen to me, O family of Jacob, Israel my chosen one! I alone am God, the First and the Last. It was my hand that laid the foundations of the earth. The palm of my right hand spread out the heavens above. I spoke, and they came into being. And now the Sovereign LORD and his Spirit have sent me with this message: The LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says: **I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is good and leads you along the paths you should follow.**

I want you to understand God's heart. I want you to see how He is willing to teach you about Himself and lead you down the paths that will transform you into His image. I am so thankful for what He has taught me and

I feel extremely privileged that He chose me to walk this path. The most amazing thing to me, however, is that I am still alive. By all rights, I should have gone crazy, been institutionalized, addicted to some destructive coping mechanism, shot myself, or jumped off a bridge. But He has held me up and sustained me. He has been my strength. Look at what He told me in Isaiah.

Isaiah 43:1-3

But now, O Israel, the LORD who created you says: "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I wish I would have heeded His instruction and not been afraid. But, honestly, for much of this journey I was very afraid. But He was with me through it all. He held me up in the midst of the storm. In fact, I can remember so vividly times when I could almost physically feel my body being held within His hands. I know that sounds ridiculous, but its not. God was involved in every detail and He made sure I did not fall; and when I stopped fighting Him, I became aware of the fact that He was there all the time.

That was a long story to make the point that I believe that one of the reasons God took me though this journey is that so you don't have to learn by experience. You can choose to believe the truth and align your thoughts, your emotions, and your body with all that God says is true. He ripped religion and self dependence from my hands and is still teaching me daily what it means to live by faith. He did this so you can have a living example to follow and so that you can hear the truth of the Word of God, believe the truth, and choose to walk in it. And if you choose to follow Jesus down the paths that He has chosen for your life, He will lead and He will guide you to your destination and you will shine with the glory of the Lord.

Psalms 31:3

For You are my rock and my fortress; for Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me.

Psalms 48:14

Our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death.

I encourage you, get on the narrow path, the old, godly way – the way of faith. Let God daily guide you with His counsel. Honestly, there is no other place I would rather be.

Let's Pray

In this study on How God Speaks, we have spent most of the time talking about how you are to position yourself so that you are able to hear God speak to you and tonight I hope you will understand why it is so important! By positioning yourself, I mean that you are manically focused on developing intimacy with God. You seek after Him in all that you do. You refuse to rely on our own understanding. You reject the voice of the world, the voice of the enemy, and the desires of your Old Man. You tune your ears and concentrate on insight and understanding. You search for Him as you would search for lost treasure. You walk on the narrow path that requires you to actively believe all that you know to be true as revealed from the Word of God. In other words, you must be willing to bet your life on the truth.

It is from this place of relationship and intimacy that you will find that God will speak to you. He will speak to you from the Word, as the Word of God is living and active to bring about correction, instruction, and training in righteousness. He will speak to you and guide you through the New Creation. Deep within, you will know a sure and steady voice that is absolutely different from all the other voices that bombard your mind. His voice will center you on the path He wants you to walk; and when you begin to walk outside of that path you will know and feel the separation from His leading. It is like a tearing inside your spirit as if the connection and intimacy you have to God is being damaged. It is only when you get back in alignment with the will of God that that sense of peace, connectedness and satisfaction returns. Keep in mind, if this is not your experience, then there is a strong likelihood that you have not yet positioned yourself adequately to hear from God in the first place. That is something definitely to be remedied.

In addition to God speaking to you from the Word, and within your New Creation, He will also speak to you through others. This method of communication is so fascinating; but it is even more critical that you are on the narrow path listening to God and refusing to rely on your own understanding. I say that because there are times when God uses other people to bring us a “word” to direct us, encourage us, build us up, correct us, and there are times where that “word” is used to test us; to test whether or not we are going to follow the path that He has established for us. We will be talking about all of this tonight.

But before we get into the various permeations of the “how” and the “what,” I want you to understand first of all that God actually gifts believers with very unique capabilities. These gifts are given for a very specific purpose: to be used according to the leading of the Spirit in order to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge. The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

Now these gifts that come from the Holy Spirit are supernatural in nature and are distributed according to His wisdom to those who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Understand, these gifts are not the same as the normal talent and skills that are intrinsic to your personality and inherited traits and they are not learned skills. Moreover, they are not to be viewed as something that is for your glory. You are not to view them with an eye towards popularity, stardom, or for anything else that has to do with you. Rather, God gives you these gifts in order to equip you to fulfill the tasks that He assigns to you.

For your reference, the gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 are not to be viewed as an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts, but merely illustrative of the kind of gifts that God gives. Paul just mentions a few to make the broader point that the gifts are from the Spirit and He is the one who decides which gift each person should have. But notice that to some He gives the gift of:

- wise advice
- special knowledge
- the ability to prophesy

Wise Advice

First let's talk about wise advice. As we have discussed, God grants wisdom from His mouth to those who fear the Lord (Proverbs 2:1-11). So this gift comes directly from the mouth of God to those who have positioned themselves relationally to receive this gift from God. The wisdom He gives is to be used to help others. If you know a person who has positioned themselves on the narrow path, and to whom God has opened His mouth and poured His wisdom into their life, stay close to them – real close. You will be privileged to have a relationship with that person and you should cherish and protect that relationship. They will be able to help you navigate your journey and guide you towards the narrow path. They will bring to you what are in effect the words of God as His provision for your life.

But let me warn you, what I am talking about is something spiritual and supernatural. It is altogether something different to seek wisdom based on worldly criteria. Most of us naturally tend to lean to those we think are cool, smart, good looking, successful, mature, those who have swagger, or a depth of knowledge on various issues. But remember you are a spiritual person and you need spiritual answers. It does not matter if a person is a genius when it comes to knowledge that this world possesses, their advice will always be constrained or limited to the natural and the functioning of this world. It is far better, far more valuable, to obtain advice that is outside of this world and which comes directly from the mind of God. In talking to the Corinthians, Paul said:

1 Corinthians 2:6-8, 13

Yet when I am among mature Christians, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world, and not the kind that appeals to the rulers of this world, who are being brought to nothing. No, the wisdom we speak of is the secret wisdom of God, which was hidden in former times, though he made it for our benefit before the world began...When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths.

The wisdom from God is not based on anything of man, including common sense, experience or even basic practicality (whether financially, relationally, or professionally). It is from God and it is unique to the work that God wants to do in you. In fact, you will find that the wisdom from God will often fly in direct opposition to the advice you receive from those you would otherwise trust (Mom, Dad, Grandpa, Pastor, Friend, husband, wife, etc.). This is because the “word” you receive from a person who speaks with the wisdom of God will be from the Spirit to explain spiritual truths: in other words, it will be to guide and direct you along the paths that God has chosen for you.

One other word of caution, anytime you receive advice, and it does not matter from whom, you need to align up that “word” with what God has already disclosed to you in the Word of God and with the overall direction of where He is leading you. Be careful to not be thrown to and fro because of things people say in the name of God. That is why you need to always be positioned relationally with God such that you know with certainty how He speaks to you and how He leads you.

Special Knowledge

To others the Spirit gives the gift of special knowledge. There will be times where God will grant to others some knowledge that is supernaturally derived; meaning that absent God stepping in from outside of time and

depositing some information into a person, there is no other way the person could have the knowledge.

I have a friend back East that I have discipled now for many years. God chose me to be His instrument to teach her how to walk by faith in the Spirit of God; as a result, He uniquely equipped me for this task. There are times when we are talking about some struggle or something going on in her life and God will all of a sudden give me understanding of what is at the root of the issue or what is really going on with her. It is funny because I will bring it up and she will usually argue or disagree with me because she just does not see it, does not connect with it, or just does not like what I happen to be saying. But I ask her to go and seek the Lord about the issue and see if He will confirm what I have said. And sure enough, God reveals to her that what the Spirit said through me was right on the money. This has happened so many times that she has now learned to listen to me in those moments or at least consider that what I am saying might just be a word of knowledge from the Lord.

I have another friend to whom God has given this gift and has applied it in her life in a very specific situation. It is actually quite creepy. She know things about my girls, see things happening inside of them that no one else sees, and she understand things that I would never ever be able to understand. She knows when they are lying, she knows when they are in trouble, and she knows when they are playing me like a fiddle. There will even be times when God will wake her up in the middle of night and tell her: “call the girls now, they need your help”. And sure enough she will make the call and they need her right at that moment. When I hear about it I am always amazed and kind of freaked out, but definitely grateful. What she has is a gift that God has given her for a very specific purpose. God knew that for her to carry out the assignment He has given her that she would need this gift; therefore, He equipped her to do the task.

Ability to Prophesy

Then there is the gift of prophecy. There has been much debate within Christianity about this gift. This gift is very similar to the other two in that God will bring information, a vision, an image, or a “word” that is very specific and is intended to be spoken to build up, edify, encourage, instruct, warn or correct another person. Now the reason there has been quite a bit of controversy about this is because in the Old Testament there were prophets that were given the “word” of God and they spoke not only about circumstances that were immediate and applied to the lives of those to whom they brought the message, but they also foretold the future and spoke about things that would not come to exist until sometimes hundreds and thousands of years later. Much of this prophecy makes up a bulk of the Old Testament and some of the New Testament. And in that context, there are those who are afraid that others will use this “so called” gift of prophecy as a tool to try and add to the Bible, supplement the Bible, or as a new revelation to override aspects of the Bible. And while this is a danger, because it has happened over and over again, we must remember that the enemy always works to corrupt and pervert the work of God. But the works of the enemy should not alter our view of how God uses this gift to bring His “word” of instruction, guidance, direction, encouragement, and correction into the life of a believer. In fact, just the opposite should be true. Whenever you see the enemy working so hard to pervert and twist something, that is a pretty good sign that the object of his perversion is likely rooted in the Lord.

Now regardless of some people’s objections, or even your own comfort with the idea, Paul clearly tells us that the Spirit gives some the supernatural ability to prophesy; which is the ability to address both current and even at times future events in the lives of others. But let me say ever so clearly, the Bible is complete; it is a perfect work and is not to be added to, enhanced, or overridden in any way. That is not the purpose of prophesy; it is for the specific purpose of building up the body of Christ.

An example in the New Testament is John the Baptist. We have no record of John ever foretelling the future, but he was a prophet nonetheless; according to Jesus, the greatest prophet that ever lived. John brought a word of correction and called people to repent and return to the Lord. Another example is in the book of Acts and the events that transpired toward the end of Paul’s life. In fact, in the passages we are going to look at you will see the how the Spirit used “wise advice,” “special knowledge,” and the “ability to prophesy” (even the foretelling of future events) all at the same time to build up not only Paul but all those who were involved in his

life. We will be reading from Acts 20 and 21. First we find Paul in Ephesus on His way to Jerusalem because He was irresistibly drawn there by the Holy Spirit. Let's pick this up in verse 22 of Chapter 20.

Acts 20:22-25

And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus — the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love. "And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again.

In this passage we first see that the Paul, who always walked the narrow path of faith, was led by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He did not have to guess, He did not have to analyze or apply any of his own wisdom to the situation; He knew that He had to go – the calling was irresistible! As I have said over and over again, if you are positioned relationally to hear the voice of God, you will know how He speaks to you and how He leads you. It will be clear and irresistible. The Spirit had clearly communicated to Paul that wherever He went He would suffer. This is an example of prophecy in that he knew what the future held for him. He did not know the details of that suffering, but he did know with certainty that he was destined to suffer. Further, Paul had a prophetic moment while he was speaking (or it might even have been a word of knowledge – I am not sure and the distinctions we try to make between these gifts are not so precise that we can say with absolute certainty which one was in operation) – and he said he **now** knows that those to whom he was talking would never see him again. This word of prophecy greatly impacted the Ephesians and we are told in verse 36-38 that when Paul had finished speaking that they wept aloud and embraced him knowing what he said was true. In this instance, the word of prophecy was a word of instruction and direction both for Paul and for the Ephesians.

As we move into chapter 21, Paul left Ephesus, made a few more stops and then went on to Caesarea. In Caesarea he stayed in the home of Phillip who had four unmarried daughters all who had the gift of prophecy. We will pick up this story in verse 10.

Acts 21:10-14

During our stay of several days, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. When he visited us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans.' "When we heard this, we who were traveling with him, as well as the local believers, begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The will of the Lord be done."

So once again, the Spirit made a declaration of upcoming events through a believer who had the gift of prophecy. And the prophecy was not some generic statement that could have applied to anyone at any time, it was very specific: the owner of the belt would be bound by the Jews and turned over to the Romans. That is exactly what happened to Paul – the “word” of God fulfilled exactly as it was spoken.

I find it interesting that the response of those who were with Paul (both his traveling companions and those in the church at Caesarea) was purely of their flesh. They did not have the mind of Christ at that moment. They were carried away by their love for Paul and did not want to see him suffer any more pain. But Paul brought to them the wisdom of God and explained that he was ready to walk the path that the Lord had set before him.

Paul was not about to surrender to his emotions or even entertain the temptation to avoid Jerusalem. Don't get me wrong, I am sure he was not looking forward to it, but his decision had been made. He was going to walk the narrow path regardless of the cost. Therefore, when he was hit with the tears, the begging, the pleading, he was not moved. His motto was the will of the Lord be done and eventually, the others joined him in that refrain.

I will get back to Paul in a moment, the story is not done, but I would also like to give you an example of how the gift of prophecy has been used in my life. Sometime back in the fall of 2002 a friend of mine had a dream where she clearly saw me, the girls, and Sarah in Colorado. She does not know how she knew it was Colorado, but she knew that that it was. She told me about that dream and she said she felt it was from God for it was unlike a normal dream. I thought that was kind of weird and blew it off, and frankly I forgot all about it.

Then the friend that I referenced earlier who lives back East, and which I believe has the gift of prophecy, told me that she was cleaning in her bathroom and God gave her one word and said it was for me. The word was “Boulder”. She then felt led to *Psalm 18* where it says:

Psalm 18:1-2

"I love You, O LORD, my strength." The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge

She called me and said that the Lord will be my Boulder my rock of granite. I pretty much said that I thought that was cool but I did not pay it much mind. Remember, I was in massive amounts of pain and distress and verses like this were nice but they did not bring me any tangible relief from my storm.

Approximately one year later, another friend of mine who lived in Boulder called me and told me that he was up on the mountain sitting on a rock overlooking the city and he was praying for me. He said that he heard God tell him that if I were to come out here that He would speak to me. At that time my friend and I were working on a little business venture together and I had to come out to Boulder for meetings, so my friend thought that he would take me to that spot on the mountain and he believed God would talk to me. When I got to town, I went to that spot, sat on that rock and prayed for a very long time – at least a couple of hours and I heard nothing. So I finally got bored and went on a hike for another couple of hours and prayed the whole time. I still heard nothing. When my friend came to pick me up he was perplexed as to why God had not spoken to me since he was adamant that he had heard God’s voice.

Well it was back to town and back to business. I was in Boulder for a week of meetings but my spirit was grieved. A lot had been happening in my life and the storm that God brought into my life had me all torn up inside and very confused. I had a lot of anxiety and was seeking God, seeking His direction, and seeking the next step that I was to take in my life. I was pretty desperate. I had this overwhelming sense that He wanted to talk to me, but I could not find the way. I was clouded. So I called my friend back East and asked her to pray. I said that I think God wants to speak but there is this barrier to our communication and I did not understand why He was not responding to all the flurry of prayers I was throwing His way.

She told me that she knew I was going to call and God had already spoken to her and told her that I cannot hear because I am not listening. Well that was a bit eerie and quite frankly not all too helpful. I was soon on my way back home to the East Coast and still had not heard a thing, but that phrase “I am not listening” just kept swirling in my head. The day after I arrived home I got up early and went on a long bike ride just to pray and seek God hoping that He would be willing to finally talk to me. My mind was still in knots and it was like I had static in my head. I was so frustrated. When I got back from my ride I just sat outside and finally asked God to calm my spirit and ease my anxiety so I can listen to him. I sat quietly not asking for anything, not begging, not going over and over the tragedy in my life, and not looking for any explanation; I just sat. Eventually, I felt led to open my Bible and God brought to my mind a verse I had read in Amos 3. So I quickly turned there and read the following verse:

Amos 3:7

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.

As soon as I read that verse I remembered the dream about Colorado and the word “Boulder.” I asked God if He was trying to tell me to move to Colorado. The Spirit within me confirmed this and I felt alignment within my being. However, just to be sure, I had this little conversation with God and said that if my family supported

the idea that I would know it was from Him. Well, I went inside and told them and to my great and vast surprise, they all said ok.

I called my friend to tell her that I was moving and true to form she said that she already knew and God had prepared her for it. She understood that the word “Boulder” was beyond just a comment about God being my rock of strength, but it was also my destination both spiritually and physically. The word of God through my friend was fulfilled!

Within a few months we packed up and moved to Boulder. It was very soon after arriving that God started to talk to me – not on that specific rock but here in Boulder – and I started to write my manuscript about what it means to live by faith and to walk in the Spirit of God. The word of God through my friend was fulfilled! I came to Boulder and He talked to me.

Then lo and behold 8 months later Sarah and Joel also moved out to Colorado. The company Joel worked for shut down the office back East and after a lot of hassle gave Joel the option of working out of the Boulder office. The dream fulfilled!

I know this all sounds crazy – and it is! But it is how God works and how He weaves His will into the fabric of our lives.

The Test

At the beginning of this teaching I said that it is so critical that you walk the narrow path and refuse to rely on your own understanding. I said this because there are times when God will use these gifts to bring a test into your life – to give you an opportunity to practice obedience and to walk the path on which He is leading you. Therefore, in order not to stumble, you need to know with all certainty how God speaks to you so you can discern whether or not the “word” that is brought to you is in alignment with God’s will. This takes the wisdom of God which, as we know, comes as a gift from God to those who stay on the narrow path. I am going to give you a couple examples of both success and failure in these kinds of tests.

Going back to Paul and the book of Acts, there is a story that comes right in the middle of the other two. Before Paul went to Caesarea and after he left Ephesus, he came to Tyre which was on the coast of Syria. He went on shore and found the local believers and stayed with them for one week. We will pick this up in verse 4 of Chapter 21.

Acts 21:4

We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem.

Note, this verse is very clear. These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit, and they said exactly what God led them to say. They were obedient to His voice. And unlike the followers in Ephesus and Caesarea, this was no emotional reaction and they were not just saying this out of their love for Paul and concern for His life. I am sure they had that as well, but they were speaking from the Spirit.

The test was two fold. First it is the responsibility of those who are prophets to speak only what God says and when He says it – no more and no less! To this they were obedient. This is very important to understand. If you have this gift, just because God gave you a “word” or a prophecy, does not mean that it is intended for the recipient in the manner that you think. Maybe God is using that “word” as a means of bringing a test into a person’s life or maybe it is to be understood exactly as it sounds; but that is not for you to determine. Your only job is to be obedient to speak the words that God gives you. How it is received is between the recipient and God. The fact that the “word” God gives you is intended to test the recipient does not make the prophecy false and it does not make you a false prophet. Remember, you are not accountable for anyone else’s response to God; you are only responsible to speak when God tells you to speak.

In this instance, God had already told Paul where he must go and what he must endure. He was ready and his mind was set on walking the path before him. And although this message was from God, it was out of alignment with the way God was irresistibly leading Paul. This message appealed more to Paul's flesh than it did to the direction God was leading him. Of course he did not want to go suffer and die – after all he was human. But as he told the Ephesians, his life was worth nothing unless he used it for doing the work assigned to him by the Lord. So this was a test and Paul held steady to what he knew God had communicated to him.

This is actually a very hard kind of test. If you are on the narrow path and God speaks to you, there will be a big temptation to move away from that “word” if it means any kind of personal trouble for your life. Your Old Man will buck like a bronco. He will try and read into everything and find a way to alter the meaning of what you know in your New Creation that God told you. He will want to fight, will want a new “word,” and will want something other than the path that God has prepared. But you must not deviate and you must not even entertain the voice of your Old Man. You must not take the risk of moving away from what God has already clearly communicated to you. Remember, the narrow path leads to life and peace; and everything else, well, does not lead to that destination.

Let me give you an example. There is a remarkable and sad story in the book of 1 Kings of a prophet of God who allowed himself to succumb to this type of temptation. This unnamed prophet came to the king and denounced his pagan practices of sacrificing to idols. The king was furious with him and he stretched out his arm and pointed his finger at the prophet and ordered the guards to seize him. But instantly his hand became paralyzed and he was unable to pull his arm back. Of course that freaked the king out and he relented and asked the prophet to pray to the Lord to heal him, which he did. The king was so grateful he invited the prophet to stay and feast with him. The prophet responded as follows:

1 Kings 13:8-10

But the man of God said to the king, "Even if you gave me half of everything you own, I would not go with you. I would not eat any food or drink any water in this place. For the LORD gave me this command: 'You must not eat any food or drink any water while you are there, and do not return to Judah by the same way you came.'" So he left Bethel and went home another way.

Well it just so happens that an older prophet lived in the area and he heard about what happened. He wanted to find this man of God and so he inquired of the direction he went and pursued him and found him.

1 Kings 13:14-26

The old prophet asked him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" "Yes," he replied, "I am." Then he said to the man of God, "Come home with me and eat some food." "No, I cannot," he replied. "I am not allowed to eat any food or drink any water here in this place. For the Lord gave me this command: 'You must not eat any food or drink any water while you are there, and do not return to Judah by the same way you came.'"

But the old prophet answered, "I am a prophet, too, just as you are. And an angel gave me this message from the Lord: 'Bring him home with you, and give him food to eat and water to drink.'" But the old man was lying to him. So they went back together, and the man of God ate some food and drank some water at the prophet's home.

Then while they were sitting at the table, a message from the Lord came to the old prophet. He cried out to the man of God from Judah, "This is what the Lord says: You have defied the Lord's message and have disobeyed the command the Lord your God gave you. You came back to this place and ate food and drank water where he told you not to eat or drink. Because of this, your body will not be buried in the grave of your ancestors."

Now after the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet saddled his own donkey for him, and the man of God started off again. But as he was traveling along, a lion came out and killed him. His body lay there on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside it. People came by and saw the body lying in the road and the lion standing beside it, and they went and reported it in Bethel, where the old prophet lived. When the old prophet heard the report, he said, "It is the man of God who disobeyed the Lord's command. The Lord has fulfilled his word by causing the lion to attack and kill him."

Isn't that story so tragic! God had clearly spoken to him, he understood God's instruction, but the temptation was too much for his flesh. I am sure this was a long journey and he was hungry, thirsty, and wiped out from his scary and intense encounter with the king. That is why he was more than ok when he thought God might have altered the plan. Sadly, he did not stop and inquire of the Lord, he just followed after what his flesh wanted and it costs him his life.

Another example from the Old Testament of where God will allow a "word" to be given in order to test and even deceive someone can be found in the tale of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, and King Ahab of Israel. At this time the nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms. These two kings, however, were amicable and met in order to discuss going to war against an enemy of Israel. King Jehoshaphat was agreeable to help Ahab but he wanted to know if it was God's will. So King Ahab summoned about 400 of his prophets to inquire of the Lord, but these were all false prophets and Jehoshaphat knew it. So he asked Ahab if there were any true prophets of the Lord that were left. He said there was one man, Micaiah, but that he always predicted doom and gloom so he did not like him. Jehoshaphat however insisted that they call the true prophet of the Lord. Micaiah came and predicted defeat. And then he continued and said:

1 Kings 22:19-23

"Listen to what the LORD says! I saw the LORD sitting on his throne with all the armies of heaven around him, on his right and on his left. And the LORD said, 'Who can entice Ahab to go into battle against Ramoth-gilead so that he can be killed there?' There were many suggestions, until finally a spirit approached the LORD and said, 'I can do it!' " 'How will you do this?' the LORD asked. "And the spirit replied, 'I will go out and inspire all Ahab's prophets to speak lies.' " 'You will succeed,' said the LORD. 'Go ahead and do it.' "So you see, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of your prophets. For the LORD has determined disaster for you."

Wow, that story kind of undoes a lot of the black and white that we have been taught in the religion of Christianity. God in essence has a heavenly staff meeting and in attendance are all of his creations, including the demons that serve Satan. God has an objective: entice Ahab to go to war. But he elicits the spirits to accomplish this purpose and when one suggests that he will lie and deceive all the prophets, God not only permitted this action but ensured his success. The prophets themselves believed the spirit they heard was the spirit of the Lord when in reality it was a lying spirit. But this lying spirit was accomplishing God's purposes and was merely a tool in the hand of a powerful God. And sure enough, the Kings went to war and like Micaiah predicted, they were defeated.

So again, not every "word" you hear is to be accepted as the will of God for your life. Rather, you are to test all things to discern whether that "word" is in alignment with how God has already spoken to you and the path on which He is leading you.

1 John 4:1

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

As a final note, the fact that there is the possibility for a false prophecy or a test from the Lord should not in anyway alter your view of prophecy. Many people have altogether rejected the notion of a prophetic word from God because they are entirely uncomfortable with the uncertainty or the notion of a test. That is a wrong

response. The fact that there is uncertainty only means that you must be sure you are on the narrow path and relationally in a place of fellowship with God where you know – absolutely know – His voice in your life.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-20

Do not stifle the Holy Spirit, Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. Keep away from every kind of evil.

Paul encourages the use of these gifts and does not want anyone to hold back out of fear. Remember, it is up to the recipient to test the message and to hold on to that which is good and in alignment with God's will for their life.

Romans 12:6-8

God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you. If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it! If you have money, share it generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

I hope that it is clear that if you position yourself to hear the voice of God for your life, He will speak to you through the Word of God, through your spirit in the New Creation, and He will use other people to bring you His instruction, guidance, encouragement, correction, and edification. Sometimes it will be advice that flows from the wisdom of God, sometimes a word of special knowledge, and sometimes a word of prophecy. He does this so that none of us will be an island, independent and alone. Rather, He gifts us all uniquely and individually so there is mutual dependence and our lives become a beautiful picture of connectedness, community, and intimacy that mirrors the depth and quality of the relationship that is shared amongst the Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God wants us, the body of Christ, to be in His image and to reflect His glory.

That is why it is so important that you take all of this seriously and get on the narrow path. Stop messing around on the broad path that leads to destruction. As we talked about last week, the Spirit says stop, now! Get on the old godly road. Position yourself such that God is your *priority* and the absolute *authority* in your life. Then you will discover how wonderful it is to have a Father who loves you so much that He will gladly disclose to you the deep secrets of His mind.

1 Corinthians 2:8-9

That is what the Scriptures mean when they say,

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."

Let's pray.

Luke 6:46

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?

This question that Jesus asked his followers strikes right at the core of all that we have been talking about – are you positioned to hear the voice of God in your life? Can you call him Lord? Does that word have meaning to you or is it just a cliché that you have learned within the religious lingo of Christianity? It is very important that you take a moment to consider this question as it is going to be central to what we are going to talk about tonight.

What does it mean to call someone Lord? The Bible refers to the Godhead as Lord more than 5,600 times; therefore, this title, this position, might be something that is very important and which we are to fully comprehend.

The term “Lord” refers to someone who has supreme authority over your life—the one who has the right to control what you do, what you say, and where you go. Biblically, this role can be either positional or relational.

By positional I mean the following:

Philippians 2:5-11

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One day every man, woman, and child that has ever lived, without exception, will bow before Jesus and with their own voice confess the then undeniable reality that Jesus Christ is Lord. They will not have a choice in the matter. They will be compelled by the position, power and authority of God the Father. That means that every person who rejected the opportunity to let Jesus be the *relational* Lord of their life will be forced to come to grips with His *position* and they will be required to relent, humble themselves before Him, and receive their just due. If the picture that this verse paints is a bit unclear in your mind, trust me, this is not how you want to experience the risen and all powerful Lord.

By relational, I mean that right here and now, each of you can choose to let Jesus have the place of *ultimate* priority and *authority* in your life. By your choice, by your willingness to align your choices with the truth found in the Word of God, He can be your supreme authority. For those of you who have a knee jerk rebellious response to the idea of authority, keep in mind that this is – and is not – what it sounds like. It is authoritative because Jesus does what He wants, to whom He wants, whenever He wants – and that is just a fact whether you like it or not.

However, it is not authoritative in the way we normally characterize that word because all that He allows in your life and all that He does is an expression of His love for you. In fact, once you come to terms with Jesus being your Lord then you get to experience the Godhead in all its aspects. You will know Jesus as your friend, your Healer, your Hiding Place, your Light in the darkness, your Strength, your Sure Foundation, your very present Help in times of trouble, your Advocate with the Father, your Righteousness, your Bread of Life and Fountain of Living Water, your Bright and Morning Star, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God, your Counselor, your Father of mercy, your God of all Grace, your Hope, your God that works wonders, your Provider, your Peace, your Portion forever, your song, and the Lover of your soul.

With that being said, who is your Lord? Whose voice do you follow? From whom do you take instruction? Please don't be delusional, someone is calling the shots in your life and it is either the Lord Jesus Christ or its not!

Your answer to this question may depend on the area of your life we are talking about. In some areas you may be your own Lord and you may operate as the supreme authority in your life. You may run around like a maverick, a lone ranger, and let no one tell you what to do. In other areas, maybe it is someone who has been very important to you, like a parent or grandparent, and they have deposited all their years of wisdom and learning into your heart and mind and that is the basis from which you make certain decisions in your life. Still, in other areas, it could be the world that takes the authoritative role in your life as aspects of your mind have been conformed into its image; and you have swallowed as truth the lies that it propagates. It may be your friends; they may be the ones who call the shots in various areas of your life. And surprisingly, it may even be religion that has taken the seat of ultimate authority in your life. Your mind may be infused with all sorts of religious teachings, instruction, and requirements that contain portions of truth mixed with error.

Regardless of the source of control, I am going to make an argument tonight that in all facets of your life – with no exception – the supreme authority in your life must be Jesus. Let's look back to **Luke 6:46**, the verb “do” is in the present, active, indicative form. This means that you should not be ok doing what God says once, doing it twice, or even every so often, but you are to right now continually do what the Lord has said; it is to be your moment-by-moment existence. If you do not reconcile yourself to this truth, then your ability to walk in the Spirit of God and experience everything that He has for you will be greatly muted.

Now if Jesus is your Lord, then that has vast implications for your life. That means (1) that you are no longer going to declare what is or is not your will for your life, but **in all things** you are going to ask God what His will is; then (2) you are going to **wait** until He answers. Now remember what we have studied. That answer may come by way of a direct communication through the Word of God, through some word spoken through a person that God has gifted to speak either a word of wisdom or a prophetic word in your life, or through a person to whom He has given a special word of knowledge. He may also speak directly in the spirit of your mind through the New Creation such that you absolutely know what He has said and what He wants you to do. He may also just lead you in more of an indirect way by guiding your spirit as He leads you down the paths that He has chosen for you. But regardless of the mode of communication, this notion of waiting for God to answer is very important.

We are on part 11 of the series “How God Speaks.” We spent the first 7 studies understanding how we are to position ourselves relationally with God in order to hear the voice of God as He speaks to us. Then over the last 3 weeks we have talked very specifically about how He actually speaks to us through the Word of God, through our spirit in the New Creation, and through others. Tonight, I want to talk about a very important aspect of experiencing God's voice in our lives and that is our need to understand His silence.

Yes, there are times when you seek an answer from God about something in your life and God chooses to remain very silent. It may be something of great importance and something that is very near and dear to your heart; yet, no matter how much you pray you get silence on the other end of the line. For most people this is very disheartening. Especially if they have really worked on positioning themselves to be able to hear His voice and they have experienced it and know what it sounds like. Often, they are absolutely undone by the silence.

Here is the reality, most of you will go through times and seasons when His voice and His leading in your life is very tangible, direct and loud. However, you will also go through long periods of time – and I mean long periods of time – where His voice is absolutely silent and quiet and you will wonder where God has gone and why you can't seem to reach Him. Now keep in mind, His silence does not mean that He is not leading your every step. It also does not mean that He has taken a vacation and is not involved in the details of your life. He is just communicating with you in a non-verbal fashion. In fact, this seems to be one of God's favorite ways to communicate with us and He chooses it quite often.

You might ask yourself: “why would God asks us to seek Him, to search out His will, and then remain silent.” Well, rest assured, all of it is for a purpose. He does this to give you an opportunity strengthen your faith and prove to yourself that Jesus is Lord of your life.

Practically, this means that you take nothing into your own hands and you are not going to make a decision, take on an assignment, or even enter into a relationship unless you either hear directly from Him or He absolutely leads you down a certain path. It also means that once He does communicate a direction or some assignment, that you will keep doing it until He tells you differently, regardless of the circumstances in which you find yourself or how those circumstances change over time. Both of these scenarios require you to wait in absolute trust and dependence upon God. It requires you to believe that He is who He says He is and that He loves you in the way He says He loves you. Further, if you are willing to position yourself in order to hear His voice, you must believe that He will pour out His wisdom and understanding so that you will know what is just, right, and fair and you will how to find the right course of action every time (*Proverbs 2:1-11*).

So let’s start with the scenario that there is something important that you need to decide: a decision that will have a big impact on your life and the lives of those who are in your life. There might even be a time element, a financial element, or some relational element that is pushing in on you and you need to make the decision very soon. So you ask God and instead of Him seeing the emergency that you obviously see, God sees this as an opportunity to try your faith and to teach you to believe what He has disclosed to you in the Word of God about the obedience of faith. Therefore, instead of answering you right away, He goes silent. James addresses this very situation with some pretty straight forward and direct words.

James 1:5-8

If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. They can’t make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do.

James tells you that God wants to give you the wisdom that you need for your life and for the ensuing decision; but if you ask, you had better believe that He will answer. The New American Standard Bible says that you must ask in faith, without doubting. In other words, there is an implied gap between our asking and God’s answering. If God answered right away, there would not be much of an opportunity to exercise our faith and believe that he will actually answer; hence, the silence. Depending on the issue you are facing, that gap can be as small as a few seconds or it can be as large as many years. However long, that gap always seems just big enough to tempt you to believe that God is not going to answer and that He has left you to your own devices. The gap always takes you to the edge of your reason and right up to the boarder of the vast and seemingly endless territory of doubt.

If you cross that boundary and enter the realm of doubt, you become extremely unstable not just in the area of concern – the one you have been praying about – but in every area of your life. Doubt spreads like a fast acting cancer and it starts to permeate areas that you once thought were secure and established; and you begin to waiver between faith and doubt, dependence and self-reliance. After all, if you become convinced that in this one area of your life that God is not going to talk to you and give you the wisdom that you seek, then how are you able to believe that He will come through in other areas of need?

With doubt comes all the baggage associated with being outside of the will of God: worry, anxiety, fear, and panic. If left unchecked, these conditions will control and dominate your mind and emotions sending you into a frenzy where you are as unstable as the waves of the sea, where you are tossed back and forth over and over again. And what I find strange is that for most people, these terrible conditions do not lead them to repentance, they actually push them further into the territory of doubt. If this happens to you, it is likely that you will start to become more and more self-reliant as you wrestle control of your life back from God. He is obviously not doing His job, so you need to step in and fill the gap. Hence, you start reasoning through your circumstances and you

begin the process of justifying what you want and the direction you want to go. Sure, you may continue to pray, but because you are pressured by the urgent nature of your situation, you make the decision, cross your fingers, and hope that God has your back.

This is the way most people seem to live. Although a decision gets made, they are unable to live with the confidence and security that comes from knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are in the will of God, whether that will is suffering or “blessing.” As a result, James said that they should expect to receive nothing from God. Wow! That is a harsh statement. However, without softening what James said, I do believe that God in His mercy still guards us and protects us in those moments. But relying on a special outpouring of His mercy is not how we are to live. God wants us to live knowing moment-by-moment that we are dead center in the middle of His will. He wants us to live by faith.

In this context, that means that you to choose to not make any decision until you know how God is speaking or leading you; regardless of the circumstances and the pressure put on you by those who are in your life. If you really expect Him to answer you, you will make the decision to wait, and you will wait, and you will wait, until God decides to make His will apparent to you. This is the *obedience of faith*. This is how you combine truth (that God wants to show you His will for your life) with active belief (evidenced by your willingness to do nothing until you hear from Him). It is this combination of actively believing the truth that births the kind of faith that is pleasing to God.

Now as you can imagine, this is not easy. **It is this kind of belief that separates those who live by faith from those who merely associate themselves with the faith.** This is the hard work of Christianity. Believe me, it is a lot easier to find a list of something to go do for God in an attempt to ease your conscience and make you feel better, but it is far harder to wait patiently for God to reveal His will to your heart.

In *Psalms 37* and *38*, David provides an example of how he combined truth with active belief and was willing to wait on his Lord. Despite the urgency and gravity of his situation, David did not act until God told him to act.

Psalms 37:5,7,8,23,24,34

Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you. Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop your anger! Turn from your rage! Do not envy others—it only leads to harm.

The steps of the godly are directed by the LORD. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand. Don't be impatient for the LORD to act! Travel steadily along his path. He will honor you, giving you the land. You will see the wicked destroyed.

David instructs us to not put our eyes on what others are doing and not to react out of our *Old Man* with worry, anger, stress, envy, and even rage. Rather, we are to trust that God is intimately involved in every detail of our lives. We are to be convinced that He will direct our steps. We are to be patient and continue on waiting for Him to act, following the last words of direction that He gave us. We are not to deviate from those prior commands or instructions even if, from our perspective, it seems that everything is falling apart around us and those who do not honor God are getting not only the better of us but the better part of life. We are to wait for God, even if we don't like what He has allowed to come into our lives. We are not to second-guess His wisdom or the ways in which He chooses to deal with us.

Now this concept of waiting for God to give us wisdom for our lives is just as vital before and after God speaks about a certain situation. From God's perspective both situations provide Him an opportunity to build our faith. For example, if you are praying for wisdom about a decision and God gives you insight and understanding, He knows what the results of your obedience will mean for you. He knows whether the wind will blow in trouble or ease. He is even behind all of the changes in your circumstances that cause you to doubt

whether or not you heard His voice in the first place. Therefore, waiting means that you will choose to hold to what your *New Creation* knows to be true, regardless of the outcome or changes in your personal situation.

A good analogy is the relationship between a general and the enlisted men he commands. If the general instructs a platoon to take a hill, they are to take that hill, no matter how much resistance they encounter. They are to continue, no matter how many men die. They are to relentlessly follow the instructions of their commander, even if it seems that the enemy has the advantage. They are to continue forward with that command, trusting that the general is leading them in the ways that will result in overall victory.

A soldier is trained not to quit and not to second-guess his commanding officer. He is not allowed to decide on his own that the hill really is not that important after all. He is not to pick a different hill, one that has fewer obstacles and perhaps less resistance from the enemy. He is not to approach from the left if his commander has told him to attack from the right. He is not to retreat if the commander has not withdrawn his original command. He is to do what he was last told, no matter how the facts may appear and no matter what his own wisdom might tell him. He is to risk all, and abandon all, in obedience to his commander. The reason being that as soon as he takes matters into his own hands, he not only places his life in greater harm's way, but he risks the lives of others, as well.

This is why the need for humility is the foundation for all our encounters with God. The reason we are to wait and not deviate from His instruction is that we do not know what we really need and we have no ability to control which way the wind blows. The future belongs to God and He controls it. That is why we are to trust Him, not ourselves.

For example, in *Psalms 38*, despite the fact that his enemies are scheming ways to kill him, David refuses to take matters into his own hands. Rather, he decides to wait for God to tell him how to handle the situation.

Psalms 38:9–22

You know what I long for, Lord; you hear my every sigh. My heart beats wildly, my strength fails, and I am going blind. My loved ones and friends stay away, fearing my disease. Even my own family stands at a distance. Meanwhile, my enemies lay traps for me; they make plans to ruin me. They think up treacherous deeds all day long. But I am deaf to all their threats. I am silent before them as one who cannot speak. I choose to hear nothing, and I make no reply. For I am waiting for you, O LORD. You must answer for me, O Lord my God.

I prayed, "Don't let my enemies gloat over me or rejoice at my downfall." I am on the verge of collapse, facing constant pain. But I confess my sins; I am deeply sorry for what I have done. My enemies are many; they hate me though I have done nothing against them. They repay me evil for good and oppose me because I stand for the right.

Do not abandon me, LORD. Do not stand at a distance, my God. Come quickly to help me, O Lord my savior.

To me this passage is quite surprising. David is not only an experienced warrior, he is a professional. He spent a big part of his life as what we would call a mercenary. He was also one of the greatest kings who ever lived – he ruled with wisdom and seemed to always know what to do. He knew how to attack and he knew how to defend. He knew how to protect and he knew how to hunt down his enemies and slaughter them. Yet, David makes himself deaf to his own wisdom and deaf to any other voice except that of the Lord's. He will not be moved by the actions or words of his enemies. He will not react to their arrogant boasts and vile schemes. He will not be tempted by the urgency of the situation, even though he is on the verge of emotional collapse. Instead, he makes a choice to trust in the Lord with all of his heart and not to lean on his own understanding. He waits for an answer from the Lord. He really believes that God is going to speak to Him and that God will direct and guide his steps. David is convinced that the Lord delights in him and has him in His hand. And during this

time of waiting, he continually confesses his sin and aligns himself to the heart of God. In total humility and dependence, he patiently waits for God to draw near and help.

This is a perfect picture of what you can expect in your life. God will set you on a direction and before you know it all hells seems to break lose. You are tempted to doubt God, to second guess him and to panic. But if you hold fast to the truth, if you choose to believe that God will speak to you and if you wait for Him, you will find out that He is a God who always keeps His promises. He will do exactly what He says. In fact, there is great benefit to waiting on the Lord. In *Psalm 40* and *Psalm 16*, David gives us a small picture of the emotional and spiritual fruit that he experienced.

Psalm 40:1-4

I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be astounded. They will put their trust in the LORD. Oh, the joys of those who trust the LORD, who have no confidence in the proud, or in those who worship idols.

Ps 16:1,2; 7-11

Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge. I said to the LORD, "You are my Master! All the good things I have are from you." I will bless the LORD who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me. I know the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is filled with joy, and my mouth shouts his praises! My body rests in safety. For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your godly one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

When you wait on God for His answers, His deliverance, and His wisdom, He steadies your feet and places you on solid ground. In other words, you will be able to navigate the troubles that you encounter. Your troubles won't necessarily be removed, but they won't be a hindrance to your ability to follow the will of God. When you are in the center in His will, even in the midst of troubles and great calamity, the *New Creation* in you can still shout His praises. Like David, you will be able to say:

Psalm 40:8

"I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your law is written on my heart".

I know that some of you are in situations that are quite harrowing and you feel that you need answers; and you need them now! But as frightening as waiting for God can be, as we wait, He strengthens us and He gives us exactly what we need to make it through the time of silence. Remember, He is your very provision for life, from beginning to end; He is what you truly need. He is the one who enables you to endure all that He has appointed for you.

Isaiah 40:27-31

O Israel, how can you say the LORD does not see your troubles? How can you say God refuses to hear your case? Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know that the LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youths will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who wait on the LORD will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

Do you now understand how waiting gives you the opportunity to live by faith? We have all been so conditioned for immediate responses, immediate feedback, and instant satisfaction. But that is not how the Lord operates. He operates on His own schedule according to His own will. Besides, you must remember, His first and foremost priority in your life is not that you get what you want, but it is that you are conformed into His

image and reflect the glory of God in and through your body. Therefore, He often chooses to bring you through times where your body and everything within you demands a certain outcome according to the timing that you desire; and yet He remains silent. He does this to show you the tendency you have to be blinded by what you think you want, when you want it. He does this to show you how you tend to react and respond to your circumstances versus resting in what He has last communicated to you.

Through His silence, He asks you to believe that He really does know what is best for your life. He asks you to become deaf to those voices that tell you that He is not going to help you. He asks you to reject the counsel of those whose minds are set on the values of this world. He asks you to lay aside your Old Man and realize the futility of taking matters into your own hands. He asks you to depend only upon Him and to do only what He has asked you to do, nothing more and nothing less. He asks you to set aside your demands, your wants, your alleged rights, your perceived needs, and trust that your Father knows best.

Proverbs 8:34–36

Happy are those who listen to me, watching for me daily at my gates, waiting for me outside my home!
For whoever finds me finds life and wins approval from the LORD. But those who miss me have injured themselves. All who hate me love death.

In my own life, God has asked me to wait on many things for many years. He has made certain promises to me that from a human perspective I cannot even begin to see how they are going to come true. But He has asked me to have HOPE and believe, and to continue to believe until He fulfills the promise. The amount of stress and suffering I have endured emotionally and psychologically as I have waited for God to act is almost indescribable. And although I have endured an amazing amount of suffering from His hand, He has made me stand. He has made me strong. He has renewed my strength. He has made me love Him and trust Him more deeply than I could ever imagine. He has tested and proved my faith—my willingness to actively believe the truth—and He has upheld me with His righteous right hand. I have learned that the will of God for my life is only found through seeking and waiting!

As I said at the beginning, God loves His silence. He loves it because if we let this form of communication have its place in our lives, we are assured that He will complete a marvelous work in our lives and we will not be disappointed. The journey may be disappointing and stressful, but the outcome of waiting on the Lord will be anything but disappointing.

Lamentations 3:25,26

The LORD is wonderfully good to those who wait for him and seek him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD.

Psalms 25:2-3

O my God, in You I trust, do not let me be ashamed; do not let my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed;

Psalms 147:11

The Lord favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His lovingkindness

My closing exhortation to you is as you seek God and His voice becomes silent, be aware of what is happening. Don't immediately assume He has taken a vacation and does not care for you any longer. Don't immediately get impatient and mad at God because He is not performing according to your time table. Don't run out and errantly believe that you have to make a decision on your own because God might not come through in the way you want. Remember, He delights in the details of your life; thus, all that He allows to happen is for the purpose of drawing you into Him so that you will have an opportunity to learn to actively believe the truth; and thereby live and walk by faith. What a glorious purpose.

In addition, if you obey His voice and the outcome of your obedience is not what you were hoping for; and instead of “blessing” it leads to calamity and trouble. Remember, that is also from the Lord. You need to take confidence in the process – in seeking and waiting on the Lord and obeying His voice. That is your responsibility. The outcomes in your life are God’s and He does what He wants, to whom He wants, whenever He wants, and there is nothing we can do about it except remember that He loves us and is passionate about us. Therefore, we can know, even in His silence, that He is leading us and directing our steps. We just need to wait! We need to choose of our own volition to let Him be our Lord and live by that reality. He is the one who gets to call the shots – He is our supreme authority. And the good news is that all that the Lord allows to come into our lives is an expression of His love for us. In this we can trust.

Psalm 27:14

Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD.

Hosea 12:6

Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually.

Let’s Pray.

Every one of us suffers from three common internal enemies that impact our ability to let Jesus be the Lord of our life. Last week we talked about what that means (letting Jesus be the Lord of our life); and, in summary, it means that He gets to call the shots in our life. We no longer are our own authority, but He becomes our ultimate **priority** and **authority**. We present ourselves to Him as a servant, as His child; and we yield all dominion of the affairs of our life to His wisdom, His counsel, His leadership, and His love.

Practically, that means in everything we do, and I mean everything, we are to seek His will and understand what it is that He has for our lives. Our goal is to live dead center in the will of God; therefore, we are to ask Him for the wisdom that we need for every decision and we are to believe that He is going to answer. And if we truly believe He is going to answer, we turn that belief into faith by waiting and taking no action on the matter at hand, or the issue we are praying about, until He chooses to speak or until we have clear guidance from Him.

Similarly, if God has set you on a direction or has given you a specific assignment, you are to continue to do what He last told you to do no matter what happens in your immediate circumstances. In other words, all hell could break loose and nothing turns out the way you were expecting; as a result, you become extremely confused, worried, and totally stressed out. However, you are not to be controlled by either those events or your feelings, but you are to hold on and continue to do what God asked of you until He gives you new directions.

This is where God's silence becomes a real problem in our lives. God often chooses key times – very important times – in our life to remain silent. We ask Him, we seek Him, we beg Him, we start to cut deals with Him, and yet He remains silent. He does this purposefully. It is not because He is cruel and loves to tease you, it is not because He has moved on to better things and no longer cares about the intimate details of your life. He absolutely cares about every detail; He just wants to give you an opportunity to turn your belief into faith by choosing to **actively** live the truth. He knows that with every choice you make to **wait** on His voice, and with every choice you make to **continue** to do what He last told you to do, that you are not only strengthened in your faith but you get to experience Jesus as your Lord and receive all the benefit that comes from that relationship.

However, very few people see God's silence as an opportunity to develop their faith and to set their belief into motion; rather, their disappointment with God's silence and disillusionment with His delay in providing the answers they seek results in Jesus being dethroned from the position of Lord in their life. Instead, they take the seat of authority and they begin to call the shots; in fact, His silence only confirms to them that they need to take matters into their own hands. This response usually starts in one or two areas of their life, but as Jesus continues to use silence as a communication tool, their unbelief spreads to so many other areas of their life and soon it becomes an imbedded pattern that is very difficult to reverse. But waiting just does not seem practical or even advisable. It is scary, it is destabilizing, and it is contrary to all the ways in which we have been conditioned: we need it now, we want it now, and we expect it now.

If you were to just step back for a moment and think through this scenario, you would think that you were crazy for jumping on the throne and pushing Jesus aside. After all, He is God and He loves you and He knows what is best? So why would you choose to set aside the truth and essentially do what you don't really want to do – that is be the Lord of your own life? Most of us know we cannot fulfill the job.

By this time, we all should know that this kind of thought process and behavior is rooted in either wrong belief (a twisting or perversion of the truth) or unbelief (our flat out unwillingness to believe the truth), but it is important to understand the reasons for our wrong belief and unbelief. I believe for most of us they are tied to the following:

- Fear,
- Selfishness, and
- Pride.

Honestly, it is very difficult to draw concrete lines around these three underlying motivations and they really do not fit into clear cut definitions. Besides, in our hearts they not only overlap but they feed each other and play

off each other such that sometimes it is impossible to categorize our thoughts, our emotions, or our response into any one given cause. But regardless of our ability to accurately dissect the true motivation in our hearts, each of these maladies plays a major role in our decision process. I am going to go through some examples that I have heard from many of you over the last few weeks and which I have told myself many times in my life. Please really focus on these and really ask God to see if any of these thoughts or concepts is at the root of your wrong belief and unbelief.

- Deep inside you are afraid that God is not going to answer you or at least He is not going to answer you in time.
- You are afraid that God does not really understand how serious this decision is for your life and how He needs to move now or else everything will just fall apart.
- You are afraid from the outset that you will look like a fool and start out so earnestly in your desire to seek God and then give in and opt for your own way.
- You might be embarrassed over the fact that you have asked others to pray for you and they keep asking you what God says and all you can say is “nothing.”
- You are afraid because your friends, family, and co-workers pressure you to make a decision and think it is ridiculous to wait on a God who rarely, if ever, talks.
- You are afraid that He is not going to let you do what you really want to do.
- You are afraid that His will is not going to be something you like and might even include suffering or separation from relationships, things, or behaviors that you really enjoy and really love.
- All you really want is to be happy and based on what you have seen in others who have traveled the narrow path, they don't seem very happy.
- You are afraid of the consequences of obedience not only to you but to those who are in your life and the potential conflict that might ensue in your relationships.
- You are more focused on what you want and have lost sight of God's overall plan not just for you but for others.
- You think that you need to love others in the way that you define love and are not sure that what God is asking you to do will be perceived by anyone as love.
- You think that you are able to do a decent cost/benefit analysis – weigh the good against the bad and make the right decision.
- You are convinced that God has given you a brain so that you can use it; in fact you tell yourself that you honor and complement God by using your brain as long as you are not doing anything “bad.”
- You convince yourself that this decision is really not that important and is not so critical that you have to wait on the voice of God; you will save that for more serious issues.
- You tell yourself that it is obvious by the way God is acting that He does not really care about the details of your life.

I am sure if I thought about it longer I could add to this list, but for purposes of what we are discussing, I believe this is long enough. Do any of these reflect the thought and emotional processes that you go through? First of all, let me say that this list is not intended to make you feel stupid, embarrassed or unspiritual. All of these thoughts are for the most part common to all of us. So please remember, first and foremost, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (*Romans 8:1*). So push any thoughts of judgment or shame aside. That is not the point. We are focused on how we are to be positioned to hear the voice of God; therefore, we must be honest regardless of how painful that may be. In that regard, the one thing that is for certain, these

thoughts and not in alignment with God. They are real concerns and from a purely practical standpoint, quite valid; but they still are in opposition to the truth.

Deep inside we seem to know this; however, in order to push through our lack of alignment with God, we convince ourselves that we are not really doing anything that bad. What I have experienced is that in order to live outside of the will of God, you have to develop a pretty good mechanism for justifying your choices and appeasing your conscience. Besides, you have to be ready to answer anyone who might challenge you – including the challenge that comes from the Spirit in your New Creation. As a result, you become pretty used to closing your ears to the truth and ignoring the voice of God – after a while it almost becomes instinctual.

I am always amazed at our ability to justify anything. It is like a sickness, we can rationalize everything so that somehow we are able to convince ourselves that the choices we make are ok. We always have a reason why the truth does not really apply to us and why our circumstances are somehow special and different from everyone else. We are even able to convince ourselves that God may work for others but He will not work for us. The sad truth is, we really just want what we want and once we make the decision, we will either fight or avoid anyone who thinks we have done wrong.

But regardless of our reasons, regardless of our feelings, regardless of our cleverness, a true disciple of the Lord must always be willing to ask this one question: **“am I doing what I know God has asked me to do?”** Let me repeat that, a true disciple of the Lord must always be willing to ask this one question: **“am I doing what I know God has asked me to do?”**

If you don't ask yourself that question, well that is another problem. You really need to start from the beginning and understand why you need God's direction in your life and how you must position yourself relationally with God in order to hear His voice. If you do ask yourself that question and you are not able to answer it with the confidence such that you know are in the will of God, then you should tremble. Remember, it does not matter if deep inside you know that want to be in the will of God. Good intentions, while honorable, will merely leave you languishing on the broad path. What matters is **choice** – putting your belief into action. What matters is **faith** – actively believing the truth! All else will leave you out of alignment with God. Remember **Hebrews 11:6** which we have quoted quite frequently:

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith it is impossible to please Him

The only way to be in alignment with God is to actively believe the truth: to make choices in accord with both God's leading and direction in your life and with the truth as found in the Word of God. All else will merely be a product of your own mind, your own emotions, and your own clever justifications. We must accept the reality that no matter how hard we want **our own** choices to be ok with God, they just are not – and never will be. Yes, God has mercy on us and His patience with our humanity is so far beyond anything I could describe – thank God for His love; but being a recipient of His mercy when we are pursuing our own desires is quite a different experience than being in alignment with His will.

If you find yourself in a place where you are struggling with your ability to wait on the Lord for His voice and His direction, or your willingness to continue to do what you know God has instructed you to do, put on the brakes, alter your course and get off the broad path that always leads to destruction.

First, you must start with **confession**. You must be willing to deal in truth: with yourself, with God, and with others. In order to truly worship God, you must worship Him in Spirit and Truth (**John 4:23,24**). Therefore, you must admit that you have lived by your own reason, been carried way by your emotions, deflected the Spirit by your myriad of rationalizations, and chose your own path. You must agree with God in this matter; it is not a subject to debate. You have either walked in the center of the will of God or you have not – you are in alignment with the will of God or you are out of alignment! It is that disturbingly simple!

Sometimes reaching this place where we can be honest with ourselves is very difficult because most of us *don't intend* to do it wrong – we don't purpose to go our own way – it is not our intention. After all we really love Jesus and we want Him to be our Lord. We grieve over the fact that we experience a relational separation. We pray, we go to church, we read our Bible, we ask God for His help, but so often He is the one who seems unwilling to be involved at the level in which we need Him. He is the one who makes this so difficult. He could just speak and make things clear and then everything would be ok.

Although that is often how we think, please understand this is a deception of the enemy and of your Old Man. It is truly scary, but we all have such an amazing ability to live in deception and denial that we will even take our good intentions, or our affections for God, and use them in a way to shift the blame away from our unwillingness to believe the truth and wait on the voice of the Lord, and put the responsibility on God for not acting on our behalf when we think He should act. As a result, we move forward in a decision or a direction that we want to go and we appease our conscience by saying that we love God and we asked Him for help. And although we did not wait for His voice or His leading, we hope that God will essentially cover our back, protect and bless us. This is so backwards and wrong!

If you want to escape this cycle, you must first admit that you have been unwilling to wait on His voice and His leading in your life. That is it. *Confession* does not have to be some big long drawn out act of emotional display or involve some other form of theatrics; it just needs to be honest. This is the kind of *confession* that is at the foundation of true Christian humility. The kind of humility that is a fundamental requirement for walking in the Spirit of God and being positioned such that you are able to hear the voice of God in your life.

This humility is not found in a set of behaviors nor is it found in a certain “holy” attitude. It is expressed in a willingness to believe truth and humbly declare that God is God and no matter how smart and capable you think you are, you are not Him. It is the humility to know that since you are not Him, that without Him you can accomplish nothing with your life – at least nothing of eternal value. In *John 15:6* Jesus said in that if anyone lives out of alignment with God's will, that they are like a useless branch that just withers away and is only good to be gathered in a pile and burned. All that we do outside of His will for our life is worthless. What a sobering reality; this is what I meant when I said that our good intentions do not buy us any extra credit. The reality is that we need God and we need His leading in every part of our life. Spiritually speaking, we are in such a helpless and desperate place that we must wait on Him until He chooses to communicate His will to us. We have to be sure; there can be no other way. Any other choice is utter foolishness and will not lead us to life and peace.

That is why in *John 15:4* Jesus gives us the admonition to *remain* in Him – to be continually positioned relationally with God in such a way that we are able to hear His voice and know His leading in our life. That is the only way we will produce the fruit that comes from the Spirit of God. **We must remain!**

John 15:4-8

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful apart from me. “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! My true disciples produce much fruit. This brings great glory to my Father.

Further, to be in an ongoing state of Christian humility, you must know that even if you venture off on your own – using your God given talents and abilities – that if He chooses to press His finger down on your life, all that you hold to, all in which you find meaning, and all your attempts to save yourself, protect yourself, provide for yourself, and care for yourself, will crumble before you and blow away like dust in the wind. The control you think you have over your life is all an illusion, for everything comes from Him and everything exists by His power (*Romans 11:36*).

It is living in this kind of humility that is essential if you are ever going to *remain* in a position to hear the voice of God in your life; and, thereby, know how to walk in His will. It is this kind of humility that is essential if you are going to experience the fruit or the benefit of oneness with Christ: where His requirements on your life are light and easy and you experience peace, rest, and security deep within your spirit – where you are satisfied and know that nothing else can fill you up so you choose to stop looking to the world, to others, and to yourself to find your security, your self-image, and your direction for life.

I said that confession is the first step toward true Christian humility but it is not the only step; next comes *repentance*. Repentance is fundamentally different than confession. Repentance is the act whereby you take your confession – your admission that your thoughts, your ways, and your demands are not in accord with the truth – and make a choice to reject each and every thought. Repentance is the refusal to live another moment outside of the will of God. It is getting off the broad path and remaining totally dependent upon God for every part of your life. It is your willingness to start over from scratch and in each area of your life, ask the question: **“God, am I living this area of my life in accordance with your will?”** It is your willingness to then wait on God to give you the answer, all the while believing the truth found in *James 1:5*: If you ask believing that He will answer, God will gladly tell you. And if the answer comes back “no” – this area of your life is not in alignment with His will, then true repentance is your willingness to ask God what He wants you to do about it and what practical changes He wants you to make in your life.

Finally, repentance is your willingness to make those changes regardless of the impact in your life to your relationships, your money, your possessions, your career, your aspirations, your reputation, your pride, your definition of who you are, or to anything else. Remember, you have to believe that this life is perishing and all that really matters is that you live smack dab center in the will of God.

This repentance process is Paul was describing in his letter to the Corinthians

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

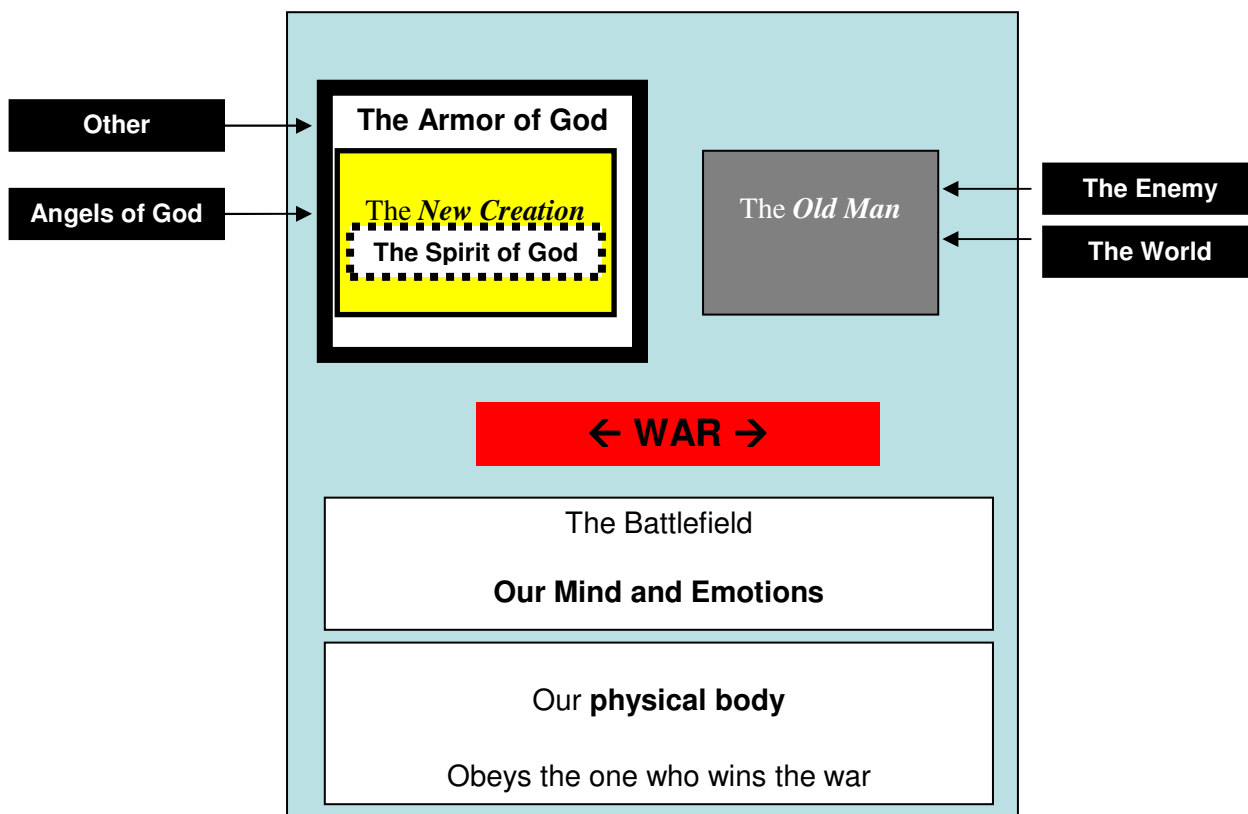
Notice it says **“every”** thought; it does not say some, or even most of your thoughts. You must approach true repentance as an all out assault on *every* thought that raises itself up against the truth; you must be willing to not let anything or even any thought that stands in opposition to the will of God have a place to root in your heart. You must punish all disobedience. This means that you must reject all error, all lies, all deceptions, all denial, all justifications, all clever reasoning – all of it must go. You must push it out of your mind and refuse to dwell on it; and, instead, choose to dwell on the truth.

- God does love you.
- God cares about every detail of your life.
- God wants you to find His will.
- God will not resent you asking Him for the wisdom that you need for your life.
- God wants you to seek Him with your whole heart and continue to search for Him as you would for lost treasure.
- God wants you to tune your ears to His voice and concentrate on insight and understanding.
- God wants to open the windows of His wisdom and His understanding and gladly pour them into your life.
- God wants you to remain in Him and bear much fruit.

- God will use silence as a means to try your faith and give you an opportunity to choose to live in a state of ongoing confession and repentance.
- God’s silence does not mean that you are free to be Lord of your own life. Rather, you must let Him retain that position and that title and you must let Him be my ultimate *priority* and *authority* for you are not able to fill that role.

It is only through this process of ongoing confession, repentance, and dwelling in truth that we learn to live in the humility that will result in our ability to *remain* in Christ and bear much fruit. And by the way, one of the truths that you must not only dwell on but you must cement into every fiber of your heart, mind, and emotions is that according to *Romans 6:7* and *11*, you are *able* to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus for when you died with Christ you were set free from the power of sin; thus you can share in His new life.

Now by way of reminder, we are in a war. We must not ever forget this truth. It is the New Creation against the Old Man. The Old Man wants to be your Lord; he held that title and position for so many years and he wants it back. He will fight every attempt you make to live in a state of on going confession and repentance.



The Old Man seems powerful because he is very loud and he has his allies: the enemy and the world. But that is it – nothing more. In reality, our Old Man does not have either the power base or the external help to truly have victory. Remember, he was defeated when you became a Christian and the only power he now has is what you allow him to have.

Romans 8:12

So dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.

The New Creation, however, has on its side the Spirit of God, our Brothers and sisters in the Lord, and the Angels of God – a powerful combination of support. Further, the New Creation has available to it the full complement of the armor of God in order to protect itself in this war. Nothing is lacking! We can have victory and we are free by God's grace to live according to our new life in the Spirit. We just need to let Jesus take His rightful position of Lord over our life and choose to live as if He is Lord of our life.

Going back to *2 Corinthians 10:3-6*, the reason Paul is so hard core when he wrote to the Corinthians and said that we must take “**every**” thought captive to the obedience of Christ is that he knows the battle that we fight and he knows the enemy:

Ephesians 6:12

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

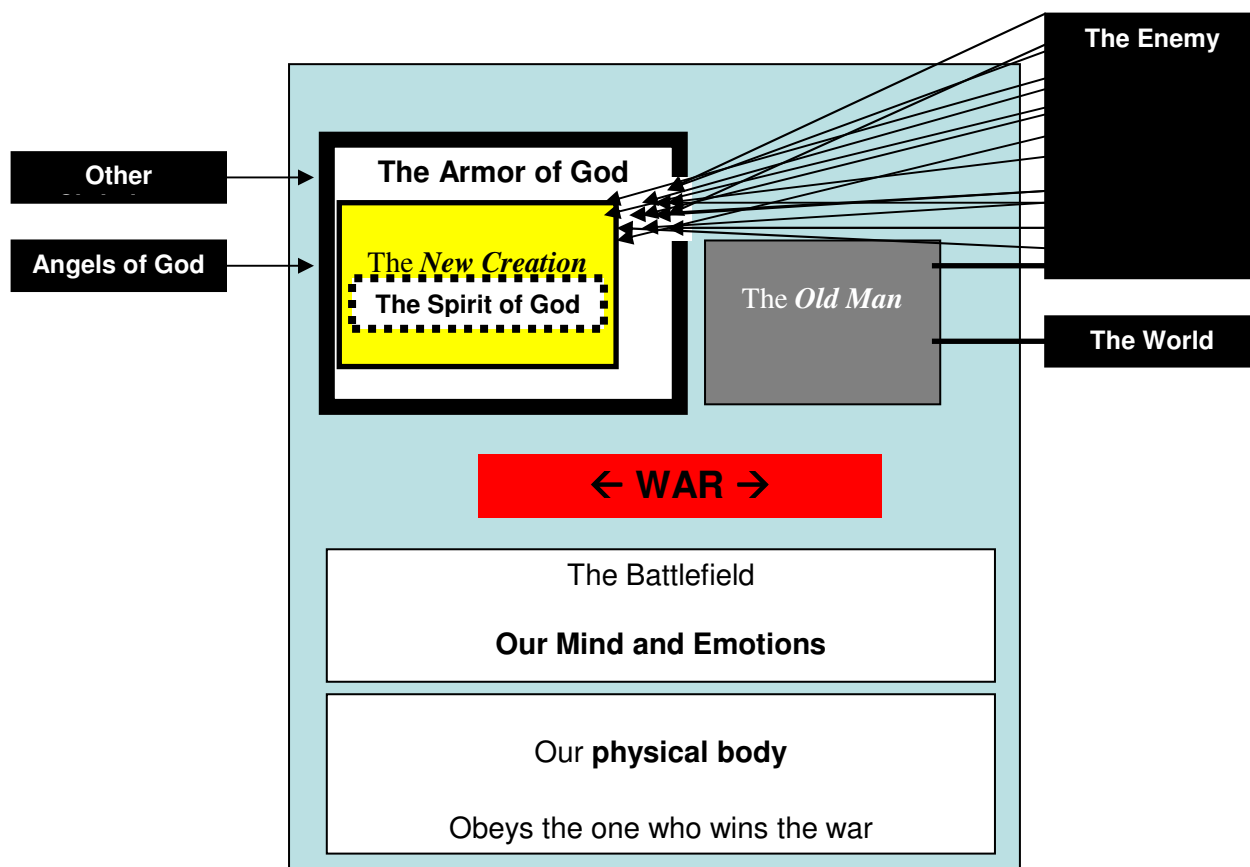
We are not to be dull of mind and unaware of what is happening all around us. No warrior will go into battle without his armor or his weapons; he will be killed. So here is the reality, with “**every**” thought that we do not take captive to the obedience of Christ, we give the enemy an opportunity to kill us.

By way of illustration, you need to make a decision in your life and to your surprise God goes silent. Due to the nature of the circumstances, waiting on God does not seem very practical and you so you begin step by step to start taking matters into your own hands – first emotionally and then mentally as you begin to rationalize the decision that you think you need to make. At first it may all seem harmless and the doubts, the justifications, the need to make a decision, the urgency of the moment, all seem so practical and necessary. But what you don't realize is that the enemy is watching you and hunting you. *1 Peter 5:8* tells us:

1 Peter 5:8

Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, our great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour.

As soon as you let down your armor and start to believe that God is not going to talk to you or think that He just might not help you, a big bull's eye is painted on your chest. You become a target. The enemy rushes at you like a mad man. And every place where you find yourself out of alignment with God, you will find that you have a break in your armor of protection. The enemy then uses that gap in your armor to flood your thoughts and your emotions with doubts, lies and deception.



At this state you become so messed up and so confused that you don't even know how to begin to unravel the myriad of lies which have bombarded your mind. You don't even know how to take your thoughts captive because this all happens so fast and is so overwhelming that you are not even fully aware that the enemy is storming the castle. You become confused and totally out of sorts. Even if you try and grab one of these thoughts and compare it to the truth, it's as if the thought runs away and slips through your hands and you are left holding this mangled mess of lies and deception. And if God continues in His silence, you move even faster to take matters into your own hands. You have to make some progress, you have to try and stop the madness, and you want to find some relief. Unfortunately, you are not your answer and you never will be!

The only way to find relief is through ongoing *confession* and *repentance*. That is it. Remember, intentions alone are not enough; it's the choices you make.

Jeremiah 6:16

So now the LORD says, "Stop right where you are! Look for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.

Stop – stop everything. You should not care what the impact is on your life. If you have to make a boat load of apologies to everyone you know – fine, just do it. But stop being Lord of your own life. Begin to believe that truth: the Lord will speak to you and He will gladly reveal to you the wisdom you need for your life if only you will wait for Him to act. Remember His promise:

Psalms 37:23-24

The steps of the godly are directed by the LORD. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will not fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.

If you let Him, He will direct your steps and He will be involved in every detail of your life. You don't have to do this on your own. You don't have to live under the bondage of your Old Man. You don't have to undergo the ruthless onslaught of the enemy. You don't have to be his victim. By the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within in you, you are **able** to choose to let Jesus by your Lord.

I hope you realize that in this 12th session, I have tried to capture many of the key aspects that I have taught in this series on How God Speaks and pull them together in a way so you can understand what it looks like to **remain** in a place where you are positioned to hear the voice of God in your life. This process, however, first begins with **confession**. It continues by your willingness to **seek** the Lord with your whole heart and your refusal to rely on your own understanding. Finally, it is completed by your **repentance** which is a refusal to do anything or take any action until you first hear His voice or understand His leading in your life. This is the way of faith. This is the old, godly way and those who travel its path will find rest for their souls.

One last reminder; letting Jesus be Lord does not mean that you quench your thoughts, desires, or aspirations. It just means that in humility you are willing to subject all that you are and all that you ever hope to be to His thoughts, His desires, and the appointments that He has for your life. As **Proverbs 16:1** says, you are free to plan and you are free to dream, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. So as you plan and work through the details of your life – big or small -- you must seek Him out in all things and be willing to wait for the answer that comes from Him. And as you wait, you will discover that you are on the narrow path and before you know it, you will join the company of those who fear the Lord; and then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will know how to find the right course of action every time (**Proverbs 2:1-11**).

Psalm 147:11

The Lord favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His loving kindness.

Let's pray.