

# Laying the Foundation

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# Just One Thing Is Required

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Welcome to PathWay Fellowship. I hope you enjoyed the worship. For the most part, our time together will be very similar to what you will experience to night. We will have a time of worship and during this time we will have open communion for any believer who wants to participate. We will have a table set up and any time during worship that you feel led, you may go and partake. Similarly, we are going to have some people who can pray with you. If you need prayer, if God starts to move you in any way and you would like to have someone to talk to, just come forward during worship and someone will meet you, take you aside, and pray with you, encourage you, or just be there for you. In addition, we are not going to take a formal offering here at Pathway so if God leads you to give any tithes or offerings, there is a box in the back and you can feel free to just put your gift in the box as God leads.

After the time of worship we are going to study about God and what it is that He desires from us; and then we will close with a few more songs and that's about it. Then you are free to hang around as long as you want getting to know the other people here.

This evening, I want to talk a little bit about this whole idea of Christianity. For the most part, I would probably be safe to assume that much of what you have seen or experienced within Christianity – whether you are a believer or not – is not what you expected and is not what you had hoped for.

First I would like to talk to the experience of those here who identify themselves with Christianity and consider themselves to be a Christian.

For most of us, we started off understanding very little of what it means to be a Christian, but we knew that Jesus had died for our sins, we knew that we could have forgiveness for everything, and we knew that He promised that we would spend eternity with Him in heaven. That was definitely good news, and something that we wanted. So we came to God on the basis of that belief. We did not have hardened evidence, we had faith. The Holy Spirit was working along side us and convinced us that we were sinners and that we needed a savior. Yes, many of us had many more facts and probably researched out all the reasons why Jesus is who He said He was, but still it all ultimately came down to a decision of belief.

## ***Ephesians 2:8-10***

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

It was through faith. There was something about God, something about Jesus, and something about what He did for us that caused us to fall in love with Him, and to want Him. His gift of eternal life – something we did not have to try and earn, was just unbelievable to us. The reality of grace—that God wanted to give us something that we did not deserve, the fact that we can be clean and forgiven—simply caused us to surrender to Him.

When we first gave our hearts to Jesus, it was wonderful. Everything was fresh and everything was new. God have us the Holy Spirit to live inside of us and we were in touch with His presence in our lives. We were able to fully experience the freedom from sin and the joy of having been forgiven. But it seems that shortly after that it all started to fade and all the promises that we thought would be ours seemed to be further and further out of reach.

- Jesus promised that our load would be light and easy
- Jesus promised that we could have rest for our souls
- Jesus promised that we would never thirst again – we would have no need to find fulfillment in anything else or anyone else
- Jesus promised that we could have joy
- Jesus promised that we could have the abundant life
- Jesus promised that He would lead us and that we could know what His will is for our life in all things
- Jesus promised that all our needs would be met in Him
- Jesus promised that He would change us so we would be like Him

But so few of us have every really experienced any of these promises on any sustained basis. As a result, for most of us

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Christianity has become somewhat of an enigma. We identify ourselves with it, on occasion we will stand up for our beliefs, but for the most part it is powerless in our lives; and few can really tell us apart from those who have never been saved in the first place. And as we look around, we are in good company. It seems that everyone else is like us and our experience is common and normal. Sure there are a few people out there that we have come across who seem to have it together and seem to experience God in a different way, but we tend to think that they just must be radical and a bit over the edge, because their experience is entirely foreign to us. So we usually write that off to some level of fanaticism and we don't think it is real. We have, for the most part, forgotten what it was like to simply be in love with Jesus and believe.

And those of us who are not Christians and have observed Christianity from a far, and have been intrigued somewhat by what Christianity claims it has to offer, well we are so confused by the lives of those we meet who claim to be Christians. They seem to be so intolerant of others and intolerant of variant beliefs; yet, they don't really seem to have a practical platform to stand on. Their lives are in just as much turmoil and unrest as the rest of us. So where do they get off claiming that they have the only truth. They are often so unloving to each other. It seems that people within Christianity are always at odds with each other and there is not a lot of unity within the church. Everyone seems to be obsessed with every other person's sins and every time you have gone to church somewhere, somehow, it turns to be about sin and the need to stop sinning. Yet, no one seems to be stopping very fast, which is probably why people are so frustrated and seem to have no real peace—and so they take it out on others. In fact, even the leaders seem to be in just as dire straits as the congregants.

Yet, notwithstanding all of this, Christians still always want to convert you and want you to become one of them. Christians still always want you to know about the love of God and the benefits of being a believer. And while that sounds great, something is just wrong with the picture.

I think it would be safe to say that from anyone's perspective, if they were being honest, that the Religion of Christianity has for a large part failed all of us. It has been ineffective and at disappointing. The reason is we have moved far away from the place where we started – the place of faith, and instead adopted a religion. A religion that is rule and behavior based and is quite merciless in enforcing its requirements. As a result, what we have experienced is not God, it has pieces of God, but it is not God.

God's idea of Christianity is all together different. Therefore, I am going to invite all of you – Christian and non-Christian—to *Take Another Look*. Week after week we are going to explore and seek out who God is and what our relationship with Him should look like. If you decide to come back you will find that God and Christianity are quite a bit different than both what you have been taught and what you have experienced.

God is amazing. He is everything He said He is and more. And first and foremost, He wants us to have a oneness with Him – a unity – that is only possible through a supernatural invasion into the natural. This invasion I am talking about is not some ethereal experience that is found in deep times of meditation, but it is practical and real and it is available for us every day, all the time. A oneness where He is able to live in and through us. God wants total intimacy with us. He wants us to be enveloped in His love and His presence. He wants to build a community of people that accurately represents Him and His love for others. In fact, true community, true fellowship can only be experienced in Him.

Each of us has been made to exist in community. We were made to have deep intimate fellowship with each other. Our relationships are just a taste, or a shadow of what we are to have with God. Everyone seeks meaningful community, but few find. And those that do, usually associate in exclusive groupings. Republicans congregate with Republicans and Democrats with Democrats. The rich usually hang out at places that only other rich people can hang out at. The poor don't get the invites. People who like to do drugs usually want to only party with other people who do drugs. Racial groups tend to congregate with those of the same race. Runners have their running club, bikers their bikers club. But rarely do you see anything that opens the door across all boundaries. Yet, Christianity does just that, and has done it for centuries. It is open to all – whether you are rich or poor, male or female, slave or freeman, educated or not, of this race or that race. It does not matter. Christianity creates a powerful community that is unlike anything else in this world.

Do you know that historically Christianity has been the only religion that has invaded every people group, every nation, and is something for every tribe, tongue. Islam has forever been primarily a Middle Eastern religion and over time has permeated Africa and Indonesia. But it is still has been primarily centered in one region and connected to one people group. Hinduism has always been primarily Indian. Confucianism has been centered in China. Buddhism has been primarily in Asia. But Christianity started as a pure Middle Eastern religion. It was a religion of the Jews. Then it moved and was centered in Asia Minor. Then it was centered in Europe and had massive penetration all throughout Eastern and Western Europe, down into Africa, and India. Then it was centered in the Americas. And now in the 20th Century is permeating Asia like never before. South Korea and China have two of the largest Christian populations in all of Asia. The reason this is so is because what unites those in Christianity is Jesus. It is not tied to anything earthly and human. It is not tied to anything that we can segment based on looks, social status, economic status, educational status. We are unified and our community is based on the presence of the Holy Spirit and our love for Jesus. Jesus crosses all boundaries and is why true Christianity throughout time has been an unstoppable force. Its community is powerful because it is Jesus based and not man based. Its message is undeniable because in the community of Jesus, real people love in a way that is unsurpassed. Yes, sinful

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and fallen people love and serve each other. This is the essence of true Christianity. This is what we can experience when we learn how to walk by faith in the Spirit of God.

But Christianity has been compromised. And for years and years it has mutated into a man made religion. That is why every once in a while God decides to shake things up a bit and refresh His message of grace and freedom and what it means to walk in the Spirit of God. Therefore, He picks someone out and He strips them of everything. He does this so they can experience raw God and be purged of the layers and layers of wrong belief and unbelief that has literally been a barrier to experiencing true Christianity.

This is basically what has happened to me. He has taken me and stripped me, and so I am here to declare to you that God wants you, He wants all of You. He wants to be one with You. And He wants you to be one with each other.

God desires us to shed our man made rules, throw off our religion; and, instead, live by faith. He desires our lives to be marked by love and not by hatred. He desires us to experience the fullness of the promises that He has made to us—He wants us to share in His divine nature. He wants His glory and His presence to be shown through our lives so that others will be utterly convinced that God sent His son Jesus to be our savior. He wants our lives to be His convincing proof; the very evidence of not only His reality, but His love for those who do not yet know Him.

The amazing thing is that there is really only one part that we need to get right to experience this kind of life—the rest; well, it will take care of itself. That is right, there is only one part that we need to get right. No long list of rules to follow, no mystical formulas, there is just one thing that we need to get right.

The reason I say that everything else will take care of itself is because experiencing God, experiencing the promises of God, enjoying the ability to love in a way that is not known in the normal spectrum of human relationships, is the overflow, or the result of being in alignment with God. It is something that is then naturally produced in our lives when we are walking by faith in the Spirit of God. It is not something we strive for, we cannot conjure it up, and it is not something we can manufacture. We simply cannot. Nothing in the history of man kind should lead us to any other conclusion. In fact, left to ourselves, we produce the results that the Bible tells us are natural to man:

sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, selfishness, lying, prejudice, gossip, mercilessness, self-confidence, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin. See Galatians 5:19-21; James 2-5.

But the natural result of walking by faith in the Spirit of God is the exact opposite:

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, moral excellence, and godliness. See Galatians 5:22, 23; 2 Peter 1:3-9.

Just look at this list: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control. This is a short list of what everyone in the world is seeking, but for some reason have been unable to find. We have paid a lot of money to therapist, we have taken a lot of medication, we have gone to seminars, we have even gone to war in pursuit of these things; yet this peace, this love always seems to evade us. The good news is that all of it is available. All of it is offered to us for free—as a gift. All of this is merely a result of the overflow of His presence in our lives. After all, God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); therefore, when His life is expressed through us, we will love in the manner that He loves.

So how does God love us? We are told that His love, the kind of love that is exclusive to the Godhead is as follows:

### **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This is how God loves those who are His. And this is ultimately how we will love when we are filled with Him. But we just have to get just this one thing right – and then we can love in the manner in which we are loved by the Father. This is the kind of love where God was willing to crush His own Son on our behalf, so that we might find life through Jesus.

**John 3:16-17.**

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

Every time I think of the hostility that Jesus endured for my sake, I am overwhelmed. When I think that the Father allowed His son to be beaten, punished, wounded, brutalized, mocked, betrayed, whipped, rejected, torn apart, and ultimately crucified so that He could take upon Himself the full punishment for my sin, I know that I am loved, and I am special. I know that my life has purpose and meaning. I know that I want to love Him back and worship Him. I know that I want my life to be surrendered to His control and His will. As I said before, God is amazing and He is worthy of everything—all of me and all of you.

Before I explain to you what the “one thing” is that we have to get right, I think I should tell you a little bit about me. Most of you know me just as Jessica and Andrea’s dad and think that I just hang around a lot at Buchanan’s. Well, that’s true I guess, but I think it might be helpful for you to understand a bit about where this message comes from and why I am standing here teaching. Tonight, I am only going to give you the highlights and over time, I am sure I will fill in more and more of the details, but for now, the highlights will do.

I gave my life to the Lord and decided to follow Jesus at the end of my freshman year in High School. From the day I first gave my heart to Him, I have always been in love with Jesus. I have been what most of you would call one of those weird radicals that you dismiss as kind of a freak. I have always wanted Him, and wanted to only do what He wanted. This is how I have lived my life. I was pretty good at it too. From the perspective of the Religion of Christianity, I was the disciplined one, I was the one who did not give myself over to the things of the world, I sought God. I read my Bible, I prayed, I fasted, I did everything that I thought I was supposed to do. I helped start a couple of churches, helped one church avert total melt down, I led many ministries, discipled so many people, and practically made myself available for God whenever I thought He needed me. I was very busy for God, but over and over I asked God for more and more of Him. I wanted my experience with God to go deeper and to be as existential as it was intellectual. I wanted my connection with Him to be real time, all the time.

Well, He took my prayers seriously. One day I was in California on a business trip and I was at my favorite coffee shop. I was reading and praying and for lack of a better description, God visited me. I had this amazing encounter with God and He told me that He was going to show me how much He loves me. Well, I left that experience expecting all this amazing stuff to happen to my life, and, of course, by amazing I meant that God was going to give me more, bless me more, and expand everything that I touched. That was what I thought it meant to show me how much He loves me. Unfortunately, I was in for an extremely rude awakening. God’s idea of showing me how much He loves me was frankly 100% in opposition to what I had thought or hoped. Instead of “blessing” He started to tear apart my life. He told me that He was going to throw me into a storm that would so rock my world, that I would be staggering around like a drunk man reeling in a stupor, being smashed by wave after wave of disaster. He told me that He was going to throw me into a pit so deep and dark that there is no way, on my own, that I will be able to crawl out. Within a very short period of time it all started to happen.

Over the years, I lost my job, lost my dogs, lost my ministry, lost all—and I mean all—but two of my friends, lost my wife, almost lost the life of one of my children, was thrown into massive conflict and disassociation with even my family members, lost all my money, and have had everyone gossiping about me and intentionally trying to tear me down. The details are gruesome, and the casualties of this experience are many. But I was cut off. I was left with one friend who was near by, one friend who was across the country, and raw God—that’s it. And over the years, with the exception of a few friends who returned, a couple of new friends that God gave me, and a re-establishment of relationships with my family, it is not like things got better. God Himself afflicted me and put inside of my body terror and pain. Literally, 24X7 I was in constant physical and emotional affliction. I could not take a pill and make it go away, it was intense, and it was always around. There were times where it felt like my chest was in a vice, I could hardly breathe, and my body was in a panic. I fell into times of dark depression and hopelessness. If you ever want to get a picture of what it was like, you can read Lamentations 3, for everything in there happened to me just as He described.

Now you might be thinking that this is too weird, and that I am making up some big dramatic story to try and impact you. But honestly, if I told you the gory details you would be shocked; I am not exaggerating what happened. In fact, a precious friend of mine that God brought to me during this storm, who is actually here tonight, was praying for me one day and for just a moment in time God let her feel the pain with which He afflicted me. She immediately broke down and could not even function. God told her that this is what Steve feels all the time. If you talk to her, she can tell you what I am saying is true, she has tasted of it and it was horrifying.

So how was this showing me how much He loves me? How was this even kind? It wasn’t and I let God know it. What kind of God would show love in such a twisted manner. I fought Him and argued with Him and was so mad at Him for what He allowed to happen and what He was doing to me. After all, this was not love, this was mean and cruel.



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Over time, however, my complaint let up. I got tired of fighting God and wresting a match that I could not win. And although I let up, He didn't. He did not calm my storm at all. Things are always in turmoil, unrest, and I seemed to always be in conflict. The whole thing has been awful. Everything I touched failed – and you need to understand before all this happened, it was as if everything I touched turned to goodness. It did not matter how you looked at it: I have had an incredible education a few times over, professional success, financial prosperity, I had lots of friends (so I thought), and in my little circles I was well respected teacher of the Bible. Pastor's leaned on my guidance and counsel to grow their churches. So to go from this place of "blessing" to one where I drip with disaster and failure has been intellectually, emotionally, and practically devastating. But through all of this, God stated to show me who He really is. He started to show me why this was necessary. He started to teach me how to view Him not through the eyes of my wants and needs but through His wants and His purposes. He started to teach me how to view Him not through the eyes of black and white religion, but through the gray where His love and His wisdom is always above the black and white rules. He started to show me the many faces of His love and most important, He started to show me all the areas in my life that prevented me from worshiping God in Spirit and Truth. He Himself started to teach me. Isaiah 31:20 says:

### ***Isaiah 31:20***

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."

And that is exactly what He started to do. He started to rip the scales from my eyes and show me who He is and how my view of Him was so distorted in so many places. He showed me the layers and layers and I mean layers and layers of wrong belief and unbelief that I had inside my heart; and He wanted me to throw them off like filthy rags. I was to say: "Begone" to everything that hindered my ability to believe the truth about God, the truth about Jesus, the truth about the Spirit, the truth about the enemy, the truth about the world, the truth about who I am in Christ, the truth about who I am outside of Christ and the truth about how we as a body of believers are to function with each other.

He taught me that light and darkness, good and bad, blessing and cursing, well-being and calamity, are all the same to Him. They are just necessary tools that He uses in our life to draw us closer to Him. See Psalm 139:11-12; Isaiah 45:6-7.

We are told in Romans 8:28:

### ***Romans 8:28***

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.

He causes all things to work for good: that means the peace and the storm, the conflict and the reconciliation, the pain and the joy, the darkness and the light—He uses all of it for good. But what is the good? From my earthly perspective, what I have gone through did not seem good. We need to look to the next verse to get a proper understanding of the "good".

### ***Romans 8:29***

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.

The good is our being conformed to the image of His Son. That is why God will use what ever it takes to strip away and remove our wrong belief, our pride, our unbelief, and all that is not of God so that we can reflect the image of His Son. He does this so that when people meet us, they know they have had an encounter with Jesus Christ. Again, He wants our lives to be the very evidence, the very physical proof that He died for our sins; and, yet, now lives.

So as part of this good, this conforming me into His image, He taught me the "one thing" that is necessary to experiencing all of Him. That one thing is faith—faith is the key. It is the basis through which we come to God in the first place, and it is the basis through which we are to live each and every day of our lives. From beginning to end, we are to live by faith.

So that begs the question, what is faith? I mean everyone has some element of faith. We all believe in things various things, other religions, humanism, science, aliens; we all have some basis of belief in our lives. But the faith that is essential

to experiencing all of God is very specific and is really not open for a free for all definition. This faith is a result of combining two aspects: truth and active belief. Both are essential—they cannot be separated. It is only by actively believing the truth that we can experience the divine nature.

To say that you know God is empty unless you are willing to risk your life on that knowledge. Knowledge without belief is little more than intellectualism. It may make you feel smart and wise but its power stops with you and you will still end up with an impotent belief system.

### **James 2:19-20**

Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?

Clearly the demons are fully aware of the truth. They existed with God before man was ever created. They dwelt in the presence of God and experienced the glory of His presence. They have true knowledge; and, yes, they believe that God is the one and only God. However, they choose not to walk according to that belief. They ignored the truth and believed a lie. This resulted in their eternal separation from the presence of God. So a mere knowledge of the truth is not enough to produce faith. It must be coupled with active belief. Over the next few weeks, we will spend a lot of time examining this concept of an active belief. For if you are unwilling to risk your life and base all that you do on the knowledge of the truth, you will rarely experience God in His fullness. Experiencing the existential aspect of God, which is absolutely critical to our life, will be foreign to you. You will only know cold truth, but you won't know how life is breathed into that truth. You won't know the power of the truth and its glory. This is the condition of many of you who have been raised in the church and to whom Christianity has become more of social identify verses your very life and breath.

Look real quick at Luke 9. If you have a Bible, look at verses 18-21.

### **Luke 9:18-21**

One day as Jesus was alone, praying, he came over to his disciples and asked them, "Who do people say I am?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead." Then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah sent from God!" Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about this.

Peter had grown to possess knowledge of the truth. He saw Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, give sight to the blind, and cause the deaf to hear, and so He was convinced by what He saw that Jesus was the Messiah. The facts were undeniable. But that was not enough! God also wanted Peter, James, and John, His inner-circle of disciples, to experience His power, His glory and the supernatural power of the Spirit. To be effective, to be alive, to be able to endure the events that they were to soon be facing, their faith to be rooted in something other than mere facts. So the very next scene is the transfiguration. In verses 28-35 we have this amazing supernatural scene where Jesus gives them a glimpse of who He really is—God incarnate.

### **Luke 9:28-35**

About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

Notice that the light is not a reflected light but it emanates from Jesus. He is its source. There is nothing external that creates it. You see, we can only reflect His light, in the same way the moon reflects the Sun, but He is the Sun, He is the Light, He is the very power itself and His light is the light that brings life to all living things. Then there was the cloud, the voice, and



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all the drama that we read about in Old Testament revelations of God. This was an encounter with the supernatural and this was an encounter with pure power.

You see knowledge is never enough. God wanted these disciples to experience Him existentially. He wanted their knowledge to be strengthened and to come alive through this experience with the supernatural. Similarly, God wants us to know Him in His full power and glory. He wants the Holy Spirit to be so alive in our being that we have regular and powerful interactions with the supernatural. In fact, the supernatural should be extremely natural to the believer who walks in faith. God likes to use our experiences with the supernatural to blend with our knowledge in a way that the substance of our faith becomes stronger, harder, and which makes us immovable and able to stand against anything that might come against us. In fact, this is the kind of faith that has allowed believers to face death and persecution and ask God to forgive those who were hurting them. Unbelievable natural supernatural strength!

On the flip side, active belief without true knowledge is also wholly inadequate. You can believe all you want that a little wood or stone idol is a god, but it will not talk to you, it will not save you, it will not help you, and it cannot do anything for you. You can even believe that you are a god or can become a god and still you are in just as helpless of a situation as everyone else—unable to add a single measure of time to your lifespan.

Let me give you another example, you can be totally convinced that the world is flat and therefore make a decision to avoid sailing off into the sunset fearful that you will fall off the world and float into space. But your knowledge is wrong and therefore, your decisions rob you from the joy of being able to know and fully experience this world. A person like this has a belief in which they are willing to base their life and all their decisions upon; but since their belief is not founded on true knowledge, they are deceived and they miss out on some very cool parts of life.

Essentially, this is the situation of everyone who is trying to find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, moral excellence, and godliness in anything other than the person of Jesus Christ. Without the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, it is impossible to have the faith that will enable you to experience the fullness of God.

### ***John 14:6-7***

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!"

Jesus has made the exclusive claim that in Him is the truth. That He is truth and that if you know Him you will fully know the Father. No one else has ever made that claim. And it is this claim that has been a stumbling block to many throughout the years. In fact, ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the time of enlightenment, Western society has moved away from this foundational belief. And that is why people have moved away from Christianity: personally and nationally and have opted for more secular approaches to life. This is also the reason why those within Christianity have lived somewhat impotent lives.

One of the things I aim to do here at Pathway is to challenge most everything you have been taught about Jesus, about God, about the Spirit, and about your life in Christ. I am going to challenge so much of what you have learned in the Religion of Christianity; because, quite frankly, so much of what you have learned in the religion is wrong and it is an absolute barrier to your having the kind of faith that enables you to experience His divine nature in your life.

True Faith is based on the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. One final verse before I close:

### ***Hebrews 11:6-7***

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.

As I said before, this "one thing" is the key, for without faith it is impossible to please God or to be in alignment and in the flow with who He is and what He wants. There is not other basis through which we can have fellowship and intimacy with God. It is only through faith. We must believe that He is – that means – that He is the great I AM. That everything is contained in Him and His words are truth. That He is God and He is sovereign, He is supreme, His will rules throughout the earth, and He is the very love that He lavishes upon those who seek Him by faith. Yes, He is rewarder of those who seek Him, and He is our reward. And if we seek Him by faith, He will disclose to us more and more of who He is and our lives will reflect, with greater and greater intensity, His light. This is the goal of Christianity: His life in ours.

Let's Pray.



## **Unbelief 666 (or Just Believe)**

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**6**66. This is the ominous number of the one who is called the Antichrist. I am not going to talk about that man tonight, we can save that for another time, but I am going to talk about that number and what it represents—unbelief!

### ***John 6:66***

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

John 6:66 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. There was this whole group of people who had been following Jesus, people who identified themselves as His friends and His disciples that one day just up and left Him. They decided that the things He was saying did not align with what they wanted out of God. And it was just all too far-fetched to believe. As a result, they turned and walked away.

This one verse alone represents the stand that most of humanity has decided to take. This one verse represents the heart of the person that says I can believe in God, but it's this Jesus thing that I have trouble with. In addition, this one verse alone mirrors our insistence that we get to come to God according to on our own terms in order to get what we want from God.

Jesus has always been a man of controversy. Jesus has always been a conundrum to those who have not believed in Him or His teachings. In fact, the things He has said are simply extraordinary, they are fantastic, are out of this world, and if you do not believe that Jesus is God, you would have to conclude that He is a lunatic. Based on the things He said, there is really no other way to view Him. He does not give us room to think He is just some good guy, a good teacher, a great prophet. No, based on what He has said, based on His claims to have come from God and to be the living God, we must conclude that either He was a crazy man that was suffering from serious delusion, or He was in fact God in the flesh.

If you have a bible, turn with me to John Chapter 6. If not, just look at the screen and I want to read to you this story. Pay close attention to the dynamic of the back and forth dialogue between Jesus and a group of His followers.

Let me set the scene. The day before this encounter, Jesus was across the Sea of Galilee where a huge group of people followed Him. The men alone numbered 5,000 which means with women and children, there were likely double that number. We are told in John that this group was following Him because they saw His miracles as Jesus was healing many sick people in the region. The day was getting late and seeing as though everyone was too far away from town to get a decent meal, Jesus performed a miracle and He fed this crowd of thousands with 5 loafs of bread and two fish. He blessed the food and passed it out and when He was done, there were 12 baskets of food left over. When the people saw this miraculous sign, they were freaking out and had decided to take Jesus by force and declare Him to be king.

But Jesus was not going to let that happen. He knew what they were thinking so He went up into the hills and just escaped to spend some time alone. That night His 12 disciples were at the beach waiting for Him, but since He did not come down they went across the lake by themselves. But in the middle of the night, Jesus walked across the water and joined His disciples in the boat, and instantly they were on the other side of the lake. So now we start the next morning.

### ***John 6:24-66***

When the crowd saw that Jesus wasn't there, nor his disciples, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. When they arrived and found him, they asked, "Teacher, how did you get here?"

Jesus replied, "The truth is, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you saw the miraculous sign. But you shouldn't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you. For God the Father has sent me for that very purpose."

They replied, "What does God want us to do?"

Jesus told them, "This is what God wants you to do: Believe in the one he has sent."

They replied, "You must show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What will you do for us? After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! As the Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "

## Laying the Foundation - **Unbelief 666 or Just Believe**

Jesus said, "I assure you, Moses didn't give them bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day of our lives."

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in me will never thirst. But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do what I want. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them to eternal life at the last day. For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life — that I should raise them at the last day."

Then the people began to murmur in disagreement because he had said, "I am the bread from heaven." They said, "This is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and mother. How can he say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

But Jesus replied, "Don't complain about what I said. For people can't come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them from the dead. As it is written in the Scriptures, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me. (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.)

"I assure you, anyone who believes in me already has eternal life. Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. However, the bread from heaven gives eternal life to everyone who eats it. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; this bread is my flesh, offered so the world may live."

Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

So Jesus said again, "I assure you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them at the last day. For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink. All who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them. I live by the power of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, those who partake of me will live because of me. I am the true bread from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever and not die as your ancestors did, even though they ate the manna."

He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. Even his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

Jesus knew within himself that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what will you think if you see me, the Son of Man, return to heaven again? It is the Spirit who gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But some of you don't believe me." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who didn't believe, and he knew who would betray him.) Then he said, "That is what I meant when I said that people can't come to me unless the Father brings them to me."

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.

Wow, that was quite an exchange and your head might be spinning right now but let's tear this apart. First of all, this group of followers came to Jesus under the pretense that they wanted to find out what it is that God requires; and so they ask: what must we do to do the works of God. And Jesus simply said "believe in me". It is clear from their response that this is not the answer they were looking for. The reality is that they were not really interested in the truth—they wanted an answer that fit in their little box and their little idea of what they wanted from God.

First, of all they were not interested in believing that God had actually sent a person they could see and touch, and whom from all appearances (with the exception of the miracles) was a mere man. They wanted Jesus to fit into their construct of what it means to have a relationship with God, which was based on their ability to keep the rules—in other words; it was based on human effort. And they were not open to Jesus redefining their relationship. You have to understand, that in those days, a person's ability to gain or retain social status had everything to do with following the laws of God. Their entire social identity was determined by their ability to keep the rules better than the next person. It was the very heart and fabric of their religious system.

So when Jesus said "believe in me" they could not even connect with what He was saying. They wanted a new and updated list of God's rules that they could follow. They hoped Jesus would give them the inside list and so they could have the corner on righteousness. It was like getting an inside tip as to what the professor is going to include on the exam. In other words, they were attempting to come to God on their own terms and they were not really interested in what God wanted.

As usual, Jesus had no intention of satisfying their religious itch. He was going to give them the truth regardless of the consequences. It was now the time to draw a hard line and sift through those who really wanted to obey God on *God's* terms, and those who wanted to obey God on *their own* terms.

Jesus replied: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." This one short answer was powerful; and, similar to their question, it was layered with deeper meaning. Jesus was not referring to a casual belief. He was not opening the door to everyone who wanted to rush down the aisle, raise their hands, and say they believed. He was not giving them the option to pick and choose to believe in just those parts of Him with which they were comfortable, such as His miracles, healings, and incredible teachings. No! Jesus made it clear in no uncertain terms that the Father wants everyone to believe that Jesus is the living God, with all its vast implications.

Jesus said that He was the living manna who came down from heaven, the true bread, the one who gives life to the world; and if they were willing to believe in Him, they would never thirst again.

What was He talking about: living manna, the true bread, one who gives life to the world, never thirsting again?

Well we have to go back in history to get the context of what Jesus was saying. Being Jewish, Jesus was referring to the story of Moses and when he led the Jews out of their bondage in Egypt and brought them through the wilderness into the land of Israel. This journey was long and out in the wilderness there was absolutely nothing to eat or drink. Without some supernatural intervention, they would have all died.

So God caused food to fall from the sky. It was this flaky substance they called manna – which means "what is it" – and they would gather it each morning and bake it like we would flour. And with it they would make enough food for the day and no one went without. It was a daily miracle that was meant to be a message: that all that they need for this life can, and will be, satisfied by God. The manna was also a symbol that pointed forward to Jesus and the fact that God was going to send His Son to earth to be our living "manna" so to speak; or the one who can satisfy all our needs and give us life.

For those of you who have not had exposure to Christianity, I need to further explain this concept. You see, God created each of us to be connected and in fellowship with Him. But when sin entered the world, man was separated from God, for a holy and perfect God cannot be in fellowship with sin. So there was this separation that ensued and the impact of this breach was devastating. Instantly, our need for God became magnified. This is evidenced by the fact there is a hunger and a thirst that resides in every person—a hole so deep that we keep trying to fill it with everything that never really satisfies. But what we don't realize is this is a God shaped hole, and those cries and that yearning will never be satisfied until our fellowship with God is restored. Only then can a person be complete. Now most people have not realized that only God can fill this hole and so they try everything they can to fill it and to numb the pain from the emptiness and futility of life. But nothing fits the shape and still that pain leaks out.

So we have this separation that was caused by sin. We have this unrecognized need to be connected to God. And that is the whole reason Jesus came to earth. He came to be the perfect sacrifice for sins. He came to pay the penalty for our sins. He came to provide a way by which sinful man – which includes everyone of us here – could have constant and real time fellowship and intimacy with God. He came to restore what was broken.

He came to die. And with His death, He would receive on Himself the full punishment for the sins of all mankind, yours and mine. You see Jesus was perfect, He never sinned, and that is why only Jesus could be the sacrifice and take on the punishment for our sins. Everything we have ever done and everything we will ever do. He took this on Himself when He died upon the cross for our sins. This was the ultimate exchange: His life in order that we could have life.

And all He asks is that we receive what He did for us by believing in Him. That is it – believing. Jesus said that that if anyone would be willing to eat his flesh and drink His blood (which is kind of strange comment, but playing off the metaphor of the manna, He was basically saying that if anyone was willing to believe in Him and in what He was going to do for them by dying on the cross for their sins), this person would not only find satisfaction now, they will also spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Jesus provided a way for that separation that was caused by sin to be bridged and our fellowship with God to be restored. As a result, we can be fully known by God and we can fully know God.

Jesus promised to be our daily manna that daily satisfies. Last week I talked about the horrendous circumstances I have lived through over the past 6 years. Well it is this truth – that Jesus satisfies completely – that enabled me to not only endure the suffering, but still worship God and with a heart of thankfulness, understand why my suffering has been necessary.

Jesus also promised eternal life to those who would believe. He said: "I assure you, anyone who believes in me already has eternal life." That is why a person who believes in Jesus does not have to fear death. They have a promise that has been guaranteed by the precious blood of Jesus. When they die, they will go to heaven and spend eternity in the most amazing place; so beyond what we can even imagine. In contrast, those who don't know Jesus in this way are actually quite fearful of death. There is something inside of every person that knows they will be eternally separated from God; and, although, they may not be able to articulate that reality in words, their fear shows it.



Then Jesus did the unheard of—He made the claim to be part of the Godhead. He said that He has seen the living God and had come from God in heaven. You have to understand, to the Jew of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, this would have been the most ludicrous comment a man could make. We are told in 1 John 4:12 that no man has seen God. Even Moses was not permitted to see God. Moses had seen the burning bush, had seen the cloud of God's presence, the thunder and lightening, but He was not allowed to see God. But Moses wanted to experience God in this way and pleaded with God and asked: "please let me see your glorious presence." But God told Moses that if He were permitted to see God's face, or the very substance of God, that he would instantaneously die. Moses was only permitted to see what we would understand as God's afterglow. We are told that Moses stood on the mountain in the cleft of a rock with his face covered and God's presence passed by and then Moses was allowed to look see the trailing remnant of God. And being Jewish, every one of the followers was intimately knowledgeable with this story.

Thus, when Jesus said that He had seen the living God and had come from God in heaven, He was making the claim to be more than just a mere man, but a very part of the Godhead. For those of you who are not familiar with Christian terminology, we refer to the Godhead as the Trinity which is made up of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—three separate beings united in one nature and one substance—one God!

Jesus then told the crowd that that no one could come to Him unless the Father had granted it, and that all who would come would by no means be cast out. In other words, if you are willing to believe, if you are willing to accept what Jesus has done for you on the cross, if you are willing to believe that He is your very sustenance for life (your living manna so to speak), and your pathway to eternal life, He will not reject you. You will be welcomed with open arms. You will not be pushed aside, ignored, or tricked—He will give you exactly what He promised. He will fill that insatiable hole inside of you. He will satisfy the longings of your heart so you hunger and thirst no longer. In other words, you won't need to find your validation in money, your looks, a job, success, fame, education, a boyfriend, a girlfriend, children, your party friends, or anything else in this world. You also will no longer need to numb the pain that exists within your body by involving yourself in behaviors that only provide a temporary sort of fix, but yet never satisfies. All that you need can be found in Him. And if you look only to Him for your answers, He will permanently satisfy you.

It is important to note that this truth applies both to those of you have yet to believe, but it also applies to you who have chosen to believe Jesus for His sacrifice and the forgiveness of your sin, but have yet to believe that it is only He who can satisfy the yearnings within your heart.

In John 6:66, it is significant to note that the "multitudes" that were following Jesus are referred to as His disciples. This is very important. This was not a segment of the Jewish leadership trying to cause trouble. Rather, it was a group of people who had been traveling with Jesus and considered themselves His followers. This group was very familiar with Jesus' use of metaphors and His method of instructing them through parables. Therefore, when John tells us that most of what Jesus said was difficult for the multitudes to receive, it was not because they had a problem understanding the true meaning of His words. They were just unwilling to accept it. They knew that if what He was saying was true, the implications to them both individually and socially would be earth-shattering.

When Jesus explained that the Father was offering them the true manna that comes down from heaven, they asked to get that bread every day of their lives. They missed the whole point. Remember, Jesus said that they were looking for Him because of the food, but not because of the miracle. In other words, they were still seeking their own self interest and what they could get out of God. If they would have stopped for just a moment and stepped outside of their religious box, they would have been able to see that such a miracle was impossible and no mere man could have pulled off that trick. Only God!

So Jesus tried to enlighten them by saying that He was the living manna. But instead of connecting 1 + 1 together, and realizing that what He was saying about Himself must be true, they just ran. They thought to themselves, how could Jesus have come down from heaven if we know His father and mother, and they live right around the corner? Besides, how could this mere man give us His flesh to eat? They understood that He was claiming to be the Messiah – the promised one – the Savior of the world – the fulfillment of all the ancient Jewish prophecies. They understood it all. It was just too difficult to believe. No one had ever made such a claim about themselves. Therefore, in their unbelief, they chose to reject Jesus' message of life.

In fact, so many people left that Jesus turned to the twelve—which were his best friends and his close disciples—and asked, "Are you going to leave, too?" To this, Simon Peter replied, "Lord to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God." ... Go Peter!

Last week, I asked each of you to take another look. It does not matter if this is your first glimpse at Christianity or if you grew up going to church every week. You need to take another look. You need to cast away any presuppositions, any prior notions that you have about Christianity and consider this truth. Jesus is not only the holy one of God; He is the only one who can fulfill your every need every day of your life. He is the only one who can make you complete. He is the only one in whom you can find life: here and now and eternally. He is the one who can forgive you of all your sins. He is the only pathway to heaven. He is the one who can bring us into a relationship with the Father. He is the one who can pour His love in and through our lives so that we can pour His love in and to the lives of those around us. Through Him we can

be absolutely unique. Through Him we can find not only our identity, but we can have total confidence that we have been specially chosen by God Himself to be adopted into His family. And something further, you can be totally free and nothing in this world will be able to exert its power over you any longer—In fact nothing can control you and through Him you can have mastery over all things.

Besides, one of the best parts of believing in Jesus is that He is a healer. That is what attracted all those followers to Him in the first place. But the miracles that He did on this earth were just a sign of what He wants to do in each and every person who is willing to believe in Him and follow Him.

The pain of **broken** families can be cured as God brings you into a new family; a family of believers that have the most important thing in common – their love for God and their love for each other. This family is an eternal family, and is one where you can find safety, comfort, security, support, and most of all unconditional love.

The fear of **loneliness** can be shattered as you come to know your brothers and sisters who share this common belief and you build a community of fellowship that is based on your belief in Him. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit – the third part of the Godhead – will bring us into a unity and a oneness that cannot be broken. I have relationships with fellow believers that are deeper than I ever have known in any context. And this is quite amazing because as I explained last week, I have been betrayed so many times by the people that I thought loved me, but who really loved themselves more. But God has brought me new relationships where I know I am safe because these friends seek God with a humble heart and they want all of Him just like I do. Therefore, I know that God will give them all of Him and they will be able to love me with His love. That is why I know I am safe and secure in these friendships. The Spirit brings us a unity that cannot be easily broken.

The part of your conscience and your soul that feels **dirty** and **worthless** because of all that has happened to you and all that you have done, gets swept away by His mercy and forgiveness. When Jesus died on the cross, His blood was the ultimate sacrifice for sins. And anyone who chooses to “eat his flesh and drink his blood” –anyone who chooses to believe—will be forgiven from everything they have ever said, thought, or done and anything they will ever say, think or do. He will make sin a non issue in the life of a believer. It will no longer be the barrier that separates us from being His. When we believe, He will cleanse us from all our sin and He will throw it away as far as the east is from the west. And He will make us into new people, new creations, that belong to Him. We will be free from the power of sin and it will no longer control us. We will have the power – the power of the Spirit – to conquer the sin that has so far controled on our lives.

#### ***Romans 8:33-34***

Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us.

The fear of **abandonment** can be overcome as we understand that Jesus will never leave us or depart. He will be with us always and our home with Him in heaven is something that He has guaranteed with through His death. When we choose to believe in Jesus we become children of God and no one, and nothing, can separate us from that wonderful place.

#### ***Hebrews 13:5-6***

For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never forsake you.” That is why we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

The fear that we you drift through life with **no purpose** and no aim becomes laughable. If you can imagine, the God who created all things has appointed His children to be His ambassadors. We are to represent His ways, His kingdom, His heart to those here on earth. In that regard, He has set up many appointments for us to fulfill. We will always have purpose and our lives will always have meaning. We will constantly be able to live for His will and to ensure that His wonder is shown to others.

#### ***Ephesians 2:10***

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.



That part of you that feels **unloved** will be absolutely fulfilled when you believe that God so loved you that He sent His only Son to die on the cross just for you. God so loves you that He would stop at nothing to ensure that He could have fellowship, intimacy, communion, and a oneness with you. He loves you so much that He will give you His Holy Spirit as a gift to live in you. The Spirit will be the very evidence that you have become a child of God and that you have a home with Him in eternity. And nothing can separate you from His love.

**Romans 8:35-39**

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? ... No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Since each of you have heard the truth, each of you are responsible to deal with this reality. And like Simon Peter, you can choose to believe that Jesus has the words to eternal life and that in Him you can find life each and every day. Remember, I am not just talking to those who do not believe, I am talking to those who claim to be believers but have yet decided to believe that Jesus is everything that He said He is. Those who have yet to experience Him in His fullness that absolutely satisfies.

Every one of us must choose. Or our lives can be marked by 666 and we can declare in unbelief that this is all just too difficult too fantastic to believe, and we can walk away. The choice is yours. God does not force the decision on anyone. Everyone is free to choose. He did not force any Jew to eat the manna – they could have tried to find their own food and eventually die in the desert. God offered it to them as a free gift, and they were free to gather it and eat; and thereby find life. I invite each of you to eat. I invite each of you to believe, accept God's free gift and thereby find life.

Was Jesus a lunatic? Was He a crazy man that was delusional and possibly a little bi-polar? Or was He God? What are you going to believe? Following last weeks message, if you remember, I said that only one thing was required to get right with God, and only one thing is needed to live by God – just one thing. That is faith. Faith is the willingness to actively believe the truth. There is no new list of rules, no long list of behaviors and duties that you must fulfill. To find all of God, all you have to do is have faith and be willing to put your life into His care.

Beware, unbelief separates us from Him. In fact, Jesus said that the world's sin is unbelief in Him.

**John 16:9**

The world's sin is unbelief in me.

**1 John 9-12**

Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God know that this is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. So whoever has God's Son has life; whoever does not have his Son does not have life.

**John 3:23**

This is his commandment that we believe in the name of the SON, Jesus Christ

I invite you all to believe. Let's pray.

# Laying the Foundation **Generational DNA**

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**B**efore I get started on tonight's teaching, I would like to recap the last couple of weeks. In week one, we talked about the one thing and the one thing only that is necessary to have a relationship with God, and that is faith. There is no long list of rules to follow, you don't need to do your penance, you don't need to punish yourself, and you don't need to change your behavior and get things right before coming to Him. You can only come to God by faith. No human effort is sufficient, just faith, and faith alone.

Faith is the combination of two things, **actively believing the truth**. I say **active**, because we must be willing to follow after the truth that has been disclosed to us by God with our entire being (heart, mind, and soul). Mere knowledge of the truth is not enough. It is only through combining the true knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, with active belief that true faith is created—the kind of faith that pleases God and is the very basis for our relationship with Him.

Last week I talked about Jesus and the claims that He made. Most people like to think of Jesus as this good man, this great prophet, one of the big ones. But based on the thing Jesus said, He does not give us any room to classify him that way. He said that He came from God and that He was the living God. No one else has made that claim. So either He was a crazy man and somewhat delusional, or He is who He said He is. But there is no other way to categorize Him.

Jesus also claimed that He can give you eternal life. He claimed that He and only He can forgive you of all your sins. He claimed to be the only one who can fill and satisfy that emptiness that resides in each one of us—that emptiness which cannot be filled by anything else. Oh sure, we try and fill that hole and shove into it what ever we can: relationships, sex, drugs, alcohol, friendships, careers, education, intellectualism, religion, philosophy, family, money, possessions, but none of it satisfies. No matter how much we wrap ourselves in these things, we always are driven to search for more. And, we are all really slow learners. Most of what we try and shove in that hole actually hurts us and from a long term perspective damages our hopes of having a good life, good relationships, a healthy family, and so on. And no matter how much pain our choices bring into our lives, we still seem blind to the futility of these options which are provided by the world; and we keep searching for something else, just hoping that one day something will work.

But that hole is there because God wants to be in fellowship with you, He wants a relationship with you, and He wants to share Himself with you; and only He belongs in that hole. He fits perfectly and only when you let Him fill that hole will you find rest, peace, and contentment. He wants to be your very provision for not only this life but eternity to come. He says that if you are willing to believe in Him, you will never hunger or thirst for anything or anyone else ever again; he will be your entire sufficiency.

So picking up from where I left off last week, I have been doing quite a bit of pondering about each of you, what you might be going through, what you have been through, and I think I am starting to realize some things about this generation. In fact, I have been doing a lot of comparing and contrasting of your generation to not only my generation, but the ones right before and right after me. It is really interesting, but each generation is significantly different from the other. Sure there are a lot of overlaps and similarities that are common to all age groups; yet, at the same time, each generation has its own dna and forces that has shaped its culture and its ways. And it is important to understand that dynamic if someone like me wants to have any form of meaningful communication with this generation. Likewise, it's important for you to understand what has made you the way you, and your friends, the way you are, if you ever want to be a force for change not only within yourself but also with your peers. Something that I think is meaningful and may actually have an impact on people of my generation, will just wash right over your heads. Our social dna is different. You see my generation was fundamentally about rules. Rules to follow and rules to break—but we were all about rules. We had right and wrong, good and bad, and these rules provided some sort of boundaries and guidelines for life and existence. But with this generation, everything is somewhat more obtuse and undefined. In a large part, rules about morality, behavior, honesty, fairness, relationships, and justice just don't play a significant role in your lives. In this regard, you generation is unique and it is venturing into what is unexplored and new territory for Western American culture.

Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. Most of you know that so much of what you try and shove into that hole is not good for you, it damages you, and it brings pain, and actually jeopardizes your future chances of having a healthy life, a healthy marriage, and family. You know that none of it satisfies. You know that it hurts deeply; you are not without understanding. But it does not seem to scare you enough to make different choices. It does not hurt enough to make you look the other way. I could come here week after week and talk about the futility of all that the world has to offer and how it is all empty. In fact, I could detail for you how nothing in the annals of human history should cause us to think any differently. But still it would move very few of you to take advantage of the offer for life and peace that God extends to you.

Your world has been so seemingly random, unpredictable and out of control. The things you thought you could trust:

parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, religion, the man, etc., have all let you down; and what's worse, they have even opted to benefit themselves and protect themselves at the cost of your emotional health and well being. So much has just happened to you; and you have had little to no control over any of it: parental splits, multiple partners, adults taking advantage of you, adults hurting you, religion offering nothing but rules and regulations regarding behavior and judgment for those who do not comply, and so on. And if it did not happen to you directly, it has happened to your friends and so many of those you have cared about through the years. Much of what was supposed to be good, much of what that was supposed to care for you, and bring some level of safety, comfort and assurance in your life, has failed you—and has failed you seemingly without much remorse or regret.

I believe that this is possibly the reason that so many of you are willing to stay living in your pain and in the drama and turmoil of your lives. You don't know anything else, you don't know another way. That has been your only reality. And besides, it is yours; you know it, you are comfortable with it, and no one can take it from you. It is your way of having some control over your own life.

You can see that the likely end point of so many decisions you make is pain and difficulty, but at least it is predictable and you know what is coming and you probably already have thought through how you are going to handle the pain and get through it. After all, you are resilient and you know how to survive because you have had to survive. And although you may be living in a cage of pain, loneliness, depression, disappointment, and at times even hopelessness, it's your cage, and it's your bondage, and in some psychologically twisted way you are actually quite comfortable there and you feel safe. Besides, as the old saying goes: misery loves company, and since there are so many in this generation who live this way, you have a connection, you have a community, and it's your home; and you are actually afraid to leave it. And since your lives have been filled with so much tumult and uproar, you almost need it to survive. In fact, some of you must have ongoing crisis or else you will not know how to function, and you don't know how to find attachment and connection to those in your community.

Another thing I have noticed is that because of the examples that have been set for you by those who were supposed to instill within you values, you really do not have a strong sense of right and wrong, good and bad. Everything is in play—and I mean everything—and it's just each person's choice and each person has to deal with the consequences. And although deep down inside much of what you are doing you know is not right; and it violates some internal voice or conscience, it seems that everyone has such an aversion to being judged, that they are very intolerant of anyone who might dare to level some standard of right and wrong over their lives. And as a result, there is little judgment or forethought exercised as to the actual consequences in the future of choices made today—the consequences of how your life and your choices are going to impact the next generation: your children.

Understandably, many of you have lived your life with little regard to what God might think, to what He might advise, or to His ways. And due to the example that has been set for you by many of those who supposedly "know" God, you have chosen to ignore, or not even consider the word of God and His counsel for you life. Most of you do not even realize that God has a lot to say about how to live a life of wisdom, a life of health, a life of peace, and a life of love.

It is all very tragic. I know that so much of everything has failed you. I know that you have had very little that has been stable and secure on which to build your lives. But, once again, I am going to ask you to reach deep within for that little place that still might have a ray of hope for this life. I ask you to please be willing to set aside, just for a moment, all the tragedy that has shaped your life, your cynicism and doubt; and I invite you take another look at God and what your life could be like.

I want you to understand that God actually **always** thinks of you, He desires to be with you, and He wants to break those bars that hold you trapped in a very unfulfilled and painful lifestyle. He wants to release you from your cage so that you might truly live.

There is a very interesting set of scriptures in Chapter 107 of the book of Psalms. This chapter describes various people groups and segments them by what looks a lot like what I have called generational dna. There is this one group that very much resembles not only this generation but people who have been subject to much pain and disappointment in their lives.

### ***Psalm 107:10-16***

There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, Prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; they stumbled and there was none to help.

Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart. Let them give thanks to the LORD for His loving kindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! For He has shattered gates of bronze and cut bars of iron asunder.

First of all, it might surprise you but God desires to give you life and He wants that life to be filled with goodness. In John

10:10 Jesus said: I came that they might have life and have it abundantly. That word “abundantly”, in the Greek, which is the original language of most of the New Testament, means He wants your life to overflow in the sense of being “beyond” what you could ever imagine, superior in quality, and even excessive in nature. Yes, He wants our lives to be superabundant.

But instead of abundance, instead of peace, instead of freedom, we find that this generation, and so many other people, are in darkness and dwell amongst the dark shadows within their souls. God gives us the reason. People have rejected His word, rejected the life that He has to offer, have spurned His counsel, and have ignored His wisdom. As a result, many people find themselves exactly in the situation described in Psalm 107 – in bondage: prisoners in misery and chains. In fact, many of you are so deep into this kind of living and thinking, and so over your heads in terms of what you have got yourself into, that you cannot even imagine the possibility of escaping. You can't even imagine being happy for real, being safe and secure. You actually believe that this is your destiny and just what your life is going to be – so you suck it up and embrace it as your own.

You are not the only generation that has turned a blind eye toward God's wisdom; in fact, we can go back many generations and find that people have just not considered God to be valid for their lives. But now it seems like it is with greater frequency and it also seems that the consequences are getting worse, and this generation is taking the **emotional** brunt of the fallout from the choices and decisions of the generations that preceded them.

Look at the middle of the verse, it says: “Therefore He humbled their heart with labor; they stumbled and there was none to help.” This word that we have translated as “labor” is a Hebrew word that is very rich in meaning. It can be interpreted as: wearing effort, worry, toil of the body and the mind, sorrow, travail, wearisome, and even wickedness. I believe that is a pretty good description of life today and the oppression that many of you are under: wearing effort – in fact everything is exhausting, depressing and even somewhat meaningless. Toil of the body and mind – there is no peace, there is not rest, and there is no contentment or satisfaction. There is just worry, anxiety, and a misery that burns inside all the time. There seems to be no escape. Even the things you do to try and numb the pain, after a while just don't work. Eventually, you need more alcohol, more drugs, more sex, another relationship, and more of everything in an attempt to stop the pain – but it just won't go away.

I was reading a study by the department of child services in Tennessee. This study says that over this past decade, there has been a 3x increase in the amount of psychiatric meds that are being used for adolescents and children. In examining the causes, it is interesting that this study first points the finger of responsibility at parents and cites 3 main reasons for this dramatic increase in the use of often dangerous and often addictive medication. (1) it says that a lot of parents have defaulted to medication because it provides a quick fix in order to control behaviors in their children they are unable or unwilling to handle; (2) it subconsciously absolves the parent of responsibility for inadequate parenting since they are at least providing a solution; and (3) it gives the parent a psychological and emotional out: for this type of treatment is built on the ideology that somehow it is all about biology and genetics verses parental styles that inadvertently contribute to sustaining illnesses.

No one wants to take responsibility. Everyone wants to shift the blame. No one wants to make the hard changes to their own lives in order to really help you. Everyone pretty much leaves you to your own devices. That is why God says that when you stumble there is no one there to help you. In fact all you find is just a bunch of empty excuses, blame, and redirection of responsibility.

Yes, all of this is a consequence of choices, belief systems, and value systems. Yes it is all a result of ignoring God, and ignoring what He wants to be in your life. But God has allowed this for a purpose. It is not to hurt you, it is not to punish you, but He says that it is to humble your heart.

In other words, God desires you to take a serious look within and decide that this is no way to live your life. He wants you to bend your knee in humility and look to Him for help. He wants you to be sick of the pain and instability. He wants you to stop trying to manage and control your life on your own. You can't. The prison bars are made of iron and bronze and your shackles and chains are bound tight. But He can set you free. He can shatter the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron asunder. He can loosen your shackles and chains.

If you cry out to the Lord in your trouble, if you ask Him to come and deliver you, He will save you out of your distress, bring you out of the shadow of death. You no longer have to live as a blind man in darkness and misery. You no longer have to be enslaved to your pain and the choices of those who should have protected you, cared for you, and provided for you. You no longer have to be hopeless and live just to survive. You no longer have to live a life of spiritual poverty, but you can find release and freedom; and, yes, even abundance.

Freeing you from bondage and darkness is one of the reasons why Jesus came. Look at the screen; I want you to read the job description that Jesus laid out for Himself. At the beginning of His ministry, in His first public teaching, Jesus said:

### **Luke 4:18-19**

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

First, I want you to note that Jesus says that He has been appointed to preach the gospel. This word gospel is very powerful. It literally means to announce good news or a messengers reward for brining good tidings. But how this word was used will help give us a better understanding of the power of what its being communicated when this word was chosen by Jesus. With the exception of Christian literature, this word is rarely used in ancient literature except to announce something that was considered to be life changing and cataclysmic to all peoples. So it is interesting that Jesus picked this word to describe His ministry.

For example, it was used to announce the birth of Augustus Caesar, as the beginning of good tidings for the world. And it was used by an Egyptian official in connection with the accession to the throne of emperor Julius Verus Maximus. So this word was not used lightly, and it is not to be taken lightly. This word “gospel” is used to make a proclamation of something life changing and of extreme and utmost importance to all peoples.

So what is so earth shattering that Jesus is announcing? He says that He is anointed to announce to everyone who lives in spiritual poverty, that they can have an abundant life both here and now and eternally. He announces that He Himself is that very life. He proclaims that no one has to spend another day in darkness, in chains, and oppressed. He came to set them all free. This is not just some spiritualized idea either; this is real. This is cataclysmic, this is life changing. That is why this is the Gospel. Jesus offers this to everyone when He says:

***Matthew 11:28-30***

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

This is His offer: rest for your souls. All you have to do is be willing to come to Him: to cry out to Him in your trouble and ask Him to come and give you His life. He is gentle, He is humble in heart, and He won't strap you with some big heavy burden of duty, guilt, responsibility, rules, and a list of behaviors you have to follow. No! All He asks is that you believe in Him and cry out to Him for help.

***2 Corinthians 3:17***

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

He offers you freedom from your bondage, freedom from your cage, freedom from the past and all the pain that has kept you oppressed. None of it has to control you any longer. For by the power of His Spirit, the Spirit of the living God, you can have victory over all of it – for where the Lord is there is liberty.

***John 1:12***

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

This is probably the most precious of all promises. You can be adopted into God's family. This blows my mind. The God of the Universe, the Creator of all things, wants to call you His child, and He wants to be your Father in the most intimate, practical, and tangible way. He wants to care for you in the way that no one else has been willing or is even able to care for you. What a privilege! Every believer has the right to not only be a child of God, but also live as a child of God. Every believer has the opportunity to grow deeper into their connection with God and to have intimate and deep fellowship with the entirety of the Godhead. No other religion, philosophy, or way of life offers anything close to what we can experience through a new life in Jesus Christ.

***1 John 5:13***

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.



This is a promise that is intended to give us hope as we journey through this life. It is a hope that is not based on a wish, but it is a **confident assurance** of an guaranteed outcome. This life is for a moment. We are here for maybe 80-90 years tops and then it is done. But eternity is for a very long time. And He offers us an eternity, starting now, abounding with peace, rest, joy, and purpose. But this promise of eternal life is only for those who choose – those who make a fixed decision – that they believe in Jesus Christ – that He is both Savior and Lord. Meaning that He is not only the one who forgives you of all your sin, He is also the one who has the right to lead you in all things. He is worthy of your trust, He is worthy of your affection, and He is worthy of your attention to all that He has to say about your life.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Here is some more good news – here is another proclamation of a life changing cataclysmic reality: God will not just leave you to deal with your old life and expect you to somehow change it and make it better. No, he has something better in store for you. If you choose to believe that He is both your Savior and Lord, he will make you into a new creation and He will put His life into your life. This new life will be created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true. All the old things, including all of your painful experiences, become powerless to control you. They will no longer have any power to direct or command your life. You will have absolute liberty from that dark existence. You can have new life in Jesus Christ. You can live as a free man or woman empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### **Ephesians 1:19**

I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

This power that raised Christ from the dead – the power of the Holy Spirit – can be yours. This power can set you free. It can shatter your cage and loosen your bonds. And this power will give you everything, and I mean everything, you need to live an abundant life filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

And one final thing that I want to communicate tonight is that your life can also be free from fear. This liberty that is found in the Spirit is complete and your fear of trusting something or someone as intangible as God will dissipate. Your fear of **once again** being disappointed, disillusioned, let down and betrayed by those you trusted, will be vanquished.

### **Numbers 23:19**

God is not a man, that he should lie. He is not human, that he should change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?

Obviously, those questions are all meant to be answered with a resounding NO! God always keeps His promises! He is not capable of lying, and He will bring to fruition all the wonderful and marvelous promises that He has made to you through Jesus Christ as you come to know Jesus, our God and Lord, better and better.

Each of you can permanently alter your generational dna. You don't have to live another day like a prisoner chained in darkness. God is offering you life and life abundant where His load is light and His burden is easy.

As I get ready to close in prayer. I once again extend the offer I made last week to talk to any of you. I am willing to meet at almost any time to work through any questions you might have. And if you just need someone to pray for you, I would love to do that as well. Also, I want to introduce Sarah and Lesley, both of them will also be willing to talk and pray with any of you. And if you want to believe, if you want to choose Jesus to be both your Savior and your Lord, then please come talk to one of us after our time of worship and I invite you to begin a new life in Jesus Christ.

Let's Pray.



# Laying the Foundation **What About Sin**

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**A**fter last weeks teaching, someone asked me the following question. If I am going to decide to believe, is there something I have to stop doing first – in other words do I need to stop doing certain sins? Or after choosing to believe, is it that then I have to stop sinning and stop doing the things I am doing?

These are both great questions; after all, for years and years it seems that anyone who talks about coming to God next talks about the need to stop sinning. Well I am going to tell you something quite a bit different. First of all, it is not my job, or anyone else's job to be the sin police. That is the job of the Holy Spirit – but also God's perspective of sin is not centered on behavior that is sinful, but on belief. Look at John 16:7-11. This is an excerpt from a conversation Jesus is having with His disciples hours before He was arrested and taken away to die.

### **John 16:7-11**

But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is unbelief in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the prince of this world has already been judged.

So it is the Counselor's job to convince you of your sin. Me I am instrument through which the Counselor works, but ultimately, He is the one who must convince you that your unbelief in Jesus is sin. He must convince you that righteousness is available through Jesus, and He must convince you that there will be a day of judgment where all of this will really matter. Now just to clarify, this Counselor is not me, and it is not you, or any other religious person, it is none other than the Holy Spirit of God.

### **John 14:16-17**

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth....

Now the Holy Spirit's work in convicting people of sin is different than what you might imagine. We will get into that a bit later, but suffice it to say that God never asks of you anything that He is not willing to do in you and for you.

Now, as far as the question of having to deal with sin before you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, we will find that Jesus only asks you to come to Him and receive from Him. Look at what He says:

### **Matthew 11:28-30**

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

His call is gentle and one of His goals is to relieve you of the heavy burden that you carry around because of sin. Yes, sin weighs us down and it in-steeps us in darkness. That is why God brings the light of His Holy Spirit to show us how heavy that sin is (which is the act of bringing conviction) and then Jesus make the offer to relieve us from that burden and exchange it for a load that is light and easy – a life that is based on believing the right things and **not one** that is based on our ability or inability to do the right things.

So that raises a question – how are we to view sin?

Really it is very simple; all we really need to know is a few of things. First of all, we need to know that we are all sinners. Paul makes this clear in the book of Romans:

**Romans 3:23**

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Yes, every one of us has sinned by nature and by choice. I say by nature because no one had to teach us to sin, no one had to teach us to lie, no one had to teach us to be self protecting and selfish, it all came pretty naturally. I say by choice, because as we grew up and developed a conscience of right and wrong, we still choose the wrong when we think it benefits us in some way. So the first thing we need to know is that we are all guilty of sin and are all thereby sinners.

Second, we need to know that our sin has caused a separation between us and a holy God. We talked a little about this in our second week. In fact, it is this separation that is at the root of that constant longing within our hearts for something more. Our sin has caused a permanent breach that cannot be bridged by anything we can do. Without the intervention of God, through His Son Jesus Christ, we would all be eternally separated from God in darkness and misery.

**Romans 6:23**

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This means that the payment we are due for our sin is eternal separation from God, or spiritual death. In other words, it is similar to our criminal justice system. The payment that a murderer is due for their crime is continual separation from everyone else while they await judgment on death row, and ultimately they face ongoing separation from everyone else through the physical termination of their life. That is what we are due – that is the wages of our sin.

Third, we must understand that because of this perilous situation that is common to all of mankind – the threat of being eternally separated from God – God decided to provide a way for us to be restored to Him without regard to sin. God had to be the one to initiate the action because there is nothing man can do to bridge the gap between us and God. Nothing! For no man is perfect and no man will ever be perfect. That is why God had to send His Son Jesus, to be the perfect sacrifice for our sin and to pay the “wages of sin” on our behalf. Yes, when Jesus was on the cross, He took upon Himself the sins of all mankind (past, present, and future), and for the first time ever He was separated from His Father in judgment (which is why He cried out: Father, why has thou forsaken me”). Jesus literally became sin on our behalf and took upon Himself that judgment that each of us is due for our sin.

**2 Corinthians 5:20-21**

... we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This was the reason Jesus came. He came to die so that we might live. He came to free us from the power of sin and bring salvation to all of us who choose to believe in Him as our Savior and Lord. He is our substitute. He redeemed us, He purchased us, and He paid the bounty that was on our head with the price of His blood. He did this so that we might have the opportunity to be restored to the Father in righteousness.

**Hebrews 9:26-28**

He came once for all time, at the end of the age, to remove the power of sin forever by his sacrificial death for us. And just as it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died only once as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again but not to deal with our sins again. This time he will bring salvation to all those who are eagerly waiting for him.

There is one critical point that I want you to understand. What Jesus did for us on the cross opens the door for anyone who wants to come to God on the basis of the work that Jesus did—for that is the only way we can come to the Father. We cannot come on the basis of our own deeds, our own “righteousness” – after all we are all sinners – or any other way. Jesus said:

**John 14:6**

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

He is the only way. And if you choose to believe in Him, you can have your record expunged and you can become totally clean now and forever. This is the heart of God.

### **Hebrews 10:10**

And what God wants is for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all time.

For if we are cleansed from our sin, then we can once again have fellowship with God. Now let's take a look at what God says about those who choose to believe that Jesus is both their Savior and Lord.

### **Colossians 2:13-14**

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross.

Every believer has had all their charges dropped. They have been canceled and no record remains. That means that every accusation that could ever be brought against you for what you have done, and even what you will do, has already been nailed to the cross. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin so we can stand forgiven and clean. That means there is nothing that you can ever do to change that reality. Once you are “one” with Christ, and that fellowship with God has been restored, you are “one” forever. There is nothing else that you will need to do, and nothing else that God has to do – ever again. It is finished!

### **Hebrews 10:15-18**

And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. First he says, “This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts so they will understand them, and I will write them on their minds so they will obey them.” Then he adds, “I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.” Now when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

Are you getting the picture? The reason God does not require you to stop sinning and clean up your life before you come to Him is because you can't! That is why He decided to step in and take action and remove forever and all time that sin that separates you from God. Your job is simple. All He asks is for you to come to Him, to believe Him, and receive Him as both Savior and Lord. That is it! Believe in what Jesus did for you on the cross and receive the forgiveness that He offers to you.

And this forgiveness is like a gift. It is free – God is holding it out and all you have to do is reach out your hands and take it. You have to make it your own. He won't force you to take this gift, but He freely offers it to you. I implore you to please take it. You won't regret it. It is the only way to find life.

Now, let's address the second question. Is the next step after choosing to believe Jesus as both Savior and Lord to stop sinning and stop doing the things I am doing?

Like the first question, I will answer this with a resounding no! God is not asking you to go and change your behavior and start acting like what you think a Christian is supposed to act like. He is not asking you to stop doing anything – He only asks you to believe. Any work that needs to be done, He does.

Until we die, we are trapped in these bodies that have this problem of sin. As believer's we are forgiven, but we still have this problem that does not seem to go away very quickly. Oh sure we can try and discipline ourselves and stop some of the more visible sins, but that does not stop us from sinning. It is in our nature. That is why Jesus told the Religious Leaders of His day that they are fools. He mocked at the pride that dripped from their bodies just because they were not “doing” the visible sins, but Jesus said that if lust, hate, anger, resides within their heart and their thoughts, that from God's perspective they are just as guilty as the ones who have actually “done” the bad things. You can find this in Matthew Chapters 5-7. So

## Laying the Foundation - **What About Sin**

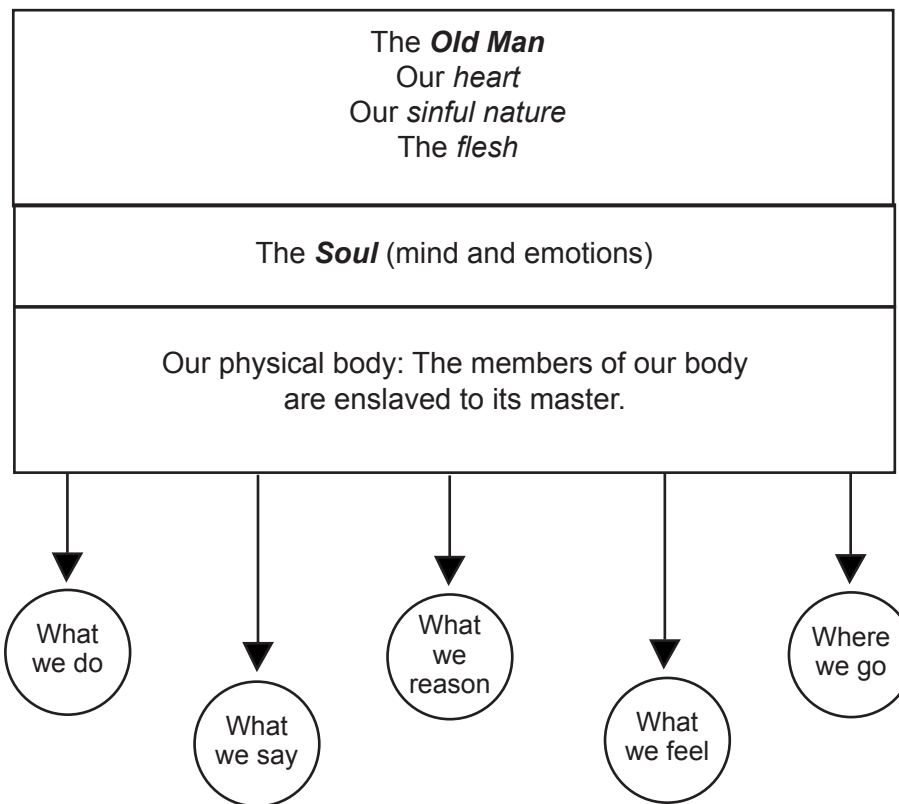
this pretty much normalizes the playing field. No one has any place to stand up and judge another because we are all guilty of sin. So forced behavior changes are ridiculous. Trying real hard to be holy is futile. Besides such effort does not buy us any extra credit with God. It is just us trying to be religious and it is really of no effect except to hurt those to whom we compare ourselves and those to whom we levy judgment.

Such arrogance is not from God. Such prideful views of oneself are not consistent with the Bible and what it says about all of us and about our condition of sin. And all though this has been the primary legacy for those in the Religion of Christianity, it is wrong and is not biblical.

So what are we to do with sin once we choose to believe that Jesus is both our Savior and our Lord? Well, as with most things in the Christian life, where we fall short, God comes through. God is the one who provides the answer and the solution.

His solution is what we, within Christianity, call the miracle of the new birth. If you remember last week, I told you that God was not going to leave you to go and try and deal with your old life, he was not going to require you to clean up and get your act together. He was not going to leave you with all the pain, hurt, and tragedy that has been in your life. He was not going to expect you to now do something that you were never capable of doing in the first place. Instead, He will bring you new life and give you the power to let go of your old life and leave it behind. He makes you into a new creation. I know this sounds weird, but it is no joke, and it is not some spiritualized fantasy that you reach through hours of mediation. The reality of the new creation is what fundamentally separates true believers from those who practice religion. This is what separates those who call themselves Christians and those who are Christians.

I am going to try and illustrate this concept through some rudimentary graphics.



Before a person accepts Jesus as their Savior and Lord, they are essentially comprised of the following components. I will be starting at the bottom of the diagram.

First, we are comprised of our *physical body*: our eyes, our feet, our arms, our ears – that is obvious

Second, we are comprised of **soul**. By the word **soul**, I am referring to that intangible part of us that makes us unique; that part of our being that resides within the conscience and subconscious. It is the place where both the best of humanity and the absolute wretchedness of humanity dwell. The Bible sometimes refers to this aspect as our "mind." For purposes of this definition, the **soul** is also the seat of our human emotions.

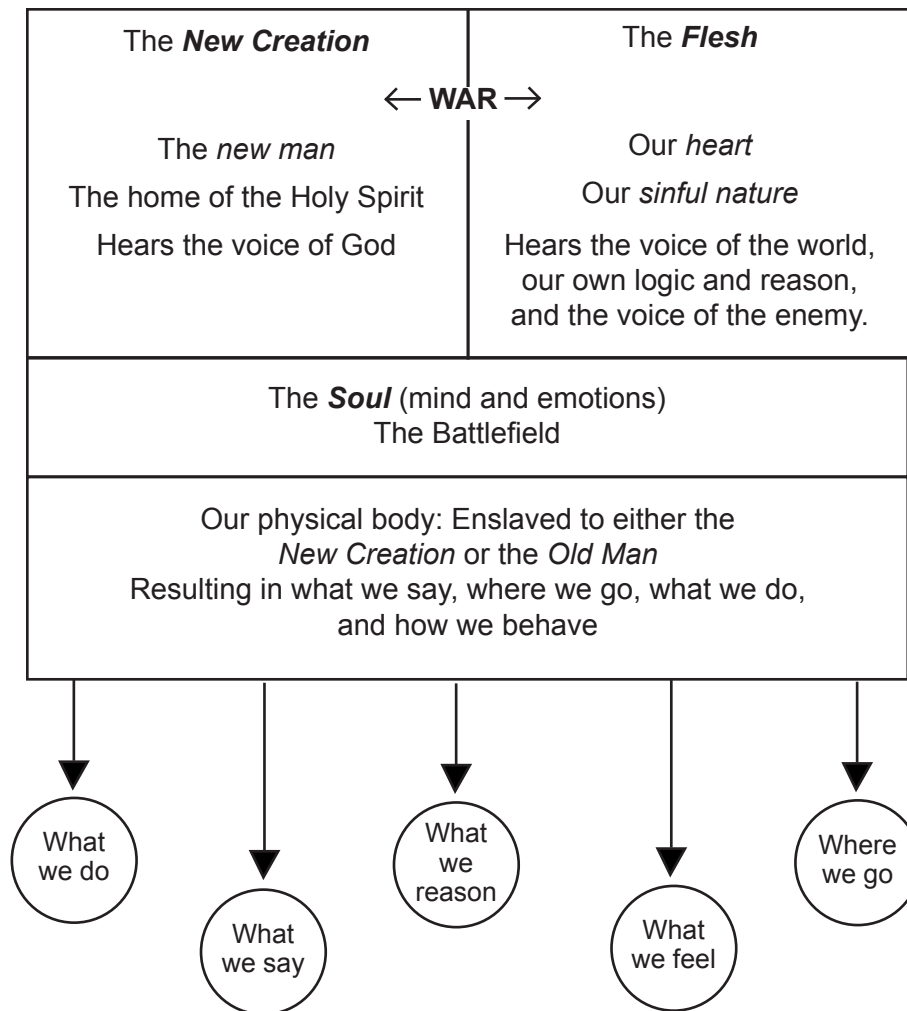
Third, we are comprised of what the Bible calls the **flesh** or our spiritual nature. The Bible refers to this aspect of our being using metaphors such as our *heart* and the *old man*. And what we do, what we say, what we feel, where we go, how

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we think is controlled by our **flesh**. It is the commander and the source behind our motivations, our desires and our self obsession. It is infected by the very sin that marks our lives.

However, the **flesh** does not operate independently. Its desires must pass through our **soul**. This is important, because our mind and our emotions have the God given ability, at times, to operate independent of our **flesh** – which is why you see acts of kindness and charity in the world – but they can never escape the **flesh** and its power to corrupt – which is why you see such horrible atrocities throughout the world.

Now that is where this idea of a new birth, and a new creation comes into play. Instead of trying to change your flesh, which would be futile since it has already been corrupted by sin, God decided to give each person the opportunity to be given a new nature and a new aspect to their being. When you decide to believe that Jesus is both your Savior and Lord – the one who can free you and forgive you of all your sin and the one who you will serve and honor and to whom you give your allegiance – then in exchange for that decision, He will give you Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit.



God creates this new aspect to your being that is perfect, holy, and sanctified, and which becomes the home or dwelling place of His Spirit.

### **John 1:12, 13**

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

### **John 3:3–7**

Jesus replied, “I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God.... The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, **but**

**the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven.** So don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again."

**2 Corinthians 5:17**

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

As the Spirit of the living God takes up residence in this new home, it is from this place that He begins to operate in your life. From here He guides you, gives you direction and instruction for your life, and He lets His nature and His character live through your body.

Let me explain this concept further, prior to receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are ruled by our **flesh**. Our **physical body**, for the most part, carries out the will of this master. What we do not realize is that this master is really a dark lord. To the surprise of many, this master is wicked beyond description.

**Jeremiah 17:9**

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

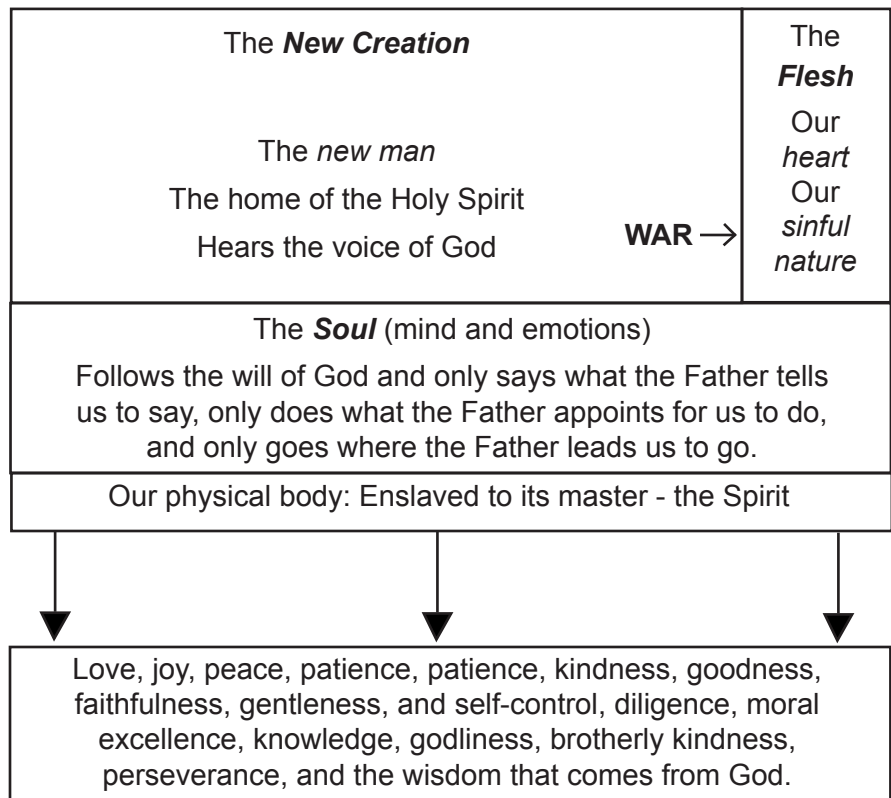
No one can truly comprehend either the reality or the level of their own spiritual depravity. We are either deceived or in denial, and we just don't want to look at the world around us and admit to the level of depravity that we really see all around us.

But since God somehow imbues within us this new nature, now the **flesh** has someone more powerful to contend with—the Holy Spirit of God. We are told that the **flesh** and the **new creation** are at war with each other and our choices are never free from this conflict.

The **flesh** continues to want to serve itself and the desires that reside deep within, but the Spirit lives to do the will of God; and wants God's heart, God's character and God's nature to live in and through our physical bodies. Our **physical body** will serve who ever is winning this war at any given time.

The battlefield for this war is fought within our **soul**. Our minds and our emotions have the ability to follow one or the other commander. Neither the **flesh** nor the Spirit of God forces us to obey; our soul must give up its will to one or the other.

If we are willing to set our mind and our emotions on the things of God, and if we are willing to listen to His voice and His leading, then the Spirit will control and our lives will produce the fruits of the Spirit. This is illustrated in this diagram:





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So again, if you look at the diagram, when we live according to our new life in the Spirit, the new creation quenches or smashes the flesh so it has little ability to control our lives. And the Spirit gives us desires and motivations that are consistent with His nature; and He produces the characteristics of God through us. We become a merely a vessel through which He lives and through which others experience Him through us.

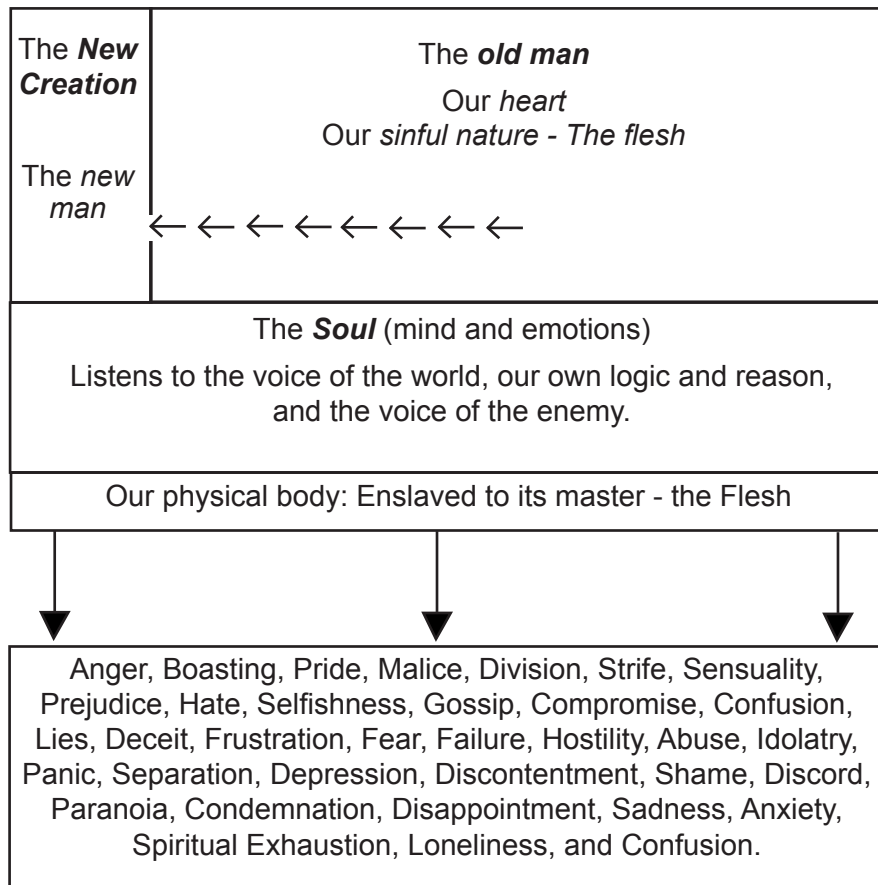
### **Galatians 5:16-18; 22,23**

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. 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. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit, you are no longer subject to the law.

But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

And in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter Chapter 1, Peter expands on this list and says that our lives will also be marked by diligence, moral excellence, knowledge, godliness, brotherly kindness, perseverance, and the wisdom that only comes from God.

If, however, we still choose to listen to our own voice, the voice of the world, and the voice of the enemy, then our **flesh** will be in control and our lives will be marked by what the Bible calls the fruits of the **flesh** as illustrated in this diagram:



So in this instance, the **flesh** smashes or quenches the Spirit and the Spirit has little ability to control your life. And the result is damage and destruction in our day to day existence.

### **Galatians 5:19-21**

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, your lives will produce these evil results: sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy,

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outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.

And beyond this list, we can add the following characteristics: Anger, Boasting, Pride, Malice, Prejudice, Hate, Selfishness, Gossip, Compromise, Confusion, Lies, Deceit, Frustration, Fear, Failure, Abuse, A sense of Panic, Tension and Anxiety, Separation, Depression, Discontentment, Shame, Discord, Paranoia, Condemnation, Disappointment, Sadness, Spiritual Exhaustion, Loneliness, and Confusion.

Now, there are many in the Religion of Christianity who do not understand this concept that in the **flesh** they can never find life. So they try and control their **flesh** and try and force it to follow God. They try and discipline it and train it to sound and look like a Christian. They teach it the language, looks, and behaviors that they believe are “fitting” for a good Christian, but the reality is that the **flesh** is corrupt and always will be. The only alternative is to learn to live by the **new creation**.

So now that I have laid the ground for what distinguishes a believer from a non-believer, this brings us all the way back to the issue of sin and what are we to do with it. The answer might surprise you, but as a believer we are to do absolutely nothing with it except to ignore it. We are to consider ourselves dead to it. We are not to fight it and we are not to struggle with it. We are to consider it as something that was killed off when we made the exchange of our life for His life.

We are to despise it and loath it and have nothing to do with it. That is where our mind and our emotions come in. We must choose to not listen to its voice and we are to give it no time or space in our lives – no matter how loudly it cries for attention. We are to consider ourselves dead to its ways, dead to its desires, and we are to consider ourselves deaf to its voice. This is where faith comes into play – actively believing the truth. We are to be fully convinced that nothing good lies within the **flesh** and the results of living by the **flesh** are only pain. We are to know that it is an enemy of God; and therefore, we are to actively choose to ignore its call.

In the alternative, we are to choose – yes choose – to set our minds on the things of God. If our mind and our emotions are centered on the things of God, there will be no room for the flesh to operate and control. If we are listening to the voice of God, we won't be listening to the voice of the **flesh**. And as a result, our lives will **not** be marked by sin, for the Spirit will be in control and will in effect live through us so that our lives will naturally reflect God. Our desires, our longings will be in alignment with the Spirit and so we won't choose to let sin have a dominate place in our lives.

Now I want to make this last point very clear because it is the very foundation of what I have been talking about for the last few weeks regarding faith. And as with most things of God, this whole idea of faith is kind of upside down and inside out. We tend to think that we have to do certain things and behave in certain ways to be good Christians and be right with God. In other words, getting back to the initial questions, we believe need to stop sinning and start doing some other form of behavior that is more God like. So like men and women of religion, we start trying to define the list of good and bad and right and wrong and start trying our best to follow it. But that is a recipe for failure. That old religious mindset is entirely wrong. We cannot **behave** our way to faith or right standing with God. We cannot behave our way to being under the control of the Spirit. We must **believe** our way to life with God. **Faith is about believing**; and the doing that God desires will flow as a natural result of our actively believing the truth.

In other words, the quality of our life, the quality of our relationships, and the way we behave is the evidence of what we believe at any moment in time. When you see a stove red hot, you know and believe that if you place your hand on it you will be burned. So you don't do that. That is an example of actively believing the truth.

- If you believe the truth about God, and base your choices and your thoughts on that truth, then your life will naturally reflect His nature because you will desire the things that come from God. The Spirit will rule and reign in your lives. Then you will merely be a vessel through which He lives. As a result, others will experience God through your life. You will become the evidence of His existence.
- If, however, you choose to not believe the truth, or you are convinced that the error that you have been taught is the truth, then your life will naturally reflect the fruits of the **flesh**.

So as an unbeliever considering making the decision for the first time to receive Jesus' free gift of eternal life, you don't have to stop sinning, you can just come. You can just receive. That is all that Jesus wants of you. To believe by faith that He is both Savior and Lord. If, you believe that due to the desperation of your spiritual condition, you must have new life, you must have this new nature that God offers you, then you can be restored to God and have eternal life beginning now and your life will be marked by His righteousness.

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The same goes for those who have become Christians. If you believe that you must then stop sinning in order to be a good Christian, then you will live a life of frustration and powerlessness. You will be like a hamster in a ball, trying real hard, running real fast, but never getting anywhere and once again, your life will be dominated by the **flesh**. Instead, you must believe the truth. If you set your minds and your thoughts on the things of God, and are willing to believe all that God has told you about Himself, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, and about your new life in Him, and if you align your choices with the truth, then you will live, move and operate out of the **new creation**. If you believe that He is our living manna, that He alone satisfies, then you will look to only Him for your life, and no where else. You will learn what it means to live by the power of the Holy Spirit and the **flesh** and sin will be powerless to control you.

One final word! This is the miracle of the new birth; this is the power of the new creation. And it can be yours. If you let Him, Jesus will be both your Savior and your Lord. He will live His life through you and you will get the privilege of experiencing the fullness of God's presence and His power in and through your life. This is a pretty good exchange – your life for His life. It's a pretty good offer – there is none better.

### **Matthew 16:25,26**

If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?

Let's Pray.



I have been talking about what it means to experience new life in Christ, and how we are to walk by faith – which I have defined as the process of uniting the true knowledge of Jesus Christ with active belief – a belief that causes you to make choices in alignment with the truth. And in regard to experiencing that new life, last week, I addressed two critical questions that have troubled many who have taken a look into Christianity:

1. Does God require us to stop sinning and clean up our act before we come to Him?
2. Does God require us to stop sinning and clean up our act after we come to Him?

The answer to both questions was No! With regard to the first question, all God asks is for you to believe the truth about your sinful condition and the truth about Jesus having died for your sins and then having been resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit which is the same power that He will give to you if you choose to believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. There is nothing you have to do except come to Him on that basis and believe. The scriptures say:

### **Romans 10:9-11**

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.”

If you are willing to come and receive His free gift of eternal life, He will forgive you and cleanse you from all your sin, and as He said, you will not be disappointed. You will find new life in Christ.

With regard to the second question, God is not expecting you to go and try and stop sinning – you can't. So as part of your new life in Christ, He will make you into a new creation that can live according to His heart, according to His ways, and will desire to fulfill His will. This new creation is where the Holy Spirit will live and have communion with you and this is how God Himself guides you and leads you through this life. The new creation, however, lives by faith, thus, once again all God asks is for you to believe the truth about Him being your life, your living manna, your very sustenance. And if you come to Him every day on that basis, you will naturally align your choices with that truth and your life will not be marked by sin, which is the outpouring of the **flesh**, but it will be marked by love which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That is what is so amazing to me about God. Anything that God asks of you, He will be willing to do through you if only you let Him have control of your life.

This brings us to another question that I was asked after last weeks teaching. I was asked how I made the so called “leap” of faith and what was it that finally convinced me that it was all true.

This is the question of a seeker? This is the question of someone who is starting down the path that will ultimately lead to Christ. So I am going to take a few moments to discuss how I became a believer and made that so called “leap” of faith. I was raised catholic and so I had a strong sense of God, Jesus, the Spirit, the devil, heaven, hell, right, wrong, good, bad, righteousness and sin. But I did not have a grasp of the love of God towards me: towards Steve, as an individual. The concepts of the love of God were always more global and all encompassing – God so loved the world that He sent Jesus – but they were not personal. On the flip side, God's anger, judgment, and wrath were all very personal to me. I was definitely afraid of going to hell. I always walked around with a sense that God was mad at me, disappointed in me, and was ready to punish me each time I sinned. I had what I liked to call a deep reverence for God; but, honestly, it was not really reverence – it was just flat out fear. I had no real idea of how to connect to God except to try and be good – which of course, as we studied over the last few weeks, is impossible. No one can be good; we are all sinners by nature and by choice. This left me in a very common place – a lot of people had this kind of experience with God, but still I was confused and something did not seem right. I knew there had to be more. Eventually, my family left the Catholic Church, actually we were asked to leave over my parent's controversial use of birth control in a time when that was still considered a mortal sin.

It seemed that for the longest time we never went to church, which quite frankly I was very ok with. But a neighbor invited my sister, one summer, to a Young Life camp. Young Life is a Christian organization that works with primarily with high school students, and while at this camp, my sister made the decision to believe in Jesus as both her Savior and Lord.

Last week when I talked to you about how in response to such a decision, God makes you a new person – well that was never more real to me than what I saw happen in the life of my sister. My sister and I were extremely close and knew each other so well, but suddenly she was different. She had been changed and at first, I did not like it. So I mocked her: called her a Jesus freak and a wacko Christian and I teased her often. But the amazing thing is that although I know it hurt her deeply, she still loved me and treated me with kindness (in fact way more kindness than I remember her treating me with before she was a Christian).

My sister also started going to church with that same neighbor. This was not the Catholic Church but a church that was filled with those that we would call “born again” types. Eventually, due to how much my sister changed, my Mom became very intrigued and started to go to church as well and dragged me and my little brother with her. This was about 10 months after my sister had come back from camp – plenty of time to see if her changes were real or were just some hyped up religious phase.

This church was amazing. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. First of all, these people seemed to love being there and were not there sitting stone faced out of duty, guilt, or compulsion, but they were there because they genuinely wanted to be there. They were also unusually loving. I had not experienced that before; but these people treated me with kindness, gentleness, affection, and I felt like they really cared about me. Then the pastor talked over and over about the love of God and how much He loves me as an individual. He talked about how I could experience that love every day, like a fresh down pour of rain. He talked about how God loves me so much that He came to die for me so that I might live. Then He said that I could know God as my Father, and I could be a child of God and His love could be mine. This was a totally new paradigm for my spiritual mind. God as a Father – that sounded a bit personal and intimate. I had never been introduced to God in that manner. I was used to the God of wrath and judgment – this gray haired guy who is all powerful and unapproachable. But I was told that I don’t have to fear God. I was told that I don’t have to look over my shoulder all the time worrying that God was going to thump me each time I sinned. I was told that I could have all my sins removed and that I could be clean and righteous by what Jesus did for me on the Cross.

I remember sitting in the back of that church just thinking about the fact that God actually knows who I am – this little speck in the vast universe; yet He cares about me, and He really loves me. So I was soaking this in like it was the most amazing news I could have ever been told. But what made it all so real to me were two things: (1) how much my sister had changed, and (2) they way all these people loved each other and loved me like I had never been loved like that before. They were my evidence. They were my proof that all that the pastor was saying was true. A person can have new life; and a person can have the love of God poured out and manifest in their life. I saw it, I experienced it, and I knew it was real!

So for me, when I decided to believe in Jesus and accept Him as my Lord and Savior, I did not have to take some big “leap” of faith. There was no big gap where I had to close my eyes and jump. This was not an issue of blind faith. This was not some leap into the void where I had to trust that God was going to catch me. No! This was a rational and emotional step that I took to believe while standing on solid evidence of what God can do in the lives of those who seek Him.

During those times when I received Jesus, there were many people who were like I am today. Keep in mind this was the early aftermath of what has been called the Jesus movement which started with the college age kids of the late 60’s and early 70’s. This is a group that wanted nothing to do with religion; they were totally burned out on all that tradition and rigidity, but wanted everything to do with Jesus. During this time the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God into the lives of these believers was amazing. Unfortunately, over time religion still got its foot in the door and once again this movement within Christianity was yanked back to a legalistic, sin centered, and behavior oriented approach to God. And like a cancer, this religion sucked away the life from this movement and the Spirit of God was largely quenched. This is why many of you sit here never really having had the kind of proof that I had as to God’s existence and the life changing power of faith that was demonstrated through love.

I guess I had it easier, but don’t worry, God still wants you to find Him. He still wants to prove to you that He is who He says He is, that He will be to you all that He has promised. He still wants you to know beyond a shadow of a doubt how much He loves you, thinks of you, and wants to be in your life. He wants to prove to you how much He wants to heal and restore all the damage and pain that you have endured so that you can live a life that becomes living proof to others that God is. And He wants this proof to be so convincing that like me, you are not taking some big “leap” of faith out into the void, but you are making a rational and emotional decision based on God proving to you that He is real – based on your seeing and experiencing His amazing love.

I hope you understand that I am not just talking to non-believers. Many of you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, but have never really given up total control of your life to Him as Lord. Like non-believers, you struggle with unbelief. You do not believe that God is enough. You do not believe that God is sufficient. You do not believe that in Jesus is everything you need for life. You do not believe that God is really going to help you here and now. You are not happy with the way you think God has managed your life. You still need proof, you still need evidence, and you are still waiting for God to come down in a pillar of fire before you are willing to relinquish total control and say: Ok, Lord, your will and not mine.

But I want you to stop waiting for that pillar of fire. Instead, I want you to start searching out and believing the truth



about God. In fact, I want all of you to be willing to actively engage your brain and your emotions, and not stop seeking until He reveals Himself to you, and you **know** how much He loves you. If you grasp in your heart, mind and soul the depth of His love for you, then you can rest in the reality that everything that He allows in your life is an expression of His love, then maybe you will be willing to drop your walls, tear down the barriers that you have erected to protect yourself, and trust Jesus with your life.

Tonight we are going to focus on the reality of God's love for you as an individual. This might surprise you, but you are not a stranger to God. You are not just some nothing in the mass of humanity. I know many of you have felt like in this world that you are alone and no one really understands you. But that is not the case. Each and every one of you is special to God and more importantly, He knows you – He knows everything about you – and He even knows you better than you know yourself. And He wants to lead you and guide you in His pathways. To understand this, we are going to be looking at Psalm 139.

### ***Psalm 139:1-6***

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know!

God is not just some gray haired old man sitting in the skies, or however you have pictured God. He is a loving father that is **interested** and **involved** in all the details of our lives. He is just not worried about the big things: world events and movements of nations. Sure He does deal with those issues, but He is also interested in who we are, what we are doing, what we are thinking, what we are feeling and He is always there for us. And because He **precedes** us, there is nothing that we do that can surprise Him. He already knows what we are going to do, the choices we are going to make; and, yet, He still chooses to love us and is still interested in being with us. And because He **follows** us, He is ready to deal with all the aftermath of the choices we make and bring healing into our lives and help us grow into people who reflect His nature.

Imagine, God knows you so well that He even knows your every thought, including all those secret notions that turn and churn in your hearts and your minds. He knows all your underlying motivations, your desires, all of the most intimate details of who you are. This can be a little bit intimidating to realize that nothing is hidden from His sight. But in reality, this is good news. This means that because His knowledge is so great and so detailed, that He and only He knows what is best for our lives and only He knows how to guide us to the right paths. Which after all is what He is really interested in – each of you learning to walk in the paths that He has established so that His will in heaven is done here on earth. There is great freedom in this truth. We don't have to listen to all the myriad of messages and ideas regarding who we are, what we are to be, and how we are to live. Instead, we can go to the ultimate authority – the one who knows. We can seek out and know His wisdom for our lives and we can have great security in knowing that the God of the universe chooses the paths that are best for us.

### ***Psalm 25:10***

All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.

His paths are good, they are what is best for us regardless of what it feels. His wisdom is above our wisdom. His knowledge is above our knowledge. And He knows us better than we know ourselves, so He is safe to trust. That is why it is ok to put your life in His hands.

Let's look at verses 7-12 of this Psalm 139.

### ***Psalm 139: 7-12***

I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night — but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you.



The good news that is announced in these verses is that God's love will always be with you. There is nothing you can do and no where you can go to escape His love. Maybe you have not been walking by faith, maybe you have been living totally so serve your old man and you life is a mess, marked by sin, confusion, and pain. Maybe you have pushed the Holy Spirit down into you little finger so you really have no ability anymore to hear His voice and His instruction. Don't despair, that does not change or impact God's love for you. God is ever present and is always in a position to help you, to guide you, to hold you up. And even in our rebellion and our stubbornness, He still protects that which He has given us – His life.

You must understand that He is not impacted by our choices – whether good or bad. He is sufficient and He is complete. That is why light and darkness are the same to Him. He is not impacted by the things that impact us. In other words, wherever you are today (living in the light, living in the darkness, or in some shade of gray) does not matter in terms of God's love and affection for you. He loves you in an unconditional way that is not limited in quantity or quality. It is a supernatural love that is immeasurable and innumerable. The only thing that is impacted by where you are today is your ability to enjoy that love and your ability to participate in the goodness that comes from living in His light: the ability to experience the peace, the rest and the abundance that we have been talking about for last number of weeks. All of it is always available to you, because God is always available for you.

### ***Psalm 139:13-16***

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous — and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

God was there from the beginning. He was the master architect of your life. His hands made you who you are. That is why He knows everything about you and even knows what you don't know. Even your body, in all its intricate glory, was all Him. In fact, it is my opinion that when you look at the complexity of a single cell, much less the entirety of the human body and all its organs, glands, chemicals, and fluids, you have to have faith beyond mine to actually believe that it happened by chance and grew from some galactic goo. To me, it all screams of a creator, an unfathomable design full of complexity. It is a picture of a love that is beyond description. I say love because in its complexity, it is all so beautiful, all so marvelous, and it all causes me to want to lift up my voice in praise.

### ***Colossians 1:15-17***

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the one **through whom** God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see — kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. **[that means angels and demons alike and all that exists in the spirit world]** Everything has been created through him and for him. He existed before everything else began, and he holds all creation together.

Not only did God set the beginning of our lives, He has also established the final moments for each of our lives. In the book of Hebrews, (chapter 9:27) we are told that even death is an appointment for us. This should bring us great comfort to know that life is not just some random accident waiting to happen. It is not just an issue of chance or even an issue of fate. God has it all in His hands. Your life, your existence is because of Him. So we can rest, we can have peace, we don't have to be worried about the future. He has it in His hands and we need to learn to live in it and experience the fullness of His love for our lives. Like creation, even death is precious and beautiful when we understand it is in His hands.

### ***Psalms 116:15***

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.

God considers the death of His **own** precious because the death of a believer is the beginning of our experiencing, unhindered, the entirety of the Godhead in all its amazing fullness. When we die, we go to be with Him and we get to remain in His presence. For those of you who might be taking notes, you can find this in 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; and Philippians 1:21-26. That is why we don't have to fear our appointment with death; in fact, we can even look forward to it. For on that day we step out of these frail and decaying bodies that have been corrupted by sin, into a new life that is in the presence of the Lord – never again to struggle with or even have to deal with the cancer of sin.

## Laying the Foundation - **Love Is the Proof**

Once again, I see nothing but the love of God. The fact that His hands not only created me, but He has established both the beginning and end of my life gives me confidence, it gives me comfort, it gives me assurance, it removes fear, and gives me a hope of a future to which I can look forward to. That to me is one of the most fabulous parts of the Christian life. I have a hope for a future that is far beyond what I can imagine. The best parts of this life are like a shadow compared to the joy and beauty and glory that awaits us in eternity.

### ***Psalm 139:17***

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God! They are innumerable! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand!

I have said this over and over again. God is thinking about each of you. His thoughts toward you are, as the psalmist said, innumerable! Think of it this way, when you fall in love with someone – or even totally attracted to someone in that early infatuation stage, all you can do is think of them. You start to notice all sorts of little things about them, the way they move, the inflections in their voice, and even their smell. You start to understand how they think, how they approach situations, their emotional constitution, and you start to take interest in the things that interest them. You become somewhat obsessed with that person. That is how God is with us all the time, everyday. As we talked about, He already knows everything about us; yet, amazingly He does not get bored, He does not tire of us, He does not lose interest, and we never become common place for Him. He is always thinking of us. He is always wanting us come to Him and receive more and more of His goodness for our lives.

### ***Psalm 139:18***

And when I wake up in the morning, you are still with me!

I believe there are two ways we can look at this: literally or through the metaphor. I think the literal understanding is all too obvious – God is omni-present and so of course He is there when I wake up in the morning – He is everywhere, always! But more importantly, when we finally get tired of living in the darkness, when we finally get tired of our hovel of self interest and self focus and we wake up, He is there waiting for us. He never leaves or departs from us no matter how far we try and run. He is not standing there with a finger that is shaking at us in utter disappointment, and He is not standing there with a gavel in His hands ready to pronounce judgment. Rather, He greets us with the morning light that brings warmth, comfort, sight, and joy.

This is our God. This is the God who loves you. This is the God who gave up His only Son to suffer cruelly at the hands of mere man in order to extend His love and His mercy to you.

### ***1 John 4:8-10***

God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

I want you to understand that He is safe. I want you to understand that He wants to pour the love of a Father into your lives. I want you to understand that He knows exactly what you need, and He knows how to bring you to that place where you can experience the fullness of Him. Remember, He is always thinking of you, so now maybe its time for you to start thinking of Him. He can be trusted not only for Salvation and eternal life, but as your Lord, He can be trusted with every part of your life. You can let go of your self-interest, your self-protection, your self-focus, your self promotion, your self-serving choices – for none of us have ever been very good at leading our own lives and having the wisdom to do it right. But that is exactly what He is offering to you – the wisdom of God so you will know how to make the right choice every time, in every circumstance of your life. God loves you so much. He loves you enough to wait for you to **wake up**. He is there, and He is offering you the **morning light**, He is offering you the fullness of His love which can be experienced 24x7. His love in you, and His love through you. Oh by the way, remember, whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed. That is a promise.

Let's pray.



I have been talking about what it means to experience new life in Christ, and how we are to walk by faith – which I have defined as the process of uniting the true knowledge of Jesus Christ with active belief – a belief that causes you to make choices in alignment with the truth. And in regard to experiencing that new life, last week, I addressed two critical questions that have troubled many who have taken a look into Christianity:

1. Does God require us to stop sinning and clean up our act before we come to Him?
2. Does God require us to stop sinning and clean up our act after we come to Him?

The answer to both questions was No! With regard to the first question, all God asks is for you to believe the truth about your sinful condition and the truth about Jesus having died for your sins and then having been resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit which is the same power that He will give to you if you choose to believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. There is nothing you have to do except come to Him on that basis and believe. The scriptures say:

### **Romans 10:9-11**

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.”

If you are willing to come and receive His free gift of eternal life, He will forgive you and cleanse you from all your sin, and as He said, you will not be disappointed. You will find new life in Christ.

With regard to the second question, God is not expecting you to go and try and stop sinning – you can't. So as part of your new life in Christ, He will make you into a new creation that can live according to His heart, according to His ways, and will desire to fulfill His will. This new creation is where the Holy Spirit will live and have communion with you and this is how God Himself guides you and leads you through this life. The new creation, however, lives by faith, thus, once again all God asks is for you to believe the truth about Him being your life, your living manna, your very sustenance. And if you come to Him every day on that basis, you will naturally align your choices with that truth and your life will not be marked by sin, which is the outpouring of the **flesh**, but it will be marked by love which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. That is what is so amazing to me about God. Anything that God asks of you, He will be willing to do through you if only you let Him have control of your life.

This brings us to another question that I was asked after last weeks teaching. I was asked how I made the so called “leap” of faith and what was it that finally convinced me that it was all true.

This is the question of a seeker? This is the question of someone who is starting down the path that will ultimately lead to Christ. So I am going to take a few moments to discuss how I became a believer and made that so called “leap” of faith. I was raised catholic and so I had a strong sense of God, Jesus, the Spirit, the devil, heaven, hell, right, wrong, good, bad, righteousness and sin. But I did not have a grasp of the love of God towards me: towards Steve, as an individual. The concepts of the love of God were always more global and all encompassing – God so loved the world that He sent Jesus – but they were not personal. On the flip side, God's anger, judgment, and wrath were all very personal to me. I was definitely afraid of going to hell. I always walked around with a sense that God was mad at me, disappointed in me, and was ready to punish me each time I sinned. I had what I liked to call a deep reverence for God; but, honestly, it was not really reverence – it was just flat out fear. I had no real idea of how to connect to God except to try and be good – which of course, as we studied over the last few weeks, is impossible. No one can be good; we are all sinners by nature and by choice. This left me in a very common place – a lot of people had this kind of experience with God, but still I was confused and something did not seem right. I knew there had to be more. Eventually, my family left the Catholic Church, actually we were asked to leave over my parent's controversial use of birth control in a time when that was still considered a mortal sin.

It seemed that for the longest time we never went to church, which quite frankly I was very ok with. But a neighbor invited my sister, one summer, to a Young Life camp. Young Life is a Christian organization that works with primarily with high school students, and while at this camp, my sister made the decision to believe in Jesus as both her Savior and Lord.

Last week when I talked to you about how in response to such a decision, God makes you a new person – well that was never more real to me than what I saw happen in the life of my sister. My sister and I were extremely close and knew each other so well, but suddenly she was different. She had been changed and at first, I did not like it. So I mocked her: called her a Jesus freak and a wacko Christian and I teased her often. But the amazing thing is that although I know it hurt her deeply, she still loved me and treated me with kindness (in fact way more kindness than I remember her treating me with before she was a Christian).

My sister also started going to church with that same neighbor. This was not the Catholic Church but a church that was filled with those that we would call “born again” types. Eventually, due to how much my sister changed, my Mom became very intrigued and started to go to church as well and dragged me and my little brother with her. This was about 10 months after my sister had come back from camp – plenty of time to see if her changes were real or were just some hyped up religious phase.

This church was amazing. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. First of all, these people seemed to love being there and were not there sitting stone faced out of duty, guilt, or compulsion, but they were there because they genuinely wanted to be there. They were also unusually loving. I had not experienced that before; but these people treated me with kindness, gentleness, affection, and I felt like they really cared about me. Then the pastor talked over and over about the love of God and how much He loves me as an individual. He talked about how I could experience that love every day, like a fresh down pour of rain. He talked about how God loves me so much that He came to die for me so that I might live. Then He said that I could know God as my Father, and I could be a child of God and His love could be mine. This was a totally new paradigm for my spiritual mind. God as a Father – that sounded a bit personal and intimate. I had never been introduced to God in that manner. I was used to the God of wrath and judgment – this gray haired guy who is all powerful and unapproachable. But I was told that I don’t have to fear God. I was told that I don’t have to look over my shoulder all the time worrying that God was going to thump me each time I sinned. I was told that I could have all my sins removed and that I could be clean and righteous by what Jesus did for me on the Cross.

I remember sitting in the back of that church just thinking about the fact that God actually knows who I am – this little speck in the vast universe; yet He cares about me, and He really loves me. So I was soaking this in like it was the most amazing news I could have ever been told. But what made it all so real to me were two things: (1) how much my sister had changed, and (2) they way all these people loved each other and loved me like I had never been loved like that before. They were my evidence. They were my proof that all that the pastor was saying was true. A person can have new life; and a person can have the love of God poured out and manifest in their life. I saw it, I experienced it, and I knew it was real!

So for me, when I decided to believe in Jesus and accept Him as my Lord and Savior, I did not have to take some big “leap” of faith. There was no big gap where I had to close my eyes and jump. This was not an issue of blind faith. This was not some leap into the void where I had to trust that God was going to catch me. No! This was a rational and emotional step that I took to believe while standing on solid evidence of what God can do in the lives of those who seek Him.

During those times when I received Jesus, there were many people who were like I am today. Keep in mind this was the early aftermath of what has been called the Jesus movement which started with the college age kids of the late 60’s and early 70’s. This is a group that wanted nothing to do with religion; they were totally burned out on all that tradition and rigidity, but wanted everything to do with Jesus. During this time the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God into the lives of these believers was amazing. Unfortunately, over time religion still got its foot in the door and once again this movement within Christianity was yanked back to a legalistic, sin centered, and behavior oriented approach to God. And like a cancer, this religion sucked away the life from this movement and the Spirit of God was largely quenched. This is why many of you sit here never really having had the kind of proof that I had as to God’s existence and the life changing power of faith that was demonstrated through love.

I guess I had it easier, but don’t worry, God still wants you to find Him. He still wants to prove to you that He is who He says He is, that He will be to you all that He has promised. He still wants you to know beyond a shadow of a doubt how much He loves you, thinks of you, and wants to be in your life. He wants to prove to you how much He wants to heal and restore all the damage and pain that you have endured so that you can live a life that becomes living proof to others that God is. And He wants this proof to be so convincing that like me, you are not taking some big “leap” of faith out into the void, but you are making a rational and emotional decision based on God proving to you that He is real – based on your seeing and experiencing His amazing love.

I hope you understand that I am not just talking to non-believers. Many of you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, but have never really given up total control of your life to Him as Lord. Like non-believers, you struggle with unbelief. You do not believe that God is enough. You do not believe that God is sufficient. You do not believe that in Jesus is everything you need for life. You do not believe that God is really going to help you here and now. You are not happy with the way you think God has managed your life. You still need proof, you still need evidence, and you are still waiting for God to come down in a pillar of fire before you are willing to relinquish total control and say: Ok, Lord, your will and not mine.

But I want you to stop waiting for that pillar of fire. Instead, I want you to start searching out and believing the truth

about God. In fact, I want all of you to be willing to actively engage your brain and your emotions, and not stop seeking until He reveals Himself to you, and you **know** how much He loves you. If you grasp in your heart, mind and soul the depth of His love for you, then you can rest in the reality that everything that He allows in your life is an expression of His love, then maybe you will be willing to drop your walls, tear down the barriers that you have erected to protect yourself, and trust Jesus with your life.

Tonight we are going to focus on the reality of God's love for you as an individual. This might surprise you, but you are not a stranger to God. You are not just some nothing in the mass of humanity. I know many of you have felt like in this world that you are alone and no one really understands you. But that is not the case. Each and every one of you is special to God and more importantly, He knows you – He knows everything about you – and He even knows you better than you know yourself. And He wants to lead you and guide you in His pathways. To understand this, we are going to be looking at Psalm 139.

### ***Psalm 139:1-6***

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know!

God is not just some gray haired old man sitting in the skies, or however you have pictured God. He is a loving father that is **interested** and **involved** in all the details of our lives. He is just not worried about the big things: world events and movements of nations. Sure He does deal with those issues, but He is also interested in who we are, what we are doing, what we are thinking, what we are feeling and He is always there for us. And because He **precedes** us, there is nothing that we do that can surprise Him. He already knows what we are going to do, the choices we are going to make; and, yet, He still chooses to love us and is still interested in being with us. And because He **follows** us, He is ready to deal with all the aftermath of the choices we make and bring healing into our lives and help us grow into people who reflect His nature.

Imagine, God knows you so well that He even knows your every thought, including all those secret notions that turn and churn in your hearts and your minds. He knows all your underlying motivations, your desires, all of the most intimate details of who you are. This can be a little bit intimidating to realize that nothing is hidden from His sight. But in reality, this is good news. This means that because His knowledge is so great and so detailed, that He and only He knows what is best for our lives and only He knows how to guide us to the right paths. Which after all is what He is really interested in – each of you learning to walk in the paths that He has established so that His will in heaven is done here on earth. There is great freedom in this truth. We don't have to listen to all the myriad of messages and ideas regarding who we are, what we are to be, and how we are to live. Instead, we can go to the ultimate authority – the one who knows. We can seek out and know His wisdom for our lives and we can have great security in knowing that the God of the universe chooses the paths that are best for us.

### ***Psalm 25:10***

All the paths of the LORD are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.

His paths are good, they are what is best for us regardless of what it feels. His wisdom is above our wisdom. His knowledge is above our knowledge. And He knows us better than we know ourselves, so He is safe to trust. That is why it is ok to put your life in His hands.

Let's look at verses 7-12 of this Psalm 139.

### ***Psalm 139: 7-12***

I can never escape from your spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night — but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you.

The good news that is announced in these verses is that God's love will always be with you. There is nothing you can do and no where you can go to escape His love. Maybe you have not been walking by faith, maybe you have been living



## Laying the Foundation - **Stand and Endure**

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You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous — and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

God was there from the beginning. He was the master architect of your life. His hands made you who you are. That is why He knows everything about you and even knows what you don't know. Even your body, in all its intricate glory, was all Him. In fact, it is my opinion that when you look at the complexity of a single cell, much less the entirety of the human body and all its organs, glands, chemicals, and fluids, you have to have faith beyond mine to actually believe that it happened by chance and grew from some galactic goo. To me, it all screams of a creator, an unfathomable design full of complexity. It is a picture of a love that is beyond description. I say love because in its complexity, it is all so beautiful, all so marvelous, and it all causes me to want to lift up my voice in praise.

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And when I wake up in the morning, you are still with me!

I believe there are two ways we can look at this: literally or through the metaphor. I think the literal understanding is all too obvious – God is omni-present and so of course He is there when I wake up in the morning – He is everywhere, always! But more importantly, when we finally get tired of living in the darkness, when we finally get tired of our hovel of self interest and self focus and we wake up, He is there waiting for us. He never leaves or departs from us no matter how far we try and run. He is not standing there with a finger that is shaking at us in utter disappointment, and He is not standing there with a gavel in His hands ready to pronounce judgment. Rather, He greets us with the morning light that brings warmth, comfort, sight, and joy.

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I want you to understand that He is safe. I want you to understand that He wants to pour the love of a Father into your lives. I want you to understand that He knows exactly what you need, and He knows how to bring you to that place where you can experience the fullness of Him. Remember, He is always thinking of you, so now maybe its time for you to start thinking of Him. He can be trusted not only for Salvation and eternal life, but as your Lord, He can be trusted with every part of your life. You can let go of your self-interest, your self-protection, your self-focus, your self promotion, your self-serving choices – for none of us have ever been very good at leading our own lives and having the wisdom to do it right. But that is exactly what He is offering to you – the wisdom of God so you will know how to make the right choice every time, in every circumstance of your life. God loves you so much. He loves you enough to wait for you to **wake up**. He is there, and He is offering you the **morning light**, He is offering you the fullness of His love which can be experienced 24x7. His love in you, and His love through you. Oh by the way, remember, whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed. That is a promise.

Let's pray.