

A New Life through Spiritual Birth

Have you just been born again? That's truly wonderful, but please don't go running off into the wild world out there without sticking around long enough to find out what just happened to you!

At the time of your conversion, there was a whole lot more going on than could possibly meet the eye, even those beautiful new spiritual eyes that your new-found faith in Jesus has given you.



You will also need to know the essentials about how to live this new life, especially how to stay connected to your new Source. So, unless you've been born again many times before, why not settle down and learn some basics which will get your growth in grace off to a great start?

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' John 3:6-7 ESV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A New Life through Spiritual Birth

A Simple Analogy

When a baby is born its former life as a fetus comes to an abrupt, decisive and irrevocable end: There's no going back to the womb! That place of darkness held the seed of life while it grew, but now a child has been brought into the light!

What Just Happened?

If you prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior, then God your Father in heaven has been showering you with some very astounding gifts. You may already be aware of some of them, but most were taking place under the radar.

A Quick Start Guide

Here is the Quick Start Guide for some of the most powerful tools in the universe: the Word of God, the Name of Jesus, the indwelling Spirit, and the righteousness of Christ. That's a ton of divine equipment! Let's get your race off to a good start.



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The "Starter Kit"

If you are a new Christian, you have been given a great “starter kit” of heavenly blessings, but it carries no guarantee you will have a happy or wholesome life. Make sure you know what’s in it, but don’t stop there: Get these three essential “extras.”

The "Big Five" Connectors

There are five things that every Christian needs to do in order to stay well-connected to our Source. The great thing is that Jesus in you loves doing these five things—He did them all the time when He walked the earth. Now, it’s our turn.

Connector 1: The Bible

Think of the Bible as Jesus in written form. He is the Word made flesh. Jesus spoke the words that brought all of creation into being. If His spoken Word can do that, think what His written Word can do for you, to bring you fully to life.

Connector 2: Prayer

Prayer is calling on God for mercy, for help or for fellowship. He delights in listening—no request is too small. Learn to let your need drive you to Him every time. You cannot wear out the welcome mat and He has promised to always answer us.

Connector 3: Worship

Worship is that higher form of our conversation with the Lord where we are not petitioning Him for what we need but thanking and praising Him for who He is and what He has already done. This brings us speedily into close communion with Him.

Connector 4: Fellowship

A lovely side-effect of our new-found fellowship with God is that we can now enjoy a divinely enabled fellowship with each other. That fellowship with other believers, in turn, enables us to stay in closer fellowship with our God.

Connector 5: Service

Service takes us into the realm where we learn to give ourselves, expecting nothing in return, simply because it is the right and loving thing to do. God always rewards those who follow Jesus in laying down their lives in service to others.

New Birth = New Creation

Being “born of the Spirit” means that you are a brand-new creation, but the old you is still around, looking for ways of overthrowing what the Lord has done. That “old man” has to stay knocked down, for the new you to enjoy the sweet air of freedom.

New Creation = New Identity

You are a new creation! Much progress will be made as you learn to understand and believe the reality of your new identity and the personality that comes along with it. Don't stay stuck on who you were: a new you wants to come forth!

The Power of Your Will

Apart from God, your will is the most powerful thing in your universe. It has the power to choose heaven or hell as your ultimate destination and a heaven-infused life versus a hellish one down here. The trouble is it doesn't work well apart from God.



Spiritual Growth ABCs

Even babies begin growing as soon as they leave the womb. Now that you've left the dark womb of the world behind, you're going to need a clear idea about which way is up where your growth is concerned. This is the key to accelerated growth.

Spiritual Growth Moments

Spiritual growth opportunities are often not what we think. This makes them easy to miss. It helps to understand what spiritual growth is not, in order to keep our eyes peeled for the God-orchestrated moments that will help us grow.

Spiritual Health

Spiritual healing goes deepest of all. Even though the reality of our spirit lies beyond the ability of our five senses to experience, it nevertheless holds the answer to all that affects our lives. Only this one thing can bring us into genuine spiritual health.



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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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CHAPTER ONE

Spiritual Birth: A Simple Analogy

When a baby is born its former life as a fetus comes to an abrupt, decisive and irrevocable end: There is no going back to the womb! That place of darkness held the seed of life while it grew, but now the child has been brought forth into the light. The darkness of the womb may return in many forms--some comforting, some terrifying—as the infant grows through the cycles of day and night, of love and fear, of clarity and confusion. Such darkness, however, can always be overcome by fresh infusions of light.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' John 3:6-7 ESV

With natural birth, the primal "reign" of unrelieved darkness is shattered as the baby's eyes begin to see the true world which has always surrounded it. However, even that is not the decisive factor: The breath of life has come! Now that the child has breathed the sweet air of freedom, it can never return to an oxygen-less environment. To not see is to be deprived of fullness; to not breathe is to be deprived of life.

In the Upper Room on the evening of His Resurrection, Jesus literally breathed on the first disciples and they received the Holy Spirit, the "breath" (*ruach*) of God's life within themselves. That's when they were "born from above." They gained spiritual sight through faith-conversion.

They gained genuine spiritual life as their regenerated spirit was joined to the Holy Spirit.



So, it is with each one of us who are born again by a living faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. We have God's own life within ourselves! Holy Spirit is the One who inspires and empowers our faith, who unites us to God and Jesus, and who raises us and enables us to live the New Life that now is opening wide before us.

Spiritual Birth Initiates Three Relationships

The new life that we receive through spiritual birth ushers us into three intimate, divine relationships:

1. Father Planted the Seed of His Word

He has revealed Jesus to your formerly sin-darkened heart as only He can. By this He is drawing you out of darkness into the glorious light of His Son's kingdom. Your heavenly Father is raising you up through His Son to be His child.



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2. Jesus Is the Light of the World

He is God's Word of mercy who saves you, washing away the "filth" of the old ways. He is God's Word of truth who now enlightens your understanding, showing you the true way to walk with your God. He is your Lover, Savior, Master, Lord and Friend.

3. Holy Spirit Is the Breath of Life

You have been brought into a very intimate relationship with, shall we say, the Mystery Person of the Trinity, who is now your Helper, willing to live through you a life you will never be able to live without His help.

Your new top assignment is to know Them, believe in Them, love Them, serve Them and become Their friend! Yes, they are [Three in One](#), but... You need all Three! To be more properly "introduced" to your new spiritual "Parents" we have included a section on [Our God](#). For now, there is so much for you to learn about how to get started with this new life! Please explore the following articles.



CHAPTER TWO

What Just Happened to Me?

You are going to have a hard time believing all of this! If you prayed to receive Jesus as your Savior, then God your Father in heaven has been showering you with some very astounding gifts. You may already be aware of some of them, but most were taking place under the radar. It takes "gospel glasses" to see them. Good thing we've got a spare pair...

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!
Matthew 7:11 ESV

Some of This You Don't Need to Be Told

You know better than anyone the power of liberation you felt, or sensed, or realized, or in some way experienced when you first became a believer in Jesus. What was the key note for you?

- That your sins were forgiven?
- That you realized you would be going to heaven?
- That a huge burden was lifted?
- That you suddenly felt the love of God or the peace that passes understanding?
- That you discovered that Jesus is real, that He is Alive and that He is Lord?



Some people even have visions, hear the voice of God, and receive immediate healing and other astounding supernatural happenings. These are the "ordinary" things that happen to new believers in the realm of experience. You will soon learn (if you haven't already) that personal experience is not the main way that we discover reality, nor is it the final arbiter of truth. We go to God's written Word, the Bible, to find out what's really real and what's really going on. This isn't the way that comes most naturally to us. From infancy on we have been doing a lot of our learning through four main avenues:

- The five senses
- The opinions of other people
- Our own experiences
- Our own understanding

Those four powerful ways of learning are not fool proof, since even "fools" are guided by these same things. Now that we have encountered the Lord, it should be obvious that everything has to pass through His perspective and His understanding to become worthy of our belief and trust.

The Bible reveals God's truth to us. Knowing Jesus calls everything else we think we know into question: He alone is Lord.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ... that I may know him. Philippians 3:7-8, 10 ESV

Our experience of conversion launches a transformation within us, but those changes will only penetrate deeply if we allow God's perspective—coming to us through the Bible—to challenge or confirm everything our senses "tell" us, everything people tell us, everything we experience, or whatever we may have developed as our own understanding.

What God Did Behind the Scenes

Now, it's time to look behind the curtain — on the other side of the "veil" of time and space. What just happened? Our Father says through His Word that many things happened in the moment of our conversion that we had no way of truly experiencing. See [What is the new birth?](#) for a fuller treatment of these twelve "hidden" gifts.

- 1) You were spiritually dead; now you are alive in Christ.
- 2) You have been sealed to God.
- 3) You received a heart transplant.
- 4) You were "dead" in your trespasses and sins; now you are alive and free.
- 5) You have been "justified."
- 6) You have been liberated.
- 7) You were blind; now faith has opened your eyes.
- 8) The Image of God has been restored to you.
- 9) You have been "reborn" as a new creation.
- 10) You are now a child of God in the family of God.
- 11) You have been raised and are now seated with Christ in heavenly places.
- 12) You are "in Christ" and He is in you.

Believe it or not, there's more! The gifts of God are too numerous to enumerate, which makes searching things out in His Word an adventure. Walking with God is like a treasure hunt with the clues scattered all over scripture.

What to Do with Your Experiences

Treasure them in your heart. Never forget what God gave you in those moments! An enemy is sure to come around and try to get you to question what you were given, or doubt what you were shown. He is a thief and will seek to steal even your most powerful spiritual moments if he can. The Lord instructed the Israelites to set up memorial stones so that they would never forget their encounters with God or lose sight of what He did to rescue them in key moments of their journey. Be sure you do the same: Rehearse the key elements of what you have learned to engrave it upon your heart; take notes on day and time; tell others about your encounter with Christ; and keep a record of things in a journal of some kind.



These moments of encounter—and we hope you will have many more—are not the building blocks of your spiritual understanding. For that you will need to assemble scriptural knowledge, piece by piece, into a framework that makes sense of all you've been through, but which doesn't contradict the Bible or any basic Christian truths. God's Word is Truth according to no less of an authority than Jesus Himself. We bring everything to the scriptures to make sure it lines up with God's revealed Word. Even powerful spiritual experiences must "bend the knee" and submit to the Light of the eternal Word to be properly understood and interpreted.

Experiences Are for Devotion, Not Doctrine

Experiences are not the stuff doctrine is made of, but they are the great builders of your confidence. You will have plenty of need of confidence in the truths you have been shown and will be learning. This is a life of faith and trust — we literally "bet" our lives on the truth! So, if your handle on the truth is shaky, your walk will become wobbly. Right now, if you are experiencing the "glow" of a first encounter, you might be tempted to think, "I could never question this. I will never doubt God again. This is just too real!"

Certainly, fresh experience drowns out all else. But what will happen when you get down the road and you begin to have other experiences, such as unexpected times of stress and life pressures, or perplexing times when God seems to be allowing the exact opposite of what you expected, or times when today's feelings have "cooled off" and the enemy is pressing you with feelings of hurt, fear, or other strong temptations? In such times of trial, we hold on to two things: as much Bible truth as we can; and the memory of what we were shown and knew of God in the past. We put those two great anchors together with lots of prayer and stand fast. When we do that we always get through the storm to the other side.

Looks like we are starting to talk about the journey of faith more than its beginning. That must mean it's time to make sure you've got your ["Quick Start" Guide](#) and your ["Starter Kit"](#) prepared for setting out on the Lord's highway.



CHAPTER THREE

A "Quick Start" Guide

Every power tool comes with one of these nowadays and you've just been entrusted with some of the most powerful tools in the universe: the Word of God, the Name of Jesus, the indwelling Spirit, the righteousness of Christ. That's a ton of divine equipment! You could be "armed and dangerous" as a warrior for the Lord, but first you've got to figure out how the thing works.

Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20-21 ESV

Four for the Road

Before you head out into that wide world, be sure to load up on these necessary items for your journey. There's a whole lot more to it than this, but these pointers will get you going in the right direction. Why wear yourself out yanking on the crank of a lawn mower, when maybe you need to fill the tank or switch it on first?

Many things in the spiritual life won't come to you naturally or automatically. Learning to slow down and listen to a friend trying to advise you is a choice. Let these pointers from your "quick start guide" become good friends.



Item 1: Five Crucial Reminders

- 1) Keep the main thing the main thing — keep your focus on Jesus.
- 2) He loves you — trust Him
- 3) He is your Lord — follow Him
- 4) He is your Teacher — listen to Him.
- 5) He is your Savior — call on Him (whenever you have a need, or lose the peace, etc.)

Item 2: Two Key Acquisitions

There are a few things that you will need to get right away, or at least make consistent, determined headway on trying to get them:



1) A [Bible](#)

This is a must. We live by [faith](#). Without a vibrant faith our spiritual life withers and dies. Faith is grown by feeding it the life-giving Word of God. We also live by truth. Scripture is our “one stop shop” where truth is concerned: Jesus is the Word of God. His Word lightens our darkness, shows us our path, and strengthens us to walk in it. Through the scriptures we are trained in the many ways of worshipping God “in Spirit and in truth” which Jesus says the Father greatly desires.

2) A Church

Church will introduce you to [the "Big Five" Connectors](#) that every Christian needs in order to grow into the person Jesus created them to be—and train you in the ways of staying connected. Church is much bigger than the local church and it is not confined to or defined by the building, but that is a great place to start. Church is people like you, flawed but seeking to be faithful, whom the Father has gathered out of the world to prepare as “bridal lovers” of His Son and “gospel warriors” to rescue others trapped in darkness.

Item 3: Top Two Strategies

Yes, this is a love affair, but you definitely need a strategy to keep it on track. Even human level loves require some work to keep them within healthy boundaries and to keep the communication open and strong. This love requires extra vigilance, because a) you have an enemy gunning for you, b) you have a fallen nature just waiting to take you down; and c) you're still a babe in the woods.

1) Trust and Obey

You really can't do better than this one in seeking a principle of simplicity that you can hold in your head and that will orient your heart. By the way, it also helps you fulfill [the top two commands](#) Jesus requires of us—to love God (by trusting God) and to love others (by doing things His way).

2) Stay Connected!

Since our top strategy is to trust Him so that we can also follow Him, it stands to reason that we need to stay well-connected to Him. [The "Big Five" Connectors](#) are Bible, prayer, worship, fellowship, service. Go to a good church: They will help you get these five going.

Item 4: Top Three Questions

Good communication is the life blood of any relationship. With the Lord our communication can take two main forms: polite or pressured. Set times of [prayer](#) and [praise](#), talking over how things are going, thanking Him for His blessings represent ways of coming to the Lord “politely.” We can also go to the Lord under the pressure of events, such as our frequent need for forgiveness or for help. Daily life gives us limitless opportunities to develop a full-bodied conversational

relationship with Jesus over matters of pressing concern to us. The following three essential questions will grow a great conversation:

1) Jesus, What do you want me to do today?

Maybe all your life you only wanted to find out what you really wanted to do and find the best way to do it. But you are under new management now. Now that Jesus has been revealed, the only honorable and wise thing to do is go to Him for His leadership. He is still asking people everywhere to "leave their nets" and "follow Him." And why not? No one else in the world, not even your dog or your best friend, not even you on your wisest day, can hold a candle to the love He has for you and the beauty of the plans He has for your life, if you would only learn to let Him lead you into them. The key is our willingness to surrender. This is a daily practice. Sometimes it may seem like a duty; but do the duty for Him and He will make it into a delight--every time!

2) Lord, What are You trying to show me?

There is always something to learn and now that you are connected to the greatest Teacher alive, you can go to Him for instruction and insight concerning the things in your life that don't make sense or don't respond to your efforts to fix them.

3) Lord, How should I respond to this?

Jesus is always ready, willing and able to help us keep our old emotional reactions to people and events in check. We learn to reign in the old ways and go to Him for the new ones! His ways of handling things really work. Not only that but if we do things His way, we get to live in His peace as we go along. This beats the pants off getting stressed up because our old ways aren't working.

No one does these things perfectly—only the Lord is perfect—but if you do them sincerely and steadily, you will make good progress and stay on the right path while you're at it. You now have a deeply rooted desire to grow spiritually (can you sense it?). Just as the Holy Spirit gives an infant or toddler a desire to grow and learn (though they are certain to make a lot of minor mistakes in the process), so too the Holy Spirit is awakening in you a desire to grow spiritually. Why not head over to [Spiritual Growth ABCs](http://www.healingstreamsusa.org) and learn more about it?

CHAPTER FOUR

The "Starter Kit"

If you are a new Christian, you need to know that even though you have been given a great "starter kit" of heavenly blessings, it carries no guarantee you will have a happy or wholesome life. Make sure you know what's in it, but don't stop there: Put it to good use gaining these three essential "extras." Then, like the first disciples, once you've stayed and prayed, you'll be ready to go out with power: power for living and power for supernatural ministry.

And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. Luke 24:49 ESV

Everyone Gets This to Get Started!

Our loving Father showered us with so much in the first moment of conversion that it takes a separate article just to list the things God was doing behind the scenes. One tragedy you will certainly want to avoid is having so many gifts, but not having the slightest idea what they are or how to access them. Not every Christian is aware of what God gave them in conversion. If you want to make sure that you are "in the know," see [What is the new birth?](#)



Practically every Christian is aware of what we are calling here, the "starter kit." These are the obvious items of the new life that everyone seems to get. Other items may be like an inheritance in the bank from a distant relative—on deposit in our name, but possibly unknown to us. These are in our spiritual hands for ready use.

- 1) Knowing who Jesus is.
- 2) Experiencing the forgiveness of our sins.
- 3) Receiving the hope of heaven.
- 4) Having the Holy Spirit within us.
- 5) Believing that the Bible is God's Word.

That's a lot of spiritual capital! Check to make sure you have received these very important items in your starter kit. There are certainly other things that you may be aware of that you personally experienced or were shown in the moment of your conversion. Hold on to them too. Nevertheless, as great as these five main elements of the starter kit are, you need to know that every other Christian was given them, but not every Christian lives a happy or wholesome life. Evidently, the starter kit is not enough to "guarantee" a desirable life for everyone. You will have to learn to "press in" to gain your full inheritance.



Moving Beyond the “Starter Kit”

There are some things that you will have to purposefully go after, because they won't just come to you.

1) The Keys of the Kingdom

One major thing that goes beyond being born again is what Jesus said He would be giving to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi, the "[keys to the Kingdom](#)." Be sure to look these up. Not knowing what they are or how to use them is a major reason why so many Christians never get healed of their past hurts and live defeated and broken lives in the present. The keys give us access to the joy, peace and right ways of living, as well as the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Don't leave home without them!

2) The Baptism of Power

Jesus also didn't want those early disciples to leave Jerusalem without something else: [the baptism in the Holy Spirit](#). This is often called the "second blessing" because it usually is not given in the moment of conversion but has to be sought after and received later in the Christian's life. It was given to the first disciples a full 50 days after they received the indwelling Holy Spirit directly from the Risen Christ. After Jesus' ascension they huddled in the upper room in prayer seeking this empowerment, not really knowing what it would be like or when it might come. Then, on the great Day of Pentecost the Spirit came down upon them all and raised the previously born-again disciples to a new level of spiritual empowerment.

3) Trust and Obedience

You will definitely need a holy and very rugged determination to keep your focus on Jesus by seeking to trust and follow Him with every step you take. In fact, there is an old gospel hymn that expresses this truth perfectly: "There is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Being faithful doesn't mean being perfect (that is not possible for any of us, even with the full help of heaven). It means you are doing your level best to live in a way that would be pleasing to Him. This means believing in Him enough to trust Him with what He allows and trusting Him enough to do things His way. To keep your new found faith in good repair, requires a lot of work, but that is the most important work we have been assigned.

Putting the “Starter Kit” to Good Use

Salvation is not just about getting you to heaven as important as that is. Nor is it just about receiving the forgiveness of your sins as necessary as that is. Nor is it only about being given a new lease on life, the gift of the Holy Spirit and a right relationship with Father God. These are all tremendous gifts to be sure, but they are only parts of the "starter kit!"

As one pastor joked, "If all God wanted to do was save you and get you to heaven, He would have had one person to lead you to Christ and another right there to shoot you!" Our Lord has plans to grow us and use us, both for our delight, the needs of others, and His glory. To be



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prepared for all our new life entails, put that “starter kit” you’ve received to good use while you are still hanging around the base camp.

There are five very important things, for instance, that you need to learn how to cultivate by using your “Starter Kit” with them, because your new life in Christ depends upon them the way your physical body depends upon food and water to keep going strong: Bible, prayer, worship, fellowship and service. We call these [the "Big Five" Connectors](#). They are so important that they require a section of their own.



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CHAPTER FIVE

The "Big Five" Connecters

There are five things that every Christian needs to do in order to stay well-connected to our Source. The quality of our new life in Christ depends upon it! Jesus Himself warned us about the danger of getting disconnected. He even went so far as to say that apart from Him we can "do nothing." The great thing is that Jesus in you loves doing these five things--He did them all the time when He walked the earth. Now He wants to help each of us enter into the same power and pleasure of doing what He did to stay well-connected to the Father. So, think of them as delights, not duties. We don't do them to "get" saved or to get God to love us. We do them because if you keep them in good repair, they will keep you powered up and rescue you when you aren't.

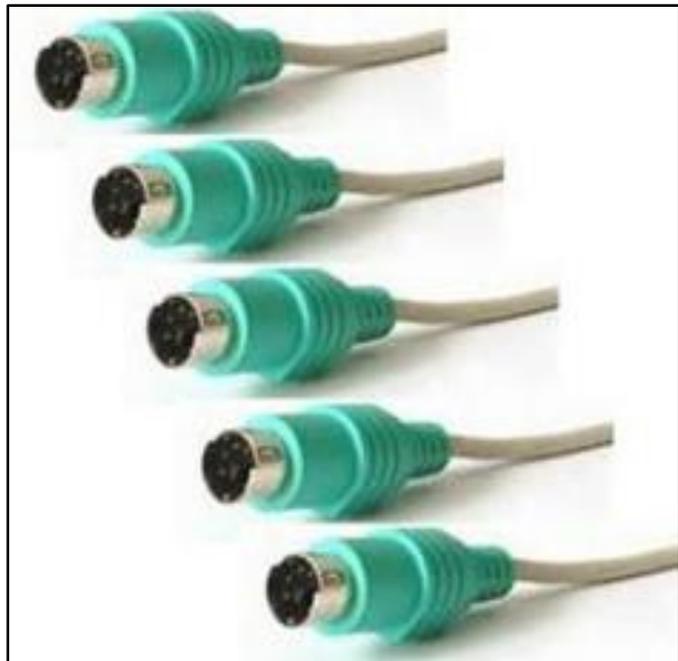
I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 ESV

Keep These "Safety Nets" In Play!

Jesus is our entry point to both eternal life in heaven and new life on earth. He is the source of it all! It is therefore of tremendous, life-saving and life-enhancing importance that we stay connected to the One who is the Way we now live, the Truth we now live by, and the Life we want to experience!

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."
John 14:6 ESV

Since Jesus says that we can "do nothing" without Him, staying connected is the name of the game! Don't believe me? You have an enemy who never doubts it for a moment. He is relentlessly seeking to get you "disconnected"! To help us in this struggle our God of All Grace has provided five grace-based ways of keeping connected to Himself. He doesn't do them for us, but He will do them with us—and work supernaturally through them to keep the connection working.



They are not magical. They do not work "automatically." You have to work with them to keep you connected, or they will just become another thing on your list to do, or worse, a source of spiritual pride. They can become rituals or routine if you let them, but beware: All life will seem to go out of them if that's your approach. God isn't going to love you less if you don't do them



and He won't love more if you do. You aren't doing these things to please or placate God: You do them because you want to stay vitally connected to Jesus!

Why We All Need to Do the “Big Five”

We do the Big Five Connecters for three excellent reasons:

1) Our Life in Christ Depends upon Them

This is how we get connected, stay connected and increase the connection to our Source of peace, joy and confidence for living. Just as a battery needs continual recharging to stay powered up, so too we need to stay “plugged in” to our power source. Our new life streams into us from a Source outside of and beyond our own understanding and abilities.

2) They Are Our Meeting Place with Jesus

Jesus did all of these 5 things when He walked the earth. They were His lifeline to the Father and to His true purpose on earth. He still loves to do them. That is why they work so well as connectors. He is inside of us now by His Spirit wanting us to gain the graced-pleasure of doing the Big Five with Him and through Him. These aren't duties—they're delights!

3) They Lead Us into Our Destiny

None of us is smart enough to figure out why we're here. That's one of the reasons why we need a Savior! There definitely is a big reason why each of us is on the planet. In fact, there are two reasons: two assignments and two purposes that go right along with them. The Big Five will draw us into our assignments and keep us flowing in those pathways of purpose!

The Danger of Not Doing the “Big Five”

The important thing to keep in mind is that we are not given these connectors for God's benefit, but for our own. Don't shoot yourself in the foot by ignoring your Big Five lifeline to the Lord. Think of them as safety nets. They won't always be in tip top repair. Sometimes you may neglect one or more of them for fair reasons or foul. When that happens, always be quick to mend them before any size-able holes develop. You don't want to fall past the "do's" into the "don'ts"!

I have worked with men with addictions for years and have never yet seen someone fall back into the addiction who was faithfully working these five do's. The men, however, almost universally think that the problem was doing the don'ts. Yes, of course we don't want to do the don'ts, but the do's keep us from the don'ts! If you need help remembering them, try this: “Big Pigs Wear Fancy Shoes” as a way of remembering the acronym (BPWFS) formed from Bible, Prayer, Worship, Fellowship and Service. Let's take a closer look at each one.

CHAPTER SIX

The Bible—Your Lifeline to Jesus

Think of the Bible as Jesus in written form. He is the Word—God’s eternal counsel—made flesh. The Bible is much more than a mere book. It is the living Word of God. Jesus spoke the words that brought all of creation into being. If His spoken Word can do that, think what His written Word can do for you, to bring you fully to life.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:1-4 ESV

Why You Need This Connector

The Bible isn’t an ordinary book. It is composed of 66 separate books written by 40 different authors over a period of 1500 years on three continents in three languages. Yet, it tells a consistent story about God’s ways with humanity and our ways with God. That’s amazing! Just as amazing is the manuscript trail: literally thousands of entire copies exist from very ancient times, all with near universal agreement of text. There is nothing else remotely close to this coming to us from antiquity. Truly, the Lord has “watched over His word” to preserve it as well as perform it. Yet, these amazing facts are only the beginning.



According to Peter the whole of scripture is “inspired by God” which means literally God-breathed. The Bible’s divine origins set it apart from any other book on the shelf.

Jesus used words of scripture to silence the voice of temptation, He taught the Word and lived by the Word throughout His life and ministry; and in His greatest trial just before the cross He declared God’s Word to be truth, praying that we would be “sanctified” by God’s word, just as He had been. Being sanctified by the Word means God uses it to cleans us of spiritual darkness and lead us into the light.

That’s a pretty impressive case to make for reading and studying the Bible, but there is even more. Jesus Himself is declared to be [The Living Word](#) of God, the Word “made flesh.” The whole of scripture is about Him, according to His own teaching (this includes [Two True Testaments](#)). In some mysterious way the written Word (scripture) and the living Word (Jesus) are one. In fact the Bible itself is described as living and life-giving, just as Jesus described Himself as both truthful and the Truth.



For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 ESV

How It Works as a “Safety Net”

At the very least the Bible will give you a road map for things to avoid (sins) and for things to do ([The "Big Five" Connectors](#) for instance). Straying outside God’s moral boundaries is certain to disconnect you from the One who drew the lines for us in the first place. Trespassing into sin always separates us from God—not from His love, but from our fellowship with Him, from His strong support, and from the confidence and clear conscience He desires to give us. Since that is not what the “new you” wants to do, you would be wise to get to know the lay of the land from God’s perspective in order to stay on the right path. This is the first, most obvious, use of the Bible as a safety net.

The other, more powerful, use of scripture is for staying in communion and communication with God. Jesus is the true Source of everything that you need in order to live in peace, joy and God’s right ways. The Bible, because it is the written Word, will work to help you stay in close touch with the living Word who is now your Savior and Lord. By His Spirit Jesus will teach you things through the scriptures that you need to know, and then help you believe and do them. He will also use the scriptures to speak to you for comfort, guidance, or correction—we need all three!

As you stay in the scriptures — reading, studying, mediating—the Bible will help keep you connected to Jesus, enjoying much closer fellowship than you ever could without His Word to bridge the gaps. In this way He can use scripture to help you stay “powered up” for doing the right thing and also speak through it to wake you up and steer you clear of wrong turns.

Problems to Avoid

The obvious problem to avoid is reading the scriptures too little less obvious is reading them too much. How can you get too much of a good thing? Spiritual knowledge which the Bible delivers in spades is not the same thing as [spiritual growth](#), which always proves itself out amidst the pressures of daily life. Just as children need both food and exercise in order to grow physically, so we ever-growing Christians need to feed on the word of God and then practice what we are learning, or our growth will be stunted.

The great thing in natural life is to keep up a steady and balanced approach to meals, eating from all the major food groups, while avoiding excessive snacking. Simply opening the Bible to any page or to only your favorite pages is "snacking" on scripture -- not a good strategy for a balanced diet! Find a way of reading the Bible that will take you through whole books and eventually take you through the whole of scripture. Pick a set time for your meal--most choose first thing in the morning. Then have a plan in mind. You could plan to read from cover to cover, for instance, but the “B4 Plan” is my personal favorite (short for 4 sections of Bible reading). The way this works is that you take four sticky tabs and put one in each of the four basic "food groups" of scripture:



1) Begin with a Bite-size Portion of Psalms or Proverbs

Go through these on a slow-paced loop. Psalms will teach you how to pray and praise, inspire you to love God and help you "jump start" your heart with devotion each morning. Proverbs will give you practical wisdom for the daily life. Begin at Psalm 1; when you reach the end of Proverbs 31, circle back around, using a sticky tab to keep track of your progress. This is your appetizer, meant to awaken your spiritual hunger to read more. So, a well-read, short portion of a Psalm or Proverbs chapter is preferable to cramming a lot in at one sitting.

2) Then, Read a Healthy Portion of One of the Gospels

These give us our vital images of Jesus. He is God's love in action. He is God's Word to us. He is our Example. Drink Him in. Begin with Matthew; when you get to the end of John, circle back around.

3) Next, Read a Portion from the Rest of the New Testament

These are letters directed to the churches--that includes us! We want to learn from those who knew Jesus the best. Start with any letter you have a hunger to read; read a paragraph or a whole chapter: when you finish that book, move on to another one.

4) Finally, Read a Portion from the Rest of the Old Testament

Clearly it will take more time to eventually finish all of the books that remain but let your interest--your spiritual hunger--guide you.

Remember to "say grace" before your spiritual meals: Ask God to open your heart and mind to His Word and to open His Word to your heart and mind. Seek to read from all four groups, but don't beat yourself up if you don't. The important thing is, on the one hand, to keep your spiritual hunger alive by not "force feeding" yourself according to someone else's schedule and, on the other, to keep chewing your way through a healthy, balanced diet of truth, skipping as few meals as possible.

Taste and see that the Lord is good! Psalm 34:8



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CHAPTER SEVEN

Prayer—Your Lifeline to Jesus

We are promised that all who call on His Name will be saved. Prayer is calling on God for mercy, for help or for fellowship. He delights in listening—no request is too small. Learn to let your need drive you to Him every time: You cannot wear out the welcome mat and He has promised to always answer us. Prayer brings us through communication into communion. The peace of Christ is the clearest sign of His presence with us. This is promised to us whenever we release our prayers to Him.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 ESV

Why You Need This Connector

Imagine having someone hanging around you filled with exactly the help, or wisdom, or comfort, or encouragement that you need, but never being allowed to speak to them. That would be incredibly frustrating, wouldn't it? You don't have to pray: You get to pray! Not only is the Lord always willing to listen to your every word, He can actually do something about all of your predicaments. That's reason enough to start talking to Him.

Our need for God's mercy and help extends to every nook and cranny of our lives, as well as that of our loved ones. Interceding—carrying requests to God—is a natural place to begin, once you know by faith that He is there and that He is listening.



Be sure you remember that conversation is a two-way street. Learn to wait in silence for Him to speak to you. Even if you don't hear words, you will receive impressions. By these means He communicates understanding, sympathy, and the clear sense that we are not alone. Prayer draws us into intimate fellowship with our best Friend, divine Lover, and majestic Lord. We begin with short term needs for intercession, but the long-term goal is intimacy.

How It Works as a “Safety Net”

Prayer is our most direct life-line to the Lord. It could take a few moments to phone a friend, your Bible is probably back at the house, a worship service might be days away, but you can always go immediately to God in prayer. In fact, He wants you to! He tells us to “come boldly” to



His throne anytime we need mercy or His divine assistance. He invites us to call on Him so that He can answer us. And He promises that all who call on His Name will be saved.

When we are under attack by temptations or troubles that might disconnect us from God and carry us off the playing field into the land of unhappy outcomes, call on His Name. This safety net works for three reasons:

- 1) As you begin praying hard for God's help, you become occupied with the things of God and that keeps the temptation from gaining ground,
- 2) God immediately "hears" that you really do want His help and starts sending it, and
- 3) Your preoccupation with prayer eventually shifts your focus off of the tempting thing and back on to the most desirable thing of all—your beautiful Lord and Savior.

As your focus shifts you become free!

Problems to Avoid

Do not make the mistake of thinking your request or concern is too small — that you shouldn't be troubling the Lord with it. No concern is too small! God really, really loves you, delights in listening to you, and wants to answer your prayers. He may not answer your prayer in the way that you've made it (we don't really know what is best for us), but He will always listen to your heart and treat you right. Don't let false humility hold you back.

Don't become demanding, either. You will eventually discover that your Father will give a good listen to your tears, your fears, even your pain and anger. He seems to welcome the kind of trust that enables us to expose our heart to Him. What doesn't work is becoming strident and stubborn, insisting on our own solution to the problem we are praying about. That's when the heavens can go strangely silent. That's when the Lord seems miles away. Even if you think He has done wrong, He hasn't, and He will be gracious and patient in helping you with your feelings. But God will get as quiet as Jesus before Pilate when He is being stubbornly accused. He will simply and silently out wait you. It's best to walk humbly with your God.

Finally, watch out for falling into routine and ritualized prayers. Would you like someone to talk to you by memorized lines, saying the same thing over and over again? Neither does Jesus! He told us not to pray using vain repetitions. Such prayers are fine for church and may be occasionally helpful in private, but learn to let your conversation be natural, free and wide ranging—just as it would be with a good friend whose affections you cherish and whose wisdom you trust.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Worship—Your Lifeline to Jesus

Worship is that higher form of our conversation with the Lord where we are not petitioning Him for what we need but thanking and praising Him for who He is and what He has already done. This brings us speedily into close communion with Him. We can worship with others in church, in our quiet times, and simply by doing all that we do as a love gift to Him. Worship also puts us back into our place. You don't have to literally kneel down to get the benefit. Kneeling in our hearts is always good for our souls because it reminds us of who He is as our Beautiful Creator and Redeemer and it reminds us of who we are as His beloved people. This softens, or unhardens, our hearts.

**Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his
hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.** Psalm 95:6-8 ESV

Why You Need This Connector

Worship literally means “ascribing worth to” the object of our worship. It is so easy for our focus to go off in other directions. Perhaps that is one reason why the Lord structured His Church around a weekly time of worship. In this way He can work with us every seventh day (at least) to get our focus off of ourselves and our problems and back on to Him. In both public services of worship and private moments of intentionally drawing close to God, we can experience the returning wonder of Who He is and of all that He means to us.

Through church worship services we can learn how to enter His presence with thanksgiving and His courts with praise—and carry that into our “quiet” times as well. Corporate worship creates a spiritual “atmosphere” which seems to draw heaven closer to the earth, making it easier for everyone present to become worship-full. The Holy Spirit loves to see us worshipping both Father and Jesus and He always comes to carry us higher once the spirit of true worship moves into our hearts. Don't settle just for singing on key or giving lip service to the prayers! Begin there, but by all means seek to use the collective opening as an opportunity for you to mount higher into genuine praise and presence. Put your heart into thanking, praising and adoring God and He will put more of His Heart into you!

We would be widely missing the mark, however, if we only thought of worship as happening in gathered religious meetings or in intimate moments of close encounter with the Lord. These can certainly be high points, but there is far more to worship than these special moments. Worship is central to the entirety of our being: We are born worshipers! We have just been worshipping



everything else but the One we have been created to worship. In everything that we do we are ascribing worth to something, even if it is the wrong thing. The scriptures take the view that everything that we do can be transformed into worship if it is done for the Lord under His leadership. The telling thing is what is in our heart. If His peace is reigning over us, He has truly been enthroned and rightly worshiped, even in the midst of daily work or play.

How It Works as a “Safety Net”

Worship services are a gift to us, like shared fire was to those who didn't have it in the old days. At its best a good worship service restores the freshness of experiencing God's presence. When the singing turns into praising, when the praying leads to burdens lifted, when the message becomes a revelation, God is visiting His people. This always refreshes us in the moment and strengthens us for days ahead. What a lifeline! And because it is so effective as a safety net, it “catches” us week after week and holds us in the “grip of grace.” Strengthened by frequent encounters with our Lord, it is easier to withstand the tempter and stay “fired up” to pursue our God-given purpose with passion.

A good worship service also serves as a safety net in this way: If we see worship happening around us and cannot enter into it ourselves, then that is a clear sign from the Holy Spirit that we are holding on to something that is holding us back. It may be something we feel guilty about, or worried about; it may be a grudge we are holding against someone. Whatever it is, we need to deal with it and then join in. In this sense I have often seen going to church like going to the doctor's. If I'm in good spiritual health, I have no problem entering into the Spirit of worship: a clean bill of spiritual health. If not, it's a good thing I had the check-up in time to work on the problem. In fact, the presence of the Lord in the worship service not only enables us to see problems (sins) but also to receive grace from Him to overcome them.

Problems to Avoid

We are told that Lucifer once led worship in heaven. He fell due to pride. That should give us all pause. At the very time when he should have been lifting up the Lord and leading others to enthrone God on their praise, Lucifer began lifting up himself, seeing to draw praise attention his way! Jesus also warned us that religious people especially are prone to this problem. The Pharisees loved to be honored, to be seen as holier than others, and to draw praise to themselves. Be very careful about this: Spiritual pride is a terrible pitfall!

Beware also of false humility. Don't hold back because you feel you are unworthy. Jesus has made you worthy to enter God's presence and to stand before Him as a much-loved child. We are actually invited to come “boldly” to God's throne of grace anytime we need mercy or help of any kind. Your sinful side will be used by the enemy as an accusation that you are unworthy and unwanted. But these are lies! We run with boldness into His presence, even when we are covered with spiritual slime, because the Blood covers us, the Love invites us, the Spirit unites us, and His Word guarantees a friendly welcome.

CHAPTER NINE

Fellowship—Your Lifeline to Jesus

Jesus, God the Father and the Holy Spirit are always in perfect love and fellowship with One Another. They are now working through the gospel to draw us out of our sin and self-focus into genuine fellowship with Them. A lovely "side-effect" of our new-found fellowship with God is that we can now enjoy a divinely enabled fellowship with each other. That fellowship with other believers, in turn, enables us to stay in closer fellowship with our God. By intentionally seeking out friends in the Lord who are seeking to grow in Spirit and in truth, we can stay cleansed, refreshed and strengthened.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:6-7

Why You Need This Connector

Fellowship will come as a completely "free" gift to you at first. You won't have to do anything but open the package! Other believers will welcome you with glad hearts and open arms. They will naturally and easily share their faith with you, pray for your concerns, encourage you and help you find your way. All of this will be exhilarating and immensely comforting: True Christian fellowship is a powerful antidote against loneliness and intimidation. It should open windows of hope as you gain the vision for the Body of Christ on earth being a true family of God's adopted children—the family you have always yearned to know — a loving, living, breathing expression of Jesus to the world.



Nothing this good goes unchallenged, so pay attention to "Problems to Avoid." You will definitely have to learn the art of "guarding" your heart. A well-guarded Christian heart, however, is not like that of a "worldling" or unbeliever. They guard themselves against being hurt by putting up walls and withdrawing from the risk of intimacy with others. It is different for us, once we have learned Jesus' way of forgiving and releasing pain. We "guard" our hearts by making sure that we are honest, open and transparent in our relationships. We embrace living with flawed, imperfect, potentially wounding humanity—just as He did. We learn to seek out fellowship wherever we can find it!

We can enjoy fellowship with all kinds of people and at all kinds of levels of relationship. Why? How? According to scripture we have fellowship with one another "in the truth" and "in the Spirit." Now that we have been born again by Word and Spirit, we are not only free to worship God in Spirit and in truth, we can find common ground with anyone if the spirit between us is



love and we can find some truths to agree upon. This is only hard if you expect perfect love and perfect agreement from everyone you meet! Once you grasp this simple principle you can become well-connected to Jesus practically anytime with practically anyone—especially if they are also seeking fellowship with both you and Jesus.

How It Works as a “Safety Net”

Intimacy has been described as “in-to-me-see.” The essence of fellowship is being honest, open and transparent in our relationships, especially with the Body of Christ. Through fellowship we “see into” each other and therefore can foresee problems or have insight to things the other person may be facing. In this way fellowship becomes an avenue for wisdom, guidance, correction and confirmation coming to us from the Lord, keeping us on track in our walk with Him. Friends help us get through the difficult patches in life. For this reason scripture compares fellowship to a cord of three strands, one that is not easily broken. Our fellowship with other believers means that if we are honest with them about what we are going through, we can receive the strong support of their prayers, encouragement and practical assistance.

Although our primary reason for going to church is to meet with the Lord in worship, you would be wise to also take advantage of these opportunities for meeting with your “fellows.” Avoid letting your conversations with other believers stay at the level of small talk you could find anywhere. Seek out those who are willing to talk openly about their life in Christ with all of its struggles, hopes and dreams. This is what makes Christian fellowship outstanding; these will be the ones you will want to grow with. Eventually, you may want to cultivate a very close Christian friend, or set of friends, with the intention of meeting regularly, not just by chance. Good friends are among the Lord’s best gifts to us; our wise, intentional cultivation of friendships is our gift to them.

Problems to Avoid

Be on your guard! There is a thief who will try to steal the greatest of God’s gifts from you. Love is the greatest gift, the one thing that we know we are required to grow (see Your Two Main Purposes). Our hearts should be much bigger by the end of the journey than at the beginning. Fellowship will help you grow love. Even our love for God is put to the test by how we love one another. We learn to love the ones we can see, as evidence that we are also learning to love the One we can’t.

Now here’s the catch: You cannot grow love without trust opening and upholding your heart. Your enemy will do his level best to see that you are wounded by your fellow Christians in order to break your trust and cause you to withdraw from close fellowship. Don’t let that happen! Being hurt and offended is practically unavoidable. Jesus even said that it was “necessary” that offense come.

Your love has to overcome being offended at the ones who hurt you, mistreat you, fail to measure up and even betray your trust. These will be your greatest opportunities to “grow up into Christ” as you learn to forgive everyone from the heart—just as He does. We need both the pleasurable and the painful side of fellowship to keep growing a heart like Jesus. Never quit and you will be certain to get the hang of loving even the seemingly unlovable!



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CHAPTER TEN

Service—Your Lifeline to Jesus

Serving others leads us out of ourselves into living more like Jesus does—selflessly. Almost everyone has work that they need to do for their own survival, which, nevertheless, benefits other people (if it is honest work!). Service takes us into the realm where we learn to give ourselves, expecting nothing in return, simply because it is the right and loving thing to do. God always rewards those who follow Jesus in laying down their lives for others.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:13-14
ESV

Why You Need This Connector

Jesus said that He didn't come to be served, but to serve, even to the point of laying His life down for others. He saw a world of hurting, needy people, abandoned the "easy life" in Paradise above and dove into our humanity in order to be of service down here where darkness tramples the earth. He came to seek and save those who were lost. Aren't you glad He "found" you and now has saved you? So is He! Our Father is a huge Rewarder of anyone who serves His will. He has rewarded Jesus by raising Him to the highest place of joy and honor. He is eager to reward you as well.



Jesus will be working in you by His Spirit to help you become a servant of God. He wants you to get that end-of-life blessing we all covet: "Well done, good and faithful servant." But He also wants you to get the full benefit of becoming like Him in this life. He has given you His own servant's heart. A new desire is welling up from the depths which like His delights in saying to God: "Behold, I have come to do Your will!"

Desiring to be a servant of God's will means that we will be drawn into the good things our loving Father has planned for us, including our destined purpose. Jesus says that as we seek Him first, "all other things" will be added to our life. That's a powerful promise of reward. A further tremendous benefit is that in seeking to be a servant the heart He has given us opens to compassion for others. This draws us out of the terrible bondage of our innate selfishness into experiencing God's kind of selfless love. Being a servant, therefore, transforms us into becoming more like Jesus. This is perhaps the highest reward possible.



How It Works as a “Safety Net”

Service is very different from ordinary work, but not because it often takes place in a church or through a ministry. It doesn't have to have “religious” trappings or settings for it to be service. The truth is that anything we do becomes service when it is done for the Lord, through the Lord and to the Lord. Eventually, we can approach even the work we do for money in this way, provided that what we are doing is of actual benefit to others and not immoral or illegal. However, we all have a tendency to self-deceive. Don't imagine that just because you want to do everything for the Lord, you will. Even service for the Lord can become self-serving, if we're not careful.

All legitimate work serves the needs of other people in some way. What separates “service” from other kinds of work is usually that we are volunteering our time. This provides a powerful check on the way we go at it. In the workplace we can justify having all kinds of attitudes and behaviors while we are “slaving” for what in the USA is affectionately called the “Almighty Dollar.” However, when we are seeking to be servants of the Almighty God, our attitudes must match up with those of Jesus. This keeps us honest. If we don't treat people as Jesus would, if we can't keep a good-hearted spirit about us, our service stinks no matter how hard we are working!

Giving your time away in today's material culture only makes sense if you are doing it because you believe the Lord is asking it of you. This is how the call to be of service—in any moment—works as a safety net. If I am not willing to lay my life down or set my agenda aside to be of service to the Lord, or if my attitude proves to be a stinker, then the call to service is showing me I need to have a “come to Jesus” meeting. I may never get that kind of feedback working on my paying job. Service, therefore, “works” to transform us, if we cooperate.

Problems to Avoid

The main problem to avoid is thinking that God needs your talent. Skills and abilities that you have cultivated, especially in the working world, are indeed God's gifts to you and can be of great benefit in service to Him. But that is not why He called you! It is your heart He wants. If your heart is focused on Him and open with compassion to the needs of others, you are ready to be of good service, no matter what your skills and abilities may be. The Lord needs us teachable and loving, period. He needs our availability far more than our abilities.

To bring us into compliance the Lord may plunge us into something that seems beyond our understanding or capability. This is so that we will learn to rely on Him through prayer and trusting obedience—not ourselves. If you come into a time a service thinking that you already know what needs to be done and how to do it, you will miss the mark by a mile. Don't power up in your own strength or try forcing things under your control. This results in steam-rolling others, losing the peace of Christ, and will bring burn-out in the long run.

The opposite problem, of course, is holding back. Don't let the sight of other people's gifts and abilities make you feel inadequate. You have a heart. You are available. That's all that is really needed! Let God worry about how to put you to good use and how to get the results He wants. It almost always seems like the problem is too big and what we bring to the table is too small. A little boy once showed Andrew two fish and five loaves of bread. Andrew almost didn't bring it to Jesus, yet to everyone's surprise, it was all that Jesus needed! That and the faith Andrew had to

muster up in order to present so “pitiful” an offering to the Lord. Step out in faith and the Lord will meet you every time!



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CHAPTER ELEVEN

New Birth = New Creation

Being “born of the Spirit” means that you are a brand-new creation, but don’t apply for sainthood yet. There is a new you, but the old you is still around, looking for ways of overthrowing what the Lord has done—and heading out on his/her own all over again. The old you has to stay knocked down, for the new you to enjoy the sweet air of freedom. Nevertheless, the glorious, unchangeable truth is that now that faith in Christ has come to us, we are New Creations. This is the miracle of new birth which raises us from our sin and separation from God into eternal life in union with our God.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17 WEB

What Does It Mean to Be A New Creation?

We still see a lot of the old nature and the former ways of living, thinking and feeling, but new things have been added that radically change all things. However, before we look at the things that have become new, let’s review what has not changed or passed away.

Paul is not telling us that we no longer have a sin nature to contend with or sins to resist. Above all the apostles, he lays out the ongoing struggle between the New Creation (spirit) and the old nature (flesh) in texts too numerous to fully mention. So what does pass away?



1) The Person Who Did Not Know Jesus No Longer Exists

That person (your former self) has indeed passed away now that the revelation of Jesus Christ has come. If a blind person regains sight and sees the sun, even if the blindness returns, they will never be the same.

2) Before Conversion, We Were One with Our Sins

With our repentance and faith in Christ, the Father separated us from our sins by forgiving them and justifying us. There is still an ongoing battle with sin, but continuing in sin is a spoiled thing for New Creations for two main reasons: one, the conviction of the Spirit; two, the sense of separation from Christ. Both overshadow the former pleasures of unrighteousness, enabling us to learn to hate sin. Many of our old ways, therefore,



change with conversion, but not all. We are engaged in an all new process of ongoing conversion, which includes cleansing and growth in Christ.

3) Now, We Are No Longer “on the Outside”

We were formerly not a people, but now we are a part of God’s family. We were strangers to the covenant, but now have been brought near, being made one with His Body on earth.

Look Ahead, Not Behind

This way of seeing the new birth (by what passed away) is like looking in the rear view mirror while driving. The really stunning, forward-looking view is how we now appear as New Creations!

We have been spiritually reborn through the revelation of Jesus Christ (See [Beholding the True Image](#)).

We can no longer measure anything without reference to Christ.

We have been given a new heart and new spirit—a new nature!

We live under a new covenant of immense mercy.

We are given the Holy Spirit, the righteousness of Christ and the Name of Jesus.

We are not our past, not our sin, not our “bad side”—we are New Creations!

We are also a mystery even to ourselves. God is bestowing a new identity upon us only He knows. Who we now are is only revealed whenever we trust and obey Jesus—we are “hidden” in Him. He is the key! As we die to Self (the false god), we live through trusting and obeying Jesus.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:3 ESV

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24 ESV

Accepted and Reconciled!

Our acceptance by God as New Creations is absolute, complete and unwavering. Try to fathom the massive liberation that God has accomplished by the Blood of atonement, our new covering.

It was God...in Christ, reconciling and restoring the world to favor with Himself, not counting up and holding against [men] their trespasses [but cancelling them].
2 Corinthians 5:19 AMP

This incredible Reconciliation covers all that we have been in Adam and will be in Christ. Faith is what God gives us so that we can receive this grace and be translated from the kingdom of darkness (in Adam) to the Kingdom of His Son (in Christ), but faith did not in any way change God's Heart towards us, which is love, or His reconciliation to our sins, which Jesus accomplished fully at the cross.



In conversion the former self (that had no life in Christ) passed away and the true self (that lives through trusting Christ) has been reborn/regenerated. The New Creation is a redeeming of the old, not an elimination of all that was former. We have a fresh start and a new center from which to live at any moment.

We Are New, But the Old Is in Us

The New Creation “comes to life” in us whenever we trust in the One who is our new life. As we “walk in the light” trusting God through Jesus Christ, our old nature is laid to rest like a shadow lying down behind us. However, the one Paul calls “the old man” wants back in. Our old nature “comes back to life” in us whenever we cease to rely upon our God. Are we going to live by a resuscitation of the old self, or by a resurrection of the new life? The choice is ever before us.

I have been crucified with Christ... it is no longer I who live, but Christ... lives in me; and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in (by adherence to and reliance on and complete trust in) the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20 AMP

Unquestionably, you are a new creation! However, you are going to need some deep convincing and some thorough cleansing in order to cease relying on the pre-programmed ways of your old nature. Much progress will be made as you learn to understand and believe the reality of your [New Identity](#) and the personality that comes along with it.



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CHAPTER TWELVE

New Creation = New Identity

Unquestionably, you are a new creation! However, you are going to need some deep convincing and some thorough cleansing in order to cease relying on the pre-programmed ways of your old nature. Much progress will be made as you learn to understand and believe the reality of your new identity and the personality that comes along with it. Although it will take entrance into heaven to fully reveal what we will be like, we do know this: that when we see Jesus at last, we will discover that by the grace of God we will have become "like Him." How's that for a new identity and a new personality?

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2 ESV

Our New Identity

The all-important issue of identity determines so much about how we will live and what we will do with our time here on earth. No one who has a poor self-image can truly enjoy living, yet the gospel has not come to tell you how great you are. Jesus says: "Without me you can do nothing," and Paul writes, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells." That's hardly a formula for pride based self-esteem!

So, what is the answer to our identity questions? Discovering who we really are—now that Jesus has come to live inside of us. And our sense of self-worth? It is based upon the solid rock of His love for us. Period. You are His beloved—just try to wrap your heart around the enormity of that blazing truth. He lived and died and lives again to bring you fully to life. Everything else you could hope to get out of life—compared to this—is chump change.



Identity and the Lost Image

What could be of more practical value to us than discovering who we really are? There are two great questions that challenge every human being: Is there a God and who am I? Socrates, after his encounter with the oracle of Delphi, believed he was commissioned by God to teach wisdom to men. The foundation of his teaching? Know thyself.



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Our fundamental problem is that we do not know who our God is; therefore, we do not know who we really are. We are suffering from a massive loss of identity made even worse by our failure to realize it and face up to it.

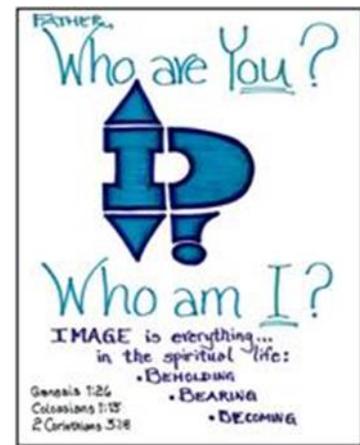
The fall from grace created our identity crisis. We tend to think mainly of the Fall as a fall into sin and into the sin nature, which it certainly was. We say rightly that fallen man, once created in the Image of God, no longer reflects that image. But one essential effect of the Fall was that, in dying spiritually, Adam could no longer behold his God. Both the Image of God and the image of man fell from his sight. Adam could neither see who God is nor could he see who he himself truly was, since who we are is entirely defined in relation to God who created us.

Jesus has come to restore both our lost vision (see [Beholding the True Image](#) and our true identity.

The “Old Identity” Can Still Trip Us Up

The old nature draws power from false ideas of self-shaped by the world. Some of us carry elements in our personality that we think of as ourselves. They are in us—but not us!

- Nervous energy/anxious feelings
- Perfectionism (people pleasing)
- Addictions/compulsions
- Drive to achieve (self-salvation)
- Flashes of anger (hot temper)
- Excessive sensitivity (easily hurt)
- Timidity/shyness (fear of man)
- Deep wellsprings of grief
- Feelings of persistent loneliness
- Depression, heaviness of heart
- Nuclear reactivity/panic mode
- Impatience (prickly, irritable)
- Stubbornness (pride, rebellion)
- Impulse to control/be in control



These ideas of self are not who we really are! Any or all of these may describe our personality as we have known it until now, but they are not our true God-given personhood. They reveal where the fallen nature still has power to block the life of the New Creation from coming forth, but they tell us nothing of what the Father created us to be before the enemy began “unmaking” us. If you need help gaining freedom in these areas, please take our [eCourse for Emotional Healing](#). It’s free and it really works!

Two Telltale Truths about Our “Personalities”

- 1) In the womb these negative traits weren’t in us. Even as young children we trusted and loved freely—no baggage!
- 2) When we die and go to heaven, these traits will have to be removed from us. They are not God’s desire for us.

Restoration of our true life begins by breaking agreement with false beliefs about ourselves and choosing instead to embrace what God is speaking to us about our new identity. Two images fell when Adam fell—that of God and that of us. Get your image rightly set by seeing His. Whatever does not look like Jesus in you, isn't the real you. Refuse to be deceived by your enemy about who you really are.

Learn how to [Recognize and Replace!](#) the grip of the old ways on you with the grace of the new. Never settle for anything less than “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Proper self-love is accepting God's view of us — it is not pride, false humility, or self-absorption. Let's get purified from all false ideas of ourselves.

The Great Exchange

Apart from Christ we will be weak, foolish, sinful and ignorant in many ways, but in Christ we are complete, secure and sustained by His life. As Archbishop François Fénelon wrote, “Expect nothing of yourself, but all things of God. Knowledge of one's own hopeless, incorrigible weakness combined with absolute confidence in God's power are the two foundations of the spiritual life.”

God is not asking us to perfect or change ourselves, but to turn to Him and learn to see and believe all of life from His perspective. Heaven's perspective on our life is always liberating. Take a moment to “look through” to heaven with your eyes of faith and seek to catch a glimpse of who you are in your eternal being. This is the real you—the eternal you.

Then let the power of that glorious vision be released with “prophetic decree” into your own heart now. If you are in Christ, then read and confess with full faith your true new identity:

- I am eternally the beloved bride of my Savior Jesus.
- I am eternally a receiver of God's love, mercy, wisdom, saving help and never-ending life.
- I am only a sinner needing mercy for a short while on earth.
- I am in Christ and He is in me—forever!
- I am an eternal being with a spirit as free as the wind and a soul of dazzling beauty and grace.
- I am indestructible in my being, due to His life in me.
- I am worse in my fallen-ness and better in my new created-ness than I ever imagined.

The Way of Restoration

Joy is produced in us whenever we realize by an active faith who we really are in Him. Even so, the truly great joy is not who we are in Christ, but who He is to us!

1) Learn to recognize all false images of self that don't match up with Jesus and which block your new life from coming forth.

2) Take full responsibility for your attachment to these false ideas of self: Repent, renounce and break all agreement with the enemy about who you are, confessing the truth instead.

3) Turn to the Father and release gratitude that who you are in Christ already looks a lot like Him—you are a New Creation!

Prayer

Father, as a New Creation I cannot define myself by anything less than who I now am in Christ without damaging my self-image, security, sense of worth and purpose. I will therefore accept no lesser definitions of who I am. Help me break all agreement with my former ways of seeing myself and trust completely in Your heavenly perspective!



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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Power of Your Will

Apart from God, your will is the single most powerful thing in your universe. It has the power to choose heaven or hell as your ultimate destination and a heaven infused life versus a hellish one down here. Like a fire hose under maximum pressure it can send you careening all over the place, unless you learn how to get a good grip on the thing and attach your will to His grace and truth.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live. Deuteronomy 30:19 ESV

The Power of Our Will

Your will is powerful! God has gone on record with “heaven and earth” as witnesses that He has given to no one else but you the power to choose life and death, blessing and cursing. It is “set before” you every day. In every situation, at all times, you and you alone have this stupendous power over your life. There has to be a catch. Otherwise, all of us would be living the dream. That’s just not happening! Perhaps it’s time to check the fine print on the offer and see what the deal really is.

One thing we need to note right away is that in giving this power to us, God had to “step back” and create room for it (us) to operate. If you give a friend the keys to your car, you retain ultimate responsibility for all that follows, but he has immediate authority over the car. If your car is a Ferrari, watch out! He may not even take you along for the ride. In that case, he’ll be fully on his own with something he is ill-equipped to handle. Yet, that is just what our God has done. He has given us “earth suits” with immense capabilities and turned the keys over to us.



We can even say “No” to God! Think about it. The most powerful Being in the universe has given all of us the ability to say no to Him and make it stick. He wants to bless all of us at every turn, He desires to save all of us from that final speed bump at the end of the road, but we are juiced up on Self and barreling along in our Ferrari, keeping His Hands off the wheel and our feet on the gas. That’s a formula for disaster. And even God cannot stop us from crashing and burning. He has given true freedom of choice to us.



The Problem of Our Will

There's a good reason why the Lord didn't want Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We are all "stuck" with having to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, blessing and cursing with every choice we make. No one can "opt out"—this is our moment by moment moral responsibility. Through our ancestral parents we are born into this whether we like it or not. We have to choose. Even not choosing is a choice.

The great problem is that we are always operating under conditions of insufficient knowledge. We don't know what right and wrong truly are in every situation. Neither do we always know which decision will produce consequences of blessing down the road or summon the curse. These would be problems enough, but to make matters much worse, our entire perspective is skewed. We have become "as gods" in our own little worlds, seeing everything from the warped perspective of Self. What seems best for me and mine isn't necessarily the best.

These are insurmountable obstacles! In Christian terms wrong choices don't simply produce mistakes, they are sins—sins of thought, word or deed, of things done or left undone, whether known or unknown to us. Sin left unchecked always produces death. Sins are notoriously hard to remedy, but being sinful is even worse. Yet that's our pre-conversion condition of being centered exclusively on Self, riddled through and through with a fallen nature which interprets all of life from our own self-serving perspective. How do you escape that?

This does not mean that we can't get some things right. Obviously, people all over the world make lots of good choices, including trying to overcome their natural tendencies to selfishness, or the world would be in much worse condition. Anyone can make a right choice at any time. That is the power we have been given. To make a right choice and to make it stick we need two things which we have sometimes, but not all of the time:

- 1) Sufficient knowledge of what the best choice truly is.
- 2) Sufficient motivation to carry it out.

For this reason, St. Augustine and many of the Reformers insisted that our will is not genuinely free. It is hopelessly shackled by our sin nature and by the inescapable limitations of our imperfect knowledge and faulty motivation. Of our own "free" will, none of us can save ourselves. None of us can even ensure our earthly happiness. Or totally avoid bone-headed failures. As they say, even good intentions can "pave the way to hell."

The Playing Field

Suffering and wrong choices are never God's fault. He is not the Author of evil. He never makes any wrong choices. He is perfectly loving and thoroughly right in all of His ways. Giving freedom to us (and to the angels, even those that fell) was the right choice. His love cherishes our freedom. What's more, His love can only grow in us if we are free. How did things go so wrong?

All suffering, sin and evil are the result of three things:

1) Free Will—Our Choices

Here's where the rubber meets the road each and every day.

2) Real World—Our Consequences

Every choice has a consequence for good or ill, for better or worse. This is called the law of sowing and reaping.

3) Real Devil—Our Enemy

Even the angels were free to choose. Some chose to rebel along with Satan, who then deceived us into joining the Great Rebellion. Now they are seeking to “devour” us through our own wrong choices.

On this field of play there are three typical conditions of the will:

1) A Strong Will

Having a strong will is what we ordinarily call will power. These people make choices and make them stick. We generally admire those who have a strong will, but the source for this is Self. It can be just as firmly fixed on something wrong, as on something we think right. The Bible calls it being stubborn and stiff-necked.

2) A Weak Will

What seems to us like a weak will, is actually a strong will in disguise. It too is powered up by the fallen nature, but unlike the “strong” will this person cannot (or will not) make a choice and make it stick. The Bible calls this being double minded. Both those with “strong wills” and those with “weak wills” keep God out.

3) A Yielded Will

This is the one we want. Now that we know Jesus as our Savior, we can freely choose to surrender and submit to His leadership over our lives as Lord. This is called having a willing spirit.

The Coach's Game Plan

It's time to go back to the fine print and see the rest of the Lord's statement on that fateful “day” when He set blessings and curses before His people as their sovereign choice. In Deuteronomy verse 19 He told them about the power He was giving them. This is immediately followed in verse 20 with His strong “recommendations” for what they/we should do with this incredible power. These two verses should never be separated!

19 I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live 20 and may love the Lord your God, obey His



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voice, and cling to Him. For He is your life and the length of your days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 AMP

Did you catch that? In order to “love Him” and reap the blessings, we have to “obey His voice.” That means listening for the inner leading of the Holy Spirit as well as for His voice coming to us through conscience, so that we can [Walk in His Spirit](#). To do that His “advice” is that we “cling” to Him. How do we cling to God? By calling on His Name!

Call on Him whenever you need help with your choices or with your motivation; whenever you need help resisting temptation; above all, whenever you begin to falter at trusting and obeying Jesus. These are the moments in daily life that we all face. All of us need Jesus to help, save or rescue us in the midst of them. What do we have to do to get His help? Call and cling!

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13
ESV

How Our Will Works

Free will only works for us if we keep it attached to the One who gave it to us. Jesus is our Tree of Life! Now that we know who He is, we should be “feeding” on Him for all we are worth. As we learn to look to Him for guidance about our choices and call on Him for help to see them through, we enter into the life that has been promised to us, a life of purpose, passion and peace.

This New Life doesn’t work by will power, but by will submission. We choose to believe in Jesus, we choose to trust what He tells us (in His Word and by His Spirit) and we choose to follow Him. Whenever we believe in Jesus enough to trust Him with everything and everyone, the Holy Spirit empowers us to walk with Him in yielded obedience. This is genuine [Spiritual Health](#). It is also our one true offering to God.

God has given us one thing that is uniquely our own—our wills—so that we can have something of value to offer back to Him.



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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Spiritual Growth ABCs

Even babies begin growing as soon as they leave the womb. Now that you've left the dark womb of the world behind, you're going to need a clear idea about which way is up where your growth is concerned. The key to accelerated growth is learning how to keep our spiritual eyes on Jesus. It is only through "beholding Him" that we are transformed. By this unique and grace-filled means we grow from one glorious transformation to another. Only the Spirit can accomplish this, but His work depends upon ours. Will we keep seeking to focus our heart and life upon Jesus. Or will we look away?

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV

His Image Is Everything

The name of the game is to grow spiritually. Now that we know who He is, we all want to grow closer to Jesus and become more like Him. You really can't accomplish one without the other, so the key to growth is very simple: Keep your eyes on Jesus. That way you will "see" Him better as you stay focused on Him—this draws us close. As you stay focused on Him you will "see" better what He is like—this transforms us. His Image is crucial! (See [Beholding the True Image](#) at our sister site, www.healingstreamsusa.org.)



In the beginning God created Adam and Eve in his image and likeness. Although we fell from our high calling, our Father hasn't forgotten His original purpose and intent. He still wants us to be bearers of, revealers of, and reflections of His True Image. In short, He wants us to be like Jesus! He has always wanted us to be like Jesus—Jesus is the exact representation of the Invisible God.

By beholding Jesus with eyes of faith we can now "see" what our God really looks like—we can hold an accurate Image of God within our hearts—and we can also "see" what we have always been meant to look like. Look at other people and all you can see is what fallen human beings look like with some in greater need of redemption and change than others. But looking to Jesus we actually see what Adam was like, before he fell from grace. That takes being "only human" to a whole new level!



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Spiritual Growth ABCs

- A) Growing in the revelation of who Jesus is and who you are in Him.
- B) Growing in faith to live by the grace that Jesus reveals.
- C) Growing in faith to believe the truths that Jesus reveals.

The essential first step of this transformation is the revelation of Jesus Christ to those who don't know Him. There can be no genuine spiritual growth without this. God had to make a way for removing the "veil" created by the sins of Adam and our own sins. Every new born Christian experiences this "unveiling" in some way. We can all say, "I was blind, but now I see." What we see is the Risen Christ: We have been given eyes of faith to "see" that Jesus is both Savior and Lord of the entire world. He is alive!

Jesus is full of grace and truth. Therefore, our growth will be in the direction of growing greatly in grace, both as receivers of grace and as grace givers, so that we can be filled to overflowing with grace—just as Jesus is. As we see God through Jesus lovingly giving us grace—the mercy and help we don't deserve and can't earn—we learn to give forgiveness, acceptance and help to others even when it is undeserved. Especially then. In this way we grow into His likeness—as we grow in genuine love of God and others. Growing in love is our top priority! The litmus test of true spiritual growth is the fruit of the Spirit. This is the "personality" of Jesus emerging through us:

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

We Grow Towards the Light

Our growth will also be in the direction of truth. Remember it was by being tricked into believing a lie that Eve, then Adam, first broke faith with God. If you have already been born again by a living faith in who Jesus is, then you have escaped the power of the first and greatest "lie" that the enemy bound you with—the darkness that kept you from giving your life to Jesus until now. But beware of the enemy's second greatest lie! He will do everything He can to make you think that it is sometimes better for you to live for yourself your way than to sacrifice all to live for Jesus His way. The truth is always liberating: The Word of God is composed of words from God that will lead you back to Him. Immerse yourself in His Word and the truths they bring you.

Recognizing that the Bible is necessary for growth and having a godly curiosity birthed in us about God and Jesus, propels most of us to study the scriptures, as it should. Gaining Biblical knowledge, however, is not the same thing as spiritual growth. In fact, if we are wise, we will steadily pursue all of [the "Big Five" Connectors](#) that keep us united to Christ: Bible, prayer, worship, fellowship and service. Growing in these is necessary for our growth in Christ, but we could be doing them relentlessly and yet be growing in the wrong direction!



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Spiritual Growth Moments

Spiritual growth is difficult and elusive. Many seem to have grown very little, even after years of being Christians. The main obstacle to growth of course is simply not doing the basics: See the ["Big Five" Connectors](#) and the ["Quick Start" Guide](#). Like anything else in life we have to master the basics first in order to have fun and be fruitful in pursuing each new avenue of endeavor. You won't become a good tinker, tailor, soldier, or sailor if you don't master the basics and keep honing your skill with them. The spiritual life is no different.

Nevertheless, true spiritual growth opportunities are often not what we think. This makes them easy to miss. It helps to understand what spiritual growth is not, in order to keep our eyes peeled for the God-orchestrated moments that will help us grow from baby steps to walking and even running with the Lord. Then, with "constant practice" we can grow towards maturity.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5:14 ESV

What Spiritual Growth Is Not

Spiritual growth can be blocked by having wrong ideas about what it is. To recognize times when the call to spiritual growth is upon us, we will need to understand what spiritual growth is NOT. Spiritual growth is not pleasure in reading the Bible or in worshiping—that is the result of past growth. Spiritual growth is not knowledge of the Bible or spiritual things—that is head growth, not heart change.



Here's what a true spiritual growth moment looks like: It is in a moment of trouble or conflict when you decide to handle things differently — the Lord's way, not your old way. Let me explain.

Here's an article I wrote about it for our Newsletter: (Use this link to sign up if you'd like: [Sign up for eNews](#))

I Love the River of Peace!

I love being carried through my days upheld and guided by the Spirit with a peaceful, easy feeling and divine synchronicity working upon all my appointments, phone calls and chores. It is so beautiful when that happens--and it has been happening a lot lately. But that is not spiritual growth: It is spiritual delight. It is the result of spiritual growth, not the growth itself.



Then there's Bible time in the morning with tea and my favorite reading chair, or teaching sessions at conference when the speaker carries you to new horizons. I said in seminary, "Just lock me in the library for a year and send in pizzas and I'll be happy." But that is not spiritual growth: It is spiritual knowledge. You only have to look at the Pharisees to see they spent way too much time growing their brains, while their hearts were shrinking! That's reverse growth through excess knowledge.

What about be grafted into the fullness of church life? When "new recruits" first come to the Old Savannah City Mission where I work in addiction recovery, they typically think that now that they are with a bunch of committed, like-minded believers everyone is going to get along marvelously and show Christian character as we seek to serve Jesus. But that's not spiritual growth: That's spiritual death. We will only find that kind of perfected community once we've died and gone to heaven!

OK, What Is Spiritual Growth?

I have to "break it down" for the guys coming in off the streets into our addiction recovery program that their spiritual growth is going to come to them in the moments that they least expect to find it and in times that look more like the devil than the Lord. Say what? Yes, there are moments here and there of genuine growth by revelation, by impartation or by healing: times when God downloads into you a transforming perspective; or releases a gift of the Spirit; or helps you mend from a deep root of bitterness or fear. These times are real and are definitely worth seeking so that we can get the breakthrough.

But, but, but there are other times, times we don't have to seek, times we would rather run from, times that don't happen occasionally, but every day. Times of trouble, times of offense, times of need, times of temptation, times of being rebuked or rejected, times of failure, etc. Any moment you don't like has the potential of being a spiritual growth moment. These are the bread and butter times when spiritual growth is an ever-present opportunity just waiting to happen.

If we handle the moment according to past emotional reflex and deal with it stressed up (anxious) or stressed down (despairing) the old nature has taken over and we get no growth. To get the growth we have to [act fast to reconnect](#) with the Lord and quickly give the fear, anger and guilt, etc. to Him so that we can keep floating in the river of peace. That means there is a lot we have to learn how to handle differently. See any need for growth? Don't worry. Between God and the devil, you will have plenty of opportunities to practice!

Your Steps to True Growth

The three main areas where spiritual growth is needed (in addition to learning how to trust and obey Jesus):

- 1) Forgive anyone who hurts, offends or wrongs you or your loved ones, forgiving them "from the heart."



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2) Speak the truth in love, even when it is not well-received, even when you don't want to.

3) Respect the authority structure He has placed over you and learn to rest under it without complaint.

It's a tall order to make progress in these areas, yet this is where the rubber meets the road. If we want to grow in the direction of becoming like Jesus, we will have to learn to overcome these challenges. Running from them doesn't work. It is impossible to avoid these situations. In fact, for many of us, they happen daily. Sadly, I have seen many Christians stumble at these hurdles, never getting the growth. Don't let that be you! Once you learn how to make progress, the growth always feels worth it.



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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Spiritual Health

Spiritual healing goes deepest of all. Even though the reality of our spirit lies beyond the ability of our five senses to experience, it nevertheless holds the answer to all that affects our lives. Every breakdown in heart, mind or body traces back to this deepest of all roots. God begins our spiritual healing through the gift of faith in Christ. Only this one thing can complete it.

Sustain me with a willing spirit. Psalms 51:12 NASB

The Deep Sickness at the Core of Our Being

What is our deadliest sin-sickness? It is the turning of our innermost life from God to self. In this we followed "our father" the devil who infamously declared his independence (and therefore rebellion) from God with a series of defiant "I wills": "I will ascend... I will sit on the throne... I will sit on the mount..." This deep sickness at the core of our being was inevitable, once sin broke our connection to God. No longer able to behold the Lord with sighted eyes, we lost the ability to carry His True Image within our hearts. Our hearts and minds have been veiled by the god of this world ever since. Into this spiritual vacuum we inevitably began "beholding" ourselves! We became self-focused and self-centered.



The gospel has come to liberate us from our separation from God and restore the true image of our God "in the face of Jesus Christ" so that by beholding Him we can grow ("be transformed") from glory to glory. We are set free to live no longer for ourselves alone, but for Him who died for us.

And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Corinthians 5:15

A New Life; A New Choice

Until we are born again, we have no other option but to live with self at the center. Now that Jesus has been revealed, we are given a daily choice: Will we seek and serve Him, or follow our own will into a life apart? The first healing of our spiritual disease, therefore, comes through the revelation of who Jesus is as our Lord and Savior. However, until Jesus becomes the Lord we freely choose to trust and follow each and every day, the healing of our spirit has not gone nearly far enough.



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David prayed to be sustained by a “willing spirit” — to fully be recovered from the sin that led him away from God and His ways. That is true spiritual health! Like any other form of health, it cannot be faked: genuine surrender to and submission to the Lord Jesus will always produce His peace. Rebellion to His leadership or straying from His Person always robs us of peace. Having tasted the bitter fruit of going his own way, David yearned to stay yielded to and united to the Lord.

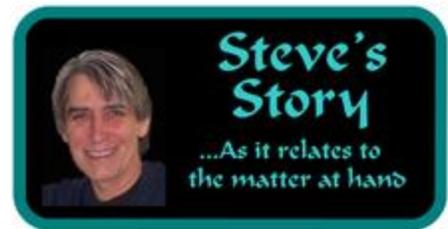
As we gain spiritual health our questions inevitably change from self-centered, self-directed, self-promoting and self-defending to Jesus-seeking: If we still ask, “What do I want to do?” it is only to remind ourselves, “I know, I want to do what Jesus would want me to do!” As we “allow” Jesus to be our Lord, He is able to cleanse us of the spiritual and emotional garbage we carry inside. Then, as our inner life becomes cleansed and healed, we live in ever greater measures of freedom, peace and joy. This in turn becomes a wellspring of health to our bodies. That is truly being healed from the inside out!

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:22
ESV

A Spiritual Health Check List

Willingness is the coin of the realm when it comes to experiencing new life in the Spirit, genuine spiritual health and growth, as well as receiving guidance from the Lord. Have you ever seen someone trying to get a resistant dog on a leash to walk obediently in the direction the master wants to go—and at the pace the master desires to set? Some dogs are rebellious; some are easily distracted by cats or other dogs. Such dogs may not be taken out beyond necessity! Then there are other dogs who don’t even need a leash, who go everywhere in tandem with their masters.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go. I will counsel you with my eye on you. Don't be like the horse, or like the mule, which have no understanding, Who are controlled by bit and bridle, or else they will not come near to you. Psalm 32:8-9 WEB



If you would love to be readily and frequently guided, then the issue of living with a surrendered heart and a willing spirit is paramount. When Isaiah saw the Lord, he fully yielded himself to God and became willing for anything (Isaiah 6:1-8). So, let’s review what a surrendered heart is saying to the Lord. Then keep checking your heart to make sure your surrender and willingness stay intact. Let the acronym SAAW remind you to look to Him.

Father, according to Your love and wisdom,

S: Send whatever You desire to send (He is the Giver of blessings).

A: Allow whatever You have to allow (of free will and its consequences).

A: Ask of me whatever You desire or require (of inward and outward obedience).

W: Withhold me from and withhold from me whatever is necessary (to fulfill your plans).



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Make me willing to be made willing to surrender everything to You.

Beware: Even a twinge of unwillingness to surrender is a step towards the Great Rebellion. If you see it in you, you have met the enemy! Carry that thought captive to Christ. True spiritual healing is a surrendered heart!

A Prayer of Surrender

Father, according to Your love and wisdom, send whatever You desire to send of Your grace and blessings, allow whatever You have to allow of free will and its consequences, ask of me whatever You desire or require of inward and outward obedience, withhold me from and withhold from me whatever is necessary to fulfill Your plans. Help me to fully trust that You are working in and through all things for my good and Your glory. Make me willing to be made willing to surrender everything to You that I may spend the better part of my days flowing in Your river of peace! May it carry me often into Your presence and always into Your purposes.



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