

Christian Living

Consider the crucial points of the Christian life with author Wendy Goubej.

Why Should I Study the Bible?

The Bible has been studied for centuries by people searching for God. It has changed many lives for the better and has comforted many sorrowful people.

Granted, the Bible's contents have also been used as a weapon against others and have been misquoted to justify any number of evils. Just as with any other book, it is easy to take words from the Bible out of context and use them for one's own ends. There have been many in history who have manipulated others with the Bible. But just because some have used it nefariously does not mean that the Bible should be discarded.

It is believed that the Bible contains the way to eternal life. The Bible claims itself to be inspired by God. And if this is so, then there are many reasons not to discard its words, but to find comfort and guidance within this holy Book.

Here are some of the reasons the Bible gives for why we should study its pages:

To give us hope

Romans 15:4 tells us that the things written in the Bible were written for our learning, so that we might have hope. There are a great many comforting verses in the Bible that speak of God's love for humanity, and His promise to help us in our hour of need.

While on earth, Jesus invited all to come and lay their burdens at His feet. This invitation extends to all humanity throughout all of history. The Bible is a book that can bring great peace and comfort to its readers. There are over 3000 promises in the Bible—assurances from a loving heavenly Father of His care and concern.

Accepting them by faith brings a peace and an assurance of His love and power in our lives.

To teach us the plan of salvation

What is the purpose of life? Where am I going when I die?

The Bible provides answers to these questions and many more. Most importantly, however, the Bible clearly outlines the plan of salvation: how we can become reconciled unto God and someday live in the earth made new.

The hope of a happy eternal life in heaven is a hope shared by many religions. The Bible gives us the plan to get us there. In addition, the Bible helps us understand

how we got here and why we need a plan to save us.

This can be very critical information, for unless we realize that we need saving, we won't look for a Saviour.

To reveal Jesus as Saviour

When on Earth, Jesus spoke of the Scriptures as testifying of Himself. To testify means to affirm or declare (often under oath) what one has witnessed or learned through firsthand knowledge or experience.

Since the Bible has been written by 40 authors over a period of 1500 years, we should see the Scriptures as a group of writers testifying of the accuracy of their experiences. The Scripture referred to by Christ is the Old Testament. That was the only Scripture there was during His lifetime, and yet Christ declared that the Old Testament testified of Himself.

Those who teach that the Old Testament Scriptures are not applicable to us do not understand what Jesus is saying. If we want to find more about Jesus, we should not restrict ourselves only to the Gospels or Paul's books. The entire Bible will reveal the beauty of God's character and Jesus Christ as the solution for humanity's problems with sin on this earth.

How God Saves Us

We all need a Saviour

All people need to come to the realization that we need saving. If we are sinners in need of saving, then we need a Saviour. Where did sin come from?

Of ourselves, we could never live up to the supreme standard needed to gain entrance into heaven. Because it was not our fault that we were born sinners, God did not leave us to ruin, but devised a special plan where we could all be saved.

Many people fight the idea that we are all sinners. Romans 6:23 states that the wages of sin is death. Just from the simple fact that we all end up dying, we can determine that indeed we are all sinners in need of a Saviour.

When we look at the law of God—the principles of right living as outlined in the Bible—we can see that we certainly have broken the law. All of us have, at some time or another, lied or stolen something that wasn't ours to take, or wished we could have something that we didn't. Many of us have killed—both literally and with our words.

No one is exempt from breaking the law. The word "law" can sometimes get people angry, but the law is just a standard of behavior and attitudes that, if followed, would make Earth a heaven to live on.

But all of us know that this planet is far from a heaven. So many commit suicide because they just can't bear the world and its problems any more. Death, however gruesome, is still, in their minds, an easier and better solution than facing the problems in their lives.

If more people turned their lives over to the control of God, and followed His principles, there would be much less pain and sorrow. However, that is not the case. We are indeed a dying human race that desperately needs a solution and a purpose.

"In Christ"

The principle of sin leading to death is so firmly entrenched in the Bible and God's Kingdom that God Himself could not change it for us after Adam and Eve sinned. If God could overlook the sin problem in us, how could He expect order and harmony in heaven? So, He devised a rescue mission, which is laid out in the Bible.

Paul, one of the apostles of Jesus, spent his whole life communicating this rescue mission, known as the Gospel or good news, to the people in Europe and the Middle East.

In Paul's writings, we find a key phrase that turns up throughout all his letters. That phrase is "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus." Similar phrases such as "in Him," "together with Him," "in the Beloved," "in Whom" all express the same idea. If we do not

understand what the Bible means by this expression, we will never be able to fully understand the good news of the Gospel.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians tells us that God devised this plan for us before He even made the world. This was His contingency plan. Because death spread to all humankind, since we are all offspring of Adam, God had to devise a plan where we could all be saved "in Christ."

The Father took the human race and corporately united it to His Son. But first Christ had to qualify to be our representative and Saviour by consenting to be made human.

God the Father united the life of His Son to our humanity in the womb of Mary. That is why Jesus is called the second or last Adam. Only by consenting to be made human could Jesus truly represent us. And when He died, His deeds of righteousness became our deeds of righteousness, and as a result we are legally redeemed.

The Bible tells us that all who are "in Christ" will live. Just as all die because all have sinned "in Adam," so also all have obeyed "in Christ" and stand justified to life in Him. By His perfect life and sacrificial death, He satisfied all the demands of the law on our behalf. In Christ, humanity has a new history that qualifies every believer for heaven.

The Gift of Righteousness

Many people believe salvation is just the forgiveness of sin. It's as though our sins are written on a blackboard and that, when Jesus died, He was like an eraser that erases all of our sins. But this is not what the Bible teaches!

Yes, our sins are written on a blackboard and Jesus is like an eraser, but that is not the whole story. Our slate does not remain empty! All of the good and holy and righteous deeds that Christ ever did are now transferred to us and are now written on our blackboard. This is the incredible good news of the Gospel.

The important thing to remember, however, is that what God has brought to the whole human race by Christ's obedience is a free gift and it cannot be ours unless we accept it.

Accepting the Gift

The moment we believe that God has done this for us, and accept it for us, we become included "in Christ" and have all the privileges that comes with being in Christ.

The moment you accept Christ as your Saviour and you trust only in Him for your salvation, God looks at you as accepted in the Beloved. It's as though once we're born, we received a special birthday present from God. It's up to us when we will open that gift and receive what He has given us. We have two options with this free gift from God: accept it or reject it.

The Bible assures us that God will make us holy, unblameable, and unreprouvable if we choose to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Though we may be sinners, in God's eyes we are now considered perfect, blameless, and without fault. This gives us peace with God and allows us to stop worrying about our salvation.

If we believe in Jesus, we become sons and daughters of God. As we continue to move forward in this belief, God will change us into people fit for heaven.

God looks on everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as His child. If you believe in His name, you have already received eternal life even though you may not feel it or think you deserve it. When President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, it legally freed all slaves. Yet ten years later, there were still some slaves working on plantations. Why? Because they did not believe the good news, so to them, they were not freed.

What will you Decide?

When Jesus died on the cross, He gave us all new life through Him. However, if you do not believe this, it will not be true for you as well.

God has given all of us a choice. We can either decide to be "in Adam" or "in Christ." There is no middle ground. It was not our fault that we were born "in Adam," but it is our fault if we decide not to be "in Christ."

Many people think they must wait until they have repented from their sins to come to God. This is not true at all. Read what the Bible says about repentance and conversion

There is nothing we ourselves can do to merit salvation. This comes to us only as a gift from God. God paid too high a price for us to ignore His incredible sacrifice for us. Find out how to accept Christ's sacrifice for you personally.

If you've already accepted Christ's sacrifice for you, read *A True Christian Spiritual Life* to find out what it means to live a Christian life—a life saved by Christ. Is it any different from any other life? How does God actually make us fit for heaven?

God's Supreme Sacrifice for You

The Cross

The Phoenicians invented the cross as an execution tool approximately 600 years before Christ. It was then adopted by the Egyptians, and later the Romans refined it and used it to execute runaway slaves and their worst criminals.

Crucifixion was the most painful and shameful instrument of execution ever practiced. The book *Watch With Me* gives a detailed description of Roman execution. It takes between three and seven days to die on the cross.

Gangrene is formed in your hands and feet where rusty nails have pierced. You have splitting migraine headaches. Every joint of your body feels torn apart and the pain is excruciating. You have cramps everywhere. Air is forced out of your lungs so that you are suffocating. In the night you are exposed to the cold and in the daytime you are exposed to the heat.

But what is it that makes Christ's death the supreme sacrifice above all other deaths? Many martyrs have suffered horrible deaths, some in ways that seem more agonizing than Jesus' death on the cross.

The Curse

It was the chief priests and officers who cried out "crucify Him" (John 19:5-7) when Pilate presented Christ to them. Pilate, an official of Rome, found no fault in Jesus, so the Jews had to give a reason why they were demanding Jesus' crucifixion. They said that they had a law that condemned Christ to death. The law they were referring to was the law of blasphemy.

According to the law of blasphemy, Jesus was to have been stoned, not crucified. In John 10:30-33 we see the Jews trying to stone Jesus after He said, "The Father and I are one." This proves they were aware that stoning was the method of death for blasphemy.

The Jews demanded Christ be crucified because they wanted him to be cursed of God. In Deuteronomy 21:22-23 we learn that if a man committed a sin deserving of death and hung on a tree as a means of execution, he was accursed of God (see also Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29).

When the Jews cried out "crucify Him" they were not only demanding that Christ be put to death, but they were demanding that God's curse be upon Him. To a Jew, when one is hung on a tree, they could not offer a prayer of forgiveness for all the sin they had committed because they were forever separated from God. They were accursed. This is what they wanted for Christ.

The Cost

Galatians 3:13 tells us that Christ redeemed us by becoming a curse. Christ felt the guilt of the whole world. And He chose to do this for us. God could not remove the curse from Christ because He loved us and that was the only way He could save us. “He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). He did this because the Son Himself had willingly chosen this path because of His love for us.

Some have accused God the Father of being evil because He allowed His own Son to die. They ask, “what kind of a Father would do that to His Son?” These people forget that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—Three in One.

What the Son wants, the Father and Holy Spirit want, and what the Father wants, the Son and Holy Spirit want. They think alike. They love us alike. It was not easy for the Father to see His Son suffering.

The Father suffered with the Son, and because they are all God, God **Himself** offered Himself as the substitute in our behalf. So, it wasn't really a far-away Father watching and allowing His Son to suffer. It was a very near Father suffering with His Son, for both were giving of themselves for us because they loved us.

It was God the Father Himself who raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 5:30; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Galatians 1:1). Jesus did not raise Himself. Jesus was totally dependent on His Father while in this world, and He was no less dependent on the Father for His resurrection also. This was a remarkable condescension on the part of Jesus, who had all power before He came to earth. But He willingly laid aside His power to be dependent on His Father in all things.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, He exclaimed, “My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?” (Mark 15:33-37).

The plan was that Jesus would die for the human race and then the Father would raise Him up. But Jesus is crying out to His Father that He feels abandoned. He does not feel His Father's presence any longer. The hope of the resurrection went with that abandonment. He could not save both the world and Himself. He had to choose between the world and Himself, and He still goes through with it!

Do you know what He is saying in this act? He is saying that He loves us more than He loves Himself—that He was willing to die eternally without the hope of resurrection so that we could live; that He was willing to be eternally separate from His own Father whom He had been together in fellowship with since the beginning of time; that He was willing to sacrifice never being able to see His Father's face again in order that we would be saved.

This is how much He loved us. This is the depth of His supreme sacrifice for us.

In Psalm 22, we read the remarkable account of a crucifixion and the very words

that Jesus uttered before He died. This account gives us a clue into the deep emotional pain that wracked His heart while on the cross.

In verse 6, Jesus describes Himself as a worm. Jesus, and in other words, God, laid down His life (1 John 3:16) and was willing to be blotted out of existence that we might live in His place. This is how much the cross demonstrated God's love for us sinners. By this supreme sacrifice, Jesus was telling us that He loves us more than Himself.

Our Choice

When we truly understand what Jesus has done for us, it inspires us to love Him (John 4:19) and to want to live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). When we see the love that Christ had in choosing us over Himself, it awakens love in us. This is the right motivation for accepting Christ. Because He has shown us how much He loves us, we can begin to slowly start to trust Him with our hearts and lives.

When love is awakened in us, then living for Him and choosing His ways becomes not a chore or a duty, but an act of loving honor and praise to the One who did so much for us. In this way, obedience to God's laws and ways is never an act of "good works" done to "save ourselves" but an outpouring of our gratitude and love for God for everything He has done for us.

Conversion and Repentance

When we realize our sin problem and our helplessness to rise above our natures on our own, there is only one thing left to do. We need to give up and let God take control! When God brings us to this point, we consider it the miracle of conversion.

But what about repentance? Don't we have to repent first to come to God? Doesn't repentance come before conversion? In this study, we will explore what the Bible teaches about conversion and repentance.

Conversion

In John 3:3, Jesus Christ says that, unless we are born again, we cannot see the Kingdom of God. This shows us that the conversion experience (also called the new birth experience) is quite important if we expect to go to heaven.

The power for the new birth comes from God, not us, and the Holy Spirit is the active agent in the new birth experience. Conversion is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. It is marked by a change of attitude towards God. Instead of running away from God, the one who is being converted turns toward God.

Conversion does not mean that we have to have everything straight right away or understand everything. The Christian life is a path that leads to heaven. Many who are at the beginning of their Christian experience are akin to babies or children just beginning the way, and learning as they go along. Conversion is about not fighting with God, but submitting to God.

In order for us to understand spiritual things, we need to have our hearts and minds renewed by the Holy Spirit. Conversion creates a new and deeper capacity for knowing God.

The Holy Spirit renews your mind and thereby creates new understandings and interests that were not there before. You begin to experience a new desire to know God. This new attitude leads to a changed life. In Ezekiel, God promises to give us new hearts and new spirits that can respond warmly to God and to others.

Conversion is called the new birth. It's the beginning of spiritual life. Just as you cannot choose your own birthday in the physical life, you cannot choose your own spiritual birthday. You cannot convert yourself, or others for that matter. That is completely up to God. You can share Christ with others, but it is up to the Holy Spirit to change the attitude toward God.

God promises that He will finish the work He starts in us (Philippians 1:6).

Repentance

Some people ask if repentance is necessary for salvation. The Bible says "yes." The only type of people who feel the need for repentance, however, are people who

realize their sinful state—those who are sick of themselves, sick of messing up their lives. Repentance involves a genuine sorrow for sin that includes a turning away from the sin.

There is a false sorrow for sin that is more of a sorrow for the consequences of the sin, like a thief that is not sorry that he stole, but that he got caught and is now in jail.

There are many people who have a false sorrow for their misdeeds. How many stories do we read of cold-blooded people who have destroyed children or families through their heartless acts, and who are not repentant?

Genuine repentance comes from God. This is a point on which many err, and as a result they lack the faith to receive the help that Christ desires to give them. They think that they cannot come to Christ unless they first repent and that repentance prepares them for the forgiveness of their sins.

The Bible does not teach that we must repent before we can heed the invitation of Christ. We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.

We cannot repent of anything until we come to Christ. Repentance is something we receive. It is a gift from God. We come to Jesus and He grants us repentance and then forgives our sin. We do not cleanse ourselves in order to come to Christ. Instead, we come to Christ and then He does the job of cleansing us.

Romans 2:4 tells us that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. We cannot turn away from sin in our own strength but we can seek the Lord to do those things for us. God delights to help those who cannot help themselves. That is one of the points of difference between Jesus Christ and the gods of other religions.

Christianity is the only religion in which the God offered Himself, died, and rose again in order to deliver humankind from its desperate state. Christianity is also the only religion in which God, and God alone, is the Saviour. All other religions, including Catholicism, teach that we have to do something in order to earn redemption. This is wholly against the Bible.

Our part is only always to come to Jesus.

A True Christian Spiritual Life

In Matthew 5:20 NIV, Jesus says, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

The Pharisees thought themselves to be very righteous. By their religious rites and observances, by their giving to the Temple treasury, and by their pious works, they felt that they were the most suited for heaven. Yet Jesus said that we needed to be more righteous than even the Pharisees.

To the disciples in Jesus' day, that statement must have seemed a complete impossibility. If even the righteousness of the Pharisees was not good enough, who could ever be saved?

What type of righteousness was Jesus talking about? Can we really even obey on our own? What about our personal struggles with sin? How can we overcome?

Jesus was the epitome of righteousness on this earth. He lived a perfect life for you and me.

If we want to discover what Jesus meant when He said that we must be more righteous than the Pharisees, we must first study how Jesus lived His life. What was the source of His power?

The Christian's Source of Power

Hebrews 2:14-18 tells us that Jesus was made to be like one of us in every way. He had struggles and temptations. He got hungry and thirsty and tired. He had to become like us so that He could qualify to become the second Adam, our Saviour.

He became an example for us in every way. Jesus can empathize with every human experience and circumstance. And we can never say that He had any special advantage.

How then did Jesus perform the miracles He did and how did He live obediently in every way?

Union with the Father

John 5:19 and John 8:28 tell us that He did nothing of Himself (or on His own). John 10:30-33 and 6:57 show us the secret of Christ's power that we may also have. John 10:30 says "I and my Father are one," and 6:57 tells us, "he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."

This is not some grotesque literal eating of Jesus, but a spiritual eating. In John 6:48, Jesus calls Himself the "bread of life," in verse 51, "the living bread." He is also known as the "Word of God" in John 1:1.

The Word of God, then, is the Bible that contains His spoken words while on Earth, as well as Holy Spirit inspired words throughout 1500 years of Jewish history (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This is the “bread” upon which we are to feast. Without it, we cannot have life (John 6:53).

The Son was in close connection with His Father and it was through this close union that the Father was able to work through Jesus. Jesus was completely dependent upon His Father in all things. The miracles, the healings and the teachings were all through the Father. Jesus became totally human, dependent upon the Father for His strength.

This principle of union with the Father applies to us because we are to connect as closely with Jesus as Christ did with His Father. John 15:1-8 talks about Jesus as the true vine and each of us being a branch in Christ bearing fruit. Jesus tells us this:

Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing...If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples (John 15:4-5, 7-8).

An apple tree bears fruit because it is an apple tree, never to become one. The same is true in the Christian life. A Christian does good because he is a Christian, never to become one or to get any reward. If we abide in Christ then Christ lives within us.

Sinful men can become righteous only as they have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him (Desire of Ages, 309).

Just as Jesus was surrendered to the Father, so are we to be surrendered to Jesus.

How did Jesus maintain a vital connection with the Father? Mark 1:35 tells us that He got up early and prayed every day. And He did not pray selfish prayers but prayers that always put God's will first (Matthew 26:39; John 6:38). He was always asking “What would You have Me do?” and asking for strength to fulfill God's will.

The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow (Desire of Ages, 300).

What a difference this is from the teachings of Ignatius of Loyola, Robert Schuller, and others in the new spiritual formation movement, which focuses the attention on us, our abilities to redeem ourselves, and even our ability to become gods.

Practical Prayer Principles

Becoming a prayerful person involves a lot of help from God, but some patient effort on our part as well. It is important to establish a time, a place, and a method for prayer.

Establish a TIME for Prayer

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed (Mark 1:35).

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up (Psalm 5:3).

Jesus' favorite time to pray was in the early morning before His busy schedule of serving and preaching began. God enjoys having communion with Him throughout the day. However, if we do not turn to God in the beginning of our day for grace and strength, we will often find ourselves on our knees in the evening asking for forgiveness for the mistakes we made because we neglected the great opportunity.

Establish a PLACE for Prayer

...he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed (Mark 1:35).

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (Matthew 6:6).

Jesus always found a quiet place to commune with His Father. Sometimes it was in a garden, sometimes up in a mountain, but wherever it was, He usually was out of doors and by Himself where He would not be disturbed.

It is important to find a special place where you will not be disturbed in your time with God. It may be a special chair by your bed or it may be somewhere in your backyard. Many people report that their prayer life is recharged when they go outdoors in nature like Jesus did.

Whether out on the deck in the morning or under the stars at night, you can feel His presence more fully surrounded by the evidence of God's Creation. But the important thing is to choose a quiet place where you can be alone to talk to your Best Friend.

Establish a METHOD of Prayer

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him (Matthew 6:7-8).

Matthew tells us that God does not want to hear vain repetitions in our prayers. Prayer is the opening up of our heart to God like a friend and is appropriate at any time, at any place, in any form. Yet in those special moments of time alone, in

intimate communion with His Father, Jesus knelt and prayed aloud.

To abide in Jesus is to allow His words to abide in you. In His analysis of how to live as a Christian, Jesus makes abundantly clear what it really means to be united with Him:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you (John 15:7).

To abide in Christ means that His words, His teachings and His life-giving principles fill your mind and transform your life. God's words contain life-giving power (Psalm 33:9; John 6:63). This is the connection to the source of power in your life.

Why do so many read God's Word and receive little benefit?

Hebrews 4:2 tells us "...the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

There are over 3000 promises in the Bible. They are assurances from a loving heavenly Father of His care and concern. Accepting them by faith brings a peace and a calm assurance of His love and power in our lives.

It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. In Christ, God has provided means for subduing every sinful trait, and resisting every temptation, however strong. But many feel that they lack faith, and therefore they remain away from Christ.

Let these souls, in their helpless unworthiness, cast themselves upon the mercy of their compassionate Saviour. Look not to self, but to Christ. *Desire of Ages* page 429 tells us this:

He who healed the sick and cast out demons when He walked among men is the same mighty Redeemer today. Faith comes by the word of God (Romans 10:17). Then grasp His promise, 'Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away' John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief' (Mark 9:24). You can never perish while you do this, never!

Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5), but with Christ we can all things (Philippians 4:13). Christ promises that when we abide in Him, there will be a host of benefits. We will bear much fruit (John 15:8). This fruit will manifest itself as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Our souls will be restored (Psalm 23:3), and He will give us "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3). Others will glorify and praise Jesus for the fruit they see in our lives (Philippians 1:11). His glory will be our glory too.

The glory that God is speaking of is not a self-centered egotistical kind of glory, but rather one that results in blessings to others. Jesus says in John 12:32, "But I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men to Myself." It is not until God is lifted up and glorified that He can bring men to Himself for the purpose of salvation to mankind.

His glory brings blessings to the world. The kind of glory Robert Schuller teaches and preaches about leaves Jesus Christ out of the equation.

Just as a baby must receive nourishment through the umbilical cord in the womb of the mother, so we, too, receive nourishment through our vital connection with God. Without it we are powerless in our battle against evil. Without it we are helpless in our struggle against temptations and sin.

Our works do not save us, but they are the evidence of genuine faith in God in our lives. They are instrumental in leading others to Christ and salvation.

What is Faith?

Sometimes we wonder how we can get to know God. Well, it's the same way we get to know anybody else. In order to get acquainted with anyone, three things are necessary:

1. We need to talk to them
2. We need to listen to them
3. We need to go places and do things together.

These are the ingredients of good communication. But how do we know God is even there?

We take advantage of many things we can't see. How long has it been since you saw electricity or wind? We can't see this mysterious thing called "life." Yet we can see the results of all of the above.

Even though we cannot see God or hear His voice with our human equipment, we can still see the working of His power, and by taking advantage of the avenues of communication He has given us, we can come to know Him. It's by knowing Him that we learn to trust Him.

Faith is important to the Christian life. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Some people think you need a whole lot of faith, but Luke 17:5-6 tells us that faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains! It apparently doesn't take a lot to achieve a lot. Faith is not measured by how much we have. A little faith, if it is genuine, does the impossible.

What if we don't have the faith required for God to be able to work in our lives? We just need to ask God for it (Mark 9:20-27). We have only to ask God for the faith we need since faith ultimately comes from Him anyway.

We shall never be at a place for which God cannot make provision in our lives. "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" is what we can say anytime we don't feel we have enough faith. He is faithful to help us at anytime in our need of Him.

The spiritual promises are always available. But the promises for temporal blessings, even for life itself, are given on occasion and withheld on occasion as God's will sees best. Faith still trusts God even when things don't work out the way we want them to. It's easy to trust God when life is going smoothly.

The real test of faith comes when our prayers seem unanswered. The truth is that we don't work on our righteousness nor do we work on faith. Both are gifts. Both

come as a result of knowing Jesus. And knowing Jesus comes as a result of spending time in prayer and communion with Him. If we will come to Him, He will supply to us the genuine faith that we need.

A Story of Faith

Genuine faith is to continue believing even if it doesn't seem to be working at first. Matthew 15:21-28 tells us of a Gentile woman of the Canaanite race that came to Jesus asking for her daughter to be healed.

The disciples and Jesus were coming to the border of Phoenicia when this woman came up to Jesus. Christ's message had spread into the region of Phoenicia where the Gentile Canaanites lived. This woman had heard of the prophet, who, it was reported, healed all manner of diseases. As she heard of His power, hope sprang up in her heart.

Inspired by a mother's love, she determined to present her daughter's case to Him. It was her resolute purpose to bring her affliction to Jesus. He must heal her child. She had sought help from the heathen gods, but had obtained no relief. And at times she was tempted to think, "what can this Jewish teacher do for me?" But she determined not to lose her only hope.

Christ knew this woman's situation. He knew that she was longing to see Him, and He placed Himself in her path. By ministering to her sorrow, He could give a living representation of the lesson He designed to teach. For this He had brought His disciples into this region. He desired them to see the ignorance existing in cities and villages close to the land of Israel.

The Jewish people who had been given every opportunity to understand the truth were without a knowledge of the needs of those around them. They made no effort to help souls in darkness. The partition wall that Jewish pride had erected, shut even the disciples from sympathy with the heathen world. But these barriers were to be broken down.

Christ did not immediately reply to the woman's request. But although Jesus did not reply, the woman did not lose faith. As He passed on, as if not hearing her, she followed Him, continuing her supplications.

Annoyed by her importunities, the disciples asked Jesus to send her away. They saw that their Master treated her with indifference, and they therefore supposed that the prejudice of the Jews against the Canaanites was pleasing to Him. But it was a pitying Saviour to whom the woman made her plea, and in answer to the request of the disciples, Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Although this answer appeared to be in accordance with the prejudice of the Jews, it was an implied rebuke to the disciples, which they afterward understood as reminding them of what He had often told them—that He came to the world to save all who would accept Him.

The woman urged her case with increased earnestness, bowing at Christ's feet, and crying, "Lord, help me." Jesus, still apparently rejecting her entreaties, according to the unfeeling prejudice of the Jews, answered, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." This was virtually asserting that it was not just to lavish the blessings brought to the favored people of God upon strangers and aliens from Israel.

This answer would have utterly discouraged a less earnest seeker. But the woman saw her opportunity had come. Beneath the apparent refusal of Jesus, she saw a compassion that He could not hide. "Truth, Lord," she answered, "Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

While the children of the household eat at the father's table, even the dogs are not left unfed. They have a right to the crumbs that fall from the table abundantly supplied. So, while there were many blessings given to Israel, was there not also a blessing for her? She was looked upon as a dog, and had she not then a dog's claim to a crumb from His bounty?

This woman was so different from the Pharisees. They murmured and complained. They manifested unbelief and bitterness, and refused the salvation so freely offered them. This woman was of an unfortunate and despised race that has not been favored with the light of God's Word; however, she yields at once to the divine influence of Christ, and has implicit faith in His ability to grant the favor she asks.

She has no national or religious prejudice or pride to influence her course, and she immediately acknowledges Jesus as the Redeemer and as being able to do all that she asks of Him.

Jesus is satisfied...By His dealings with her, He has shown that she who has been regarded as an outcast from Israel is no longer an alien, but a child in God's household. As a child, it is her privilege to share in the Father's gifts. Christ now grants her request, and finishes the lesson to the disciples. Turning to her with a look of pity and love, He says, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." From that hour her daughter became whole...The woman departed acknowledging her Saviour, and happy in the granting of her prayer" (DA, 399-402).

Even though Jesus seemed to ignore, spurn and even insult her, this Gentile woman persevered in her faith, continuing to trust Him and petitioning her request. The best definition of faith is trust. It is depending upon another.

Living Faith

There once was a tightrope walker who was crossing Niagara Falls. After he had held the crowds spellbound with his daring, he asked, "How many of you believe I could cross the tightrope again, this time pushing a wheelbarrow with someone riding in it?"

The crowds applauded. They were sure he could do it. But then he said, "Who will

volunteer to ride the wheelbarrow?”

There was a vast silence. The audience had just been reminded of the vital difference between belief and trust. It's one thing to believe that the wheelbarrow would make it safely across the chasm. It's quite another thing to put your life on the line. That's the kind of faith that is genuine!

How can we best learn to trust someone? By getting to know them. Paul trusted Jesus. In 2 Timothy 1:12 he wrote, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed.”

We can get to know God like that, too. Here's how:

1. Listening to Him (Romans 10:17)
2. Talking to Him (Philippians 4:6; Luke 11:9-13)
3. Working with Him (Matthew 11:29)

But how do we acquire faith? Is it something that we work on or do we screw up our energy as tight as possible until it comes? The Bible tells us that faith is a gift from God. He has given everyone a measure of faith (Romans 12:3) and is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Our faith gets better and better the more we work on getting to know God through the three avenues above. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more genuine it becomes.

God's Will Revealed

When we are walking with God in this way, God will help us to be certain of His will. We will tell us, help us, guide us throughout our lives. There are three ways that God reveals His will to us.

- 1. Through His Word (Psalm 119:105; Joshua 1:8).** The Scriptures are a very reliable source of finding God's will on any given subject. Much wisdom can be obtained regarding finances, parenting, or any number of moral issues. If you need guidance on a matter, always consult the Bible for guidance first.
- 2. Through providence or circumstances (Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 37:23).** God will often bring circumstances into our lives in order to reveal His will to us. When we are in prayer regarding life decisions such as a job or residence, we need to look for open or closed doors.
- 3. Through direct communication to the heart (Acts 8:26-40).** Sometimes the Holy Spirit will impress upon your heart His will to you. Often times it is helpful to pray very specifically to the Lord regarding certain matters that we are unclear about.

An example of this is one person who prayed about an offered job opportunity. They

prayed that if this job opportunity were in God's will for them, their excitement would continue to grow stronger and stronger. And if this were not God's will, that He would take this idea away.

As soon as that prayer was uttered, the person couldn't even remember the name of the company. They knew instantly that it was not God's will for them. Six months later, the company folded! God knows the end from the beginning. By being in the very center of His will we have peace in our lives.

Surrender

As we perceive that God is real and active in our lives, we have a desire to learn more about Him.

As we begin to sense our sinfulness and our need for Christ, we begin to desire a personal relationship with Him. We want to give Him our love, but sometimes there seems to be nothing there. How does this work of conversion begin, and what is our role in it?

Jesus taught that the righteousness needed to enter heaven was greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). The righteousness needed for salvation is a righteousness by faith (Galatians 2:15-16, 21).

Righteousness by faith is a transaction—the greatest trade that was ever made! We trade our total sinfulness in exchange for Christ’s holy righteousness. This is the only righteousness that can gain us entrance into heaven.

Dying to Self

We receive this righteousness of Christ’s when we give up on trying to obtain salvation by our good works or behavior, and surrender our will to God. The Bible calls those who have given up on themselves “dead” (Romans 6:2). Dead people cannot sin (Romans 6:7). We die to self by being crucified spiritually with Christ (Romans 6:6).

This is an act of surrender, but it is not an actual physical death, nor a death to one’s identity. It is not about being a mindless spineless thing that obeys without question. It is an intelligent surrender of one’s selfish desires and inclinations to God’s revealed will.

No one can crucify themselves. It must be done for them. It is the same with surrender. We actually need God in order to be able to surrender fully to Him.

Because He is a gentleman, God does not force Himself on us, or possess us against our will. He asks us for permission first (Revelation 3:20). Jesus spoke of self-surrender as self-denial—a losing of one’s life, giving up everything in order to gain everything.

We all have to die. Our choice is whether we want to die to self and be reborn in Christ, or to die without Christ and forfeit our salvation. When we hold on to the control of our lives here on Earth, we lose our eternal life, but when we decide to lose it for the sake of Christ, we gain eternal life. Self-surrender is not a one-time experience. It’s something we have to do daily (Luke 9:23).

Surrender is God's work in us

And there is life after spiritual death. Romans 6:4-5 tells us that dying to self is not

the end. It is the beginning of a new life in Christ. God controls the new life because we have yielded ourselves to Him. Surrender, or giving up, is admitting that we can do nothing. Inevitably, therefore, the work of bringing us to the point of surrender must be the work of God. It is not something we can do for ourselves.

We are controlled either by God or Satan (Romans 6:16; Luke 11:23; James 4:4). The only control we have is to choose who is going to control us:

Unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light (Desire of Ages, 324).

James 4:7-8 tells us how to resist the devil and his control:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.

Let God fight against Satan on your behalf. You are not strong enough on your own. Romans 7:18-19 tells us that everything depends on the right action of the will—the power of choice God has given to us; it is ours to exercise.

You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. (Phil 2:13) Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered on Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him (Steps to Christ, 30).

Instead of expending our energies doing good works to earn our salvation, we need to rechannel those energies into spending time with Christ. As we make the choice to spend time day-by-day in beholding Christ, we invite Him to do His work in our lives, and He will lead us step-by-step to the point of surrender. Giving up is possible only when He has brought us to that point.

Christian Growth

In a previous article, we explored what faith is. We learned that another word for faith is trust. And we learned that we begin to trust God by reading His Word, praying to Him, and trusting Him with our life.

Are you interested in growing spiritually? The key is that you cannot grow by focusing on growth. Probably nothing is more detrimental to spiritual growth than constantly checking yourself for fruit.

There is one sure way to tell whether you are growing: look at whether you are eating. Isn't the way to grow spiritually to partake of the Bread of Life?

Growth and Grace

What does God expect of me? What part of the process does God play and what part do I play?

In the Christian life, we are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

We obtain the grace we need from the throne of grace. We are invited to come boldly to ask for mercy and grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

We obtain the knowledge of Jesus Christ through the Word (1 Peter 2:2-3). It is through personal study of Scripture that we come to a fuller understanding of the knowledge of Jesus.

Through these two avenues, we are able to grow in faith and love (2 Thessalonians 1:3). Our faith must grow in its dependence on God.

Peter was a good example of our situation. His eyes were only on Jesus as he stepped out of the boat and onto the water to be with Him. But once he took his eyes off Christ and began to depend on himself, he begins to sink. It's not unusual for us to waver like this in our faith as well.

Abiding in Christ and His Love

John 15:4 tells us that we can only grow and bear fruit if we abide in Christ. Just as a branch needs to stay connected to the main trunk of the tree in order to receive life-giving nourishment and sustenance, so we need to stay connected to Jesus. Growth in the Christian life is learning to depend upon God more and more.

Dependence upon God is an all or nothing proposition. There is no such thing as a partial trust or partial surrender. You are either surrendered to God at any given moment or you are not, and are instead depending upon yourself.

Romans 8:35, 38-39 tells us that there is nothing that can ever separate us from the

love of God. Therefore, if we fall and fail, we don't need to wait for God to "cool off."

We don't give up and decide that we'll never make it to heaven. We don't try to "make things right" on our own, and then come back to Him. We can come to Him immediately, confess our sin, and our need of Him.

Through it all, our relationship with God continues. When we think of the wonderful words of Romans 8, we realize that God will never separate from us. The only time separation can occur is when it's us doing the separating.

Matthew 26:41 tells us that the "spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak." We are naturally weak. We want to do the right thing, our intentions may be good, but we fail short in the actuality of doing. But God promises us that His grace "is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We must realize that as Christians, we don't grow by becoming stronger and stronger. We grow by realizing anew each day how weak we are and how dependent we are upon God's grace.

The secret to growth in the Christian life is repeating the first conversion experience on a daily basis. Colossians 2:6-7 admonishes us, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught..."

You continue your Christian experience, you abide in Christ, "in the same way as you received Him at first...you gave yourself to God, to be His wholly, to serve and obey Him, and you took Christ as your Saviour. You could not yourself atone for your sins or change your heart; but having given yourself to God; you believe that He for Christ's sake did all this for you. By faith you became Christ's and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to give all—your heart, your will, your service—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must take all—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper—to give you power to obey" (*Steps to Christ*, 34).

Christ is the Author

Hebrews 12:2-3 gives us the secret to Christian growth:

Looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

*When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevents the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life's cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or our own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind (*Steps to Christ*, 34).*

When we stay focused on Jesus, we will bear much fruit and we will have victory (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). Many people have the mistaken idea that spiritual birth comes from God, but that spiritual growth is their own responsibility. It is simply not possible to grow in grace by our own feeble efforts.

Growth is a gift from God, just like repentance and forgiveness and eternal life. And we continue to receive the gift of growth as we ask Him into our lives each day.

God's Promises to You

Jesus has given us many precious promises in His Word. It is impossible to believe these magnificent promises and not have assurance now. That is why Jesus gave them to us.

Following is a list of twenty promises. There are many more in Scripture.

God's Assurances

Promise

Reference

He will keep you from falling.

Jude 24

Judgments will be given to the saints.

Daniel 7:22

He leads you in paths of righteousness.

Psalms 23:3

He gives you victory now.

1 Corinthians 15:57

He who started a good work in you will complete it.

Philippians 1:6

Jesus is your attorney.

1 John 2:1

The Father loves you.

John 16:27

He gives forgiveness and cleansing from sin daily.

1 John 1:9

He forgets your sin and iniquity.

Hebrews 8:12

Jesus assures you and helps you be bold.

Hebrews 10:19-22

He will confess you before His angels.

Revelation 3:5

You can overcome by His blood.

Revelation 12:11

He offers you His righteousness free.

Matthew 22:11

No one can take you from His hand.

John 10:29

If you believe on Him you cannot be condemned.

John 5:24

He always causes you to triumph.

2 Corinthians 2:14

Jesus does the miracle-working inside you.

Romans 8:3-4

With Him everything is possible for you.

Mark 10:27

He will take your cares and worries.

1 Peter 5:7