

INDIA BLOGS - 5

Lessons Learned in India

2021 – 2023



Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer

Christian Training Organization

Jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org

ChristianTrainingOnline.org

(India Outreach, Spiritual Warfare, Family Ministries, Counseling, World View)

Copyright © 2021

© 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2021, 2022, 2023

INDIA BLOGS – JANUARY 2021 – DECEMBER 2023

BLOG 864: GOD PROMISES TO MEET OUR NEEDS

(I help homeschool many of my grandchildren in the Bible. Part of that includes Bible memorization. In 2020 we started memorization promises in the Bible and I've been thinking about them a lot. I put together a series of blogs on Bible promises to share with you. I know they'll mean as much to you as they do to me.)

Philippians 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Paul is sharing his own personal testimony with the Philippians when he records this great promise of God. "My God," he says. He knows this by personal experience. When we have a personal relationship with God, we can say this as well. We can be assured of it because He "WILL" meet all our needs. Every single one. He may not meet them the way we expect, but He keeps His promise to meet them. If He doesn't change our circumstances, He promises to give us the grace to get through (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Of course, the key word here is "needs," not "wants." If it is a need God will provide it. He also meets many of our wants as well, but He never promises to meet them all. That is all by grace. If we think something is a need but He isn't providing it, then it is a want and not a need. That includes life when it is our time to die.

It seems we can do ourselves a big favor by not making our 'wants' into 'needs.' When it comes right down to it, there are very few actual needs we have, especially compared to our wants. When we do have a need, we really don't even have to ask God for it because He has already promised He would meet it. And who could know our needs better than God? (January 12, 2021 Doylestown PA)

Are there any wants in your life that you think are needs? Ask Him to show you if there are needs He is meeting in a way didn't expect, so you think they aren't being met?

BLOG 865: GOD PROMISES SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:3-6

This promise from Philippians is one of my personal favorites because it assures me that one day, I will be exactly what God created me to be. Often it doesn't seem like that will ever happen. In fact, sometimes it seems like I am losing ground instead of moving ahead. But God promises me that He will complete what He started at my salvation.

Growing in Christlikeness is the goal of all of us (Romans 8:28-29), but it is a lifelong process which we will never finish while on this earth. Paul refers to this process as a "good work," although many times it feels anything but "good." It seems I learn best from discomfort. And it definitely takes "work" for spiritual growth is a long, slow, hard process which is often painful. There is no such thing as instant spirituality, despite what some may claim.

I recently heard the process of spiritual growth compared to a rock tumbler. Rough stones are put in and tumbled around until they become smooth. The tumbler bounces the rocks against each

other for weeks or months until all the rough edges are removed. That's how stones in the bottom of a stream become smooth as well. God uses the rubbing of life's pains and troubles to smooth our rough edges to make us more like Jesus. We see that in Paul's life as well as Peter, John, Abraham and everyone who grew spiritually. We have God's promise that one day we WILL be smooth with all our imperfections and rough edges gone.

I can't do this in my life but God can and will. I don't always see it happening in my life but God promises it so I trust Him with this promise. If you aren't applying this promise to your life regularly you should! (January 18, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What has God done in your life in the last year to make you more like Jesus? Where is He working now? What can you do to cooperate with the work He is doing?

BLOG 866: GOD PROMISES HIS PEACE

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

When we come to God for salvation, we have peace WITH God (Romans 5:1) because the enmity between us has been removed. We become His friends, no longer His enemies. In our daily life we need the peace OF (or FROM) God (Philippians 4:7) to fill us and be with us. "Don't be anxious" is God's command, but we can only stop anxiety by replacing it with peace.

Have you ever tried talking yourself out of anxiety, or ignore your fear and act like it didn't exist? How well did you do with that? What about whipping up peace on your own? Anxiety/fear can't just be removed, they have to be replaced by something stronger - God's peace.

God's antidote to anxiety/fear is to pray which includes thanking God for all the wonderful things He has done for us and all the bad He has prevented, most of which we aren't even aware. As we focus on God and trust in Him, He will give us peace in our "hearts" (emotions, subjective feelings) and "minds" (objective thoughts and plans).

All this is done "in Christ Jesus," the only place where true peace will be found. Hannaniah, Azariah and Mishael found this as they were being thrown into the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:8-25). Stephen experienced it as he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:59-60). Peter, who feared a servant girl, a few days later had peace and courage to stand for Jesus before all the religious leaders (Acts 4:8-13). (January 21, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you have peace in your life? What is your biggest enemy to peace? How can you have victory over anxiety and fear?

BLOG 867: GOD PROMISES TO HELP YOU DO WHATEVER HE WANTS

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

The world is big today on affirmation: "You can do it," "Just do it." We convince our children that they can do anything they want. We even expect that of ourselves, which sometimes leaves us feeling like a failure when we aren't able to do anything and everything. Some even quote Paul as saying, "I can do all things" (Philippians 4:13). But Paul isn't saying we can do everything, he is saying that we can do everything God wants us to do "through Christ who gives me strength"(Philippians 4:13).

Every passage in Scripture must be taken in context and in Philippians 4 Paul is talking about the importance of being content in life, no matter if we have a lot or very little. The key, Paul says, is

contentment. In addition, Paul says he "learned" to be content. A newborn baby is anything but content. It wants what it wants and wants it immediately. Patience and acceptance of life as it is doesn't come easy as children grow. It doesn't come naturally to any of us. On a scale of 1 to 10, how content would you say you are? Where would God place you on that scale?

There is no excuse to be anything but a 10 in contentment, because God promises to give us the strength we need to accept life as it is. If Paul can learn, through God's power, to be content with prison, persecution, near-death experiences, rejection, beatings and betrayal by friends, God will be able to give us contentment as well - but we must turn to Him for it.

If God wants us to be content, He will give us the strength to be able to do it. The principle is clear: if God wants you to do (or stop doing) something, then He will give you the strength to do it. A Christian can never say "I can" in their own power, nor can they say "I can't" with God's power available. (January 25, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

When is the last time you said, "I can't"? Confess that as sin. It is a lie. Memorize this verse, Philippians 4:13, and repeat it over and over all day.

BLOG 868: GOD PROMISES HIS CONTINUAL PRESENCE

The LORD will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." Deuteronomy 31:5-6

When he was 120 years old, Moses turned over leadership of the Jewish people to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:1-6). Through Moses, God promised Joshua and the whole nation they would finally enter their Promised Land by God's provision and protection. Remembering what God had done in the past (verse 4) would help them trust Him in the present. That's good advice for us today as well. Follow Joshua (which means "Jesus") and trust in God's promises by remembering His past deliverance.

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5,

When the writer of Hebrews wanted to encourage Jewish Christians undergoing intense persecution to stay faithful, he quoted this same promise (Hebrew 13:5). As he closes his book, he reminds them of this promise to their ancestors. It was true in the past, and is still true today. "Never," under any circumstances, no matter what we do or don't do, will He leave or forsake us. He won't "leave or forsake." It is repeated for emphasis, to make sure we understand how certain it is.

Moses failed many times, and didn't enter the land with the others because of his sin. But still he affirms God has never in any way turned His back on him. The recipients of the book of Hebrews were being persecuted because of their faith and were wondering where God was. He was still with them despite all that was happening. His promise is still true for us today. No matter where we are in life, what we have done or what circumstances we find ourselves in, He is always with us. Always. Forever. Now there is a promise you can build your life on. (February 1, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

When does it mean most to you that God will never leave or forsake you? Think of hard times in the past when He was with you. Thank Him again for that.

BLOG 869: GOD PROMISES HIS STRENGTH

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah ministered at the same time Jeremiah did, right before Jerusalem was destroyed and the nation of Judah went into captivity in Babylon. Even though judgment for sin was coming, God promised strength for those who trust in Him ("hope" or "wait").

For those going through unbelievably difficult times, God's promises are still true if they keep their eyes on Him. They will "renew their strength." Do you ever feel weary, tired out, don't know if you can go on? If you turn to Him, Jesus promises renewed strength.

God also promises those who faithfully follow Him that He will enable them to "soar," "run," and "walk." When we acknowledge that God is in control of all and that He promises to do what is best for our growth and His glory, then we can effortlessly glide above all the turmoil and fear as an eagle glides effortlessly on air currents far above us. He promises extra strength to "run" when extra effort is needed. The rest of the time He will help us in our normal, everyday "walk." He promises energy for that as well.

The key is trusting, waiting patiently on the Lord and His timing. Don't rush ahead of Him, don't lag behind Him. Trust and patience go together. When we have them, we have hope. Our part is to patiently trust in Him and His timing. His part is to take care of all the rest. That's a deal you can't pass up! (February 2, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

How patient a person are you? What do you need patience for in your life right now? In what ways does your impatience keep you from receiving God's help and strength?

BLOG 870: GOD PROMISES HIS RESTORATION

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

Jeremiah prophesied before and during the fall of Judea to Babylon. Despite the message of soon-coming judgment, God also showed the people there was hope in the future. In the previous chapter, Jeremiah bought real estate in Jerusalem as the city was about to be overwhelmed by the Babylonian army. God was showing there was hope in the future, the people would be restored. Even when King Hezekiah arrested Jeremiah for speaking of coming judgment and captivity (Jeremiah 32:3), he stayed faithful to his message.

God always provided an option for the people to repent. God said, "Call to me." They can turn from their rebellion and call on God instead of the false idols they had been calling on, and He promises to hear and answer ("I will answer you"). When we repent by confessing/admitting our sin (1 John 1:9), God promises to forgive and restore ("answer" prayer for forgiveness).

In addition, He promises to go far beyond restoring and "tell them great and unsearchable things they do not know." Sin and disobedience will be gone, replaced by blessing far beyond their imagination. That doesn't mean they won't still suffer the physical consequences of their sin, but there will future restoration and present blessing from God. He promised it, and He always keeps His promises!

The nation did go into captivity. Jeremiah himself was martyred. But 70 years later a remnant returned to the land, and 400 years after that the Messiah Himself came to Israel. He performed miracles and paid for the sins of the world. Certainly, that qualifies as something "great and unsearchable!"

This promise is great for a prodigal son who wants to return home (Luke 15:11-24). The truth also means that God will show us his great and unsearchable truths and blessings when we turn to Him for them. All we have to do is call on Him. (February 8, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Is there a need for you to call on Him right now? Then do so.

BLOG 871: GOD PROMISES TO USE YOU

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:12-13

Paul thanked the Philippians for their faithfulness to God and encouraged them to stay faithful, because what was happening was really God working through them. He wants to remind them they cannot take credit for their good works, for the good they do is not of themselves but from God working in them.

We can learn from this that we should take no credit for our good works, but give glory to God for His work in us. It is natural for us to take credit for the good we do and to blame others, sometimes even God Himself, for the bad we do. The truth is that we should give God credit for anything good that comes from us and take full blame for the bad. When we take credit for what He does, we are stealing His glory, and that is something we should never do.

Paul further says God works in us to "will" and to "act." He puts a desire for godliness in us so we choose ("will") to do good, then He gives us the strength to carry out that desire ("act"). It's humbling to remember that we cannot even desire to do good if we are left operating by our old sin nature. Unbelievers can do human good, but nothing that counts in God's sight, because God doesn't look at the act. He looks at the motive behind it. Unless we are motivated by love for Him and the desire to please Him, any human good we do is as wood, hay and stubble and will not last in His sight (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

The final part of this special promise is that all God works in us is for "His good purpose." Often, we ask Him to bless our plans or bring about our desires. We are to do what He wants, not try to get Him to do what we want ("Your kingdom come, Your will be done" Matthew 6:10). We are to daily live in faithfulness to Him ("continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling") and in love toward all the saints (Ephesians 1:15). His purpose includes all believers ("Our Father in heaven...give us...forgive us...deliver us..." Matthew 6:9-13). That doesn't mean a smooth and easy life, though. His "good purpose" for us is to become more Christlike in all we say and do (Romans 8:28-29): a sometimes slow and painful process.

God had a plan and purpose for Ruth's life. She showed great faith and love, and He worked in her and through her to bring about His plan, even when she was a young widow in a foreign land. God's plan was for her to be the great-grandmother of King David and have the Messiah as one of her descendants. (Book of Ruth)

God also worked in Abigail's life. She was in a very difficult marriage to a cruel man, Nabal. She faithfully followed God's leading in her life. He used her to help David and allowed her to eventually become David's wife (1 Samuel 25). God promises to work in us to use us for His glory as well. He will make us like Christ and work through us to do His will on earth.

Sometimes we feel useless and want to quit, but remember His promise. We cannot depend entirely on ourselves to mature and grow into serving Him according to His purpose; He is behind it all, working in us when we let Him. What better goal can we have for life as we start each new day. (February 15, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Spend some time thinking of the good He has done through your life and how He is using you now. Thank Him for it.

BLOG 872: GOD PROMISES HIS GUIDANCE

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

I'm sure you are familiar with this promise, but it may not be saying exactly what you think. Let's look at it and see just what is being promised here.

First of all, we see 3 conditions we must meet for this promise to be true. What are the conditions? God expects us to 1) trust 100% in Him (hard to do), 2) trust 0% in ourselves (even harder to do) and 3) always 100% acknowledge our total dependence on Him (most difficult of all to do). These are all inner heart attitudes, not simple outer actions. They must be our inner desire, even if we struggle and sometimes fail in them. God knows our heart, and He knows if we truly desire to have these three or not. In other words, before He will show us His will, we must be totally committed to following it no matter what.

We can't ask God to show us His will just so we can consider it with our other options, then decide if we want to follow Him or not. We must sign on the dotted line before we are shown the contract. That's what faith is all about. That's our part. Then God will do His part.

When we do this, God promises He will make our paths "straight." Our misunderstanding of this promise centers on the meaning of "straight." We read it and we think, "smooth," "easy," "direct," "downhill." That's not what the word means. It has the idea of "clear," "understandable." God promises He will reveal His will for us in a clear, understandable way, something we can follow and know we are following Him. We won't be confused about what is right and wrong - the Bible and His Spirit within us will show us that.

Abram was fully committed to following God, and the Lord led him from Ur to Canaan (Genesis 11:27-12:9). Elijah was totally devoted to following God and was directed to a brook, then a widow's home, and finally to the conflict with the prophets of Baal (His path wasn't easy, but God made the way clear and Elijah followed (1 Kings 17-18). The magi, king-makers from the east, were seeking God's will with all their hearts, and He led them thousands of miles to see the new-born Messiah/King (Matthew 2:1-12). Proverbs 3:5-6 promises that when we want to follow God, He will direct our lives in that direction.

What He is not saying is that when we trust Him all will go smoothly and easily. It won't. We'll clearly know when we are living for Him, or for ourselves - He'll make that plain. His Spirit will convict us. And with His help, as promised in Hebrews 13:5; Philippians 4:19, etc., we will be able to follow. This verse promises awareness of God's will for our lives, but it doesn't promise that way will be easy and smooth. It wasn't for Jesus, and it won't be for those who follow Him, either. Are you confused about a decision or direction in your life? Make sure you are trusting Him and committed to following Him no matter the cost. Don't expect the path to be easy, but you can be sure it will be what God wants, and He will guide you step by step. (March 1, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Are you willing to do whatever He wants and go wherever He wants you to go, no matter what it is? If so, tell Him now that you'll follow 100% no matter what.

BLOG 873: GOD PROMISES HIS GRACE

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

Sometimes the words we pray must make the angels shake their heads in disbelief. Often, we ask God to do something He has already promised to do. How many times have I asked God for grace for myself or for someone else? I should have saved my breath. He has already promised to do just

that. As I look back on my life, it's clear that His grace has always been sufficient, just as He promised. No matter how bad things have been, His grace has seen me through it.

Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 12. He had a miserable affliction that he three times begged God to remove, but God never did. Instead, God answered Paul's deep desire for relief in another way. He didn't remove the problem, but rather enabled Paul to live with it and to therefore grow in understanding because of it.

How many times do we think God doesn't answer prayer because our circumstances don't change? If we would look more closely, we would see that God took care of those circumstances in a different way - He enabled us to endure them.

Rahab was a Gentile female prostitute, but seeking for God. His grace was sufficient to save her physically and spiritually (Joshua 2) and place her in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Noah, too, found God's grace great enough to save him and his family from the world-wide flood that destroyed everyone else (Genesis 6-9). Lot didn't deserve grace (Genesis 18-19) but God's grace was great enough to deliver him from Sodom and Gomorrah.

The whole premise of this promise is that when we are facing something utterly beyond our ability, something that causes us to admit our helplessness and come to Him begging for help, He will always be there for us. It's in times when we admit we need grace that we will recognize His grace in our lives. It's when we are totally at our end that we most need and appreciate His help and provision. I think of this verse often when in India. I feel my weakness most clearly at those times, and in contrast I can recognize it is only His power that gets me through. There have been other times in my life where I was in that same totally helpless position and felt Him carrying me. God allows those times in all of our lives so we will turn to Him and acknowledge our need of Him. Have you been there? Are you there now?

We usually ask God to remove burdens and difficulties in our lives, but if He doesn't remove them, we should ask for His help to endure them instead. Often our prayers aren't answered because we are telling God what to do when He has another plan for us. This is true in spiritual warfare as well. We can get discouraged when deliverance from demonic oppression doesn't come quickly, but God promises enough grace to help us persevere.

Don't always beg God to remove the difficulties in your life. Look for His grace instead. There is a saying, "sometimes the Lord calms the water, sometimes He calms the child." You don't even have to ask Him for grace, because He already promised it. Lean on His grace, let His grace carry you when your way is stormy. After all, His grace IS sufficient! (March 8, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

When has God's grace been most evident in your life? Where can you see God's grace working for you now?

BLOG 874: GOD PROMISES TO NEVER LEAVE US

Joshua had a big challenge ahead of him. As if taking Moses' place wasn't enough of a challenge, he was to lead the Jews into the Promised Land and drive out the strong nations entrenched there. When Moses turned over leadership, he had important advice for Joshua: ***"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*** Deuteronomy 31:6

Moses didn't tell him, "You can do it!" The truth was that Joshua couldn't do it – not by his own strength and ability. That's why Moses said "God can do it!"

The writer of Hebrews quotes Moses' words and applies them to times of financial difficulty and material loss. Whether we have difficult decisions and battles to fight, like Joshua, or are facing personal challenges, like the writer of Hebrews refers to, God is with us. ***I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5***

The emphasis in the verse is on the word "never." "**NEVER** will I leave you..." is how the Greek is structured. Under no conditions or circumstances will He desert us or turn His back on us. We never have to pray for Him to not depart, for He already said He won't. That's a promise, and God never breaks His promises!

Sometimes we think no one cares or understands, that even God has left us. When the situation we face is hard and painful, we may feel He must have left us. The truth is that He can't and He won't. He promises to never turn from us. He never left Moses. He was with him at birth and through his years in Egypt; with him for the 40 years he was a shepherd in the wilderness; with him when he returned and led the Jews to freedom. Moses wasn't perfect during those times: he murdered a man, had an anger problem, and struggled as a father and husband. Yet, God never left Moses.

God never left Joshua, either. He was with him at Jericho and throughout one battle after the next. He was with Joshua as he conquered and subdued the Promised Land. Joshua didn't have to do it alone. He couldn't have. He didn't have to, for God was always there as He promised.

He will never leave us, either. If we are in danger like Daniel was, He will be with us. If we don't always sense His presence, as the disciples during the storm on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus slept in the boat, He is still with us. Even if we leave Him, He will never leave us. He promised! (March 15, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What are you facing today? Are you facing it with God or in your own strength? Are you believing the lie that you are alone and no one cares? Whatever is going on in your life, this short promise is one you should memorize and repeat daily.

BLOG 875: GOD PROMISES TO UPHOLD US

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

Why are there so many promises about fear? Could it be because we human beings are so prone to fear? It's something I've struggled with my whole life. I bet many of you have, too. That's why God gives us these wonderful promises to carry us through any and all fear.

"*I am with you,*" Hebrews 13:5. God promises He will always be with us no matter what. It's a promise He makes many times in various ways.

"*I am your God,*" as our God, our Master and Lord, He will give guidance, provision and protection. As His servants, we are to trust, obey and serve Him. In medieval days the lord was responsible for his people. He would lead them wisely, provide for their needs, and be there to defend them from danger. That describes God as our Lord. The people under the medieval lord were to put their faith in their lord and do whatever he asked. That's how we should respond as well.

"*I will strengthen you,*" assumes we are weak and needy. Unless we recognize our weakness, we won't turn to Him for help. The longer I live as a Christian, the more I become aware of my inability to do anything without Him. The good news is that I don't have to – He promises enough strength for whatever I need. It's all His doing, working in and through me.

"*I will help you,*" assumes we will not sit back and let God do everything for us. We must do our very best while always realizing it is God's strength working in us.

“I will uphold you,” assumes we would fail without Him – which we would. We never have to fail or fall because He always promises to uphold us when we turn to Him for strength and help.

“With My righteous right hand,” reminds us God is holy and just, therefore He can’t and won’t do anything wrong. “Right hand” refers to His power and authority to do what is right. God can and will do the right thing in our lives. We can count on it!

Isaiah, who wrote this, faithfully served God for over 50 years. He was persecuted by his fellow Jews. They rejected and mocked him and his message. Tradition says he was cruelly martyred. Through all of that, though, he had these promises from God, the same promises we have today.

God gives us strength *when* we need it – not ahead of time. The Jordan River parted when the priests’ feet hit the water, not before (Joshua 3:8-13). The mouths of the lions were shut when Daniel was in the lion’s den, not before (Daniel 6:21-22). God will give us what we need to face whatever He has for us: illness, grief, pain and suffering, even death (Psalm 23:4).

“Do not fear” is a promise for us, but is also a command for us. God can command it of us because of His promise to be with us through it – whatever it is. Think of it this way, God’s commandments to us are also His enablement for us. (March 22, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 876: GOD PROMISES TO USE EVERYTHING FOR OUR GOOD

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

This familiar verse is sometimes misused to say that no matter what happens, God will turn it around so it becomes good. That isn’t what He is promising. Sin is still sin. Evil is still evil. God can and does bring good results despite sin or evil, but He doesn’t change them into something good. Abuse, loss, loneliness, suffering and pain are never good, but somehow God works in the situation to bring something good for His people. It may not seem so at the time, but that’s His promise, and God keeps His promises!

Paul was a trained Jewish theologian who persecuted and killed Christians (Acts 7:27-8:3; 9:1). God used “all” things in his life for God’s glory. He used Paul’s theological training to help him write doctrine in the New Testament. God used his persecution of Christians to expose Paul to the faith and testimony of those who died for their faith. He also used it to humble Paul and show his salvation was all by grace. Paul never forgot these things and was forever grateful for them.

A mistake we make with this verse is thinking only in material terms. We think when we lose a good job that God owes us a better one, or when we lose something in the service of God that He will give us more and better back. However, most of the ‘good’ He does for us is spiritual, not physical. He uses physical suffering and material loss to teach us trust, patience, compassion. Gentleness and other Christlike qualities He also forms in us as He molds us into Jesus’ image (Romans 8:29). These spiritual traits are of much more worth than any earthly possessions anyway, for they last for all eternity.

God is always working. He keeps the universe, the church, and you and me functioning. He is working for “good.” It may not be health or financial or relational improvement, instead it could be growing in faith and trust, learning to depend on Him, or having others see how we respond to tragedy. The ultimate goal, as the next verse (Romans 8:29) tells us, is to be “conformed to the likeness of His Son.” The best “good” God can do for us is to help us become more like Jesus. And that doesn’t come by everything in life being easy and perfect!

This promise doesn’t apply to everyone, though. There are two conditions given. 1. We must use our free will to respond to His love for us by “loving Him”. 2. We do that because He has “called

us” through His sovereignty. The verse only is true for believers who are living for Him. Suffering in the lives of unbelievers or believers who are not following the Lord are for the purpose of bringing them to Him. That is ‘good.’ But for us who are His and living for Him, He has much more, and all of it is “good.” (April 12, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Take a few minutes to think of some of the most recent difficult experiences you’ve had. How can you apply Romans 8:28 to them? What ‘good’ came from them?

Are you going through trying times now? Keep on the lookout for God’s ‘good’ through it. It’ll be there. It must, for God promises it will be.

BLOG 877: GOD PROMISES AN ESCAPE FROM TEMPTATION

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Every time you come to a fork in the road there are two options: go right or left. You can’t go both. With no option you just keep going straight. Life is that way as well. Every time we are tempted to sin, we also have the opportunity to resist and keep from sin. Satan and our flesh tempt us to disobey God and meet our needs our way, but God also provides an escape from that, a chance to trust and obey Him.

Paul tells us 3 things about temptation in this verse that should be a comfort and help. 1. Every temptation we face is “common to man.” It’s not beyond what others face, it’s what all mankind experiences. Jesus Himself faced every temptation we face – and didn’t give in to any of them (Hebrews 4:15). Joseph’s temptation to give into Potiphar’s wife’s advances is common (Genesis 39). He couldn’t excuse it as something unusual or unique to him.

2. Every temptation we face is never too much or “beyond what we can bear.” That’s an important promise because often we feel we face more and worse situations than others. We say “It is too much” and “I can’t bear it,” but those are lies. The truth is that it isn’t too much to resist. We never have to sin. Joseph couldn’t use the excuse that the temptation to sleep with Potiphar’s wife was too great for him to overcome. As strong as it must have been, he wasn’t forced to give in and sin.

3. With every temptation God always “provides a way out, so we can stand up under it.” We don’t have to battle it toe to toe because God always makes it possible to run from it, either physically (like Joseph from Potiphar’s wife in Genesis 39) or spiritually. Note that it says: God “provides” a way out. It is always there, but we have to go through it. He doesn’t force us against our free will. We must physically remove ourselves from the area of temptation and/or spiritually separate from it by claiming God’s truth over the lies we are tempted to believe. Joseph resisted by running from the physical presence of the temptation so he wouldn’t give in.

It seems Joseph was also tempted to gain revenge on his brothers when they came to Egypt for food (Genesis 42-44). When we are hurt by someone, we are tempted to become bitter and seek revenge. This, too, is a common temptation but not beyond what we can resist. God always provides a way to resist, and that is what Joseph did when he revealed himself to his brothers and forgave them (Genesis 45:1-15).

We spiritually separate, or escape from temptation by filling our hearts and minds with God’s truth. Knowing and quoting Bible verses is the best way to have victory over temptation. Jesus did just that (Matthew 4:1-11). It’s our sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. ... I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:9,11).

When someone goes into a dangerous situation, they always plan a way out before they enter. Living life as a Christian is dangerous because we face many temptations from the flesh and Satan. We need a plan of escape as we start each and every day. Do you know where your greatest temptations will come from? What is your plan of escape when they hit? What must you do to remove yourself from it physically, socially, emotionally or spiritually? Being prepared ahead is the best way to have victory. (April 19, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What is your escape when you see or hear something that tempts you to sinful thoughts, when you are hurt and want to hurt them back, or when you face whatever temptation seems to be Satan's most successful in getting you to sin?

BLOG 878: GOD PROMISES TO ALWAYS BE WITH US

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Psalm 118:6

Psalm 118 is a Psalm of praise for deliverance from the writer's enemies. Even though he was surrounded and overwhelmed, God rescued him and defeated his enemies, so he is praising God. You could wonder why God didn't just keep him from being attacked in the first place. But then he wouldn't have seen God's power, increased his faith and praised God. God taught him he didn't need to fear his enemies.

We don't know if David wrote this Psalm, but many he did write are about this same theme. For many years Saul and others tried to kill David. Time after time God delivered him. Similarly, when Paul was returning to Jerusalem he was warned that his enemies there would arrest and imprison him, but he wasn't afraid and continued on his mission.

The writer of Hebrews quotes this special promise as well. ***So, we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:6***

The fear of man is a big problem today, even among Christians. We fear what others think of us, if they will criticize or reject us, mock us or turn from us. Ask yourself, though: "What can man do to me?" No one wants to be disliked, but if God likes us does it really matter what others think? We shouldn't treat others in such a way that they turn from us, but neither do we need to let them manipulate us and dictate what we say, wear, think or do to gain their approval.

So, "What can man do to me?" A lot, really. They can cause us emotional or physical pain. But they can only do what God allows, and then He promises to bring good out of it in our lives (Romans 8:28). It's not so much what they do, but our anticipation of the pain they can cause that causes us to fear them. Yet if God is our helper, we have a far greater power on our side than anything man can bring against us.

We can't fear both God and man. It's one or the other: either terror of man or deep respect for God. When we focus on God and His promises, our minds can explain reality to our emotions and be victorious over them. Our faith is all based on God and His Word, not on the circumstances we face. Faith feeds on the promises of God. Does yours? (April 26, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What is your greatest fear of people? What past experiences have contributed to this fear?

BLOG 879: GOD PROMISES TO HEAR & RESPOND

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:11-13

Because of their disobedience to God, He eventually let His people go into captivity in Babylon. God directed Jeremiah, who was still back in the land, to write a letter to the ones who had been taken away captive. God gave them several assurances, promises from Him.

“I know the plans I have for you.” God has plans for each one of us. He created us, knows us and has unique plans for every one of us. Life is not empty or meaningless. We are not worthless or meaningless. God has plans for us. We are needed and valuable to God Himself. That should be very reassuring to know!

We don't have to try to sell him on our plans for ourselves, but should simply trust Him with His plans for us as He gradually unveils them to us. We shouldn't compare His plans for us with His plan for someone else. God has different plans for each of His children, but all are equally good for His glory and our growth.

Sometimes the plans may seem difficult, like God's plans for Job to glorify Him. Job suffered, but God is still glorified through his faithfulness, and Job was blessed at the end and for all eternity. His servant Lazarus experienced death only to be brought back to life. Showing His power over death brought great honor to Jesus, and Lazarus' experience must have brought blessing to him.

“Plans to prosper and not to harm you.” These are good plans that are to our spiritual benefit. Even in captivity as a consequence of sin, God has something good for His people. That should be comforting to us as well. Sometimes we fear submitting to God's will because we are concerned, He may want us to do something too difficult or painful. But God has no plans to harm us, just to grow us.

“Plans to give you hope and a future.” Even when it seems God has deserted us or we have gone far from Him, He still has good plans for us. His plans for us are better than any plans we could have for ourselves. The prodigal son had run far from his father, but the father still had a place and a future for him when he returned (Luke 15:11-32).

“I will listen to you.” God promises to hear us and respond to our need. The truthfulness of this promise is seen throughout the Bible, as well as in our own lives.

Then comes the condition: that we *“call upon Him and come and pray to Him.”* When the Jews truly turn to God for help, He will be there waiting to take care of them. He is the same with us today. When we seek Him, He will hear and respond.

When we call, though, we must *“seek Him with all our heart.”* There can be nothing casual about this. It can't just be idle curiosity on our part. It must be total, sincere, fully committed pursuing of God Himself in all areas of our lives. Jacob sought God's blessing so much in his life that he wrestled with the Angel of God and wouldn't let go until he was blessed (Genesis 32:24-28).

If we only seek Him out of selfish motives, for our own benefit and ease, then He won't hear us. But if we seek Him selflessly, with a desire to serve and follow Him no matter what, He will hear and answer. Could this be why so many Christians don't hear from Him, they are seeking Him for their selfish ends, not His godly ones? Could that be true of me? Could it be true of you? (May 3, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you believe God has plans, good plans, for you? Are you willing to patiently trust Him for them to come about? Are you seeking His plan for your life with all your heart and being?

BLOG 880: GOD PROMISES TO NEVER CONDEMN US

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

I quote this a lot, both in my teaching and counseling. I also remember it when I sin. These words begin what is perhaps the most outstanding chapter in what is perhaps the most outstanding

book in the Bible – Romans. Having laid out the need and provision of salvation in Romans 1-7, Paul shows the difference Christ makes in a life, starting with no judgment on us or for us.

Paul uses the strongest Greek possible to emphasize that there is absolutely, irrevocably, and completely “NO” verdict of sin coming against us any time ever. We may still suffer the natural consequences of sin in this life, but the eternal guilt and punishment are forever gone. Paul, who persecuted the church and killed Christians, is the very one writing this. This promise must have meant a lot to him personally.

Satan’s lies tell us that we aren’t forgiven, we are too bad to be with God, He is done with us and it is too late for us. Lies, every one a lie. There is NO condemnation!!! Satan can’t take away our salvation, but he can take the joy of it when we live under a cloud of guilt and shame.

Paul killed Christians, but was forgiven. David was a murderer and adulterer, and was also forgiven. Peter denied the Lord three times, but was restored. None of God’s people face judgment for sin, because Jesus took that punishment and paid the price for our sin.

Sometimes it can be hard to accept God’s forgiveness and to forgive ourselves. God doesn’t condemn us, but we condemn ourselves. It may be done out of feelings of worthlessness, or it could be pride that keeps us from wanting to admit our sin. But when we do this, we cut ourselves off from the source of joy on our own, no help from Satan needed. If you struggle with this read Psalm 103.

Remember, since God doesn’t condemn us, we shouldn’t be condemning each other. If God has forgiven a person, who are we to withhold forgiveness? If God doesn’t place them under guilt, how can we do so. If they are forgiven, restored and unconditionally loved by God, how can we do anything less?

Do you know why there is no condemnation on us? It’s because Jesus took all of it on Himself. It’s all been paid for, so there is no reason for us to condemn ourselves. Now He is in heaven interceding for us (Romans 8:34) and, as our advocate, defending us when Satan says we deserve condemnation for our sin (1 John 2:1). (May 10, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you put yourself under condemnation, or do you accept God’s wonderful gift of forgiveness?

Do you put others under judgment for that which God has forgiven them?

BLOG 881: GOD PROMISES TO FORGIVE US

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

This is a wonderful promise we often quote and use. However, it is a promise with a condition. The condition is mentioned first. For this promise to be true we must “*confess our sins*”. That means admit to God Himself that we have sinned. It means not making excuses, blaming someone else, or trying to do good to make up for the sin. Sometimes people use confession as a self-centered way of removing the guilt so they feel better. They don’t think about the awfulness of their sin against a holy God, they just want to stop the shame and guilt. Nor are we to punish ourselves, as if our suffering could add to the work of Jesus on the cross.

We all sin (see verse 8 and 10). The hardest part of confessing is humbling ourselves to admit, to ourselves first of all, that we failed and sinned. Then comes accepting forgiveness and forgiving ourselves, the next hardest part.

God doesn’t force us to confess, but He waits until we do. The father of the prodigal son was waiting and willing to forgive his son, but couldn’t do so until the son returned and admitted his sin (Luke 15:11-32). The son had to hit bottom before recognizing his need and repenting. That is true today as

well. Chances are each one of us has had to hit bottom at one time or another. But, as the verse says, God is faithful.

When the condition of admitting our sin is met, then the blessing comes: forgiveness! God is “*faithful*.” He can be counted on to keep His Word to forgive. He is also “*just*.” He can’t and won’t ignore sin, and sin must be paid for, so He took His wrath for that sin out on Jesus on the cross. And because He is just, the sin is paid for and He won’t make us suffer for a sin that has already been paid for.

As a result, God will “*forgive us our sin*.” He removes it as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12), forgets it (Isaiah 43:25) and covers it with the blood of Jesus (Romans 4:7).

He not only removes the sin we confess, but when we have this attitude of wanting all our sins gone, He forgives even the ones we aren’t aware of. He will “*cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness*.” That includes wrong thoughts, good we should do but don’t, and good we do for selfish reasons. It’s ALL gone!

Then it’s up to us to live in this forgiveness and not take advantage of it. We must use the same standard in forgiving others who sin against us. We must forgive immediately, as God does with us, even before confession is made. The sin still may block fellowship, as it does with God, but when personal reconciliation is attempted, we must be like God and put all their sin behind us and restore the relationship.

Imagine, having your sin totally and forever removed just by taking the blame for it. It sounds so easy it makes me wonder why we sometimes wait so long. (May 17, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Is there any sin you need to confess, to admit to? Is there a forgiven sin for which you are having trouble forgiving yourself? Is there anything for which you need to apologize to another person? Is there anyone who has sinned against you that you need to forgive?

BLOG 882: GOD PROMISES TO ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8

The Sermon on the Mount contains many promises, and this is one of them. It is actually one promise stated in three ways: ask and you will get, seek and you will find, and knock and the door will open.

“ASKING” is something done verbally. The speaker must initiate the conversation with a question. The question won’t be answered nor the request filled until it is asked. When we ask for something that is in His will (1 John 5:14-15) He promises to provide it. If it is a true need, direction, comfort, forgiveness, strength, forgiveness or anything else, we will receive it from Him.

Esther sought direction and guidance about what she should do to save her fellow Jews from annihilation (Esther 4:15-16). God was with her and led her to approach the king, who responded favorably and saved the whole nation.

“SEEKING” is done visually. Again, we initiate by looking for something: an answer, a solution or insight. We may seek comfort, encouragement, peace, reconciliation for a relationship, meaning and purpose in life, friendship and companionship, or victory in a struggle. God promises He will provide it for us.

The woman at the well was seeking truth in life, and wanted something to quench the inner thirst she was feeling (John 4:1-26). She found what she was looking for when Jesus gave her living water, the gift of eternal life.

“KNOCKING” is something we do physically. Once again, we initiate by knocking on a door until it is open. It could be an opportunity we seek or a closer relationship with God we desire. Whatever it is, when we knock, He will open.

Nehemiah went knocking on the door of opportunity when he heard about the bad situation in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1). He prayed, and God opened the door for him to bring his request for help to the king. Artaxerxes not only allowed him to return to Jerusalem, but also helped make the trip a success.

This promise, in 3 forms, is not something to use to gain wealth, health and fame. It speaks of a general lifestyle of coming to God for whatever we need and finding Him always ready to meet our needs. He is not distant and uninterested, nor do we have to beg or jump through hoops to get His attention. He is available whenever we come to Him, like a loving parent is for his child. If the child is casually curious or distracted, he won't receive much attention or help from the parents. But if he is determined to connect with the parent and gain their assistance, and perseveres in contacting them, he will have it. Jesus told several parables about perseverance to illustrate this same point (persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 or the persistent friend in Luke 11:5-13).

The best word in the verse is the little verb *“will.”* That's where the promise lies. He doesn't say *“can”* or *“might,”* God says He WILL. And when God says He will do something, He does it!

I have been praying for many years for my children and grandchildren to have a hunger and thirst to grow closer to God and better know His Word. I ask God to put a desire to ask, seek and knock into their hearts which will last their whole lives. I pray that for myself as well. I challenge you to make that your prayer as well. (May 24, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

On a scale of 1 to 10, where do you stand on the “ask-seek-knock” meter? How serious are you about connecting with God and His Word?

BLOG 883: GOD PROMISES TO ALWAYS HEAR US

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14

When a parent says to a child, “Did you hear me,” he isn't wondering if sound registered through their ears. He is asking if the child understands and will respond to what was said. So, too, when God says He “hears” us, He means the request registers and He will respond appropriately. He promises that will happen every time we ask Him about something.

This is not a blank check to get whatever we want whenever we want it, but assurance that He will give us what we need. It means we are asking *“according to His will,”* wanting what He wants for us. We don't presume to know what is best for us, instead we trust Him to answer in the way that is best for our growth and His glory. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him.

God put it in Elijah's heart to pray for the widow's son to come back to life, and when he prayed it happened (2 Kings 4:32). It was God's will for the Jews to totally defeat their enemies, so when Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still so the enemies couldn't escape in darkness, God did so (Joshua 10:12-15). Samson prayed for his strength to return so he could avenge himself on his Philistine enemies, and God granted his request (Judges 16:4-30).

God does the same for us. He reveals His will to us in our spirit or mind, then when we pray accordingly, He answers that prayer. First, we must want to have His will done more than anything else. Then, we must deeply desire to know His will. When He guides us in His direction, we must follow. We can't make our own plans and then try to convince Him to put them into effect. We can't make our will become His will for us. We must want and follow His plans for our lives.

This promise was written by John, Jesus' closest friend on earth, the cousin He loved in a special way (John 20:2). It was written about 70 years after Jesus returned to heaven, so John certainly has a lot of experience behind this statement. He knew it was true!

Yet for Him to hear and respond, we must first "ask." We must humble ourselves and recognize our need. We ask for Him to do what is best, not to do what we think is best. We must learn to pray the problem, not the solution. God has better solutions than we have, many of which we haven't even thought. So, don't tell Him what to do to take care of something, just talk to Him about the issue and tell Him you trust Him to handle it in the way that is best for your growth and His glory. You'll see many more prayers answered if you do this instead of giving Him a list of things you expect Him to do for you! (May 31, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Does it seem He isn't answering a prayer of yours at the moment? Try praying the problem and leave the solution up to Him. Go ahead, close your eyes and pray the problem right now, trusting He knows best how to take care of it!

BLOG 884: GOD PROMISES WE CAN'T BE SEPARATED FROM HIM

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:38-39

Many years ago, I memorized Romans 8 because it is a special chapter in a special Bible book. It starts with a wonderful promise that there is no condemnation for believers (verse 1) and ends with another great promise – we can't be separated from God. There are many other promises in between. Read it and count them.

Paul could have just said "nothing will separate us from the love of God in Jesus," but he wanted to emphasize that truth so there is no doubt or exception to this promise. Thus, he uses a series of all-inclusive extremes to show everything possible included in God's commitment to us.

"Death nor life." Nothing that happens in life can come between us and God. Absolutely nothing. Not even death can separate us from Him (Colossians 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). We have no need to fear death, for it brings us closer to God, not further.

"Angels nor demons." Satan and his demons try to do all they can to separate us from God, but it can't be done (1 John 14:4), and they know it. So, they tell us lies and try to use fear so we don't believe and trust in God's continuing presence in our lives. They can't turn God from us, so they try to turn us from God. They can't take our salvation, but they can take our joy and peace. Have they taken yours?

That's what Satan tried to do with Job (Job 1-2). He tried to turn God against Job by accusing Job of obeying Him for material gain. It didn't work. Then He tried to turn Job against God by taking everything but his wife from him, but that didn't work either. Satan couldn't forcibly come between God and Job, and he couldn't do it by lies, deception, accusations, or pain and suffering. It just couldn't be done, and it can't be done with us, either.

“Present nor the future.” There’s nothing we can do now to turn God against us. Our salvation is eternal and secure, as is God’s presence in our lives. There’s nothing we can do in the future to change our relationship with God, so don’t live in fear.

“Any powers.” No demon, no government authority, no human being, no force of nature, not even Satan himself can separate us from God’s love.

“Height nor depth.” No matter how far we travel from God, we can’t get away from Him, either. No matter how high we go into the heavens or how low into the depths of the sea, He is still there loving us. Jonah ran from God and ended up in the belly of a large fish in the depths of the ocean (Jonah 1), but God was still with him and delivered him.

“Anything else in all creation.” In case he missed anything, Paul makes it clear nothing can separate us from God’s love. That includes us. We can’t do anything to separate ourselves from Him. There’s no sin for which He will turn us out. His unconditional love in Jesus will always be given to us, forever! He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

These special verses should be memorized by anyone who struggles with thinking they may have lost their salvation. If you fear being rejected by God or the possibility of turning from Him and being eternally lost, these are great verses and great promises to give you the truth and peace you need. (June 7, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Are you “convinced” of this truth as Paul was? What difference does it make in your life knowing and believing these things?

BLOG 885: GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

In recent blogs we’ve looked at many promises of God, but there are hundreds of others in the Bible. Tune your attention to notice them when you read or listen to the Bible. Make a list of ones that speak to you. Write them down for future use. They are good ammunition to have when you need them!

It’s also good to keep a record of promises God has kept in your life. It’ll encourage you, and you’ll praise Him for all He has done. He is faithful to keep His promises, you know. He cannot lie or break a promise (Hebrews 6:18). He kept them in the past. He promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants that He would return them to the land He promised, and He did (Zechariah 8:7-8). They are there now.

God promised Noah He would save His family (Genesis 6:17-18; 9:9-17). He told Ishmael he would bless his descendants (Genesis 17:18-20). Moses was assured God would spare the Israelites if they obeyed Him (Exodus 19:5). All these promises were kept.

There are many Old Testament prophecies promising a coming Messiah or Savior. God’s faithful promise was fulfilled in the New Testament when He sent Jesus to atone for our sins. God promised to send His Son (Matthew 1:21-22) to die for our sins (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10) and give us eternal life (John 3:18). Here are some other promises God has made to us.

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14

God has been faithful to His people as well (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). He's been faithful to me. Has He kept His promises to you as well? (June 14, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” Numbers 23:19

“Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.” Psalm 119:89-90

“Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22-23

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23

Take a few minutes to think of God's faithfulness in your life. What fulfilled promises stand out in your mind?

BLOG 886: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON SIN

During church recently, I had one of those moments when the light bulb goes off in my head. Yes, I was listening to the sermon – that's what triggered my realization. I guess I've known it all along, but it really hit me in a strong way this time. Maybe it's nothing new to you, but in case it can help you I'll share it with you.

I tend to go through life thinking I'm OK with God most of the time, but sometimes I sin and need to confess my sin (1 John 1:9) to get back right with Him. Isaiah 64:6 burst that bubble. “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” I've counseled and taught that verse many times, but God showed me through it that I'm NOT OK most of the time, especially when I sin. I always fall short, even when at my very best. Even when serving, ministering, worshipping or teaching, I still need His continual grace and mercy. But the best is the way God applied this to my heart.

Sometimes I get discouraged when struggling with the same old sins and failings. I get disgusted with myself, and assume God must also. My sin gets me down because I feel that, after all this time, God must be pretty tired of the same failures from me. BUT He is constantly forgiving me and accepting me because there is nothing holy or perfect I can ever do. You see, He knows I cannot do anything to impress Him, but He loves and accepts me anyway. He doesn't expect perfection from me, He knows I am nothing but dust (Psalm 103:14).

The comforting and encouraging part for me is that I don't have to worry about my occasional fall because I am fallen all the time. And if God can love and care for me through all that, He can continue to lovingly forgive my sin and encourage me to overcome it. That awareness gave me a new appreciation for God's grace and mercy. My times of sin aren't seen in contrast to the times I don't sin. My times of sin are just part of my 24-7 need of His grace and mercy. It helps me accept His forgiveness and better appreciate the unknowable depth of His love and faithfulness. (March 29, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 103:8-14 *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; 14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.*

How do you respond when you sin? Can you accept God's forgiveness and love, no matter how many times you commit the same sin?

How does it make you feel to realize that even your very best Christian behavior is like "filthy rags" to God – but that He loves you just the same?

BLOG 887: GOD'S NOT MAD AT ME!!!

Someone asked an elderly pastor to summarize the Bible in one sentence. He said, "God loves you and isn't mad at you!" That's nothing new or profound, but God used it to speak deeply to my heart. I know those truths in my head and have been teaching and preaching them for years. But do I really believe He loves me? Yes, I do. And do I really believe He isn't mad at me? Well..... Maybe not angry angry, but disappointed in me? I'm disappointed in me. I think I should be a lot further along spiritually by now, but I'm not. If I'm disappointed in myself, I assume He must be disappointed in me as well. God used that short statement to reassure me that He isn't mad at me. What a great feeling it is to know and remember that truth!

I think many Christians go around feeling God is disappointed with them, maybe even a bit angry at them. Maybe you are one of them. Maybe God will speak to you through this as He has to me. I was living under a cloud of gloom and didn't realize it until it was gone! It took away my joy and peace, and it kept me focusing on myself instead of Him. Letting that familiar truth sink down from my head to my heart/feelings made all the difference!

Now I need to keep that truth in my heart. I need to keep reminding myself He loves me and isn't mad at me. I need to allow myself to accept that truth and drop the load of self-condemnation I can so easily pick up. Yes, I do fall short – far short. But rejecting His love and mercy doesn't help bring me closer, it just drives me further away from Him.

Remember, if it is discouraging you from going to your Father, then it is not of Him. His arms are always open to His children. (April 5, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*

Romans 5:9 *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*

1 Thessalonians 5:9 *For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Do you go through life thinking God is angry at you or displeased with you? What makes you think that? How do you reconcile that with what the Bible says about God not being angry at you?

BLOG 888: GOD'S WAITING ROOM FOR HEAVEN

Some of the people at my mother-in-law's trailer park for seniors in Florida refer to the place as "God's waiting room for heaven." At first, I thought that it sounded pessimistic and gloomy, but as I've

gotten to know them better, I realize that's not how they see life. They are making the most of the time they have left, but know that one day God will call them to heaven.

When I think of a waiting room, I think of sitting in a doctor's office waiting for the door to open and a call for me to enter. Sometimes the wait is long and I watch others go ahead of me. Then other times it's a short wait for my name is called right away. I never know when I will be called. While waiting I look around and notice who has been there before me and who arrived later. I try to find a way to pass the time until I am called. I'm not in a hurry to enter, but I know the time is coming so I may as get it over with. I wonder, is that how I am waiting for God to call me home? Is that how you are facing your future?

A waiting room doesn't have to be that way, though. For God's people it should be more like a bride and groom waiting in separate rooms in church for the pastor to call them into the sanctuary to be joined together forever. They are full of joyful anticipation and great excitement. They are at the start of a wonderful, life-long love relationship unlike anything they have experienced before.

The person who has put their faith in Jesus is assured of victory over death and eternal life with Him in heaven. Jesus' resurrection has opened the door for us so there is no fear of walking through it. Because, Jesus conquered death by coming back to life on that resurrection morning, so we are assured of a glorious entrance into glory with Him. Praise God for that!

Maybe this trailer park really is God's waiting room for heaven. It could be said the whole state of Florida is a waiting room. But actually, all of life, from a person's first breath, is headed in that direction. We are all in God's waiting room. Everyone on earth is waiting. No one knows when the door will open and they will be called to pass through. But there is never any reason to feel fear or gloom, because when our name is called, real life will just begin! (May 10, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

How do you view death? How are you adjusting to getting closer to your call into His presence?

BLOG 889: MY SPIRITUAL BUCKET LIST

It seems everyone has a bucket list today – something they want to experience before they 'kick the bucket.' I've already crossed off some of mine: pastoring a fine church, having a great wife and godly children, writing some books and enjoying good health into retirement. There are other things I wanted to do but haven't: hike the Appalachian Trail, run a marathon and learn to paint with oils are among them. Our list as a couple includes a visit to the Grand Canyon and to see New England in the fall. Recently I started thinking about a spiritual bucket list for myself. What do I want to accomplish in the years left to me on this earth? Here's what I came up with.

1. LEARN TO PRAY BETTER. The difficulty here is defining what "better" means. To me it refers to a deeper, more intimate personal relationship with God. Better communication, both speaking and listening, is what I want.

2. READ THE BIBLE AGAIN AND AGAIN. I want to keep reading through the Bible year after year. I don't like establishing a deadline to finish, I prefer reading a few pages each day. But when I finish Revelation, I want to go back to Genesis and start again. My appetite for God's Word is growing, and that's a good thing!

3. HELP TRAIN MY GRANDCHILDREN. I want to help impart knowledge and skills that are necessary for them to live a life of faithful service to God. I am able to teach many of them the Bible on line and sometimes in person. I want to continue to do so. I want to set a godly example and encourage them in their spiritual life. If God calls any of them into full time Christian ministry, I'd love to help mentor them by passing on some of what God has been teaching me.

4. LEAVE A GODLY LEGACY. When my family gathers around my coffin at my graveside and think of my life, what will they remember me for? I want them to know I loved them. I want my grandchildren to think of all the fun times we had together. But mainly I want to be remembered as someone who sought to be faithful to God. I want my memory to be an encouragement to them when they are going through tough times. More than anything, I want to leave a godly legacy for my descendants.

That's my bucket list. No way can I do any of that without God's help, but He's been gracious, patient and active in my life so far and I know He'll continue to be in the future. All praise to Him!
(May 17, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Isaiah 6:1-8 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ... Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

If you don't have a spiritual bucket list written down somewhere, don't put it off any longer. Use the remaining time God is giving you wisely. If you don't mind, please send me a copy of your list. I'd love to see it! (jerry@schmoyer.net)

BLOG 890: REDEEMED RUNNERS (Olympic Lessons 1) 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

From the time of Adam and Eve people have been running and jumping. Elijah ran to Jezebel after the prophets of Baal were deserted (1 Kings 18:46). Peter and John ran to the empty tomb (John 20:4). Phillip ran alongside the Ethiopian's chariot (Acts 8:30). Everyone knows what running is and, unless there is a physical handicap, everyone has run sometime during their life.

Being naturally competitive, people have been trying to see who is the fastest and strongest from the beginning. This summer we will have the 2021 Olympics in Japan. However, the Olympics started long ago. The first recorded Olympics were held during the time of Isaiah and Hosea, but historians say they started long before that, during the time of Joshua. During the time of Paul and the early church, the Olympics were as well-known as they are today. In his writings, Paul uses athletic competition as a way of describing the Christian life. Paul was probably involved in athletic contests when he was a young man. He certainly was interested in them and used them as analogies in many of his writings. This series of blogs will look at them and the lessons they teach us about living the Christian life.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24, Paul writes: ***"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize?"*** Most of the readers had attended athletic competitions, probably some were at the Olympics in Greece for it was held near where these reader lived in Corinth. The city of

Corinth itself hosted the Isthmian games every two years, which was second only to the Olympics themselves. Herod built a large amphitheater in Jerusalem where similar competitions were held. Foot races of various distances were the oldest and most popular competition. Wrestling, boxing and racing chariots and horses were also common.

Paul quickly gets right to his main point: **“Run in such a way as to get the prize.”** The Christian life is equated to a foot race because both have a goal in mind, something to attain. Runners compete with other runners to come in first. Similarly, Christians compete with themselves to overcome their self-centered, sinful ways and become more like Jesus. When we live a faithful life for Jesus, we will receive a prize – the crown of life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

It takes strict training and discipline to do your best as an athlete, and as a Christian. **“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training”** (1 Corinthians 9:25). In the early Olympics, contestants were required to prove to the judges they were of Greek citizens in good standing and had undergone 10 months of training. We qualify for our Christian race by becoming citizens of heaven by regeneration (John 3:2, 7). Only born-again believers in Jesus Christ can be eligible to become more Christlike. Paul is pointing out that it takes complete self-discipline and focused concentration to live an authentic life becoming more and more like Jesus. (June 21, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

How serious are you about running your Christian life? If an athlete trained at their sport like you work at living a Christ-like life, how would they do? Where do you need to step up your training program today?

BLOG 891: RESTORED RUNNERS (Olympic Lessons 2) 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

My wife and I exercise together almost every day. We do it to be able to live a healthier life. We practice spiritual disciplines like Bible study and prayer to enable us to live a faithful Christian life as well. Both take discipline, time and focused attention. Lessons learned in physical training can be applied to spiritual training as well. In our previous blog we looked at Paul’s analogy of comparing the Olympics with living the Christian life. **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training”** (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).

God will reward us in heaven for living in faithfulness to Him on this earth (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). **“They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever”** (1 Corinthians 9:25).

This should motivate us to put all our energy and focus into living for Him. That was Paul’s goal and it should be ours as well. **“Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly”** (1 Corinthians 9:26). I’ve run some half-marathons and taken part on many athletic competitions, so I know a participant can only be successful if they give their best effort. Paul gave his all to Jesus.

During a race each runner must follow the path chosen for them. They cannot run in any direction but must stay on the assigned course. We must follow God’s path for us in life in full obedience to Him. Paul did, and he wants his readers to follow his example. He sets different courses for each of His children and we must run the race He has set before each of us.

Paul also says **“I do not fight like a man beating the air”** (1 Corinthians 9:26). The analogy here switches from running to boxing. Some boxers would go into the ring swinging aimlessly in any direction hoping a wild punch would land on an opponent. That’s not the way a successful contender would fight. Paul wants to make sure every punch lands just where he aims it. Every word, every

action and every thought of ours should hit our target of Christlike living and thinking. That's quite a goal, but it's necessary to win.

“No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:27). “Beating my body” refers to disciplining himself to do what is necessary to live for Jesus, not fulfilling the lazy, self-satisfying lusts of our flesh. His chief opponent is his sin nature. Athletic training demands healthy diet, adequate rest and regular exercise and practice. It doesn't come easily. It takes lots of long, hard work.

Living faithfully for Jesus requires us to spend time studying, memorizing and applying His Word – that's our healthy diet. We need consistent, direct communication with God through prayer and listening to Him speak to us – that's connection with our Coach. Authentic Christ-like actions and thoughts must be practiced continually – that's our version of daily workouts. Knowing where we are weak and what to do about it is essential to moving toward victory.

An athlete can't train for one hour a week and expect to be in top shape. Church attendance once a week is great, but it can't be our only training. Not if we want to get the prize for faithful living for Jesus. Like Paul, we need focused, disciplined purpose in life. That come from knowing and following Jesus. (June 28, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Is God's reward for a life lived faithfully for Him the goal of your life? How are you doing with that? Are you taking adequate time to prepare by studying your Bible? Do you spend enough time with Him in prayer? Are you focusing on faithfully doing what Jesus would do in all your thoughts and actions? If so, God will have your crown waiting for you when you get to heaven. (More about these crowns in the next blog.)

BLOG 892: GODLY GOALS (Olympic Lessons 3) 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrew 12:2

The Olympics are all about winning. The goal is to win by crossing the line first or getting the highest score. It's all about a gold medal. Michael Phelps holds the record with 23 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze medals. That's quite an accomplishment. In fact, winning one medal, much less a gold medal, is extremely difficult. First an athlete must win local competitions so he gets to represent his or her country. Then they go through a series of trials and eliminations until they make the Olympic finals. They the best in the world face off against each other. The difference between winning and losing is often a fraction of a second or inch. To come away with an Olympic gold medal is the highlight of a lifetime. The gold is the goal, but very few achieve it.

As Christians we have a goal as well. We face stiff competition attaining it. The competition isn't other Christians but ourself. Our goal is to grow in Christ-likeness (Romans 8:28-29). We all need goals, something to work toward and to measure our progress. Jesus had a goal – to glorify God by His life (Luke 13:32). Paul had a goal as well: ***“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it”*** (2 Corinthians 5:9). That wasn't just Paul's goal, it is “our” goal. All of us are going for the same goal – to please Jesus.

For too many today, including Christians, their life goals focus on money, position, possessions, power, prestige, popularity or an easy life. Everyone has something they live for. What do you live for? What do you think about first thing in the morning when you wake up? Or last thing at night before falling asleep? Dave Johnson, an Olympic decathlete, said: “Even though I may be winning Olympic medals, I believe my finest day is yet unknown -- that won't be until I stand with Jesus and He's showing me all the things that I trust Him for now by faith.”

It's been said that life is like climbing a ladder, working our way to the top step by step. The challenge before us is living in faithfulness to God. That happens when we become more and more

like Jesus in all we think, do and speak. Paul said that is his goal, and he equated it to an athlete in competition for first place (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Paul says that he, like an athlete, is running to gain the prize.

What is Paul talking about? What prize is he referring to? Paul says in Philippians 3:14 ***“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*** What is this prize? Is it salvation? No, it couldn't be salvation for we know that is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9) given to everyone who just believes (John 3:16). We don't discipline ourself to receive it, compete for it or set everything aside to do our best to attain it. It is ours forever at the moment we accept Jesus as our Savior (John 3:1-21). The prize Paul refers to given to some Christians but not all. What is it and how do we get it? We'll answer those questions in the next blog. (July 5, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What is your goal in life? Be honest, what do you spend most of your time and energy pursuing? What is your default thought pattern? Where does pleasing God fit into your life? Thank Him for His unconditional love and mercy as He helps you grow closer to Him.

BLOG 893: CROWNED CONQUERORS (Olympic Lessons 4) 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrew 12:2

In the Olympic games in Paul's day the winner was honored by having an oak-leaf cluster placed on his head as a symbol of victory. The victor was thus publicly "crowned" for all to see. This is the word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 9:25: ***“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”*** Today we put a gold, silver or bronze metal on a ribbon around the victors' necks, but they both are recognition of a special accomplishment.

As Christians, God's honors faithful Christians with a "crown." If Olympic athletes do all they do for a lesser, temporary prize, why don't we as Christians do all we can to strive for a greater, permanent prize?

Dave Johnson, US Decathlete, said: "Sports, for me, is an extension of my devotion to God. Each time I go out and compete I do my best for God. He did His best for me when He gave His Son to die for me on the cross, and this is my way of saying thank you. All of us have a finish line in life. All of us are in a race. For some it's as brief as a 100m sprint. For others it's a marathon. I know that as I grow older my body will not be able to stand up to Olympic competition. But my life is more than the decathlon. I have something more than gold. I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that will bring me through the finish line of life a winner. I won an Olympic medal, but I'm convinced that each of us has to think about what we really want to be remembered for when we reach the finish line of our lives. What is that crown at the finish line of life that lasts forever? I believe it's the crown God gives those who lived their lives on earth for Him, who made the most of what God gave them to do and did it for His glory, not their own. Life's ultimate prize is to know God. And it's for everyone."

The Bible mentions several **crowns** God will give faithful Christians. There is a crown for living for Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:24-25), for leading others to salvation (1 Thessalonians 2:19), for looking for Jesus' return (2 Timothy 4:6-8), for persevering through persecution and martyrdom (James 1:12) and for faithfully serving others (1 Peter 5:4). All who put their faith in Jesus will be in heaven when they die, but only those who do their best to faithfully live for Him will get a crown.

We don't have to be perfect, just striving to live for Him. We don't have to be sinless, just confess our sins when we do sin (1 John 1:8-10). We don't have to be well known, just faithfully do

our best with what God has given us (1 Corinthians 9:27). Any believer can do it if they keep their eyes on Jesus, living in obedience to Him (Hebrews 12:1-2; Proverbs 3:5-6).

It's not what we do in life, but why we do it. That which is done out of selfish motives won't last, but what is done to honor and please Jesus will last for all eternity (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Helping someone in need, praying for a friend, saying a good word about Jesus to another person, contributing time or money, studying your Bible, encouraging those who struggle, sacrificing for someone else – all these and many more will be rewarded if you do them out of a motive of love and commitment to Jesus. If you do them to impress God or others you won't be rewarded.

Elana Meyer is a distance runner who got a silver medal in the 10,000 meters. She says: "As a Christian it doesn't really matter if I win or lose, as long as I do my best. Every competition is a challenge for me, but I don't make a separation between Elana the runner and Elana the Christian. God's love for me is unconditional -- it doesn't depend on my winning a gold medal. In the long run, Christ is my highest goal and my greatest joy." (July 12, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Paul puts it this way: ***"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing"*** (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

What will we do with these crowns when we get to heaven? That's the best part of all. We'll bow before Jesus and lay them at His feet in recognition that they wouldn't have been possible without all He has done for us (Revelation 4:4, 10). They'll be the only thing we have to give Him in heaven. He wore a crown of thorns for us. We will gladly give our crowns of gold to Him. Do you want to have crowns to lay before Him? Now is the time to lay them up. Live a faithful life of love and obedience to Him and you'll become more and more like Him. He'll crown you for it! (July 12, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Thank God for your free salvation and assurance of eternity in heaven. As if that isn't enough, He promises extra blessings for those who faithfully live for Him. Thank Him for the crowns and rewards He has waiting for you in heaven. Ask Him to motivate you to keep on living for Him.

BLOG 894: ENTANGLED ENTRANTS (Olympic Lessons 5) Hebrews 12:1

Karoly Takacas was a champion shooter in his native Hungary when his right hand, his pistol hand, was shattered by a hand grenade. Ten years later, in the 1948 Olympics, he won his first Olympic gold medal - using his left hand! Bob Wieland lost the use of his legs and could only walk on his hands. As a handicapped athlete, he has completed a 3-year walk on his hands across America, the New York City and Los Angeles marathons and the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon course in Kona, Hawaii. Sports are full of stories of those who haven't quit when things got hard, heroes who overcame seemingly impossible odds to achieve their goals. Why didn't they quit? What drove them? And how can we, as Christians, be like them in overcoming our obstacles in life? Hebrews 12:1 gives the answer. ***Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)***

The picture is of an athlete running a race with **spectators** watching. We are watched as we live out our early lives. God Himself is watching. Angels are watching as well (1 Corinthians 4:9). They haven't personally experienced God's grace in their lives, so seeing Him show undeserved love

and grace to us causes them to worship Him. Satan and demons are watching as well (Job 1-2). They look for openings to attack us and for sin in our life so they can point it out to God (Revelation 12:10). Sporting teams scout their opponents, looking for weak areas to attack. Satan does the same. Sports teams must be aware of their own weak areas so they can work to improve them. Christians must do the same.

Unbelievers watch us, too. Some look for excuses to mock us and God, others are hoping for reason to believe and trust God as we do. In addition, other believers are watching. We can set a good example for them to follow and encourage and motivate them to faithfulness. Performing in front of others brings out the best in an athlete and it should also in Christians. Remember that you are always being watched, even when you think what you are doing is in private.

In order to do our best in our race through life we need to follow the example of athletes. Runners streamline their equipment and dress to cut back on air or water resistance. Runners wear tight, lightweight clothing. Swimmers even shave the hair off their bodies. Bicycles are lightweight and extremely slim. In our travel through life, we must set aside every sin, habit or distraction that interferes with our being all we can be as a child of God.

“The sin that so easily entangles” refers to those sins which most often trip us up. Demons watch to discover our cracks and weaknesses, then exploit them to defeat us. Each of us have our own areas of weaknesses which differ from those in others. We need to know what they are because the demons assigned to work against know our flesh weaknesses. We need to ***“throw them off”*** with God’s help. (July 19, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What distractions keep you from running the best race you can? Which are the most dangerous hindrances to you faithfully living for Jesus? What extra weight do you carry around with you? Thank God for those who have been a good example of faithful Christian living to you. Thank Him for the sins He has entangled you from in the past.

BLOG 895: STUMBLING SAINTS (Olympic Lessons 6) Hebrews 12:1

As followers of Jesus, we know to avoid sin because it will interfere with our living for Him. Sometimes we are so focused on keeping from sin that we allow other things, which are OK in themselves, to slow us down in our Christian life. The Bible warns against these hindrances.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)

“The sin that so easily entangles” will keep us from living a faithful, Christ-like life. But it isn’t just sin that holds us back. We need to ***“throw off everything that hinders.”*** There are many things in life that in themselves aren’t sinful, but when they hinder or distract us in moving toward our goal of Christlikeness they need to be set aside. Work, friends, money, exercise, dress, sex, popularity, success, achievement, hobbies, food, etc., are all OK in themselves but when they interfere with our spiritual growth they need to be “thrown off.” The image is of someone running the 100-meter dash in the Olympics wearing a bulky bathrobe. There is nothing wrong with wearing a bathrobe, but in those circumstances, it will hold them back.

The further and longer you run with Jesus, the more sensitive you become to distractions. Living the Christian life is a continual process of dropping whatever interferes so we can run better.

Anything that takes time, energy or focus from our relationship with Jesus is a hindrance. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said to his disciples, ***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny***

himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Galatians 5:7 says, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?”

We must be careful, too, of **carrying extra weight** with us. Overweight athletes do not perform well. The same is true of “fat” Christians, those who nibble on spiritual junk food but don’t study the Bible themselves. We can fill ourselves with high-calorie stuff that appeals to our emotions but is low in nutrients. What do you read, watch on TV or listen to on the radio? What kinds of conversations do you have with others? What do you day-dream about when your mind drifts? How much influence do those who aren’t living for Jesus have in your thoughts and actions? It doesn’t have to always and only be on God subjects, but too much fluff and not enough substance will undermine your ability to run your best race. Fear and worry are certainly extra weights we often carry around as well.

How can we get rid of the extra weight we carry and avoid that which hinders us? **First, realize sin’s power to control you was broken by Jesus** (Romans 6:11-12). Jesus already defeated our sins, weaknesses, distractions, extra weights, wrong influences of others, fears and worries. We don’t have to battle them alone. We don’t have to give in to them. When we ask Jesus for help and lean on His strength, we can overcome them all.

Second, **we have His holy Spirit in us** strengthening, guiding and encouraging us (Romans 8;13; Ephesians 4:22; Galatians 5:16). We don’t have to battle on our own.

Third, **we need to depend on God’s grace to help us** (Titus 2:11-12). Evelyn Ashford, US Sprinter, said: “The Bible is my guideline, if I’m feeling well or not. God has really helped me through some difficult things. My faith in Him has helped me excel in my athletics and off the track as well.”

Finally, we must **‘run with perseverance’** as the verse says. Florence Griffith Joyner, another US Sprinter, said: “You never fail until you stop trying.” Even if the course God sets for you seems too hard, just keep going. Recently I read about an Olympic steeplechase winner who ran 9 laps before being declared the winner while everyone else just ran 8 laps. There are many stories of runners falling down and getting up to still win their race. We must do the same. The next blog will talk more about running with perseverance. (July 26, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What is causing you the most trouble in your Christian life? What can you do this week to better overcome it? Thank God for all He has done to help you in your life up to this point. Name as many things as you can.

BLOG 896: PATIENT PARTICIPANTS (Olympic Lessons 7) Hebrews 12:1

I’ve always loved to run. When I was younger, I ran as fast as I could, whatever the distance. Now that I’m older I still run a lot, but not nearly as fast. I no longer try for speed, now I pace myself so I can keep going the full distance. I’m no longer working on my speed. Now I’m working on my perseverance. That’s what the writer of Hebrews says we should do in our Christian life as well.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)

The story of the tortoise and the hare has always been a favorite of mine because I’ve found that persistence is more important than swiftness. That is true in training for the Olympics, or any sport. It takes patient perseverance to achieve a goal, just like Hebrews 12:1 says.

That certainly describes how God deals with mankind, doesn’t it? He waited 2,000 before sending the flood, then hundreds of years before sending the Jews into captivity and now thousands of years before the tribulation. And what about all the patience He shows each of us individually?

Pole vaulter Bob Richards said, "One reason why I think a great deal of Jesus is because He never pointed out the weaknesses and shortcomings of people. He always thought of the dream that God had for their lives. Never emphasizing their failures, He simply said, 'Go and sin no more. Be what God intends you to be.'"

We need patience and perseverance, too, as we run our race. The race starts at salvation. God, angels, demons, believers and unbelievers are watching. God sets the course for each one of us. There are obstacles and hindrances in our path. Our goal is Christlikeness. For faithfully living for Him we will be rewarded with crown.

Yet patience doesn't come naturally or easily. Have you ever seen a patient baby? Even as we mature, we are still in a hurry and want things done as fast as possible. We want instant spirituality, instant fruit, even instant patience. We don't see a need for endurance, we want things done immediately, if not sooner. We pray, "Dear God, I want patience & I want it now!"

The world doesn't tolerate qualities like patience, but God does (Hebrews 6:12; Galatians 6:9). J Hudson Taylor said there are 3 absolutely necessary characteristics to be a missionary: 1) patience, 2) patience and 3) patience. How can we become more patient? What's the secret? No secret, but lots of insight from God's Word.

"Run with patience" sounds like a contradiction to us because we think of patience as lying down and doing nothing while running is moving ahead with speed. However, we aren't to run with speed but with patience. When I run, I try to set a pace which I can consistently keep for the whole distance I want to cover. Starting fast then having to stop short of the goal must be avoided at all costs. Learning to pace themselves is an important skill for any runner, and for Christians as well.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, for only God can produce it in us (Galatians 5:22-23). Have you ever tried to fake patience when you were impatient? How well did it go?

We miss many blessings in life because of our impatience. One day a woman called a theater she had attended the night before and described a very, very expensive piece of jewelry she lost while there. The person who answered the phone went to look for it and found it, but when they came back to the phone to tell the woman she discovered the woman had hung up. How many blessings have I missed out on because of my impatience? What about you? (August 2, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Thank God for the patience He has shown you in your life. Ask Him to help you be that patient with others. Ask Him to develop the fruit of patience in your life (Galatians 5:22-23).

BLOG 897: PERSISTENT PERSONNEL (Olympic Lessons 8) Hebrews 12:1

Roger Bannister was the first American to run a mile in under 4 minutes. He was burnt very badly when trying to start a heater in school. Doctors didn't think he'd ever walk again, but he persevered and patiently learned to walk, then run until he was the fastest American at in his time. It took patience and faith for him to accomplish what he did. That's a winning combination for us as well.

Our passage, Hebrews 12:1, starts with **"Therefore,"** tying it to the previous chapter, Hebrews 11 – the chapter about faith. Patience is based on faith (James 1:2-4). Without faith in God, we won't patiently wait for Him to act. Patience means moving ahead ("running"), but doing it in faith. That's how Noah could spend a year building an ark (Hebrews 11:7), Abraham waited years for a son (v. 11), Joseph endure an Egyptian prison (v. 22) and Joshua walk around Jericho for 7 days (v. 30). The opposite of faith is fear. When we are motivated by fear we won't be patient.

Instead of being impatient, we must trust God with His guidance and leading. We must “**run with perseverance the race marked out for us.**” God has planned the course of each of our lives, and they all differ. He gives us what we need to stretch and grow, and to learn to trust Him through it. Don’t compare your life with others. Your life is what God has chosen for you, no one else. He knows what He is doing. He can be trusted. When we trust Him, we can patiently persevere living the life He has set for us. Noah worked on the ark for over 100 years. David was 15 years old when he was anointed king but didn’t reign over the whole nation for almost 30 years.

Philip Brooks, the well-known hymn writer, was a quiet and poised man. One day he was found pacing the floor in frustration. When asked what was wrong, he replied, “The trouble is that I am in a hurry and God is not.” Who hasn’t felt that way at one time or another? When Abraham didn’t wait patiently for God to act, he took matters into his hands and through Hagar had Ishmael. We still suffer the consequences of that in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Saul offered a sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel and lost the kingship and his life. Moses grew impatient and struck the rock twice, thus forfeiting his opportunity to enter the Promised Land. It can be tempting to run ahead of God and try to make things happen quicker than God wants. It can also be tempting to get discouraged and give up on God when He doesn’t seem to be doing what we want when we want it.

God waits for us, like the father of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-11). We need to be patient with others as He is with us. Even harder, we need to be patient with ourselves. That can be the most difficult one of all. We need to learn to patiently persevere in all we do: not quit but not rush ahead of God either.

Dan Jansen, one of the best skaters this country has ever produced, was very close to his sister Jane. She died of leukemia when he was at the 1988 Olympics. He heard of her death just before he skated in the 500-meter race. He was determined to win for her but he fell and didn’t finish. He came back 4 years later in Albertville but didn’t win any medals. Two years later, in Lillehammer, Norway, in the last race of his Olympic career, he won the gold medal. He stood on the victory platform while the National Anthem played and saluted Jane. He never gave up, he persevered and didn’t quit, and he achieved what he was aiming for. “**Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes**” (Palm 37:7). (August 9, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Think of times in the past when you persevered and didn’t quit. What was the result? Is there anything happening in your life now for which you need perseverance? Ask God to help you be persistent in life.

BLOG 898: FOCUSED FELLOWS (Olympic Lessons 9) Philippians 3:7-14

“Running is a way God can use me for His glory. Athletics is not my life. Christ is. I’m a Christian first and then an athlete. I try to do everything for God’s glory, including running. A person must never become the focus of attention. If people look closely at me, they’ll discover I have many faults. It’s important to look at the Lord and build our lives around Him.” Elana Meyer, distance runner, Olympic Silver medalist in 10,000m at age 25. She had the right idea. Her priorities were right on target.

Paul says the same thing in Philippians 3:7-14 (take a moment to read this passage). Again, Paul uses an athletic analogy to describe the Christian life. The goal of all of Christians is to be Christlike. As we move through our Christian life, following the course God has laid out for us, we will face obstacles and temptations but we need to keep our eyes on the goal and move ahead with patient perseverance. If we do, one day we will wear the victor’s crown.

The key to running a good race in the Christian life is to stay focused on Jesus. Living for Him is more important than anything we could gain focusing on ourselves. ***“Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”*** (Philippians 3:7). In fact, Paul says ***“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him*** (Philippians 3:8-9).

Paul gladly gave up everything to follow Jesus: friends, family, position, heritage, inheritance and power. He was one of the bright rising stars in Judaism with a secure, important future ahead of him when he turned his back on it to serve Jesus. He doesn't regret it one bit. Being ***“found in Him”*** is more important than anything. Living for Jesus was his life.

When he met Jesus, Paul realized his own self-righteousness was worthless (Philippians 3:9). His goals in life had completely changed. Now all he wanted was Jesus. ***“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”*** (Philippians 3:10).

He didn't just want to know about Jesus, mere facts in his head. Instead, he wanted to personally and intimately know Him as his Lord and savior. He not only wanted to experience His resurrection, life-giving power, he was also willing to suffer as Jesus did. Paul suffered much ridicule, rejection, persecution, pain and even martyrdom because of his commitment to Jesus. Paul was willing to give up his own agenda, his comfort, his daily life and eventually even his physical life to follow Jesus. No price was too high. Nothing he could do even came close to what he owed Jesus for his salvation and eternal life (Philippians 3:11a).

This passage is a life-long favorite of mine. Many years ago, I made it a goal of my life to know Jesus better – really know Him. I know a lot of theology about Him but I want my personal relationship with Him to grow. If that isn't your life goal then it should be. (February 14, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Are you growing spiritually year after year? I that your main goal (Hebrews 6:1)? Think back to where you were spiritually a year ago? What about 10 years? Or 20? Thank God for the growth that has taken place in you during that time and thank Him for His promise to keep you growing (Philippians 1:6).

BLOG 899: CHRISTLIKE COMPETITORS (Olympic Lessons 10) Philippians 3:7-14

Paul admits he has far to go to attain his goal of Christlikeness (Philippians 3:12). Don't we all! The more a person grows as a Christian, the more clearly, they see the gap between what they are and Who Jesus is. So, what's the solution? Drawing on his own experience of going from killing Christians to being a leader among them, Paul shares his two-fold approach to moving towards his goal of Christ-likeness.

First, ***“forgetting what is behind”*** (Philippians 3:13) means not focusing on past failures or successes. We aren't to forget God's mercy in the past, or lessons we learned from our failures, but we must forgive ourselves for our defeats and not become proud about our victories. A good runner does not dwell on past races, good or bad. They just look ahead. When in a race they can't keep turning around to see what is happening behind them, they ignore what is in back of them and push to the finish line with every ounce of energy they have. That's what we are to do as well.

Allyson Felix was an American runner who came in second in the 200 meters in the 2004 Olympics. She kept training but came in second to the same woman in the same event in 2008. She

didn't give up but kept running. In the 2012 Olympics she beat that same woman and got the Gold medal. She didn't let the past keep her from moving ahead to her goal.

In our desire to serve Jesus, we can get so hung up on our own mistakes and sins in the past that we allow the past to rob us of our present and future joy. We punish ourselves although Jesus has already taken the punishment for those sins and God does not remember them any more (Hebrews 8:12). If Paul could be forgiven and then forgive himself for his past, we can as well.

Lot's wife looked back and died (Genesis 19:26). The rich young ruler looked back and didn't follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16-30). Paul had to put his blaspheming of God, and persecuting of Christians behind him in order to press on to his goal. Moving ahead is the second part of Paul's formula for victory over focusing on the past. ***"But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me"*** (Philippians 3:12).

Paul continues with the analogy of a runner giving his all to cross the finish line. He holds nothing back but focuses on his goal with every thought and action of his entire being. The goal is living a faithful, godly life and in the process growing to be more like Jesus in all we think and do. That is Paul's one and only goal in life (Philippians 3:13) and it should be ours as well.

Football quarterback Joe Namath once wrote a book titled: "I Can't Wait Until Tomorrow - Because I Get Better-Looking Every Day." As Christians, we must be getting better looking every day as we look and act more and more like Jesus. We must deny ourself and die to our own wishes and goals each day (Luke 9:23), remembering we died with Jesus (Romans 6:6, 11). We must keep putting Jesus first in our lives (1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 4:11). (February 21, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Do you struggle with hanging on to past sins and failures? If so, do this: write God a letter listing them and ask Him to forgive you for them. Write out Hebrews 8:12 at the bottom. Seal the paper in an envelope and put it in your Bible where you'll see it often. Whenever those things come to mind remember your letter of confession and forgiveness.

BLOG 900: TOTAL TEAMMATES (Olympic Lessons 11) Philippians 1:27; 4:3

My family has always enjoyed sports. We enjoy watching sporting events and we enjoy competing in them as well. Many great life-lessons can be learned through athletic competition. Paul has been using some of them to describe living a faithful Christian life. We've been looking at them in this blog series. One of the most important lessons we learn is teamwork. That's what Paul is referring to in Philippians 1:27 and 4:3.

Paul tells the Philippian Christians they should ***"stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel"*** (Philippians 1:27). "Contending" speaks of standing together to overcome a common foe. It is an athletic term for team work, struggling together, wrestling against a common enemy. Picture a team in tug-of-war, working together with all their energy to defeat their opponent. Be it athletic competition or Christian living, those on the same team must work together for the benefit of the team. ***"Contending as one"*** is our common purpose. Too often Christians compete with each other or pick on each other (Philippians 4:3).

"No man is an island" is true in sports and Christianity. Even in individual sports, athletes need to work with others in training, coaching, learning, encouraging and mutual support. Achieving one's goal all alone is very difficult, even impossible (Genesis 2:18).

God calls us to **fellowship with Himself and each other** (1 John 1:3). The Greek word for "fellowship" comes from a word meaning "commonness, partnership, togetherness." As brothers and

sisters in Christ we are in His family and have Jesus in common. We share a common partnership to serve Him. We are all born into His family and nourished on His Word. We are filled with His Spirit and face the same enemy: the world, the flesh and Satan. We are guaranteed the same inheritance. We are on the same team, and we need each other to succeed. We are like Siamese twins. To not get along with each other is disastrous! Like spokes on a wheel, the closer we are to Christ, who is the center hub, the closer we will be to each other.

God has illustrated this concept often in nature: geese take turns leading the way, deer alternating breaking through deep snow, ants and bees cooperate or they don't survive. We help each other by praying for each other (James 5:6), forgiving each other as God forgives us (Colossians 3:13; Matthew 18:21p; Ephesians 4:32), encourage each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11), restore each other (Galatians 6:1) and support each other (Galatians 6:2; Acts 20:35). We've all seen pictures of one athlete helping another across the finish line. I still remember when Derek Redman's father left the stands to all but carry his son across the Olympic finish line.

One thread can be easily broken, but weaving many together gives strength. One twig can be snapped in two, but holding a handful gives strength. Satan's motto is to divide and conquer but God wants us to close ranks and stand firm. We need each other. Jesus Himself needed fellowship with His disciples. A winning team is not composed of the best individual athletes, but the best members that can work together as a team.

Teamwork with fellow Christians is essential. You need them and they need you (1 Corinthians 1:10). God, like any parent, wants His children to get along (1 Peter 3:8). That's very important to Him (Psalm 133:1). It brings Him joy, and it brings joy to us as well (1 John 1:3-4). (February 28, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Do you know a Christian who is hurting or struggling? What can you do to help them?

Are you hurting or struggling? Have you shared your need with other believers who can help? Don't let your pride, fear or anything else get in the way! We are all part of one Body and body parts help each other. When one suffers everyone suffers.

BLOG 901: PRACTICED PLAYERS (Olympic Lessons 12) Hebrews 12:11

Have you watched the Olympics on TV? Have you been thinking about the parallels Paul and others have made to living the Christian life? Our start line is salvation and the finish is when we go to heaven. Our goal is to become more Christlike the closer we get to the finish line. Our prize is the crown God will give us for faithful service. Angels, demons, others and God Himself are our spectator. Our course is laid out by God and tailor-made just for us. There are plenty of obstacles and hindrances in our way but we must patiently persevere and keep our eyes on Jesus. We can't look back. We need others to help us as we help them. We must be in training every day, working on the basics over and over.

Do you know what the basics of the Christian life are? Learning the Bible, prayer, obedience, worship and praise, helping others and telling people about Jesus. A victorious individual or team keeps focusing on the basics – athletes and Christians.

"The parallels of being a successful runner and victorious Christian are striking to me. To stay in top condition, I run up to 3 hours a day or about 93 miles a week. In the same way, I train to develop and maintain a disciplined spiritual life. Despite my running schedule, it is important to stay in close contact with the Word of God, the Bible, because it is the purest way of knowing what God wants me to be and to do. I make a special place in my day to get alone with God, praying to Him and reading my Bible." Elana Meyer, distance runner, Silver medalist in 10,000m at age 25

As an athlete must stay in physical training, so we must stay in spiritual training (1 Timothy 4:7-8; Hebrews 12:11; 5:14). First, in athletics as well as Christian living, it is important to **stay clean**. An athlete can't train or perform well if they are dirty. The same is true for Christians (1 John 1:8-10). You cannot allow unconfessed sin in your life and think you can grow spiritually.

Athletic performance depends, in a large part, on what is put into a person's body. **Proper nourishment** is essential to reach full potential physically or spiritually. As Christians, we must be good stewards of our bodies, but we also must nourish our mind and soul on God's Word (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). Fill your thoughts with Scripture, not just worldly music, movies and ideas

Good communication between performer and trainer is another necessity. Finding the right coach, then listening to what they say, is important for every athlete. We, too, need to follow the advice of mature spiritual Christians and leaders. We need to listen to them and learn from them. They get their wisdom from God and His Word, so we know it is what we need. Make sure you are in continual, direct communication with God through prayer (Matthew 6:6; Psalm 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

When we are given good advice, we need to **follow instructions**. Why have a coach if you think you know better than them? Sometimes we think we know better than God and we don't obey Him. That never brings victory. We need to trust God so we can obey in faith. That's how a good working relationship works between any coach and student.

Physical training is hard. The flesh is weak and wants to indulge instead of discipline sacrifice. Bodies get weary and want to stop or quit. Achieving the goal takes **perseverance**. Athletes and Christians must stick to their commitment, keep their eyes on their goal, exercise self-control and resist temptation. Temptation can come from others around us (Proverbs 1:10-17; 1 John 2:26), our own sinful desires (Galatians 5:17; 1 John 2:16) or even Satan himself (Genesis 3:1-13; Mark 4:15; Luke 22:31-32). God, our coach, gives us His Word, the Bible, to help us have victory over temptation (Psalm 119:9-11; 165; Matthew 4:1-11).

Finally, a successful athlete needs to have a **positive attitude** in order to do their best. Sports psychologists do a big business helping athletes stay confident and optimistic. As Christians we keep a godly outlook through praise and worship. Focusing on God and His greatness and blessings keeps our eyes off ourselves and our petty complaints. We can't ever have too much worship in our lives! Stick to these basics and watch God work in you and through you. (March 7, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

How are you doing with the basics of your faith? If you were an athlete, would you be doing enough to win? Which area do you need to work in most? What can you do starting today to improve in that area?

BLOG 902: CORRECT COMPETITORS (Olympic Lessons 13) 2 Timothy 2:5

"Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world" King Gustav V of Sweden said to Olympian Jim Thorpe after he won both the pentathlon and decathlon in 1912 at the Stockholm Olympics. But the next year he was stripped of his gold medals because he had broken the rules by earning \$25 a week in minor league baseball a few years previously. He was sad the rest of his life. However, in 1982 grace was shown to him and his medals were restored. But he had died 30 years earlier. He hadn't competed according to the rules and he paid the penalty.

There are many rules surrounding athletic competition and the Olympics. Lynford Christie had 2 false starts in a sprint race and was disqualified. If a relay team member passes the baton outside

the zone the whole team is eliminated. There are rules about how to sign up, what to wear, how to compete and virtually every detail of competition. If you break the rules, there is no medal.

Ten months of preparation was required to participate in the ancient Olympics. This included a strict diet and exhaustive training. If these weren't done the participant was disqualified. If anyone participated unlawfully or not in good sportsmanship they were also dismissed from competition. The rules had to be obeyed.

The same was true in Paul's day. Just like in sports, if a Christian breaks the rules there are penalties to pay (2 Timothy 2:5; Luke 13:24; 1 Corinthians 9:24; Colossians 1:29). **Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules** (2 Timothy 2:5). Competing according to the rules, in sports and Christian life, is required if one is to be victorious.

What rules does God have for us in life? Aren't we under grace, not law? Yes, but even under grace we are commanded to submit to God and obey Him. Living for Him is our first priority in life. God has always required obedience from His followers (Exodus 23:21; Deuteronomy 27:10; Jeremiah 7:23).

The Jews were promised blessings for obeying God (Deuteronomy 11:27; Job 36:11) but negative consequences for disobedience (Deuteronomy 11:28; Jeremiah 11:3-8). Abraham obeyed God and God blessed him with prosperity and descendants (Genesis 22:18; 26:5). The angels always obey God (Palm 103:20-21). However, Pharaoh refused to obey God and let the Jews leave Egypt (Exodus 5:2) and suffered many consequences. Sons who disobeyed parents were to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 21:18). Disobeying God cost King Saul his throne and life (1 Samuel 15:19, 24).

Obedience is based on faith and trust. If there isn't obedience, there isn't faith in God (Acts 6:7; Romans 16:26). Serving God means obeying God (Joshua 24:24), and obeying God shows faith in Him (Hebrews 11:8). In fact, God says obedience shows love for Him (John 14:15, 23; 1 John 5:3). If there is no obedience, there is no love.

Isn't it strange that everything God created obeys Him except man? The sun, moon and stars obey and move in their respective orbits. The earth rotates and revolves. Seasons come and go. Only man does not obey. Instead, man tries to get God to obey and serve Him. That's not competing according to the rules and participation with God will never be allowed. God loves it when we obey Him (John 15:4, 10; Deuteronomy 5:10; Psalm 103:17-18).

Obedience comes by listening to what God says in His Word and then applying that truth to our lives. Athletes don't get to pick and choose which rules they want to follow and neither do we. We must obey all God tells us in His Word. Ready it. Study it. Apply it. Obey it. God requires these things for our own good, like a loving parent to his child. Compete to the best of your ability, but do it correctly. (March 14, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Are you learning more and more about God and what He says in His Word? Which Bible commands are the hardest for you to follow? Why? What can you do today to follow them better?

BLOG 903: CONTROLLED CONTESTANTS (Olympic Lessons 14) 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7

Can you stand on your hands and walk around a room? What about standing still on just one leg for 10 minutes? Can you do a double back flip and land on your feet? Gymnasts can do all these things and more. They can do them because they train for them. They develop power, coordination

and muscle control through hours of hard work. They need to do it because without great body control, they can't do well in their sport.

To do well living our life for God we must develop control as well – spiritual and emotional control. We are not to get angry when someone hurts us. We must forgive those who have done us wrong. We have to have patience for others, and patience waiting for God to work. We must have self-control so we don't give in to temptation. It takes long, hard work to develop these skills. The control comes from the Holy Spirit, it's not something we whip up. But we must develop the ability to lean on His power to help us with what we do and don't want to do.

Cosmas Ndeti of Kenya was one of the top marathon runners in the world in the 1990's. He won the Boston Marathon in 1993, 1994 and 1995, an almost unbelievable accomplishment. He wasn't always a top runner, though. He was just one of a dozen talented Kenyan runners and didn't give 100% to his training. Then in 1993 he accepted Jesus's free gift of salvation and things changed. "With faith in Jesus, anything is possible" he said. "Before I became a true Christian, I was following some bad things ... drinking and smoking ... I might drink even though I had to run tomorrow. But then I couldn't run. But when you know Christ, you can be more disciplined." That's the key – self-discipline. You can't really have it without Jesus. "You have to put God first. Then you worry about other things. After my running career is over, I'd like to be a preacher ... be a good example to people here in my country." Winning races not the most important thing to Cosmos. "When someone has Jesus in his life, victory is sure."

Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit: ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control***" (Galatians 5:22-23). In Bible times when someone made a list, the first and the last items on the list were the most important. Love and self-control are emphasized because encompass everything else in the list as well.

The term SELF-control is misleading. It is really SPIRIT control for only then is self not in control but self is under the control of the Holy Spirit. In our own power we can't control our self any more than we can fly to Europe without a plane. It takes a deliberate act of our will when we choose to allow God's Spirit to rule in our life. We recognize our need of Him and tell Him to take charge and work through us. Then we sense His guidance and leading and follow. When we act independently, in our own strength, we confess the sin and put ourselves under His guidance. God commands us to do all kinds of things that are impossible for us to do: trust, love, forgive, humble ourselves, serve, give, etc. He doesn't require us to do anything that He doesn't give us the strength to do. So, when He requires these things, He also provides the control to do them – Spirit control (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 3:20-21; Philippians 4:13).

If you think doing a double back flip is hard, what about turning the other cheek to someone who has taken advantage of you, forgiving someone who purposely hurt you and didn't apologize, resisting your favorite temptation, controlling your anger, fear or lust, resisting Satan and his demons or putting others before yourself? The Christian needs self (Spirit) control to overcome the challenges of life just as an athlete needs physical self-control to overcome the challenges in their sport.

Start by making your decision to live by the Spirit. Be willing to give up present pleasure for future gain. You received the Holy Spirit at the moment of your life, but He doesn't fill you and use you until you surrender to Him to do so (Ephesians 5:18). (March 21, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Where in your live have you seen God increasing your self-control? Thank Him for it and continue to be sensitive to His leading in this area.

BLOG 904: ALL ATTACKS ARE FATHER-FILTERED (Job 1)

Satan not only attacks God's kingdom on a world-wide scale, but he opposes individuals who are part of that kingdom as well. **Job** is a prime example of this. He lived around the same time as Abraham. He is a picture of a righteous man, following God and facing his own warfare because he is faithful to God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). There are several lessons we can learn about spiritual warfare from Job's conflict with Satan. Read **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7**.

One of the ways Satan attacks God's kingdom and people is by bringing accusations of sin against believers (Zechariah 3:1-4; Revelation 12:10). Because God is holy and must judge sin, Satan tries to point out the sins of believers in order to bring God's wrath upon us. However we are safe from condemnation because Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross (Romans 8:1). Still, Satan is forever tattling on us to God.

We don't know how Satan is allowed in God's presence, but in some way or form this must happen for he accuses Job to God (Job 1:1-6; 2:1-7). God allowed Satan to attack Job, but with certain limits which God imposes (Job 1:12; 2:6).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: All Satan's attacks against us are 'Father filtered,' allowed by God for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). This painful suffering of Job's served as an example of faithfulness to all heavenly beings, and to the millions who have read of Job in the Bible.

Satan can only do what God allows. Satan had to have permission to attack Job, and even then, God limited what he could do (Job 1-2; 1 Kings 22:19-23). God actually uses his evil plans for good (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). He used the lies the demons gave the false prophets to bring about the destruction God wanted (1 Kings 22:19-23). He used Satan's afflictions on Job to show he was a faithful witness and example to Satan and his forces then, and to untold millions of believers since. He used all that Joseph went through to save the nation of Israel (Genesis 50:20). He uses what you and I go through for our growth and for His glory as well. When you look at nature, you see God is a God who never wastes anything, but makes multiple good uses of everything. He does the same with our pain and suffering as well. Not one tear, not the slightest struggle is wasted but is used for His plan in our lives (Romans 8:28).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: One other item of interest in this account is the way Satan was able to attack Job and his family. He used evil men (Job 1:13-15), nature (lightning, Job 1:16), hostile men (take animals, kill servants, Job 1:17), natural disaster (wind to destroy a house and kill Job's children, Job 1:18-19), and sickness and pain against Job himself (Job 2:6). Other examples of these in the Bible include: crippled limbs (Luke 13:11), Paul's thorn in the flesh (eye disease? - II Corinthians 12:7), muteness (sometimes dumbness, too - Matthew 9:32-33; 12:22; Mark 9:17-18,24-25), blindness (Matthew 12:22), seizures (Mark 1:26; 9:17-18,20,22,25; Matthew 17:15,18; Luke 9:39), deafness (Mark 9:17-18,20,25), sores (skin cancer?) (Job 2:7), boils and other painful afflictions (Psalm 78:49 - the plagues in Egypt were demon-caused), and physical torments of all kinds (Revelation 9:5,10).

While we aren't to fear Satan or give him credit for more power than he has, still he clearly has more ability to use nature, people and sickness than we often recognize. He has many weapons in his warfare against us.

While not every natural disaster, attack by evil people or physical sickness is from Satan, this probably does happen more often than we imagine. We aren't to fear him for God is greater (I John 4:4), but we are to recognize the attacks of our enemy so we can properly fight against them (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). If you are facing some of these right now, follow Job's example of not sinning by accusing God of wrongdoing (Job 1:22; 2:9-10). Stay faithful to God and keep your trust in Him no

matter what (Job 1:21). See it as part of your warfare and don't let Satan defeat you through it. (October 4, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Does it give you comfort to know that all Satan's attacks against you are Father-filtered? Think of someone going through a really rough time and share this truth with them. Visit, call, write or email them to remind them that God is still in control of all that happens.

BLOG 905: WHY SUFFERING? (Job 2)

One of the first questions to come up when we read the story of **Job** is to wonder why God allowed this to happen to him when he clearly didn't deserve it. Why do the innocent suffer? Let's see what we can learn from Job. First, read **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7**.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Why does God allow people to suffer and struggle? How can a God of love allow so much evil to continue? God doesn't defend Himself or explain what He allows. He gives us a free will choice as to whose kingdom we will pursue. Sin and the resulting evil are the natural consequences of turning from Him.

The fact of pain in the world is not a reason to see God as less than loving. Still, innocent people suffer. We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by these things for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to the cross to take on the punishment for every sin we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. If it weren't for that we would all spend eternity in hell. So, anything less than hell from now on is because of His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more love and mercy to some than others is not up to us to judge. God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him until we know all the facts as He knows them and see everything as He sees it. Many things seem unfair to little children but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor, having a pretty shiny knife taken away, things like these seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them. But a child doesn't have the perspective to truly understand all that is involved and we don't either. We do know that facing things we don't understand gives us an opportunity to trust. Our faith is stretched and we grow. God is glorified as we see Him deliver and as others watch us continually trust Him no matter what happens. Spiritual warfare itself is often very painful. It is just one of many forms of suffering God uses for our good and for His glory. Often deliverance isn't a sudden, complete act. God allows the struggle to go on for it teaches us to fight and to trust Him.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: A related question is why God would allow Satan to attack us at all when He could prevent it. If He is a God of love why not deny Satan and demons any opportunity to attack? Then we wouldn't have to resist or learn to fight? Life would be much simpler and easier. But that isn't God's purpose, nor is it how He works. Why didn't God just kill all the Canaanites and not have the Jews have to go through warfare against them? The Jews had a free will to follow God or not, and if they followed, they needed to learn to obey and to fight as God would have them. Perseverance, faith, teamwork, patience, obedience and many lessons were tied up in this. God used it to stretch their faith, to give them opportunities to grow and see Him work through them and to show others His glory by what He could do through His people. The same is true of us today. (October 11, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you still ask God "why" questions all the time? What answer does He give you? What can you tell someone who asks why God allows suffering in the world?

BLOG 906: LESSONS FROM JESUS' TEMPTATION - 1

Immediately following His baptism Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit, the 'dove' who had just descended on Him, into the desert (Matthew 4:1). He needed time to focus on what was about to come, to strengthen His spirit and commitment. He needed time alone with His Father, something that would happen time after time during His earthly life. After 40 days of fasting and praying **Jesus was tempted by Satan**. Whether He waited because God restrained him or because he wanted to hit Jesus when He was weakest is unknown. Satan, who had been opposing God's plan of redemption from the beginning (Genesis 3:14-15), now focuses his attacks on Jesus.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Note that Jesus was in the perfect center of God's will when He was tempted, for God Himself led Him to the desert (Matthew 4:1). Being tempted to sin does not mean we are out of God's will or not following closely to Him. Often the opposite is true, like with Jesus. It is because we are following God closely that we are attacked the hardest. Be aware so you aren't taken by surprise. Don't think it is a bad sign that you are tempted. Being attacked is actually a good sign for Satan only attacks those who are doing damage to his kingdom. When you aren't being attacked is the time to make sure you haven't drifted from the conflict (Luke 6:26).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Note that Satan attacks immediately, as soon as Jesus commits to doing God's will by being baptized. For us, too, the attacks come when we move in the direction of following God. When we are not as close to God, Satan and his forces leave us alone, but when our devotion increases so do the enemy's attacks. We soon discover that when we fade a bit in our walk with the Lord then the pressure decreases, tempting us to follow God, but not quite so closely!

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Notice, too, that this battle with Satan was God's perfect will for Jesus. "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). God does not prevent our battles, no matter how hard we pray for that to happen, but He does help us through them. So it is better to focus on fighting them in His strength than looking for ways to avoid them. They are part of God's will for us because they strength us and show us that His grace is sufficient, as was true of the Jews fighting for the Promised Land behind Joshua's leadership.

LESSON FOR TODAY 4: The place where Jesus was sent by God to fast, pray and battle Satan was the "desert," considered the abode of demons (Matthew 12:43). Sometimes God leads us into strongholds of Satan's so we can do battle for Him, knowing we can experience have victory through His power (I John 4:4). We aren't to run from such encounters but face them with His strength.

LESSON FOR TODAY 5: Fasting can be a useful tool in spiritual warfare, not because our suffering earns God's pity so He is more apt to answer our prayers, but because it is a way of denying our flesh and putting spiritual things before personal needs. It clears our mind and helps us focus on the battle at hand. Hunger reminds us of our weakness, our need of His strength and it reminds us to pray. It frees up more time to spend in prayer as well. We must be sure God wants us to fast before we do so, and we must use wisdom in what kind of a fast it is and how long it lasts, but it is a weapon we should make us of. Jesus used it often.

LESSON FOR TODAY 6: Jesus faced these human temptations as a man just like us. He did not rely on His deity to make it through. He was attacked just as Adam had been, but unlike Adam He did not sin and therefore He won back what Adam lost (Romans 5:12-21). We, too, can have victory through God's power, just as Jesus did. The same resource is available to us! (August 30, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Being tempted doesn't mean you are out of God's will. Think of a time you were faithfully following Jesus but were tempted anyway? Is there anything anyone can do to assure they won't ever be tempted again?

BLOG 907: LESSONS FROM JESUS' TEMPTATION - 2

The **first temptation** Jesus faced after fasting for 40 days in the wilderness was for physical needs – Jesus was hungry after 40 days of not eating. Jesus could turn the stones to bread, but that was not God's will. This was a legitimate need but not God's way of meeting it.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Sin is using an illegitimate way to meet a legitimate need. Hunger is a legitimate need, but Jesus must meet it in God's way, not in his own or Satan's way. When tempted look for the legitimate need behind it (peace, comfort, companionship, joy, etc.) and seek to have that need met God's way instead of taking a 'shortcut' that is sinful.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Building on what was just said, the fact that we have a legitimate need doesn't mean it has to be immediately met. The very common "entitlement mentality" today seems to say we should have everything we want as soon as we want it, and that parents, God, the government, or life itself owes it to us! That is a very unbiblical attitude and quite dangerous. In fact, it's the very lie Satan used with Eve in Eden – "You are entitled to this fruit!"

Jesus had victory over Satan's temptations by quoting God's Word each time He was tempted. That is the only way to have victory. Jesus knew the Bible well enough to quote the book of Deuteronomy three times.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: Quoting Scripture is our best weapon against Satan's attacks against us as well. Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Psalm 119:9-11 tell us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. When thoughts or temptations you don't want come into your mind, use Scripture to have victory. There is power in God's Word that is lacking in our own words (Hebrews 4:12). Reminding demons of God's truth shows them they must submit to it, and helps us put our faith in Him and not give in to the lie behind the temptation. It allows our mind to explain reality to our emotions. Always have some verses that speak to your situation memorized or written down where you can reference them at any time. Use them as soon as you sense opposition coming against your thoughts. (September 6, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What are some of your favorite Bible verses to use when attacked? How many of God's promises can you recite from memory? When is the last time you memorized a Bible verse?

BLOG 908: LESSONS FROM JESUS' TEMPTATION - 3

The **second temptation** Satan used against Jesus after His 40 day fast in the wilderness was an appeal to Jesus' pride. He was due recognition from all so Satan suggested an easy way to get it - by throwing Himself down from the highest part of the temple and letting angels come rescue Him in the sight of the watching crowds. If Satan wanted to defeat Jesus, why would he offer to help Him have everyone come worship Him? While this might have seemed like something that would benefit Jesus, it really was a subtle way to give him recognition without having to go to the cross. This would have been a short-cut to His Kingship – giving Him the throne of Israel without having to go through the agony of crucifixion. But if He had taken this route, then there would be no salvation for us – and that was exactly why Satan tempted Him in this way. He was willing for Jesus to have His temporary throne on earth as long as He didn't pay for our sins in the process.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Pride is what motivated Satan to sin and rebel against God (Isaiah 14:13-14). It is still one of his best tools against us today (1 Timothy 3:6). There is no short-cut to maturity or spirituality, no easy way to grow. The way up is down. God exalts those who humble themselves (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). He humbles those who exalt themselves (Luke 18:14). Pride

is self-centeredness, a focus on ones self. It is pride if we think we are better than others or if we think we are worse than others. Either extreme is pride, an inordinate attention to self. Either extreme is wrong. Satan doesn't care which direction he gets us to fall as long as we fall!

Satan's **third temptation** was a final desperate measure. He put it all on the line, something he didn't have to do with Adam and probably didn't want to do with Jesus. But everything was at stake so he offered Jesus' ruler ship of the whole world if Jesus would bow down to Satan. Ruler ship of the world was what Jesus had come to win back, and Satan was offering to give it to Jesus for free. But there was one condition – Jesus would have to recognize Satan as His authority instead of God the Father. Again, we see that the end does not justify the means.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Satan seems to offer people today everything they want if they turn to this world system. He received ownership from Adam of the world system of values and motives as it operates today (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He tries to get us to think that we, too, can have everything we want. Adam and Eve believed this lie, and many today believe it as well. But it is a lie. It is Satan's bait to trap people into bondage.

When Satan was unable to defeat Jesus after three tries, he left, and the angels came to minister to Jesus (Matthew 4:11). Satan wasn't done, though. Luke 4:13 says he left but would return at an "opportune time." He is never done; he never stops working against Jesus.

LESSON FOR TODAY 3: There will be lulls in demonic oppression against us. Often it seems oppression comes in cycles or waves. Some times things are very difficult, then it seems the attacks get milder or even disappear for awhile. But they always return. We will never have ultimate, total victory in this life. If you are going through a difficult time remember that it will one day lessen. If you are not going through a time of challenges and attacks, be prepared for when it returns. Don't be surprised or discouraged when it returns, either. Use this rest time to refresh and prepare for the battle when it starts again.(September 13, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

In what areas of life are you most often tempted? Why are you tempted in that part of your life so often? What can you do to better assure victory when those temptations come?

BLOG 909: "MARRIAGE IS A 50-50 PROPOSITION" (Marriage Lies 4)

Did you believe the common lie that marriage is 50-50 when you got married? Do you still believe it? Like all lies, it sounds true when you first hear it. It seems to make sense to think that if both marriage partners do their half they will meet in the middle and everything will be fine. After all, it isn't fair for one to do more than the other, is it? When they do their part, then I'll do mine. Sound familiar?

Similarly, those who aren't married can see their **friendships** and other relationships the same way. "What's in it for me?" "What am I getting out of this relationship?" "Is this friendship worth the effort?" "I won't reach out to them unless they reach out to me first."

Satan subtly weaves these lies into our culture to feed on our pride and self-centeredness. It's very easy to forget we are to serve others as Jesus serves us and instead expect them to serve us as well (John 13:14-15). Servanthood is the key, in marriage or in friendship (Philippians 2:3-8).

The truth, of course, is that **relationships demand 100% from each person.** Both mates must be fully committed to do their very best all the time no matter what. If we do any less the relationship will fail. If you only do 50%, who will determine what 'half' is? Where is this 'middle' where we are supposed to meet? Just where is the middle where we need to meet? Jesus doesn't meet us half way. He doesn't say that if we do our 50% then He'll do His 50%. How would that

work? Jesus does 100% when it comes to salvation, and continues to do so as He guides, forgives, restores and uses us. We are to be like Him. We are to give 100% as well (1 Corinthians 13:7-8).

Be aware of subtle lies that will undermine your marriage. We believe lies because **we deceive ourselves**. Our pride, self-focus and ignorance open us to self-deception. We will believe what we want to believe, which agrees with what we think. We think we are wise but really, we are fools (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

Truth does not come from within us, it comes from God's Word (Psalm 119:15-16). The better we know God's Word the more clearly, we will see the lies of the enemy. If we fill ourselves with worldly thoughts and ideas by what we watch and listen to, we will be secretly fed lie after lie. Nourish yourself on God's Word and know His truth instead. Only God's truth can bring freedom (John 8:31-32). (September 20, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you have trouble meeting your meet more than half way? Do you secretly keep score to make sure they are working as hard as you are? What would it look like if each of you totally gave 100% all the time?

BLOG 910: "IGNORE THE PROBLEM AND IT'LL GO AWAY" (Marriage Lies 5)

If only this lie was true, we'd all have perfect marriages and friendships! Single or married, we are often tempted to avoid facing difficulties in our associations with others. What if we could ignore every difficult issue and live happily ever after? It doesn't take long to find that doesn't work!

Of course, Satan doesn't want us to face and work through sins in our lives or relationships. He is using them to bring hurt and damage to all involved, so he wants them to continue. He wants us to keep them secret so he can feed them and keep them alive. He loves it when we keep our problems and defeats in the darkness, but the darkness is where he rules and reigns. He loves when we think if we ignore a problem it will go away.

The lie behind this is that **a great marriage doesn't take work – it just happens**. "Our great love overcomes all obstacles, just give it time." "If we ignore the issues long enough, they'll fade and be gone, so don't make a big deal of it." The same lie is used to undermine relationships of those who aren't married as well. It can be easier to let something painful go because we feel it'll be even more hurtful to face it and work it through.

The truth is that **marriage takes commitment, work and forgiveness**. It's been said that great marriages are made in heaven. They come in kits and you have to put them together yourselves. And believe me, it's not easy assembling a godly marriage! It takes honesty, openness, confession, forgiveness and a humble, teachable spirit. It also takes time, both quality and quantity, to work through issues and keep growing. A marriage ceremony takes about an hour, but a marriage takes a lifetime.

Instead of overlooking uncomfortable situations, identify the problems and face them together. It's not about blame or whose fault it is, but about what each person can do to overcome the problem. The enemy is not your mate, it's the problem. Your mate is your teammate in overcoming it. Attend a marriage retreat, get godly Christian counseling, read good books and talk to mature Christian couples who have worked through similar situations together. However, you do it, you must **face the problem**.

That's not just true of current, ongoing problems, it's also true of difficulties and sins from long ago. **Problems in the past don't stay in the past**. Even issues from before you met your mate must be worked through. Past baggage like pornography, unhealthy past relationships, sexual immorality, addictions, dysfunctional family of origin, rage, abuse, etc. must be dealt with. Don't think

you can ignore them and they will go away, they pop up again and can be very destructive. It takes courage to recognize, admit, face and work through these matters. God forgives all sin in our past (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), but the consequences often remain and need to be overcome. If it's something you can deal with together, do so. If it's bigger than that, get help. Just don't believe the lie that says that if you ignore it then it'll go away! (September 27, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

If there are any issues in your past or your mate's past that seem to pop up and influence your relationship today, pray about them. Pray together regularly, and follow God's leading as He starts working to heal these areas.

BLOG 911: "MY MATE NEEDS TO CHANGE" (Marriage Lies 6)

Every counselor knows they can't listen to just one side of the story when there are relationship conflicts. No matter how clear everything seems or how convincing the person may be, the other side needs to be heard before conclusions can be drawn. That's because there are always two sides. Seldom is it all one person's fault while the other is completely innocent. Counselors know that, but Satan feeds that lie to anyone who will listen.

Single people can feel this way about their relationships with family or friends. Difficulties arise there as well. Are they faced or do we pass the blame off on someone else? It's very easy to see the speck in someone else's eye and miss the log in your own (Matthew 7:5).

It's so easy to think that whatever happens **is all their fault**. We say, "If they were like when we first met, we'd be fine, they've changed and expect too much of me." "I've tried for years and it hasn't helped, now it's up to them."

The lie behind the lie here is quite obvious: "**It couldn't be my fault.**" "I'm doing OK." "If they would change it'd be all right." "If they would accept me like I am and stop trying to change me, our marriage would be OK."

Sometimes the lie is the opposite: "**It's all my fault.**" "I'm a mess and hopeless." "I'll never change." "I'll never be good enough for them." "It's impossible, so why should I even try?" "I'll never be perfect." Satan doesn't care which form the lies takes because it all comes from pride and self-centeredness. He is the originator of pride and knows all about it (John 8:44; 1 Timothy 3:6).

The solution in both extremes is the same, **look for where you can grow**. Unrealistic expectations of ourselves, our mate or our marriage are the basis of many marriage problems. We bring assumptions into our relationship that are often idealistic and not possible, then wonder what is wrong when they aren't met. Singles do that as well as married people. The truth is that no human being can meet our deepest needs, only God can do that (Philippians 4:19).

When we believe the lie that it's my mate that needs to change, not me, then we develop a taker mentality, not a giver. We need to confess our critical, judgmental attitude. Jesus condemned those who look for fault in others but ignore the bigger problems in their own life (Matthew 7:5). To change John Kennedy's famous quote, we should ask not what our mate can do for us but we can do for our mate. That's what Jesus does for us.

We can't change anyone else, only ourselves. We are called to unconditionally love our mate, like Jesus loves us (1 Corinthians 13). We need to honestly and humbly ask God to show us where we need to grow and mature so we can be a better Christian and mate. God promises to help us grow (Philippians 1:6). There is nothing we can't overcome with His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9). No matter what issues we face in our life or our marriage, God's grace can help us cope and, through it, grow to become more Christ-like. (October 18, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

The only person you can change is yourself? How are you coming along with that? How willing are you to let God change you? Take a few minutes to give Him the authority to change you where you need to be changed.

BLOG 912: "IT'S TOO LATE, THINGS WILL NEVER CHANGE" (Marriage Lies 7)

If you never perform maintenance on your car it will deteriorate to the place where it can't be fixed. It'll be too late. A little preventive upkeep can present a disaster. The same is true in marriage. Relationships need continual care to function at their best. If that is neglected your marriage can get so bad it may seem hopeless and impossible to fix. Then it's easy to believe Satan's lie, **this marriage has gone too far to be fixed**. "It's beyond repair, love can never return." "Once trust is broken it can't be restored." "It's easier to divorce and start over with someone new than try to fix this impossible mess." Satan's goal is to defeat God's kingdom on earth, and he does that by attacking the church through the families and singles in it. He undermines relationships by feeding people the lie that the relationship can't be restored. We need to know how to have victory over these lies and attacks.

The truth that defeats these lies is that **nothing is too hard for God** (Matthew 19:26). He is a miracle-working God and specializes in impossible situations, for then He gets all the credit. He is the healer of relationships, but He does that through us. It takes work on our part: forgiveness, humbling ourselves to apologize and be willing to change, putting the past behind and starting again, turning our hurts over to God to heal and not replacing them with anger, going to God with unmet needs and becoming totally dependent on God to give us His love for our mate. These things take commitment, time and often outside help such as godly counseling. But things can change, it's never too late. This lie becomes an excuse to blame and not keep trying. God never quits on us and we, to be like Him, can never quit on each other.

To move away from this lie you need to **make an unbreakable commitment** to your mate: no divorce. That has to be completely off the table as an option. No matter what, you can't even think of it. "Till death do us part..." Your mate needs to know you are committed whatever the cost. Every couple needs to make and keep that commitment, for there will be times it will seem easier to divorce that work through problems. You also need to make a commitment to not make things worse: don't blame, argue, fight, do or say things to hurt each other, passively withdraw or talk to others (except a godly Christian counselor).

When things fall apart for a sports team, they fall back to **focusing on the basics**. The same is true for marriage. Following Jesus' example, men need to love their wives unconditionally, putting their needs first – just like Jesus does for us. Wives need to show respect to their husbands and trust God is working through them – just like we trust Jesus. Ephesians 5:21-33 expands on this. I have some good articles about how to do this. They are on my web site **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** or email me at jerry@schmoyer.net and I'll send them to you.

Marriage starts when we marry the one we love, but it grows when we **love the one we marry**. Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult. But having a growing marriage throughout your life is rare and can only be done with much commitment and God's help. Remember what you did to win the heart and hand of your mate? You need to keep doing that to stay married. If you left your first love, return to it. Give your mate the very best you have, not just what's left over after you have given your best to everyone else. Trust God's promises to forgive and forget the past (Romans 8:1), provide all your needs (Philippians 4:19) and always be with you (Hebrews 13:5). God can be trusted. Make sure you can be as well.

Are there areas of your marriage that you have given up on, thinking they will never change? They can, or at least your attitude to them can change. Are you willing to pay the price for one of those two to happen? If so, talk it over with God right now.

BLOG 913: “IT’S OK TO FIGHT SOMETIMES” (Marriage Lies 8)

When I was growing up, I knew a couple that fought over and over. I had never seen anything like it. There was yelling, cursing, complaining and criticizing one day, then the next day all would be normal. I never knew when it would start or stop. It went on their whole married life. It embarrassed me and it scared me, but it was just a way of life for them. It was normal – or was it? Is it OK to fight now and then?

The answer is no. We won’t always agree, we will hurt each other and bring out emotions in each other, but fighting to win and/or hurt someone is never right. Still, that **it’s OK to fight sometimes** is a common lie to that many believe. The lie says that it’s no big deal because every couple fights from time to time. “Fights aren’t that bad; they help clear the air and let emotions out – or so they claim.” But it’s a lie. If it’s between married couples or friends doesn’t matter. Fighting does much harm but no good.

The opposite side of the coin is that we should never disagree about anything because if we do, something is wrong with our marriage. That isn’t true either. **Disagreements are inevitable, but not fights.**

Satan is all about anger (John 8:44) and loves to provoke people who love each other to get angry with each other. That’s a weapon of his we need to know how to counter. The Bible says to **never go to bed angry** (Ephesians 4:26) – and that doesn’t mean to stay up and fight all night! It means we need to learn to communicate and work things through. No one really wins in a fight. One person may get their own way, but the relationship loses. Usually the louder, angrier, stronger person comes out on top, except when the quieter one is so good at their passive aggression, they ‘win.’ When we are wrong, we need to admit it and when we are right, we need to keep quiet. That’s good advice!

Each couple needs to learn to **communicate**, which really means to learn to listen and understand what the other is saying. One person, usually the more introverted person, should talk first and explain their concern in a gentle, quiet way (1 Peter 3:4). The other must focus on understanding what is said. When the listener can repeat to the speaker what they are feeling and saying, then the other can address what is said. But they shouldn’t speak, argue, disagree or say anything until they can repeat the first person’s words in an acceptable way. Speaking we can do – listening we are very poor at. Make it your goal to be a good listener. If you want to read more about this look on my web site <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> or write me at jerry@schmoyer.net.

Most fights are not about the thing you are arguing about. You probably follow the same pattern with different topics or subjects. What’s really behind them is a person’s pride and ego. She feels unloved and is hurt. He feels disrespected and is hurt. Stubbornness, pride and self-centeredness are what fights are about. **Discussions are about issues; fights are about control and winning.** No, it’s never OK to fight.

Do you and your mate fight to win? Or do you listen to each other to better understand where they are coming from? Do you feel ‘listened to and understood’ in your marriage? Does your mate?

BLOG 914: “THERE IS TOO MUCH TO FORGIVE” (Marriage lies 9)

Have you ever been so badly hurt by your mate you didn't know if you could ever forgive them? It may have been done accidentally or on purpose. Perhaps they haven't apologized. Maybe they continue to say or do the same thing. What if it gets to the point where you no longer want to forgive? Poison spreads within you that robs you of all peace and joy. You become critical and negative, distrusting and bitter. You feel trapped because you think the offense is just too much to forgive. That's a lie. So is the lie behind the lie: they don't deserve to be forgiven, instead they deserve to hurt like I am hurting. "They need to earn my forgiveness, but I'm not going to give it."

Satan is the epitome of bitterness and revenge. He promotes unforgiveness wherever possible by reminding us of past hurts, magnifying present issues and focusing our thoughts on ourselves and our pride. Unforgiveness is a great tool of bondage that Satan uses whenever possible. The only antidote is forgiveness, that is our only way of victory. If Jesus can forgive us everything, how can we withhold forgiveness from those who have done far less to us? It's been said that a good marriage is the union of two good forgivers and that is very true. That's true of friendships between those who aren't married as well.

God commands us to forgive (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31-32), so if we don't, we are disobeying Him. He is so serious about it that He says He will forgive us the same way we forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15; Luke 6:37). When we forgive, we are freed from bondage, for unforgiveness is a leading cause of demonization (Ephesians 4:26-27). Forgiveness reflects Jesus in our lives and is a beautiful testimony to others (Ephesians 4:32).

Jesus had some very strong, sober words to say about those who do not forgive others (Matthew 18:32-35). He commands us to forgive 77 times (Matthew 18:21-22). There are many reasons for this. One is that unforgiveness is one of the most direct ways of opening one's self to demons (Ephesians 4:26; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11). This is especially true in marriage.

Forgiveness is not easy to do. Often, we think it means saying that what was done to us is OK, or that we aren't going to think about it anymore. We may feel like we are letting them off the hook for what they have done. "They don't deserve forgiveness." True. No one deserves forgiveness from Jesus, yet He gives it freely. Understanding what forgiveness means is important for us to be free.

Anger is a secondary emotion, used to cover pain. When we hit our thumb with a hammer, we feel pain but we react in anger because that's an easier emotion to express. In order to forgive, though, we must admit and confront the pain we feel when others wound us. Our pride wants revenge, to hurt them back – but then we are trapped in unforgiveness and bitterness. Forgiveness is a mental choice, not an emotional feeling.

Forgiving means giving up your right to hurt the other person back because they hurt you. Forgiveness has a price – you give up your right to revenge, to see them hurt for hurting you. That's what Jesus does when He forgives us!

Instead of covering pain with anger, turn your hurt over to God in prayer. You need to do it over and over, each time you remember the pain. If not, it will turn into anger and unforgiveness. Rely on God's power to help you handle the pain in a healthy way. Experience the hurt so you can move beyond it. Often times making a list of past hurts, from your mate or others, is the first step to forgiveness. Make sure you have forgiven those in your past: parents, those in past relationships, friends and enemies. Until you do, you'll be in bondage.

Forgiveness is not a quick emotional switch in your heart, it takes time to heal and move on. It is a process that must be repeated each time the painful memory comes back. Gradually the pain will lessen and be gone. When it tries to come back you cannot allow it to stay.

Remember how God has forgiven you. Think about what Christ did for you on the cross and recall His mercy to you in so many ways. Ask Him to help you forgive through the power of His love. We can forgive the unforgiveable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us.

When someone sins against you, forgive them immediately, even while they are still committing the offense. Even if they are doing it unintentionally, forgive immediately. Don't wait for them to apologize or admit their wrong. Forgive as quickly as you expect God to forgive you. If not, your prayers will be hindered and evil can gain access to your life.

When this happens in marriage reach out to your mate immediately. Withholding love is a form of revenge and shows forgiveness has not been given. Forgiving means treating them as if the offense never occurred – the same as God forgives you. By forgiving others for having hurt us we can let go of the painful past and create a healthier relationship. That's important in marriage as well as in all relationships in life. Learn to forgive. Forgiveness is a very important tool we all need to learn to use and use regularly.

When you think of forgiving those who have hurt you, does God bring anyone to mind? If so, make sure you have forgiven them, and continue to do so each time the hurt returns. Make sure there isn't anything you haven't forgiven your mate for. If you need their forgiveness please ask them right away.

BLOG 915: "THE HONEYMOON SHOULD NEVER END" (Marriage Lies 10)

When two people love each other and are in the center of God's will when they marry, their whole life should be like the honeymoon – right? Not right. "Shouldn't true love overcome everything?" Eventually, but not right away. It takes work, sacrifice and forgiveness for marriage to work. Even Paul said "Those who marry will face many troubles in this life" (1 Corinthians 7:28). Paul is referring to the extra pressures on marriages during times of persecution, but the truth is that married tests people in ways they haven't been tested before. Outside pressures can't destroy a marriage, it is the couple's response to the pressures that can cause trouble.

The same is true with all relationships. If a **single** person makes a new friend, things go great at first. But the closer the people get the more likely hurts or misunderstandings will arise. That's natural and inevitable for people with a sin nature.

The lie behind the lie here is that if my relationship takes this much work, we must not be right for each other. We think that after all these years it shouldn't take this much work. But that isn't true. Two sinners, who are opposites in many ways, are now together 24-7, will find many points of friction. God uses marriage to unveil those rough spots so they can be smoothed over as we become more Christ-like. The truth is that marriages go through similar stages. Basically, we can say there are three stages of growth to maturity.

Stage one is when the couple function as **lovers**. They fall in love and marry. The relationship is characterized by romance. They see their mate as the answer to all their problems. Their commitment is untested, conflict is avoided and the mate is idolized because their strengths are in focus and weaknesses are ignored or denied.

The second stage is when they become **antagonists**. The pendulum moves to the opposite extreme and weaknesses are magnified while strengths are forgotten. Pressures of life, children, work and financial stress grow during this stage. Our unrealistic expectations of ourselves and our mate come crashing down and we become resentful of each other. Power struggles develop and hurts are not forgiven. The couple questions their commitment because conflict and resistance keep growing. This is a bad stage. Romance is gone. The best they can hope for is efficient teamwork

and to decrease the hurt they cause each other. Many couples stay in this for the rest of their marriage. Some divorce, others stay together legally, but live separate lives under the same roof. But no one has to stay in this stage forever. In fact, some couples move through it quickly and with a minimum of pain.

When the problems of stage 2 are overcome, they enter stage three where they become **allies, partners** in life. Maturity brings acceptance of themselves and their mate just as they are. Growth continues, but they help each other through the changes. They have learned to adjust their expectations and live in harmony. Each one honestly and humbly recognizes their own sin and faults so that a balanced view of self and their mate results. Their commitment has been tested and is dependable because it has lasted. Unconditional love grows and they feel safe and secure with each other. They have learned how to face conflict and resolve it in healthy ways. Peace and harmony are present. That doesn't mean there aren't still issues that pop up nor trips back to stage 2 to resolve problem areas, but it does mean that, for the most part, life is good and the relationship is sound and secure.

Yes, the honeymoon will end, and the going may be rough for a while. But the end result, stage 3, is much better than the honeymoon. Love is deep and secure; it is tested and proven. Two really do become "one flesh" when their very souls are knit together.

How to get from stage 2 to stage 3? Return to the basics of forgiveness, communication, showing unconditional love and respect, humble service and sacrifice and totally depending on God to do His work in you individually and in your marriage. You can find more detailed help on these at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> or write me at jerry@schmoyer.net.

Which stage are you in? If you aren't in stage 3, what do you need to do to keep moving in that direction? If you are in stage 3, what do you need to do to stay there?

BLOG 916: ANGER & UNFORGIVENESS: OPEN DOORS FOR SATAN (2 Corinthians 2)

The early church faced many difficulties as it spread. Attacks from without were repelled by turning to Jesus for guidance and power. It was the attacks within the church that were, and still are, the most effective for Satan. The church in **Corinth** had more than its share of troubles, mostly brought on by their own sin and disobedience. Demons can use those sins as openings to come in and magnify the damage among believers. Paul wrote letters to the Corinthians to warn and educate them about these things. The warnings and teachings apply to us today as well.

In 2 Corinthians he warned the believers to **be aware of Satan's schemes** so they aren't tricked and defeated (2 Corinthians 2:11). The brother who was living with his father's wife and was disciplined by exclusion from church fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) evidently repented and was restored to fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:5-6). Now Paul encourages them to forgive the man and treat him with love and acceptance (2 Corinthians 2:7-10). If they don't forgive him, Paul says, Satan will use that to work against them (2 Corinthians 2:11).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Paul is warning them that Satan will use their unforgiveness as an opening to attack them. One of the leading causes of demonizing is unconfessed anger. Anger includes any form of unforgiveness, bitterness, hate, jealousy, gossip, criticism, etc. Paul says these can "give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27). He tells the Corinthians that if they don't forgive each other Satan will use that to "outwit" them (2 Corinthians 2:10-11). Jesus Himself said that those who don't forgive others will be turned over to tormenting demons to bring them to repentance (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:34). This anger includes anger toward others, parents, self, or God. There can

be no removing demons who claim this access until all anger is truly confessed and put under the blood of Jesus. This is one of the first things that usually comes up when we counsel people and pray for their deliverance. Do NOT take this lightly! Don't rush through this step. Spending time praying for God to show anger and unforgiveness is time well spent.

Many verses warn about the danger of unconfessed unrighteous anger and how demons can use it to gain access to the angry person (2 Corinthians 2:10-11). "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Anger comes from mishandling hurt and pain. Instead of feeling the hurt we turn it into anger for revenge or control. This allows demons to use it as an opening. There is a lack of control that opens the door. Also, it is almost like a prayer for power to hate someone, and demons seek to answer that prayer. They made Saul angry at David, so much so that he tried to kill David (I Samuel 18:10-11; 19:9-10). Paul says there is a very close connection between anger and demonizing (Ephesians 4:27).

Pain must be handled as pain, not turned into anger. You can't bury something alive and think you are getting rid of it. The hurt must be dead - faced, admitted, healed, removed, forgiven. When a person buries hurt alive it keeps poisoning everything until it is dug out and destroyed.

While there is a legitimate use for anger ('righteous indignation') most of what we face is not right. Anger is a secondary emotion, unlike fear which is a basic emotion. Wrong anger is always the result of mishandling another, deeper emotion like fear or pain. Let's take pain, first of all. When a person hits their finger with a hammer what do they do? Usually, they get angry. What they feel is pain, but it comes out as anger because anger is a much easier emotion to handle than pain. When someone says something critical or threatening it hurts, but the natural response in many is to get angry. That way they don't have to face the pain – but it stays and causes more and more anger. That's where fear comes in. It's not just pain that causes anger, but fear of pain. Fear is at the root of anger in other ways as well. To seek to manage our fears we try to control our lives and circumstances (thus the control emphasis part grows). We feel that is necessary to prevent pain and other things we fear. We use anger as a control tool. The adrenaline rush makes us feel in charge instead of a victim. We learn that people can be manipulated and controlled by our anger (or the threat of it) and we use that to control as well. This is another reason why it's important to deal with and get victory over the fears down inside. When they go the anger and control issues will become much more manageable. A person can't stop their anger as long as what causes it is still inside pushing it out. They must get the root cause out, and that is where dealing with the fear comes in. (October 25, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you or someone you know struggle with anger? What have you learned from this blog that can help bring victory? Write down the main lessons that apply to you so you don't forget them.

BLOG 917: YOU CAN'T BE LIKE JESUS BY TRYING TO BE LIKE HIM (Fruit of the Spirit 1)

A group of Christian laymen involved in missionary work approached a small village near an Amish settlement. Seeking a possible convert, they confronted an Amish farmer and asked him, "Brother, are you a Christian?" The farmer thought for a moment and then said, "Wait just a few minutes." He wrote down a list of names on a tablet and handed it to the lay evangelist. "Here is a list of people who know me best. Please ask them if I am a Christian." (Taken from "In Living Faith" by Jimmy Carter). The evidence of faith is fruit. Jesus Himself echoed this same truth when He said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). That still applies today. What if someone asked your closest friends if you were a Christian? Would they say 'yes' without hesitation? That doesn't mean

we have to be perfect, but there must be evidence of Christ-like character in our lives. We all want to be more like Jesus, but that isn't something we can do in our own strength. It's not like playing 'Simon Says' where we just mimic some outward actions. We can't become like Jesus by trying to be like Jesus!

Becoming more like Him isn't something that we can produce in our actions. It can only be done as God Himself works inside us to bring about an inner change in attitude and conduct. That's why Paul calls the attributes of Jesus that God wants to reproduce in us 'fruit' (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus says we are branches that hold the fruit which He Himself as the branch produce in us (John 15). Roy Hession says: "Victorious living and effective soul-winning service are not the product of our better selves and hard endeavors, but are simply the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are not called upon to produce the fruit, but simply to bear it." ("The Calvary Road" Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 13)

That's why we can't be like Jesus by trying to be like Him. Only He can do it in us. What we do in our own strength, the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), are tainted by our sin nature and can never make us like Jesus. There is no way that we on our own can whip up such things as unconditional love, inner joy no matter what, peace despite circumstances, patience when things aren't moving fast enough, kindness to those who are unkind to us, goodness to those who are intentionally insensitive to us, faithfulness to those who have been disloyal to us, gentleness to those who have been harsh with us or self-control when our emotions are running all over the place.

So, if we can't have these by doing them, how can we get them? We allow God to reproduce them in us as we draw closer to Him. When our intimacy with Jesus grows the fruit just naturally starts to be produced in our lives. When a young child hangs around their parents they start to automatically pick up characteristics of their parents. That happens as we grow in fellowship with Jesus as well. But for us as Christians it even goes beyond that, for the source of these traits is the Holy Spirit Himself inside us producing them as we allow Him full control of our lives. Grow in your relationship with Him and He will grow these in you! (November 1, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

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

John 15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Can you think of times in your life when you tried to be like Jesus but failed? What about times you just submitted to Him and felt Him flowing through you and reproducing Himself in you?

If there is any sin in your life, any disobedience, any unforgiveness, any failure to do something He wanted you to do, admit (confess) the sin and ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Now ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and to do whatever is necessary to replicate Jesus in your life.

Are you guilty of trying to get those to whom you minister to just act like Jesus instead of leading them to allow God to reproduce Jesus in through them?

Ponder this statement throughout the day, "I can't be like Jesus by trying to be like Him." Let it become a part of the basis of your Christian life.

BLOG 918: WITH FRUIT ITS ALL OR NOTHING! (Fruit of the Spirit 2)

The concept behind a water wheel is very interesting. Did you know that there are overshot waterwheels and undershot? In the one case the water falls from above the wheel to turn it. In the other the water turns the wheel as it flows below it. Which do you think is the more powerful? The first, or course. We, like wheels, are turned by forces from various sources, but too often we move by the undercurrent--mercenary desires and selfish aims drive us. However, when we let God's driving force fall from above, we have power beyond anything we can produce on our own. The love God puts in us is far greater than any love we can come up with on our own. So is His joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

When we allow God to do His work within the result is that He reproduces His fruit in us. Notice Paul doesn't say fruits (plural) although he does use the plural 'acts' for what the flesh produces (Galatians 5:19). The 9 traits listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are not 9 separate traits but all characteristics of one person – Jesus. They aren't set out on a buffet table for us to file by and choose which we want. They are one unit – all or nothing. When God is in control all 9 of these are producing themselves in us, when He isn't in control none of them are there.

Please understand that since we have different personalities, different temperaments, and different strengths and weaknesses that some of these fruit will come more 'naturally' to us and others will be more difficult to grow. Still, God makes all of them equally available. If we are naturally laid back and easy-going, we don't want to mistake that for the fruit of patience. Likewise, if we have a problem with anger, we can't blame God for not giving us more self-control. We must make sure we allow Him to produce fruit in the areas of our strength as well as weakness. If the patience we have isn't from Him then it isn't Christ-like, it's just another of the works/acts of the flesh disguised as fruit. It's counterfeit. And just because we may see evidence of 8 of these fruit but find it very hard to allow God to produce the last one, doesn't mean we can coast thinking that 8 out of 9 is pretty good! To be like Jesus we need all 9. Unless His Spirit is producing these in us, we won't have them in their entirety. If one is lacking in your life then the full production of the other 8 is being hindered as well. They are all interconnected. They are not separate entities. Don't pick them apart and isolate them as separate qualities but remember they talk about one person – a person becoming more like Christ in what they think and do. (November 8, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Ps 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

Ps 92:12-14 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,

Which of these 9 fruit do you find come more naturally to you? In other words, which do you try to do in your own strength? Confess the danger in that and ask God to forgive you for trying to counterfeit His fruit by your own flesh.

Which of these 9 fruit do you most need? Which do you lack more than others? Do you make excuses for it, blame it on others, or just ignore it and live with it? If so, then confess that as well as the sin itself. Ask God to show you what you need to do for Him to reproduce Himself in this area as well.

Do you focus on some of these fruit to the exclusion of others in your ministry?

Pray and ask God to reproduce all His fruit in you, especially in the areas where you are least like Jesus. When situations arise during your day, pray again that He would help you respond as Jesus would have responded.

BLOG 919: BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE (Fruit of the Spirit 3)

We Americans say we love everything! We love pizza, football and our country. We love Mom, apple pie and American Idol. We love whatever is good and wholesome. But when we say we love everything, we really don't love anything. That cheapens love and puts everything on the same level. Real love is sacrificial and costly, it is unconditional and unselfish. It is for the good of the other and not for our self. This kind of love is commanded by God. Jesus said in John 13:35: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37 say: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Where does this supernatural, unconditional, other-centered love come from? It certainly isn't something we can just decide to start doing one day. Human love is conditional. We love "if" and "because." To love in spite of comes from God. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). He produces it in us as we let Him fill us and control us. It comes from Him. It is a response to His love. We love Him because He first loved us (I John 4:19). Loving God is one thing He can't force us to do. It's a free will choice we make and that's why our love is so important to Him. Still, His Spirit is the source of the love inside us.

I Corinthians 13 tells us that love is the greatest of all attributes. That's why it is listed first among the fruit in Galatians 5:22-23. All these fruit (not fruits) describe one character, and love is the predominate trait in that character. That is God's outstanding quality and that is also reflected in Jesus' life. Donald Grey Barnhouse puts it this way: "Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love's touch. Goodness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love holding the reins."

"Joy is love exalting and peace is love at rest. Patience, love enduring in every trial and test. Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin. Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within. Faith is love's eyes opened, the loving Christ to see. Meekness, love not fighting but bowed at Calvary. Temperance, love in harness and under Christ's control. The Christ is love in person, and love, Christ in the soul." (Missionary Dr. Kenneth Moyner).

It's all about love. Joy is love rejoicing. Patience is love enduring. Peace is love trusting. Kindness is love serving. Goodness is love reaching out. Faithfulness is love proving. Gentleness is love touching. Self-control is love restraining. It's all about love. Love is the greatest!

"If love is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example, justice without love is legalism; faith without love is ideology; hope without love is self-centeredness; forgiveness without love is self-abasement; fortitude without love is recklessness; generosity without love is extravagance; care without love is mere duty; fidelity without love is servitude. Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or

informed, by love.” (Richard P. McBrien) To be like Jesus means to have His love flowing out to others. He makes it available for His people. It’s free for the asking – but you have to ask. (November 15, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ... Love never fails. ... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Read the above verses again, only instead of the word ‘love’ insert ‘Jesus’. Does that describe Jesus?

Now read it again and insert your name or ‘I’ for the word love. How does it sound that way? How well does that describe you?

Do those you minister to you know you love them? Would they use ‘loving’ as one of the first words they choose to describe you?

Pick out 1 or 2 of the places where you need improvement. Spend a few minutes praying about them, asking God to make you more like them. Plan some steps you can take to become more like Jesus in these areas.

BLOG 920: DO YOU HAVE THE JOY, JOY, JOY, JOY DOWN IN YOUR HEART? (Fruit of the Spirit 4)

How do you feel when you hear the Hallelujah chorus? Does it sound joyful to you? We assume Handel must have been overflowing with joy in order to write that fine piece of music and I’m sure that is true. However, his joy didn’t come from circumstances for his health and his finances had reached the lowest possible place at that time. His right side was paralyzed, he was threatened with debtors’ prison because he couldn’t pay his bills and he was fighting depression. But when he got his eyes off himself and onto God, he was filled with so much joy it overflowed into his masterpiece. Handel was a man of deep faith in God. While writing the Hallelujah chorus a servant hadn’t heard from him in some time so he quietly entered Handel’s room to find him sitting at his desk with tears streaming down his cheeks. He looked up and said, "I saw all of Heaven before me, and the great God Himself." Now that will bring joy no matter the circumstances!

True joy is not something we can whip up on our own, especially when conditions are unfavorable. Anyone can be happy when life is doing well, but to have joy when things are falling apart is a gift of God. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Joy isn’t easy to describe. In the Old Testament there are 27 different words that are used for some aspect of joy. Suffice it to say, though, that joy is an attitude of mind that flows from peace and hope when our focus is on God and His faithfulness. Perhaps it could be said that joy is the outflow of a foundation of peace. So, joy isn’t dependent on circumstance. In fact, often it is negative circumstances that cause us to turn more closely to God and thus find joy in Him alone (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12-13). Always remember that joy is a gift of God’s grace. It comes from His Spirit. In the Greek the word for joy and the word for grace come from the same root meaning “rejoice.” This is not by chance. The “joy of the Lord” is not something we have naturally in our own strength and power; it comes by His grace.

So how does this apply? Well, if the roof is leaking and you can’t get someone to fix it, move your chair! In other words, if things are tough and you’re getting down under it all, change your attitude. Focus on God and His faithfulness and He will produce the fruit of joy in you by His Spirit. When we focus on Jesus’ words only then does God promise that our joy will be full and complete

(John 15:11). God knows that circumstances will not always make us happy (John 16:33) but that He will give joy despite it all (Psalm 30:5). Remember Peter and Silas in prison after being unfairly whipped. It's midnight in a dark, filthy dungeon and they are locked in stocks with their bodies screaming in pain. So, what do they do? They sing! (Acts 16:22-25) That's what God's joy within is like - no matter what is happening in life God's joy is greater than any situation we may find ourselves in. But, like Peter when he walked on water but started to sink when he looked at the waves, we too must keep our eyes only on Jesus. (November 22, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

James 1:2-4: Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” 1 Peter 4:12-13

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Psalms 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Nehemiah 8:10 Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Do you tend to look at circumstances around you and get discouraged? Is your glass half empty instead of half full? Take a moment to get your eyes on Jesus by writing down a list of times and ways in which He has been faithful to you. Trust Him to be so in your present situation.

Does your joy depend on how well your life and ministry are going, or do you depend on God to fill you with His joy each day? Select one of the verses above to meditate on all day. Whenever circumstances start to get to you remember the verse. When God gives you His joy thank him for it.

BLOG 921: “I’VE GOT PEACE LIKE A RIVER” (Fruit of the Spirit 5)

Peace – we often talk about it but don't always understand it. Sometimes we think of it as calm circumstances, a time when there aren't external difficulties or stresses. Thus, peace is the absence of trouble. Perhaps that is why we so often try to control our environment and pray for God to remove anything that stretches us. But there is a big difference between everything going OK in life and real peace deep within. We seldom live with circumstances perfect, but we can always have peace within, no matter what storms rage without.

The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. Shalom's basic meaning is wholeness and well-being in all areas of life. Real 'shalom' isn't something that we can produce ourselves any more than we can whip up unconditional love or deep joy. It has to come from God's Spirit. It is His fruit. It is an inner contentment, an attitude of faith in God despite what we face in life.

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace because He alone brings peace. He isn't called the Prince of Love or Hope, although He could have been. God blesses His people with peace (Psalm 29:11) because Jesus provided it on the cross (Ephesians 2:13-14).

The fruit of the Spirit is peace. Remember first, it's FRUIT not fruits. Love is the blossom; peace is love trusting. God has placed His Spirit, His love within our lives. Therefore, while we may still live within a world in desperate need of peace, we trust God with absolute confidence for He is our peace.

Second, don't forget it is the fruit of the SPIRIT, not the fruit of the saints. We cannot produce the fruit. This is spiritual fruit, and peace is only produced in our lives as we are connected to Jesus. He is the life-giving vine by which we receive His Spirit in our lives. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing," but when we are connected to Him, we will "bear much fruit." (See: John 15:5). The first step to having peace in your life is to be connected to Jesus. Jesus went to the cross and died in your place. Jesus suffered torture and the most brutal of deaths to restore peace in your life. Therefore, first we have peace WITH God (Romans 5:1), for the enmity is removed by the cross and He accepts us because Jesus paid for our sins. Then we have peace FROM God (Phil 4:7). (November 29, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

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

On a scale of 1 to 10, how much peace do you have in your life now? What is keeping it from being a 10? What do you need to do to make it a 10?

Is your first response to trouble to try and control circumstances or ask God for His peace?

Where do you need peace in your life right now? Ask Him for it now.

BLOG 922: "LORD, GIVE ME PATIENCE AND GIVE IT TO ME NOW!" (Fruit of the Spirit 6)

The annual cost of those who run red lights is over \$7 billion dollars. This includes medical bills, car repairs, etc. The average time saved by running a red light is less than 50 seconds. So why do so many do it? Impatience.

Patience is a fruit, a product of God's Spirit. It isn't part of the equipment we are born with. Have you ever met a patient newborn? No one has to learn how to be impatient. We are automatically made that way – it's part of our self-centered sin nature.

A French proverb says, "Laziness is often mistaken for patience." Perhaps the opposite is also true, patience is often mistaken for laziness. A mother once chided her doctor, when her daughter was ill and she was worried. "Why don't you do something?" she asked. "I am doing something,"

replied the doctor. "I am waiting." Many of us have trouble determining when we are being patient and when we are being lazy.

We can define patience as bearing difficulties without complaint, trusting in a greater reason or purpose behind them. The Bible uses four different Greek words that are translated in various ways as patience. Each of these words emphasizes one aspect in one way or another of what we think of as patience. Paul said the fruit of the Spirit is "makrothymia." This is a compound Greek word made up of the words "makro" meaning long, and "thymia" meaning anger. So literally it means LONG TO ANGER as opposed to "oxythymia" which means sudden anger. Longsuffering gives us the picture a person who in relation to those who annoy, oppose, or molest him, exercise patience. He refuses to yield to passion or to outbursts of anger.

What's so great about patience? Why does God want us to be patient? One reason is because He wants us to be like Him and He is patient (2 Peter 3:9). Another reason is because He knows it is best for us to patiently trust and wait.

Every fruit I know of has a protective outer layer. We peel a banana or orange to eat the fruit inside. Others fruit like an apple or grape we will eat skin and all. The outer layer serves an important purpose; it helps keep the moisture inside the fruit, even in dry seasons. The outer peel will also protect the fruit and allow it to grow. If the outer peel or skin is broken or removed, then the fruit will rot and spoil. Patience is like that for the soul of man. Patience protects our hearts from becoming rancid—bitter and rotten to the core. God wants our lives to be sweet and appealing to others; that's the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit to give our lives the aroma and taste of Jesus! The practical practice of patience restores and protects relationships. Godly patience enables us to show mercy instead of hate, to forgive instead of seek revenge. "Patience is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down."

Patience is love enduring; it's love that lasts and won't be broken by anger. We are to be patient; with a long fuse we give allowances for each other's faults and shortcomings. It only comes from staying closely attached to Jesus, the vine (John 15:5). Then when trials come it means we place our faith in Him and default to His timing instead of taking things into our own hands (Romans 5:3; James 1:2-4).

Patience is not idleness; it doesn't mean you do nothing. Patience is active. The patient man is always ready to meet his neighbor halfway; instead of building fences, patience builds bridges to maintain relationships. Further, patience is not simply a character trait or quality an individual may possess. PATIENCE IS A LIFESTYLE! It is a way of life that affects all our relationships. Patience is an expression of love because love is patient. Patience, being slow to anger enables us to live a good life. Patience will keep us from embarrassing ourselves by what we say or do. (December 6, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Isaiah 40:31 They that WAIT on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Would those who know you best say you are a patient person? Why or why not?

What seems to make you most impatient? What can you do about that?

Ask God to show you any impatience you may have within you now, then confess it as sin and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit and patience.

BLOG 923: CHRISTLIKE KINDNESS (Fruit of the Spirit 7)

What do Pharaoh's daughter rescuing Moses, Rahab helping the Jewish spies, David's treatment of Mephibosheth and Elijah's response to the woman whose son just died have in common? They all were showing kindness.

Kindness can be defined as God's loyal love and favor toward His people. In the Old Testament, the word translated as "kindness" or "lovingkindness" refers to God's long-suffering love- His determination to keep His promises to His chosen people in spite of their sin and rebellion (Deuteronomy 7:12; Hos 2:14-23). This attribute of God was shown through His divine mercy and forgiveness toward sinners when payment of sins through the sacrificial system was no longer effective (Deuteronomy 22:22; Ps 51:1).

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as "grace" best represents the idea of God's kindness or lovingkindness. Because God has been gracious toward believers, they should treat all people with kindness or grace (Luke 6:35). All people are created in God's image and should be treated accordingly, no matter how badly they have twisted and deformed that image (James 3:9). Kindness is not an apathetic response to sin, but a deliberate act to bring the sinner back to God (Hos 2:14-23; Rom 2:4).

God wants us to be kind to others because He is kind to us. Our kindness shows His kindness to others, and in doing so we become more like Him. Whenever we show love or compassion to others, we are being kind. To an extent man can do that out of their old nature, but to show real kindness requires the presence and power of His Spirit for it means being kind to those who aren't deserving of it and may retaliate with hate. Turning the cheek in love can't be done without God's power.

How can we become more kind? First, we need to submit to the will of God (Philippians 2:1-8). If we can't submit to God's, will we won't be able to submit to the needs of others. Then, we need a teachable spirit (James 1:21). We need to be open to instruction to make us more like Jesus. If we think we know it all already we will never grow more like Him. Finally, we need to have a consideration and love of others (Ephesians 4:1-2). We need to be able to put ourselves in other's shoes and be sensitive to their needs.

Kindness is love in operation so others can see Jesus in us. We deeply appreciate God's kindness to others. Others can experience His kindness through us. (December 13, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 14:21 He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Who comes to mind when you think of people who are kind? What is there about them that makes them stand out from others? (Make a list of traits or characteristics.)

How do you measure up to the list you just make?

Pick 2 or 3 of the traits you lack and pray about them, asking God to produce them in your life. Then make a list of things you can do today to meet these.

BLOG 924: WHAT ARE YOU 'GOOD' FOR? (Fruit of the Spirit 8)

One of the favorite New Testament stories for children is called the Good Samaritan. Everyone knows how the Samaritan responds to another in need. That is why he is called 'good.' But what exactly does 'good' mean? Other than the opposite of 'bad' how would we define good?

Goodness is defined as praiseworthy character; moral excellence. The Bible speaks often of the goodness of God (Ex 33:19; Rom 2:4). God's goodness consists of righteousness, holiness, justice, kindness, grace, mercy, and love. Goodness is also one of the fruits of the Spirit that should characterize Christian believers (Gal 5:22). Christians are called to goodness, even as God the Father is perfect and good (Matt 5:48). Goodness differs from the previous fruit, kindness, in that kindness is an outer action and goodness is the heart attitude that causes that action.

When used of God, 'goodness' sometimes is used as a summary of all His attributes (Exodus 33:19). Goodness is all God is. To the extent that we are 'good' we are like God. When we are lovable, virtuous and righteous we are like God.

Goodness cannot be separated from holiness. Holiness of life will always express itself in always of doing what is in the best interest of others. Moral Goodness is not optional, to keep the Commandments and God's Word must be a high priority. We must conform to all God's laws and principles. Holiness is not listed as a fruit of the Spirit, for it is part of goodness. When we are holy, we are good, when we are good, we are holy.

There is a difference between being good and doing good. Being good comes when God's Spirit indwells us at the moment of salvation. Doing good is the acting out of that inner goodness in everyday life. Being good is the holiness of Jesus that God gives us at salvation. Doing good is living a holy life in all we think, say and do. In essence, only God is good. But when He lives in us then we have His goodness, the fruit of His Spirit, which works through us.

The 'good' Samaritan is a fine example to all of us of what happens when God's goodness reigns in the heart. His love flows out of us to those around us. The good Samaritan wasn't unique – we can and should all be like Him when God's Spirit lives within. (December 20, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Ps 25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways.

Rom 15:14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

What comes to mind when you think of holiness? Where would you say God's holiness is most evident in your life? Where do you need God's help to be more like Him?

Think of some ways you can show God's goodness to others through your actions today. What are they?

Ask God to fill you with His Spirit today and have Him manifest the fruit of goodness in your life.

BLOG 925: CAN GOD COUNT ON YOU? (Fruit of the Spirit 9)

Semper Fidelis is Latin for "Always faithful." It is the motto of the City of Exeter in Devonshire, England, and is a testimony to the city's loyalty to the British Monarchy. Queen Elizabeth I wrote a letter to "The Citizens of Exeter" in 1588 suggesting they adapt this motto because of their faithfulness in supporting the British fleet that had defeated the Spanish Armada. It has also been the motto of the United States Marine Corps since 1883, and it is the title of the official March of the Marine Corps composed by John Phillips Sousa in 1888. Christian Disciples are called by the Holy Spirit to be "always faithful," and "Semper Fidelis" would be an excellent motto for us to adapt as well.

Just what does this word for 'faithfulness' mean? How can we define it? That is very easy for it is the same word as that used for 'faith.' Faithfulness is staying true to someone or something, being trustworthy, being someone who can be counted on. A faithful person is one whom can be trusted and depended on. Trustworthiness is the characteristic of the man who is reliable.

God is faithful (Psalm 119:138; 1 Cor 10:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). Jesus is often called 'faithful' (Rev 1:5; 19:11). He is faithfulness personified. He is totally reliable, trustworthy and steadfast.

Faithfulness, life love, joy, peace and all the other fruit, is something that will be shown outwardly to others. It doesn't stay inside; it expresses itself visibly in our lives and actions. First of all, we are to be faithful to God. He has been faithful to us so why wouldn't we be faithful to Him? He should be able to depend on us.

Then, too, we are to be faithful to others. We are to be loyal and dependable to our families and friends, to our church and employers. The Golden Rule still applies – treat others the way you want to be treated. Do so and you will be showing faithfulness to them. (January 17, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Cor. 4:2 Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man (woman) be found faithful.

2 Thes. 3:3 The Lord is faithful, who will establish us and protect us from evil.

Hebrews 13:5 "I Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.

How dependable are you? If you were God, would you trust yourself with important Kingdom work?

Do you have a reputation for being a loyal and faithful friend? To whom can you show that faithfulness today?

We grow in faithfulness by learning the Word of God (Roman 10:12) because the better we know God the more we will want to serve Him. Spend some time reading the Bible today.

BLOG 926: POWER UNDER CONTROL (Fruit of the Spirit 10)

Do you remember that chant from childhood: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me?" It isn't true. Everyone has sometimes been hurt by words. We are hurt by lying words. We are hurt by unkind words. We are hurt by angry words. Words can hurt us. That's why God wants His people to be gentle.

Gentleness is possibly the most misunderstood virtue. Many people think of gentleness as being weak, timid, or passive. This is not the biblical understanding of gentleness. The Greek language in which the N.T. was originally written, was a precise & expressive language. When the

Greeks developed a word, they not only gave it a careful definition, but they almost always illustrated it. Their definition of gentleness was "power under control," & they illustrated it with the picture of a horse that had been tamed. Gentleness to them was a powerful animal with its power completely under control. Have you ever watched a 2000-pound horse pull logs? That big, strong Belgium horse was strength under control.

For example, water that's under control would be water rushing through a dam turning turbines, generating electricity to light a city. Water out of control would be a flood destroying everything in its path. A disease out of control can devastate the body & kill its victim. But a disease under control can produce vaccines & save thousands of lives. So, when you think about gentleness, think about power under control, anger under control, our emotions under God's control.

The Life Application Bible states concerning gentleness: Gentleness—Humble, considerate of others, submissive to God and his Word. Even when anger is the appropriate response, as when Jesus cleared the temple, gentleness keeps the expression of anger headed in the right direction. Gentleness applies even force in the correct way.

The fruit of kindness is showing love and compassion to others. Goodness is an inner spirit of love and holiness that show itself in doing that which benefits others. Gentleness, then, is tenderness but not weakness. It is power, but power under control. Examples would include Jesus' dealings with the woman at the well (John 4), the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and Zacchaeus the moneychanger (Luke 19).

DeSales once wrote, "Nothing is so strong as gentleness," and "Nothing is so gentle as real strength." When you are producing the fruit of the Spirit you will find you are strong enough to be gentle. What a perfect picture of Jesus. What a wonderful goal for us! (January 24, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Timothy 6:4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Think of some times when others showed you gentleness. How did it feel? How were you affected?

Think of sometimes God has been gentle with you. Thank Him for it.

Who can you show gentleness towards today?

BLOG 927: SPIRIT-CONTROL: DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT (Fruit of the Spirit 11)

A young girl was learning the fruits of the Spirit, so her father asked her to recite them to him. "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and remote control," was her reply. That's not exactly right, but it is much closer to the truth than we may realize. You see, 'self' control doesn't mean that self is IN control. It means that self is UNDER control – under the control of the Holy Spirit.

We are born without self-control. Babies can't control their muscles to walk or to feed themselves, they can't control their bowels and they certainly can't control their emotions. Control needs to be learned – physically, emotionally and even spiritually. This fruit really should be called SPIRIT control, not self-control.

So, what does Spirit control really look like? It is the ability to rule your personal life so that you are not dominated by sin (Romans 6:12). It is the ability to control your self-life from within by spiritual means (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

For the Christian self-control is a spiritual grace. In the secular world we often associate self-control with willpower. Self-control or willpower would embrace such things as dieting, quitting smoking, exercise, gambling, alcohol, work habits, ethics, and living within your means. These are only just a few; each of you can add many others to this list. In our Christian walk nothing is ever accomplished by our own personal works, efforts, or merit. The entire Christian life is a walk of grace in total surrender and dependency upon the Holy Spirit. It comes by grace through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not by any personal effort on my part other than total surrender and obedience to Him. Christian self-control always honors Jesus, not myself.

Remember, self-control (really Spirit control) starts within, not without. It is not just controlling our actions, for it starts with controlling our thoughts. What is in our heart comes out through our mouth. Spirit control doesn't just help us keep our mouth shut, it shows us how to have a proper attitude in our heart.

Imagine if you started your car and noticed white smoke coming out the tailpipe. You wouldn't get a new tailpipe because that isn't the problem. The tailpipe only reveals the problem. Rather, you would do some engine work. In the same way, your habits only reveal what goes on in your heart.

If you have a habit of gossiping, the problem isn't gossip; the problem is malice or envy. If you have a habit of blowing up, the problem isn't your temper; the problem is rage, hatred, and bitterness in your heart. If you have a problem with pornography or infidelity to your spouse, the problem is lust in your heart. The base sin in all these is pride which is idolatry. Any time something is put before God it is idolatry, and idolatry begins in the heart.

Everyone needs the fruit of self-control. Paul needed it as well (Romans 7:19-21). Victory came when He let the Spirit control him (Romans 8 follows Romans 7). And we need it daily, even hourly (2 Corinthians 4:16). It isn't just for the 'big' things in life but for everyday things like our actions and speech (James 1:26). Spirit control – don't leave home without it. (January 31, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Cor. 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is self-controlled in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. . Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus, I fight: not as one who beats the air. . But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

II Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Think of some areas in life where you need God's Spirit control. Pray specifically for each area and the control you need in it. Remember to pray throughout the day as these issues arise in life.

BLOG 928: INCREASING OUR FRUIT PRODUCTION (Fruit of the Spirit 12)

How does a branch bear fruit? By trying its best and working hard? By doing its very best? No, a branch cannot bear fruit by itself. If you see a branch lying by the side of the road and bring it home, will you see fruit form, grow and ripen on it? Never! A branch only bears fruit when it is

attached to the vine. Actually, the vine produces the fruit, the branch just displays it. It manifests itself on the branch, but is produced within the vine itself. The roots and trunk supply the branch with what it needs to produce fruit.

That was common knowledge to anyone in Jesus' day, so that is the analogy Jesus used when explaining to His disciples that they needed Him to produce fruit. It was late Thursday night, April 2, 33 AD, a few hours before the crucifixion. Jesus knew His time with His disciples was almost at an end so He wanted His last teaching opportunity to really count. So, He uses this final opportunity to again make sure they knew the importance of staying in close contact with Him in order to produce spiritual fruit for the Kingdom.

The meaning is clear: Jesus' branches (disciples) need to stay in close contact with Him in order for Him to produce fruit through them. We can't do anything on our own, only through Him. Salvation is all by Him, so is the fruit we produce as we live for Him. A branch not in direct contact with the vine is useless. It can be a mile from the vine or a thousandth of a Millimeter. The distance doesn't matter. Any removal at all, no matter how small, and the sap doesn't flow so fruit isn't produced. Without God's Spirit freely flowing in us we won't be able to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

How can we tell if we are in direct contact or not? That's easy. When we spend time in prayer and Bible study, worship and service, and when we make sure all our sins are confessed and under the blood, then we are assured we are filled with His Spirit. We will then find we have an unconditional love for God, family, self and others. We will have a joy despite circumstances and be at peace with God and others no matter what is going on around us. We will be patient in trials and our thoughts and actions will be characterized by kindness, goodness and gentleness. Our faith in God will grow and so will our loyalty and devotion to Him. We will have Spirit-control in all areas of life. In effect, we will be growing in spiritual maturity. He does all the work – we just stay close and allow Him to work in us. That certainly isn't hard, is it. It's all available if we allow Him to do it. (February 7, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

John 15:1-8 "I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Of these 9 fruit of the Holy Spirit, which do you need most in your life? Why?

Write them down and pray every morning that God would fill you with His Spirit and produce these fruit in you. When a need arises during the day pause and ask for His fruit to be manifest at that time.

BLOG 929: A PERSONAL UPDATE

As 2021 winds down, I thought I'd give you an update on my life (this blog) and an evaluation of CTO's India ministry (Dec 3 by me, Dec 10 by Pastor Moses). First, I want to start by expressing my sincere, heartfelt thanks to all of you for your faithful prayers, giving and support for CTO. Words can't express how appreciative I am as are the pastors in India.

I've been retired 5 ½ years now. I feel like an old soldier who has been moved back from the front battle lines. While my health is good for my age (75), I know I wouldn't have the energy or focus to do what I did while pastoring. I'm no longer on the front lines, but I've not been sent home (to heaven) from the war, either. There's still a lot I can do for the Kingdom using my time and experience.

My first duty starts at home with my wife, Nancy. I'm still learning how to be the husband she needs and God wants me to be. Hopefully I'm making progress. God has given us a very close, loving relationship. We are both amazed at the deep, growing oneness we experience. We enjoy each other more than ever and look forward to many years together. I thank God daily for the godly woman with whom He has blessed me.

We spend much time with our 6 children and 22 grandchildren. I've been able to help home school most of them at one time or another. I mainly teach the Bible and history on line or in person. I love it!

While I'm not on the front lines, I'm seldom far from them. I help support and reinforce other pastors in various ways. Through CTO, which is now in its 8th year, I mentor and teach pastors in India and elsewhere (more about that in the next blog). I am involved in a local church teaching, counseling and mentoring on line and in person. I write 3 blogs a week: India Update, Spiritual Warfare and one for Pastors and Church Leaders. I led a men's retreat in 2021 and have been leading a marriage retreat for 20+ years. I write books and articles to help pastors and Christians grow in their faith.

Sometimes I get to take a trip to the front lines and minister by preaching, spiritual warfare counseling or mentoring pastors. I thank God for still using me in these ways and giving me the privilege of serving Him in any way I can.

What about you? If you are still on the front lines, stay faithful. Soon you will look back on it. Now is the time to make sure you don't have regrets. If, like me, you've slowed down because of your age or health, still do what you can. Use your gifts, your time, your money and your experience the best you can until our Great Commander sends you home. As long as God keeps us alive, He has a work for us to do – that's why we are still on earth. Do you know the purpose He has for you in your current stage of life? Are you fulfilling it? Make sure you will be able to say with Paul: ***"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing"*** (2 Timothy 4:7-8) (December 27, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 930: INDIA UPDATE: 2021 & 2022

In my last blog I updated you on what is happening in my life. This blog is an update about CTO and our ministry in India. Next blog will be Pastor Moses' evaluation of 2021 and look ahead to 2022. I want you to know what is happening so you can pray and give to support the ministry.

Even though we have not traveled to India in 2021 and won't in 2022, CTO is more active than ever. Since the start of Covid we have sent over \$50,000 to buy food for needy pastors. That has provided a month's worth of food for about 2,000 poor pastors and their families. Thanks SO MUCH for your prayers and generous giving!

We continue to provide \$25 a month for 18 needy pastors who also help with CTO work in India. \$25 a month is a lot for families living on \$50 or \$75 a month! This money is provided by individuals who commit to giving \$25 per month for this need. We could use a few more people willing to give an additional \$25 a month for this part of our ministry. For security purposes we can't let you know who you are supporting, but we do ask you pray for them regularly. God knows who they are!

We also assist in other ministries there such as supporting orphans, teaching women to sew, helping children keep up with their school work, drilling water wells, etc. These are not mainly CTO ministries but we do help in various ways.

Our main focus continues to be pastor training. My not being there has caused pastor Moses and others to hold their own pastor training conferences. CTO provides the teaching materials and funding and Pastor Moses does the planning and teaching. I have had 4 Zoom sessions teaching Indian pastors and more are planned for 2022. I send a weekly blog training and encouraging pastors in India, Africa, South America, Europe and the USA. I correspond with several pastors and church leaders in each of these locations, mentoring and training them individually.

The books we have printed and distributed have been invaluable during the last two years. Pastors continue to read and use them. There is a growing demand for them by those who haven't received them. They are available in English and Telugu on our web site as well as in printed copies. Translations in Spanish and Hindi are also available on line. Printing costs in India are skyrocketing with printers closing because of the high cost of ink, paper and labor. The government has enacted a new 18% tax as well. It is getting very costly to print books. Please pray for this part of our ministry and support it financially if God so directs you.

I have many other resources on the web site including articles about the Bible, marriage, men's issues, spiritual warfare, pastoring and many more. There are also sermon, Bible study courses and videos of my sessions in India, as well as videos where I talk about India and our work there. <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/>

Thanks so very, very much for your faithfulness to God and this ministry. It is a great encouragement to me and the pastors in India. Your prayers and financial contributions are very much needed. Your contributions for food for needy pastors was wonderful. Thanks so much! However, since this summer contributions have declined. The need in India continues. God gives us in the USA extra money so we can give it back to Him to use for brothers and sisters who are less fortunate. If we keep that portion for ourselves, we are robbing God (Malachi 3:8-12). Ask yourself: "If I lived in India, what would I hope those in the USA would do to help me?" That's the Golden Rule. Give as God leads. He will bless you in many ways. You can't outgive God! (January 3, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

BLOG 931: PASTOR MOSES' 2021-2022 REPORT FROM INDIA

I asked PK about his evaluation of what was happening in India and the ministry of CTO there. This is his response:

"Thank you for your prayers and the support for the ministry. We continue to pray for you and all those who support CTO. Appreciate your prayers and support for the ministry in India. About the work with the Pastors in India, so far so good. We are trusting God to help now and even in the future.

"Through CTO Pastors are blessed through books and training with conferences they have attended. They have specially increased their faith in the Lord and stood for the Lord in the churches, even though Corona has come. CTO helped thousands of Pastors in time of lock down and Corona with the food, provision for a month, so that made them and their families feel happy and Thankful to the CTO ministry in India.

“Specially the Pastors will be remembering Pastor Jerry’s teaching, and reading his books. They always help them to keep going on in their ministry. They keep reading the books along with the Bible and teach to their church members.

“We have struggles and sufferings in the ministry with non-Christians and at the present time with the government. But we are trusting God will change the situation in the future. There are many Pastors have Passed away, because of the Corona. Many others are struggling but God has been helping the Pastors. They are now coming together for prayer and fellowship in many places. Now and in the future the work of CTO of teaching and encouraging Pastors will keep go on. They have the books and others will be getting them.

“Pastor training continues, even if Pastor Jerry can’t come, because of the Corona and other health issues. In his place I, Pastor Moses, will continue to do the same lessons in the conferences. Christians in the USA encourage the Pastors in India through CTO support and prayers. The ministry CTO has established in India over many years continues now and will in the future no matter what the situation. Thousands of Pastors know the teaching of Pastor Jerry, and the books, so they keep reading and working for the Lord .

“So please continue to pray and support the Pastors in India so Pastors will continue to work and reach more people for God. We Appreciate your prayers. Blessings PK Moses”

I want to add my thanks again as well. Even though we are not physically in India, the impact of the work continues through our prayers, support, encouragement and training. God will reward and bless each one of you for your faithfulness as He has Pastor Moses and myself. You may not meet these people in this life, but be assured you will meet in heaven. Think of all you’ll have to talk about and praise God for together! (January 10, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 932: FINDING TRUTH IN A WORLD GONE MAD (Truth #1)

Times have changed. It used to be all we, as believers, faced in the way of attacks from the world were differences over immorality, abortion and evolution. Recently, a plethora of new challenges to our faith have exploded on the scene. We now face the woke culture, cancel culture, critical race theory, Black lives matter, LGBTQ+, gender identity and gender change issues, racism, radical Islam, vaccination controversies and much more.

Most Christians don't really understand all these new challenges to our faith. If we don't comprehend them, how can we accurately evaluate them and defend our faith against them? How can we train our children and other Christians how to respond to them?

In this series of blogs, I'll give you some tools so you can better understand what is happening around us and compare it to God's truth. I'm no expert on these things, but I believe I have some useful insights to share. Feel free to challenge me if you disagree or correct me if I am in error.

We need to start by finding a basic plumb line for truth. Where do we find truth? From the news outlets, politicians, actors or our co-workers? There is little truth to be found there. Even Christians don't agree in many of these areas.

The only place to find truth is in God's word. We must accept that as our final, absolute authority. In order for that to happen we must be firmly convinced that God exists and that He revealed truth in the Bible. If you don't know how to defend these truths, email me at jerry@schmoyer.net and I'll send you my articles on How we know God exists, the Bible is true, and Jesus is God and the only way of salvation. Or you can read or download them at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/articles/>

God is our standard giver; the Bible is our given standard and Jesus is our standard for a perfectly lived out life. The first tool we need in order to evaluate and understand all that is happening today is that truth is absolute. It is not relative.

Those who reject the Bible as their absolute turn to man himself as the final authority. Instead of the Bible, they base truth on their own mind and rational thinking. Thus, they believe man is good and there is no sin or Satan. They have no hope beyond this existence. Life is just to be lived for the pleasure one can get now. This is diametrically opposed to the absolute truth of the Bible.

Civilizations in the past that have been founded on God's absolutes have flourished and prospered. Look at Rome, Europe, and the United States. Where God's truth has been rejected, civilizations remain in darkness, evil and poor living conditions. Africa, India and Asia are examples.

It used to be generally accepted that truth was absolute. It was defined and didn't change. That belief was called modernism. The time we live in now is called postmodernism. Truth is relative, determined by the people, and there is no absolute. If someone says they are a male in a female body, then that is truth. There's no questioning their truth. Doctors and hospitals are forced to act on the statement of the person and change their body to align with their current feelings.

As we turn further from God's word, we are turning further from His absolutes. Gay and lesbian relationships are more acceptable today than even a few years ago. Almost 70% of the people today approve of sex between unmarried adults. In 2006, 50% of the people said it was very important that couples with children legally marry. Now under 30% say that. Truth is changing, and it is moving further and further from God's truth in the Bible.

Truth has become relative. Today, truth is discovered by man, not created by God. 60% of USA professing born-again Christians under the age of 40 say salvation can be received through Jesus, Buddha or Muhammad. They base that on what they feel is right, not on God's word. What they feel takes precedence over what the Word of God says. They believe the Bible may have reflected the beliefs of people in its day, but not today.

If a pregnant woman feels abortion is okay, she can abort her baby with no consequences. But if she decides to keep her baby, believing it is a life, and the baby is killed in utero by an act of violence, that crime is considered murder. There is no absolute, it depends on what the woman thinks.

Suppose we applied that logic to cheating or stealing or killing? If there is no absolute, there is chaos. What would it be like sitting down to a game of Monopoly where each person made up their own rules? They could change their rules whenever they wanted. What kind of a game would that be? That is how a man makes moral decisions today.

Relativism says there is no such thing as absolute sin. If we go against a personal choice, that is wrong. But there are no absolutes to sin against it. Yet we know that absolutes are absolutely necessary. What would happen to our country, our freedom or our values if there were no absolutes? What would relationships be like if there was no honesty or truth between people?

Judges 17:6 says, **“everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** That's the way life is lived today. But Jesus says there is truth. “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” John 8:32. (March 28, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Are you firmly convinced that God exists? Are you absolutely sure the Bible is his Word? If so, does that show in your values, motives, priorities and goals in life?

Can you explain your beliefs in God and the Bible to others?

What difference does it make if truth is absolute or relative?

BLOG 933: WHY RADICAL REFORM FAILS (Truth 2)

Have you ever traded glasses with someone? What did the world look like when you viewed it through their lenses? Each one of us has a lens through which we view life in the world around us. It's called our worldview. It's the sum total of our beliefs about the world, the big picture that directs our daily decisions and actions. It's the framework to understanding existence. It's our structure to place all that happens. Everyone has a worldview - from the aborigine to the college professor.

Proverbs 23:7 says "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he". We are what we think. Our actions are determined by our values and our values spring out of our beliefs. We can't see someone's beliefs or the values which result. What we do see is their actions. From these actions, we can determine the values and the beliefs behind them.

If someone believes a fetus is not a life, their value then is that it's OK to end its development. Their actions then are seen by their support of abortion. On the other hand, if the Bible is our absolute, then the Bible's values will be our values and our actions will be based on them. Our actions will be Christ-like. An unborn baby is a life and not to be terminated.

Instead of evaluating people's actions, or even their values, we need to look at their beliefs. As we try to make sense out of the many new philosophies and movements around us, we must look at the basic beliefs, not the resulting actions. We must understand the worldview behind the belief in order to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it.

There are three tests for a worldview, three questions that every person and every belief system need to have answered. 1: Who am I? 2. What is my problem? 3. What is my solution?

The Bible answers the question of who we are by saying that we are created in God's image. Our problem is sin. Our only solution is redemption in Jesus.

Those who reject the Bible as their authority say that who we are is a result of chance, just like all the other animals. Since there is no god, there is no absolute standard of right or wrong, and there can be no sin. Thus, the problem for mankind today is our society. They see the solution as changing society, removing what they don't like to make better living conditions which will solve all man's problems.

Now let's apply that to the social and racial problems our country is facing. Critical Social Justice (CSJ) seeks to reform our society by replacing democracy with Marxism. Since they believe that the end justifies the means, whatever it takes to destroy capitalism is okay. For example, don't reform the police, defund and remove them. Don't try to improve our society, destroy it and replace it.

Some who want racial reform say the solution is making more and stronger laws and then enforcing them. However, culture can't be changed by new laws or by replacing democracy with Marxism. The problem is not in the conditions around us, but in man's own heart. It is sin within, not circumstances without that need to change.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 says "There is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins." Isaiah 64:6 says "All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Jeremiah 17:9 says "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can cure it?" God's Word says our problem is sin within man.

Are we to believe God's evaluation of the problem or men's? We know man can't change himself, yet many times we try to remake ourselves. We want to improve so we are better people. While that is good, and to some extent we can use our free will to make better choices, real lasting

change only comes from within by God's spirit. If sin is the problem in the world today, it is also the main problem in your life and mine. And the only solution is Jesus. (April 4, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Do you try to change other's actions and behavior? What can you do to help others change their heart? How can you change your own heart to be more like God wants you to be?

BLOG 934: WOKENESS: A GOOD IDEA GONE BAD (Truth #3)

Evangelical Christians tend to reject every new idea the world comes up with, and often before we really understand them. Wokeness is a good example of this.

The term "wokeness" derives from the African American vernacular which means to "stay woke." It refers to a continuing awareness of the issues around us. The term first appeared in the 1940's but has become more common today.

What's interesting, is that wokeness is based on Bible truth. In ancient civilizations, the strong had every right to dominate the weak. Cruelty, rape, torture and slaughter were ordinary means of enforcing power. Neither the gods they worshipped nor the moral codes they wrote opposed domination. The strong had all the rights, the weak had none. It's still that way in places like India, Africa, Asia, China. Nazi Germany operated on that same basis. These cultures were not based on the truth of God's Word.

As the truth of the Bible spread, man came to realize that everyone is made in the image of God and had intrinsic worth and dignity. No matter their race, ethnicity, gender or income, all have equal worth. Oppression of the poor and weak was condemned. Neither might nor wealth made oppression right.

Christianity also emphasized the spiritual and moral equality of all people. We all suffer from the same problem, sin. We all need the same solution, salvation through Jesus. Because of these ideas, Christianity is the soul historical source of concepts now taken for granted such as human dignity, human equality and universal human rights.

We don't see that outside Christianity. Hinduism has its caste system which brings great oppression to millions. In Islam, females are inferior to males, and Muslims are superior to other nationalities. Buddhism, Confucianism and other world religions teach the importance of being kind to others, but they do not take a strong stand against slavery and oppression.

History proves God's truth 'woke' man's conscience. In ancient Rome, unwanted children were left outside to die of exposure, but Christians would take them in. In Europe during the Middle Ages, when plagues would kill thousands, people fled from the cities. Only Christians stayed and took care of the sick. Hospitals, schools, churches, education and a better level of society came to third world countries when missionaries brought them in. In most of the world, where Christian values are not accepted, slavery is still the norm. There are 42 million people in slavery today. It is Christian countries that have removed it.

So, if wokeness is built on Bible absolutes, why don't Christians support it? That's because there is a failure in wokeness. It sees the problem, but not the solution.

Those who promote wokeness see the solution as forced external conformity. Any who do not agree with their truth are to be punished. Political correctness must be adhered to. There is a prescribed way to speak and act and any deviation is to be canceled. We see many companies and organizations becoming woke today. Company logos change to rainbows during gay pride month. LGBTQ+ affirming toys and children's books are created.

To them, everyone is either an oppressor or oppressed. Everyone is in one category or the other. White Evangelical Christians are not oppressed, so we are seen as part of the oppressors. There is no room for working together in unity to bring change. There is no seeking forgiveness or restoration. Their only solution is to destroy and remove what they don't approve of. To them, the oppressors are guilty and the oppressed are innocent. So, remove the oppressors and lift up the oppressed. That's why so much of the focus is on tearing down and destroying and not building up.

John Tillman sums it up well: "Our culture has become anti-mercy, going past skepticism and walking into the wilderness of hatred and retributive violence. In recent years, when people have offered public forgiveness to individuals that everyone agreed did not deserve it, our world wouldn't tolerate it. We are opposed to forgiveness. We go beyond refusing to forgive—we label forgiveness and mercy, not just foolish, but evil.

"A culture that is invested in and glorifies hatred, retribution, payback, and vengeance cannot allow an act of mercy to stand as a simple act of mercy. It must be critiqued and spun. Media and pundits immediately will attempt to twist it, politicize it and discount it.

"Our world is desperate to explain away Christian forgiveness as something else. It must be enabling evil. It must be the result of racism. It must be a naïve and foolish gesture. It must be anything other than Christian forgiveness. Never that."

Because they see the problem but offer no real solution, wokeness just replaces one hatred with another. They claim we hate them, so that justifies their deeper hatred of us. The Bible worldview says we are not to just destroy wrong, but to replace it with right. We are to use forgiveness, mercy and working together for unity as our goal, not destruction.

Proverbs 24:29 "Do not say, 'I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did.'" Matthew 18:21-35 "Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" When we follow God's truth, we take the path of forgiveness.

As Christians, we reject wokeness. But before we are too quick to criticize them, we need to make sure that we ourselves aren't guilty of unforgiveness. (April 11, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Is there anybody you need to forgive and haven't? Ask God to show you if there's somebody that you hold something against. When He does, don't try to make excuses or justify your unforgiveness. Forgive, apologize if necessary, and restore the relationship.

BLOG 935: CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND THE CHRISTIAN (Truth #4)

Hegemony. The word is used often to describe current American society. I had to look up the word to see what it meant. It refers to the dominant group in a country, the ones who determine and define a culture. In the USA, our culture has been defined by white Christian males from the Revolution on. Thus, our culture is known for its whiteness.

Whiteness does not refer to a skin color, but to a collective belief system. Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren has white skin, but is accepted as non-white because of her reception and promotion of the critical race theory.

Hegemony today in the United States is the belief system that our country was founded upon. This includes the nuclear family made up of a male, a female and children, with a husband as the head of the family. It also includes the belief that hard work is a key to a success, that all are responsible to work, that authorities are to be respected and obeyed, and that objective, rational,

literal thinking is truth. If you believe those things, you're part of the hegemony, no matter your skin color. If you reject them, you are not part of the white hegemony, no matter your skin color.

Remember, we live in postmodern America. Perception is reality. Facts are not based on truth. Truth is what each one says it is. If your truth is opposed to my truth, both are true. I can say $2 + 2$ is 3 and you can say $2 + 2$ is 5 and, according to postmodernism, both are true. I can say a fetus is life so don't kill it. You can say that a fetus is just cells so you can kill it. They say both are true.

Those who are white, of the hegemony, are considered racist. If you are part of the hegemony, you are racist. No matter what you believe about other races, if you believe in the nuclear family, hard work and rational truth, you are considered racist. If you are an Evangelical Christian, you are labeled racist. Doing this-doing what? is systemic racism. There is no room for discussion or exchanging ideas. You can't use statistics as facts to prove otherwise, only whiteness uses statistics. Trying to use them just proves you are white and not one of them. You can't use reason, rationality, facts or examples. Only the hegemony does that and they are wrong because they are racist. It's hard to wrap your head around those beliefs, but that is what they feel.

Since, to them, culture can't be fixed, it must be destroyed. Family, authority, and all the other values that our country has stood for must go. There's no neutrality. Everyone is either fighting this evil white culture and therefore on the right side of history, or they are supporting it and therefore are promoting evil. There can be no neutrality, no room for skepticism and no chance for debate. They are on the right side and the rest of us are on the wrong side.

The beliefs of this system say that everyone is either an oppressor or the oppressed. Therefore, their values are to remove oppressors. Thus, their actions are justified. Whatever it takes to destroy the current USA culture is justified so it can be replaced.

They view biblical morality as oppressive, discriminatory and dangerous. They demand conformity in many areas of life to their own political ends. Yet they often are guilty of doing what they condemn others for doing; demanding their own way and putting down anyone who is different.

We see it all around us today. Facebook and Twitter close the accounts of those who did not agree with them. Best-selling books that are against transgenderism are removed. Businesses like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby are boycotted. So are states like Georgia because of their restroom laws and Texas because of their new abortion law.

The biblical worldview is totally opposite. God tells us to forgive, restore and work together for the betterment of all. Luke 6:27-37 says: "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either." Luke 17:3-4 says: "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

As Christians, we need to set an example of love and forgiveness as we work together with those with whom we disagree. That starts in our marriages and families. We should be exemplifying it in our churches. We need to carry that over into our society. Saying we love our enemies and showing it are two different things. Confessing our past sins against others and changing our actions shows the love of Jesus. We can't just say they are wrong; we need to model the truth in every aspect of our lives. (April 18, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

How do you treat those with whom you disagree?

How complete is your forgiveness of those who oppose you?

BLOG 936: SHOULD CULTURE BE CANCELED? (Truth #5)

While many are trying to bring about racial change for the future in the USA, some are also working to change the past. But can the past be changed? What do we do about wrongs that have already been committed against racial groups? What do we do with this part of our history? Their answer is simple: cancel it.

The cancel culture seeks to write the wrongs in our country by removing anyone or anything that ever did, in their opinion, anything unacceptable. For example, J. K Rowling, the famous author of the Harry Potter series, has faced tremendous backlash for voicing her fears that the push for transgender rights will ultimately endanger women's rights. Some Dr. Seuss books have been removed because of how race is depicted. The names Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Columbus and others are being removed from schools and streets. Their statues are also being destroyed. It's canceled. Cancel culture is pushed by movies, books, Pop music, TV, ads, businesses and such organizations as the NFL, NBA, MLB and Disney.

Cancel culture is a culture of disdain. It is easy for people to be offended. Not too long ago a little girl in school with a Bible verse on her shirt was expelled because others were offended by it. A tour guide in Disney who gave a thumbs up about something, was sued for \$80,000 because someone was offended by his using a white supremacy sign. They say that anything unacceptable must be punished and removed.

The goal of cancel culture is to punish and ostracize any who disagree. This is in direct conflict with Jesus' command to love God and love others. God says we are not to judge. Romans 12:14 says "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Romans 12:17-21 says "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

God says don't judge, but do love and forgive. We can evaluate error, but not pass judgment on the ones in error. We must appraise, that is how we can tell truth from evil and right from wrong. But we can't become the one who looks down on the other and condemns them as a person. We can reject their actions and beliefs, but we can't play God who alone can judge their hearts. We are not to put value judgments on the people who believe and practice those things. We can condemn their beliefs and actions, but not them as human beings for whom Jesus died. We don't want them judging our hearts, so we shouldn't judge theirs.

We need to find loving ways to support them as people and to show them Jesus by our actions. We will never be able to argue anyone into the Kingdom of heaven. We don't like them canceling us, we can't cancel them. Jesus doesn't. They need Jesus, not criticism. (April 25, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

What is your attitude to those pushing the cancel culture? How do you respond to the movements which condemn us and all we stand for? How should we respond? How would Jesus respond?

BLOG 937: OF COURSE, BLACK LIVES MATTER (Truth #6)

One of the deadliest plants in North America is spreading. Poison Hemlock is so dangerous it can cause respiratory failure and death if eaten. Even touching it can cause blisters. Its relative, the Spotted Water Hemlock, is even worse. Eating it causes death within 2 hours. These plants grow across the whole United States. They look innocent, and even beautiful, but they can be deadly. The same is true with some of the philosophies and beliefs that are being spread today. They seem innocent, even attractive, but they are very destructive.

“Black lives matter.” Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Of course, we believe black lives matter because they are created in the image of God, as are all of us (Genesis 1:26-27). We all agree that racism is evil. There is only one race and that is the human race. Ultimately, we all have the same parents, we all come from Adam and Eve, through Noah. Black lives do matter.

“Black Lives Matter.” Do you agree or disagree with the organization? There's a difference between the idea and the group. The group stands for much more than the name implies. Black Lives Matter was started in 2013 in response to separate police shootings of two young black men. BLM came into prominence at that time. It is an extreme attempt to solve the race issue. It is against all racism, but especially in the police force and the legal system. Their commitment is to remove racism by force. They take the truth that all lives matter, which is biblical, and twisted into something completely unbiblical.

“The two co-founders of Black Lives Matter, Patrisse Cullors and Alicia Garza, claim Marxism as their ideology: ‘We actually do have an ideological frame,’ Cullors said in an interview, ‘Myself and Alicia in particular, we’re trained organizers. We are trained Marxists. We are super-versed on ideological theory.’” (Quoted in the *Washington Times*, “The matter of Marxism: Black Lives Matter is rooted in a soulless ideology,” June 29, 2020).

“On their official website, BLM expresses their support of the LGBTQ agenda: “We make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead. We . . . dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk. . . . We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual. We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families (Bible of 1 male, 1 female and children) and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, especially our children.” (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe>, accessed 6/16/20).

Peaceful protests against racial injustice are appropriate. Rioting, looting and violence against police officers is not. Equality cannot be attained by moving to the opposite extreme. As a result of this movement, reverse discrimination is growing in many places. Instead of equal treatment, minorities are being given preferential treatment. A UCLA professor, Gordon Klein, was suspended because he didn't give black students an easier final exam than the other students. He felt that would be discrimination in reverse and demeaning to them.

Black lives do matter, but when the solution is Marxism, violence, and an anti-family culture, we cannot support that (Ephesians 2:11-22). God is not color blind. He made everyone different. He started the nations and various ethnicities at Babel. We can't pretend that there isn't injustice done to people of other races. Racism is to be rejected, but racial differences are not to be rejected. In truth, we are all one in Jesus. 2 Corinthians 13:11 says: “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.” Revelation 7:9 says: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”

As Christians, we must apply God's absolute truth to all areas of life. His truth is that all people do matter. We must treat each and every person the same way we want to be treated. Christians should be at the vanguard of showing love and acceptance to all other people groups. We, who have the love of Jesus, must be showing that to others so the world knows what true love is. (May 2, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Ask God to show you if there is any prejudice in you against any person or people group. Make that your prayer for the next several days. Confess any sin and ask God to help make your attitude that of Jesus.

BLOG 938: EQUALITY: GOOD OR BAD (Truth #7)

A few years ago, when I was out for a run, I saw an insect I had never seen before. It looked like a colorful, beautiful moth. However, I soon found out that it was the Spotted Lantern Fly and has killed 300 million ash trees in Pennsylvania. That is 1/3 of the total number. When the ash trees are all gone, then they will start on apple trees and others. These insects look beautiful, but they're destructive,

The same is true of much of what is being accepted as truth today. Jesus tells us that the truth will set us free (John 8:32). Yet we're not seeing much freedom today. Instead, there is much bondage, darkness, defeat and depression taking place.

In previous blogs, we have compared the world's solution to racial problems with the biblical worldview. We looked at social and racial reform, wokeness, critical race theory, cancel culture and black lives matter. We saw they don't line up with God's truth as revealed in the Bible. Now let's look at the world's solution to moral problems such as gender equality, abortion, LGBTQ+ and gender reassignment.

Absolute truth is found in God's word, and only in God's word. God sets our standards and we must apply them to every area of life. If there is no God, or if He hasn't revealed truth in the Bible, then man himself becomes the final determinator of right and wrong. The Biblical worldview says that sin does exist, and the only solution is salvation in Jesus. We cannot deny the problem of sin and expect it to go away. We cannot turn from the solution of Jesus and think there is another way, for everything else fails. Since God exists, He has the final say as to what is right and what is wrong.

God clearly says that all people are equal. The United States passed the Civil Rights act to make sure that the rights of every citizen were equally enforced. We would all agree with that. However, recently it has been amended to include sexual orientation and gender identity. That may not sound like anything major, but its application hurts many innocent people today.

What happens when the rights of people to choose their own values and beliefs conflict with those who want to force everyone to accept their views of sexuality? When it goes contrary to what God's Word says then it is not just a matter of preference, but of right and wrong.

Gays deserve personal rights as all human being do. But when their personal rights take precedence over the personal rights of others, then problems occur. That is what is happening with Evangelical Christians today. In many places, faith-based organizations cannot deny employment based on sexuality. Transgender surgeries are required of faith-based hospitals. We all have heard about cake-makers and wedding photographers who have been penalized for not serving gays.

Putting the rights of some over the rights of others takes away their privacy and protection. It's not only Christians who suffer from this. When bathrooms become open to anyone who wants to use them, the rights of some are made secondary to the rights of others. This can be especially dangerous for females. Women competing against men in their same sports is not fair. Open locker rooms and restrooms in schools and malls are just unsafe. The list goes on and on.

We are all created equal. Genesis 1:27 affirms that God created us as male and female. None are valued above the other. But each is created with a specific sex that is not fluid or determined by how we feel at any given moment. We'll see more about this in future blogs. (May 9, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Do you truly believe you are no better than those of other races? What about other cultures? How about those with different lifestyles? Ask God to show you any sin in your thinking. Confess it and ask God to cleanse you from it.

BLOG 939: THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE TRUTH (Truth #8)

We have been looking at the biblical worldview compared to the worldview of those who reject the Bible. Those who reject God's word have no absolutes. Right and wrong are decided by each individual. This is called postmodernism. It affects all areas of life. One of its consequences today is the right to abortion. They believe that each person can decide if they think a fetus is life or not. If they do not believe it is a human being, they feel they have the right to choose if that fetus should live or not.

Those who promote this want to free women from the burden of unwanted pregnancy and child raising. It will allow people to avoid the consequences of sex. They say it will keep poor families from having too many children, and remove the anxiety and stress from women who do not want a pregnancy or a baby.

The truth is, most of the babies being aborted are African American. Margaret Sanger, who started Planned Parenthood, seemed to have this in mind as she stated in videos of her interviews. Abortion has become a genocide of black babies.

Abortion fails in other ways as well. There are many physical, mental and emotional consequences to destroying a baby before birth. Many studies have proven this, but this is not publicized by the media. The violence and pain done to a fetus as it is aborted is also ignored. In countries where having male babies is preferable to female babies, female fetuses are often aborted. This results in not having enough females for the males. This imbalance has many negative repercussions. In several western nations, there are often not enough new people to sustain the culture. Those who support abortion say that they support a right to choose, but the one most affected, the baby itself, has no say in its future.

In the Old Testament, child sacrifice was often practiced by the Jews and the nations around them (Micah 6:7-8). In fact, it was universally practiced (see Wikipedia article on Child Sacrifice). Satan loves pain, suffering, blood and death. Sacrificing innocent babies and children to the 'gods' was, in fact, sacrificing them to Satan and his demons. He was behind the slaughter of the baby boys in Egypt in Moses' time and the killing of the children in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. He is behind abortion today. Humans are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), and when one is destroyed it is an attack on God Himself. There have been over 63 million legal abortions in the USA since Roe vs. Wade in 1973. That is ten times more than the Jews who died in the Holocaust by Nazi Germany (6 million Jews died in the Holocaust 1933 to 1945). If the Nazis deserved God's justice, what about those killing babies today?

As Christians, we know the Bible tells us that abortion is murder. Jeremiah 1:4-5 "Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'" Isaiah 49:1b "The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name." Psalm 139:13-15 "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

When the Bible is rejected as God's truth for us today, then man replaces it with his own ideas and opinions and they are often in conflict with the Bible. Abortion is one among many, but it is perhaps the worst sin mankind is guilty of today. (May 16, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

If God asked you if you were doing all you could to end the murder of unborn babies, what would you say? Is there more you can do? Do you pray regularly against this evil? What can you do to help and support women who have had an abortion? How can you meet and minister to these women, many of whom struggle alone for the rest of their lives?

BLOG 940: LGBTQ+ AND THE CHRISTIAN - 1 (Truth #9)

As we look at the truth of God's Word versus man's truth today, we see a great discrepancy in values. In the last blog we saw how the belief in no absolutes allows man to justify abortion. Now we'll look at how it impacts our moral values through the sexual revolution.

The sexual revolution, also known as a time of sexual liberation, was a social movement that challenged traditional codes of behavior related to sexuality and interpersonal relationships. It started in the 1960's. It contributed to the normalization of contraception, pornography, premarital and extramarital sex, homosexuality, legalization of abortion and alternative forms of sexuality. Turning from a Biblical standard of morality to letting each person decide what is right or wrong for themselves has opened the door to a flood of immorality and sexual sins. We see that in the LGBTQ+ movement today.

There has always been homosexuality, but it has exploded in popularity and focus in the last several years. At first, their cry was, "Let us do our own thing without interference, that is all we want." Soon after, it changed to, "Give us equal rights, that is all we want." Now the demand is, "Force everyone to agree with us and support us. That's all we want."

Postmodernism says whatever an individual chooses is right for them. There is no absolute truth. Just be true to yourself, not any other standard or belief system. Happiness, they say, is the main goal in life and we are all entitled to it. So, if being involved in a homosexual relationship makes you happy, you should be free to do whatever you want. When man believes there are no absolutes and that everything is relative, then man can choose whatever he thinks is right and wrong. They believe there is no right or wrong. They are free to do whatever they want to do or don't want to do.

Schools and teachers, TV and movies, the music industry, the news media and politicians and community leaders promote this to a willing public. It seemingly frees people from guilt and sin and legitimizes any and all behavior. These lies are communicated to our children as well. But does this really bring happiness? There is a high cost that goes along with rejecting God's absolute truth.

The cost-of-living counter to God's design and entering a homosexual lifestyle is a high risk of HIV, greater promiscuity, depression and substance abuse as well as a lower life expectancy. All of these are well documented. Mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health suffer.

While it may seem like this is a very large movement, actually only a small percent of people identifies with this culture. Yet they have tremendous influence today. When man turns from God's truth, Satan enters with his counterfeit truth. And that is what has happened today. Satan wants to destroy the family unit of a man, woman and children. He wants to cause chaos in the lives of people and in our culture as a whole, and that is happening. Following the new morality today is like drinking salt water to quench your thirst. Instead of finding satisfaction and fulfillment, it just increases a stronger appetite for more extreme behavior. The pattern goes on and on.

God's Word is clear about His purpose for sexuality: sex between a married man and woman. Genesis 1:27 says: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:28 says, "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Genesis 5:1-2 says: "When God

created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them 'man'."

There are several important implications from these verses in Genesis. First, when Adam was alone and needed companionship, God created a woman. He did not create Bill, but Eve (Genesis 2:24). Jesus quotes these verses, affirming that marriage is one man and one woman (Matthew 19:3-6). Marriage is a picture of Jesus and the church. Jesus said God made people male and female and commanded a man to leave his parents and be joined to his wife and the two would become one flesh (Matthew 19:3-6).

The second implication is that God commanded Adam and Eve to fill and subdue the earth. Children are necessary to do that. It takes a male and female to create children (Genesis 1:28). (May 23, 2022 Doylestown, PA) (To be continued in the next blog.)

In what ways have you been influenced by media and the world around you concerning sexual morality? Are you more accepting of homosexuality on TV and in movies? Do you watch programs that regularly promote this lifestyle?

Are you more accepting of people living together without marriage? Do you watch movies or TV programs that portray this lifestyle and choose to overlook the sin?

When you meet someone who is homosexual or living in immorality, do you show Jesus' love and acceptance of them as people while warning them of the danger of their sin? Love the sinner, but hate the sin.

What are you doing to keep your children from being influenced by the world around them in these ways?

BLOG 941: LGBTQ+ AND THE CHRISTIAN – 2 (Truth #10)

In the previous blog I wrote about what happens morally and sexually when a culture turns from Bible morality to no moral absolutes. We saw God created sex only for a man and woman in marriage (Genesis 1:27-28). When man needed a mate, He created a woman, not another man (Genesis 2:24). He commanded them to have children and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28). This necessitates a male and female. There are other implications for us from Genesis 1 and 2.

Third, God created men and women to have unique biological and mental sexual orientation (Genesis 1:27). That does not change when someone chooses to change their sex. The old homosexual argument that they were "born that way" has no scientific support. It has been disproven by many studies. The homosexual agenda knows this and does not use this in their propaganda, but the media still promotes this lie.

This argument does not even stand up to reason. What if someone claimed that it was okay for them to murder or rape because they were "born that way"? Can we say it is okay to hate another race because I was "born" to hate them? What about twins that have the same genetic code? Wouldn't both of them then be born gay? Yet many times one twin claims to be homosexual but the other does not.

In Sodom and Gomorrah, God judged the people for their homosexual sin (Genesis 19:1-13). If God had made them that way, he would not judge them for being the way He created them. It is their choice; it goes against God's absolutes and so the sin is under God's judgment. Billy Graham said if God doesn't soon bring judgment upon America, he'll have to go back and apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." He said that in 1965, 56 years ago. We know how much worse this has gotten since then!

When man turns from God's truth, sin grows. The influence of the world and the flesh take over. We know Satan is committed to opposing God and his image in man. This is one way that he does so. Just because someone feels an attraction toward the same sex does not mean it is right. We know that sex outside of marriage between a male and female is wrong. Feeling an attraction to someone of the opposite sex and having sex with them is also wrong if you aren't married. Heterosexual temptation must be resisted, so also should homosexual temptation. The same is true of pornography. Why not just say that that is the way we are made and give in to the sin? Temptation to homosexuality does not mean one is a homosexual, it just means Satan and their flesh are tempting them to sin.

God's truth in his Word clearly forbids homosexual practice. Leviticus 18:22 says, "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." Leviticus 20:13 says, "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." "Adulterers" refers to sex outside marriage of one man and one woman. "Men who have sex with men" is two Greek words which explicitly describe homosexuality. There can be no misunderstanding as to what is meant. Both these words are also used in 1 Timothy 1:9-10, "We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality."

Romans 1:26-32 adds, "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. ... Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them." "God gave them over" means God is, in effect, saying, "You want to do without me? OK. I won't interfere with your sin or its consequences." They don't see the error in their ways because they allow Satan and his demons to deceive them into thinking they are right. They reject healing, forgiveness or repentance but instead aggressively promote their sin and condemn any who don't approve of their behavior.

We must always remember that it is the sin of homosexuality that God hates and rejects, not the people themselves. No sin is greater than any other sin. God forgives and restores any who come to Him, no matter their sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We do not condemn homosexual people, just their sin.

We have plenty to work on in our own lives. Temptation to sexual sin or any kind of lust is common to all of us. Before we try to get the splinter out of someone else's eye, we must get the log out of our own eye. (May 30, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

What moral or sexual sins do you most struggle with? What can you do to have victory over them?

BLOG 942: PICK YOUR OWN GENDER (Truth #11)

Once Pandora's box is open, there's no going back. Postmodernism says that truth is whatever you want it to be. We see the results of that in many different ways today. One of the most extreme is the issue of gender. The focus of attention has moved from homosexuality. The whole issue of what is a male and a female, and how does a person know which one they are? For example, Facebook

lists 58 options for gender. In looking through the list, I must admit I don't even understand what most of them are. The sad part is, the list keeps expanding.

If the goal of man is to be happy, then nothing is to be denied. We know that outer circumstances do not bring real happiness, only Jesus does that. Yet man keeps going to greater and greater extremes trying to make life better. But we can't return to Eden by our own efforts, especially if they go against God's revealed truth for us. Yet man keeps trying. A relatively recent phenomenon is the fad of changing gender to find answers to life.

Those who promote this say it is a way of expressing individual freedom and helps people find themselves. They demand that any traditions, religions, regulations or social ties that restrict individual self-expression must be destroyed. When man believes that the most important thing in life is happiness, which is achieved by his individual expression, then nothing can stand in the way.

These people say they are honestly trying to be themselves, and are not being fake or hypocritical. That can be nothing more than justification of sin and not resisting temptation. To them, doing what they want is all that matters. It's all about them. Disney has long promoted the motto: "Follow your heart." That is what people are doing. But is the 'heart' something we should follow? Does allowing every feeling we have and allow it to determine our actions really bring happiness? What does God say about the heart? Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can understand it?" Our emotions were not created lead us.

As we've seen in man's other attempts to find meaning and purpose apart from God, this too fails. There is a very high rate of those who once question and 'change' their gender, returning to their original gender. High depression and suicide rates show that gender change is not dealing with the root issues, but only symptoms. Man's problem is emptiness within, not circumstances without.

We know God loves transgender people the same as He loves all of us sinners, but what does He say about their sin? Deuteronomy 22:5 says "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this." Deuteronomy 23:1 says, "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." These show God does not want crossdressing or mutilation of sexual organs. Much destruction and misery come from disobeying God's created order.

Therefore, God commands us to stay away from such things. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says, "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."

The good news is that 1 Corinthians 6:11 gives hope to all who have broken God's law: forgiveness is available no matter the sin. "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (June 6, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Who do you know who is struggling with this issue? What do you do to help them find truth? Are you afraid to get involved? How can you show them the love of Jesus while also affirming His truth, the truth that alone will set them free?

BLOG 943: WHAT IS A GODLY MAN? - 1 (Truth #12)

What is truth? Is it a relative commodity, ever changing at the whims of people? Or is it a settled absolute, the same for all generations in all places? Each person must face this issue, and

the way they answer will determine their direction in this life and for all eternity. Who are we? What is our problem? What is the solution? One of the discussions about who we are is "What is a man?"

The world, in its confusion, is redefining what a man and a woman are. They are searching for meaning and purpose in all the wrong places. Significance and meaning are only found in following God's truth, as revealed in the Bible. That's the only place we can find what a man really is.

I remember as I matured wondering just what it meant to be a man. I didn't know what it felt like to be a man, so I didn't know if I was one or not. In truth, I felt like a little boy pretending to be a man. Many men have difficulties with defining and acting out Godly manhood. Undermining manhood is a tactic of Satan to undermine the family, the church, and the nation. Let's look at what God's Word says about Biblical manhood.

Genesis 2:7 and 1 Timothy 2:13 make it clear that God created man first, before woman. Why this order? Why didn't He create them both simultaneously from the same lump of clay? God was saying something about the relationship between a man and a woman. All people are equal in His sight. It doesn't matter their age, race, or sex. We are all equal in personhood. However, we are not all equal in the duties God has given us. We have different responsibilities. If you have a boss where you work, you are both equal in human value. Your boss is in a position over you, but that does not make him a better human being than you. It just means he has different responsibility. That is how it is in marriage. Men and women are equal, but by creating man first, God is showing that man has the first responsibility in the family and in the church. He is God's chosen channel for leading a family.

Second, we see that men and women were created with separate, different, unique traits and abilities. There is no one right way to be a man or a woman. Some men have what would be called feminine traits and some women have what might be called masculine traits. That is not a confusion of sexual identity, but the way God made them. My wife and I often switch roles in what would be considered a man's role and a woman's role in carrying out the duties of our family. Still, I am the one responsible to initiate and to lead as God directs.

The key is for Christian men to accept themselves as they are and not compare themselves with other men. They are to accept their wife as she is and not compare her with other women. They are to accept their children as they are and not compare them with other children. Men and women are created with differences. Each man, too, is a unique creation of God, different than others. That is true of women as well. Yet God's chain of command is through the man. We are responsible to discern His will for our families and lead them in that direction. He holds us accountable.

A third truth we see from God's creation order is that man is given the moral pattern by God (Genesis 1:16). One of the responsibilities that came with being created first was a primary responsibility to receive and teach God's truth. Man is held accountable by God to do this. Woman is to help and take part, but the responsibility was given to man to not eat from the fruit of the tree and man was responsible to pass that on to women. God did not tell them both at the same time. Being responsible is a prime indicator of maturity and wisdom and therefore one of the more important characteristics of a godly man. In Eden, Adam did not initiate and lead as he should. In fact, he followed her lead even though he knew God had said otherwise. Adam was the one most responsible for the disobedience. That is why we talk about the sin of Adam. We say Adam fell, and rightly so, because he knew better and he was responsible (1 Timothy 2:14).

Man must lead. He must initiate. He must be the first to forgive, to bring guidance and direction, to show love and to reach out in sacrificial service. He follows the example of God who leads, initiates and forgives us. Man is accountable to God for this. God will direct, lead and reveal truth through man. Many times, He reveals it through a wife who then shares it with her husband, but man ultimately has the final authority for his family. A man who does not seek and consider his wife's wisdom and opinion is a fool. So is a man who lets his wife fill a role he should be filling.

Many men are afraid of taking a stand. They want to keep the peace at all costs, so they let their wife initiate and make decisions that they should be making, or they should make together. It is not always women who force their way into leadership, it is more often men who abdicate their role and step back. The role must be filled, so the woman is forced to step in. For men, Jesus is our example. Ephesians 5:25 says "Love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Initiate with her as Jesus does with you. (June 13, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

MEN: how would you define godly manhood? What will you do to assure that your sons grow to be godly men? Where is God working in your life to help you be all He created you to be?

WOMEN: What are some of your husband's strengths as a man? What are his weaknesses? What are you doing to help him with these weaknesses? What are you doing to make it harder for him to be all God wants Him to be?

BLOG 944: WHAT IS A GODLY MAN? – 2 (Truth #13)

The world around us is often ignorant about what it means to be a man today. The man is key to the family, church and country, so its important men know just what is expected of a man. That is what the previous blog was about. We'll continue that here.

We have seen that man is created first and given the moral pattern first. We also see he is interrogated first after they sin. God came to them in Eden to call them to account for their sin (Genesis 3). Even though the woman had eaten the forbidden fruit first, God came to Adam, not Eve, to hold him responsible for their failure to live by the pattern He had given. Eve was responsible for her actions as well, but the man, the head, was responsible for both. A Christian man is obligated to lead his family to the best of his ability. He needs his wife's help, but she needs his headship. She needs to know he is praying, studying the Bible, spending time with God and seeking His guidance for their marriage and family. Every married woman needs a man who is doing this.

When God confronted Adam in Eden, He went right to the heart of the problem (Genesis 3:17). God said to the man that he had listened to the voice of his wife when he should have been leading. Many men today listen instead of leading. There are no excuses. There is a time to listen, but it is always the right time to lead.

Another truth we see in Genesis 3 is that Satan attacked the woman first. Satan assaulted God's pattern by attacking the woman instead of the man. If God means for man to bear special responsibility for leadership in the garden, then Satan will do what he can to destroy that pattern. In other words, Satan rejects the order that God has established and simply ignores the man and takes up his subtle battle with the woman. In doing that he makes man into exactly what he wants him to be: a silent, withdrawn, weak, fearful and passive wimp. A masculine wimp is a very dangerous person. One moment he's passive and follows his woman and the next moment he's angry and blames her for all his problems. That's what Adam did. I hope that doesn't happen in your family as well.

The final lesson we learn from Eden is that God commanded man and woman to be fruitful and multiply, to raise godly children. A parent needs to involve themselves in all their children's growth and maturity. This includes their gender development. God commands children to obey their parents in everything (Colossians 3:20). Flip that around and ask what this implies for parents. It means parents are to lead. They must know their Bible and God's truth. They must know their culture well enough to apply God's truth. They must give godly wisdom and guidance as they raise their children, and not let the world influence them in its own ways. Deuteronomy 6:7 commands parents to raise their children in his truth. That means parents must have their own devotional life, their own strong relationship with the Lord and be growing together spiritually. Both are responsible for the spiritual

growth and development of their children, but again the man holds final accountability to God. He doesn't have to do all the training, although he needs to do as much as he can. God holds him accountable to make sure it gets done in the home. The church can supplement, but the main teaching comes at home.

Parents must understand what is happening in the world and how to apply God's absolute truth to the situations they are facing. Parents must clearly understand the Bible's worldview and implement it into their lives. They must be aware of the temptations and influences of the world's lies on themselves and their children. They must know how to counter these by reliance on God's Word. (June 20, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

What can you do today to better implement God's truth about manhood into your lives?

What can you do to better prepare your children, grandchildren or any children you know for the lies and deceptions they face in the world?

Do you pray for the children you know as well as their parents? You should be doing this regularly.

BLOG 945: RADICAL ISLAM AND THE CHRISTIAN - 1 (Truth #14)

In this series of blogs, we have been talking about the absolute truths God gives us as Christians. Those who reject His Word come up with their own so-called 'truth'. This is postmodernism. They do not believe in final, total truth. However, there is one large, influential group that is active today which also believes they have complete truth which all are to follow. However, their 'truth' is in direct conflict to Christianity and the Bible. This group is radical Islam.

Radical Islam, also called Islamic fundamentalism. It is defined as a puritanical, revivalist and a reformed movement of Muslims who aim to return to the founding scriptures of Islam and Muhammad. To them, this also means returning to the Islamic culture of the seventh century AD world. This is when Islam began and was strongest. Fundamentalist Islam has a critical view of women, non-Muslims (whom they call infidels) and other Muslims who disagree with them, whom they call apostates.

We had heard of some of the rules of the Taliban in Afghanistan where girls were forbidden to attend school, women were confined to their homes and forced to wear a full hijab, boys were forced to learn rote recitation of the Quran and women were banned from leaving their houses without a male relative. Polygamy is approved, and so is physical abuse of a wife in order to keep her living as she should. If a woman brings shame to the family, the nearest male relative can take her life to keep the family honor. Becoming a Christian is one of the ways of bringing shame, and many Moslem women have been killed because of their faith in Jesus.

Islam still controls most of the land that they did in the seventh century, except for Spain, France and Palestine. Spain was the heart of the Muslim world, the base of operations to overtake all of Europe. God did not allow that to happen. Charles Martel stopped their advance at the Battle of Tours in 742 AD. However, Muslims stayed in Spain until 1492. In fact, Columbus's voyage to the New World was financed as a way of thanking God for the removal of the Muslims from Spain.

Today, radical Islam seeks to control all the land it once did, including Palestine. They want to regain their seventh century rulership and then spread to the rest of the world. They see their biggest enemy as other Muslim rulers who do not share their commitment to worldwide Islam. They believe these leaders of Muslim countries have been corrupted by Western influence and are not pushing for Islam to take over the world.

We call these people 'radical'. But what they are is true to their beliefs. Radical Islam is real Islam, true to the worldview of the Quran and all that it teaches. Non-radical Islam, the ones who don't participate in violence and terrorism, is considered liberal, apostate and westernized. They have watered down what original Islam stood for and what the Quran teaches.

Now, think of us as evangelical Christians. To the rest of the world, and to liberal Christianity, we are seen as radical Christians. We put our faith in God's revelation to us in the Bible. We want to return to the early church practices and complete commitment to God's will. We believe we have the only true revelation from God, and it is our responsibility to bring the whole world under that authority.

Do you see the parallel? They are radical Islam; we are radical Christian, but we each are trying to do the same thing in our faith. The biggest difference is that they feel the way to bring the world under their influence is by violence and force. God tells us to do it by love and peace. Both of us are committed and willing to give our life for what we feel God wants us to do.

We can see an example of this in Afghanistan. Sometimes we wonder why we failed in Afghanistan. Why didn't our Christian ideals gain hold and grow? We tried our very best. How did everything fall apart so quickly and completely? It goes back to worldview. You can't build Christian truth on an Islamic world view. We in America are different because of Christianity. Afghanistan is what it is because of Islam. They are two greatly conflicting worldviews. Beliefs determine actions, and beliefs must change before actions will change. We changed the actions of the people in Afghanistan, but not the beliefs. Worldview prevails. (June 27, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

How well do you understand God's truth as revealed in the Bible's world view? Can you explain it to others? If not, look it up online and make sure you know, follow and teach it.

Do you know any Muslim people? What are you doing to show them the truth of Jesus? Do you pray for them regularly? If you were in their place and they were in your place, what would you want them to do for you? Do it for them.

BLOG 946: RADICAL ISLAM AND THE CHRISTIAN - 2 (Truth #15)

In this, the last blog about God's truth in conflict with the world's so-called 'truth,' we will finish our study of radical Islam. We saw that radical Islam, or fundamentalist Islam, is really pure Islam as it was practiced and as the Quran commands. Those who follow radical Islam are committed to their worldview and committed to spreading it worldwide. As Evangelical Christians, we are also committed to spreading our biblical worldview worldwide. While we use love, they use violence. The bottom-line difference, though, is in our worldview compared to theirs.

In comparing these two worldviews, what is wrong with radical Islam? We said in blog 2 that a worldview answers three questions; Who am I? What's my problem? What's my solution? Radical Islam answers by saying that who we are is servants of Allah. Our problem is that Allah's rulership of the world is rejected. Their solution to the world's problems is to have the world submit to Islam.

This is the worldview of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Isis, and other Islamic groups that we label as 'terrorists. They deserve that label because violence is their chosen method to spread their beliefs. Some are much more extreme than others. They do not all get along with each other. But basically, they agree that their first step is to take over control of Islam worldwide. Next will be the destruction of Israel and United States, as well as anyone else who stands in their way of world domination.

It's important to realize that these are not extremist views; these beliefs are based on the Quran. The Quran says, "fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them and seize them. Lie and wait for them in every strategy of war" (Quran 9:5; 2:193; 5:36,54). It also says, "No Muslim should be killed for killing an infidel" (Quran 9:50).

Muslims want peace. But peace to them will only come when the whole world submits to Allah and his rulership. Please understand that Allah is not the same as God. Allah is a capricious, self-centered, vengeful god who does not care about his people or get involved with them. His was the moon in Ur, one of many gods worshipped there. God called Abraham to leave Ur because of moon worship. Muhammad elevated this one local deity and made him his main god. But Allah is not another name for God.

Encarta Encyclopedia says that Islamic law states that all nations must surrender to Islamic faith, or at least its rule. The Quran states that those who die in a jihad become martyrs of the faith acquiring a special place in heaven (Quran 1:35). Since the Quran requires Muslims to defend their faith, Al-Qaeda followers believe that they are required to attack Americans in our homeland. As a result, they do not see 911 as an attack on innocent Americans, but as a defense of Islam, striking back at crusader aggression. Thousands are willing to die for Islam in this quest for worldwide domination.

God says we are to love others, not use violence to promote our beliefs. Leviticus 19:33-34 says, "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God." Mark 12:31 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."

What can we do to combat these committed enemies of Christianity? How are we to respond to these things? First, pray for the Islamic fundamentalists and all the terrorist groups. Pray they would come to Jesus. Jesus says we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). There are more Muslims coming to faith now than ever. It is extremely dangerous for them to make their faith known, but God is reaching them through dreams, visions and other means.

Second, pray that Christians who are in Muslim countries would be protected, empowered and encouraged to share Jesus with their neighbors. Some are non-Muslims who face severe persecution. Others are Muslims who have converted but face extreme persecution.

Third, pray for the ministries and missionaries who reach out to the Muslim world. More workers are needed (Matthew 9:38). Be a missionary in your own area. Befriend Muslims that you know and come in contact with. Show them Jesus' love in operation.

Fourth, make sure you and your family know God's truth as revealed in his Bible. Make sure it is taught in your church. Be committed to knowing and following His absolutes, because that is the only way to overcome all the lies and mistruth around us. (July 4, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Ask God to bring Muslim people into your life so you can get to know them and show them Jesus' love and truth. Go out of your way to meet Muslims.

Be alert to anyone you know or meet who is deceived by the world's lies. Share the truth of God's Word with them. Pray for them. Live a godly life as an example to them. Love them with the love of Jesus.

BLOG 947: ARE WE UNDER GOD'S JUDGMENT?

God is sovereign and everything that happens is under His control. Do you agree? God has a reason for everything He does or allows. Agreed? Therefore, the worldwide Covid pandemic we are experiencing is under His control and for a reason. Right or wrong? So, the question is, what is God saying to mankind through this? If God is sending a message this big, we should be carefully listening. Are we? Are you?

Unfortunately, most of the world does not believe in a personal Creator God who is concerned about or in control of this world. Therefore, of course, they wouldn't be listening to Him, but we, His people, should be finally tuned to Him. Even so, the pandemic is making an impact and changing lives among those who don't believe in God. This is impacting them as well.

But what message are they getting? Perhaps that we are not as in control of everything as we thought. Our big guns, science and medicine, are pretty impotent. I like the way Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Church in Dallas, put it: "This COVID deal is about something bigger. It's about God showing the whole world, 'I can shut this mama down whenever I decide to.'"

He referenced 2 Chronicles 16:12-13. The events of Asa's reign from beginning to end are written in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. In the 39th year of his reign, Asa was afflicted with disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness, he did not seek help from the Lord, but only for the physicians." ASA kept looking to the physicians and he refused to look to the Lord. The result was disastrous for him.

What will it take for people to seek help from the Lord? It seems like quite a lot! How far did 9-11 go to turning a 'Christian' nation back to God? Not very far! In the 10 plus years since 9-11, we've gone much further from God and his Word.

Is COVID God's judgment like a biblical plague? I don't think so. When judgment comes, we'll know it for sure. Is Covid a warning from God? Is He showing mercy out of His love for us so man will see his need of God? I think so. But that's just my opinion. What's yours? What do you hear God saying to you? What has He been doing in your life during the past 2 years? How are you responding? (July 11, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 86:15 But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

Psalm 103:8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

Psalm 145:8 The Lord is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.

BLOG 948: IS YOUR GOD BIG ENOUGH?

Do you have a big God or a little God? A little girl listened attentively as her father read the family devotions. She seemed awed by her parents' talk of God's limitless power and mercy. "Daddy," she asked, placing her little hands on his knees, "how big is God?" Her father thought for a moment and answered, "Honey, He is always just a little bigger than you need."

How would YOU answer the question about how big God is? Is He bigger than YOUR needs? Do you really believe that? Most people don't. How are we to show them that we have a God bigger than any of their problems?

GOD AS A PERSON When one accepts the reality that a God exists, the next step is for them to understand that God is a person. To many God is just a force, an energy source, a 'Mother Nature' which is an unfeeling power. Thus, there is no possibility of a personal relationship or intimacy. How can we explain that not only is there a God, but that He is a person?

First of all, we must understand what personality is. Personality means there is a **mind** that can think and reason, a free **will** than can make moral choices, and **emotions** which can feel. If man has these, where did they come from?

As a Person, God has a **mind** which to think and reason. That is the creative source behind everything working so perfectly and fitting together so well in the universe, everything from the tiniest

atom to a complex human being to the largest galaxy. Such a perfect, intricate system has 'design' and 'intelligence' written all over it.

As a Person, God has a free **will** to make choices. Before the creation of the world, He chose to make man with a free will, too, despite knowing man would sin and be separated from God eternally. God then chose to come to earth, Himself, in the form of a man, to pay man's eternal penalty for sin by suffering what we would suffer for all eternity on the cross.

As a Person, God has **emotions**. God has this built into nature. Music is more than just notes and sounds. They were created to touch a deep spot in man. The beauty of a sunset, the majesty of a waterfall, the awesomeness of the ocean -- all these were created by an emotional Being to evoke emotion in man. Did love and hate just evolve? If so, why so completely in man, but not in animals or trees? Only man can plan ahead in a rational way (not just be natural instinct for survival). Only man knows inside that there must be justice somewhere, sometime. Only man can feel guilt. Only man has sought to find and contact God. All peoples everywhere have had a natural, built-in desire to find and know God. If God is not personal, where does this across-the-board desire for personal contact with Him come from? (July 18, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

THE NON-MORAL ATTRIBUTES OF GOD These are the attributes of God which do not involve moral qualities. They are:

Omnipresence God is all ("omni") present ("presence"). He is everywhere (Psalm 138:7-12). There is no place He is not. He is in (but not limited to) nature, space, everywhere. There is no place anywhere in the universe, however large or small, where He is not.

Omniscience God has all knowledge. He knows everything (Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 23:23-25). There is nothing He doesn't know. We don't have to inform or remind Him of anything. He knows the future as thoroughly as the past, our every fleeting thought.

Omnipotence God has all power. He is able to do whatever He wants (Job 42:2). There is nothing He cannot do. He is able to do anything. He is always able to do whatever we need, but He isn't always willing. Sometimes He knows it would be better for us in the long run as well as for His own glory to not do a thing. He is always able to do anything and everything.

Sovereignty God is the supreme ruler of all (Ephesians 1). He is in sovereign control of that which He created. Since He formed and made everything, both by right and supremacy He can do anything He wants with His creation. He has no limits. He has no one He needs to get permission from before He can act. He is sovereign.

Immutability God is unchangeable (James 1:17). This is a real anchor because it means that God's love and mercy that is available for us today will always be available. The rules will never change because God Himself will never change. Sometimes His plan changes, but He Himself will never change for He cannot change. Perfection can't be improved on.

Eternal There is no beginning or end to God (Genesis 21:23). He is free from all succession of time. He created time to serve Him in one small part of His plan, but He is far above time and unaffected by it. To try and squeeze Him into time and look for a beginning or end to Him is ridiculous. Time will be gone, so there can be no end to anything!

THE MORAL ATTRIBUTES OF GOD These do involve moral qualities.

Holiness God is separate from moral evil and sin (Leviticus 11:44-45). He is sinless and unable to sin (in thought or deed). He is absolute perfection.

Righteousness & justice This is how God treats His creation (II Chron. 2:6). God imposes just laws and sanctions. His rewards and punishments are fair and right. We can never cause Him of being unfair or unjust. We may not understand everything from our perspective, but we know that all God does is right.

Truth God's knowledge, declarations and representations conform to reality (John 17:3). God Himself and all He does is truth, without any error or mistake. He is never wrong.

Goodness God is good. The non-moral attributes can seem hard and cold, but when guided by God's goodness we know that the very best is being done for us! These include:

Love The part of God's nature that motivates Him to communicate Himself to man, to get involved with man, to pay for sin for man so man can be pardoned. This is a rational and voluntary affection, not a mere emotional impulse (I John 4:8). It is the motive for all God does for and with His people.

Benevolence This is the affection which He feels and shows to His creatures. It is manifested to us in His care for our welfare (Psalm 154:9). God cannot hate what He made, only what was later added to that creation, which is sin (John 14:5).

Grace God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Grace is goodness manifested to the ill-deserving (which is everyone). Grace is an essential quality of God, but His use of it is optional (Eph. 2:4; James 5:11). All we have is because of His grace (Eph. 2:8-9). God shows grace to everyone in withholding judgment on sin (Ex 34:6) and provision of salvation (I John 2:). For His people His grace is seen in their election and foreordination (Acts 18:27), redemption (Eph. 1:7-8), salvation (Acts 18:27), sanctification (Rom 5:21; Titus 2:11-12), preservation (II Cor 12:9), service (Heb 12:28) and final presentation (I Pt 1:13).

Mercy This is goodness manifested to those who are in misery or distress (also called compassion, pity, loving-kindness). Grace is getting what we don't deserve from God (goodness), mercy is not getting what we do deserve from God (justice, punishment).

Thus, God is a personal God with all the traits we would naturally expect of God: power, control and goodness. With such a God in control there is no reason for fear or worry! (July 18, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 950: HOW ARE PEOPLE SAVED WHO NEVER HEARD OF JESUS?

The question often comes up about those who were born before Jesus or those today who never heard of them. Is salvation available for them? If so, how? First let's be sure that salvation is only to be found through Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5). There is no other way, person, religion, etc. to get us to heaven. Only Jesus. But what about those who never heard of Him?

Every person is accountable to God, if they have heard the name Jesus or not (Romans 1:18-32; 3:23). All deserve eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). He paid for their sins, if they heard about Him or not (John 4:42; 1 John 2:2). Those who reject His payment for sin will eternally endure God's wrath on sin in hell (John 3:16, 36; Revelation 20:15).

Salvation only comes from hearing God's good news of forgiveness (Romans 10:13-14). We know God is just and would never do anything that was not just (Genesis 18:25; Romans 2:11). All deserve hell; no one deserves heaven, or even a chance at heaven through Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-9). But how can God hold someone accountable for rejecting Jesus if they never heard about Him?

THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE THE OLD TESTAMENT

First, let's talk about those who do not know about God through His written Word in the Old Testament. They may not have heard about the creator God of Israel, but they do know there is a God for their conscience within makes that plain to them (Romans 1:19, 32; 2:15; Ecclesiastes 3:11). Everyone has something within that tells them there is a God. If they respond to that or deny it is up to their free will choice.

In addition, God has revealed His eternal power and deity through nature and what He has created (Romans 1:20). Man is responsible for what he does about this basic awareness of the existence of God. Suppose you were lost in a dark cave and then found a little lighted arrow pointing

in a certain direction. Whose fault would it be if you failed to follow the arrow? Just yours. God has His own little arrows in our heart and in nature. Man must just follow them.

So, what is the minimum of what needs to happen for salvation? A person must give all of himself that he has to all of God that he understands. I repeat. A person must give all of himself that he has to all of God that he understands. That is true for a child, a mentally handicapped person, or someone who only knows there is a God through his heart and through nature. The more mature we get the more of ourselves we have to give, but even a child can give his heart to God. And a person doesn't need to know more than that there is a God to accept that truth and seek to know more about and follow that God. Anyone can do that, no matter if they have never heard the name of Jesus or read any of the Old Testament.

God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). He welcomes those who acknowledge their spiritual need and seek Him (Ezekiel 34:11; Luke 19:10). When a person does accept the reality of this creator God and seeks to better know Him then he is accepting all of God that He understands. Sometimes God will reveal more of Himself to that person through a messenger (Acts 16:6-10), through inner revelation in the form of a supernatural dream, or through other means such as the names and meanings of the stars as He created them. God's promise is still true. "If from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Those who do not turn to Him do not do so out of ignorance, for all are accountable and fully responsible (Romans 1:19-20). No unbeliever will stand before Him in judgment and say he didn't have a chance to believe. Everyone will admit they knew something about God but chose to reject that knowledge instead of seeking more. Those who do not respond to Him are guilty of rejecting Him (Romans 1:21-23). Man can reject the truth (Romans 1:18) and refuse to honor God (Romans 1:21), turning to idols instead (Romans 1:23). They can ignore God's standard of righteousness, but they are still accountable for doing so (Romans 1:24-32). The serious part is that when someone rejects God, He rejects them (Romans 1:24-32).

Never let it be said that God is unfair in doing so, though (Romans 2:1-16). God is more than fair. He reveals Himself to man within (heart/conscience) and without (nature). All man has to do is accept that truth and, in His heart, acknowledge the God that created him. If he has given everything he has of himself to all of God that he understands, God will forgive his sins and give him salvation. It couldn't be any simpler or fairer than that. (July 25, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Have you given everything you have of yourself to all of God that you know and understand? Perhaps you did this as a child, and several times since. Salvation comes the first time to do so, but it's good to keep on recommitting as you grow. If you haven't done this in a while, do so now.

BLOG 951: HOW WERE PEOPLE SAVED WHO ONLY HAD THE OLD TESTAMENT?

The basis of salvation is for a person to give all of themselves that they have to all of God that they understand. God reveals Himself to everyone through their inner awareness of a sovereign God and through His creation. But then, what about those who also have the clearer revelation of God in the Old Testament, but lived before Jesus and only had vague prophecies about his future coming? What would be their standard for salvation? It would be no different than what we already mentioned, giving all of themselves that they had to all of God that they understood. It's just that they would understand God much more clearly from His revelation of Himself in the Old Testament.

You see, the basis of salvation is always the death of Christ. That is the only way God can forgive sin of anyone, because Jesus paid for it on the cross. There is no other way. And the requirement for that pardon to be applied is always faith in God from the heart of the individual requesting forgiveness. What changes through Bible history is the content of that faith, what God has revealed to man. For those who don't have the written revelation of God the content of their faith is in a creator God who is sovereign over all. For those who knew more about Him the content increases. Adam, for example, understood that innocent blood had to be shed to cover his shame and guilt. He and his descendants offered sacrifices as a way of showing their faith in God who would remove their sins.

Now when God revealed the Law to Moses and the Jews on Mt. Sinai, they got a much deeper, clearer revelation of Who God was and what He expected. Their faith in God was shown by living by the rules and regulations in Exodus and Leviticus. It wasn't that doing these things earned their salvation, for salvation is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), but that inner faith shows itself outwardly by wanting to follow God – James' "faith without works is dead" (James 2:14-20). Salvation didn't come by them putting faith in what they did, but in putting faith in the God who told them to do it. Actually, the law could not bring salvation, no matter how well it was kept. Its purpose wasn't to be a way to earn salvation but to show man his sin and the impossibility of being perfect in God's sight (Galatians 3:14-24). Today our faith isn't shown by our trust in God as seen in His Law, today we are under grace and our trust in our gracious God to provide free salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Those with the Old Testament had the same truth revealed to them as we have in the New Testament. Man's heart is wicked and corrupt (Jeremiah 17:9) and even our righteous acts are dirty in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). Because God is holy, He must separate Himself from sinful man. Man cannot reach up to God, only God can initiate the contact by reaching down to man (Isaiah 59:1-2). He reaches down to reveal that the way between God and man can only be open by the shedding of innocent blood (Leviticus 17:11). The blood of animals can't pay for sin, but the sacrifice of the sinless God-man Messiah can pay for it (Isaiah 53:1-12).

So, faith in the provision of the coming Messiah was a key ingredient in the faith content for those who had the Old Testament. They didn't know His earthly name would be 'Jesus,' but that wasn't the issue. Putting faith in this coming Messiah was the critical point. God would provide for their sins for they could not. In order for this to happen the Messiah would have to be "cut off" (crucified, Daniel 9:26). This would be a painful time of suffering for Him (Psalm 22:1-31). This is what God revealed and in what those with the Old Testament had to put their faith (Genesis 15:6).

Clearly God is totally fair in wanting all to come to Him, but also just in judging sin. He gives each person a free will choice. We should be thankful for the clear revelation of Jesus and salvation we living in these days have. (August 1, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Are you depending totally on Jesus for your salvation or do you also lean on the good you do (or the bad you don't do)? Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone for God's glory alone.

BLOG 952: SPREAD THE WORD

Isn't it wonderful that, no matter how long you've been studying the Bible, God still points out things you haven't seen before? That happened to me recently in the Christmas story. It's in Luke 2. The shepherds, after seeing Jesus, "spread the word concerning what they had been told about this child."

The first thing they did was spread the word. They didn't form a group to study the angels' words. They didn't make rules for others who wanted to become part of their group. They didn't sit around practicing what they would say. They didn't worry about what they would do if someone asked a question they couldn't answer. They didn't fear the rejection of those who wouldn't believe them. They went right out and told the wonderful news they had received.

That's what a witness does. A witness tells what he knows. Unlike a lawyer, who tries to argue people into his way of seeing things, a witness simply passes on what he has experienced. God tells us to be witnesses, not lawyers. Yet often we feel we need to be trained as a lawyer and theologian before we will share our witness. We don't have to have all the answers. We just need to do what the shepherds did and tell others what we have experienced. What our listener does with what we say is between them and God. Our duty is simply telling them.

It's like a quarterback on a football team. He is responsible to throw the best pass he can, but once the ball leaves his hand there is nothing more he can do. Then it's up to the receiver. Sometimes you will throw a great pass, but the receiver will drop the ball. Other times your pass may wobble and be off target, but the recipient makes a circus catch. It's not the quarterback's fault if he drops the ball, he is just responsible to make the best pass he can. That's what we are to do when we tell others about Jesus.

Or responsibility is to tell others what Jesus has done for us. We, like the shepherds, are to share the good news of what we have seen and what we know about the Messiah. God will take it from there.

The shepherds went out looking for people they could tell about Jesus. We must do the same. Who can you talk to today? Who has been on your heart lately? Perhaps a visit, phone call, letter or email is in order. Share the good news. (August 8 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Luke 2:16-18 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

BLOG 953: DEATH: WHO WANTS IT?

Death. Who wants to read a blog about death ? It's not a subject we like to think about. Yet, the older I get, the more I find myself thinking about it. The closer it looms in the horizon, the more attention I give it. It used to be something way out there in my future, but that future is getting closer and could be here any day. Death is our promotion to heaven to spend eternity in God's presence. I can understand why those who don't know God fear death. But why should we who are his children fear it?

I think one reason is that we fear the process of dying, not what comes on the other side. God promises to walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4). Jesus will take us from this life into the next (John 14:3) and we will be with him forever (Luke 23:43).

God promises us grace for each day as we need it. That includes the day we will die. He promises dying Grace. We don't get that ahead of time, but it'll be there when the time comes. God promises it, and He always keeps His promises (Psalm 23:4).

I think another concern about death for Christians is about the people they will leave behind. I know that when I die, it will be wonderful for me. But I know there are those who will grieve. I don't want to be the cause of grief in anyone's life. That's something we have to leave up to Jesus. He loves our loved ones more than we love them. He knows what the grief of death is like. He wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35). He promises to be near to the brokenhearted and save the

crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). We need to trust in His promises. We commit our loved ones to His care when we are gone, the same as we do now while we are still here.

When we live for the Lord and went to serve Him, we don't want to leave this world until we have completed our work here. Perhaps there were things unaccomplished. There may be things in the past that could have been done better. So yes, we want to go to heaven, but not just yet. It's good to want to live these lives so that every moment has meaning until we are done. But the timing of our death is a decision only God can make.

One thing we do know for sure, one second on the other side of death we will be glad that it happened. Trust God with the timing of all of it. Thank Him that we have assurance that this life is not the end. This is not as good as it gets, this is as bad as it gets for the child of God. We are not leaving the land of the living and going to the land of the dying, we are leaving the land of the dying to spend eternity in the land of the living.

So, take your concerns and fears about death to God and leave them there. But don't let it rob you of joy and peace in your life today. Jesus has conquered death. There is nothing to fear. (August 15, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 8:37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

BLOG 954: "I DIDN'T GET ANYTHING OUT OF CHURCH!"

When I was pastor, one of the comments that people made that bothered me the most was when they would say, "I didn't get anything out of that today." They may be referring to the worship music, the sermon or the whole package. A statement like that shows reveals wrong assumptions.

Sometimes I want to say to the person, "If you come to get, you're coming for the wrong reason. Worship is not about you and me. It's not about getting our needs met. It's not about a performance by the pastor, the worship leader or anyone else. When we come to get, we come for the wrong reason." We can be guilty of consumer mentality, even when it comes to worship.

Worship is not about you or me. Worship is about God. We come to give, not to get. When we give to God by worship and prayer, He gives back to us His word and His presence. When we come to get, we don't. When we come to give, we both give and get.

Something else is wrong when we say that we didn't get anything out of the service. We assume we should be getting a warm, emotional feeling. We want to be passionately touched, lifted up and encouraged and made to feel better than when we entered. What if God's purpose is to convict us? To stretch us? To cause us to go deeper in our faith? "Feeling good" may be what we desire, but it isn't God's ultimate purpose for us.

Don't equate worship with an emotional high. Some Christians look for a church that will pump up their emotions. What happens the rest of the week? What happens when trials and difficulties come?

The first use of a word in the Bible is often a good indicator of what the word means. The word "worship" is first used by Abraham when he said he was taking Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him. But he didn't say "sacrifice," he called what he was going to do "worship" (Genesis 22:5). It had nothing to do with him feeling good or being emotionally high. It was all about honoring God by obeying Him.

About that same time in history, Job went out on the hillside and stood at the graves of his dead children and “worshiped” (Job 1:20). Neither Job nor Abraham were experiencing an emotional high. They were both in pain. Yet they were acknowledging God's sovereign control over their lives and they were submitting to His will. That is worship. It is a mental choice, not an emotional feeling. Feelings may follow. But then they may not.

In worship, the focus is on God not on us. In the Lord's prayer we are told to pray, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done” (Matthew 6:10). Not my kingdom but Your kingdom. God is not my servant who is to jump through a hoop and make me feel good when I am down. He is the Master; I am the servant. We need to keep that straight.

Remember, worship is a verb, an action word. It is something we do, not something done to us. Paul and Silas in prison, after they were beaten and put in chains, worshiped (Act 16:25).

Psalms 96:8 commands us give to the Lord the glory due His name and bring Him an offering. Psalm 51:17 says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. These, oh God, you will not despise.” (August 22, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 29:2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. (See also Psalm 95:6; 96:9)

Why not pause right now and spend some time in worship. Forget your emotions. Recognize God for who and what He is. Submit to His will. Tell Him you trust Him. Lay your burdens on Him. Give Him your heart, your love, and your life. That is true worship.

BLOG 955: DOING CHURCH IN A COVID WORLD

Covid-19 has changed our lives forever. Life will never be exactly the same as it was before it hit. That is true of the church as well. While many people have not returned to church, and might never do so, overall I think the church has been purified and matured by Covid. There may not be as many programs and activities, but the ones we now have are more focused on meeting basic spiritual needs. Perhaps not as many attend, but the ones who do have purer motives and reasons.

Most of the churches that have been strong through Covid are those that focus on preaching and teaching the Bible. Only God's Truth will get us through hard times. People want to hear from God during these changes in life, and pastors who preach the Word are helping them do so. God's love and sovereignty are being focused on in a bigger way now. People are being assured that God has not abandoned them and that He is working for their good during these times.

In addition to feeding the sheep, faithful churches today are increasing their efforts to reach unbelievers with the gospel. Evangelism efforts seem stronger and more focused today. We are seeing more clearly the need of the gospel and are reminded that it is our only hope.

Churches that are most effective today are staying away from political involvement and arguing. The focus is kept on Jesus and His work as the only solution. They avoid taking sides but agree to disagree and not let differences about politics, vaccinations or other issues facing us cause division. They keep the main thing the main thing.

It's good to see churches working together for the common good, helping and cooperating with each other. Larger churches are helping smaller ministries. Similar size churches in local neighborhoods are coordinating their efforts and supporting each other. There is closer fellowship among pastors and Christians. Competition is replaced with a common need. And this is not just among Christians. Churches are working with other groups in their communities for the common good. This is a great opening for outreach into the community as well.

Small groups in healthy churches today are a large reason for their success. These provide fellowship, teaching and even outreach on a grass roots level. Prayer groups are also developing and providing an important connection with God. Prayer really does change things! (August 22, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 16:18 “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

How has Covid impacted your faith? How are you different spiritually than in February 2020? Think about this awhile before answering. Ask a mate or close friend.

How had Covid impacted your church? What good changes do you see happening?

What can you do to help your church grow at this time?

BLOG 956: IS LOVE ALL WE NEED?

It's popular today for people to say “Love is all we need.” “If it's done out of love it's okay.” “If love is our motive, anything is all right.” Is it true that if we have love, anything goes?

It is true that as Christians we are to be marked by love (John 13:34-35). Loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves are two of the greatest commandments (Matthew 22:37-39).

Yes, love is important. If we do great works without love they are useless (1 Corinthians 13:1). The church at Ephesus was in great danger because they had left their first love (Revelation 2:1-7). They did good works, but since they weren't motivated by love for Jesus the works amounted to nothing. Yes, love is very important. But is love alone enough? If we have love for God and others, but our actions are selfish and sinful, does the love make it all OK?

Any married couple can tell you that love alone is not enough. It takes commitment, communication, forgiveness, patience, sacrifice and service to make a marriage work. Love must be backed up by actions to be effective. Husbands are commanded to love and sacrifice for their wives. Wives are commanded to love and respect their husbands (Ephesians 5).

Jesus said in John 14:15 “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Love produces obedience. 1 John 5:3 says “This is love for God, to keep His commandments.” Love without obedience is empty. Obedience without love is legalism. Both obedience and love are necessary to live a Christ-like life.

Yes, we need love. But to use that as an excuse to not know and obey the Bible is totally wrong. It is God's Word that sets the standard for what love is and does. We are commanded to love, but we are also commanded to obey, to give, to pray, to serve, to teach, to evangelize and to forgive. Doing these without love is empty, but love without these is hollow and self-focused. It takes both to live a godly Christian life. (August 29, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

John 14:23-24 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word;

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.

How is your balance between love and obedience? Are you stronger in one than the other? Which one? What is the danger in that imbalance? What should you do, starting today, to have the right amount of both?

BLOG 957: THE MOST QUOTED SCRIPTURE.

Not too long ago, John 3:16 was the most quoted scripture by those who weren't Christians. That has been replaced by Matthew 7:1 which says don't judge or you will be judged. We hear that used everywhere today to support all kinds of unbiblical ideas and lifestyles. It is used to say that we cannot condemn or point out fault in anyone else. It assumes there are no absolutes and anything anyone does is okay.

But what about the man who is guilty of child abuse? Should he be allowed to work in the children's department in a church because we are not to judge him? I read about a pastor who had a man arrested for abusing his, the pastor's child. A church member thought he was judging too harshly and paid the man's bail. The molester promptly bought a gun and killed the pastor's son and his wife then took his own life. Was the pastor really guilty of judging this man? Or was he applying Biblical criteria in his evaluation of the man's actions?

The Bible says we are not to play God and think we know the inner motives of a person. But it does say we are to evaluate what a person does and act accordingly. Matthew 7:20 says that by their fruits we shall know about a person. He is warning against false teachers who appear in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). We are to pay attention to the product in a person's life to know where their fruit comes from. We are not to pass judgment on someone as if we were God and knew all about them, but we are told to evaluate their actions so we know how to respond to them.

We are commanded to evaluate but not condemn. We must make sound judgments based on the facts as we see them. We cannot go beyond that and play God about things we do not know. But when we see something that does not line with scripture, we can evaluate that behavior or belief so we know how to correctly respond to it.

Paul and Jesus both did this. There were times when they would shake the dust off their feet and move on elsewhere (Matthew 10:14; Acts 13:51). Jesus called the religious leaders "whitewash sepulchers" (Matthew 23:27-28). John called them serpents (Matthew 3:7). Paul criticized Peter in Galatia for compromise (Galatians 2:11-113). Paul told the Christians in 1st Corinthians to remove a man from fellowship who was living in sin (1 Corinthians 5:1).

We cannot play God, but we can and must evaluate the fruit in a person's life and from that we can know better the root that is inside. (September 5, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 7:16 "By their fruit you will recognize them."

Proverbs 20:11 Even children are known by the way they act, whether their conduct is pure, and whether it is right."

What fruit do others see in your life? When they evaluate your actions do they see Jesus behind all you do and speak?

Are you guilty of passing judgment on others? Do you look down or criticize others for their faults or shortcomings? Suppose God help you to the same standard you use on others?

BLOG 958: AN INDIA PASTOR'S TESTIMONY

I received the following testimony from an Indian pastor who writes to me (see pictures below). What a blessing it is to read about how God works in their lives!

"I had come from a Hindu family and my parents used to worship, Naga (snake), Trees, Animal, Air, Moon, Sun, Earth, water, Men's, Idolatry. They worshipped like 330 millions of god's. Mostly my parents worshipped (snake God) as their personal God. In 1975 while my father is laboring in a farm a big snake (Naga) bite him on his left knee there is no proper medicine and

hospitals in our Village for snake bite. My father was in a dangerous condition and he was in coma. All my village people around had lost their hopes. I also thought that for sure he is going to die. Our village people worshipped many Hindu gods, but there was no answer from any of them.

“There is a Church near by village. My Mother rushed into the Church and knelt down and earnestly prayed to Jesus Christ. God the Lord our all mighty heard her prayer. Soon after her prayer my father slowly got well. At that time my mother made a covenant with God to send her only son to become a Pastor to do God’s Service. At that time my age was 12 years only.

“From my Childhood I used to Prayerfully attend the Church regularly and take an active part in Sunday School Programs. After completion of my 10th grade, after many prayers, our Lord called me through vision. He sought me and saved me and anointed me with His holy fire and God has called me for the full time in 1986. And I left my job opportunity as school drawing teacher. According to the word of God (1John1:7-9, Acts.2:38) I repented and baptized in 1987. And I was dedicated by Him for full time to do His work at the age of 18 years old. And I have faced numerous hardships but have not turned my back at any kind of situations and etc.,

“After that I wanted to join in the Theological Training in Bible College to become a Pastor to serve our God among the Gospel in unreached areas. I shared my thoughts with my uncle (Big Father) And he was very much happy and brought an application form from the Bible College for me . And he arranged everything to join in Bible College. But unfortunately, my father was not happy about it. He forcefully made me stop going to Bible College. 10 days after this incident I met Electric Accident very dangerously, all the people around me thought that I was dead, but God did a great miracle and I was alive to serve Him . And my father realized his mistake and he himself took me to continue for Bible College training.

“My parents had worshipped Naga (Snake) as their God. But that snake only bites him and tried to kill him. But Jesus came to the earth to save His people from many kind of Sins. He shed His blood and died on the Calvary to save all the people from sin. Finally, my father came to know that Jesus Christ is the only God who would save His people.

“I have a specific calling and desire to reach Tenali unreached areas. The first day I arrived I faced many persecution I was verbally treated many times by the antichristian. People there worship Krishna God. This God is very famous for all over India. People where I minister are very strong in Hindu faith. We have started churches and trained pastors, but many Pastors have been beaten for their faith. And they burned our Churches and Bibles and our clothes were torn as well. People strongly reject Jesus and the Gospel.

“There are so many places in the world where the truth Gospel of Christ has not reached. It is a fact even today in our India, there are areas where the Gospel of Christ was not reached, till today their beliefs are clouded in spiritual darkness only.

“My ministry was started by me with a single person, but today by the grace of God there is Team of 45 Pastor’s and Evangelists who Toil day and night invading the power of devil’s and extending in this area. We need your prayers and gifts for our ministry to grow.” (September 12, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 959: IS ALL SIN EQUAL IN GOD'S SIGHT?

Many times, I hear Christians say that all sin is equal in God's sight. Is this true? 1st Samuel 15:23 says “Rebellion is as the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.” That seems to equate seemingly severe sins with those that seem less severe. Jesus Himself said that anyone who

lusts after a woman has already committed adultery in his heart (Matthew 5:28). Does that mean that thinking something sinful is as bad as doing it?

These statements were given to keep people from minimizing their rebellion or arrogance or lust by saying, "Well, at least I didn't act on it." Sin is sin, and all sin is evil in God's sight. God wants us to know the severity of wrong thoughts and attitudes. The heart matters. Thoughts count. Everything we do originates in our heart (Matthew 15:19).

But does that mean a lustful thought is as bad in God's sight as adultery, or anger at someone is the same as killing them? We don't want to minimize any sin, but it certainly seems some sins are worse than others in the evil intent behind them as well as the consequences of their actions.

Billy Graham said it seems obvious that some sins are worse than others, both in motivation and effects, and should be judged accordingly. Stealing a loaf of bread is vastly different from exterminating millions of people. Since may also differ at the root.

Scripture teaches degrees of punishment at judgment. Some people will have it easier than others. For example, Sodom's punishment will be lighter than Capernaum's since Sodom's opportunities were few compared to Capernaum where they saw and rejected Jesus Himself (Matthew 10:15).

Jesus said some who deserved punishment would receive many blows and others few blows (Luke 12:47-48), depending on what they did with the opportunities they were given. He also pronounced more severe condemnation on the religious leaders for their pride and unbelief than those in darkness who were sexually immoral (Matthew 23:13).

Sin is still sin. We cannot minimize any of it. But not all sin is equal. We cannot think that stealing something small is as bad as taking someone's life. All sin is awful and an affront to our living God. But the fact that God has different degrees of punishment for sins shows that some sins are worse than others. In the Old Testament, not everyone received a death penalty for sin (Numbers 35:16). Some were excommunicated (Leviticus 7:20). Others faced various penalties.

Yes, all sin is sin in God's sight. But some sins have greater consequences in this life and in eternity. We cannot look at any sin and think of it as little. All sin is deserving of death. All sin is horrible and reprehensible to God. But some sins are even more horrible and reprehensible. We are not any better because we do not commit those sins. (October 3, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 89:14 "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you."

1 John 1:8-10 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Do you excuse some sins in your life as small and unimportant? Do you ever justify a sin you commit by it isn't as bad as some other sins? Do you have a hard time accepting Jesus' forgiveness for your sins?

BLOG 960: INDIA TRIP CANCELLED

For months we've been praying and talking about going to India in Jan, 2023. I have health issues to consider, so it's been a hard decision. After much prayer for God's guidance, we bought tickets for 2 ½ weeks in January. I know this was God's leading. After all, there's no safer place to be than in the center of God's will, right? That was Wednesday afternoon. We kept praying and had

great peace as the 24-hour deadline to cancel came and went. We started making plans for our time there.

Then Friday morning we faced a new medical situation, this time concerning Nancy. It isn't life-threatening but it was obvious that a trip to India will not be possible. The doctor concurred. We thank God for making it very, very clear so we wouldn't wonder and second-guess His will. No trip to India this year.

Did God just want to see if we were willing to go, like He wanted to see if Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac? What about the large sum we had just paid for plane tickets that couldn't be cancelled? God gave us peace about that, too. Surprisingly, we were able to cancel our reservations and have all our money returned. We thank God for that.

I know that someday we won't be able to go to India. For several years we have been praying and actively searching and recruiting my replacement. There were a couple possibilities, but nothing worked out. That same evening Nancy got sick and we realized we needed to cancel; a near-by pastor inquired about participating in our India mission. As we visited it seems he meets all the requirements. He is praying for God's guidance and confirmation. We want what God wants and we need His clear leading with this.

We had a long video talk with Pastor Moses online. It was hard breaking the news to him. He was very disappointed, too. We have become close to his family and others in India. We will miss seeing them.

So, no trip to India in January for us. Hopefully someone else will be going instead of me. Pastor Moses will continue having periodic conferences as he has been doing. We will continue to focus on book distribution since we now have 16 books to train pastors. The books have been a very effective way of getting solid information to many pastors quickly and easily. LifeWay is using them to train pastors in India, and planning to use them in other countries as well.

I know God is not done with CTO. The focus may change but the mission remains. The need is greater than ever. We have a great God who does great things. Please pray for guidance, and for money to fund conferences and books in 2023. Finances are still needed as the cost of everything, especially printing books, continues to rise. We fund individual pastors; the conferences Pastor Moses leads and other ministries as well. Thanks so much! Jerry and Nancy (September 19, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 8:28-37 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ... If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things. ... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How are we to respond when God leads in one direction, then totally closes the door so we have to go in a different direction?

Do you think God still asks people to do something to see if they are willing, then not have them go through with it, like Abraham sacrificing Isaac? Has that ever happened to you?

BLOG 961: STAGES AND CHANGES

My mother's favorite Bible passage was Ecclesiastes 3 where it says there is a time for everything under heaven. The older I get, the more I see the truth in that. As I look back on my life, I see numerous stages and changes: growing up, getting married, raising children, our empty nest and now retirement. I'm going through a major change now with having to cancel our trip to India in January, 2023. I'll training another pastor to go in my place. Instead of doing the work, I will be training others to do it. There will be a few more stages coming, too, unless God calls me home soon.

Each stage has its advantages and special blessings. Our current time period gives Nancy and myself time to enjoy each other and deepen our relationship. We have more time for each other and we have gotten even closer than ever. I never knew it was possible to feel as close to another human being as I do to her. I love this part of the stage. Being retired gives us time to minister and serve others. We do what we can to help our children and grandchildren. We also have Nancy's mother to help take care of. So, we're still in a caregiver stage in that way

God brings us to these seasons for a purpose. Each one has its own particular challenges and rewards. Each one takes adjustments. Each stretches us and makes us more like Jesus. God works in each to grow our faith and trust in Him. Each stages seems like it will last forever, but none do. They come and they go. Such is life. The same is true of our work in India.

Nothing in this life is permanent. Nothing lasts forever. I don't know how many stages and changes I will still have, but I know the final big change will be when I am taking to heaven. Then there will be no more change. In a moment in the twinkling of an eye I will change and then I will be with Him forever. I'm looking forward to that change. Are you?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, 3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance...

What are some of the stages you have gone through in life? What stage are you in now? What is God trying to teach you in this season of life? What are you doing to prepare for the next stage?

BLOG 962: CAN YOU BE CLOSE TO GOD WITHOUT ATTENDING CHURCH?

We know that our relationship with God is personal, one on one. The church can supplement and help that but we can go directly to God without depending on a local church. There are many today who have stopped attending church. Some have stopped because of Covid, others because they've been hurt by someone or something in a church and others who disagree with something that happened in a church. The number of those claiming to be Christians but don't want anything to do with a local church are growing. They say they love Jesus but not the church.

The truth is, though, we need the church to be all we can be as a Christian. Jesus calls the church "MY" church (Matthew 16:13-19). We belong to Christ. The church belongs to Christ. If we distance ourselves from that which is His, we distance ourself from He who is the Head of the church.

Many say they are leaving the church but not their faith. When there is no church available, as is true in some parts of the world today, God sustains them in His own special way. But for places that have a functioning Church body, He works through it to provide for many of their needs.

God gifts each Christian in a unique way. Our gifts are to be used to minister to other Christians. Thus, we need to be with other Christians for them to be of use. My gift of teaching does

not function when I am alone. It is not given for me to teach myself but to teach others. We all need others with different gifts to find fullness in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

As Christians, we should have a desire to fellowship and connect with other Christians. Those in the family of God should love to get together with their family members. We are all One in Christ.

Church involvement can be messy and difficult because the church is made up of other imperfect human beings. But withdrawing from them and trying to make it on our own is not God's way. If you are Christian, you are part of the Body of Christ. He is the Head and we are His Body. We need other Christians and they need us. It's the way God created it to be. (October 10, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 10:25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Are you involved in a local church? What are you doing to help strengthen your local Body of Christ? Are you using your spiritual gifts to minister to others? Are you allowing them to minister to you?

BLOG 963: TURNING THE TABLES

One day Jesus entered the temple courts and saw the corruption and greed that was on display by those who were selling things in the temple. Jesus got so righteously indignant at them that He turned over their tables and chase them out. Actually, He did that twice (John 2:13-17; Matthew 21:12-13).

Why did He physically turn over their tables? Wasn't that a bit extreme? Why did He do something so disruptive? Clearly, He was trying to get their attention. I'm sure they didn't appreciate what He was doing, or even understand. They must have resented Him for it. Unfortunately, many of them went back to doing the same thing. But I've been thinking about what Jesus did and why He did it. He wanted to get their attention so they would change their behavior.

What tables in my life is Jesus trying to turn over? Where is he trying to get my attention? What unacceptable behavior of mine is He trying to point out? Is He trying to show me my selfishness, laziness or pride? Is he trying to deepen my commitment?

We might not like it when God overturns a table in our life. But He does it for our good. He does it because He hates the sin in our life and desires us to get rid of it. He does it so that we will make the necessary changes in what we think or do. Often, however, we become uncomfortable about change and upset with Him when He forces it upon us. We expect him to answer our prayer to make our life smooth and easy, just the way we want it. But He sees what needs to go and disrupts our lives so we will follow Him more closely. (October 17, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 12:6 “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”

What tables is the overturning in your life today? Why is he doing it? How are you responding to it? What is he teaching you? Are you learning?

BLOG 964: DEALING WITH MY DOUBTS

I consider myself a rational, analytical type person. I need proof before I'll believe something. I don't go by my feelings or emotions. I've always been this way. It's the way God created me.

I first came to know the Lord is my savior watching Billy Graham when I was 10 years old. That was 65 years ago. I have seen the Lord do many things in my lives and the lives of others. Yet I

still get hit by nagging doubts from time to time. What if this is all a fake? What if this isn't true? What if there is no God or Jesus?

I have studied apologetics my whole life. I have taught on this subject often and even wrote a book about it. I know all the sound, rational reasons to prove that God exists, Jesus is God, and the Bible is true. Still, the enemy keeps shooting those doubts into my mind.

I've concluded that there is no rational, logical way of coming to faith. Faith is just that, faith. Yet, there is one overwhelming way that I personally know God exists. It is far beyond the rational, intelligent arguments I know so well. It has to do with the change He has made in my life.

I know what I am capable of in my own flesh, even on a good day. Did I fill myself full of peace, joy, forgiveness, humility, unconditional love and a desire to serve others? That is not me! I cannot manufacture that. I cannot counterfeit them. I know what I would be like as a person if I had never met Jesus. Everything between that person and the person I now am proves to me that Jesus exists.

When I think of what He has done for me, how He has paid for my sins on the cross and come back to life, all I can do is praise Him. My heart wells up with praise. I sing out loud and raise my hands in worship (when I am home alone)! The joy sometimes turns to tears at the wonder of the cross. I don't get that way about other things, only about Jesus. It must be God's Spirit working inside of me, lifting me up. I'm not an emotional person. I can't even fake it. But what I feel when I think of Him and what He's done for me is beyond explanation. It has to do with the Holy Spirit revealing His goodness and love to me.

An old favored him of mine concludes with "You ask me how I know He lives. He lives within my heart." Yes, that is very subjective. But to me it is very real. You ask me how I know he lives? I know he lives in my heart. That's the only explanation. It's something I know is true beyond the shadow of a doubt.

So, when the doubts pop up, that's what I think of. That's what I remember. I am a new creation. The old has gone the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). I have crucified with Christ, yet it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:20). (October 24, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 "These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except for their own spirit within them? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God"

Do you ever need proof of his reality? Has he changed your life? How do you account for the praise and worship that wells up in you when you worship Him? That's Jesus. There's no other explanation.

BLOG 965: GOD BLESSES THOSE WHO GIVE

Sometimes we are so afraid of seeming like we believe the prosperity gospel that we neglect the truth of God's Word which says He does bless them who bless Him (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). When I look at our small income over the years, and what God has blessed us with in our retirement, I am amazed. We are not rich, but have enough to meet our needs and those of others with whom He wants us to share. Only God could have done such a thing. We have tried to be faithful in giving back to Him, and He has more than blessed us in return.

We are not under the law, but the principle of tithing is still a good way to start giving. We can, and should, give beyond 10% (2 Corinthians 9:6-8) but do it because we want to, not because we have to. We aren't earning anything from God by giving to Him. Like a parents wants to give to a

child who lovingly shares what little they have with the parent, so our Heavenly Father wants to give His blessings to us.

In the closing days of the Old Testament, the people had stopped giving to God and were using their money for themselves. God accused them of robbing from Him and gave promises of blessings that would follow if they put Him first and gave as He requested. Read Malachi 3:8-12. Basically, He is saying, "You can't outgive Me. Try it and see what happens!" He wanted to bless them in many ways, but their selfishness and disobedience stood in the way.

The same is true today. We can't outgive God. When we share what we have with Him, He blesses us in many ways, now and in eternity. The prosperity gospel is wrong when it says the only reason we aren't healed and healthy is because of our lack of faith, so if we claim it God will have to deliver. That's not what I'm talking about. When we give to God just to get from Him, we are missing the whole point. Giving must be done from a willing, loving heart that doesn't expect anything in return. God is a gracious giver and it is true that when we follow and serve, He blesses us in many ways. Sometimes this includes financial blessings as well.

Having said that, I must acknowledge that some times it doesn't seem that God prospers us. That seemed to be true in the early years of my life and ministry. Now I can see God was using finances to stretch us and teach us to trust Him. It was a tool He used to help us grow. He now uses other tools to do the same thing, but in some people lifelong financial struggles are His means of teaching faithfulness and dependence on Him. If that is your case, keep giving. It might be tough, but think of where you'd be without Him and you'll better appreciate what He has given you. And remember, God promises His greatest blessing to come to us in eternity, not in this life.

I have found that true in life in many ways and I'm sure you have as well. Give cheerfully, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). (October 31,2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Do you recognize that all you have comes from God, or are you taking credit for it and thinking it is all yours and yours alone?

Are you faithfully giving back to God by supporting His servants and ministries on earth? Pray and ask God to show you how much He wants you to give and where He wants you to give it. Then make sure you give it BEFORE paying any of your other bills. God gives us the best, let's not give Him our leftovers!

BLOG 966: SUCCESSFUL TRICKS OF SATAN TODAY

Satan's whole purpose is to oppose God and his people on earth. He is very good at deluding and defeating millions. Look at the world today and you'll see how successful he is. How does he do it? What's the secret of his accomplishment? Understanding how he works helps us better defend against those things in our life and family.

1. He convinces us he doesn't exist. "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist" is a line from the 1995 movie "The Usual Suspects." It is also a central theme of apologist and theologian C.S. Lewis' famous book, "The Screwtape Letters." The world, even many believers, don't believe he really exists. That allows him to work undetected, never

getting blamed for what he does. People blame the evil around us on culture, the economy, poor parenting, even Christianity for pointing out sin, but never of the real source.

2. He lies. The Bible tells us that lying is fundamental to the corrupt, bankrupt character of the devil (John 8:44). He cannot tolerate truth. The only time he uses it is to cover for a deeper lie. His unbiblical world view, self-centered motives, selfish priorities, hatred, lust, fear and greed rule the world today. The ideas, values, goals and actions of unbelievers all come from him. Three times Jesus referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Other passages of Scripture call Satan “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), and “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), informing us “that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

Additionally, we believe lies about ourselves, as the devil seeks not only to separate us from God but from one another. Low self-esteem abounds, leading to many different problems. Children are being bullied like never before, suicide rates abound and human cruelty seems to be at a frightening height in societies all around the globe.

3. He offers riches and status. Money, possessions, power, social position, pleasure and popularity are sought by most people today. These become idols, substitutes for God in people’s lives. They dull the natural longing in people for real meaning and purpose in life, which only God can give. As substitutes, they fail for they ultimately bring emptiness, meaninglessness and hopelessness. Satan offered these things on Jesus when he tempted Him (Matthew 4:1-11) but Jesus countered them with the truth of God’s Word by saying “it is written...”. They worked on Adam and Eve in Eden, though (Genesis 3:1-7).

To resist and have victory, we must understand how he works and be alert for it in our own lives (1 Peter 5:8-9). Also, we must stay close to Jesus and be growing in our faith so we can resist his tricks and traps (James 4:7). God promises victory if we follow Him (Isaiah 54:17). (November 7, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Which of Satan’s tricks and traps are most successful against you?

What must you do to have better victory over them and him?

BLOG 967: DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL PERSONALITIES

We are all different. Everyone knows that. We are glad for variety in personalities and characteristics. We would not want everyone to be the same. That is impossible! It would never work. Yet sometimes as Christians we think there is just one right way to be spiritual. We stereotype exactly what being a mature Christian looks like. But that is wrong. God made us different and that can’t be changed. Just as there are a variety of personalities in people, so there are different spiritual personalities as well. Let me illustrate.

On the morning of the resurrection, Peter and John went running to the tomb (John 20:1-10). John outran Peter and got there first but didn’t go in. He took it all in from a distance, processing the evidence before him. Peter then burst in and looked around in confusion. John then entered and concluded Jesus had come back to life. It doesn’t seem Peter fully believed until later. They had different reactions to the same event. They processed differently and responded differently. Neither was more right, or wrong, than the other.

Introverts process and respond differently than extroverts, men are different than women, adults than children and so do different nationalities (i.e., Germans and Hispanics). God created us

to have a variety of 'spiritual personalities' and we can't change that. So don't judge those who are different. The one who raises their hands in worship is not necessarily more spiritual than the one who doesn't. Approaching your faith through an emotional grid is no more spiritual than a rational grid. If we aren't careful, we can put subtle pressure on others, or even ourselves, to show our faith in a certain way. Don't evaluate the faith of others by how they express themselves or react to life. Don't evaluate your own spiritually by how you compare to someone who is different than you. Remember Peter and John at the empty tomb. Just be yourself! (November 14, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 4:10-11 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Do you evaluate others spiritual growth by what you see outwardly? Do you have a standard you assume is the 'right' way all spiritually mature Christians should act?

Do you sometimes think you aren't as spiritual as others because you worship, relate or think differently than they do?

BLOG 968: HOW WERE PEOPLE SAVED WHO ONLY HAD THE OLD TESTAMENT?

The basis of salvation is for a person to give all of themselves that they have to all of God that they understand. God reveals Himself to everyone through their inner awareness of a sovereign God and through His creation. But then, what about those who also have the clearer revelation of God in the Old Testament, but lived before Jesus and only had vague prophecies about his future coming? What would be their standard for salvation? It would be no different than what we already mentioned, giving all of themselves that they had to all of God that they understood. It's just that they would understand God much more clearly from His revelation of Himself in the Old Testament.

You see, the basis of salvation is always the death of Christ. That is the only way God can forgive sin of anyone, because Jesus paid for it on the cross. There is no other way. And the requirement for that pardon to be applied is always faith in God from the heart of the individual requesting forgiveness. What changes through Bible history is the content of that faith, what God has revealed to man. For those who don't have the written revelation of God, the content of their faith is in a creator God who is sovereign over all. For those who knew more about Him, the content increases. Adam, for example, understood that innocent blood had to be shed to cover his shame and guilt. He and his descendants offered sacrifices as a way of showing their faith in God who would remove their sins.

Now when God revealed the Law to Moses and the Jews on Mt. Sinai, they got a much deeper, clearer revelation of Who God was and what He expected. Their faith in God was shown by living by the rules and regulations in Exodus and Leviticus. It wasn't that doing these things earned their salvation, for salvation is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), but that inner faith shows itself outwardly by wanting to follow God – James' "faith without works is dead" (James 2:14-20). Salvation didn't come by their putting faith in what they did, but in putting faith in the God who told them to do it. Actually, the law could not bring salvation, no matter how well it was kept. Its purpose wasn't to be a way to earn salvation, but to show man his sin and the impossibility of being perfect in God's sight (Galatians 3:14-24). Today our faith isn't shown by our trust in God as seen in His Law, today we are under grace and we trust in our gracious God to provide free salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Those with the Old Testament had the same truth revealed to them as we have in the New Testament. Man's heart is wicked and corrupt (Jeremiah 17:9) and even our righteous acts are dirty in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). Because God is holy, He must separate Himself from sinful man. Man cannot reach up to God, only God can initiate the contact by reaching down to man (Isaiah 59:1-2). He reaches down to reveal that the way between God and man can only be open by the shedding of innocent blood (Leviticus 17:11). The blood of animals can't pay for sin, but the sacrifice of the sinless God-man Messiah can pay for it (Isaiah 53:1-12).

So, faith in the provision of the coming Messiah was a key ingredient in the faith content for those who had the Old Testament. They didn't know His earthly name would be 'Jesus,' but that wasn't the issue. Putting faith in this coming Messiah was the critical point. God would provide for their sins, for they could not. For this to happen the Messiah would have to be "cut off" (crucified, Daniel 9:26). This would be a painful time of suffering for Him (Psalm 22:1-31). This is what God revealed and in what those with the Old Testament had to put their faith (Genesis 15:6).

Clearly God is totally fair in wanting all to come to Him, but also just in judging sin. He gives each person a free will choice. We should be thankful for the clear revelation of Jesus and salvation we who are living in these days have. (January 9, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Are you depending totally on Jesus for your salvation or do you also lean on the good you do (or the bad you don't do)? Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone for God's glory alone.

BLOG 969: WHY GRAY HAIR?

My hair has undergone many changes in my lifetime. When I was a toddler, it was blond (almost white) and curly. As I grew it became dark and thick. Now it is almost white again, but with gray mixed in. Gray hair sets a person apart as being older, something we don't always want advertised. Why does God make our hair change as a public announcement of our increasing years? How should we be viewing our own increasingly gray hair?

Gray hair reminds us of God's faithfulness. When you have walked with God for a long time, you can attest to His faithfulness. Trials and difficulties have come and gone, but God has been dependable through it all (Isaiah 46:4). He has promised to be faithful, and when we have gray hair, we can look back and thank Him for His years of faithfulness.

Gray hair pictures God's blessings. God doesn't guarantee us a long life, but those who have lived many years can thank God for His many blessings and joys in life. The writer of Proverbs calls gray hair "a crown of splendor" (Proverbs 16:31). It is God's reward for the godly saint who has been living close to God and His benefits for many years.

Gray hair is a sign of maturity and wisdom. Or at least it should be. Just being alive for many years does not bring maturity and wisdom, but for those who have been following Jesus for a good portion of their life, it does (Proverbs 20:29). Our bodies become weaker as we age, but our minds become wiser and more attuned to what really matters in life.

God uses anyone who is available, no matter their age, education or abilities. Sometimes today the elderly are set aside as not being of as much worth as the young. Not so in God's sight. God called Abraham when he was 75 years old, and he had a promised son at 100. Sarah gave birth to that son at 90. Moses was 80 when God called him to lead the Jews out of Egypt. Caleb and Joshua were well up in years when God used them to defeat the inhabitants of Canaan so the Jews

could settle in their Promised Land. Our roles in the Kingdom may change, but we are far from useless no matter our age. If God has us alive, He has a good reason and purpose for it!

We should always treat those who are elderly with respect because of the lives they have lived for God and their contribution to the Kingdom of God (Leviticus 19:32). Please be patient with them (us), because they (we) can't do as much as before. It can be humbling for us, but it presents a good opportunity for others to serve those who have paved the way for them. Treat them with unconditional love (Matthew 22:39).

When you see someone with graying hair today, even if you see that person in your mirror, remember God has created gray hair for a reason. It reminds us of His faithfulness over the years. For God's people, it's a badge of honor for those who have been loyal to Him in the past. For us who are getting grayer, it's another way of knowing that our time on this earth is getting shorter and we need to be ready to transition into the next world. (January 16, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Isaiah 46:4 "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."

Proverbs 16:31 "Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness."

Proverbs 20:29 "The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old."

What is your attitude to those who are up in years?

How are you adjusting to your getting older?

Think of an elderly person you can contact and encourage today. Do so soon.

BLOG 970: DEMONIC DREAMS

Dreams come in all forms and types. Most aren't so bad and often aren't remembered. But sometimes a horrifying, scary dream can shock us. Demonic beings may even be seen or felt. Are these our fault? Have we given these demons an opening by something we thought or did in a dream? What are we to do when we have a demonic dream?

There is an interesting passage in the book of Job, a book which clearly deals with spiritual warfare because it records Satan's direct attacks on Job and his family. After Job pleads his innocence (Job 3), his friends who have come to comfort him speak. Eliphaz speaks first and sets the tone for what will be said about Job in the next thirty or so chapters. His opinion is based on a dream (Job 4:13) he had just had which was demonic (Job 4:15-16). It terrified him: "Fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake" (Job 4:14). Accusations against Job were placed in his thoughts in the dream. He accepted the words as true and responded to Job's suffering by saying it must be his own fault. The others picked up on this theme and continued their attacks until the end of the book. Here is an example of a demon putting terror into a sleeping person and telling them lies in the dream that they believed when they awoke.

It does happen. Demons can cause such experiences while we sleep. It becomes worse when we think we are somehow at fault or to blame. It is true that demons can influence or control our conscience minds when we have given them an opening to do so. But when we are following Jesus and living for Him as best we are able, they cannot influence our subconscious mind. We don't have to live a perfect life, but we must confess known sin (1 John 1:9) so demons no longer have a foothold in our lives because of it (James 4:7).

While we may dream we are doing something sinful, we can't really sin while dreaming because it is not our conscious self that is making the free-will decision to commit the sin. Thus, we are not

accountable and should not feel any guilt when awake. If the sin is something we are allowing in our life, then we are guilty for it – but only in our awake life, not when asleep.

Satan uses fear as a main weapon (2 Timothy 1:7; Psalm 23:4), so demons can try to put fear into us by the dream. They can try to use either the content of the dream, or just the fact that we are having it, to instill fear. That is the opposite of faith and means we are looking at our limited resources instead of trusting God who has unlimited power and is great than Satan (1 John 4:4).

In the Old Testament, in Job's day, God often spoke to people through dreams. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of coming world empires (Daniel 2), Gabriel's warning to Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Joseph (Matthew 2) or Old Testament Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dreams (Genesis 41). While God still can and at times does use dreams to communicate to people, His written Word and the Holy Spirit within us are by far the most common means of transferring guidance or information to us today. God never uses confusion, darkness, terror or uncontrollable guilt to motivate us. He gently draws with love and security.

If you have these experiences call on the name of Jesus, even in your dream. When awake remember God's promises of protection and victory (1 John 4:4; etc.). If these dreams are a regular occurrence, pray for your sleeping space and dedicate it to God, commanding any demons that have access to it to be gone. Play Christian music or a recording of someone reading the Bible 24-7. Leave a small light on 24-7 as well. Demons hate hearing Jesus praised and love darkness, not light. You can anoint your walls with oil (in the shape of a cross) as well. Before going to sleep pray for God to put a hedge of protection around you, your mind and your heart. That's what Job did (Job 1:4-10). (January 23, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 4:8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

What do you do when you have a really bad dream?

What advice would you give to someone who has them often?

BLOG 971: PROOF JESUS IS COMING BACK

Fifty years ago, when I was a young Christian, prophecy and Jesus' return were common topics of books, sermons and conversation. That seems to have taken a back seat during the present time. Does that mean that those who have been expecting Jesus to return were mistaken? Is He not going to come back? Despite what scoffers say (2 Peter 3:3-10), He will be back. You can count on it. Here's proof we can now that for sure.

God Promises Jesus will come back. The Old Testament is full of Messianic promise--that promised is its main focus. From beginning (Genesis 3:15) to end (Malachi 4:2), the entire Old Testament is filled with prophecies of the coming Deliverer--at least 333 distinct promises, by one count.

There are more than 100 prophecies dealing with the first advent of Christ. All of them were fulfilled precisely, literally. His riding on a donkey, the parting of his garments, the piercing of His hands and feet, and the vivid prophecies of His rejection by men in Isaiah 53--all these might have been interpreted symbolically by Old Testament scholars before Christ. But the New Testament record repeatedly reports that such things were fulfilled in the most literal sense, so "that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matthew 26:56; cf. 2:15; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:35; John 12:38; 15:25; 19:24, 28).

God cannot lie and He will not change His mind (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2). What He promised will happen.

Jesus Himself promised He would return. Jesus often spoke of His coming to earth again (Matthew 24; Luke 21). He stated: "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). One of His last promises to His followers was "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:2-3). If He doesn't return, He will have been a liar.

The inspired Scriptures Promise His return. God's Holy Spirit led Paul (1 Corinthians 1:4-7; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; etc.), Peter (1 Peter 1:13; 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Peter 3) and John (1 John 3:2) to write in detail about Jesus' appearance and return.

Jesus will come for His Bride. One of the descriptions of the Body of Believers today is the "Bride of Christ" (Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:6-9). Marriage is one picture of Christians and Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2) and shows His love and care for us (Matthew 25; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:6-9). That's why we know He will be back for us, as a groom going for His bride (John 14:2-3).

We look forward to His rescue from this evil world. He will come to take us out of the sin and suffering we face in this world (Matthew 16:27; John 5:28-29). That is our blessed hope (Titus 2:13). His return will bring final and total judgment on sin and sinners (1 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Jude 1:14-15; Revelation 19:11-16).

Satan is now the ruler of this present world system (John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; Ephesians 6:12; 1 John 5:19). But Jesus will take back dominion when He returns and brings eternal judgment to Satan and His demons (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10).

The Second Coming is not supposed to make us stop what we're doing to wait for the Lord's return. And neither should it motivate us to focus all your attention on the events and political developments of this world. Instead, it should prompt us to holiness as we direct our heart toward Christ, whose coming every believer anticipates with joy. (January 30, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

How often do you think about Jesus' return? Is it just when you want to escape this life, or is it because you really are anxious to be with Him?

If you knew He was coming today, is there anything you'd want to take care of first? Do it now!

BLOG 972: HOW DO I KNOW ITS GOD SPEAKING?

I'll never forget the first time someone told me they had a word for me from the Lord. It was a strange and somewhat confusing prophecy which brought more fear than anything else. Was this really from God? Or was it a counterfeit from Satan, or just words from a sincere but confused woman?

Sometimes God's message to His prophets were very strange. Hosea was told to marry a prostitute (Hosea 1). Isaiah was commanded to go around naked for a year (Isaiah 1). Did they wonder if it was really God they were hearing? They obeyed, and clearly God was behind them and had a good reason for what He told them to do (Isaiah 20:3-6). How can we know for sure what we hear comes from God Himself and nothing or no one else?

God speaks through: The Bible (Psalms 119:105), Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3), Sign and Wonders (Acts 3:6-7), Tests (Judges 6:36-38), Godly People (Proverbs 8:32-34), Children at Bedtime (1 Samuel 3:8-9), The Creation (Romans 1:20), Preachers and Prophets (Acts 11:27-28), Donkeys

(Numbers 22:30), Bushes (Exodus 3:1-4), Angels (Luke 1:26-28), The Angel of the Lord (Genesis 22:10-11), God's Glory (Exodus 33:18-19), Circumstances (Acts 16:6-8), Reasons (Isaiah 1:18), Dreams (Joel 2:28), Visions (Joel 2:28), Failures (Matthew 26:75) and Holy Spirit to Human Spirit (Jeremiah 29:12-13). Obviously, there is no one 'approved' way. If we can't tell by the channel of communication, we must look elsewhere to understand the source.

Over the years I have come to understand my wife's words, pauses, inflections, emotions and moods. I can recognize her voice easily because I am very familiar with hearing it. The more I listen to God, the more recognizable His voice becomes as well. There are traits and characteristics that help me be assured it is from Him. Usually, the thought He communicates is not something I had been thinking, it is new and it has a 'rightness' all over it (1 Kings 19:11-13). It brings joy and motivation. Even when it is conviction of sin, there isn't fear or guilt – just a desire to turn from the sin and be done with it. His voice is quiet, gentle and positive.

When the voice speaking to me is Satan or my own flesh that is not true. I often feel failure, guilt, fear or dread of the future. Bondage, not freedom, results (Matthew 11:28-30). His words speak to the very core of my being (Hebrews 4:12). From God, I have peace (Philippians 4:7) and know everything is under control (Jeremiah 29:12-13). When it isn't from Him, I feel fear and panic. I'm not motivated to thank or praise Him.

God's messages are clear, specific and understandable. Those not from Him are confusing, uncertain and sometimes vague (John 16:8). God's leading lines up 100% with the Word of God. Those from Satan or the flesh are full of deceit, half-truths and lies (John 14:6). When I share God's words with mature believers, they make sense of them as well (Proverbs 11:14; Deuteronomy 19:15; and Matthew 18:16). As we mature spiritually, our increasing spiritual experience and discernment allow us to distinguish between God's Spirit and ourself or Satan. (February 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Isaiah 28:23 "Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say."

How do YOU know when God is speaking to you and it isn't Satan or your own flesh?

Spend some time now quietly listening to whatever He wants to say to you.

BLOG 973: FINDING A GOOD CHURCH TODAY

Not so long ago a person could visit a church once or twice, listen to the messages, and discern whether the church was founded on the infallible Word of God or not. Churches either did or didn't believe in the Bible as inspired. Those were your two options.

That is no longer the case. It can be very hard to discern what a church really stands for. Even when it does claim to be based solely on the Bible, there are many new and strange doctrines and practices entering the church. Forms of worship, requirements for salvation, standards for living the Christian life, roles of pastors and leaders, over emphasis on certain spiritual gifts – these and other areas can be confusing. No one wants to get their family involved in a church only to later find problems in the leadership, error in the preaching or unsafe situations for children. How can we know what churches are sound and safe to commit to? What should we look for? Or, like many Christians today, should we avoid all churches and stay home instead. Watching church on TV seems much easier and safer.

First, we should remember that no church is perfect. All are in process (Matthew 16:18). It's been said that if you find a perfect church you shouldn't join it, because then it won't be perfect anymore!

Second, God commands us to become part of a body of believers, despite the difficulties that arise when sinners get together (Hebrews 10:25).

Third, the church must be based on God's Word as their final authority in beliefs and practices. Does it teach God's Word in a way you can understand and grow spiritually (Deuteronomy 4:2)? Does it live out the Great Commission, making evangelism part of their emphasis? Are the leaders approachable, transparent and friendly? Are they open to suggestions and criticism? Is there a system of accountability for them?

Fourth, is it a church that you would freely talk to visitors or new Christians? Would they be welcomed, even if they are of a different race, ethnic group or economic level? Are visitors greeted warmly and made to feel at home?

Fifth, prayer must be an important part of the church. The services as well as the lives of the people must be characterized by prayer. Are there prayer groups you can join or go to for special requests?

Sixth, is there place for you to serve? The church should be open to others coming in to help. It can't be a closed clique of people who control everything and don't want new help. Also, it should be a place where your spiritual gifts can be used.

Seventh, it must be a place where you are comfortable with the service, including the music and worship. Are you able to worship freely. Does the atmosphere of the service and the music lead you to worship?

In summary, it must be a church where you can worship, learn God's Word and serve in a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere. There must be a healthy atmosphere of acceptance, love and excitement about following Jesus. Don't be too quick to switch churches, for none are perfect and none will ever meet all your needs. Only Jesus can do that. But don't stay in an unhealthy situation, either. Your gifts and resources should be contributing to the growth of the body of Christ. Listen to the Lord and follow His leading. (February 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Name some churches that have really ministered to you in the past. Have you thanked them for the role they played in your life? If not, do so today. Pray for each of them each day this week.

BLOG 974: WHEN DOUBT HELPS FAITH

I've written several blogs about doubt because I think it's something we as Christians don't discuss enough. We believe it is wrong so we pretend it doesn't exist, even though many of us, me included, deal with it from time to time. What is doubt? Is it a tool of Satan, a weakness of the flesh, or a legitimate seeking after greater understanding? I think it can be any of them.

When life is difficult, and you pray for God to intervene, but it doesn't seem He does, do you begin to doubt? Do you wonder if He really loves you and cares? Do you ever wonder if He even knows what you are going through? When prayers aren't answered, do you begin to doubt the power of prayer? Or perhaps you doubt if your prayers are "good enough" to be answered? Wouldn't it be better if God gave us everything we wanted as soon as we wanted it so we would never doubt Him?

Faith consists of believing God exists, that He came to earth as Jesus to pay for our sins and that the Bible is the written record of God's absolutes for us today. Faith is trusting God cares about me individually, loves me, forgives me because I trust in Jesus and has a wonderful plan and purpose for my life.

But does having faith include believing I can have anything and everything I want as soon as I want it? Does it mean I know what is best for me? Can I assume that God always wants everything easy and perfect for me? And when problems come, is it because God isn't able to help me or because I don't deserve His help? What do I do with these doubts? Do I pretend I don't have them so I seem like a good Christian?

Doubts need to be faced and worked through, not ignored. They are nothing to feel guilty about. Temptation is not sin, it's what we do with the temptation. The same is true of doubts. In fact, doubts can help us refocus our trust in God despite questions about what He is doing and why He is doing it. Unanswered prayer or questions about what God is doing (or not doing) are reminders to trust in God Himself, not just His actions. We put faith in Him because He is faithful to do what is right and best, not easiest for us. We put our faith in His proven character, not in His actions, because we can't correctly evaluate them. It isn't His inability to change our circumstances or lack of love for us. He is always able to do anything, but He is not always willing. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were about to be thrown into the fiery furnace, they affirmed that God was able to save them, but He might not be willing to do so if He had other plans for them (Daniel 3:17).

Face your doubts and questions. Take them to God without fear or guilt. He is big enough to handle them. They don't surprise Him – He knows them anyway. Let Him use them to make your faith stronger. After all, faith isn't based on proof. It's the opposite – it means trusting when there is no proof (Hebrews 11:1).

You will have doubts. It's natural. You're human. Don't feel bad about having them or be discouraged when they come about. Submerge yourself in prayer and saturate your mind and spirit with uplifting Scriptures. Focus on all God has already done for you and what your life would be like without Him. He's been faithful so far; He will continue to be so in the future.

Having doubts does not diminish your faith or belief in God. In fact, they can make your belief in Him and His will for your life stronger. When a request you've submitted goes unanswered, take a moment and ask God if you're asking for the right thing. When things don't go your way, ask God to show you His way. Pray for God to reveal the root and the source of the doubt in your heart so you know if you should rebuke it or trust God with it. If fear is involved, confess the fear and don't let it influence you. Ask God to put Scripture promises in your mind to correctly handle the doubt.

Again, it's okay to have doubts. It's a part of the journey and a part of growth as a Christian. (February 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Daniel 3:17-18 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

When do doubts most arise in your heart?

How closely are your doubts related to your fears?

How can you use your doubts to strengthen your faith?

BLOG 975: SATAN IS ALIVE AND WELL TODAY

Several years ago, Hal Lindsay wrote a book called, "Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth." It's still true. However, in our culture, he hides his tracks well. What better way to work unopposed than to convince people you don't exist? It's like being invisible.

People today will tell you that believing in Satan is old-fashioned and superstitious. In our scientific age, they say, we know better. Why should people be wary of something that is only fiction? This comes right from the one who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden.

Lying is fundamental to Satan's plan and purpose (John 8:44). He cannot tolerate truth. When he tried his lies on Jesus in the wilderness temptations, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. He used God's truth to expose the lies of His enemy. Paul says that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). It is our only offensive weapon.

If someone is invisible and is whispering and spreading lies without people knowing where they come from, much havoc can be caused. This is what Satan does. He tells us lies about himself, lies about God, lies about others and lies about ourselves. How do you know when something is a lie? Anything that does not line up to the truth in the Bible is a lie.

How are we to have victory against this unseen enemy? First, we need to recognize he exists and that he hates us and will do anything he can to ruin our lives. We must be on our guard against this roaring lion who seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8-9).

We do this by submitting to God and resisting Satan's attempts to deceive us (James 4:7). Satan may have control of the earth, but he does not have control of God's people unless we let him. We have a free will to determine who we will listen to and follow.

Isaiah 54:17 reminds us, "No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and this is their vindication from me declares the Lord."

Our enemy does not fight fair, but he fights. Are you aware of the lies and deceptions he uses against you? Don't go to one extreme and fear him. But don't go to the other extreme and forget about him. Remember who your enemy is. Many times we fight battles against people in our lives. We feel a family member or an enemy needs to be defeated. They are not the ones we are to fight. Remember who your enemy is. Others may deny him or ignore him, but God's people must always be alert against him. (February 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. ... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

What are some of the lies Satan uses to deceive you? Meditate on this during the day and write them down so you can be aware of them. Write the truth of God's Word down as well.

BLOG 976: WHEN PRAYERS ARE UNANSWERED

Every Christian has to deal with the question of why God didn't answer their prayers. If you ask Google that question, you will get almost 20 million responses. It's a question that is asked often. Just think for a moment: what would your life be like if God would have answered every prayer you ever prayed just the way you wanted it answered? Who would you be married to right now? Where would you be living? What kind of a person would you be? Your life would be totally different than the way it is.

Sometimes it's a good thing God doesn't answer our prayers. What would a child be like if their parents gave them everything they asked for and did everything they wanted them to do? God, our heavenly father, knows that not everything we want is best for us. Often we don't understand why that is, but he knows best.

When we pray for healing or restoration of a relationship and God doesn't answer, we are tempted to wonder why? What is wrong with wanting restoration in a relationship or healing in a

body? There is nothing wrong in wanting those things, but God knows what is best for us in the long run. He honors free will and doesn't force a person against their will. Even though a restored relationship might be great, He allows people to choose their own path in life.

We don't always understand why bad things happen despite our prayers. Situations like these are opportunities to trust God. Do you believe He is a loving, sovereign God, even when he doesn't do what you want? When God doesn't answer, we must recognize that He is still God and He knows what is best (Hebrews 13:8). He is still worthy of our trust and devotion (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Actually, there are no unanswered prayers. The answer may be wait, later, or no. These are not what we want to hear, but they're still answers. Our prayers are never ignored. God considers every one of them and does what is right and best for us in them. If we could know everything God knows, we would agree that everything He does (or doesn't do) is right and perfect. You can always count on that. (March 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Revelation 5:6-8 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits[a] of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

What are some of the prayers you have, or are praying, that seem unanswered? Turn them over to God and trust Him with them, to do what He knows is right and best. Remember, He never forgets any one of them but keeps them always before Him (see Revelation 5:6-8 above).

BLOG 977: PEOPLE YOU NEED IN YOUR LIFE

We all know of people that we shouldn't have in our life. They can be a bad influence or a temptation. Are you also aware of the people you should have in your life? Proverbs 13:20 says "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

We can never be the person God wants us to be on our own. God did not create man to live life alone. We need others interacting in our life to help us reach the potential He has for us. Here are some of the types of people we all need in our lives.

Mentors. We all need someone to coach us at different times and in different stages of life. No one person can teach us everything we need to know. We need a godly pastor, Sunday school teacher, mature Christian friend and a favorite author or radio program. Paul had Barnabas and Silas to help him grow and mature. They could look into Paul's life and see where Paul needed help or advice and provide it. Paul did the same for Timothy, Titus and others.

Role models. We need examples of those who are living through circumstances that we are going through. Luke was a great role model for Paul. He was older and more mature and provided examples of what Paul needed to be and do. We can find role models in our church or among our Christian friends. Reading Christian biographies and listening to the testimonies of others also helps us grow in our spiritual lives.

Partners. No one goes through life alone. We need a mate, friend or others that are going through what we are going through as we are going through it and can share with us. We need someone that will understand when we share our burdens. Paul had Silas as a partner to share life with. We all need someone we can be our real, true selves with, someone with whom we can honestly share our joys and sorrows, victories and defeats.

Friends. Partners, role models and mentors can be friends. But others can be friends as well. A friend isn't necessarily someone to give advice or training. They are people who help us enjoy life. They provide companionship and fellowship as we navigate through life day to day. They are someone faithful and loyal who can always be there. Priscilla and Aquilla were friends to Paul. So was Mark. He enjoyed and needed their companionship.

Do you have these people in your life? Are you filling these roles in the lives of others? Look for people you can mentor, be an example for, partner with, or become friends with. We each need those people those people in our lives and we need to fill those roles and others wise. (March 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Who have been your mentors, role models, partners and friends through life? Thank God for them.

Who has He put into your life to mentor, be a role model to, partner with or be a friend to? Pray for them and reach out to them in the next day or two.

BLOG 978: DISCOURAGEMENT: TOOL OF SATAN

One of Satan's greatest tools against Christians is discouragement. Each one must face it from time to time. Living for Jesus can be very difficult as we face sin and temptation. Satan knows just what will discourage us and he uses it against us as he did with Elijah (2 Kings 19). He did the same with Timothy, who tried to lead a church that didn't want to follow. Some people opposed and challenged Timothy and he was unable to bring them under control. That led to discouragement.

Discouragement can also come when we are physically or emotionally tired. When we are drained, we don't have the energy or resources to stay strong. It's important to get enough healthy food, rest, exercise and relaxation to stay strong and fight off discouragement. That was part of God's cure for Elijah's discouragement (1 Kings 19:5-8).

Pressure can also cause discouragement. When we feel we have more to do than we have time, ability or resources to do it, we may want to quit trying and give in. But remember, God says He will bring to completion the good work He is doing in us (Philippians 1:6). We are just to faithfully do our best, the rest is up to Him.

Another cause of discouragement is when we struggle with a sin that seems to defeat us. Timothy was often controlled by fear. When our focus is on ourself and our failures, we will be discouraged. When we allow sin in our lives, we block God's Spirit from filling us with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Be alert to when you are feeling discouraged. Discouragement doesn't come from God; it is a tool of Satan to defeat and destroy us. Remember, God doesn't look at what we produce, He looks at our faithfulness in following Him. The results are up to Him, not us. We are only responsible to faithfully serve Him.

The best way to have victory over discouragement is to remember and rely on God's promises. He says He will always be with us (Joshua 1:1-9), never leave us (Hebrews 13:5), not give us more than we can handle with His help (1 Corinthians 10:13), His grace is always sufficient for whatever we are going through (2 Corinthians 12:9) and He will use whatever happens for our growth and His glory (Romans 8:28). (March 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 4:2 "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

1 Samuel 17:47 *7and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."*

When are you most apt to struggle against discouragement? What must you do to prevent or overcome it?

What promises in the Bible mean the most to you when you are discouraged?

Do you know anyone who is discouraged? Stop and pray for them right now. Reach out to them today with God's truth to encourage them.

BLOG 979: FROM SCOTT TROXEL. Scott Troxel, who is going to India with Rev. Rick Reilly in June, 2023, to lead pastors' conferences for CTO, wrote this about his trip to India. Pray for Rick and Scott and they prepare for this special time. "As I've considered this trip to India and the many ministry opportunities this would afford, the exhortation to "do good" came to my mind. "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Galatians 6:10). I've been given many opportunities to "do good" in my life. Sometimes, I am tempted to question whether or not I am qualified to do this or that ministry due to my own perceived limitations or shortcomings, not too dissimilar from Moses, as he questioned his ability to speak to the Israelites and to Pharaoh as the mouthpiece of God. I've found that if I step out in faith, trusting the Lord, knowing that His will for me is to "do good" and that He will give me grace upon grace to do His will, then it is true that I can do whatever the Lord wills for me to do in whatever specific areas of ministry. In this case, the Lord has given me this ministry opportunity to serve the brethren in India and I am desirous to be faithful to walk in it.

BLOG 980: CAN SALVATION BE LOST?

We have salvation through Jesus and only through Jesus. It comes through putting faith in Him. But after we have it, can we lose it? There are those who say we can't be sure of our salvation because we can lose it if we stop believing or if we commit certain sins. Is that true? If so, we will be living in fear and insecurity. What we do for God will be motivated by fear, not love or appreciation. Does God want that?

God's Word clearly tells us that God is faithful and will not turn from us even if we deny or are faithless to Him (2 Timothy 2:11-13). Even when we stumble and fall, He will not turn us away (Matthew 12:20; Psalm 37:24). When we confess our sin, God forgives us and never holds the sin against us (Romans 4:6-8). Nothing can separate us from God, not even we ourselves (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:37-39).

The word for "believe" in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written refers to a one-time event with future results (John 5:24; 6:47; 3:15-16, 36; 6:40). God did not use a tense that referred to continually believing, because that would be something we would have to do to earn or keep our salvation, and that is impossible (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Bible also says that if we "believe," we "have eternal life" now, already. Since it is eternal, we have it forever, but that starts now, not if we live a certain way until we die. In the Greek language "has" is in the continual tense, meaning when we believe at one point in time in the past, we continually have eternal life from then on. It doesn't say we might or could have it, it says we do have it (John 6:47; 3:15-16, 36; 5:24).

The Bible also says if we "believe," we "will be saved." "Believe" refers to a one-time event in the past when we put our faith in Jesus. "Will be saved" is in the future tense. It is something we are guaranteed, promised for the future (Acts 16:31). No conditions or requirements are given.

God guarantees that those who come to Him for salvation will never ever die without salvation for they can never lose their salvation (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:37-39)

Those who believe in Jesus are “born again” (John 3:3), and no one can be “unborn.” Jesus is using physical birth as a way of teaching about spiritual birth, and when one is born, they can’t be unborn. Similarly, salvation is a free gift which cannot be given back, nor is there any requirement to meet to keep it (Ephesians 2:8-9). There is nothing we do for salvation except to simply receive it, so there is nothing we need to keep doing to keep it (Romans 3:28; John 3:16).

God wants us to know we cannot lose our salvation so that we live for Him out of a pure motive of love and devotion, not out of a selfish desire to earn or keep our salvation. Still, this is no excuse to sin, for taking advantage of such marvelous love like that hurts Him deeply.

To illustrate, a man who was a widower hired a woman to work for him. She took care of his home, clothing and meals, because at the end of the week he paid her for her work. After a while they fell in love and married. Then she continued to take care of his home, clothing and meals, but she did it for a much better, purer motive – love for the man. Which do you think Jesus would prefer from us? (March 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

John 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Do you struggle with doubts about your salvation?

Why might Satan put these thoughts in your mind?

What verses can you claim to counter these doubts?

BLOG 981: IS MY WORSHIP ABOUT ME?

Do you know anyone who left a church because they didn’t like the worship? Granted, there are many different types of worship and various personalities of people. So, it stands to reason some types would minister to a person better than others. Having said that, I must also say that it can be very dangerous to judge worship by how it impacts us. Worship isn’t about us, it’s all about God. Plus, worship is much more than singing in a certain style. Yet, studies show most people choose a church based on its Sunday morning music, not it’s doctrinal position. When did worship become about us, our preferences or our experience? Worship isn’t to make us feel good or lifted up, it’s to honor and recognize God Himself. I admit it is easier to do that with music we like, but remember that music is only a means to an end and not the end itself. Too often the end of worship music is to uplift, entertain and make us feel good instead of focusing solely on God.

We are not commanded to sing in church, but we are commanded to worship, be it in church or out. We can and should worship any time and place. Worship is an attitude of heart, not something that only happens during singing in church. That’s a good thing, because many Christians do not regularly attend church, and too many of those who do come in during or after the music portion of the service.

Worship is so much more than corporate singing. It is a lifestyle of adoration to our God. And it’s something we are to do every day of the week, not just on Saturday nights or Sunday mornings. Worship is described throughout Scripture as: ascribing to Him the glory due His name (Psalm 29:2), bowing down (humbling oneself) and kneeling before Him as our Maker (Psalm 95:6), exalting Him as God (Psalm 99:9), declaring that Jesus is truly God’s Son (Matthew 14:33), presenting your bodies “as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Romans

12:1), taking pride in Christ Jesus and putting no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3) and rejoicing always, praying continually, giving thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

It is dangerous to equate worship with emotions. We expect a song to move us emotionally and then we consider that worship. Worship isn't first and foremost an emotion, it is a mental attitude, a choice to thank and praise God no matter how we are feeling. We can still worship even when distracted or struggling if we choose to focus on God's greatness despite our circumstances. Worship happens when we acknowledge God in our minds, even if we aren't "in the mood" to worship.

The key to worship is focusing on Jesus and all He has done for you. Worship is a response to His goodness, love and mercy in our lives. It's not an emotion we whip up or a tradition we perform. It's spontaneous praise as we focus on Jesus (read Isaiah 6:1-4).

In [John 14:23](#), [Jesus](#) told a Samaritan woman worship wasn't about *where* it was done – in a sanctuary, warehouse, converted storefront, or home – but about *how* it's done. And He wasn't talking about a beat or lyrics, the absence of drums, or what year the music was written. He said, "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers" ([John 14:23](#)).

To worship God in spirit and truth means having the right heart and motives as we come before the King of kings, either in private or corporate worship, and acknowledging His indwelling Spirit that gives us the desire and enables us the obedience to worship Him in the first place. It then involves a surrender of all that we are and have, to all that He is. Surrender, after all, is saying "Your will, not mine" to God in every area of life—including what we consider our worship preferences. (April 3, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 95:1-7 Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. 2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. 3 For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. 6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

What does this blog say to you about your worship?

When are you best able to focus your praise and worship on Jesus?

Spend a few minutes right now worshipping God from your heart.

BLOG 982: PROOF THE HOLY SPIRIT LIVES IN YOU

We know the Holy Spirit is God, part of the Trinity. But is it true He lives inside of us? Does God really indwell us? If so, we always have His presence and guidance (John 16:8). He is there to produce the fruit of the Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22-23) and empower us with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). He reveals God's truth to us (John 14:26), comforts us (John 14:18, 27), convicts of sin (John 16:8) and helps us in expressing our thoughts in prayers (Romans 8:26). If He is not within us, none of these would happen.

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit lives in us from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 12:13). This is literally Jesus's presence in us by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians

1:27). The Holy Spirit is always in every believer from the moment of salvation. How much we let Him control and lead us depends on our allowing Him to fill us completely (Ephesians 5:19).

In the Old Testament the filling of the Spirit was rare and was usually related to the ability to serve in some particular area. Undoubtedly, the Spirit of God was behind the work of the inspiration of the Old Testament, and those who wrote Scripture were guided infallibly in what they wrote (Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11). The Spirit of God in the Old Testament gave men wisdom (Genesis 41:38-40; Numbers 27:18; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13). The Holy Spirit also gave men special skills in the Old Testament, such as the tailors for the priestly garments (Exodus 28:3) and the workmen who built the tabernacle (Exodus 31:3; 35:30-35). In the case of Samson, the Holy Spirit's filling gave him superhuman strength (Judges 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). It is probable that the Holy Spirit was involved in the miracles of the Old Testament, though they are not attributed to the Holy Spirit specifically.

Today He indwells every believer from the moment of salvation (John 7:37-39; 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), produces the fruit (good works) in believers (Galatians 5:2-16) and baptizes (identifies) all Christians into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). He is the One Who restrains sin in general (2 Thessalonians 2:7), convicts unbelievers of sin (John 16:8-9), and seals (guarantee of assurance) believers (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). He guides and directs believers and teaches and reminds them of God's Word (John 14:26). He gives spiritual gifts to each believer and through them ministers to the whole Body (1 Corinthians 12:4-13).

We are commanded to be filled (controlled) by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) by continually being in total submission to God (Galatians 5:16, 25) and not allowing any sin or disobedience in our lives (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Sinning against God is defined in the Bible as grieving the Spirit (Isaiah 63:10-11; Ephesians 4:30).

PROOF FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE Those who are Christians can affirm from personal experience the change in them from before to after salvation. There is no accounting for this other than God Himself living inside and ministering to all our needs as promised. It is not a transformation we could have made on our own; it had to come from a source outside us, and that is God Himself. (April 10, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

John 14:16-17 I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

How do you know God's Spirit lives in you?

What would be different if He didn't?

What can you do better to hear and follow Him today?

BLOG 983: PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN TO LIVE IN AN UNBIBLICAL WORLD

The world has never been a safe place for those trying to serve God, but it can be especially difficult for those emerging from childhood and moving into Satan's kingdom (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2. John 12:31) on their own. We would all agree that it is much more difficult for kids now than when we were young. What can we do to help prepare them for this transition?

Children and teens get hit on every side with the world's values and morals, its philosophy of life and self-centeredness. These connect with a person's sin nature, making a difficult force to

overcome. The key is to be equipped for these battles before they occur. No general would send soldiers to fight their enemy if they weren't equipped and trained to have victory. That must happen before the battle. The same is true of Christian parents and grandparents. We must train and prepare our children when young, the younger the better.

We homeschooled our children, which gave us more time with them and kept them from many hours of influence by peers and secular education. Even if you don't home school, you must make their spiritual growth your first priority. Immerse them in God's Word by reading to them, teaching memory verses, having good Bible books available and watching Bible-based videos and programs on TV. There is no substitute for making sure they know God's Word thoroughly from a young age. (Timothy knew Scripture from infancy (2 Timothy 3:15).) They must be saturated with God's values and world perspective so when they are exposed to other belief systems, they will be able to separate truth from error. They shouldn't just learn facts in their head, they need to be challenged to accept the truth in their hearts and commit their lives to it. They need to believe because they believe, not just because their parents or pastor believes.

Along with teaching them the truth, teach them other viewpoints and belief systems so they know how to think critically and evaluate things Biblically. I have the opportunity to do that with some of my older grandchildren. I feel like I am helping equip them for the day they move into the world on their own. I want to give them a solid foundation of truth that can withstand anything that comes at them. God's Word is truth and does have all the answers. It does work. We need to teach that to our children so they can resist doubts and lead others in truth. The world and its beliefs are not something to avoid or fear, but a mission field that needs the truth. Give them confidence by helping them understand what they believe and why they believe it. (I have written a book about just that and will send you a free PDF if you ask, or you can find it at https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/download/india/Books/english_translations/Why-We-Believe.pdf There are many excellent tools and resources for teaching apologetics to children and teens. Avail yourself of them. Don't just hand them a book, but go through it with them. You'll learn a lot, too.

We want to prepare our children by giving them a good education, caring for their health and teaching them basic life skills. Don't neglect their spiritual growth. Prepare them to withstand attacks against their soul. They WILL come. Are your children equipped to withstand? (April 17, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

How equipped were you to understand and defend the Biblical world view when you graduated from high school?

What can you do to better equip your children to stand firm for God and spread His truth to their generation?

BLOG 984: PROOF HEAVEN & HELL EXIST

Is there really a heaven and hell? How can we prove they are real? There are stories, songs, myths and legends about both. Are they real, or just something someone imagined? It makes a world of difference if there is no heaven or hell awaiting us after this life. If this life is all there is, we'd live it much differently than if we knew there was another life afterwards. So, this is a very important question.

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE First, we must prove that there is life after death. We can prove that from the Bible (for proof the Bible is God's Word go to <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our->

[ministries/india/articles/](#)). We know God created man to be with Him forever, but death entered with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:19). Yet, death shows God's mercy on man, for it frees him from endless living on this earth separated from God. Death allows man to be reunited with God. Death is the result of sin (James 1:15; Romans 6:23). Jesus came to remove the power of death, which keeps us in a state separated from God forever (1 Corinthians 15:21-22). David knew he would live even after death (Psalm 23:6; 49:15; 16:10). Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:7), Job (Job 19:25-27), Paul (2 Corinthians 5:8) and Jesus believed in life after death (Mark 12:26-27; John 11:25-26).

Since there is life after death, now we will look at where that life will take place – in heaven or in hell. We can easily prove heaven exists from the Bible because there are over 600 verses that talk about heaven. The Bible says God created heaven (Isaiah 48:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9). Moses believed in heaven (Deuteronomy 26:15), and so did Solomon (1 Kings 8:30). Jesus taught about heaven (John 14:2-3). Peter (1 Peter 1:3-4) and Paul (2 Corinthians 5:1) spoke of heaven.

Many people believe in heaven because it fits with what they would like. But most people reject hell because they don't believe there can be such a destiny for anyone. Yet, if we believe in heaven, we must also believe in hell. Jesus talked about hell over thirty times (Matthew 13:42, 50; 25:41; 16:19; 10:28; Mark 9:43; Luke 16:22-31). The Old Testament talks about hell as well (Psalm 9:17; 16:10; 55:15; 139:8; Job 11:8; Proverbs 15:24; Isaiah 5:14).

The Bible makes it clear that hell is for those who have never accepted God's gift of salvation by putting their faith in Jesus (Revelation 20:10, 15; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 25:41-42; Luke 16:23-24). The only way to avoid hell and be in heaven is through Jesus (John 14:4-6; Acts 4:12).

PROOF FROM EXPERIENCE There are many verified testimonies from those who died and experienced heaven before being brought back to life so they could tell what they experienced. There are stories of those who experienced hell the same way. I personally have talked to several people who have gone to heaven before being revived, and one man who went to hell. He immediately turned his life over to Jesus upon waking up!

PROOF FROM REASON There is a common longing in all people for justice, for a time of peace, for something far better than this world. There is a need in us that this life does not satisfy. All people and cultures, all religions and beliefs, look forward to something better after this life. Where does this come from if not from God who built it into mankind because there really is a heaven and hell? (April 24, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

I'll continue this in the next blog: "How Hell Glorifies God.")

Matthew 13:40-43 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

How would your life be different if there were no heaven to go to when you die?

What would the world be like if there truly were no hell?

Take a few moments to thank God that you know your eternal destiny.

BLOG 985: HOW HELL GLORIFIES GOD

In the last blog we talked about how we know heaven and hell exist. We talked about proof from the Bible, from experience and from reason. This time we'll look at more proof and then apply this.

PROOF FROM THE CHARACTER OF GOD When a good God looks down on this Earth and sees all these horrible atrocities occurring (like people murdering and raping), since He is good, He cannot turn a blind eye to the crimes being committed. And since it seems justice is not always carried out on this Earth, it must happen after we die. Therefore, there must be a place of punishment after we die (we call that Hell) and a place of bliss (we call that Heaven). But a good judge won't just punish murderers and rapists, He'll have to punish all acts of injustice, even thieving and lying.

We've all done at least something wrong in our life, either by lying, stealing, lusting, greed, jealousy, anger, fear, etc., so that means we are deserving of going to Hell. And the good deeds that we do don't merit us anything in front of a good judge, because a good judge would never accept a bribe. Just like if you murder somebody, you can't say to the judge, "I admit I murdered that person, but look at the good works I've done - helping the poor, working for charities. Can you let me go?" If the judge were to let the criminal go free, he would be a corrupt judge. A good judge cannot be corrupt. Likewise, the perfect character of God demands punishment for sin, eternity in hell for those who reject His free gift of salvation. The only alternative is to accept Jesus's punishment for our sin on the cross, in which case we have His perfection and are not deserving of hell. Therefore, there must be another place for those who follow Him, a place of blessedness such as heaven.

PROOF FROM THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS Jesus conquered death, showing death is not the victor and there is a life after death. It also proves that what Jesus was saying about heaven and hell are also true. He stated that everyone will go to either heaven or hell. So, the resurrection of Jesus proves a life after death in either heaven or hell.

HOW HELL GLORIFIES GOD While we Christians believe in hell, we often ignore the reality of it because public opinion is very much against it. Yet, is an essential part of God's plan. God created humans and angels with a free will so they could choose to follow Him instead of being forced to do so like robots. The angels had a one-time choice when about 1/3 rejected God and rebelled against Him. While we are alive, we have a free will to follow God or reject Him. Those who follow Him by putting their faith in His provision of salvation will be with Him forever.

If there were no heaven or hell then God would be a liar and there would be no justice, no victory of good over evil. If there is a heaven for those who choose to accept His gift of salvation, then there must be a separate place for those who reject it. That is hell. The absence of God's presence, glory, love and majesty leaves us with a place of pain, suffering, darkness and hopelessness.

Hell doesn't mean God isn't a God of love. He loves us so much He Himself paid the eternal price for our sin so we wouldn't have to spend eternity in hell. God is perfection and anything less cannot be with Him. His holiness, righteousness and justice demand that anything imperfect be banned from His presence. If not, there was no reason for Jesus to die for our sin. God's justice demands sin be paid for, but His free will gives man a choice and does not force us to believe.

The existence of hell shows God keeps His Word, it demonstrates His power to subdue all who rebel against Him and show how unspeakably merciful He is to those who trust Him. (May 1, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Luke 11:23-27 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

What, to you, is the strongest proof for the existence of hell?

If hell really does exist, how important is it to warn people about it?

Ask God to show you someone you can warn today.

BLOG 986: GO TO CHURCH EVEN IF YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT

We live in a time that emphasizes the importance of individual happiness and fun. If something is hard, challenging or difficult, we find ways to avoid it. After all, I should only have to do what I feel like doing, right? Not right, not for the servant of Jesus.

As a Christian, my life is not about me but about serving the One who loved me and redeemed me. We do what God wants, whether we want to or not. And that includes attending church. Our Sunday morning pattern should be to gather with God's people to learn, fellowship and worship. If I "feel like it" or not has nothing to do with it. We are to go, not because we feel guilty if we don't or expect special favors from God if we do, but because God commands it and we need it. David wrote/sang in Psalm 122:1 "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'"

We need to hear God's Word preached on a regular basis (Hebrews 4:12). We can get that on TV, but we also need to live in close fellowship with real people who have the same values and struggles we have. Sitting passively before TV is a world of difference from engaging with others who can encourage, challenge, help and pray for you – and you for them. We need fellowship, not entertainment.

When we attend church, we are voting with our bodies, letting others know what we see as most important on a Sunday morning. That encourages the pastor and others who are there, sets a good example for our children and others who know us and strengthens the Body of Christ, Jesus's Bride.

Imagine living in a culture where church attendance is forbidden. Suppose you had to meet deep in a snow-covered forest during the middle of the night to be able to get together with other believers? Or a dark cave? Or a rice paddy surrounded by jungle? What if you always had to fear someone breaking down the door of the home you were meeting in, or blocking the door and setting the house on fire? We have privileges and opportunities here that many don't. They could be removed here. A generation ago we never imagined God would be banned from school, the government and social media.

Let's not pass up any opportunity for fellowship and worship. After all, that's what we'll be doing for all eternity. And worship in heaven won't be all about us, that's for sure! (May 8, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Psalm 122:1 I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD.

How regular are you in your church attendance?

What seems to be the main thing that causes you to miss church? What can you do about that?

What would be missing in your life if you were never able to attend church again?

Pray for those who can't freely gather to worship.

BLOG 987: THINGS TO NOT WORRY ABOUT

I come from a long line of worriers. Growing up, I learned from some of the best. And I learned well. It doesn't take a lot of creativity to find things to fear, to anticipate what could go wrong in any and every situation. I'm sure you can come up with your own list of things to worry about, so I won't add to it now. But I would like to give you a list of a different kind: things to NOT worry about. If you have any of these on your list, you must take them off.

Don't worry about the worst that can happen. I used to imagine what was the worst that could happen, thinking it would prepare me so I wasn't surprised. Instead, we should think of the best thing that can happen (Hebrews 11:1), for God is able to do more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20). God is loving and kind, and if something bad does happen, we have His guarantee it is for our growth and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Don't worry about something good that may not happen, such as marriage, having a child, getting that perfect job. God promises to never withhold something that is good for us (Psalm 84:11). Often what we think is "No" is really just "Wait." When it is "No," we know that it is for a good reason.

Don't worry about health concerns, yours or another person's. God knows all about it (Psalm 139) and is the Great Physician. Whatever happens is just what He knows is best to happen.

Don't worry about safety or protection because God promises to watch over us (Psalm 12:2-3) and give us peace (Psalm 4:8). So much is out of our hands, but nothing is out of His hands.

Don't worry about what others think of you. That's a biggie in my family and in me as I grew up. I've learned to follow Jesus and leave the rest up to Him (Psalm 101:2-3). God will protect our reputation with those who matter when we serve Him (Isaiah 54:17).

Don't worry about things out of your control, for nothing is out of God's control (Philippians 4:8). All we can control is our attitudes and actions; everything else is in God's hands

Don't worry that you won't have what you need, because God says He will provide for our needs (Matthew 6:25-26). If we need it, we'll have it (Philippians 4:19). If we don't have it, God is saying we don't need it.

Don't worry about money. I can honestly say this hasn't been one of my biggest fears, but I know for many others it is. God has given me faith to trust Him for our financial needs, and He has always provided just enough when we needed it (not early but not late) (Matthew 6:20). Follow His guidelines for financial stewardship, and He'll take care of the rest.

Don't worry God can't handle something. Trust Him Who can and will handle everything (Proverbs 16:3; 3:5-6). God won't make a mistake because He can't make a mistake (Psalm 18:30).

Don't worry that God is punishing you. Fear is from the enemy, never God (1 John 4:18). He will never punish His children (Romans 8:1). Jesus took all our punishment on the cross (Romans 3:21-31).

Have you taken those things off your worry list? What is left? Probably not much, if anything at all. Let your mind rest on God's truth and let that reality control your emotions, not the other way around. (May 15, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

In Philippians 4:6-7 "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

Which of these are you most tempted to worry about?

Why do you worry about them?

What should you do instead?

BLOG 988: WHICH GOD IS THE REAL GOD?

We know that the God of the Bible exists and that He created everything (for proof go to <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/articles/>). But how do we know the God we worship, the God revealed in the Bible, is the only true God? How do we know He is the One who created the world? What about the claims of other religions that their god or gods are the true ones? How can we answer them?

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Bible tells us that there is only one God and He is the one revealed in the Bible (James 2:19; Isaiah 45:2-12; Deuteronomy 4:39; 6:4-5; Jeremiah 10:10; Psalm 83:18; John 17:3; Mark 12:32). For us who believe the Bible is God's Word, that is enough proof, but what do we tell those who don't see the Bible as the final authority from God? How do we show them that our God is the only true God?

PROOF FROM REASON Common sense tells us that there can be multiple supernatural powers, like angels and demons, but there can only be one God. By the very definition of the word "God," which means sovereign over everything, there can only be one God, because if there were two or more, then none would have final, total control. If there are two or more gods, then neither of them is really "God."

Therefore, the gods of all the world religions cannot all be God. Only one can be sovereign over all. No religion can claim to have more than one god, for if they do, they admit that none of them are sovereign over everything.

PROOF FROM COMPARISON We can agree there is only one true God. But how can we know which one is really God? Let's compare them to what we've seen about the God who exists and created everything. Which one meets the characteristics we've seen the true God has?

God has revealed Himself in nature and in His creation. He is the designer, the One in sovereign, total control of everything. He spoke, and it came into existence. He created a world of beauty, color, taste, sound and pleasure because He cares about us and wants us to enjoy His creation. He also wants us to know and have a relationship with Him, for He built into everyone the idea of a supreme being and a natural desire to find and know Him. Everyone worships something – that need in all mankind must have come from somewhere and that could have only been from God.

He also built into man a sense of justice, fairness and of punishment for wrongdoing. Animals don't have that, only human beings. These couldn't have started with us, but must have been put into man from the beginning by God. This also implies there will be a time when all injustice is removed, evil punished and everything will be fair and right. The true God must have these characteristics to impart this sense into us.

In addition, we are also created with a capacity to love, something else that is nowhere in the animal kingdom. The source of love must have been with the One who created us. An important characteristic of God, therefore, is love. God is not distant and removed, He is involved with us in a personal way.

It's also built into us to look for something more than what this life has to offer. There is an emptiness in all people that only God can fill. "Is this life all there is? There must be more, there must be something after this!" It's built into man to look for a life beyond this life. There must be a God to meet these needs.

So, to summarize, the God we see is a personal, sovereign God who created a world for man, the height of His creation, to enjoy. He wants to have a relationship with man. He has set absolutes of right and wrong. He is a just God who will punish evil but also a God of love who cares for His people. He has a wonderful future destiny for the people He created. Now let's compare that to the gods of different religions. (Mau 22, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

(In the next blog we'll look at so-called gods like Allah and others and see how they compare to the God of the Bible.)

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Does Satan ever tempt you to doubt if our God is the only true God? How should you counter this?

If someone would ask you how you can say that the God of the Bible is the only true God, what would you tell them? (Be prepared, there will be a time you will be asked.)

BLOG 989: PROOF THERE ARE NO OTHER GODS

In my last blog I gave proof from the Bible, reason and comparison with other "gods" that the God of the Bible is the only true God. Now we'll be more specific in our comparison between God and the other counterfeits. We can gain some insight into what God is like from His creation. We live in a world of color, smell, sounds (music), tastes and beauty. The God who created such a world must be characterized by those as well. He created man with the capacity for love, joy, laughter, desire for justice and an innate knowledge of right and wrong. Animals don't have these, and man didn't just develop them on his own. Their source is the God who created man. Thus, nature shows a sovereign God who cares about His creation, wants justice and is the source of love. How do the various "gods" compare to this description?

CHRISTIANITY follows a personal, sovereign God who created a world for man, the height of His creation, to enjoy. He wants to have a relationship with man. He has set absolutes of right and wrong. He is a just God who will punish evil but also a God of love who cares for His people. He has a wonderful future destiny for the people He created. Now let's compare that to the gods of different religions.

JUDAISM has the same God as revealed in the Bible, but they only use the Old Testament. They reject Jesus as the Messiah, yet Jesus clearly claims to be God. Therefore, they only accept part of the true God.

ISLAM worships Allah, but Allah is not the same as our God. He is entirely different. Allah was one of many gods worshiped by Muhammad's Quraysh tribe. Allah was one of the names for the moon god who was married to the sun goddess. The Muslim flag today features a crescent moon that still recognizes this fact. In fact, Abraham was called out of Ur (meaning "moon-city") in order to follow God's call (Genesis 11:27-32). Abraham had to leave the place of moon worship in order to follow God. The god Allah was an Arabian idol that sat in the Kabbah with many other idols until Mohammed made Allah his number one god.

Some say Allah and our God are the same, just with different names. However, they have entirely different characteristics. Our God is knowable and personal, while Allah is unknowable and impersonal. Our God cannot change or go against His nature. For example, our God cannot lie. Allah can do anything he wants with no limitations. He is capricious and changes his mind. He has no feelings towards man and doesn't personally enter human history. Allah provides no savior or intercessor. He shows no grace or mercy. Those who follow him are on their own and not assured of

his help or acceptance. He does not come near meeting the qualifications of being the true God of love, justice, care and truth.

HINDUISM has many, many gods. Anything and everything can be a god. Brahma is impersonal, formless, abstract and without attributes. These do not even come close to a sovereign God of love and justice. This could not be our loving, caring, sovereign creator God.

NEW AGE focuses on man himself as god, the belief being each person has a higher consciousness within themselves, a part of the god force is within all of us. This falls short of God being all-sovereign as revealed in His creation.

BUDDHISM does not believe in a personal god. Buddha never claimed to be god, but taught there is a god-like force in everyone.

CONFUCIANISM has little belief in the supernatural and so focuses on social and political structure in this life. It teaches there is an ethical principle of order which is impersonal, but guides all things.

So, we can see that only the God of the Bible is personal, sovereign, caring, just and loving. None of the other gods come anywhere near to those characteristics. Yet many people follow them because there is a counterfeit supernatural power behind them. That power is Satan, the one who wants to be worshipped instead of God. He puts his power behind these other religions and receives their worship (1 Corinthians 10:20-21; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Ephesians 2:1-3; Revelation 20:3). Make no mistake, there is power behind the other gods, but it is from Satan and his demons.

Since this world is under Satan's control, there is much opposition to God and His truth as revealed in the Bible. Satan is behind this world system (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 14:30; Matthew 4:8-9). When we as Christians tell others that our god is the only true God (John 14:6), there is often rejection and sometimes persecution. Most people will not mind us believing in our God if we let them believe in theirs. But when we tell them we are right and they are wrong, difficulties start. Darkness doesn't want light, for light removes darkness. (May 29, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

How does this comparison of our God with other "gods" help you better understand and appreciate the God you worship?

Spend some time thanking Him for Who He is and that you have the privilege of knowing Him.

BLOG 990: HEARTACHES OF BEING A PASTOR

I love pastors. I've been one my whole life and have been involved in training and mentoring pastors for many years. Pastors aren't perfect people, but they do share a commitment to serve Jesus and others. I love their dedication, their hard work and their sacrifice. Pastors struggle with the same sins and difficulties others face. We are all still works in progress. People often see pastors as a step above others, closer to God and more spiritual. They think we have a wonderful life because others look up to us and admire us. But we face all that others face. Sometimes pastors have to deal with extra heartache because of their role with people. Satan often tries to use this to discourage us or get us to quit. If he can stop the leader of a church, he can affect all the church does and everyone in it. This blog is to help you better understand some things we pastors go through so you can better pray for us and support us.

It makes pastors sad to see people not follow Jesus and when Christians turn to sin instead of living for Jesus. It often bothers us more than it bothers them, because we know that not living for Jesus only brings misery.

As pastors, we mourn when marriages struggle and fail. Sometimes we are unable to help and that makes us feel like we have failed them. We see the pain the people go through and how it affects their children, and we grieve for them.

It is very sad to see young people grow up and make decisions that lead to sin and trouble. We try to tell them how important it is to follow Jesus, but they think they know best and follow the world's ways instead. We feel bad for them and often think we should have been able to do more to lead them to follow Jesus.

When people sin and turn from Jesus, we need to carry out church discipline to warn them and others of the seriousness of their choices. If warning and talking with them doesn't change things, we must remove them from church membership. When I have had to do this, I felt like I failed as their pastor.

We think it is our fault if the church we are leading is struggling or not growing. When people leave our church, we blame ourselves. If we aren't bringing unbelievers to Jesus, we think we are doing something wrong or God isn't blessing us.

When people we know and love are sick, we pray for them, but if God doesn't heal them, we can think we let them down. If they die, we speak at their funerals, and our hearts are very heavy with grief. Doing a funeral for a person who isn't a Christian can be very hard because we don't have words of hope for the listeners and because we know they have gone to hell without Jesus.

Sometimes people gossip or complain about us. They criticize us to others. This is often inaccurate and unfair. Still, the talk hurts us, and it is difficult to explain the truth. When the talk is about our wives or children, it hurts even more.

As pastors, we have high expectations of ourselves, so when we make a mistake, forget to do something, have a sermon or teach a lesson that doesn't go as well as we thought it would, we put the blame on ourselves. Even when things are going well and the people are pleased with us, we often think we could be doing better.

Many pastors struggle with loneliness for themselves and their families. It's sometimes hard to be a pastor or his family and have friendships like others have.

Pastors and their families also struggle with not having enough finances to meet their needs. This can be a great burden on pastors. We also feel we don't have enough time for everything that needs to be done, and it is hard to not do everything we think needs doing.

In addition, we also struggle with sin in our own lives. We all have areas where we are weak, places where God is working to make us more like Jesus. Many times, we aren't satisfied with our prayer time and Bible study.

These are some of the burdens we carry as pastors. To my fellow pastors, know you aren't alone and that others struggle, too. Have fellowship with pastors near you so you can encourage and pray for each other. Remember that Jesus understands these things, for He went through them Himself (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). Claim His promises for He says He will always be with us (Joshua 1:9), won't give us anything too hard for us without His help (1 Corinthians 10:13) and that His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). (June 5, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 10:15 (Isaiah 52:7) How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

Ask God to make you more sensitive to the difficulties and struggles your pastor and his family face.

Pray for them specifically and daily.

Do all you can to thank, encourage and help them. You may feel unqualified, but any and all help is greatly appreciated.

BLOG 991: SATAN'S GAME PLAN

It's much easier to defeat an opponent if you know their game plan. That's true in sports, business and warfare. Those following Jesus find themselves in a war with an enemy who is trying to destroy them. Unfortunately, many Christians live in sin and defeat, but they don't have to. God has revealed Satan's game plan to alert us. He also gives us His power to have victory. Let's make sure we understand what that game plan is.

1 John 2:16 reveals weapons Satan uses to attack and defeat us: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." This is the same 3-pronged attack Satan used on Eve (Genesis 3:1-7) and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). He uses it on us today as well.

1. Cause a craving for physical gratification. People today are preoccupied with sex, drugs, alcohol, food or anything that brings physical pleasure. Eve was tempted to eat fruit which "was good for food" (Genesis 3:3b). Jesus was tempted with bread after fasting for 40 days (Matthew 4:3-4). God gives us good things to please us, but when we go outside God's intended purpose for these things, they become sin. What temptations for food, drink, sex, etc., are most effective against you?
2. Cause a desire to accumulate money and possessions. Satan tempted Eve by showing her what was "pleasing to the eye" (Genesis 3:6c). He showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and told Him He could have them all (Matthew 4:8-10). He still tempts us with the newest, biggest, flashiest possessions the world has to offer. He wants us to think we have to have them; we can't be happy until they are ours. But they are like drinking salt water. They don't bring satisfaction, just a desire for more. What "things" most tempt you? What do you feel you must have to be happy?
3. Cause boastful pride, focusing on themselves. The final weapon of Satan's used against Eve and Jesus and us is focus on status and significance. Satan tempted Eve by promising knowledge that would make her like God (Genesis 3:4-5). He tempted Jesus to avoid the cross by jumping off the highest point of the temple and having angels save Him in front of all the watching people so they would see how great he was (Matthew 4:5-7). Satan tempts us to elevate ourselves over others as well. We want to be noticed and recognized, seen as successful and important and have others impressed with us. We don't want to yield, submit, serve, apologize or humble ourselves. That's all pride. Where is your biggest battle with pride? Under what circumstances do you most often give in? What must you do to have victory?

It's not a question of "if" Satan will tempt you, but "when" and "how." It will happen. Knowing his game plan for defeating you gives you an advantage in being able to block his attacks. (June 12, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 John 2:14-15 I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

Take a moment to write down the temptations to which you are most vulnerable. Under each write what you need to do to block the attack.

BLOG 992: LIES ABOUT SCRIPTURE

Fact number one: We need to feed on God's word to grow spiritually. There is no other way to become mature in our faith except by reading and studying the Bible.

Fact number two: Satan does not want us to grow spiritually, so he will do anything he can to keep us from God's word. One of the main ways he does that is through feeding us lies about the Bible. Satan is a liar, and everything he says is to deceive (John 8:44). We are not to be ignorant of his tricks and traps (2 Corinthians 2:11). Be careful to avoid the lies he will feed you about God's word.

Lie number one: "You already know what the Bible says, so you don't need to spend time reading it." If we are busy, lazy or don't want to be convicted by God's word, this lie provides a great excuse to avoid it. We can grab hold of this lie as an excuse to not spend time with God in the Bible. The truth is none of us know God's word as well as we could or should. There is always more to learn. Even reading parts we know well bring fresh encouragement and spiritual strength. There's always more to be gained by reading the Bible.

Lie number two: "The Bible is too hard to understand, so don't bother trying to study it. Let the preachers do that." The truth is that anyone can read the Bible and gain from it. Even a child. There were times in history when Christians were not allowed to own a copy of the Bible. Now we all have many in our homes. That's a great privilege. But it doesn't do us any good in our homes unless we have it in our heads and hearts. You don't have to be a Bible scholar or know Greek or Hebrew to know what it says. Any believer can read it, and God's Spirit will teach and apply God's truth to us.

Lie number three: "The translators got it all wrong, so don't bother reading it." While there can be controversy about how some things should be translated in the Bible, there is no controversy over the basic truths that it contains. There can be various ways of conveying a truth from one language to another. But that doesn't mean a particular translator is wrong. It just means that it can be difficult for one language to convey exactly what another is saying. That doesn't mean any one translation is incorrect, though.

Lie number four: "The Bible is full of contradictions, so you can't trust what it says." There are no contradictions in Scripture regarding any doctrine or truth of consequence. There are places where one writer will say 100 people were killed and another will say it was a thousand. Scholars can give various explanations for this. But this does not mean the Bible is untrustworthy. Actually, it means just the opposite. If the Bible were a man-made book, those differences would have been corrected long ago instead of continuing to be copied and passed on. The fact that they're still there shows that the Bible is brought to us in exactly the same way as it was written.

Lie number five: "You're too busy now. You can read it later when you have more time. It's a great book to study, just don't do it now." This, too, is a great excuse for those who are busy, lazy, or are living in disobedience to the Bible.

Studying God's Word takes effort and commitment, but the benefits are well worth it. It's easy to find justification to not do it, and Satan's lies are available for anyone looking for an excuse. He knows that Scripture brings victory over his forces and over sin in our lives, so it stands to reason he will do all he can to keep us from the Bible. How successful is his plan with you? (June 19, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

How much do you study your Bible? What reasons do you give for not spending more time reading it?

BLOG 993: INDIA UPDATE: THE FIRST TWO CONFERENCES

Friday, June 16th -Saturday, June 17th

Rick and I are here sitting at Newark International Airport excitedly awaiting our flight to India. We look forward to serving the Lord Jesus Christ through ministering to the pastors in India. Lord willing, we will be in India in around 24 hours.

After a 14-hour flight, we sit waiting at the Mumbai Airport for our transfer flight to Hyderabad. The Lord Jesus Christ is good! We've made it safely thus far! We look forward to fellowshiping with the brethren in Hyderabad and the surrounding areas.

Sunday, June 18th We arrived at our hotel the night before at around midnight. After a good night's rest and a breakfast, we headed to Pastor Moses' church for fellowship. It was good to meet the rest of the brethren there, including the rest of Pastor Moses' family. They had purchased their church building just a year ago and so it was neat to get a chance to see it in-person.

After corporate worship, led by some of the church members there, I (Scott) had the opportunity to perform a special song ("He Is Exalted") and then share an exhortation from Hebrews 4:14-16. Following that, Rick shared a teaching based on texts from Job and Hebrews 12:3-11, talking about how our Father God is the best Father, so good to us that He even sent His only Son Jesus the Christ to die for our sins on the cross. Also, Rick talked about how the Father sometimes chastens us but that is because we are His children and that He truly does love us!

Following the church service, we enjoyed a fresh-made lunch from Pastor Moses' wife Krupa. We then took an approximately 7-8 hour drive to where our hotel would be for the majority of our trip, near the city of Tatipaka.

Monday, June 19th The night before we arrived at a fairly late hour at our hotel, having gotten slightly lost along the way. But the Lord helped us find our destination! We had a late-night meal and then went to bed right afterwards.

The following morning, following breakfast and other preparations, we had only a 30-minute drive to our first conference location at Delta Mission Church (praise the Lord!) Once we arrived, we were warmly greeted by the pastors and church members there. Almost right away, the conference was underway, filled with singing from several people, many times of prayer, and the conference teachings based on the Scriptures and materials from CTO.

The teachings were warmly received (that had nothing to do with the warm temperature of the day). The pastors were very thankful for this learning opportunity! In one of the teachings on "What God Expects of Churches", during a section that uses the pictures of frogs and lizards, connecting to the reality that pastors need to work hard to evangelize, a frog had climbed right up front to be a real-life model of Rick's point. The picture of that is included below.

At the conclusion of the teachings, we prayed for the various pastors there and for their churches. Then, following that, each registered person in attendance received a stack of CTO books for use in their further study of the Scriptures and things related to being a pastor. Many pictures were taken, and everyone was thankful for the blessings that they received!

Tomorrow may be like today regarding what we will be doing, yet in another location. There could certainly be unexpected events that only the Lord knows. Thank you for your continued support of the Body of Christ through CTO!

Tuesday, June 20th Today we held a conference at Bethany GDM (Godavari Delta Mission) in Ambajipeta. Right away, as we were entering the church building, we were greeted by the sound of

one of the men singing. All throughout each of the conferences there has been a lot of Christian worship songs with beautiful Indian melodies. Many of the pastors come prepared with a song to sing to praise the Lord Jesus Christ!

The pastors at each conference come from a bit of a distance away. Some already have a degree in ministry/pastoring yet wanted to attend the conference because they were hungry to learn even more than what they've already learned from Bible college. The pastors have been very thankful and appreciative of the conferences and for the CTO materials that they've received. (Wednesday, June 21, Andhra Pradesh, India)

-Scott Troxell and Rick Reilley

BLOG 994: INDIA UPDATE: CONFERENCES CONTINUE

Wednesday, June 21st As we left the hotel today for the conference location, one of the employees of the hotel shared with Pastor Moses that he had a flat tire. Unfortunately, there was a nail in it. Fortunately, there was a tire repair place nearby that did the repair in approximately five minutes. Then we were on our way!

Today's conference was held at Sharon Prayer Church in Potukurru. Several things followed the same conference routines as the previous days, but there were a few differences as well. First off, we had a dog walk right into the church, down the aisle, and take his place underneath our seats. I found out later that it had been the pastor's dog, which explained how comfortable he was with walking around the church. In addition, we also had a good view of a lizard on a tree (though it did NOT come into the church building like the dog).

Secondly, all throughout the conference the electricity kept on turning off then on again. Thankfully, when it did go out, it usually came back on again 5-10 minutes later. It was refreshing to feel the coolness of the ceiling fans again!

Thirdly, there were two little twin girls that Pastor Rick had met along with their mother. Their father had died, and the pastor of the church had taken the two girls in to live with him and his family since their mother needed assistance to support them. Pastor Rick had opportunity to prayer for them and to encourage them. Please pray for these girls, their mother, as well as the pastor of Sharon church and his family helping with these girls.

In one of the sessions, the pastors are being taught about what the Bible expects of pastors as they do ministry. Pastor Rick shared that "...being a pastor is never easy." There are frequent hardships that come with being in that God-given position, yet the Lord Jesus gives greater grace! Through Pastor Moses, Pastor Rick, Pastor Jerry, and others from CTO, we are feeding pastors His Word so they can better feed their sheep His Word and so that they can better do ministry according to the spiritual gifts He has given all of them. Praise the Lord!

Thursday, June 22nd As we drove to today's church conference location, we were slowed down by the entourage of a famous Bolly wood actor who is running for a political office in Andhra Pradesh. There were many signs all around that referred to him as the "Boss". In the town center, scaffolding and speakers were being set up for him to speak to the folks later in the day. We had to stop closer to the location of the church due to a traffic jam at the big convention center where he would also be speaking. We had a later start to the conference because of the commotion caused by the visiting actor/politician. Thankfully, we didn't start too late!

A frequent comment from the pastors over the course of the conferences so far is that they have never heard teaching like that before. It has been a blessing to see them having their eyes further opened to seeing Christ Jesus throughout the Scriptures and learning how to better pastor their

church from the Scriptures. This is all provided by the grace of God and through prayer and support from folks like yourselves. Thank you for supporting the ministry of God through CTO.

A key point from one of the teachings from today was about the church in Antioch. At the church in Antioch, the saints loved and served each other, showing the grace of God to one another and to unbelievers. The pastors were asked if their church members acted in love and grace towards each other as well. Do you and your church do the same, demonstrating the love and grace of God? One of the quotes from the teachings that challenged both the pastors and, I hope, challenges you too is that “all Christians are required to share their faith, not just their pastors”. We encourage you to follow the Lord, demonstrating the love and grace of God, and to be bold in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.

Following an unexpected trip to the auto repair shop due to an unexpected dip in the driveway of the church cracking the car’s front bumper [pictures will be included later], we visited at the home of one of the pastors that has been helping to lead the conferences so far. [On our way there, I had my first ever ride on the back of a motorcycle!] He and his family served us wonderful foods and were honorable hosts. Afterwards, we visited their church in a local village near their home. The room was packed! The evening was filled with singing, prayer, encouragements, and a teaching from Pastor Rick on the account of the Lord Jesus Christ calming the wind and the waves, thus showing that He is God! He was with the disciples in that windstorm, and He is with us in the storms of life. (Friday, June 23, Andhra Pradesh, India)

-Scott Troxell and Rick Reilley

BLOG 995: INDIA UPDATE: ONE WEEK FINISHED

Friday, June 23rd We packed up our things following breakfast, checked out of the hotel, and got into the car to head towards our next conference destination, located in the city of Kakinada. We will be staying in a hotel in this city as well. There was on and off downpours, some with thunder and lightning. Thankfully, no major flooding and the rains were done by the time that we got to Kakinada.

The name of the church today is God’s Prayer Ministry (DPM). One could tell that this church was a bit nicer than the others we’ve visited so far. For example, they had air conditioning (praise the Lord!)

😊 Certainly, there is more wealth in the cities than in the villages, but there were still those who, when asked how many times a day that they eat, had answered that they eat only one time. I’m glad that we can minister to both the poor and the wealthy.

As I looked around the church, I noticed the bright, vibrant colors of the flowers used for decorations, the paints used for the walls, the coverings for seats near the pulpit area, even the colors used to paint the exterior walls of the church. The use of bright colors matches the vibrant and colorful people of India.

One part of a teaching that stood out to me today was on spiritual warfare. Pastor Rick spoke from Mark 5, the passage about the Gadarene Demonic. Rick shared that “being a pastor isn’t easy because of Satan’s attacks”. He shared that, instead of going after each individual church member, demons go after their pastor. If he fails, then they all can fail. This topic is very applicable to the brethren in India, especially with explicit demon worship in the form of worshipping idols happening all around them. Rick encouraged the brethren today by reminding them that we have power in Jesus’ name over demons. He also shared that demons, who are full of hate, can’t understand love. They get driven out by the Scriptures, centered in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we learn them and believe them in faith. Their influence is kept away when we continue in that Truth and Love for one another.

We have idolatry and demon worship in America as well, though it appears differently than it does in India. Our response should be the same, learn the Lord Jesus Christ by learning His Word, believing it, and obeying it, repenting from any thinking that goes against Christ. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." (1st John 4:4)

Saturday, June 24th Today we visited New Life Pentecost Church in the village of Gorripudi, within the district of the city Kakinada. The pastor shared that the building was a year into construction. The pictures show some of the scaffolding still visible as the project continues. There is only a partial backwall...open concept? In India, since the weather is warm most of the time, people can do okay without having four walls to some of their buildings.

As we've been visiting each church, we are treated well and shown great honor. Indian society functions very much by an honor and shame culture. One desires to bring honor to their family by how they live, how they speak, etc. Each church we visit greets us with handshakes saying 'blessings' or 'praise the Lord', trying their best to greet us in English though that may be two of the few phrases that they know in English. They have served us food and drink almost right away as we get there. It would be a shame if we refused. As a result, we might return home from India having gained a few pounds (My wife said that she thought I would lose some weight!)

This culture of honor and shame affects life as a Christian convert in India. If one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, leaves Hinduism/Buddhism/Islam/etc., and follows Christ, their unbelieving family members are shamed. Frequently, these family members respond by kicking them out of their homes, hurting them, causing them to lose their jobs, or worse. This can be the cost of following Jesus Christ in this type of culture.

Reader, though you may not live in an honor/shame culture, the question remains...would you be willing to follow the Lord Jesus Christ even if you were under the same threats? I am reminded of the words found in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Our God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is worthy of this! Let's follow Him.

Sunday, June 25th Following breakfast, we left our hotel and came to the church, called Carmel Prayer House. This is the church of the pastor who has been our host the past few days at other area churches in the Kakinada area.

Every church that we've been able to visit during an evening service or a Sunday morning has been full of children. The children are very much a part of leading the musical portion of worship. They lead the singing. They play the drums. They play the piano. The adults are the ones that sing along with them. There is a clear recognition that the children are equally a part of the church and not just ones to be sitting idly by while the adults do all the aspects of worship and ministry. As the worship leader at New Life of Shillington, this motivates me to really encourage the youth of our church to be more active in doing ministry. Even if it's not done perfectly, they can be taught by the adults the biblical way of doing ministry, following our examples of service, and operating in our gifts to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Following church, the pastor of the church rode with us to the Bay of Bengal, which is only a few miles from the church building. The Bay of Bengal had a nice beach. There were lots of food vendors. We got to eat some ice cream (I got a butterscotch cone!) There were many cargo ships off in the distance. Kakinada is one of the major port cities of Andhra Pradesh.

Following this, we rode to some of the older churches in Andhra Pradesh. One was Anglican, another was Catholic, another was Baptist. We stopped by the Baptist church to take some pictures. This is the oldest Baptist church in Andhra Pradesh. We were then asked to come inside and attend their service. Following the sermon, Pastor Rick was asked to come to the front to share a word of exhortation. He spoke regarding the Lord's "good confession" before Pilate, where He clearly states

that He is the Christ the Son of God. He also shared a bit from Philippians 2:5-13. The main exhortations were for us to boldly proclaim the good confession, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that we should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling because, though we may experience loss, hardship, and persecution due to our confessing Jesus Christ as Lord, He is worthy! He is our Life!

Following the service, we were invited to share some coffee and talk with the man that shared the main sermon. We came to find out that he had attended one of the CTO conferences back in 2017. He shared that he still has the books by Dr. Jerry Schroyer in his personal study library. What a neat connection that was!

Once finished there, we took a brief stop at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Kakinada. It was established in 1892. Pastor Moses shared that the numbers of those attending this seminary have declined in more recent years.

Before returning to our hotel, we stopped by the house of the pastor from Carmel Prayer House. They were hospitable and kind hosts. The food was delicious!

Now we hope to rest until tomorrow (Monday) when we continue with the next pastor's conference! It is a busy time for us all, but the Lord is working in and through us to accomplish His will. May His great Name be magnified forever! (Monday, June 26, Andhra Pradesh, India)

-Scott Troxell and Rick Reilley

BLOG 996: INDIA UPDATE: FINAL CONFERENCES

Monday, June 26th We left at what we thought was a good time to arrive on time at today's conference location. Little did we know that it would be a longer trip than an hour, being 2-3 hours. We were traveling into a more rural area, a tribal village area. We encountered miles of roads with deep potholes even worse than the one's in Pennsylvania. One pothole was around 6 inches or more deep and was as wide as the road, filled with water as well. The roads were narrow to begin with and it was essentially a single lane road divided into two. Now with potholes, it made travel even worse! Though the trip took around twice as long as expected, the Lord Jesus Christ provided safe travel to our conference location.

The conference itself went well, though we did have a later start. Everyone was glad that we were there. They enjoyed the teachings and were encouraged that we came. The pastor of the church asked us to eat lunch in his home. It was a very modest home, but I think that it represents the typical home in an Indian village, especially in a more rural area.

Praise the Lord that the Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed even in the more remote parts of the world! Please pray for these pastors that have greater physical needs in addition to spiritual needs. Some don't even have a source of water except the local stream. Some don't even have a bathroom, such as the pastor of the church we went to today. Also, please pray for Pastor Moses that the Lord would provide a vehicle for driving in such rough terrain. His little car was a real

champ, but a vehicle that is a bit higher above the ground would be more suitable for roads of this type.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support!

Tuesday, June 27th Today's conference location was much closer yesterday, maybe being around a 30-minute drive on much nicer roads. We had first met the pastor hosting the conference at the conference the day before when he was there helping out.

I appreciate seeing numerous pastors working together to help host the other visiting pastors. It is a blessing to see pastors from different churches working together for the glory of God. Pastors of large and small churches, urban or rural, wealthy or poor, even different denominations, all working together as the singular Body of Christ Jesus for His glory.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1)

Wednesday, June 28th Last night at supper, Pastor Moses and I learned that one of the servers was a Christian. She attends a church called Impact Ministries. She shared that she is one of the singers on her church’s praise team. She showed us a few videos of her singing with her church’s praise team...very nice singing voice! She asked for prayer to grow in her abilities as a singer at her church.

Today, we traveled about an hour and a half to today’s conference. During lunch, we got to speak with a young pastor named Moses. His father was one of the pastors helping to coordinate the past few conferences. Moses has already completed his schooling and has received his Master of Divinity. He currently is an assistant pastor at his church, but he hopes one day to start a Bible college in Kakinada, likely in conjunction with his church. He shared that there are already a few college age students interested in attending classes. Please pray for young Pastor Moses, that the Lord’s will would be done in his life, particularly regarding starting a Bible college.

It’s bittersweet to think that we’ll only be able to serve at one more conference tomorrow and then we’ll head back home to America. Praise the Lord for the works He has done and will be doing in India. Please continue to pray for these pastors, their churches, Pastor Moses, Dr. Schmoyer, and the ministry of CTO. There is still much work to be done. (Thursday, June 29, Andhra Pradesh, India)

-Scott Troxell and Rick Reilley

BLOG 997: INDIA UPDATE: FINAL CONFERENCE AND BACK HOME

Thursday, June 29th Following yesterday’s conference, we traveled to Vijayawada and settled into our hotel. The following day, we ate a quick breakfast and headed out to the location of our final conference, Bethel Prayer Hall, near Gosala. The conference today will be more jam-packed as Rick tries to fit the same teachings into a shorter time-frame (9am-1pm).

On our way to today’s location, we noticed a lot of Muslims dressed in their formal attire. Pastor Moses shared that today was a holiday in Islam, called Eid ul Adha. This holiday commemorates Abraham’s faithfulness to God, for being willing to offer His son Isaac, and God’s faithfulness in providing a substitute for Isaac. They celebrate by sacrificing many goats, cattle, chickens, etc. and then having a feast.

What a sad reality that Muslims can be so close to seeing the reality of Christ Jesus, yet be so far off and twisted in their understanding of the true God of the Scriptures, as opposed to the demon they call Allah! Please pray for the pastors to have boldness in sharing the gospel to all people, including the Hindu and Muslim.

Right now, we are on our way back to Hyderabad to stay overnight in a hotel. Tomorrow morning, we will board our flight to Delhi and then from there back to the U.S. Soon our time in India will be done. Thank you for your continued prayers before, during, and following our trip.

Friday, June 30th – Saturday, July 1st We woke-up early this morning, packed up our things, and met Pastor Moses in the hotel lobby. After some brief conversation, he drove us to the airport at Hyderabad. Once at the airport, Pastor Moses, Rick, and I said our goodbyes, then Rick and I headed into the airport.

Praise the Lord our flight to Delhi went smoothly! We had a long layover in Delhi scheduled, about 14 hours. The plan was to sit in the airport the whole time, but, after following some unclear directions from the airport staff, we ended up outside the airport. Unfortunately, once outside the airport, we were not allowed to go back in, at least not for another eight hours, closer to the time of our flight. (At least, this is what the military police told us, after we had tried to get them to let us back in, but they had guns, so we decided it best to leave it alone.) Rick and I decided to get a taxi and go somewhere else for eight , preferably some place that had food and air-conditioning. We were recommended to go to a place called Worldmark by one of the airport workers. At first, we thought he said Walmart, and were surprised to find out that it was instead a fancy shopping center.

There were only a few stores there but there were also very many restaurants and a mall-type food court. At one point, it felt like we were back in America, hearing country music playing over the loudspeakers...but we were still in India! The American influence in Delhi was quite clear, even down to the amount of wealth. Even now, I am typing this journal entry while sitting in a Starbucks, seeing people dressed the same as in America but speaking another language (likely Hindi). It's amazing to think that, for all the wealth that we were seeing, not too far away there are many people who are very, very poor. Both the rich and poor need to know about Jesus Christ!

Lord willing, we'll make it back to the Delhi airport, get on our plane for our 14-hour flight to Newark, New Jersey, and eventually be back home in the Reading area sometime later Saturday morning, July 1st. I think I'll do one more journal entry to summarize our two weeks in India as well as share some final thoughts on the ministry that was accomplished.

Final Thoughts from Scott I have learned several things about the Lord Jesus Christ, about my role in His Body, and about India as well. I'll talk about India first.

India Thoughts Coming to India, I expected to see poor people, Hindu idols, lots of mosquitos, and hot weather. I was correct about some of those expectations, but I am surprised at the wealth of India. Rick said that even since his last time in India the growth in wealth is apparent. I learned that, in the parts of India where we stayed and visited, there must not have been that many white people. Almost everywhere we went, people looked at us like we were movie stars and wanted to take "photos" or "selfies" with us. This was especially noticeable at the conferences that were in the poorer areas since it was possible that we were the first white people they had ever seen. Regardless, they were very appreciative of the teachings at each conference, and many had requested to hear more teachings in the future. There definitely is a need for more consistent biblical teaching to be made available to these pastors and their congregations.

Lord Jesus Christ Thoughts Regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, the teaching from Mark 5 on the Gadarene demoniac really affected me as I was reminded once again of the extreme devotion of the Lord Jesus Christ. This isn't necessarily a new thing, but rather a new freshness, living waters that come from Him that are never stale or stagnant. When Rick shared about how the Lord was teaching His disciples that He is the "Lord of the Spirit World" by driving the Legion of demons from the demon-possessed man, he said that the Lord finished his teaching on demons there. We aren't told where the demons went after the swine died by running off the cliff. The Lord turned His focus to the man sitting in his right mind and spoke with him. The lesson is for us to focus on the people for whom the Lord died, caring for them, loving them, ministering to them the love of Christ in whatever ways we can. The Scriptures don't say too much about the spirit world of angels and demons. The Lord's emphasis wasn't here but rather on loving people, being devoted to people and to God.

My Role in the Body of Christ Thoughts Hearing the same teachings almost every day, at first, seemed like I may end up zoning out after hearing them so many times. But instead, I learned new things each time. Sometimes the focus was on how I should treat my wife and my children. Sometimes the focus was on better ways to study the Scriptures. Sometimes the focus was on how

Jesus Christ is the focus of the whole Bible. As a husband and father, I've been challenged to re-evaluate how I am leading my family in the Lord Jesus Christ. Am I loving my wife the way the Lord Jesus Christ loves the Church? Am I leading my children to learn to love the Lord Jesus Christ? I am encouraged to spend more time reading the Bible each day, at least as many times as I eat, but surely even more. Jesus Christ is the True Bread from Heaven. He is my Life. We should seek to know Him more often than we eat our physical food (though that's important too). I've been encouraged to really think about the question "What did the original writer mean for the original reader to understand from what was written in the Scriptures?" regarding interpretation and eventual application of the Scriptures.

Regarding the future of ministry in India, I don't know the Lord's specific will, but there are a lot of opportunities for ministry with CTO as well as in other ways. My wish is that the poorer villages could have their physical needs met, like buildings and water but even more so to get more training for the pastors to better minister to the members of their churches. I wish that more frequent training could occur in other topics centered in the Lord Jesus Christ that would be applicable to ministry and growth in Him. Please pray for us to have wisdom in discerning the Lord's will for future endeavors in India! Thank you for your continued prayers for us (Rick and I), Pastor Moses, Jerry, Nancy, CTO, and for the pastors that we have been able to minister to these past two weeks.

Grace and peace in Christ, Scott Troxell

Final Thoughts From Pastor Rick Grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is my first addition to the journal entries Scott has kept. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to minister to many pastors throughout India during the last two weeks. I also thank the Father to have participated in worship dear brothers and sisters. Pastor Moses was a soldier for Christ. He battled illness, fatigue, and remained faithful to the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

During my time here, my thoughts often centered on an aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ, His willingness to work with imperfect men to accomplish His will. I have often thought that His preference to include humans in His body and work results in a most inefficient way to fulfill His will. How often do we delay His goodness? How often to require an alternate, at least to us, way He must minister? Yet, indeed, He has chosen to work for, in, and through men to accomplish His will. He has allowed us the possibility of obedient service and disobedience. We offer a mixture of His transformative work and our own opinions. Yet, somehow, He accomplishes His will. I praise Him for such wisdom. The Lord Jesus Christ is praiseworthy. He is perfect and good in all He does. I humbly thank Him to see some of His work in India. I thank you, reader, for both the prayers and financial help to make this ministry work. (Saturday, July 1, Flying home from India)

-Pastor Rick Reilley

BLOG 998: IS IT OK TO PRAY FOR MORE MONEY? (CTO 2023 Update)

Do you ever pray to have more money than God is providing? What percent of Christians do you think do so? How many people feel they have enough money and don't desire anymore? God tells us to bring our needs to Him. Yet He has also promised to meet our needs (not wants) so should we just be content and live with what He gives us? Is it ever right to pray for more, or should we be make do with what we have? That's the dilemma I've been facing with CTO. I'll update you about what is happening.

The first 6 months of 2023 have been very fruitful for CTO and our ministry to pastors in India and elsewhere. The year started badly with us having to cancel our India trip because of health reasons, but things improved from there. We are almost done translating all the books into Hindi and Spanish. We are in process of translating and printing them in Swahili (Africa, \$1,700) and Odia (northern

India, \$500) also. Those costs have been paid and the books are being used to training pastors and Christians in those locations.

LifeWay continues to use the books for the pastors' training curriculum. They pay all expenses as part of their ministry outreach. Pastor Moses and CTO are involved in helping a dozen new wells be dug during the first half of 2023. Finances are provided by another ministry, but we are privileged to help in other ways.

Our web site is an excellent resource for pastors everywhere. We need to move it to a new host but that requires money to pay someone who has the knowledge to do the technical work. Pray we would find the right person.

I want to thank you for your prayers and gifts to support our recent work training Indian pastors. Pastor Rick Reilly and Scott Troxell returned from leading 10 very successful conferences. 800 men and 160 women attended. The pastors expressed great appreciation for the teaching, books, fellowship, worship, food and encouragement they received. We have been praying for years for someone else to go to India and lead conferences and we thank God for providing them. I hope they, and possibly others, will be able to continue going. I want and need to train someone to take over my role in this ministry for when I am no longer able to carry the load, so please keep praying for that need as well.

Our ministry is expanding, but extra ministry means extra costs. We anticipate the conferences I will lead January 11 to 28, 2024, to cost about \$16,000 to \$18,000 (we already have our plane tickets bought). The approximate cost per pastor at our conferences is about \$18 per person plus 16 books which is another \$18 per person. So, it is about \$36 per person – still a great bargain for all they receive and much cheaper than pastor's conferences in the US or elsewhere.

We also have ongoing expenses like helping support 25 pastors who work with us as well as reprinting books, which has gotten to be a big expense. We are out of 3 of our most important books. Reprinting two of them costs \$5,000 each. A third book, Bible Overview, would cost \$10,000 because of its large size. It doesn't look like we will reprint this book any time soon. To finish the newest book, Paul's Advice to Pastors, will be another \$1,500. So, for books we need \$11,500 which doesn't include Bible Overview. We have enough money for our conferences in January or to reprint books, but not for both. Yet both conferences and books are essential to our ministry.

I know God has promised to provide the finances for all He wants us to do. That is true in my own life with my time, finances and health. That is also true for CTO. If He wants it done He will provide. But if He doesn't provide, does that mean He doesn't want us to do it, or He wants us to ask Him for more money so we have what we feel we need? I think, in this case, He wants us to pray for enough finances to cover both conferences and books. So please pray that nothing would hinder the money He wants provided from being given (we know Satan does not want these things to happen). That means more funds are needed in the next few months to pay for the conferences. Also, pray I know how to best use the resources He does provide.

I don't think there is anyone-size-fits-all answer to my question about living within our resources or asking God for more. We must pray and ask God for wisdom and to show if He wants us to make do with what we have or if He wants us to ask Him for more so we can see His provision. So before you ask for more money, or assume you shouldn't ask, pray for Him to guide you and show you if you should be content or if there is a legitimate need for more. (July 10, 2024 Buffalo, MN)

James 4:2-3 You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Pray for me to know God's plan and will for our ministry to pastors in India and elsewhere.

Pray for yourself to know God's plan for you and your family in all you do today and in the future.

BLOG 999: CAN A PRACTICING HOMOSEXUAL BE A CHRISTIAN?

As Christians, we know we are not to judge others. But we are often called upon to make evaluations about situations around us. We have to know God's Word and how to accurately apply it today. But we must do it with great humility, recognizing all sin is sin, and our sin is no less than theirs in God's sight.

Still, God clearly sets standards in His Word and we must know and follow them. Homosexuality is sin (Leviticus 18:22;20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:26-32). However, the issue everyone faces when coming to Jesus for salvation is admitting he is a sinner and needs Jesus. No one understands all their sins or the depth of them. We don't have to recognize and promise to turn from every sin before coming to Jesus. We come knowing we can't overcome sin and we need His forgiveness and help. In fact, quite often we don't recognize the depth of our sin and depravity until after we come to Jesus and start growing in Him. Recognizing homosexuality is sin and turning from it is NOT a requirement before salvation. All sin is sin, none is worse than other sin.

So yes, a homosexual can turn to Jesus and accept His free gift of salvation. So can a murderer or a gossip or someone who lusts or loses their temper. That doesn't stop anyone from coming to Christ. Sometimes before salvation God may convict a person of their sin and their need to be willing to give it up, but the focus in salvation is on Jesus' free gift, not on ourself or our sin.

There will be a time after salvation when each one who comes to Him, realizes the depth of their sin and the necessity of turning from it. That is true of sexual sin as well. It is also true of murder or lust of anger or whatever. Sometimes God removes the sinful desire immediately, other times it gradually fades, but in some cases, there can be a lifelong struggle with it. The problem comes when a person stops struggling and just lives a lifestyle of sin, be it homosexuality, murder, lust or anger. That's where the waters get cloudy very quickly.

I'm not going to comment on the person who claims to come to Christ but then chooses to remain in their sin (whatever the sin). Did they never truly believe (like the seed on rocky soil, Matthew 13:20)? Are they a Christian but a carnal one (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)? I don't think there is any simple, one-answer-fits-all solution. Only God knows the real truth in those cases, and we know He is merciful and loving, but also holy and just. We leave those cases with Him. Pray that if they haven't really come to Jesus they will, or that if they have, they will admit their sin and turn from it.

Takeaways from this: 1) we can't think our sin is somehow 'better' than someone else's sin, 2) we are only where we are because of God's grace and mercy ("There but for the grace of God go I."), and 3) when Jesus was on earth, He left the "pretty-good" people and reached out to those in gross immorality and sin. He welcomed them and loved them because He saw the person behind the sin, and so must we. (July 17, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved through faith - and this is not from yourself. It is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.

Do you know anyone living a homosexual or immoral lifestyle? If not, ask Jesus to help you seek them out as He did so you can show them His love.

How are you doing at being able to love the person but not their sin? Can you separate the two? We see ourselves as more than just the sum of our sins, we must learn to see others that way as well.

BLOG 1000: DOES THE VIRGIN BIRTH REALLY MATTER?

Many today consider the virgin birth of Jesus an unimportant doctrine. It is perhaps the most attacked and disbelieved doctrine about Him, even by professing Christians. Yet it is a very important truth. In order for Jesus to be Savior of the world, He had to be a man to represent us, God because no one who was only man could pay for the sins of the whole world, and sinless because if He was guilty of sin, He wouldn't be able to pay for our sin. The virgin birth is necessary for all of these to be true. Jesus was born of Mary and thus human to take our place, conceived by the Holy Spirit so He was God and could pay the price for all our sin, and born of a virgin so that He did not inherit man's sin nature and He would be sinless.

If the virgin birth is not true, this means Mary was pregnant before marriage and should have been stoned, and Jesus was wrong about His parentage when He said God was His Father. He would have been the illegitimate child of a sinful union of a Jewish peasant girl and an unknown man. He wouldn't have been God and man, nor could He have been our sinless Savior. There would be no salvation, no eternal life with God, no Trinity and no future for us. Denying the virgin birth is a denial of Jesus as God the Messiah. Without the virgin birth, Christianity collapses and becomes just another collection of ancient sayings by a long-dead teacher. How can we prove the virgin birth really happened?

PROOF FROM REASON Satan knew of this prophecy, so he inspired other religions to counterfeit it. The prophecy is first recorded in the Bible in Isaiah 7:14, but was part of God's plan from the beginning. God impregnating woman later became a part of Roman and Greek mythology. Satan only counterfeits important truths about God. His purpose is to take away from God's glory and make it seem like what God has planned is nothing new or special. We know the mythical stories of Rome and Greece are not true. Many lump the story of Jesus being virgin born with them in order to discredit it.

However, since it was a part of pagan religion, the Jews would have nothing to do with it, for the idea of Jesus being virgin born would be especially disgusting to the Jews he was trying to convince. It is not anything someone then would say if he wanted others to believe Jesus was God and the Messiah. If they did make it up, would they have been willing to give up their lives defending what they knew was a lie?

Also, the virgin birth was widely accepted in the earliest years of the church. Mary and her other children were still alive. People could ask them to find out the truth. If it wasn't true, they would have denied it, and that would have spread everywhere. But nothing like that ever happened.

For God, the virgin birth is no problem at all. As creator and sustainer of all things He could easily create a fetus in a woman without a male seed to show that He was the Father and this was His son. If God can't do something like that, then He really isn't God!

PROOF FROM HISTORY The virgin birth of Jesus was believed and accepted by all from the very beginning. It was included in the Apostles' Creed, written in the late AD 300's. It says He was "conceived by the Holy Spirit" and "born of the Virgin Mary." Clearly it is something important to the early church.

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The virgin birth of the Messiah was prophesied in Isaiah 7:14. The word "virgin" can mean "young woman" as well, but the Jews took it to mean virgin as we would define it today. When Jewish scholars translated the Septuagint, they used the Greek work that can only mean virgin, not the word for a young woman. Clearly the Jews saw this prophecy as applying to a virgin. Also, Genesis 3:15 purposely leaves out any mention of union with a man when reference is made to the Messiah coming from the "seed of the woman."

Matthew, a well-educated former Roman tax collector, and Luke, a professional doctor, are the two who record the story of the virgin birth (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-37). The best educated

disciple would be very sure this was true before he wrote such a thing. And a doctor, Luke, definitely would want to be sure of this medical fact. Paul, in Philippians 2:6-8, points out that Jesus was God who took on human nature and was made in human likeness. He was still man, but not to the extent of being guilty of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12-21).

So, we see reason, history and the Bible all verify the truth of the virgin birth. It may not seem like it really matters, but it is of the utmost importance to our faith. Do you believe it? (July 24, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Isaiah 7:14 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him 'Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')."

Matthew 1:18, 22 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ... 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" —which means, "God with us."

Do you believe in the virgin birth?

Why is it important?

What, to you, is the most convincing proof of the virgin birth?

BLOG 1001: PRAYERS GOD WON'T ANSWER

As Christians, we are very serious about being in God's will in all we do and say – and rightly so. But one area where we may miss His will is in our prayers. We want our lives, and those around us, to be nice and easy. Therefore, we pray for God to quickly remove every illness, struggle, financial problem and difficulty that comes up. But what if God doesn't want them removed? What if He allows them for a purpose? What if He is using them to stretch and grow the person? Do we really want God to change His plan for them just because we assume everyone must always be happy and not have any problems?

Many times, when I pray for myself or others, I only focus on having the difficulty removed. Then when God doesn't do what I want I feel like my prayers aren't being answered. Do we really want God to do everything we say? I'm reminded of King Midas (not the muffler guy) who wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. He got that wish but when flowers, food and even his daughter turned to gold he found his gift to be more of a curse. Suppose you did everything your children wanted and gave them all they asked for? Children don't understand, but parents know that isn't always best. Our heavenly Father knows that about us as well. His purpose is to make us more like Jesus, not give us an easy, perfect life. That will come in heaven. Do I need to remind anyone that this life is not heaven? We should thank God for not always answering all our prayers but instead doing what He knows is best for us in the long run.

Godly parents know it is not always best for our children if we bail them out of hard situations. We know enabling them doesn't really help them. We can't deny them opportunities to stretch and grow. Trust that your heavenly Father knows what is best for us and those we pray for.

When praying for yourself or others, ask God how you should pray. Don't be so quick to give Him your solution, as if He is waiting to be told what to do. Instead pray the problem, not the solution. Let God decide on the best solution. Like Jesus, we can tell God our request, but we must

always end up with asking Him to do His will, whatever He thinks is best. Jesus is our example: Luke 22:42, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done."

Also, remember when you pray that God will not force anything against a person's free will. Jesus tells 3 parables about lost things being found in Luke 15. A shepherd went looking for his lost sheep and a woman searched for her lost coin, but the father of the prodigal son didn't go searching for him. He must have known where he was at, or had a very good idea, but He waited until he made the choose to return. God is a great respecter of free will choice. He created it and never forces anyone. So, we can't pray for God to force someone to do something they don't want to do. We can ask Him to put a desire in them to do the right thing or to fan the tiny spark in them that knows what is right. But we can't ask God to impose our will on them.

So, before we pray, we should preface our prayers with requests to be open and sensitive about how God wants us to pray for others, and ourselves. We certainly don't want to be asking God to do something that is not His will. That wastes our time and makes it seem like He doesn't answer our prayers. Instead pray as Jesus taught us to pray: (July 31, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 6:9-10 This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, holy is Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Are you guilty of telling God what to do instead of seeking His will in a situation?

Are you willing to let God decide what is best in your life or someone else's' when you pray?

Stop and pray now, first asking God to show you how you can pray in His will for the needs in your life and the lives of others.

BLOG 1002: PROOF SATAN & DEMONS ARE REAL

Satan and demons are part of our culture. We see them in Halloween celebrations, movies and in religious groups which worship and serve them. But do they really exist, or are they just part of folklore with no basis? If Satan and demons really do exist, then we have very clever and powerful enemies with abilities far beyond our own. If they don't exist, then the Bible and Jesus both lie by speaking of them many times.

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Bible tells us that Satan was God's highest created being (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-20). He was an angel. He is very intelligent and clever (Genesis 1:26; 3:1-7; 2 Corinthians 11:3). He is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). Even though he was God's highest creation, he wanted to be worshiped instead of God. He rebelled but was cast out of heaven and lost his perfect state (Isaiah 14:12-20; Ezekiel 28:11-19). He still has great strength and power, so much that even Michael the archangel viewed him as a foe too powerful to oppose (Jude 9). Yet, Satan's attributes, impressive as they are, are not limitless. His power is subject to God's restrictions (Job 1:12; Luke 4:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8). The control of God on his activities is illustrated by Satan's request to God for permission to afflict Job (Job 1:7-12).

We read that Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), snatches the Word of God from their heart so they don't respond to it (Luke 8:12) and works in men to oppose God's work (Revelation 2:13). He tempts believers to lie (Acts 5:3), accuses and slanders us before God (Revelation 12:10), does all he can to hinder what we do for God (1 Thessalonians 2:18), tempts us to sin (1 Corinthians 7:5) and incites persecution against us (Revelation 2:10). He was judged and defeated at the cross (John 121:31). One day he will be sent to hell forever (Revelation 20:1-10).

Demons are angels who rebelled along with Satan and were also cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-13). "Demon" means "destroyer." They are also called evil or unclean spirits, referring to the fact they don't have a physical body. They spread their sin and uncleanness any way they can. They are spiritual terrorists, trying to destroy the work of God's kingdom (Daniel 10:10; Revelation 16:13-16). They are led by Satan (Ephesians 6:11-12) and can inflict disease (Matthew 9:33; Luke 13:11,16; Job 2:7-10) and lead men to sin (Matthew 4:1-10). Demons can indwell men (Matthew 4:24) and animals (Mark 5:13). They oppose spiritual growth (Ephesians 6:12) and spread false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1). Even so, always remember they can do nothing without God's permission (Job 1:6-12).

PROOF FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE In my spiritual warfare dealings with those who have been demonized, I have seen clear evidence of the reality of Satan and demons. The things people thought and the way they acted were evil beyond what the person normally was like. Voices came from people that didn't sound anything like the person's own voice. The profanity was beyond anything imaginable. The knowledge the demons had was far above what the person could have known as well. Those who deal with demonically oppressed people sense in their spirit the evil working in the person. The person who is delivered also attests to the demonic presence which worked through them. Missionaries and others often have stories of these things as well. In many cultures Satan flaunts his evil and power to control people by fear. People living in those places have no doubt that Satan and demons are real.

PROOF FROM REASON The best explanation for the vile, evil acts committed today by people who were seemingly normal not long before is the reality of an evil presence working through them. Cruelty that seems beyond human ability, supernatural strength or capacity to give or withstand pain, knowledge of things no human could have ever known – these are best explained by a personal evil power in the universe – Satan and demons. (August 7, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Revelation 20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

What difference does the reality of the existence of Satan and demons make in your life?

Why do most people deny the existence of Satan and demons?

Are you ever tempted to deny their existence?

Satan doesn't mind if we go to the opposite extreme and give him too much recognition and attention. He receives our preoccupation and fear as worship. How can we keep a healthy balance of knowing he exists but not focusing on him instead of God?

BLOG 1003: PROOF GOD IS GREATER THAN SATAN

We know in our heads that God is greater than Satan, but it doesn't always seem that way in life, especially when we are going through difficult battles. We may not always feel like God is greater. It is during those times we need to let our minds explain reality to our emotions. Use the arguments below to reassure yourself that God is indeed greater!

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Bible repeatedly and clearly affirms that God is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4; James 2:19). Jesus defeated Satan on the cross (1 John 3:8; Colossians 2:13-15) and has power over him (Colossians 1:15-17; Luke 4:41). Satan and his demons cannot separate us from God (Romans 8:37-39). We can have victory over them through Jesus (James 4:7; Luke 10:17-19; Acts 19:13-16). They can only do what God allows (Job 1:6-12), and God only allows what is for our good and His glory (1 Corinthians 10:13; Romans 8:28; James 1:2-4). One day Satan and all demons will be sent to hell forever (Revelation 20:1-10).

PROOF FROM EXPERIENCE Christians everywhere will testify to the victory God has given them over Satan and his forces when they live in obedience to Him and follow His Word. I have seen that happen time and time again in my own life and in my family, as well as with those to whom I minister. Satan and demons must yield to God's command and the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11; Luke 10:17; Acts 16:18).

PROOF FROM REASON Since the God of the Bible is the only God and is sovereign over everything, it stands to reason He is sovereign over Satan and demons. He created Satan, and the creator is always greater than the creation. If Satan were the more powerful, he would have overcome God and taken over control long ago; clearly, he hasn't done that. There can only be one supreme power in the universe, and that is God! (August 14, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. 4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

When does Satan's power seem the strongest to you?

What do you do when you doubt God's power?

Satan doesn't have as much power as he wants us to think he has, so he uses fear to control us. What fears defeat you? What must you do to have victory over them?

BLOG 1004: MUST A CHRISTIAN STAY IN AN UNHAPPY MARRIAGE? (Unhappy Marriage 1)

God wants us to be happy - right? Doesn't He love His children and not want them miserable or unhappy? If a person isn't meeting their mate's needs, then they have failed and the unhappy mate should move on to have a marriage that is satisfying and fulfilling, correct? That's certainly the way movies, TV, unbelieving (and some believing) friends and the world around us sees marriage. Life is short so why suffer when we don't need to? God understands our needs - He created them. He is a loving, forgiving God who gives second and third chances. So, if the marriage isn't what we want it to be, what else are we to do?

Can you find the fallacy in that reasoning, the lie the enemy uses to destroy relationships? It's the presupposition that happiness is our main goal in life and marriage. But is that biblical? Does God promise us happiness in life or in marriage? Is the only purpose of marriage to make us happy? What if God has a different, a better purpose for marriage than fun and pleasure?

First, we must understand God's purpose for us before we can understand where marriage fits because marriage is only one part of life, even though a very big part. God's purpose for us in this life is not to make us happy (that will happen in heaven) but to make us holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). A.W. Tozer describes, "No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He

should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he should be."

Marriage is one of God's most effective tools in maturing and refining us, in making us into the image of Jesus, because it so clearly shows our pride, our selfishness and our self-centeredness. Adjusting to living day after day with someone who is opposite to us in gender, temperament, personality and often birth order is difficult. Then add our sin natures, our hurts and failures in the past and our lack of spiritual maturity and you have a recipe for disaster. We must stretch and grow, humble and submit, serve and forgive over and over and over. We must love even when we don't like, forget what is fair, drop our need to be heard or understood and treat our mate like Jesus treats us. That's a long way from "living happily ever after." But growth and stretching don't come from everything being the way we want it and from only getting and never giving.

Author and speaker, Tyler Ward, says that marriage is about personal reformation. He describes, although happiness is often a very real byproduct of a healthy relationship, marriage is designed to pull dysfunction to the surface of our lives, set it on fire and help us grow. The job of marriage is to refine our dysfunction and spur us into progressive wholeness. An unhappy marriage, then, shows where one or both fall short of thinking and acting as Jesus does.

The key is to stop seeing your mate as someone who should meet your needs and instead focus on meeting their needs no matter what. Your mate is not your enemy, the one standing in the way of your happiness. Instead, they are your partner through life. Either both of you work through your issues and find peace together, or neither of you finds peace. The Golden Rule needs to rule your lives and your expectations need to be realistic and attainable. None of this is possible without Jesus being the center of each person's life. Without Him it can't be done. With His help it is possible - hard and difficult, but possible. Without Him it is impossible.

Some marriage relationships go beyond unhappy and are toxic, damaging and even dangerous. Next time we'll talk about them and how to handle those situations. (Augusts 21, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

What are your expectations of your mate, yourself and your marriage? How have they changed since you were married?

What advice would you give someone who said they wanted out of their marriage because they weren't happy? What if one of your married children told you that? What advice would you give?

Pray and ask God to help you do your part to make your marriage what He wants it to be.

BLOG 1005: WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE IN AN UNHAPPY MARRIAGE? (Unhappy Marriage 2)

In our previous blog we said that the purpose of marriage is not to make us happy but holy. Marriage is a tool God uses to stretch and mature us to make us more like Jesus. But what about marriages that are more than just unhappy but are actually toxic, dysfunctional and destructive? What about when unrepentant adultery, physical abuse or abandonment are present? Those aren't the kind of unhappy marriages we are talking about. God does allow for the dissolution of these relationships for protection and safety against the unrepentant offender.

But what if you aren't facing abuse, abandonment or adultery, but you aren't happy in your marriage? Is divorce an option for marriages which are struggling or seemingly hopeless? Marriage is designed to be a lifelong commitment, and we vow to make it so when we marry. Malachi 2:15-16 says: "Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one

God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. 'The man who hates and divorces his wife,' says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'does violence to the one he should protect,' says the Lord Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful."

Ephesians 5 describes marriage as a metaphor for our relationship with God. He is not capricious in His affections toward us, nor does His love depend on favorable circumstances. His relationship with us is solely based on His covenant with us. God remains faithful to us even when we break our vows and hurt Him. Therefore, God wants us to remain faithful to our vows, too, because He knows broken hearts, broken marriages, and broken homes can be redeemed for His ultimate glory.

Does this mean that God wants us to remain in an unhappy marriage? No. What He wants is for each of us to use our pain, our sorrow and disappointment, our loneliness and anger, as an invitation to pursue His healing. He wants us to understand what health looks like in our marriage—healthy expectations, communication, boundaries, and conflict resolution—so that we can experience transformation right where we are, rather than waiting to discover it in a new relationship.

God does not want us to remain in an unhappy marriage. He wants us to work through our issues so we can turn that marriage into a happy, growing relationship based on Him. Divorcing and trying again is not His solution. Many people, though, aren't willing to pay the price to improve their marriage. It takes hard work, lots of forgiveness, taking our hurts to Jesus, giving when it seems we don't get and putting everything into meeting our mate's needs even if they ignore ours. It takes pain, sweat and tears to make a good marriage. But ask anyone who has put in the work to make their marriage what it should be and they'll tell you it's more than worth it.

An unhappy marriage should be an indicator that there are things God wants to address in our lives and in our marriages, so that we can pursue healing and wholeness in every area of our lives. God wants us to recognize issues within our marriage as they arise, be willing to address them, and work together towards personal and relational growth. If we do, we will continue growing together allowing us to develop greater connection, strength, and intimacy in our marriage.

In the next blog we'll look at some specific steps that can be taken to change an unhappy marriage into a growing, healthy relationship. (August 28, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 5:21-33 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. ... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ... Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how hard would God say you are working to make your marriage what it should be?

What can you do today to better put your mate first and focus on their need before your own?

Pray and ask God to help you do that, even if you are the only one trying to improve your marriage.

BLOG 1006: HOW TO HEAL AN UNHAPPY MARRIAGE (Unhappy Marriage 3)

We've been talking about unhappy marriages in the last 2 blogs. Now we'll talk about what to do to improve them. What are we talking about when we talk about an unhappy marriage? It's one where criticism is common, where hurtful things are purposefully said or done and little positive, uplifting, encouraging talk takes place. It's one where one or both have given up hope for their marriage and sometimes fanaticize of a life without their current mate. It's a life where love

languages aren't spoken, sex is lacking or nonexistent and there is no real connection or oneness between the people. Relationships with others mean more than with your mate.

So, what do we do about an unhappy marriage? If you read the first blog in this series you know God's purpose for marriage is to show where we need to grow to be more like Jesus. His purpose for our marriage is to make us holy, not happy. The second blog showed that the solution is not to divorce, but to pay the price to work it out together with God's help and guidance. If there is physical danger or harm, then the best solution is to remove yourself to a safe place and work on things (if possible) from a distance.

All relationships have times of struggle because all relationships are made up of human beings with a sin nature. But there are things we can do to heal an unhealthy relationship. First, don't focus on your mate and their faults. Stop blaming them. Stop blaming yourself. Instead focus on doing what you can to make things better, to treat your mate as God treats you. This includes praying as well as doing. Ask God to show attitudes, words and actions of yours that can be improved. Ask for Him to heal you from pain caused by your mate, and to heal them from hurts you have inflicted. Ask Him to help you be more like Jesus in all you think, say and do. Reach out for help to a pastor, Christian counselor or a trusted, mature, godly Christian you can talk and pray with. With their help, learn how to develop more spiritual reactions, patterns and ways of dealing with issues.

Start seeing your mate as your help out of your misery instead of the one inflicting it. They are miserable, too. Sin and Satan are your enemies, not each other. Join together fighting sin and Satan, don't fight each other. Satan wants to divide you so he can cause misery and defeat in each of you. Don't let that happen.

Commit yourself to saying and doing something each day that affirms and builds up your mate. Use their love language to help make sure the message gets through. Find ways you can go out of your way to meet their needs.

Pray individually and together each day for yourself, your mate and your marriage. Pray for peace, healing, wisdom, forgiveness, humility and love. Ask God to give you the love He has for your mate.

Find ways to affirm and encourage your spouse for what they get right instead of criticizing them for every imperfection. Everyone needs encouragement and appreciation, especially your mate. Don't let your unforgiveness or pride stand in the way of doing what Jesus would do.

Spend time each day reading the Bible and praying together. You might think it'd take a miracle to give you the marriage you need, but remember that we serve a miracle-working God. He does miracles, but He does them through us so let Him work a miracle in you so He can do the same in your mate and marriage. (September 4, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Which of the suggestions above do you think would be most helpful to your marriage?

What can YOU do today to start implementing these things?

BLOG 1007: PROOF ANGELS EXIST

The vast majority of people believe in angels. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and many other religious groups affirm the existence of angels. Primitive Sumerian carvings, ancient Egyptian tombs and Assyrian artifacts have winged figures. Yet, often what others believe about angels is different from what the Bible teaches. Who is correct? In fact, do angels really even exist?

Does it even matter if they exist or not? We don't worship them or talk to them, nor they to us. But understanding angels helps us know how God works in the world. Knowing this will help give us peace and assurance. It also leads to praising God for His greatness. And while we don't relate to angels now, we will share eternity with them, even rule over them (1 Corinthians 6:2-4).

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE Angels are mentioned in 34 of the 66 Bible books. There are 275 references to angels. Jesus talked about angels many times (Luke 15:10; 22:43; 16:22; Matthew 25:41; 18:10; 26:53; 24:36). The Old Testament (Isaiah 6:2; Psalm 103:20; Job 38:6-7) and New Testament (Luke 1:11; 2:13; Revelation 5:11; 13:2; Acts 5:19; 12:7; 27:23-24; Colossians 1:16; Jude 6; Hebrews 12:11; 1:14) speak often of angel activity.

The Greek word for "angel" (angelos) means "messenger." Actually, the word is just transliterated in our Bibles, meaning English letters replace Greek letters, but the word is the same. Were it translated into English; we would have the word "messenger" every time "angel" appears. That is basically their function -- messengers (servants) of God. They are God's servants who help God's people (Hebrews 1:14). Individual angels seem to be assigned to children and believers (Acts 12:12) to help them in special ways. God could use His sovereign power to do things such as prevent an automobile accident, have a child fall safely and not be hurt, discover a set of lost keys or similar actions, but usually He has His angels do that work. Angels protect God's people (Psalm 34:7; 91:12; Matthew 18:10). They bring answers to prayers (Acts 12:7), although sometimes demons oppose them, and the answers are delayed (Daniel 10:10-21). Angels watch and learn from believers (1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Timothy 5:2). They encourage us in danger (Acts 27:23-24). They even help in evangelism (Luke 15:10; Acts 8:26). They care for God's people when they die (Luke 16:22; Jude 9). They fight against demons (Revelation 12).

PROOF FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE The Bible tells us that angels can appear as people in order to assist us, and we aren't even aware that they are angels (Hebrews 13:2). I have had several experiences in my life where it became clear afterwards that the person or persons I was involved with weren't people but were angels. Many others have this same experience.

I have been involved in spiritual warfare ministry for over 30 years. Anyone who has been demonized, or who has helped those who are to find freedom, knows the reality of angels and demons (fallen angels). There is no doubt of their existence to those who are involved in spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries.

PROOF FROM REASON It is quite clear that supernatural occurrences happen today. There is no other explanation for certain events or experiences, whether they are good or evil, but for supernatural influence. . These supernatural occurrences could be direct interventions by God (or Satan). However, they could just as well be caused by angels or demons. Missionaries often have stories of such events and experiences. These experiences don't necessarily prove that angels exist, but seeing angels (or demons) as the cause is a good explanation for them. (September 11, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Daniel 10:4 As I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, 5 I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. 6 His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. ... 11 He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you. Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first

day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. 14 Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future.”

Have you ever experienced angels in your life (Hebrews 13:2)? What was it like?

Why don't angels show themselves to us more often? What might happen if they did?

Be continually aware as you go through today that there are angels always with you: in the car, at work, in your room, watching and protecting you. Thank God for them. Don't make their job any harder than it already is!

BLOG 1008: TITUS: IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME

Titus isn't nearly as well-known as Timothy. He assisted Paul like Timothy did. He also worked behind the scenes. But he wasn't Paul's number one troubleshooter. He wasn't as highly recommended and complimented by Paul. He didn't have Paul's love and father-son relationship like Timothy did. He only received one short letter, most of which Paul had already written to Timothy. His gifts and skills aren't recorded for us. He was just an average person doing his best to serve God any way he could.

We should be able to identify with him. Most of us will never be well-known. We don't have special skills or gifts given us by God. We won't pastor large churches or do outstanding things that are recorded and remembered. After we are gone, only a few people will remember us, and when they are gone, that memory will also end. It may be hard for us to identify with Paul, sometimes even Timothy, but Titus is someone we all can look to as an example. He faithfully served God for his whole life.

How could he do that when there wasn't earthly recognition or reward? What did he get for his life's labor? He did it for God, out of love and devotion to Jesus. It wasn't all about Titus, it was all about Jesus. His reward came when he went to heaven, and he is now enjoying it for all eternity. We are rewarded and blessed for all eternity because of our faithfulness, not because of what we produce (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). The world looks at the quantity of what we do, but God looks at the quality of our heart in doing it (1 Corinthians 4:5). We tend to think that bigger is better, so see those who have large ministries or who do great things as more successful in God's sight. But God doesn't look at things that way (Psalm 147:10; 44:21; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chronicles 28:9). He does not evaluate by outer appearances like we do (1 Samuel 16:7; Isaiah 55:8).

If we want to please Him, we must serve Him for His sake and not for what we get out of it. Our motive can only be love for Him. The church in Ephesus was doing many good, impressive works for God (Revelation 2:2-3, 6). But they weren't doing it out of love for Jesus (Revelation 2:4). If they continued in that way, God said He would end their ministry (Revelation 2:5), and that is what happened. Don't let that happen to you and your ministry! (September 18, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1 Samuel 16:7 The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

What would Jesus say about what you are doing for Him? Is it really for Him, or do you have a lot of yourself in your service?

Ask God to show you any wrong motives or selfish desires you have in your service for Him (Psalm 139:23-24 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.").

Blog 1009: PRAYER LIFE IN A RUT? (Praying Scriptures 1)

Do you ever feel like your prayer life is in a rut? You pray about the same old things using the same old words. You have a hard time focusing on what you are saying and your mind wanders. You want to connect with God but it seems you are not really making contact. You've even tried some new programs or gimmicks to wake up your prayer life, but nothing seems to work for long. In all honesty, you feel your prayer life is boring - and you feel guilty about it.

If so, then try this. Try praying God's Word back to Him. Turn the words of Scripture into your words to Him. It's almost like having God sitting with you, leading you in prayer. Read a verse then talk to God about it. Turn it into a prayer of praise, intercession for others or apply it to yourself.

For example, you could try using Psalm 23. You read, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Then you say something like, "I thank you that you are always looking after me as a shepherd watches sheep. You protect me, guide me, nurture me and never leave me. I need Your shepherd direction in my life today when I _____. Help me know what to do about _____. In the past I see your shepherd care when You _____." You can pray about others, too: "Can you please shepherd _____ today because they are going through _____." Sit quietly and meditate. Let God's Spirit talk and minister to you. Pray about other shepherd-related thoughts that come to mind.

When nothing else comes, move on to the next verse. "Lord, I thank you that I've never really been in want. You give me so many blessings, even ones I am not aware of or don't thank you for." Pause, meditate about this, and think of some things God has provided for you. "I thank you for providing for my financial, health, spiritual and relational needs (name them specifically). Forgive me when I get greedy and think my wants are needs. Help me to trust your provision and be content with it." Then pray for others: "Lord, _____ seems to have many needs. Can you provide for them (be specific – pray the problems, not your solutions. Let God decide what is the best solution)." Then pray for needs for your church, those who have experienced a disaster in their lives, etc.

Don't rush. Take your time. Better to just do a few verses thoroughly than to rush through a lot of verses. Make sure you spend time listening and don't just do all the talking. That's not a conversation. If a verse doesn't seem to apply or if you don't understand it, ask God to help you see it's truth and if nothing comes to mind move on to the next verse. You can also use books like Philippians, Ephesians, even Romans.

Praying this way can help you carry on a real conversation with God. He speaks to you in His Word and you speak to Him in prayer. After all, isn't that what communication really is? Two people talking back and forth to each other? It sure beats giving God our daily To-Do list of what we want Him to do for us and then wondering why He doesn't do it, why He doesn't answer our prayers.

George Muller, the great man of faith, prayed the Bible daily. The early church prayed the Psalms (Acts 4:23-31). Jesus, on the cross, prayed two different Psalms (Matthew 27:46 and Luke 23:46). A great place to start is with the Psalms. They were written for the purpose of communicating with God. Next blog will be about how to pray the Psalms, but don't wait until then to get started. Start right now. (September 25, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Luke 11:1 "Lord, teach us to pray."

Psalms 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Open your Bible to Psalm 23 and start praying through it verse by verse. Take your time. Ask God to help you learn how to talk with Him.

Blog 1010: PRAYING THE PSALMS (Praying Scriptures 2)

In the last blog I talked about bringing life and variety into your prayers by praying the Bible back to God. I gave a short example from Psalm 23 but I'd like to build on that. I hope you have been trying to do this during the past week.

in Acts 4, after Peter and John were arrested and threatened by the Jewish authorities for preaching Christ. Acts 4:23 says, "When they were released, they went to their friends [that is, the church] and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. . .'" These are words taken from Psalm 146:6. They quoted God's Word back to Him, using Scripture to express their worship.

Acts 4:25 continues: "The Lord, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?'" This is from Psalm 2:1-2. They used the Old Testament to frame and express their thoughts to God. So can we, and we have the New Testament as well. When they were looking for words to praise God, they quoted His Word back to Him. After praying this, the place was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit so they could continue to speak God's Word with boldness (Acts 4:31). These are new believers, but they knew the Bible and used its words to convey their prayers to God.

We may think of worship as singing or some emotional response, but worship also involves prayer and meditation based on God's Word as we reflect on Him and His goodness. Basically, worship is attributing worth to God, and the Bible contains many great examples of that.

Another good passage to use is Psalm 145. Read each verse aloud, then paraphrase it and personalize it in a prayer back to God. For example, Psalm 145:8 reads: "The Lord is gracious and compassionate; Slow to anger and great in mercy." Pray that back to God by personalizing it: "Lord, You are gracious and compassionate. Thank You for being slow to anger and great in mercy when it comes to Your love toward me. I know I can bring anything to You."

By personalizing the Word to your own life and situations and keeping God's attributes and the truth of Who He is intact in your prayer, you are applying Scripture to your everyday life. That is what it means to pray Scripture over your situation and to use it as a weapon in spiritual attack.

You may not know God's Word well enough to find a verse for every situation, but there are resources you can use. My book, "Topical Index of Bible Verses," will refer you to Bible verses for any need or situation you face. You can go to <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/> and scroll down to "Topical Index of Bible Verses." or email me (jerry@schmoyer.net) and I'll send you a PDF of it. Or you can do a Google search for the topics or subject you are praying about. (October 2, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Psalm 145:1 I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.

Spend some time now making praying Psalm 145:1 (above) back to God. Tomorrow use verse 2.

BLOG 1011: LESSONS IN PRAYER FROM GEORGE MULLER (Praying Scriptures 3)

George Müller (1805-1898) is regarded as one of the most remarkable Christians in the church's history because he fully lived by faith. His life story has inspired many believers to greater heights of faith and more faithfulness in prayer. He lived during the nineteenth century in Bristol, England. Besides pastoring a large church, he led four far-reaching, influential ministries. Today, people know him best for one of those —his orphanages. In a time when most orphans in England lived in miserable workhouses or on the streets (like in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*), Müller would house, feed, clothe, and educate them. Müller cared for as many as 2,000 orphans at a time through his orphanages—more than 10,000 in his lifetime. Yet he never talked about the needs of any of his ministries, even when asked. He committed to going to God only in prayer. Only through his annual reports would people learn after the fact what the needs had been during the previous year and how the Lord had provided.

He recorded over 50,000 specific answers to prayer in his journals, 30,000 of which he said God answered the same day or the same hour that he prayed them. That's an average of 500 definite answers to prayer each year—more than one per day—every day for sixty years! God entrusted Müller with over half a billion dollars (in today's money) in answer to prayer.

How did George Müller pray? He said that for the first 10 years of what he called his "life of faith," he often struggled to get into the spirit of prayer. Like us, he often didn't not feel like praying and couldn't focus for long. Then something changed. He described it in his own words: "The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer ... But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray.

"I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experiential fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point."

What made the difference? He started praying through the Word of God. He would read or recite a passage of Scripture as he knelt, sat or walked outside. It kept his mind and heart focused on God. He was reminded of God's promises which strengthened and increased His faith. He listened as God spoke to Him through Scripture. He based His speaking back to God on that same Scripture.

Clearly God had a special purpose for him. His plan for us might be different. Praying Scripture is not a guarantee to get God to do whatever we want, but it is a good way to strengthen our faith connection and deepen our communication with Him. Have you been trying it? Like the ad says, "Try it. you'll like it!" (October 9, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

***Matthew 7:7* "Ask, and it will be given to you seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**

Have you been praying Scripture to God this past week? If so, continue what you have been doing. If not, try it with Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14.

BLOG 1012: PRAYING LIKE JESUS PRAYED (Praying Scriptures 4)

Often, we struggle with meaningful, effective prayers. We repeat ourselves day after day, our minds wander and we don't feel like we've connected with God. In previous blogs I've talked about praying Scripture back to God as a means of directing our prayers and having two-way conversation with Him. The early church prayed that way, so did George Muller. Jesus Himself prayed that way.

When tempted after fasting 40 days in the wilderness, Jesus quoted the book of Deuteronomy to counter Satan's attacks (Matthew 4). On the cross, Jesus said only seven brief statements. The Roman soldiers had beaten Him until ribbons of skin hung from His bloody back. He had barely been able to stagger to the place of crucifixion. He hung from the cross severely dehydrated. His entire body weight pulled on the three spikes that held Him to the wood. He had to push up on the spike in His feet to get enough breath into His diaphragm so He could speak. But to do so was so agonizing that He would speak only briefly before sinking back down. If the Romans wanted to hasten the death of those they crucified, they would break the prisoners' legs so they couldn't push up and would soon die of asphyxiation. They did this to the two thieves at Jesus's side (John 19:31-33).

It's no surprise then that Jesus spoke very little. But each word He said had great meaning. The longest statement He made was, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matthew 27:46), the first verse of Psalm 22. This Psalm is the most lengthy and explicit prophecy in the Old Testament about the crucifixion. Psalm 22 contains more details about the physical aspects of crucifixion than all four gospels combined. By quoting the first verse, Jesus was identifying with the whole Psalm, even though He wasn't able to utter all of it. His listeners would have thought of the rest of the Psalm. The whole Psalm became Jesus' prayer at that time.

Psalm 22:14 says, "I am poured out like water," just as John reported (John 19:34-35). Verse 14 refers to all His bones being out of joint, which is what happened to a victim of crucifixion. The extreme thirst is mentioned in verse 15, just as Jesus experienced (John 19:28). There are many more examples of His suffering, His clothes being divided, the reaction of the criminals also dying with Him and the response of the people. But the Psalm concludes with God's answering and delivering Him (Psalm 22:19-31). This must have brought great comfort and assurance to Jesus as He was going through the misery of crucifixion. Praying this Psalm helped Jesus keep His eyes on God and the goal He was striving for (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Then at the end, Jesus gathered the last ounce of His strength, strained upward up a final time, and cried, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46) which is a quote of Psalm 31:5. The final act of Jesus' earthly life was to pray the words of a Psalm.

Praying God's Word brings peace and comfort, it resets our priorities and helps focus on His truth instead of the lies that defeat us. It helps us put into words our deepest feelings and desires. It helps us remember God's promises and the future victory that is in store for all of us so we can persevere through present painful situations. Follow Jesus' example - pray the Scriptures. (October 16, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 6:17–18 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Turn to Psalm 22 in your Bible and start praying it to God as a way of remembering and thanking Him for the crucifixion. Focus on worship, not your own needs.

BLOG 1013: TIMOTHY: A TEACHABLE SPIRIT

It's been my privilege to mentor several men who were becoming pastors. They were a joy to train because they were very teachable. They were open and willing to learn. They didn't mind

correction and learned from it. If they would have thought they knew all they needed to know and that what they did was always right, I would not have been able to build anything into them. Their pride would have kept them from being open to learning and growing. How sad.

Timothy was a joy for Paul to train because he was open and willing to learn new things. A close bond developed between them, a father-son love and respect (2 Timothy 2:1-2). First and Second Timothy are full of Paul's advice to Timothy. He corrected him where necessary, taught new things where needed and encouraged him in all he did. When you read these books, you can see how open Timothy must have been to learn and grow. If he wasn't, he wouldn't have been useful to Paul or God.

The Bible says that people who are unteachable are fools (Proverbs 26:12; 11:14). Unteachable people don't realize they are this way, they just think they are always right (Proverbs 16:12). They see correction or suggestions as personal criticism and are offended (Proverbs 12:1). Their insecurity and fear of being rejected make them unable to consider they may be wrong. It is their pride that won't allow them to think there may be a better or different way. People with this attitude may pretend to listen, but they have already rejected what is said. They stick with their way, even when it fails.

We all know people who feel they are always right and have to have everything their way. It is bad for them and those around them. It is terrible when God's leaders are like this. God tries to reach them and help them mature, but they don't take advice from others as coming from God. They aren't open to new things God is trying to show them through others. Thus, they even block themselves off from God.

If you honestly admit that sometimes you are not very teachable, then humble yourself before God. Pray and ask Him to forgive your pride. Yield to Him and accept His correction and teaching. Ask Him what you can learn from others who try to give you godly advice and suggestions. (October 23, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 26:12 Do you see a man [who is unteachable and] wise in his own eyes and full of self-conceit? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Proverbs 12:15 tells us, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise."

Proverbs 11:14 Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

What is your first response when you are criticized?

How do you react when someone tries to show you a better way of doing something?

How do you react when you are wrong?

Would your wife or children say you are not open to correction and new suggestions? Would God?

BLOG 1014: UNDERSTANDING THE TRINITY

We know that God exists and that Jesus is God (for proof that God exists, the Bible is God's Word and Jesus is God, go to <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/articles/>). Does that mean we have two Gods, God and Jesus? No. They are different, although they are the same. As Christians, we believe in the Trinity, that God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all God. They are three separate personalities but one God. There is only one God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal persons, the same in substance but distinct in person. Many deny the Trinity. In doing so they then deny the deity and divinity of Jesus and the Holy

Spirit. Some also claim the Bible is untrue for it clearly teaches God is triune. How can we prove the Trinity and the Holy Spirit exist?

The Trinity is impossible to understand with our limited intelligence. We are a tiny speck on a tiny planet in the midst of the whole universe. The fact that we cannot understand all there is to understand about our Creator should not surprise or alarm us! There are many things our minds cannot understand. This is one of them. But that doesn't mean it isn't true.

PROOF FROM REASON If the Trinity isn't true, why would the writers of the Bible make up such a thing? If they were creating a new religion and trying to convince others to believe in their religion, why would they ever make something so hard to understand a key feature? Who would even think of such a thing in the first place? The Trinity is not something man could or would invent on his own. The only explanation is that God revealed this truth to the writers of the Bible and they faithfully recorded what He revealed.

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Bible records that the Father is God (John 6:27), the Son is God (Hebrews 1:8; John 10:27-30; 14:8-10; 17:3-5; Philippians 2:5-11) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4; John 14:16-17, 26). All three are referred to as equal (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

Jesus says we are to "baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). He doesn't say in the "names" (plural) but in the "name" (singular). These three are all one. We have proof the Trinity exists. (October 30, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 28:18 Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What difference does it make if the Trinity is true or not?

Does it bother you that there are some things about God that you can't understand? Why or why not?

Although we can't totally understand the Trinity, taking it by faith can bring great assurance. What comfort do you find from the doctrine of the Trinity?

What difference can awareness of the Trinity make in your life today?

BLOG 1015: IS THE BIBLE THE ONLY TRUE, INSPIRED BOOK?

We know the Bible is inspired by God (for proof see <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/articles/>). But has God also inspired other books? What about the books other religions use? Are they true as well? If so, we may be missing something by not studying them, or they may say something we like better than what the Bible says. How do we know the Bible is the only inspired book from God to man?

PROOF FROM REASON We know that our God is the only true God. Since that is true, then other religions' gods cannot also be true. If their gods are false, so also are their books about them.

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Bible claims it is the only inspired book from God (Revelation 22:18-19). It clearly states there are no other inspired books. God only had one Son (John 3:16), who came to earth only once to die for mankind (Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18). Only the Bible tells us that story and that Jesus is the only way of salvation (John 14:6), thereby teaching that none of the other books have the way of salvation. What good are they without that?

PROOF FROM COMPARISON WITH OTHER BOOKS When we compare the Bible with the holy books of other religions, we can see that they all can't be true, for they contradict each other and say very different things about God, sin, man and his relationship to God. None of the other books are 100% true in everything they say about science, history, morality, etc., like we saw is true of the Bible. None of the other books brings about the kind of changed lives and healthy culture that the Bible encourages. Look at the histories and the current living conditions and standards of the people who follow the other books, and you'll see how God has blessed those who have followed Him and His Word.

CHRISTIANITY has the Bible, which has a lot of evidence showing it is inspired by God.

JUDAISM honors the Hebrew Bible, but not the New Testament or anything about Jesus. Many Jews reject the inspiration of the Bible and only see it as a book of Jewish traditions.

ISLAM follows the Koran, which some put on an equal place with the Bible. The Koran is about 1,300 years old. Unlike the Bible, the Koran was created by one person, the prophet Mohammed. He recited it, and his scribes wrote it down. Both the Bible and the Koran claim to be divine revelations. Both books claim to have been accurately preserved through the centuries. The Koran was written about 550 years after the New Testament and affirms the Bible as the word of God, but says the Koran is more recent, therefore it must be superior. There are many factual and historical inaccuracies in the Koran. There is doubt Mecca even existed when Islam is claimed to have started. There is much factual evidence to question the character and motives of Mohammed himself. In his book, Mohammed speaks very disparagingly of women, saying they have half of the mental acumen of men, and that the inhabitants of Hell will be for the most part women because they are ungrateful to their husbands. The Koran allows for wife beating, so how could it ever have originated with God?

The Koran says Jesus is not God (5:17, 75), was not crucified (4:157), did not rise from the dead and was not the son of God (9:30). The Bible says salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), but the Koran says it is by sincerity and works (3:135; 7:8-9; 21:47; 49:14; 66:8-9). There are no miracles and no fulfilled prophecies in the Koran. The Koran says Abraham sacrificed Ishmael and that Alexander the Great was a Muslim who worshipped Allah. However, Alexander lived hundreds of years before Muhammad started Islam. With all these differences, it is not possible for both books to be true: only one can be true. The truth of the Bible has been proven many times over.

Mohammed himself has said, "I have fabricated things against Allah and have imputed to him words which he has not spoken." (Al Tabari, The History of Al-Tabari, vol. 6, p.111). He also admitted to having mistaken the words of "Satan" for those of Allah (Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah, pp.165-166). How can anything else he has said be trusted?

HINDUISM looks to the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahmanas and other special writings as their authority. They speak of a god who is impersonal and undefinable. They say the world was born in a golden egg which lived one year then divided into two parts, which became heaven and earth. They say sin is ignorance, not something done against deity. The Bible says man dies once (Hebrews 9:27), but Hindu scriptures say man goes through successive cycles of deaths and rebirths called reincarnations. These teachings are totally contrary to the Bible, so both cannot be true. The god they describe is much different than the God the Bible describes. These books cannot be God's inspired books to us.

BUDDHISM has no one scripture. They have collections of stories and legends about Buddha, some of which were added by Buddha's followers after his death. They do not claim to be inspired and faultless, and they contradict much of what the Bible says.

CONFUCIAN writings say nothing about worshipping a god, confessing sin, or seeking forgiveness. They encourage the readers to be hard working, modest, sober and thoughtful. They were not given by God to man.

MORMONISM has a book, the Book of Mormon, which they claim is equal or even superior to the Bible. Since the original writing of the book, there have been thousands of changes and alterations to eliminate very poor grammar and clear contradictions. A lot of it has been copied word by word from the King James Bible. Despite all the changes, there are still many errors and false prophecies. It denies the deity of Jesus by making him a man like us who worked His way to becoming a god. It also teaches that everyone can earn a degree of deity as Jesus did. Objective scholars all agree the Book of Mormon is not a book that shows any signs of being written or preserved by God.

For all these reasons we can be assured that the Bible is God's Word, his only Word to mankind. Since that is true, it is important for us to appreciate this divine revelation. We must study and learn its truths and be able to correct those who live and believe in error. (November 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God ^a may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

What, to you, is the strongest proof that the Bible is the only inspired book by God?

Think about what an awesome privilege it is to have a copy of God's very own inspired words in your possession. Thank God for making His Word available to you.

Take some time to read it now.

BLOG 1016: DID JESUS REALLY PERFORM MIRACLES?

The Old Testament contains many miracles. People often deny them, looking for other explanations for how the events took place. If the miracles weren't true, then the Bible is full of lies and errors and can't be believed for other miracles, especially Jesus's miracles and resurrection.

Miracles were an important part of Jesus's ministry on earth as well. Those in Jesus's day could watch the miracle take place, but how can we today know Jesus really performed miracles?

PROOF FROM THE BIBLE The Old Testament records 55 miracles, the Gospels describe during the life of Jesus 37 miracles and the rest of the New Testament tells of 20. That is a total of 112 separate miracles.

A miracle is not a coincidence of natural happenings. It's not magic. It is overriding natural laws by a higher law. Jesus called them "signs" (John 20:31-32). We realize they were done for a purpose – to prove that Jesus was God (Matthew 11:4-6; Luke 7:22-23; John 10:25, 38; 14:11; 15:24).

The focus was not the miracle itself but what it taught about Jesus. If He had power over physical ills, He can also heal spiritual ills. If He could deliver from demons, He can deliver from sin. If He could give physical sight, He can give spiritual sight. If He could feed with physical bread, He can feed with spiritual bread. If He could bring the physically dead back to life, He can do the same with the spiritually dead. If He could stop a storm on an ocean, He can stop Satan's attacks against us. When we are helpless, He can deliver us.

There are four major times of miracles in history. The first was during the time of Moses and Joshua, the second during Elijah and Elisha's time, the third during the time of Jesus and the disciples, and the fourth will be during the coming Tribulation time. In each case, God is

authenticating His chosen messengers and showing everyone that His messenger has His power and authority.

The Bible records many times that Jesus did miracles (Matthew 4:24; 21:14; 12:15; 15:30; John 10:24-25, 30-31; 3:2). Of course, the resurrection is the most outstanding miracle ever. John 11 talks about the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Many details are given, and the clear identity of the person and location are stated. Many were there and saw it happen. Afterwards, anyone who wanted to check the truthfulness of the account could easily find the place and eyewitnesses to talk to, as well as Lazarus himself!

Bible writers considered miracles as authentic occurrences and evidence of Christ's divinity. They considered Him to be from God (John 3:2; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22) and said they were convincing proofs of Jesus's deity (Acts 1:3; Hebrews 2:3-4) and not made-up myths (1 Peter 1:16).

There was no single pattern to Jesus's healing miracles: some asked to be healed, others didn't; some had faith, others didn't even know who Jesus was. Whatever the illness, whatever the need - Jesus met it. He had total control over nature: calming the sea, cursing a fig tree, turning water to wine, catching many fish when there weren't any there a moment before – all these were done by Jesus with just a word. Miracles were a means to an end, not an end in themselves. That's why not every sick person in Palestine was healed. Healing everyone wasn't Jesus's purpose.

Satan can do miracles, too. He can counterfeit God's power with shows of his own (Matthew 7:22-23). His power is limited by God, however. He can't stop Jesus's power. Jannes and Jambres counterfeited and challenged Moses, but lost to God's power (Exodus 7:10-12).

PROOF FROM REASON Some say those Jesus healed only had psychosomatic illness. But thousands and thousands came and were healed – and stayed healed. Those who knew them knew the illnesses were real, for they were amazed at the change. Plus, He healed every single one He said He would heal; there were none where He failed.

Doing miracles wasn't something people expected the coming Messiah to do, so the gospel writers wouldn't have felt the need to invent miracles to convince their readers that Jesus was the Messiah. If they had, it is doubtful they would have been willing to give up everything, even their own lives, to follow Him.

Miracles are God's intervention in nature. If God exists, miracles are possible, even probable. To say they can't exist is to deny the existence of God. If God could create the universe out of nothing, His other miracles would be easy for Him.

PROOF FROM OTHER WRITERS We have seen what ancient writers have recorded about Jesus. They give more support for His miracles:

THALLUS, an ancient writer and historian, recorded the darkness over the whole earth at the time of Jesus's crucifixion. The only way he could explain it was to say it was an eclipse, but modern science can determine when they have occurred in the past, and there were none during that time in history.

THE TALMUD tells the story of a rabbi (Rabbi Eleazar ben Dama) who was bitten by a venomous snake and called on a Christian named Jacob of Kepharsama to heal him. He arrived, but Rabbi Ishmael would not permit it. Rabbi Ben Dama replied, "I will bring you proof (from the scriptures) that he may heal me!" but then died before he could produce the proof. He believed a Christian could heal him by Jesus's power. (Tosefta, Hullin 2:22-23).

ANCIENT PAGAN SPELLS often contain the name of Jesus because clearly, the pagans thought there was power in that name to heal.

JULIAN THE APOSTATE was the Roman Emperor from AD 361-363. He was a strong enemy of Christianity. He wrote: "Jesus . . . has now been honored for about three hundred years; having done nothing throughout his lifetime that was worthy of fame, unless anyone thinks it a very great work to heal the lame and the blind and to cast out demons in the towns of Bethsaida and Bethany." This shows how common the knowledge was that Jesus performed miracles in those areas, as recorded in the Bible (Mark 8:22; John 12:1).

Yet, despite this great amount of proof that Jesus performed miracles, many people deny it. How can they do so? Those who don't believe in Jesus have preconceived prejudices against anything supernatural. If they believe anything supernatural exists, then that opens the door to God existing, and with that belief comes accountability to Him. Holding to their belief there is no God, they reject any form of supernatural. Yet we have provided much evidence that God exists, as do miracles. (November 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Acts 2:14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ... Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."

What proof would you give someone who asked if Jesus really did miracles?

What difference would it make if they were fakes or just made up by the gospel writers?

What miracles have you experienced in your life?

Pray and thank God for them, and thank Him for being a miracle-making God!

BLOG 1017: WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

Forty years ago, my only sibling, a younger sister, died of cancer. She left a husband and two young boys. Many who knew her wrestled with the question, "Why does God let bad things happen to good people?" That question has always bothered me. First, it questions God's and goodness, and we should never do that (Job 37:21 – 41:9) - Secondly, it makes two fundamentally wrong assumptions.

First, it assumes that some people are "good." Maybe relatively speaking, comparing morally upright people with those who clearly are evil and wicked, we could call some "good." The Bible tells us none of us are "good" in absolute terms (Romans 3:23; 6:23; etc.). None of us is good compared to God and His standards. It's like everyone lining up on the coast of California and start swimming to Hawaii. Most would not get very far, but a few might get much further into the ocean than the majority. Still, even these "good" swimmers would fall far short of Hawaii. Some people might be better than others, but none are good enough in God's sight.

The other problem with this statement is the wrong assumption that things which are hard, painful or difficult are "bad." No one would say that illness, broken families, financial loss or death are pleasant or enjoyable. Some things may not be "good" in our human viewpoint, but God promises to bring good from them for His children who are living for Him (Romans 8:28). Joseph said that what his brothers meant for evil God meant for "good" (Genesis 50:20). If God is in sovereign control, and all He does is out of love for us, then everything that happens is for our growth and His glory, and that makes them "good." His purpose is to make us like Jesus, whatever that takes, not to make our life smooth and easy.

Still, I understand why people as why bad things happen to good people. It does seem that trials befall those who don't deserve them. But then, what do any of us deserve? Nothing but eternity

in hell. So, anything short of being in hell now is all by God's grace and mercy, not because we are good enough to deserve it!

So instead of asking why bad things happen to good people, instead we should ask why good things (anything short of being in hell now) should happen to bad people (us - we are all sinful in God's sight). Everything that happens to Christians living for Jesus is good because God has a reason and purpose for it. We may not enjoy all of it, just like a child does not the stretching, difficult and painful parts of growing up. But God promises He is always with us and will never allow anything that is too much to happen to us (1 Corinthians 10:13). So why do good things happen to bad people (us)? It's all God's love and mercy. Thank Him for it. (November 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Romans 8:28 *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.*

How do you respond when hearing of something "bad" happening to someone "good"?

How do you respond when it happens to you?

Keep your focus today on all the good things in your life compared to what you deserve from God. Confess any entitlement feelings you may have toward God.

BLOG 1018: THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

We think of God as "Father," and rightly so. He is always referred to in with male pronouns. The Lord's Prayer tells us to pray "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:1). Jesus and Paul both called God "Abba (Daddy)" (Romans 8:15; Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6). As our Father we focus on His sovereignty and oversight, His protection and provision and His guidance and wisdom. He perfectly fits the Father role we all need.

However, God also fits the "mother" role perfectly as well. He is loving and comforting, caring, sacrificial, tender, gentle, nurturing and full of grace and mercy. While men have these qualities as well, we usually think of them as coming more from females. But if females have these traits, where did they originate? If 'male' characteristics came from God, then 'female' ones must have as well. Are you following me here? If all the good we see in fatherhood came from God, then it stands to reason that all the good we see in motherhood does as well. There is no other source.

That's why God created Eve, to fill up the empty spaces missing in Adam (Genesis 2:18). Clearly Adam and Eve (man and woman) have traits and characteristics unique to their gender. Since God created them both then the source of both is God Himself, therefore God has all the good traits that both men and woman have. God is also our Heavenly Mother as well as our Heavenly Father. Let's look at how this plays out in our lives.

God gives us birth. *"You have forgotten the Rock who bore you and put out of mind the God who gave you birth" (Deuteronomy 32:18).* God is the source of our life, just as a female is the source of life of her offspring. Our physical and spiritual life originate with God (Isaiah 66:8-9). Think of a loving mother with a newborn, carefully and attentively caring for it, and then picture God treating you in the same way.

God raises and protects us. *"Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the Lord alone guided him" (Deuteronomy 32:11-12).* An eagle is often used as an image of God. What we don't always notice is that the eagle pictured is female. It is the mother who bears the young eaglets and teaches

them to fly. God takes care of us as a mother eagle takes care of her young. God nurtures us, protects us from unknown danger and provides for all our needs.

Another mother bird is used as an example of God's motherly care for us. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem!.. How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me!"* (Matthew 23:37-38). In times of danger a hen will gather her chicks under her wings for protection from enemy or fire. They will absorb the hurt and protect their young (Psalm 57:1). That's what Jesus did for us on the cross.

God worked through Paul and others, including church leaders today, to care for Christians as a mother cares for her children (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).

God disciplines us. *"I will fall upon them [disobedient Israel] like a bear robbed of her cubs"* (Hosea 13:8). God's wrath against that which would harm His children is like the wrath of a mother bear protecting her young. God protects us from Satan, the world and sin. He doesn't remove our option to sin, but He disciplines us when we do sin so we won't continue in sin (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:11-12). Those verses say that God's correction in our life is proof we are His and He loves us. He loves us, but He hates the sin in our life and goes after it like a mother bear goes after someone harming her children. Suppose God gave us everything we wanted and let us go any direction we chose? As any good parent, He corrects us so we will go the right way.

God provides for us daily. Many parables show God as a man providing for the needs of others, but some also refer to women (Luke 13:20-21; 15:8). *"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you"* (Isaiah 66:13). God cares for us like a loving, godly mother cares for her children. He is ever watching over us, anticipating our every need and encouraging us. He doesn't just provide for our physical needs, but also for our emotional ones. His Spirit comforts us when we are anxious or discouraged. He provides for us as a good mother does for her children. (November 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

I don't know what your earthly mother was like, but take a few moments to think of God as an unseen but always-there mother throughout your life. Thank Him for His faithful, sacrificial love shown to you.

BLOG 1019: MY VIEW OF RETIREMENT

God created the world and gave authority to Adam and Eve who turned it over to Satan when they sinned. God Himself came as Jesus to win it back. When He came, He landed behind enemy lines, in enemy occupied territory. He gathered a band of followers around Him to help spread light in the darkness and bring freedom for those in captivity. When Jesus left, that band continued to operate. They grew into the church which continues to grow today.

As Christians, we are still living in enemy occupied territory. Life is a battle. It is constant warfare. The intensity of the battle ebbs and flows but we are battling the forces of Satan and his demons in addition to the world he controls. Since we left Satan's army to join God's army, he has been doing anything he can to win us back or at least make us ineffective in God's army. Those no longer in Satan's army find themselves attacked by Him the rests of their lives. Pastors, church leaders, Christian teachers, missionaries, etc. are on the front line of that battle. We fight, we train, we encourage, we help the wounded, we rescue those we can from bondage into the freedom found only in Jesus.

When I retired from full-time pastoring, I felt that I stepped away from the front line of the battle. That doesn't mean I don't have my own personal battles. God has been working in me in many ways during the last few years. Growing physically older and weaker has its own new set of battles to fight. But as far as the ongoing universal conflict between God and His church and Satan and his forces, I

now work mainly behind the lines, supporting the war effort by training pastors, teaching, writing books and blogs, counseling, praying and preaching and teaching when asked. Every once in a while I make a foray back to the front line when I minister in spiritual warfare, am invited to preach or train pastors in India.

It's important for me to keep that battle motif in mind or I will start to coast and think this life is all about my pleasure. It's not. I must constantly be alert for our enemy is everywhere. He is very deceptive. We must fight for ourselves, for other Christians who are also attacked and to win the freedom of unbelievers who are still in bondage.

That's the way I see my life. How do you see your role in life? I challenge you to evaluate the way you see your place in life today. How do you view life and your part in it? Are you here to serve God, or do you believe He is here to serve you? (Doylestown, PA December 4, 20223)

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Philippians 1:21

Take a few minutes to write down what you think your function in life is. Why does God keep you alive?

Are you fulfilling the purpose for which God has you on earth, or just passing time trying to find some pleasure here and there?

BLOG 1020: WHY?

Why is this happening to me? Why didn't God prevent it? Why these continuing struggles? Why? Why? Why? I ask those questions, you ask them, everyone asks them. Somehow we think that if we knew God's reason in allowing that which we don't understand, we will better be able to adjust to it and accept it. We should know better than that. Children often question "Why?" but giving them an answer doesn't seem to be much help. The big problem with asking "Why?" is that it often implies a lack of faith and trust. We infer that if God could explain Himself to us, then we'd know if He is right or wrong and can act accordingly.

Does God owe us an explanation? Would we be able to understand or trust even if He did? God may not answer our "Why?" questions, but He responds to them like the loving Father He is. Here are some of the things He says.

"Trust Me, I know what I'm doing." Instead of having faith in Him, we put our faith in our ability to understand His reasons, and if they seem good enough to us we'll trust Him. That will never work. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).* That's God's way of saying, "Because I said so." His ways are perfect (Psalm 18:30) and He never makes a mistake.

"It's an opportunity to stretch your faith." *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).* God allows things we don't like or understand to help us mature and become more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29). An easy, perfect life only produces spoiled children and God doesn't want that to happen to His children.

“Just be patient.” Just like children, we get impatient to see the end. We want the product, but we don’t like the process. Again, faith is the antidote to impatience. *“No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” Psalm 84:11*). God has a different timeline than we do. We have His promise that if we are following Him, He won’t withhold anything good for us. Perhaps He knows something we don’t, and the thing we want isn’t the very best thing for us. Do you trust Him enough to let Him make that call?

“I’ve got something better in store for you.” We may think God is giving us second best, or He’s forgotten about us, but that is not true. Jesus said: *“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)* Keep your hope in God (not in what you’re hoping to get from Him). He is far better than the most loving of earthly parents. He sees what’s best for us eternally, not just temporally. And He is a God who loves to bless His children.

“I’m protecting you from yourself.” The Psalmist said *“My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long – though I know not how to relate them all” (Psalm 71:15)*. Do you believe that God is saving you all day long through what He brings in and out of your life? God may say “no” to save you from something hurtful or He might allow something you don’t like because it’s keeping you from something worse. God knows our weaknesses when it comes to temptation. He knows our tendency for failure when it comes to our relationships and He sees what’s ahead. We don’t. Like any good parent, God is committed to protecting us from anything that is not His perfect best for us.

“I love you too much to give you everything you want!” God loves us too much to give us exactly what we want. Look back on your life and you will see numerous times when things worked out differently than what you wanted. Hindsight shows God knew better than you. Instead of questioning “Why?” we now say, “Thank you for knowing and doing what was best for me!” God is loving. He is good. And if He *“did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)*. If God has not delivered on something you wanted or has allowed something to happen which you don’t understand, His answer might best be “Because I love you. And one day you will understand.”

Notice how many of these remind you of when you were raising your children and expecting them to trust and obey you. A godly parent says all these things to their children. If we as fallible human beings want to do what is best for our children, how much more does our heavenly Father want to do so! (Doylestown, PA December 11, 2023)

Which of the above responses speak most strongly to you? Write it down some place where you’ll see it and remember it.

Are you doing your best to trust God with things you don’t like or understand? If so, change “why me?” to “why not me.”

BLOG 1021: WHEN STORMS HIT

We’ve had strong ties to Ft Myers, Florida, in recent years. So, when Hurricane Ian hit the end of September, 2022, we grieved along with the people who lived there. Fort Myers Beach has many special memories and was one of our favorite places to go. It was virtually wiped out. In a matter of hours, everything totally changed. It was sudden and unexpected. For many, life will never be the same as before Ian hit.

That happens in life, too. Storms roll in suddenly, leaving devastation and sorrow in their wake. One conversation, doctor’s visit, email or sudden change of circumstances can turn a life

around. It can hit hard and leave us flat. We can't stop them from happening, but we know where we can run for cover. God's Word tells us how to prepare for and survive through the storms of life.

1. Storms will come. It's not a matter of IF but of WHEN that happens. *"WHEN you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. WHEN you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze"* (Isaiah 43:2). God never promised to keep storms away, but He does promise to be with us through them. Daniel still faced the lions. Joseph was still thrown in prison. Job still lost all he held dear. The disciples still faced persecution. Being a believer doesn't mean we will be kept from every hard circumstance, but that He will be with us in it all. *"...When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him."* Isaiah 59:19

2. Always be alert. *"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."* Matthew 24:42. *Be aware of what is going on around you at all times. Don't ignore the warnings or think somehow you'll be spared. You need to know when to stay and when to go!*

3. Be prepared ahead of time. *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."* Ephesians 5:15-17 *Storms can come with little or no warning, so always be prepared for the worst. Stay close to God at all times, lean on Him and be filled with His spirit. Listen to what He says. Know what to do when a storm hits. Plan ahead.*

4. Know where to go for refuge. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* Psalm 46:2 *When storms come, we head for the nearest shelter, the best place to weather the event. Put your faith in Jesus and lean on Him. He is our safety and sanctuary, our constant help. He can speak to the storm and it must obey Him!*

5. Storms can be overwhelming. They can be too much for us, but never too much for God. *"The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!"* Psalm 29:10-11 *Even when it seems the water is rising above your head, God is with you. We do not face the storms alone. God may not always remove the storm, but, as the verse says, He gives "strength to His people," and He blesses us with "peace."*

6. Storms don't last forever. *"I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."* Genesis 9:13 *No matter how hard the storm hits, or how long it lasts, it will not continue forever. There will be a stopping point. It may not seem like it when the storm is raging, but one day the sun will shine again and all will be calm. It may not always happen in this life, but it certainly will in the next. Remember that when in the midst of the storm. Go through the storm in such a way that won't have regrets when it is over. You don't want to look back with sorrow over how you handled it. You can't do anything to change your response once it is over. You can only do that when in the storm. Storms do come, but storms also go. (Doylestown, PA December 18, 2023)*

Matthew 8:26 *"He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm."*

Everyone is either in a storm, coming out of a storm or waiting for the next storm to hit. Which is true of you?

What do you need to do in this stage to prepare for or endure the next storm?

What has God taught you through the last storm you were in?

Who do you know that is going through a storm and could use a word of encouragement? Reach out to them today.

BLOG 1022: JESUS IS COMING BACK FOR US

“Jesus is coming back!” How many times have you heard that said, sung or preached? But just because a lot of people say it doesn’t mean it is true. It’s very important to know if this will happen or not. So, on this day that celebrates Jesus’ first coming, let’s look to the future and think about when He will come back again. Some deny it, but here’s the proof.

We know that Jesus came as God, born of a virgin, performed miracles, was crucified and came back to life. That was His first coming. One of the promises He gave to His disciples was that He would come back a second time. That return has been the cause of much speculation as well as doubt. If He does return, then we can be assured justice is coming and sin and evil will be gone. It confirms that this world is not all there is. If He doesn’t come back, then He lied and we have no future. If He lied about one thing, who knows how much else He lied about. If He is coming back or not is an important question. How can we know for sure it’ll happen?

PROOF FROM BIBLE PREDICTIONS The Bible is our authority, a trustworthy source of truth. There are over 300 references to the return of Jesus in the Bible – it isn’t a small or unimportant doctrine (Zechariah 11:10; Acts 1:11; Matthew 24:29-30; Revelation 19:6-16; 1:7; 22:7,12,17,20).

PROOF FROM JESUS’ PROMISES Jesus Himself promised He would return (John 14:3; Matthew 16:27; Luke 21:27; 19:11-27; Revelation 22:20). If He isn’t then He lied, and we know He is truth and there is no untruth in Him (John 14:6; 1 John 2:21).

PROOF FROM JESUS’ FOLLOWERS Those who followed Jesus firmly believed that Jesus was coming back and wrote about it in the Bible (Acts 3:11-12, 19-20; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10; 1 John 3:2). They didn’t make this up, but had heard it from Jesus Himself and saw it prophesied in the Old Testament. Their belief was founded on factual evidence.

PROOF FROM INNER HOPE Built into all of us is a natural longing for a better life, justice, removal of evil, peace, meaning and satisfaction. These things don’t happen in this world and only will when Jesus comes. God has built it into all people to look for when He comes to earth and sets right all that is wrong.

This is the hope, the confident assurance, of all who believe in Jesus. It is what we look forward to. The evidence shows that it will happen. Do you believe He will return (1 Corinthians 15:19-22)? Does your life show it? (Doylestown, PA December 25, 2023)

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God[a]; believe also in me. 2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

What difference does it make that Jesus is coming back?

How can remembering this each day change your life?

INDEX 2021-2023

SERIES OF BLOGS

Promises of God: Blog 864 to 885
Olympic lessons for today: Blog 890 to 903
Lies about Marriage: Blog 909 to 915
Fruit of the Spirit: Blog 917 to 928
Truth: Biblical vs. culture today: Blog 932 to 946

BIBLE BOOKS

1 Corinthians 10:13: Blog 877: God promises escape from temptation
1 Corinthians 9:24-27: Blog 890 to 893, 903 (Olympic lessons)
1 John 1:9: Blog 881: God promises to forgive us
1 John 5:14: Blog 883: God promises to hear
2 Corinthians 12:9: Blog 873: God promises His grace
2 Timothy 2:5: Blog 902: Correct Competitors (Olympics 13 2 Timothy 2:5)
Deuteronomy 31:5-6: Blog 868 God promises His continual presence
Deuteronomy 31:6: Blog 874: God promises to never leave us
Galatians 5:22-23: Fruit of the Spirit: Blog 917 to 928
Hebrews 10:23: Blog 885: God keeps His promises
Hebrews 12:11: Blog 901: Practiced Players (Olympics 12 Hebrews 12:11)
Hebrews 12:1-2: Blog 893 to 897 (Olympic lessons)
Hebrews 13:5: Blog 874: God promises to never leave us
Hebrews 13:5: Blog 868 God promises His continual presence
Hebrews 13:6: Blog 878 God promises to always be with us
Isaiah 40:31: Blog 869: God promises His strength
Isaiah 41:10: Blog 875: God promises to uphold us, strengthen us
Jeremiah 29:11-13: Blog 879: God promises to hear, respond
Jeremiah 33:3: Blog 870: God promises His restoration
Job 1-2: Blog 904: All Attacks are Father-Filtered (Job 1); Blog 905: Why Suffering (Job 2)
John 3:16: Blog 957: Most Quoted Scripture
Lamentations 3:22-23: Blog 885: God keeps His promises
Matthew 4:1-11: Blog 906-908: Lessons from Jesus' Temptation 1,2,3 (Matthew 4:1-11)
Matthew 7:1: Blog 957: Most Quoted Scripture
Matthew 7:7-8: Blog 882: God promises to be always available
Numbers 23:19: Blog 885: God keeps His promises
Philippians 1:27: Blog 900: Total Teammates (Olympics 11 Philippians 1:27; 4:3)
Philippians 1:3-6: Blog 865: God promises spiritual growth
Philippians 2:12-13: Blog 871: God promises to use you
Philippians 3:7-14: Blog 898 to 899 (Olympic lessons)
Philippians 4:13: Blog 867: God promises to help you do whatever He wants
Philippians 4:19: Blog 864: God promises to meet our needs
Philippians 4:3: Blog 900: Total Teammates (Olympics 11 Philippians 1:27; 4:3)
Philippians 4:6-7: Blog 866: God promises His peace
Proverbs 3:5-6: Blog 872: God promises guidance
Psalm 118:6: Blog 878 God promises to always be with us
Psalm 119:89-90: Blog 885: God keeps His promises
Psalms, Praying them: Blog 1010

Romans 8:1: Blog 880: God promises to never condemn us:
Romans 8:28: Blog 876: God promises to use everything for our good
Romans 8:38-39: Blog 884: We can't be separated from God

ALPHABETICAL INDIX

2023 India Pastors Conferences, Rick and Scott: Blog 993 to 998

Aged People: Blog 969: Why Gray Hair? (Isaiah 46:4; Proverbs 16:31; 20:29)
Allah fails: Blog 945 & 946: Radical Islam & The Christian (Truth 14, 15)
Allah: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
Alone, never: Blog 878 God promises to always be with us (Psalm 118:6)
Angels: Blog 1007: Proof Angels Exist
Anger, God slow to: Blog 886: New perspective on sin (Psalm 103:8-14)
Anger: Blog 916: Open Door for Satan (2 Corinthians 2)
Angry, God not at me: Blog 887: God's Not mad at me! (Romans 5:9; 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:9)
Answer to prayer promised: Blog 870: God promises His restoration (Jeremiah 33:3)
Anxiety: Blog 987: Things to Not Worry About (Philippians 4:6-7)
Ask, seek, knock: Blog 882: God promises to be always available (Matthew 7:7-8)
Athletic lessons for today: Blog 890 to 903 (Olympic lessons)
Attributes of God: Blog 948: Is Your God Big Enough

Bad things: Blog 1017: Why Bad things Happen to Good People?
Bible promises: Blog 864 to 885
Bible, lies about it: Blog 992: Lies About Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
Bible, most quoted verse: Blog 957: Most Quoted Scripture (John 3:16; Matthew 7:1)
Bible, only true book: Blog 1015
Big, God is: Blog 948: Is Your God Big Enough
Black Lives Matter fails: Blog 937: Of Course, Black Lives Matter (Truth 6)
BLM fails: Blog 937: Of Course, Black Lives Matter (Truth 6)
Bucket list, spiritual: Blog 889: My spiritual bucket list (Isaiah 6:1-8)
Buddhism view of God: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)

Cancel Culture fails: Blog 936: Should Culture be Cancelled? (Truth 5)
Cancelled Trip to India: Blog 960: India Trip Cancelled (Romans 8:28-37)
Changes in Life: Blog 961: Stages and Changes (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)
Children, raising as Christian: Blog 983: Preparing Your Children to Live in an Unbiblical World (Proverbs 22:6)
Christian Training Organization update: Blog 930: India Update 2021-2022 (Matthew 25:40)
Church attendance important: Blog 954: I Didn't Get Anything Our of Church! (Psalm 29:2)
Church attendance: Blog 986: Go to Church Even if You Don't Feel Like it (Hebrews 10:25; Psalm 122:1)
Church during Covid: Blog 955: Doing Church in a Covid World (Matthew 16:18)
Church, Finding: Blog 973: Finding a Good Church Today (Acts 2:42)
Church, must attend? Blog 962: Can You Be Close to God Without Attending Church? (Hebrews 10:25)

Compassion of God: Blog 886: New perspective on sin (Psalm 103:8-14)
Conferences: 2023 India Pastors Conferences, Rick and Scott: Blog 993 to 998
Confucianism view of God: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989:
Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
Control of self necessary: Blog 903: Controlled Contestants (Olympics 14 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)
Control, self: Blog 927: Spirit-Control, Don't Leave home Without It (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the
Spirit
Covid and church: Blog 955: Doing Church in a Covid World (Matthew 16:18)
Critical Race Theory fails: Blog 935: Critical Race Theory and the Christian (Truth 4)
Crowns, receiving: Blog 890: Redeemed Runners (Olympics 1 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Blog 891:
Restored runners (Olympics 2 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Blog 893: Crowned Conquerors
(Olympics 4 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7-8)
CTO update by Pastor Moses: Blog 931: Pastor Moses' 2021-2022 Report from India
CTO update: Blog 930: India Update 2021-2022 (Matthew 25:40)
CTR fails: Blog 935: Critical Race Theory and the Christian (Truth 4)
Culture today vs. Bible truth: Blog 932 to 946
Culture, cancel fails: Blog 936: Should Culture be Cancelled? (Truth 5)

Death, waiting for heaven: Blog 888: God's Waiting room for heaven (John 3:16; 14:1-3; 1 John 5:13)
Death: Blog 953: Death: Who Wants it? (Romans 8:37-39)
Deception: Blog 972: How Do I Know It's God Speaking? (Isaiah 28:33)
Demonic Dreams: Blog 970: Demonic Dreams (Psalm 4:8)
Demonizing open doors: Blog 916: Open Door for Satan (2 Corinthians 2)
Demons: Blog 1002: Proof Satan and Demons are Real
Deserted by God, never! Blog 874: God promises to never leave us (Hebrews 13:5)
Difficulties in life: Blog 963: Turning the Tables (Hebrews 12:6)
Difficulties of pastoring: Blog 990: Heartaches of Being a Pastor (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7)
Discipline from God: Blog 963: Turning the Tables (Hebrews 12:6)
Discouragement Used By Satan: Blog 978: Discouragement: Tool of Satan (1 Corinthians 4:2; 1
Samuel 17:47)
Door, open to demons: Blog 916: Open Door for Satan (2 Corinthians 2)
Doubt Helps Faith: Blog 974: When Doubt Helps Faith (Daniel 3:17-18; Hebrews 11:1)
Doubts, handling them: Blog 964: Dealing With Doubts (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
Dreams, Demonic: Blog 970: Demonic Dreams (Psalm 4:8)

Equality fails: Blog 938: Equality: Good or Bad (Truth 7)
Eternal security: Blog 980: Can Salvation Be Lost? (John 10:28)
Evangelism: Blog 952: Spread the Word (Luke 2:16-18)

Faith helped by Doubt: Blog 974: When Doubt Helps Faith (Daniel 3:17-18; Hebrews 11:1)
Faith trust: Blog 998: Is It OK to Pray for More Money?
Faithfulness: Blog 925: Can God Count on You? (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Father-Filtered, all attacks: Blog 905: Why Suffering (Job 2)
Fear of God, wrong kind: Blog 887: God's Not mad at me! (Romans 5:9; 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:9)
Fear, not for believer: Blog 878 God promises to always be with us (Psalm 118:6)
Fear: Blog 987: Things to Not Worry About (Philippians 4:6-7)
Fellowship, Christian: Blog 900: Total Teammates (Olympics 11 Philippians 1:27; 4:3)
Female made by God: Blog 942: Pick Your Own Gender (Truth 11)
Focus on Jesus in life: Blog 898: Focused Fellows (Olympics 9 Philippians 3:7-14)

Forget past sins: Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10 Philippians 3:7-14)
Forgiveness by God: Blog 886: New perspective on sin (Psalm 103:8-14)
Forgiveness in marriage: Marriage Lies 9: Blog 914 There's too Much to Forgive
Forgiveness, God promises to: Blog 881: God promises to forgive us (1 John 1:9)
Forgiveness: Blog 916: Open Door for Satan (2 Corinthians 2)
Friends: Blog 977: People You Need in Your Life (Proverbs 27:17; 27:6)
Fruit of the Spirit, increasing it: Blog 928: Increasing Your Fruit Production (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Fruit of the Spirit: Blog 917 to 928
Fruit of the Spirit: Blog 918: All of Nothing (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Future, God give us: Blog 879: God promises to hear, respond (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

Gay lifestyle fails: Blog 940 & 941: LGBTQ+ and the Christian (Truth 9 & 10)
Gender, made by God: Blog 942: Pick Your Own Gender (Truth 11)
Gentleness: Blog 926: Power Under Control (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Giving blessed by God: Blog 965: God Blesses Those Who Give (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)
Glorify God, hell does: Blog 985: How Hell Glorifies God (Luke 11:23-27)
Goals, godly: Blog 892: Godly Goals (Olympics 3 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:2); Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10 Philippians 3:7-14)
God fair to those who haven't heard: Blog 950 & 951: How Are People Saved Who Never Heard of Jesus? (2 Peter 3:9)
God glorified by Hell: Blog 985: How Hell Glorifies God (Luke 11:23-27)
God promises strength: Blog 869: God promises His strength (Isaiah 40:31)
God speaking: Blog 972: How Do I Know It's God Speaking? (Isaiah 28:33)
God will never leave us: Blog 874: God promises to never leave us (Hebrews 13:5)
God will use you: Blog 871: God promises to use you (Philippians 2:12-13)
God with us: Blog 878 God promises to always be with us (Psalm 118:6)
God, how big? Blog 948: Is Your God Big Enough
God, motherhood of: Blog 1018
God, which is true: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
God: Blog 1003: Proof God is Greater Than Satan
God's grace promised: Blog 873: God promises His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9)
God's help promised: Blog 867: God promises to help you do whatever He wants (Philippians 4:13)
God's Judgment: Blog 947: Are We Under God's Judgment? (Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8)
God's presence promised: Blog 868 God promises His continual presence (Hebrews 13:5)
God's promises: Blog 864 to 885 Promises of God
Godly man: Blog 943 & 944: What is a Godly Man? (Truth 12, 13)
Gods, false: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
Good, all things work for: Blog 876: God promises to use everything for our good (Romans 8:28)
Goodness: Blog 924: What Are You Good For? (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Grace promised: Blog 873: God promises His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9)
Gray Hair: Blog 969: Why Gray Hair? (Isaiah 46:4; Proverbs 16:31; 20:29)
Growth promised: Blog 865: God promises spiritual growth (Philippians 1:3-6)
Guidance promised: Blog 872: God promises guidance (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Hair, Gray Blog 969: Why Gray Hair? (Isaiah 46:4; Proverbs 16:31; 20:29)
Hear us, God will: Blog 883: God promises to hear (1 John 5:14)

Hearing God's Voice: Blog 972: How Do I Know It's God Speaking? (Isaiah 28:33)
Heaven, Proof of: Blog 984: Proof Heaven & Hell Exist (Matthew 13:40-43)
Heaven, waiting for: Blog 888: God's Waiting room for heaven (John 3:16; 14:1-3; 1 John 5:13)
Hell glorifies God: Blog 985: How Hell Glorifies God (Luke 11:23-27)
Hell, Proof of: Blog 984: Proof Heaven & Hell Exist (Matthew 13:40-43)
Help from God promises: Blog 867: God promises to help you do whatever He wants (Philippians 4:13)
Hinduism view of God: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
Holy Spirit proof: Blog 982: Proof Holy Spirit Lives in You (Acts 14:16-17, 25)
Homosexuality fails: Blog 940 & 941: LGBTQ+ and the Christian (Truth 9 & 10)
Homosexuality: Blog 999: Can a Practicing Homosexual be Christian?
Humility: Blog 1008: Titus, It's Not All About Me

India trip Cancelled: Blog 960: India Trip Cancelled (Romans 8:28-37)
India update, PK Moses: Blog 931: Pastor Moses' 2021-2022 Report from India
India update: Blog 930: India Update 2021-2022 (Matthew 25:40)
Indian Pastor's Testimony: Blog 958: An Indian Pastor's Testimony
Indwelt by Holy Spirit: Blog 982: Proof Holy Spirit Lives in You (Acts 14:16-17, 25)
Islam fails: Blog 945 & 946: Radical Islam & The Christian (Truth 14, 15)
Islam view of God: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)

Jerry Schmoyer update: Blog 929: Personal Update (2 Timothy 4:7-8)
Jesus is coming back for us: Blog 1022
Jesus perform miracles? Blog 1016
Jesus, being like Him: Blog 917: You Can't Be Like Jesus By Trying To Be Like Him (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Jesus, intimacy: Blog 898: Focused Fellows (Olympics 9 Philippians 3:7-14)
Jesus, keep eyes on: Blog 898: Focused Fellows (Olympics 9 Philippians 3:7-14)
Jesus, praying like Blog 1012
Jesus' temptation: Blog 906-908: Lessons from Jesus' Temptation 1,2,3 (Matthew 4:1-11)
Jesus's Return: Blog 971: Proof Jesus is Coming Back (Titus 2:11-12)
Job: Blog 904: All Attacks are Father-Filtered (Job 1); Blog 905: Why Suffering (Job 2)
Joy: Blog 920: Do you Have the Joy, Joy, Joy ... (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Judaism view of God: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
Judgment, are we under: Blog 947: Are We Under God's Judgment? (Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8)
Judgment, none for believer: Blog 880: God promises to never condemn us: (Romans 8:1)

Kindness: Blog 923: Christlike Kindness (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit

Leadership heartaches: Blog 990: Heartaches of Being a Pastor (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7)
LGBTQ+ fails: Blog 940 & 941: LGBTQ+ and the Christian (Truth 9 & 10)
Lies about Marriage: Blog 909 to 915
Lies about the Bible: Blog 992: Lies About Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
Life Stages & Changes: Blog 961: Stages and Changes (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)
Listening to God: Blog 972: How Do I Know It's God Speaking? (Isaiah 28:33)

Loss of Salvation: Blog 980: Can Salvation Be Lost? (John 10:28)
Love alone OK? Blog 956: Is Love All We Need? (1 John 5:3; John 14:21-24)
Love of God never end: Blog 884: We can't be separated from God (Romans 8:38-39)
Love: Blog 919: The Greatest of These is Love (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit

Male created by God: Blog 942: Pick Your Own Gender (Truth 11)
Maleness, Biblical: Blog 943 & 944: What is a Godly Man? (Truth 12, 13)
Man, godly: Blog 943 & 944: What is a Godly Man? (Truth 12, 13)
Marriage Lies 10: Blog 915: The Honeymoon Should Never End
Marriage Lies 4: Blog 909: Marriage is a 50-50 proposition
Marriage Lies 5: Blog 910: Ignore the Problem and It'll Go Away
Marriage Lies 6: Blog 911: My Mate Needs to Change
Marriage Lies 7: Blog 912: It's too Late, Things Will Never Change
Marriage Lies 8: Blog 913: It's OK to Fight Sometimes
Marriage Lies 9: Blog 914 There's too Much to Forgive
Marriage, Unhappy: Blog 1004: Must a Christian Stay in an Unhappy Marriage?
 Blog 1005: What to Do If You are in an Unhappy Marriage?
 Blog 1006: How to Heal An Unhappy Marriage
Mentors: Blog 977: People You Need in Your Life (Proverbs 27:17; 27:6)
Miracles, Jesus perform? Blog 1016
Money to God: Blog 965: God Blesses Those Who Give (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)
Money: Blog 998: Is It OK to Pray for More Money?
Moses' India update: Blog 931: Pastor Moses' 2021-2022 Report from India
Moslems fail: Blog 945 & 946: Radical Islam & The Christian (Truth 14, 15)
Motherhood of God: Blog 1018
Muller, George, Blog 1011, prayer

Needs met promised: Blog 864: God promises to meet our needs (Philippians 4:19)
Never alone: Blog 878 God promises to always be with us (Psalm 118:6)
Never Heard of Jesus: Blog 950 & 951: How Are People Saved Who Never Heard of Jesus? (2 Peter 3:9)
Never leave us, God promises: Blog 874: God promises to never leave us (Hebrews 13:5)
New Age view of God: Blog 988: Which God is the Real God? (Deuteronomy 6:4-5); Blog 989: Proof There Are no Other Gods (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
No condemnation for believer: Blog 880: God promises to never condemn us: (Romans 8:1)

Obedience necessary: Blog 902: Correct Competitors (Olympics 13 2 Timothy 2:5)
Obstacles in Christian life: Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10 Philippians 3:7-14)
Old People: Blog 969: Why Gray Hair? (Isaiah 46:4; Proverbs 16:31; 20:29)
Old Testament, how is salvation: Blog 950 & 951: How Are People Saved Who Never Heard of Jesus? (2 Peter 3:9)
Olympic lessons for today: Blog 890 to 903
Open door to demons: Blog 916: Open Door for Satan (2 Corinthians 2)

Pagans who Never Heard: Blog 950 & 951: How Are People Saved Who Never Heard of Jesus? (2 Peter 3:9)
Parents, raising Christian children: Blog 983: Preparing Your Children to Live in an Unbiblical World (Proverbs 22:6)

Partners: Blog 977: People You Need in Your Life (Proverbs 27:17; 27:6)
Pastor in India Testimony: Blog 958: An Indian Pastor's
Pastoring heartaches: Blog 990: Heartaches of Being a Pastor (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7)
Pastors conferences: 2023 India Pastors Conferences, Rick and Scott: Blog 993 to 998
Patience necessary: Blog 896: Patient Participants (Olympics 7 Hebrews 12:1); Blog 897:
 Persistent Personnel (Olympics 8 Hebrews 12:1)
Patience: Blog 922: Give me Patience and Give it to me Now! (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Peace promised: Blog 866: God promises His peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
Peace: Blog 921: I've Got Peace Like a River (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
People needed in life: Blog 977: People You Need in Your Life (Proverbs 27:17; 27:6)
Perseverance necessary: Blog 896: Patient Participants (Olympics 7 Hebrews 12:1); Blog 897:
 Persistent Personnel (Olympics 8 Hebrews 12:1)
Personhood of God: Blog 948: Is Your God Big Enough
Plans God has for us: Blog 879: God promises to hear, respond (Jeremiah 29:11-13)
Power under control: Blog 926: Power Under Control (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit
Pray, God will answer: Blog 879: God promises to hear, respond (Jeremiah 29:11-13)
Pray: Blog 998: Is It OK to Pray for More Money?
Prayer answered promised: Blog 870: God promises His restoration (Jeremiah 33:3)
Prayer Life in a Rut? Blog 1009
Prayer will be answered: God promises to be always available (Matthew 7:7-8)
Prayer, God will hear us: Blog 883: God promises to hear (1 John 5:14)
Prayers unanswered: Blog 976: When Prayers Are Unanswered (Revelation 5:6-8)
Prayers: Blog 1001: Prayers God Won't Answer
Praying like Jesus: Blog 1012
Praying Scriptures Blogs 1009-1012
Presence of God promised: Blog 868 God promises His continual presence (Hebrews 13:5)
Pressing on in life: Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10 Philippians 3:7-14)
Prize, running for: Blog 890: Redeemed Runners (Olympics 1 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Blog 891:
 Restored runners (Olympics 2 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Blog 893: Crowned Conquerors
 (Olympics 4 1 Corinthians 9:24-27); Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10
 Philippians 3:7-14)
Promises of God: Blog 864 to 885
Promises, God keeps: Blog 885: God keeps His promises (Numbers 23:19)
Prophecy: Blog 971: Proof Jesus is Coming Back (Titus 2:11-12)
Psalms, praying them: Blog 1010

Quoted Bible verse, most: Blog 957: Most Quoted Scripture (John 3:16; Matthew 7:1)

Radical Islam today: Blog 945 & 946: Radical Islam & The Christian (Truth 14, 15)
Radical Reform fails: Blog 933: Why Radical Reform Fails (Truth 2)
Rapture: Blog 971: Proof Jesus is Coming Back (Titus 2:11-12)
Rapture: Jesus for us Blog 1022
Restoration of God promised: Blog 869: God promises His strength (Isaiah 40:31)
Retirement, my view of: Blog 1019
Return, Jesus for us: Blog 1022
Reward, running for: Blog 890: Redeemed Runners (Olympics 1 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Blog 891:
 Restored runners (Olympics 2 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) Blog 893: Crowned Conquerors
 (Olympics 4 1 Corinthians 9:24-27); Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10
 Philippians 3:7-14)

Role models: Blog 977: People You Need in Your Life (Proverbs 27:17; 27:6)
Rules, follow in life: Blog 902: Correct Competitors (Olympics 13 2 Timothy 2:5)
Running for the prize: Blog 890: Redeemed Runners (Olympics 1 1 Corinthians 9:24-27); Blog 891: Restored runners (Olympics 2 1 Corinthians 9:24-27); Blog 893: Crowned Conquerors (Olympics 4 1 Corinthians 9:24-27); Blog 899: Christlike Competitors (Olympics 10 Philippians 3:7-14)

Salvation of those Never Heard: Blog 950 & 951: How Are People Saved Who Never Heard of Jesus? (2 Peter 3:9)

Salvation secure: Blog 884: We can't be separated from God (Romans 8:38-39)

Salvation, loss of: Blog 980: Can Salvation Be Lost? (John 10:28)

Salvation, never lost: Blog 880: God promises to never condemn us: (Romans 8:1)

Satan Today: Blog 975: Satan is Alive and Well Today (2 Corinthians 2:10-11)

Satan uses Discouragement: Blog 978: Discouragement: Tool of Satan (1 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Samuel

Satan: Blog 1002: Proof Satan and Demons are Real

Satan: Blog 1003: Proof God is Greater Than Satan

Satan's attacks: Blog 904: All Attacks are Father-Filtered (Job 1); Blog 905: Why Suffering (Job 2)

Satan's plans: Blog 991: Satan's Game Plan (1 John 2:14-15)

Satan's tricks: Blog 966: Successful Tricks of Satan Today (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Satan's voice: Blog 972: How Do I Know It's God Speaking? (Isaiah 28:33)

Schmoyer trip Cancelled: Blog 960: India Trip Cancelled (Romans 8:28-37)

Schmoyer, Jerry update: update: Blog 929: Personal Update (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

Schmoyer, Jerry, retirement: Blog 1019

Scott Troxell Blog: Blog 979: From Scott Troxel

Scripture, lies about: Blog 992: Lies About Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Scripture, most quoted verse: Blog 957: Most Quoted Scripture (John 3:16; Matthew 7:1)

Scriptures, Praying Blogs 1009-1012

Second Coming of Jesus for us: Blog 1022

Second Coming: Blog 971: Proof Jesus is Coming Back (Titus 2:11-12)

Seek God wholeheartedly: Blog 879: God promises to hear, respond (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

Self-Control: Blog 927: Spirit-Control, Don't Leave home Without It (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit

Self-Control: Blog 903: Controlled Contestants (Olympics 14 1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Sex: Blog 999: Can a Practicing Homosexual be Christian?

Sin forgiven: Blog 881: God promises to forgive us (1 John 1:9)

Sin, degrees of? Blog 959: Is All Sin Equal In God's Sight? (Psalm 89:14; 1 John 1:8-10)

Sin, God give escape from temptation: Blog 877: God promises escape from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Sin, new perspective: Blog 886: New perspective on sin (Psalm 103:8-14)

Sin, overcoming: Blog 906-908: Lessons from Jesus' Temptation 1,2,3 (Matthew 4:1-11)

Sin, turn from: Blog 894: Entangled entrants (Olympics 5 Hebrews 12:1); Blog 895: Stumbling Saints (Olympics 6 Hebrews 12:1)

Sin: Blog 991: Satan's Game Plan (1 John 2:14-15)

Spirit, fruit of: Blog 917 to 928

Spirit-Control: Blog 927: Spirit-Control, Don't Leave home Without It (Galatians 5:22-23) Fruit of the Spirit

Spiritual bucket list: Blog 889: My spiritual bucket list (Isaiah 6:1-8)

Spiritual growth promised: Blog 865: God promises spiritual growth (Philippians 4:6-7)

Spiritual Personality: Blog 967: Different Spiritual Personalities (1 Peter 4:10-11) Blog 966: Successful Tricks of Satan Today (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Spiritual Warfare: Blog 1002: Proof Satan and Demons are Real

Spiritual Warfare: Blog 991: Satan's Game Plan (1 John 2:14-15)

Stages of Life: Blog 961: Stages and Changes (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4)

Stewardship of things: Blog 965: God Blesses Those Who Give (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

Storms, when they hit: Blog 1021

Strength of God promised: Blog 869: God promises His strength (Isaiah 40:31)

Strength promised: Blog 875: God promises to uphold us, strengthen us (Isaiah 41:10)

Suffering in Life: Blog 963: Turning the Tables (Hebrews 12:6)

Suffering used for good: Blog 876: God promises to use everything for our good (Romans 8:28)

Suffering: Blog 1020: Why?

Suffering: Blog 1017: Why Bad things Happen to Good People?

Suffering: Blog 1021: When Storms Hit

Suffering: Blog 904: All Attacks are Father-Filtered (Job 1); Blog 905: Why Suffering (Job 2)

Teammates, Christians: Blog 900: Total Teammates (Olympics 11 Philippians 1:27; 4:3)

Temptation, God gives escape from: Blog 877: God promises escape from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Temptation: Blog 906-908: Lessons from Jesus' Temptation 1,2,3 (Matthew 4:1-11)

Temptation: Blog 991: Satan's Game Plan (1 John 2:14-15)

Testimony of Indian Pastor: Blog 958: An Indian Pastor's

Timothy, teachable spirit: Blog 1013

Titus: Blog 1008: Titus, It's Not All About Me

Trans lifestyle fails: Blog 940 & 941: LGBTQ+ and the Christian (Truth 9 & 10)

Trials in life; Blog 963: Turning the Tables (Hebrews 12:6)

Trials used for good: Blog 876: God promises to use everything for our good (Romans 8:28)

Trials: Blog 904: All Attacks are Father-Filtered (Job 1); Blog 905: Why Suffering (Job 2)

Tricks of Satan: Blog 966: Successful Tricks of Satan Today (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Trinity, understanding Blog 1014

Troxell, Scott Blog: Blog 979: From Scott Troxel

Truth, Choosing: Blog 939: Right to Choose Truth (Truth 8)

Truth, where to find it: Blog 932: Finding Truth in a World Gone Mad (Judges 17:6) (Truth 1)

Truth: Biblical vs. culture today: Blog 932 to 946

Unanswered Prayers: Blog 1001: Prayers God Won't Answer

Unanswered Prayers: Blog 976: When Prayers Are Unanswered (Revelation 5:6-8)

Unforgiveness: Blog 916: Open Door for Satan (2 Corinthians 2)

Unhappy Marriages: Blog 1004: Must a Christian Stay in an Unhappy Marriage?

Blog 1005: What to Do If You are in an Unhappy Marriage?

Blog 1006: How to Heal An Unhappy Marriage

Unity, Christian: Blog 900: Total Teammates (Olympics 11 Philippians 1:27; 4:3)

Upheld by God: Blog 875: God promises to uphold us, strengthen us (Isaiah 41:10)

Used by God: Blog 871: God promises to use you (Philippians 2:12-13)

Verse Most Quoted: Blog 957: Most Quoted Scripture (John 3:16; Matthew 7:1)

Virgin birth: Blog 1000: Does the Virgin Birth Really Matter?

Why? Blog 1020

Will of God, knowing: v

Witnessing: Blog 952: Spread the Word (Luke 2:16-18)

Wokeness fails: Blog 934: Wokeness: A Good Idea Gone Bad (Truth 3)

Word, praying Blog 1009-1012

World view vs. Bible world view: Blog 932 to 946

Worry: Blog 987: Things to Not Worry About (Philippians 4:6-7)

Worship: Blog 981: Is My Worship About Me? (Psalm 95:1-7)