

New Vision, New Hope

Inspiration for living the full potential
of your destiny in Christ

Gill Keith
Your Personalized Bible
as unique as you

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Book Description (for Kindle Store):

Experience the incredible power of God for your life that is available in Christ. With topics like “Where’s Waldo”, “The Devil’s Favorite Letter” and “The Greatest Gift You Can Give Yourself”, you can step up to a new level of freedom and hope. Be inspired by the application of Biblical examples and the author’s personal experiences. In short, allow God’s Word to transform your life.

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Introduction

The focus of *New Vision, New Hope* is mind renewal. The key Scripture universally quoted with regards to mind renewal is Romans 12:2 (NKJV): “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” But another Scripture I believe is just as key and one you will read throughout these studies is Philippians 3:13-14 (NKJV): “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Congratulations! If you thought you had already “apprehended”, had already arrived, you would not have opened this book. Until we let go of the past we cannot reach to the future. In order to experience new life and the fullness of who we are in Christ we must first let go of the old way of thinking. God has a high calling for each of our lives. As we experience the transformation of our thinking we will enter a new freedom and a new life. I hope that as you read and meditate on these pages the eyes of your understanding will be enlightened (Ephesians 1:18) and you will enter into your position in Christ in a new and deeper way.

This is not material to sit down and read cover to cover. Ephesians 4:22- 24 tell us to put off the old man and put on the new. Putting off the old man, that is salvation, is instantaneous when we are born again. Putting on the new man is mind renewal and it is a lifelong process. Take the time to meditate on each devotional and allow it to sink in. There is a word here that will change your thinking, change the way you see yourself and change your life if you will allow it.

If the reference to your identity in Christ is unfamiliar to you, let me recommend a website: <http://www.YourPersonalizedBible.com/products/free-samples/> Here you will read specific Scriptures that tell you that you are valuable, loved, forgiven, victorious, chosen and complete in Christ.

We are on the road from im-perfection to in-perfection. Of course we will never arrive at the goal of being perfectly like Christ as long as we are in these mortal bodies but we are called to the journey.

It is my prayer that the reflections you will read in these chapters will lead you into a deeper understanding of who you are in Christ and what that redemption truly means in your life here on earth and to your eternal destiny. Live in the fullness of His love.

1: Hope and Change

Hope and change! No, I'm not campaigning for Barack Obama. His vision was to change government. We need a vision to change ourselves. My flesh tells me change is all about what's going on out there but in truth it's about what's going on inside me. *"If the government changes, if my job changes, if my wife changes."* No! If I change. That is when my life will be different.



I can't change other people, I can't change what is out there, but I can change me. In my marriage, I can wish it were different, I can dream about it being different, I can even tell my wife all the ways she needs to change so it will be different, but in the end nothing will happen until I change.

I remember a vacation my wife and I took with another couple to Antigua, an island in the Caribbean that is a former British colony. We rented a car and I was elected to be the driver. The problem was, with the British influence, they drove on the left side of the road. After we checked into our condo, we went to the store to get groceries. Leaving the parking lot, I pulled out onto the street only to see a pickup headed straight at me on my side of the street. Help me, Jesus! Then I realized it was me who was on the wrong side! Time to change, quickly!!

Jesus came to bring change and renewal. God loves us the way we are but He also loves us enough to not leave us the way we are. Salvation changes us from dead in sin to alive in Christ. People came to Jesus because He didn't come with empty tradition. He came with the hope of real change. When Jesus came into a room, lives changed. When I met Jesus, I didn't leave the same. When I came to know Jesus, not just know about Him but really know Him, my thinking changed, my vision changed, my life changed.

Jesus is the hope of the world. He brings a hope that life can be better, my family can be better. Hope says I see tomorrow as better than today. The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10 says, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." Salvation is not just about getting to heaven. My faith has an impact here and now.

Have you lost your hope? You don't see a better tomorrow? You think, *"When can I get out of here?" "Thank God, they legalized pot. I can get through another day."* *"I just need food stamps, I just need welfare, I just need a check from somebody to take care of me."* Why is that outlook so prevalent today? Because hope is placed in the wrong things. John 10:10 says Jesus came to give us life, abundant life. There is something better ahead.

The world says, *"Go buy a lottery ticket."* What does the lottery do but try to give someone hope for change? And it disappoints. Romans 15:13 says God is the source of

our hope. Have you tried and tried, but you feel beat up and beat down? Matthew 18:3 says we must become like a little child. Yes, that speaks of purity and trust, but a child is a bundle of potential, expectation and hope. I must live in His hope, live in His potential. I am not a victim. I can rise above my circumstance. I will stand up and say “I am who God says I am.”

Do you feel stuck in “*I can’t help it.*”? Stuck on negatives? Romans 8:37 (NKJV) says, “We are more than a conqueror.” Have you ever watched The Biggest Loser? The contestants are people who have lost hope. Now those trainers have to help them to change the way they see themselves. “Come on, one more set. You can do it! I believe in you. You have to believe in yourself.” God sees more in me than I see in myself. The first thought I need to change is “I can’t” to “I can.”

“*What difference does it make? Nothing will change. I am just stuck here.*” Well, Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, “As he thinks in his heart, so is he.” What have I stored up in my heart, what is that treasure? Is it bitterness, negativity, defeat or is it faith, peace and hope? It’s my choice.

Colossians 1:27 says that the riches of God’s glory is Christ in you, the hope of glory. My hope is not in other people, it is not in the government, not in money, not in stuff. My hope is not even in Christ in heaven. My hope is in Christ in me. I should get up every morning with the thought “Christ is in me.” To do that I need to know my identity in Christ: I am valuable, I am loved, I am forgiven, I am complete, I am called.

Ephesians 1:18-20 says, “Having the eyes of **his** heart enlightened, that **Gill** may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in **Gill**, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward **Gill** because **he** believes, according to the working of the strength of His might which He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places.” The hope of His calling, the riches of God’s glory, the greatness of His power. The same power that conquered the grave lives in me. Wow!

Judges 6 is the story of Gideon. The Israelite nation is struggling under the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon is hiding in a wine press trying to thresh out his meager supply of grain that he has kept hidden when suddenly an angel appears. The angel didn’t talk about how powerful the enemy was or how bad the economy was. No, he addressed Gideon, “Mighty man of valor.” Gideon looks around in confusion and says, “Ah, I think you have the wrong guy. Perhaps you are looking for Judah just down the street?” Gideon was meditating on the negative. The angel declares, “The Lord is with you.” and “You are a mighty man.” But he couldn’t receive it. Gideon had to change his thinking and when he did, he changed a nation. He could have said someone else needs to do something, instead he finally said, “God can use me.”

I need to focus on faith thoughts, thoughts that are encouraging and productive. Philippians 4:8 commands: “Finally, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely,

whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, *Gill* should think about these things.” I must choose my thoughts wisely because they will soon be my tomorrow. Worldly, negative thoughts results in a worldly, negative life. Garbage in, garbage out. The enemy wants my thoughts on the negative. I am going to choose whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable...

Feel stuck? Economic problems, social problems, despair, hopelessness leads to helplessness. Helplessness causes us to lose motivation and strength. I have to remember: it is not about what is around me, it is what is in me. I am on my way to where God wants me to be. This is Godly thinking, not just positive thinking. My goal is to walk like Jesus and talk like Jesus, but I must first think like Jesus.

What are the key thoughts that you struggle with? If I told you my issue, you would probably say, “*Well, you should just get over it.*” But with your issue, you’ll say, “*You don’t know what I’ve been through.*” We all have issues. To counter them we need to build up an arsenal of Scriptures that battle those issues. Those could be called “go-to thoughts”. Russell Wilson, quarterback of the Seattle Seahawks, has his go-to players. Third and 5 you can expect him to go to Zack Miller on a short slant across the middle; third and 1, watch for Marshawn Lynch up the middle.

Looking for go-to Scriptures? Try Romans 8 (NKJV):

- When the devil is beating on you, go to Romans 8:1 “There is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
- When your emotions are in turmoil, go to Romans 8:6 “To be spiritually minded is life and peace.”
- When you feel afraid and insecure, go to Romans 8:15 “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption.”
- When you feel like friends, family, the world are against you, go to Romans 8:31 “If God is for us, who can be against us.”
- When God feels distant, go to Romans 8:39 “(Nothing) can separate us from the love of God.”

Hope is not a feeling. Hope is a Biblical way of thinking. Sure, my emotions get down, but I am hanging onto my hope. According to John Maxwell, change is helped by The Big Mo, momentum. If you played basketball in high school, you will remember practicing free throws: make 7 or 8 in a row and you felt pretty good, miss 3 or 4 and you can feel like quitting. It is like that for me with dieting: one day I am down 2 pounds, “Yes!!” (fist pump), the next day I am up 3 and I’m ready to bag it, you can have the whole dieting business! 2Corinthians 3:18 says we are going “from glory to glory”. I am going forward with vision and hope of where God wants my life to be.

Through years of practice, we have developed habits of thought. They are called beliefs. Romans 12:2 warns us to not be conformed to the world, but instead be transformed. It starts with my mind. Change a thought and change your life. Hope and change, hope and

change. Unless I change, my situation is hopeless, but without hope, I cannot make meaningful change. With hope change happens.

2: Half way

Time for a Bible name quiz:

- Timothy: That one is easy, Paul's assistant and traveling companion.
- Thomas: Easy too, one of Jesus's apostles, commonly known as "Doubting Thomas".
- Tamar: Here they get a little tougher, she was the daughter-in-law of Judah who tricked him into sex and gave birth to Perez who is in the lineage of Jesus.
- Terah: No clue? He was the father of Abraham. Why have we heard so little of him? He only went half way.

What would you think of a flooring contractor who carpeted half your living room and left the other half bare? Or a roofer who finished the south side of your house but left the north side undone? That was Terah in Genesis 11:31. He took his family from Ur of Caldees to go to Canaan but he got to Haran and settled there. He only made it half way.



Likewise the Israelites came up to their goal and faltered. They left Egypt but did not have the right mindset to enter the Promised Land. Israel, again in Haggai 1, had stopped work on the construction of their new temple for 16 years. They had laid the foundation but then lost the vision. Haggai 1:6 says, "You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." Jesus's disciples in John 6 turned away when Jesus talked about commitment. Jesus didn't run after them. The attitude of the many was, "This teaching is hard." The attitude of Peter and the few: "Where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

On the other hand, Elisha would not stop short. In 2Kings 2:1-14 he recognized that his mentor, Elijah, would soon be taken from him. Elijah encouraged him to stay behind first at Bethel then at Jericho and finally at the Jordan River. The result of his follow-through was that he received Elijah's mantle and a double portion of his anointing.

I remember my first (and only) experience with a rock climbing wall. My wife and I decided to try it out. Being a gentleman, I let her go first. Up she went, rang the bell and back down. Then it was my turn. About half way up, my legs were burning, my hands were trembling. I didn't think I could make it. Then I saw in my mind the picture of my wife ringing the bell and I knew I could not stop short.

What does halfway look like in your life? "Hey, I stopped drinking, but smoking isn't that bad." "I go to church every Sunday, but I just don't have time to read my Bible every day." "I give to my church but tithing is more than I can afford." But, But, But...

The greatest enemy of success is not failure, it is "good enough". Contentment brings containment. Contentment becomes a lid over your life. I can picture Terah standing in the lush Mesopotamian valley at Haran looking at the barren desert mountains leading to Canaan and saying, "This is good enough right here." Terah talked big but only went halfway and missed his destiny. He didn't see it as choosing hell or choosing Satan, of course. He was lured away from his destiny by comfort, luxury, the pleasures of the world, by "good enough". As a result, I believe he missed God's call for his life. Later Abraham took his family the rest of the way into Canaan and the result was he became the father of faith.

Jesus didn't stop halfway either. He went all the way to the cross to become our Savior. Hebrews 12:2 says, "for the joy that was set before Him (Jesus) endured the cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Are you discontent with where you are? That is a good place to be. It is a place of stretching and growing. It is a place to catch a new vision of who God wants you to be.

Romans 12:1 tells us it is our reasonable service to God to be a living sacrifice. That takes follow-through. My Dad drummed follow-through into me. A child lacks follow-through. He wants to be a fireman one day, a doctor the next, a carpenter after that. James 1:8 warns a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. If we are to be successful in our Christian walk, we need focus.

We made a decision for Jesus. Now we need follow-through. I'm not talking about what we do in church, but how we live that out during the week. I made a decision for Jesus at 12 but I had no follow-through. In a few weeks I was living the same as I had before. At 24 I made a commitment to the Lord, but soon you could see no difference in my life. At 32 I made a decision and that one stuck.

We are all familiar with the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. A farmer goes out to sow seed. Some seed, representing those who hear the Word of God, fall on:

- Wayside – These are those who are a Christian when it's convenient, but they are easily distracted.
- Rocky soil – These are those who are sincere but not rooted in the Word so they lack the staying power to go all the way.
- Thorns – Some will have a strong start but will be pulled back by sin habits, worry or fear because they never changed the way they think.
- Good soil – Let's be those who press through, who go all the way, whose lives bear fruit.

Matthew 7:24-27 warns against building our life on the sand, unwilling to let God's Word change us. That is when there is no commitment, easily moved, looking for a handout, only following when everything is going right, only making it half way. If we

build on the rock of God's truth, we will stand in time of trial and adversity, we will have the character to not stop half way.

In Acts 20:24 (NKJV) Paul knows that he faces persecution, imprisonment, even death, but he makes a remarkable commitment: "None of these things move me nor do I count my life dear to myself that I may finish my race with joy." We had better be prepared beforehand or we will be moved by circumstances. Today is a season of preparation for what God is bringing to our lives. We must use the time well today if we are to be ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

How am I going to develop follow-through? Here are some keys:

1. Recognize the potholes. We all have those things that get us off track. It might be alcohol or drugs or friends or a woman (or a man). When I am driving my car I take care to avoid the potholes because I know they can do damage. The same is true of the potholes in our life. Avoid them or pay the price. 1Peter 5:8 says, "**Gill** must be sober, self-controlled and watchful. **Gill's** adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Please don't get eaten. Avoid the potholes.
2. No "Plan B". In Luke 9:62 (NIV), Jesus warned, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." Have you heard those who are told they need to change and they reply, "I'll try."? Recognize that "I'll try" is a formula for failure. It leaves the door open for another path.
3. Armor up. Ephesians 6:10-19 details the armor of God: the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of the Spirit, etc. We need those weapons if we are to stand in the battle.

3: The Landmine of Pride

Does God want us to live a life of surrender or a life of victory? Would you believe both! We must die in order to live. (1 Timothy 2:11) We must give if we expect to receive. (Luke 6:38) It is the humble who will be exalted. (1 Peter 5:6) The Bible constantly challenges us to live beyond ourselves. Power without character is like a balloon let go, unpredictable and ineffective. Pffsssssss. With character the power is focused like an arrow.



What is a landmine? I define it as something that catches you by surprise and is destructive to your life. Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) refers to “the sin that so easily entangles.” We recognize lust, bitterness, murder, jealousy, unforgiveness, alcohol or drug abuse, but one sin sneaks up on us: pride.

Mohamed Ali made well known statement: “It’s hard to be humble when you are as good as I am.” Of course he had what it took to back that up. Proverbs 8:13 warns that God hates pride and arrogance. Pride is believing I can do anything apart from God. BOOM, there is the landmine. I’m not willing to admit I’m wrong. BOOM, there it is. I am not willing to ask for directions. BOOM, there it is again. Is my heart God-focused or self-focused? 1 Peter 5:5 (NIV) says, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

It is popular in our culture to consider pride a male sin, but before the women turn to the next lesson recognize this: focus on self – I need, I want, I feel – is at its base pride and that is just as predominant in the female as the male. Women may manifest pride a little differently but I believe we are all prone to fall into it.

There is a good pride: healthy self-respect, dignity, satisfaction in a job well done. The other side is bad pride: conceit, egotism, arrogance, boasting, putting others down, self-righteous.

Isaiah 14:12-15 (NIV) narrates the fall of Satan: “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the north. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit.” His downfall was pride. Isaiah continues in verses 16-17 to describe Satan’s fate: “Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: ‘Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a wilderness, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?’” Someday we will see the

devil for who he really is. I think we will look at him and say “Is that all he is? This is what had everyone so scared and intimidated?”

Pride is sneaky. It shows up as arrogance, greed, envy, anger, self-pity and “poor me’s”. When I am driving I tend to see others as obstacles. That is pride. In Genesis 3:5 Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. William Ernst Henley wrote the famous poem “Invictus” in 1875. It concluded with the lines, “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.” It may be a very stirring poem but its underlying basis is pride. “I’m the boss of my life.” Better think again. Who is in the driver’s seat of your life?

Pride stops growth. When I say “Look how great I am.” I have stopped pursuing excellence and have settled for “good enough”. Pride says look where I’ve come. Humility says look where I am going. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking less about yourself. I am valuable, not because of what I have done but who I am in Christ. Philippians 3:13-14 encourages us to not look back but rather to press toward the goal.

Psalm 101:5 warns us that God will not tolerate pride. What qualifies us for God’s grace? In 1Corinthians 1:26-31 God pulls the rug from under human thinking and turns it upside down. Let’s look at this passage in detail.

1. Vs. 26 says we are called by God not because of position in society, advanced education or great wealth. God came for those whom the world looks on as losers. I remember choosing teams for kickball in 5th and 6th grade. The two most popular kids always got to be captains and it seems like I was always the last one chosen. “You take him.” “Nah, I had him last time. It’s your turn.” God starts with the people the world chooses last. James 2:5 tells us that God has chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith. That is the place where pride can be defeated.
2. Vs. 27-29 says God chose the weak, the despised, the outcast. Peter was a common fisherman. Matthew was a despised tax collector. Zacchaeus (Luke 19) was a chief tax collector, a collaborator with the oppressive Roman government. Jesus is no “country club” savior. In Matthew 11:5 (NKJV) “The poor have the Gospel preached to them.” was Jesus’s proof to John that He was Messiah. Isaiah 55:8 tells us that God’s ways are not our ways.
3. Vs 30-31 reminds us God alone is our source of salvation. 2Corinthians 10:17 (NIV) says, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” God looks at the heart. He looks for character, integrity and humility.

Hebrews 12:1 tells me to run **my** race with endurance. I’ll never be as strong as ____ or as skinny as ____ or as good looking as _____. I must focus on my unique God given gifts and talents. Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goes before destruction.” The landmine is there waiting. Watch your step!

4: Dead Men Don't Sweat It

The purpose of the Law is not to show me how to live so God will like me. Rather it is a mirror to show me it is impossible for me to be right before God by myself. I need a Savior. I can put on an outward show of how holy I am. There is a word for that: religion. But inwardly I know how far short I truly fall. It is only through faith I am made right with God. Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law. Faith makes me a son of God, clothed with the life of Christ himself. (Galatians 3:27)

Philippians 2:7 says Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” Jesus did not come as a people pleaser, to gain recognition and a large following. He came to take my place, as a substitute for the price I should have paid.



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We are either connected to Adam or connected to Jesus. Both positions give an inheritance: defeat or victory, death or life, separation or reconciliation. The sinner deserves to die, but Jesus took our place. I didn't get what I deserved. Hebrews 10:3-4 says that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. Jesus had to deal with it. Hebrews 9:26 declares that Jesus put away sin, abolished it, and delivered me from guilt. Isaiah 53:6 says, “The LORD has laid on Him **Gill's** iniquity.” The clearest Scripture on this is probably 2Corinthians 5:21: “For Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on **Gill's** behalf; so that in Him **Gill** might become the righteousness of God.” The Father laid on Jesus the sin that was rightfully mine so that I can stand before Him righteous in Christ.

1Corinthians 1:18 tells us that the cross is the power of God to absorb my sin and my punishment. That means the cross is like a sponge, soaking up the anger, hatred, lust, adultery, pride, negativity, the list goes on and on. If I live under the weight of guilt and shame, it is because I am trying to punish myself to appease what I see as an angry God. The problem is that mindset always pushes me down. Guilt is man's way of atonement but it brings no mercy, no healing, no freedom. The devil wants me under a burden of guilt and shame. “You always fall short, you'll never measure up.” The truth is he is right; I can't do it. I must depend on the Cross and faith in Jesus's completed work in His death, burial and resurrection.

Romans 8:33-34 says, “Who could bring a charge against **Gill**, because **he** is one of God's elect? It is God who justifies **Gill**. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and more than that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God and makes

intercession for **Gill**.” God has declared me not guilty. If the devil can get me to dwell on past sin and failure, he keeps control. But the reality is God is not holding those past failings against me. Micah 7:19 promises, “He will again have compassion on **Gill**. He will tread **his** iniquities under foot; and You will cast all **Gill’s** sins into the depths of the sea.” It is time to let them go. Hebrews 4:16 encourages us to come boldly before the throne of grace. Anything that keeps me from God’s throne is of the enemy.

We face a choice: Live a self-focused life or a God-focused life. God is not “out there” somewhere; He is in here, in my heart. In Ezekiel 11: 19, God promises to remove the heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh. Only the Word of God will change us. We must decide to die to self.

When I went through Bible School, one assignment was to present a 10 minute sermon on a theme of our choice. One woman in the class was a former mortuary assistant and her message was titled, “Dead men don’t sweat it.” She said no one she worked on was worried about the mortgage payment or the utility bill or the car loan. You could wave pornography in front of them and it didn’t bother them. Pass a greasy hamburger under their nose and they didn’t try to take a bite. Dead men don’t sweat it. I must surrender every area to Christ. If I am truly dead to an area, then I am not tempted.

Hopefully we all recognize that our relationship with God is not based on our works. At least in our heads, we’ll say “Amen”, but something inside us still says we need to do better. There is that gnawing feeling that we are just not good enough. 1Peter 5:7 commands us to cast all our cares on Him, because He cares for us. We must surrender the guilt and surrender the shame.

The keyword is: Trust. When our children were small, I taught each of them to jump to me from the side of the pool. Our son Paul was about 2 when I was working with him to have the trust to jump to me. He took to it quickly. Then one day he was standing on the side of the pool and I was several yards out in the pool, distracted by the activities of the other children. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. I looked and he was gone. I rushed over to where he had been standing and dove down. There he was standing on the bottom calmly looking around. He didn’t see me but I could see on his face the trust: “I know my Daddy will be here any second.”

We each stand on the edge of eternity. I may step through that curtain in 50 years, I may step through tonight. Do I face eternity with the trust that Jesus’s sacrifice was enough? 1Corinthians 15:58 tells us to be steadfast, unmovable knowing that our labor is not in vain. When we built a short sidewalk from our driveway to the front door, I wanted it to last, to be strong, so I made sure it had the right rebar. With that rebar I knew it was unshakeable. The Word is our spiritual rebar to make us unshakeable, unwavering.

The old man died. I no longer have to live with the guilt, condemnation and shame that my old man carried. With trust in His Word, I step into new life, new freedom, new hope.

5: Where's Waldo!

Ever do “Where’s Waldo?” puzzles? They are drawings depicting dozens of people doing a variety of amusing things within the scene. Readers are challenged to find a character named Waldo hidden in the group. Waldo's distinctive red-and-white striped shirt, bobble hat, and glasses should make him easy to recognize, but the drawings involve a distracting use of red-and-white striped objects to hide the real Waldo. What is the technique at work in a “Where’s Waldo?” puzzle? Busy-ness, distraction, sensory overload. Isn’t that how the devil works? He wants us distracted by busy-ness of living, preoccupied with everyday life, sucked into the world’s way.



Matthew 7:13-14 admonishes us to enter by the narrow gate. The road to salvation is not promised to be easy. If I get my focus off of the things of God, I am soon back in old habits, old responses. Perhaps you have heard it said, “A man without a future will return to his past.” God wants us to move forward.

Picture the circumstances in Luke 2:41-52. Mary and Joseph are busy getting ready for the trip home from Jerusalem. In all the hustle and bustle, Mary lost Jesus. Can you imagine, she has been entrusted with God Himself on earth and she lost Him! Was there a time when you felt close to Jesus but now He seems distant, a time when you were on fire but now it is hard to open your Bible? It is time to break through the distractions and reconnect.

1 John 2:15 (NIV) tells us, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.” There is no place for love of both the world and God. We have to make a choice. Matthew 6:24 (NKJV) warns, “No one can serve two masters.” Focus on self is destructive. Romans 8:7 (NIV) tells us, “The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God.” Deuteronomy 6:5 (NLT) commands “And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” In other words, don’t allow the distractions of the world to get our eyes off of God.

In the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:3-9, the seed sown among thorns is the busy-ness of life. That busy-ness chokes out the productivity of the seed. In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus says we can build our house on the rock or build it on the sand. On sand means no commitment and easily moved. Those built on sand only follow when everything is going right but disappear when difficulty comes. Those built on the rock will stand the test of time, adversity and trial.

In Acts 20:24 (NKJV) Paul described persecution, imprisonment, stoning, shipwrecks but he concludes with: “None of these things move me.” That is focus. We had better be prepared beforehand or we will be moved by circumstances.

Romans 12:1 commands that we be a living sacrifice which is our reasonable service. To be a living sacrifice takes determination and follow through. I made a decision for Jesus at 12 but I had no follow through. In a few days my life looked just like it did before. Again at 24 I made a commitment of my life to God but still there was no follow through. At 32 I once again made the choice to follow Jesus and that one stuck. Until that time I was religious on the outside but only going through the motions. Finally it reached my heart.

There are many people in the Bible who showed focus. In Mark 5:25-34, the woman with a bleeding condition was focused on touching Jesus. In Mark 2:4, four friends are carrying their paralytic friend to Jesus and, when the room was too crowded, they broke through the roof. In Matthew 14, Peter walks on water until he lost focus. There are others who got off focus. In Genesis 19:26, Lot’s wife looks back to her old life and is turned into salt. In Exodus 16, the Israelites don’t have a vision of possessing the Promised Land and want to go back to the slavery of Egypt.

Entering the kingdom of God requires discipline and perseverance. 2Timothy 2:3 tells us to have the discipline of a good soldier. Hebrews 6:12 says that through faith and perseverance we will inherit the promise. Jesus is our example. Hebrews 12:2 (NIV) says, “Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.” I could not pay the price for my sin, but Jesus did. That is worth my focus.

Let’s get focused:

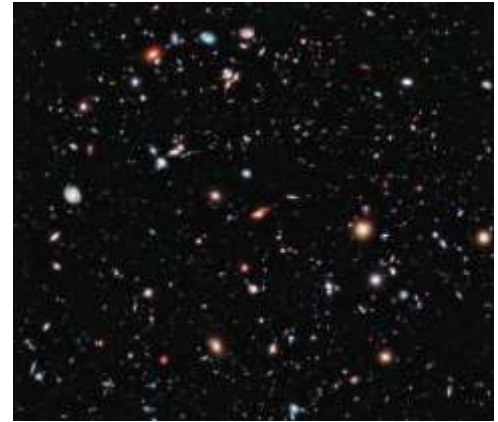
1. Plan: Make the decision to follow God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength. Luke 9:62 (NKJV) warns, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” And James warns in James 1:8 that the double minded man is unstable in all his ways. There can be no plan B.
2. Prepare: Jesus says in Luke 14:28 that the first step in building a tower must be to first count the cost. Ephesians 6:10-19 lists the armor of God. That is where our preparation and training must be: truth, righteousness, peace and faith. The source of that is the Word of God.
3. Press: Philippians 3:13-14 (NKJV) is a Scripture to go back to again and again: “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Keep our eye on the prize and allow that hope to give us direction.

Where’s Waldo? I don’t really care. What I do care about is where is Jesus in your life. Henry Ford said, “Thinking is the hardest thing we as humans do. That is why so few do it.” It is time to plan, to prepare, to press.

6: Picture the Dream

We moved into our present house five and a half years ago. For nearly 10 years before that my wife was picturing it. She could see the dining room. She could see the bedroom. She could even see the pantry. Realtors told her there was nothing like that anywhere, but she had a dream. She pictured it and she held onto that dream until the day came when we walked into this house and we knew we were home.

God changed Abram's name to Abraham, "father of many nations". But wait, Abraham was childless, his wife Sarah was barren. Was this some sort of sick joke? No, God gave him a picture to get ahold of the dream. In Genesis 22, God took Abraham outside at night and told him to look at the stars. Those countless stars became the anchor for his dream. Every time he stepped outside at night he was reminded of God's promise.



The picture shown here is the Hubble Space Telescope's Extreme Deep Field photo. Scientists say the area shown is equivalent to looking at the night sky through a soda straw. Every dot, every smudge is not a star, it's a galaxy, over 5,500, each with billions of stars. Ever wonder how big God is? Look at that picture. And that doesn't even come close! I think that picture is God's way of saying, "You ain't seen nothin' yet." 1Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV) says, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

There is something very powerful about a picture. God speaks in pictures. In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel had a vision of dry bones coming back to life through the power of the Spirit. In Acts 10, Peter had the vision of animals lowered from heaven on a sheet. In Ephesians 6 Paul used the picture of a Roman soldier's armor to describe our spiritual defenses not because we are to take an actual helmet and write "salvation" on it or swing our Bible around like a sword. He used an earthly image so we can better grasp a spiritual truth.

The parables of Jesus painted a picture. John 7:38 pictures living water flowing from the believer. A mustard seed is used to portray faith in Mark 4:3. The parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-20), the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46), the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), a lamp under a basket (Matthew 5:14-15); the Bible is rich with imagery.

We just finished a butterfly experience with our grandchildren. For \$5.00 we sent away for 10 caterpillars that we all watched grow bigger, weave a cocoon and finally break out as butterflies. Yesterday we all celebrated as they were released. Every time one soared free, we all cheered. In that I saw a picture of our freedom from the prison of sin and condemnation. 2Corinthians 3:17 (NKJV) declares, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Can you hear the angels cheer? (Luke 15:7)

As a kid, I loved to do “paint by numbers”. I could feel artistic through something that required no skill. With those paintings when only one or two colors had been completed, it didn't look like much but as more colors were added the picture took shape. Perhaps your future is painted in only one or two colors right now. Faith is needed to fill it in.

We've all heard people say, “I'm just tellin' it like it is.” Or “I call 'em as I see 'em.” The problem is that hinders faith from being activated in our lives. The Bible tells us in Romans 4:17 (NIV) that God “calls into being things that were not.” Proverbs 29:18 (The Message) states, “If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.”

Some use a dream board with pictures of what they are believing for. We make daily declarations over our business, our relationships and our personal growth. Remember this: “The me I see is the me I'll be.” If someone says “Dog”, I see a German Shepherd. Someone says “Tree” and my mind pictures a tall pine. When someone says “Future”, what do I see?

It can be fun to look back at pictures of the past. I have lots of dorky pictures in my high school yearbook. I can smile and joke remembering the good times. But in reality that doesn't help me move forward. The picture I need to see, to really focus on is the future.

Jesus healed blindness more often than any other disease (Matthew 9:27-31, Mark 8:22-26, Mark 10:46-52 and John 9:1-12). Why? Could it be that He recognizes the importance of seeing the dream, of having vision for the future? In Matthew 23:26, He accused the Pharisees of blindness not because their eyes didn't work, but because they did not use spiritual sight.

Have you had a vision but disappointment and failure has sucked the life out of it? It is time to recharge. Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV) are words to recharge: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Habakkuk 2:2-3 in the Message says, “Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what's coming. It aches for the coming—it can hardly wait! And it doesn't lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait.” The dream God has planted in me is on its way. It will come right on time. I like the way it says, “it aches for the coming--it can hardly wait.” As a child we could hardly wait for our birthday or for Christmas. As we grow older and start to experience disappointments in life we begin to become afraid to hope. “Blessed are the pessimists for they shall not be disappointed.” No, that's not in the Bible. What the Bible does say is, “We live by faith, not by sight.” (2Corinthians 5:7 (NIV))

Stating the vision establishes accountability. “What's your vision?” “Oh, well, I have some thoughts. We'll see what works out.” That shows no accountability, no faith.

Discard that which is contrary to the vision: negative relationships, drugs or other addictions, or poor self-image.

Revelations 2:4 warns us against leaving our first love. Why does that happen? We have lost the dream. It is time to reconnect. Seek God for the vision for your life then pursue it with everything you've got.

7: What floats your boat?

What floats your boat? What motivates your life? Where is your passion? What gets you out of bed in the morning to tackle another day? It can be many things:



1. Guilt? If so, I am allowing my past to control my future. 2Corinthians 5:17 promises me that I am a new creation. That means I have a fresh start. I do not have to be a prisoner of my past. Romans 8:1 declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Guilt does not have to control me.
2. Anger/Bitterness/Unforgiveness? Understand that unforgiveness hurts me more than the one who hurt me. It is like drinking poison hoping the other person will die. They have forgotten it and have moved on with their life. Job 5:2 (NLT) warns, “Surely resentment destroys the fool.” Jesus in Matthew 6:12 (NLT) included in His model prayer, “Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” To the extent that I am willing to forgive is how much I want God to forgive me. Ouch! (More on this in another lesson)
3. Fear? Fear takes many forms:
 - a. Fear of rejection - Peer pressure is called being conformed to the world in Romans 12:2
 - b. Fear of failure – That was Gideon’s problem in Judges 8
 - c. Fear of lack – The rich young ruler manifested that in Luke 18
 - d. Fear of _____? Name it for your life.

Fear is just faith with the expectation of a negative outcome. Fear is a self-imposed prison. The good news is in 1John 4:18 (NKJV): “Perfect love casts out fear.”

4. Materialism? I have heard the world’s drive for ‘stuff’ described as: “We spend money we don’t have to buy things we don’t need to impress people we don’t like.” The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:7) describes this attitude as “seed that falls among thorns”. Materialism may bring pleasure for a moment but it is short lived and empty. It results in a drive for more and more. How much is enough? Most of the world lives on \$2 a day. Have you seen the bumper sticker, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” That certainly points out the folly of materialism. I thought the bumper sticker was intended as a joke until I realized how many people live that way. As the Bible says in Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV),

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” I just read recently in my devotional Psalm 119:36-37 (NLT): “Give me an eagerness for your laws rather than a love for money! Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.”

Guilt, unforgiveness, fear, materialism: these options all have one thing in common, focus on self. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us we can take the broad, easy way that leads to destruction or the narrow, difficult way that leads to eternal life. The choice is ours.

5. God's will – Here is the path to true peace, true joy, true freedom. Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) promises, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” God’s peace and rest are available but I must take action: Come! I don’t have to get my act together just come. When I am broken and hurting, come.

We will never find true fulfillment apart from God. In John 15: 5 (NKJV) Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” When I get discouraged, when the world seems to be lining up against me, when nothing is going right and the future looks pretty dismal, I fall back on my connection with my heavenly Father.

A few moments of pleasure and I can lose everything I have gained. When our children were younger we took them sledding on a popular hill in our town. It was a lot of fun to go zipping down the hill but when I stood at the bottom of the hill and looked back up I realized how quickly I lost what I worked so hard for in climbing to the top. One sin leads to another, a small sin to a bigger one. In 2Samuel 11, David started by not going with his army to war. Then He allowed his gaze to linger too long on Bathsheba bathing. Next he had her in bed and arranging for the murder of her husband. Sin is a slippery slope. Everything starts small, as a seed. I had better watch what I plant.

How do I connect to God’s will:

1. Build my foundation on the rock. That is the warning in Matthew 7:24-27. My connection with God begins with salvation. Romans 10:9-10 (NIV) tells us, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”
2. Understand my identification with Christ. I died with Christ (Romans 6:8). I was buried with Christ (Romans 6:4). I was raised with Christ (Colossians 3:1). Through identification I am seated with Christ in heaven (Ephesians 2:6).
3. Practice God’s presence. Psalm 100:4 commands us to enter His courts with praise. God’s presence brings power. James 4:7 (NIV) promises, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” It is submission to His presence that brings victory. The 23rd Psalm is well known.

Verse 4 (NKJV) says, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” That’s not because I’m so big and tough, but because of God’s presence.

4. Get ahold of vision. God doesn’t want me to just muddle through, to “hold on ‘till Jesus comes”. He has a purpose and a destiny for each of us. It is vision that pulls me forward. God doesn't expect me to be perfect, but He does expect me to be growing. 1Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV) promises, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Wow, count me in!
5. Recognize the importance of teamwork. Mountain climbers don’t go onto the mountain alone. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NKJV) says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” We need each other in this spiritual journey.

1John 2:17 (NIV) warns, “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” I think we need to live each day as if it were our last. Philippians 3:13-14 (NIV) is such a key Scripture, “One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Is Jesus coming soon to rapture His church away? Are we living in the “last days?” I don't know but I am sure I am not too many decades from standing before His throne. My hope lies in hearing Him say to me the words of Matthew 25:21 (NKJV): “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Then I will step into eternity in His presence. That is what floats my boat. What floats yours?

8: Identity Theft

Have you ever been or known someone who was the victim of identity theft? We have actually had people order Bibles with stolen credit cards. Something is wrong with that picture. But there is something worse than forged checks or stolen credit card. Who is the biggest offender in identity theft? It is the devil. John 10:10 says the devil comes to steal, kill and destroy.



We have one very powerful weapon against his attacks: understanding who we are in Christ. For years I was a born-again Christian, but I was always worried: How can I possibly get into heaven? What must I do to counter the lies, the lustful thoughts, the anger of which I was guilty? Then one verse changed my life. It was Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation for **Gill** because **he** is in Christ Jesus, because **Gill** doesn’t walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” That began my journey of understanding my identity in Christ and stopped the identity theft carried out by the devil against me.

Ps 118:6 tells me God is on my side. He loves me and no one can take that away. Romans 8:31-39 says, “What then shall we say about these things? If God is for **Gill**, who can be against **him**? He who didn’t spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for **Gill**, how would He not also with Him freely give **Gill** all things? Who could bring a charge against **Gill**, because **he** is one of God’s elect? It is God who justifies **Gill**. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and more than that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God and makes intercession for **Gill**. Who shall separate **Gill** from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, “For Your sake we are killed all day long. We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” No, in all these things, **Gill** is more than a conqueror through Him who loved **him**. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate **Gill** from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, **Gill’s** Lord.” What a tremendous expression of God’s love. The key here: nothing can separate me from that love. It’s not important what people say or think about me. My address or the clothes I wear or the car I drive are not important. My confidence is in Christ. In Him we are all equal. Ephesians 2:14 tells us He tore down the dividing walls that separate us from Him.

Everybody gets hurt in their journey of life. We live in fear, shame, condemnation, BUT God... Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused of rape, thrown into prison, his life looked totally hopeless, BUT God.... Moses fled Egypt after committing murder, 40 years in the desert with dirty, stinky sheep, 80 years old, a life seemingly wasted, BUT God.... David committed adultery with Bathsheba then arranged for the murder of her husband, BUT God.... Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times BUT God.... What God can do for you can override anything the world has done to you. Isaiah

61:1-3 prophesied of Jesus: “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me; because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to **Gill** because **he** is humble. He has sent Me to bind **Gill** up when **he** is brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to **Gill** when **he** is captive, and release to **Gill** when **he** is bound; to proclaim to **Gill** the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of **his** God; to comfort **Gill** when **he** mourns; to appoint to **Gill** when **he** mourns, to give to **him** a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that **Gill** may be called a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, to declare liberty to captives. We just have to walk out.

I can’t be lazy and expect to grow. I have to do my part. 2Corinthians 6:11-12 in the Message translation says, “Dear, dear Corinthians, I can’t tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn’t fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren’t small, but you’re living in a small way.” I am the one who is boxing myself in by the way you think.

I have to ask myself, “What am I depositing?” If I went down to the local branch of Bank of America and said to the teller, “I’d like to withdraw \$500.” She might reply, “Well, yes sir. May I have your account number?” “Oh, I don’t have an account. I just want \$500.” You know how far that is going to go. There are no withdrawals until there is first a deposit. The same is true in our spiritual life: I can withdraw only what I put in.

When I go through difficult times I won’t insult God by asking, “Don’t you love me?” In the deepest trials and tragedy I choose to say, “Nothing can separate me from the love of God.” I need to go back and stand on Romans 8:31-39. There is a difference between how I feel and who I am, e.g. I may feel fearful but I don’t have to be afraid. I can feel anger but I can choose to walk in love. I might feel hurt but I can choose to forgive. As I meditate on the Word it becomes reality to me. God loves me! I am chosen, redeemed, forgiven, accepted, renewed. That meditation on the Word is our preparation for battle. Ephesians 6:10-19 tells us about the armor of God: the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, etc. In Ephesians 6:13 tells us after all the preparation, it is time to take our stand. I have the victory. It’s guaranteed. If I take hold of that truth, the devil can’t do a thing about it. We read earlier in Isaiah 61:3 we are trees of righteousness that God might be glorified. That goes along with Ephesians 2:10: “For **Gill** is His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that **Gill** should walk in them.” One translation says we are His masterpiece. We are trophies on His living room table, prizes that He shows to company and brags about.

Joyce Meyers says, “I’m not where I need to be, but thank God I’m not where I used to be.” So often we carry around crud from the old man, but Galatians 2:20 says that I have been crucified with Christ. If I move into that new reality, I will move into a new level of victory. Col 3:1-3 tells us, “If then, **Gill** was raised together with Christ, **he** should seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. **Gill** is to set **his** mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For **Gill** died, and **his** life is hidden with Christ in God.” It is time to kick the old, dead man out and undergo a change of thinking. Rom 12:2 says, “**Gill** is not to be conformed to this

world, but is to be transformed by the renewing of **his** mind, so that **Gill** may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.” I can’t allow myself to be forced into the world’s mold, but I need to change my thinking to prevent being like the world. I need to get rid of that old man thinking and step into God’s new life.

So often we try to please people by wearing a mask and living phony lives. Dave Ramsey puts it this way: “We spend money we don’t have to buy things we don’t need to impress people we don’t like.” What do I really believe? How do I think? Matthew 12:34b warns, “For out of the abundance of **Gill’s** heart, **his** mouth speaks.” Listen to your talk: “I’m so dumb.” “I’m a big screw up.” “I can’t do anything right.” What does the Bible say about you? Get over yourself and step into Christ.

I’m not talking about being religious. A religious person has no joy or peace. Religion tries to change the outside. It is knowing my identity in Christ that enables me to overcome anything the devil can throw at me. Nobody can take that away. Psalm 139:14 tells me I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Believe it!

God has a gift for me, an identity gift. The devil may be scoffing, “Who do you think you are?” Well, I am nothing in myself, but I know who I am in Christ!

- I am the righteousness of God in Christ. (2Cor. 5:21)
- I am a new creation. (2Cor. 5:17)
- I have been made holy by the Blood, set free. (Heb. 10:10)
- I have been chosen to be blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:4)

Being a Christian isn’t about going to church on Sunday. It’s about being empowered on Sunday to live as a Christian the rest of the week. The greatest obstacle to God’s abundant life is me, in how I see myself. I need to see me the way God sees me. If the devil can steal my identity, my defeat is assured. When I understand my identity I am more than a conqueror. It is time to stop identity theft.

9: He Stands at the Door

We made a trip to Orlando, Florida for a Christian business conference with Dr. Bob Harrison. We brought our office manager with us and when we checked into the hotel, we were given adjacent rooms. The interesting thing about how the rooms were constructed was that there was a double door interconnecting our rooms. When we opened our door between the rooms, there was a second door that could only be opened from her side; there was no door knob on our side for her door. Seeing that door reminded me of Revelations 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If **Gill** hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to **him**, and will dine with **him**, and **he** with Me.” A door separates me from Christ. There is something in each of our lives that keeps us from entering into that full relationship, a sin that we hang onto with both hands.



Each of us must stand alone before God. If you have ever had to stand in front of a booking desk at your county jail, you turned over your wallet, your shoes and whatever else was required. Your mama wasn't there, your girlfriend/boyfriend wasn't there, I wasn't there. Before Jesus we will stand alone. There will be no attorney, no plea bargain, no time off for good behavior. On the cross, Jesus said, "It is finished." The door is open on His side. Will you choose to open your side? There is a famous painting based on Revelations 3:20. When the artist presented it, others commented, "You made a mistake. There is no handle on the door." His response was, "The only handle is on our side."

In Luke 5:32, we are told that Jesus did not come to call the self-righteous, but the sinner, the one desiring to repent. He is on the hunt for those who have come to the end of their rope (literally the end of themselves) and are ready to admit their life is out of control. Are you ready?

Perhaps you have never made Jesus Lord of your life and today you need to make that step. Don't hesitate. He waits on the other side of that door with open arms. But I also want to address the BS-ers out there – the Back sliders. (Were you thinking something else?) There was a time when you made Jesus Lord of your life. You invited Jesus in. But then He starts knocking on doors. Anger: "Oh, yes Lord. Please come in." Lust: "Well, OK (hesitant). You can come in." Pride: "Now wait a sec. I don't think I'm ready for this." Maybe you even go back and start closing doors you had previously opened. Jesus must be Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. Your life is like a house with many rooms. What rooms are you not opening to Him? What is in your way to opening that door: a girl, a bottle of Jack Daniels, a stack of poker chips or a list of internet porn sites? Maybe

its money, pride, selfishness, jealousy or gossip. It is time to push whatever it is out of the way. Is the sin you have worth that much? Do you love that sin more than Jesus?

Romans 6:11 says, “Thus **Gill** should also consider **himself** to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus, **his** Lord.” When I attended Bible School, one of the highlights of the curriculum was presenting our own sermon. One gal in our class had been a mortician assistant at one time and she spoke on “Dead Men Don’t Sweat It.” Dead men don’t worry about paying bills or meeting deadlines. Dead men don’t get angry or tell their spouse off. Dead men don’t get pulled into the mire of pride, unforgiveness or anger. We should consider ourselves dead to sin. It does not need to have control over us. We can open the door to that room and let the healing light of His presence enter. In the presence of His light, the darkness must flee.

Matthew 7:13-14 says, “**Gill** must enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.” We have all seen the game show Let’s Make a Deal. Contestants are pulled from the audience and given the choice of what is behind Door #1, Door #2 or Door #3. Today we are playing a new game. The prize is heaven and the consequences are eternal. Well, not really new. It’s been played since Adam and Eve. Life presents us with many doors, each calling out: “Go this way! This is the door to happiness, fulfillment, fortune, pleasure!” There is Materialism, New Age, Occult, Buddhism, Islam, Jehovah’s Witness, etc. Yet only one door leads to heaven. John 14:6 (NKJV) Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. **Gill** cannot come to the Father, except through Me.” God doesn’t care what bumper sticker you have, what t-shirt you wear or what tattoo is on your arm. Have you opened the door of your heart to Jesus? Have you opened every door to Him?

John 15:1-5 tells us, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the farmer. If **Gill** is in Me but doesn’t bear fruit, He will take **him** away. If **Gill** bears fruit, He prunes **Gill**, that **he** may bear more fruit. **Gill** is already pruned clean because of the word which I have spoken to **him**. **Gill** must remain in Me, and I in **him**. As the branch can’t bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can **Gill**, unless **he** remains in Me. I am the vine. **Gill** is a branch. If **Gill** remains in Me, and I in **him**, **he** will bear much fruit, for apart from Me, **Gill** can do nothing.” Remain in the vine. If Jesus is separated from us by a wall of pride, anger, unforgiveness or indifference, we cannot be connected, we cannot experience the strength and purpose that comes from the vine.

To sup with Him is a time to linger, not to rush through to get back to our daily lives. Today our lives are filled with distractions. I remember growing up, my dad was an electrical engineer and I guess he would be called a geek today. We had the first TV on the block, a little 7 inch black and white number. On a good night we got 3 channels, 2 of those were pretty fuzzy unless you turned the antenna just right. Today we are a microwave generation. We want everything right now. We don’t have time to linger; we want to hurry back to our schedule, to do what we want. We are looking for quick answers. God is not a genie in a bottle; it’s not: “Rub His belly and out pops the genie to

grant all your wishes.” We need to quiet our spirits, linger with Him and grow close to Him in order to hear His voice.

Our lives may be dominated by anger, hurt, resentment, self-pity. If so then we may try to dull our pain with alcohol, drugs, pornography, sex. That leads us back to anger, hurt and self-pity in a cycle of destruction. Satan will tell us all kinds of lies: “You’re not worth anything.” “You deserve what you’re getting.” “No one loves you, not even God.” Don’t get mad at the devil. He’s just fulfilling his job description. John 10:10 (NKJV) says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.” But you have a choice to listen to him or listen to God.

Deut. 30:19 warns, “I call heaven and earth to witness against **Gill** this day, that I have set before **him** life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore **Gill** should choose life, that **he** may live, **he** and **his** seed.” God is giving you a choice. In case there is any confusion on your part, He even tells you which way to go. Choose life! But it still has to be your choice. Isaiah 43:1-2 promises, “**Gill** should not be afraid, for I have redeemed **him**. I have called **Gill** by **his** name. **Gill** is mine. When **Gill** passes through the waters, I will be with **him**; and through the rivers, they will not overflow **him**. When **Gill** walks through the fire, **he** will not be burned, and flame will not scorch **him**.” Get ahold of that today: God has called you by name. He knows you personally.

Jesus is knocking. Remember, the handle is on our side. Will I let Him in?

1. *I can*. I can give up that sin. I can open every door.
2. *I must*. There is no plan B, no other option that brings freedom.
3. *I will*. I will open the door that leads to eternal life.

Say it aloud: “I can. I must. I will.” “I can. I must. I will.”

10: Cost of Discipleship

I start with a hypothetical conversation at a local bar. Sam and Joe are sharing their second beer when Joe says, "I can't figure out this Christianity thing. What do you think?" Sam replies, "Well, the thing I would suggest is find a Christian and watch 'em; see how they live." Joe says, "Yea, I know Pete. He says he's a Christian. I'll watch him and see what it means to be a Christian." Joe won't tell Pete. He won't ask for permission, but he'll be watching. Count on it.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV), Paul makes a very bold statement: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." He is saying if you want to know what a Christian is, watch me, imitate me. It is easy to call yourself a Christian. For me, I went to church every once in a while; I had a Bible... somewhere. There is a difference between calling myself Christian and being a true

Christian. I may be on fire for a month, on fire for a year, on fire while I'm in church, but what happens when the trials come.

The world says if it gets hard, quit. The world says, "It's all about me, me, me." That attitude leads to disappointment, bondage and death. In Matthew 7:13, Jesus warns: "**Gill** must enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it." We will not enter eternal life by taking the easy way.

God's love is expressed by His desire to see our life improve. Isn't that just like we want for our children. God wants to bring us to a new level. To reach that new level there is a price I must be willing to pay. If I am not willing to change, I'm wasting my time living for Jesus. I have to undergo the renewal of my mind. That is a change that is not overnight. "Well, my life got a little off track." The devil wants us "off track". How far will a train go if it is a little off track? It's called a train wreck! The flesh pulls us back and the devil uses that to bring us into bondage and destruction.

Ever hear of the submarine Christian? He is the one who is up front on Sunday morning, singing dancing and praising God, then Monday morning he keeps his head down and hopes no one notices him. Carrying your cross is not about minor inconveniences. A flat tire is not your cross. A coworker who annoys you is not your cross. 2Tim 2:3 tells us, "**Gill** therefore must endure hardship, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." It is time to be a real man or woman. It is time to be a disciple.



Between conversion and resurrection is discipleship. We live in a consumer culture, focused on self. I hear this ad on the radio: “Get the car you deserve.” “Get the credit you deserve.” Get what I deserve? I don’t want what I deserve; I deserve hell! How often do we quit and blame others. Don’t waste your life. Do not quit. We are not called to comfort or to success but to obedience. When you fall (not if but when), get back up. That is the character of a Christian.

Luke 14:26-35: “If **Gill** comes to Me, and doesn’t hate **his** own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and **his** own life also, **Gill** can’t be My disciple. If **Gill** doesn’t bear **his** own cross, and come after Me, **he** can’t be My disciple. For will not **Gill**, desiring to build a tower, first sit down and count the cost, to see if **he** has enough to complete it? Or perhaps, when **Gill** has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock **him**, saying, ‘**Gill** began to build, and wasn’t able to finish.’ Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy, and asks for conditions of peace. So therefore if **Gill** doesn’t renounce all that **he** has, **he** can’t be My disciple. Salt is good, but if the salt becomes flat and tasteless, with what do you season it? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown out. If **Gill** has ears to hear, let **him** hear.”

What is the cost of being a disciple?

1. Don’t quit. First count the cost. Do not raise your hand unless you are ready to see it through to the end. We were married in 1969. That was the year Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. It was the time of the Beatles, Brady Bunch and Woodstock. A mobile phone meant an extra-long cord so you could walk around the living room while you talked. Facebook was the family photo album. Seems like ancient history. You know, weddings are easy; marriage is hard. Starting is easy; hanging in there to finish is hard. Salvation is easy; discipleship is hard. Our grandson just finished army boot camp. The army didn’t go to that expense so he could wear a sharp uniform or travel to exotic locations. Joining the army means preparing for combat. Don’t make excuses. Don’t play the blame game. Get ready for the fight.
2. Don’t quit. First, just like the king facing the opposing army, do your homework. Is your life a series of decisions followed by quitting? We are in a real war with real casualties and real quitters. It is not a video game that is all fake and doesn’t count. The kingdom of God will not be won with your thumbs. It’s time to do something that matters.
3. Don’t quit. Are you ready to make a difference? Salt is used for preserving and enhancing. Does your life make a difference? Jesus counted the cost and went to the cross anyway. I will not change until I recognize the cost of staying the same is greater than the cost of changing. I have a problem with sweets. I hear the health consequences of too many sweets; I see the scale reading 20 pounds high. I make the head commitment that I will change. But I come face to face with the Dairy Queen Blizzard and that is all out the window. Why does society send people to jail? To make people uncomfortable enough to change. The Bible can’t

change you. It can show you a better way, but you must make the choice and then follow through.

Give your life to Jesus and make your life better? No, the whole truth is we must expect sacrifice. Romans 12:1 commands, “Therefore I urge **Gill**, by the mercies of God, to present **his** body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is **Gill’s** spiritual service.” I am not expected to worship God with singing but with my entire life. Will you be a contributor or consumer? Make your life count.

In Luke 9:62, Jesus says, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” In 1519 Hernando Cortez landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico to conquer the Aztec nation. After disembarking his army, he burned the ships. The message: we conquer or we die; no turning back. What does it mean to look back? You say to God, “I give you my whole life, except my pornography.” “I surrender all, except my bitterness and unforgiveness.” What is back there you want?

Hebrews 12:1 says: “Therefore let **Gill** also, seeing **he** is surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles **him**, and let **Gill** run with patience the race that is set before **him**.” I remember as a child growing up near the Potomac River. We would love to splash and play and run in the water. But on occasion, clumps of seaweed drifted up to shore and when we ran through the water the seaweed wrapped around our legs and held us back. That is the picture I have when I read Hebrews 12:1, the sin, the past pulling me back like that seaweed.

One final thought: Philippians 3:13-14 “**Gill** doesn’t regard **himself** as yet having taken hold, but one thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Keep your eye on the prize. Keep pressing. Don’t quit.

11: The Sword of the Spirit

Has the devil taken anything from you? You won't get it back by being on the defense. It is time to be on the offense with the sword of the Spirit. If I leave the sword in its scabbard it is of no use. Do you want to go into spiritual battles and leave your Bible on the shelf? It is time to step up to the battle. But remember there is no victory without preparation.



Several years ago I was given a ride in a police car. Unlike what you might be thinking, I got to ride in front. Just before we started on patrol, the officer said, "There is a shotgun under this seat. I hope you don't need it because, if you do, it means something very bad has happened to me." Well believe me, my eyes got big and I started wondering if I really wanted to do this. But later I realized how useless that instruction was since he did not show me how to release it from its mount, how to release the safety, nothing to prepare me for its use. Am I prepared to face the enemy? Am I ready for the spiritual battle?

James 4:7 tells us: "**Gill** must submit **himself** therefore to God. If **Gill** resists the devil, he will flee from **him**." We love to quote the last half, but are we willing to submit first? Our attitude can be, "Don't tell me what to do!" Recognize that I am not a threat to the devil because I go to church. Am I living in submission every day? Then God can correct me, guide me. John 15:14 says: "**Gill** is My friend, if **he** does whatever I command **him**" Fear must be replaced with faith. Deception must be replaced with truth. Otherwise we keep doing the same thing and getting the same results.

Ephesians 6:17: "And **Gill** must take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." This sword is not the book, paper and ink; it is the spoken word that rises up when we plant the written Word deep in our heart. How did God create the world? He spoke. Revelations 1:17 gives a picture of Jesus with a two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. I never thought this was not a particularly attractive picture but I realize now that this is a picture of His speaking the Word of God. Luke 6:45b warns: "For out of the abundance of **Gill's** heart, **his** mouth speaks." What is inside you will come out. The devil is going to be in your face.

We must be ready for close quarter fighting. The Bible is not just beautiful literature. Is it on the shelf collecting dust? Then it's of no use. It's like that shotgun that I haven't been trained to shoot. When the devil tempted Jesus, He spoke the Word. First He had to have it inside. I must be effective with the Word. Are you facing temptation? Trials? Problems? Speak the Word. It is not man's opinion. When I speak the Word, it gains power in my life. Hebrews 4:12 says: "For the word of God is living, active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of **Gill's** soul and spirit, of both **his** joints and marrow, and is quick to discern the thoughts and intents of **Gill's** heart."

Until it is alive to me (rhema) it is just words, not THE Word that becomes activated when I speak it.

I'm not a wimp, not barely getting by, not keeping my head down hoping the devil doesn't notice me. Yes, I am tempted to say, "I can't do it. I can't make it." That is the time I must rise up and declare the finished work of Jesus to experience the victory. "Devil, in the name of Jesus, you have no authority in my life. I choose right now to focus on God's love, on God's promises and on God's peace." Hebrews 10:23 declares: "Let **Gill** hold fast the confession of **his** hope without wavering. For He who promised is faithful." Do you want to know God's will for your life? Then read His word. Plant the Word in your heart. Then speak that living Word.

God's Word:

1. Establishes unity with God. Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together unless they agree?" When we agree with God's Word we experience unity with His purposes and goals. Numbers 13 tells the story of the Israelite nation as they readied to enter the Promised Land. They sent 12 spies in to check it out. 10 spies came back and said, "The land is wonderful but we can't take it because there are giants in the land. We are like grasshoppers in their sight." Now you could say they just spoke what they saw, but God called it an evil report because it was not spoken in unity with God's promise. Joshua and Caleb the Bible says had a different spirit and said, "Let us go up and take the land for we are well able." Unfortunately, the spirit of the 10 spies infected the entire nation and they turned away.
2. Establishes God's authority. Matthew 8 relates the story of a Roman army officer who asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus was coming to heal his servant when the officer said: "I am not worthy for You to come under my roof. Just speak the word and he will be healed." That officer recognized the authority of Jesus's words. 2Corinthians 5:20a says "**Gill** is therefore an ambassador on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating through **him**." If the ambassador of England walked into your home today, his words would carry the authority of the nation of England. We are ambassadors for Christ. We are under His authority and when we speak we should recognize that we represent His kingdom.
3. Establishes God's destiny in your life. Proverbs 18:21 warns: "Death and life are in the power of **Gill's** tongue; if **Gill** loves it, **he** will eat its fruit." Mark 11:23b promises: "**Gill** shall have whatever **he** says." Speak your way into God's purpose for your life. Numbers 14:28b warns: "Surely as you have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you." My life will follow my words. Watch what you speak over your life.

I invite you to declare these truths over your life today:

I am the head and not the tail. (Deuteronomy 28:13)

I am above only and not beneath. (Deuteronomy 28:13)

I can do all things through Christ. (Philippians 4:13)

I am a child of the Most High. (Galatians 3:26)

I am a new creation in Christ. (2Corinthians 5:17)

I am free of condemnation and guilt. (Romans 8:1)

I am dead to sin. (Romans 6:11)

I am an overcomer. (Revelations 12:11)

Nothing can separate me from God's love. (Romans 8:38-39)

I am blessed. I am blessed. I am blessed.

12: Brainwashed

From Dr. Seuss: “You have brains in your head and feet in your shoes. You can steer your life any direction you choose.” My life is my choice based on what is going on in my head. Doubt, fear, worry, defeated and limited thinking keep me from moving into God’s best. I need a good brain washing.

Ephesians 4:23 commands us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. The Amplified Bible puts it this way, “Have a fresh outlook. Be constantly renewed.” It’s not a one-time thing. We are constantly bombarded with unrenewed thoughts from TV, radio, magazines, conversations and we need to clean them out. It’s stinkin’ thinkin’ and that leads to stinkin’ talk, stinkin’ actions, and a stinkin’ life.



Someone may tell you, “If you give your life to Jesus, your life will turn around!” Wrong. As long as our thoughts remain the same our life will too. Mind renewal isn’t optional, it is a command. Romans 12:2 (NKJV) says, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” You can’t just say a prayer and have everything turn around in your life. God will do His part by providing grace but I need to do my part as well. It’s time to grow up! I blame the devil. I blame God. Do I have the honesty to blame myself? Christianity is about change. It begins on the inside.

When I look in a mirror, what do I see: “failure, disappointment, dumb...” We are brainwashed with negative. A baby elephant is trained by tying a heavy chain to his leg and tying it to a large stake. The baby elephant will pull and fight until he eventually decides that’s just the way life is. At that point they can replace the chain and stake with a light rope and small peg. The elephant will grow into a many ton monster but he will not pull loose of that rope because his mind tells him it is no use. We have areas where we don’t even try, but it is all in our mind.

We try different coping mechanisms like alcohol, drugs, sex, anger, bitterness but they are all just temporary. We need that mind change. The only thing that is going to produce lasting change in our life is our thoughts. When we change our thoughts to agree with God’s Word, then we will have the mind of Christ and experience what He desires for us to have.

Several years ago, I was driving to work listening to Christian radio. The announcer came on and said, “Hold that thought, the one you were just thinking. Now compare it to Philippians 4:8.” It says, “Finally, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely,

whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think about these things. (NKJV)” I had to admit I didn’t compare too well. I was thinking about the tasks that were ahead of me that day and whining to myself about them. How I think determines my outlook on life.

Do I see myself as a victor or a victim? Victim mentality keeps you down, dependent on the viewpoint of others. Thoughts are like an elevator: they can take me up or they can take me down.

We need Godly perspective, Godly imagination and images in our mind that are not perverted. If we could replay your thoughts on the TV: what rating would they have? G, PG, R, X? The good news is I’m not stuck where I am. I can change.

That old way of thinking will eventually take us out. If I think like the world thinks, I will get what the world gets. I must keep my mind in the right place. Psalm 1:2 tells us that the one who prospers is the one who “in His Law meditates day and night.” What am I meditating on? What am I marinating in? If I marinate in the world then nothing will change. Instead I need to marinate in the Word. Joshua 1:8 commands us to meditate on God’s Word day and night. I don’t have to stay the way I am and it is His Word that will change me. 3John 2 says that just as your soul (mind, will and emotions) prospers, so will your life. Prospering starts on the inside first.

13: Breaking From Your Past

It is time to break from your past and embrace God's vision for your life. Have you ever been in handcuffs? If you have, you know how restricted and bound you feel. We recently saw the newest Superman movie, Man of Steel. I think my favorite scene was where he turns himself in to the police and they handcuff him. Lois Lane meets them and asks, "What's with the handcuffs." Superman shrugs and says, "It makes them feel better." Of course when he needed to act, he snapped them like they weren't even there.

Our past can hold us in handcuffs. Break free! Jer. 29:11 tells us, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward **Gill**, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give **him** hope and a future." Do you want to be liberated from the limitations of your past, of living to please others? Then you must believe in yourself and your vision for tomorrow. You need to look forward to a new future and envision a new destiny.



I often refer to Philippians 3:13-14: "**Gill** doesn't regard **himself** as yet having taken hold, but one thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." I need to look at what I am going to, not what I am going through. What I am going toward pulls me forward; what I am going through holds me back.

We are meant to focus more on what is in front of us than what is behind us. How big is the rear view mirror of your car? How big is the windshield? The difference obviously is because we are to focus forward more than we look back. In Genesis 19:26 Lot and his family are leaving Sodom and Gomorrah as the cities are destroyed. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. In Numbers 11:5 the Israelites leave the bondage of Egypt but soon are drawn back by the memory of garlic & onions in Egypt, not thinking about the slavery and suffering. In Luke 9:62 (NKJV) Jesus says, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

I'm sure you have been to a carnival and gone into the House of Mirrors where they have the curved mirrors. In one your head is ballooned out, in another your stomach looks like it belongs to an elephant. Each is a distortion. We allow people, circumstances and events to distort our vision.

Isaiah 43:18-19 tells us, “**Gill** must not remember the former things, and **he** must not consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing. It springs forth now. Doesn’t **Gill** know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” God is doing a new thing. I remember when we were first married, we owned a VW bug. Corinne had never driven a stick shift so I took her to a large parking lot and gave her lessons. She picked it up pretty easily and became comfortable with it. A couple of weeks later I was gone over the weekend for a business trip. She decided to be courageous and drive the VW to church. Everything went great until she went to leave and realized I had forgotten to teach her how to put the car into reverse. She thought, “That’s OK. I’ll just wait until the car in front of me pulls out.” Wouldn’t you know it, every car in the lot left except one, the one right in front of her! She had to go into church, find the individual and explain her embarrassing problem. It is important that you learn to shift. When you find your thinking is taking you in the wrong direction, shift. When you find yourself surrounded by the wrong people, shift. When your life is out of balance, shift.

1. It is time to believe in your own value. The world will beat you down, but you have the ability to go in your own direction instead of following the crowd. Exodus 23:2 warns us, “Don’t follow the crowd.” Find the confidence within yourself to follow God. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us, “**Gill** must enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.” What is your self-talk? How often is it “head trash”, those limited views and prejudices that hold you back? I spend a lot of time on my computer. If I write something I don’t like there is a very useful key: “Delete”. It is time to erase the harmful internal chatter. Use the “delete” key to clear out anything that doesn’t agree with God’s view of you. Stop the stinkin’ thinkin’! I can’t change my behavior until I change my thinking. In Numbers 13:33, the Israelites saw themselves as grasshoppers, and so the people of Canaan did too. Believe a lie and Satan takes over. Dr. Dave Martin says, “I will never rise above how I see myself.”
2. Who is with you on the journey? Proverbs 13:20 “If **Gill** walks with the wise, **he** will grow wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.” There are those who give us energy and those that hold us back from meeting our potential. Their words can be uplifting or crippling. When our kids were young we took them crabbing. We learned that if you throw one crab into your bucket, he quickly learns to grab the edge of the bucket, pull himself out and off he goes. How do you keep a crab in the bucket? Put in two crabs. When one grabs the edge, the second pulls him back down. Do you have crabs in your life? Find people who will celebrate you. Do those around you attack you for your vision? You are in the wrong place. 1Corinthians 15:33 (NIV) says, “Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.”
3. Check your balance. We have all ridden in cars where a tire was out of balance. It means you are in for a bumpy ride. Proverbs 4:27 says, “**Gill** must not turn to the right hand nor to the left, but **he** must remove **his** foot from evil.” Stay close to God if you want to stay balanced. Mat 6:33 “But **Gill** is to seek first God’s kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things will be given to **Gill** as

well.” Set boundaries. Re-examine priorities. Reset your internal compass.
Jeremiah 8:4b (NKJV)

4. says, “Shall one turn away, and not return?” If you take a wrong road, you turn around and go back. We recently visited Phoenix, Arizona for a conference. I was unfamiliar with the town and I made a few wrong turns. Sometimes I had to turn around and go back. On some roads a U-turn is illegal (I don’t think I did any of those); not on the road of life. If you need to make a U-turn, it’s OK. There is no shame in that. If you have made a wrong turn, choose a different path. Proverbs 3:5-6: “**Gill** is to trust in the LORD with all **his** heart, and **he** is not to lean on **his** own understanding. In all **his** ways **Gill** is to acknowledge Him, and He will direct **Gill’s** paths.” We brought a GPS with us on the trip. When I made a wrong turn, it didn’t scold. “Hey, dummy!” No, it just recalculated and showed me where to go from where I was. God doesn’t scold. He just shows you where to go from here. Are you going to continue to go in one direction because it is all you have ever known? How does that make sense? How’s that working for you?

Don’t let fear of failure put you in neutral. If a car is in neutral the only direction it can go is downhill. Your life in neutral can only go down. Failure is not final; it’s only feedback. Albert Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that we used when we created them.” It is up to you to determine the next step on your journey.

Lasting change requires commitment, persistence and discipline. Are you man enough, woman enough? 1Sam 30 David’s enemy, the Amalekites, attack his town while he and his men are gone. The town is burned and the families and goods are captured. David and his men are all deeply grieved. His men are in revolt, wanting to stone David. But verse 6 says David encouraged himself in the Lord. He went on to overtake the raiders and recapture his family and goods. There are times when we need to encourage ourselves in the Lord because we won’t always get it from family or friends. Circumstances sure won’t always do it. When times are difficult, when things look hopeless, it is not about what I can do, it is about how big my God is. How badly do I want it? How desperate am I to become what God wants me to be instead of settling for where I am?

Isaiah 40:29-31 is a particularly beautiful passage: “He gives power to **Gill** when **he** is weak. He increases **Gill’s** strength when **he** has no might. Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall; but if **Gill** waits for the Lord, **he** will renew **his** strength. **Gill** will mount up with wings like an eagle. **He** will run, and not be weary. **He** will walk, and not faint.” My wife and I recently had a date night and went to see the movie Bourne Legacy, definitely a rooster flick (as opposed to a chick flick). In one of the chase scenes, excitement builds as the bad guys close in and the situation looks hopeless. Then the hero shifts gears, floors the accelerator and pulls away. It is time to shift gears and break from your past. It is time to hit the “delete” key on the lies that give Satan power in your life. It is time to connect with people who will celebrate your dream. It is time to get on the right road. It is time to take back your life. You hold the keys to your destiny.

14: Freedom Isn't Free

2Corinthians 3:17 says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty for **Gill**." Freedom is a thought process. Paul was one of the freest men to ever live yet he spent much of his adult life in prison. True freedom is only available in Christ.



To understand our freedom in Christ, I suggest you read all of Romans 8. Romans 8:1 tells us there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. According to Romans 8:37 I am more than a conqueror. Romans 8:35 promises nothing can separate me from the love of God.

Romans 8:21 tells me I have the glorious freedom of the children of God. Is that the freedom to party, get drunk, sleep around, gossip, lie, hold onto resentment? 2Peter 2:19 warns I become a slave to whatever I surrender myself to. Paul in 1Corinthians 10:23 tells us, "I am allowed to do anything" --but not everything is good for you." Genesis 25 demonstrates what is called the Esau syndrome. Esau comes in from a day of hunting to find Jacob preparing bean soup. He wants some so badly he trades his birthright as the firstborn son to Jacob. How often do we trade away God's blessing in order to satisfy a short-term appetite?

1Peter 2:16 tells us to live as free men, but do not use our freedom as a cover-up for evil; instead we should live as servants of God. It is the paradox of the Gospel: to live free we must be slaves.

Colossians 2:14-15 promises my guilt was nailed to the cross. Freedom from guilt, fear, condemnation. Freedom to rejoice, laugh, dream. Freedom to face eternity with confidence. Freedom from bondage, freedom from my past. Recognize that hope and faith go hand in hand. Faith without hope has no focus; hope without faith has no foundation. Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV): "Faith is the substance of things hoped for." Faith has nothing to work on without hope. The Bible is the book of hope. It gives us the picture of where we can go in life. Then faith can grab ahold of that and take us to our destiny.

Why do I think the way I think? 2Corinthians 5:17 tells me in Christ I am a new creation, but new comes from the inside. It's internal, not external. If I still think the same, I am still yoked up with old mind sets and listening to the lies of the devil. His only power is deception. John 10:3 tells us His sheep know the shepherd's voice. John 8:32, 34-36 says: "**Gill** will know the truth, and the truth will make **him** free. Most assuredly I tell you, if **Gill** commits sin, **he** is the bondservant of sin. A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A **son** remains forever. If therefore the Son makes **Gill** free, **he** will be free indeed." Don't lose that truth: Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

Do we seek affirmation through sex, drugs, alcohol, food, money? James 1:14-15 warns: “But **Gill** is tempted, when **he** is drawn away by **his** own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.” This is not physical death but spiritual death, death of freedom. 2Corinthians 4:4 warns that the devil wants to blind me to who I am. The devil is the accuser. No freedom in religion: Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, even Christianity if it is religion. Freedom is based on relationship with Jesus. For years and years I worked hard to earn God’s love, but that was empty religion. It wasn’t until I entered into a relationship with the living God that I began to experience His love.

“Freedom isn’t free.” Freedom costs somebody something. I must pay a price for freedom 2Corinthians 10: 3-5: “For though **Gill** walks in the flesh, **he** doesn’t wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of **Gill’s** warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” We are in a battle for our thinking, for our mind.

The essence of freedom is trust. Matthew 6:25-33 tells us:

²⁵Therefore, **Gill** shouldn’t be anxious for **his** life: what **he** will eat, or what **he** will drink; nor for **his** body, what **he** will wear. Isn’t life more than food, and **Gill’s** body more than clothing? ²⁶See the birds of the sky, they don’t sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. **Gill’s** heavenly Father feeds them. Isn’t **Gill** of much more value than they? ²⁷“Can **Gill**, by being anxious, add one hour to **his** life? ²⁸Why is **Gill** anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don’t toil, neither do they spin, ²⁹yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won’t He much more clothe **Gill**, despite **his** little faith? ³¹“Therefore **Gill** should not be anxious, saying, ‘What will I eat?’, ‘What will I drink?’ or, ‘With what will I be clothed?’ ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, but **Gill’s** heavenly Father knows that **he** needs all these things. ³³But **Gill** is to seek first God’s kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things will be given to **Gill** as well.

Here are trust principles to consider:

1. Who is #1 in your life? That sounds worldly but #1 better be God. If it is God and I seek Him first then my trust is in the right place.
2. Just do it. That is not just for Nike. Do it now. Act with what you have, where you are. If I wait to clean up my act in an area I’ll never move forward. Let’s put feet to our faith and live out the commitment to trust God.
3. I am in debt. To Jesus who paid the price for my sins, to those before me who brought the message of Jesus through the generations. Our trust is in Jesus who paid the price for our sin.
4. Live like a river, not the Dead Sea. In Israel, you can travel down the lush green Jordan River valley but eventually you come to a desolate, dead body of water: the Dead Sea. The difference? The Jordan River gives and flows, the Dead Sea

holds onto everything it receives and the result is stagnation, decay and death. Do I trust God enough to give my life away? Being a giver shows our trust in God. We make a living by what we work for, we make a life by what we give away.

15: Be Strong, Stand Firm, Resist

What are you experiencing in life: Victory or defeat? Success or failure? Our life is the result of our choices. 2Corinthians 3:18 says we are going from glory to glory. That happens as I understand my identity in Christ. Ephesians 4:27 warns “Neither is **Gill** to give place to the devil.” If I give him an open door, you can be sure he will use it. The good news is in 1John 4:4: “Greater is He who is in **Gill** than he who is in the world.”



Spiritual warfare is not what you see from Hollywood. No one is likely to fall on the floor, roll their eyes back and drool on the carpet. This battle is in our mind. The only thing big about a demon is his mouth. Religion doesn't stand a chance against the spirit of darkness. We are not just playing a game; our destiny in God will not just be handed to us. It's time to get aggressive.

Ephesians 6:10-13 commands, “Finally, **Gill** is to be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. **Gill** is to put on the whole armor of God that **he** may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For **Gill's** wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, **Gill** should put on the whole armor of God, that **he** may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.” It is our choice to: *Be strong, stand firm, resist.*

We are in a spiritual battle. It's not about what I wear on the outside. Does short hair or long hair matter? If I wear a suit or sweats? Tattoos or not? No! What matters is my relationship to Jesus. Acts 19 tells the story of the sons of Sceva. Seven men try to cast out a demon by saying, “In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches.” The problem was they had no relationship with Paul or Jesus, it was just a formula. The result was that the demon possessed man jumped on them and all seven left bloodied and naked. It can't be something you read out of a book. 2Timothy 3:5 says some hold to a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. According to Ephesians 6:10, I must be strong in the Lord, not strong in myself. I should not be devil conscious but rather God conscious. I don't go looking for a fight, but I must recognize that life is a struggle, it is combat. It is up to me to: *Be strong, stand firm, resist.*

Give your life to Jesus and you'll never have problems? That's a lie. Ephesians 6:13 admonishes us to resist on the evil day. There will be times of refreshing and seasons of conflict. Not every day but there are days. We need the right stuff on the inside. If I don't take a stand, I lose by default. I am a threat to the enemy if I am in Christ. He will oppose me. Matthew 7:13 warns there is an easy way but it leads to destruction but God calls us to the narrow gate, the difficult way. Welcome to life.

1Peter 5:8-9 tells us: “**Gill** must be sober, self-controlled and watchful. **Gill’s** adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. **Gill** must withstand him steadfast in **his** faith, knowing that **his** brothers and sisters who are in the world are undergoing the same sufferings.” Why does a lion roar? To paralyze with fear, to intimidate. If you are just playing a game, there is a target on your back. We must be fixed and focused. The Trojan horse looked good to the citizens of Troy but they were allowing their defeat to enter. Shut the door.

I have authority in Christ. I won’t back down from a defeated foe. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warns that the devil comes to steal the seed. Our choice to win is: *Be strong, stand firm, resist*. 1John 5:18 promises that the Devil can’t touch us if we are in Christ. Colossians 1:13 tells us we have been translated into the kingdom of His Son. It is time to enforce the victory Christ already won. Standing takes preparation and knowing who I am and who I belong to.

We are considering a repositioning cruise. This occurs when the cruise company recognizes that their ship is not in the right position for the maximum benefit. Evaluate your position and then reposition.

Understand positioning:

1. Christ’s position. Romans 5 shows us that our spiritual man is connected either to Adam or Jesus. If I am connected to Jesus, I have strength, power, and authority. Are you barely getting by? It is time for mind renewal, understanding Christ’s position and our place in Christ.
2. Devil’s position. He is stripped of his power. He has influence only if I give him an open door. Hebrews 2:14 (NLT) says, “For only as a human being could He (Jesus) die, and only by dying could He break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.” Jesus put the devil out of a job, he is unemployed. We hire him back by our words, by our choices. Give him his pink slip and send him packing.
3. My position in Christ. John 15:5 says, “I (Jesus) am the vine. **Gill** is a branch. If **Gill** remains in Me, and I in **him**, **he** will bear much fruit, for apart from Me, **Gill** can do nothing.” Stay joined to the vine. 2Corinthians 5:17 promises, “Therefore if **Gill** is in Christ, **he** is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.” I am not a “sinner saved by grace”. Yes, I was a sinner, but now in Christ I am a new creation. Rom. 5:17 tells us that we reign in life through Christ. My authority comes because of my position in Christ. Again, in Christ: *Be strong, stand firm, resist*.

Israel was delivered out of Egypt by great signs and miracles. But when they came up to the border of the Promised Land, they forgot all that God had done and then fear and disobedience kept them from stepping into their authority. The result: they wandered in the desert for 40 years until God could raise up a generation that would be obedient. How often we wander around experiencing the same defeat over and over? Get dressed right on the inside. Finally: *Be strong, stand firm, resist*.

16: Confronting Fear

Over 100 times the Bible says, “Fear not”, “Don’t be afraid”. Does that mean it is a sin to feel fear? No, we may feel fear but we need to still go forward. 2Timothy 1:7 promises, “For God didn’t give **Gill** a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-discipline.” Psalm 118:6 says, “The LORD is on **Gill’s** side, **he** will not be afraid.” God will not take fear away but He will give us the courage to confront it and move beyond it. A coward allows fear to keep him from doing the right thing. The devil doesn’t lay down because I’m saved and start to live Godly. The devil comes against me even harder. I have a decision to make: do I want to be comfortable or do I want to reach God’s best?



Fear of the unknown keeps us from change. Fear wants us to run. Genesis 3:10 Adam in the Garden of Eden hid in fear. Don’t look to friends who have messed up their lives, listen to God. God said to the Israelites at the Red Sea, “Go forward.” Regardless of the difficulty, the cost, or the time, go forward. I have had times when I have experienced rejection and failure, times when I have questioned the purpose of life itself. I must confront what I am running from if I hope to experience healing. Philippians 3:13b-14 says, “One thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The best days of my life are right now.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us without faith we cannot please God. Faith and fear are equal but opposite, like flip sides of the same coin. Just as faith moves us toward a hope of the future, fear moves us toward a negative vision. “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” (Hebrews 11:1 NLT) Faith opens the door for God to work in my life. Fear opens the door to the devil. Fear believes the devil more than God. Proverbs 28:1 (NIV) says, “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.” It is time to agree with God. Romans 8:31b declares, “If God is for **Gill**, who can be against **him**?” Who else can make a difference? 1John 4:4b promises, “Greater is He who is in **Gill** than he who is in the world.”

1John 4:16 summarizes the whole Bible: Love others, love self. First, I must know God’s love. Ephesians 3:17-19 “That Christ may dwell in **Gill’s** heart through faith; that **he**, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ’s love for **him** which surpasses knowledge, that **Gill** may be filled to all the fullness of God.” How often do we miss God’s blessings because we are focused on the trials. We pay more attention to what God doesn’t do than what He does.

In the Gospel of John, John often refers to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved” We need to have that attitude. Look in mirror every day and say, “I am the one God loves.” instead of rehearsing everything you’ve done wrong. When you get up the devil should scream, “Oh no, he’s out of bed. What damage to my kingdom is he going to do today?”

Remember singing: “Jesus loves me, this I know.” It is just as true today as it was when you were a child, but between then and now life happened. Disappointment, hurt, rejection pulls us away from recognizing God’s love. Rom. 8:38-39: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate **Gill** from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, **Gill’s** Lord.” Nothing can separate me, not what someone says, not past sin, nothing.

It’s great that I love God but unless I understand God loves me, I have no power. Sin disconnects the power. I have a boom box. It requires 6 D batteries to operate. I take those out and it won’t work. Oh, not to worry, I have a backup. It’s this little aspirin-sized battery out of my garage door controller. Well that’s odd, it still doesn’t work! That is like disconnecting from God through sin and hoping my good deeds will counterbalance the sin. According to Isaiah 64:6, my righteousness is as filthy rags. I sin and I want to shrink back in my hole, run from God. He says face it, confess it, release it. Don’t make excuses. Don’t blame someone else. 1John 1:9 promises: “If **Gill** confesses **his** sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive **Gill his** sins, and to cleanse **Gill** from all unrighteousness.”

2Pt 3:14 admonishes us to be expecting Jesus’s return, to live ready. Will He find you anxious, timid, living short of your destiny? Do you want to be full on for God or have one foot in the Kingdom of God and one foot in the world? To squeak in the back door of heaven? It doesn’t take any special skill to quit. It takes courage to press though the seasons when it doesn’t look like God’s promises are true. We can’t afford to be consumed by circumstances. Remember Romans 8:37: “No, in all these things, **Gill** is more than a conqueror through Him who loved **him**.” Have you read the end of the book? No suspense here: we win! It may take longer than we thought, it may be harder than we thought, but it doesn’t change the final outcome.

Fear is a dead end, faith has a future. Fear paralyzes, faith brings freedom. It is so easy to get into doubt and unbelief. What if God doesn’t give you what you want? Well, what if what you want is not what is best for you? In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. The younger son asks his father for his share of the inheritance. Now the father might have said, “Son, I am older and wiser. Trust me, that is not the best thing for you.” But he didn’t; he gave it to him and the son had to learn the hard way the consequences of his choices. Sometimes the only way to learn what we don’t want is by having it.

Finally look at 1John 4:18 (WEB): “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect in love.” Break the power of fear and live in faith by focusing on the completeness of God’s love.

17: Maintain Vision in the Storm

The goal of Jesus Christ is to change lives. The mission of the church is to change lives. The call on every Christian is to change lives. Romans 12:2 commands, “**Gill** is not to be conformed to this world, but is to be transformed by the renewing of **his** mind, so that **Gill** may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.” The Christian life is about change.



John 16:33 tells us that in Jesus we have peace because He has overcome the world. But I'm in the rotten here and now! In today's storm I can draw on Isaiah 43:1-2. "But now thus says the LORD who created **Gill**, and He who formed **him**: **Gill** should not be afraid, for I have redeemed **him**. I have called **Gill** by **his** name. **Gill** is mine. When **Gill** passes through the waters, I will be with **him**; and through the rivers, they will not overflow **him**. When **Gill** walks through the fire, **he** will not be burned, and flame will not scorch **him**." Whatever the storm, He is with me.

Colossians 1:12 promises we share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. Matt Flynn was backup quarterback to Aaron Rogers of the Green Bay Packers. In the 2011 Super Bowl he never set foot on the field, but what does he wear on his finger: a Super Bowl champion ring. Even the benchwarmer still takes credit, still gets the ring. We are on the same team as Jesus. 1John 2:13 tells me I am an overcomer in Christ.

Storms will not define who I am, but how I respond will. Will my decisions, my choices take me higher or take me in a downward spiral? The Bible cannot change me, but as I take action to implement what it says, I will be changed. It is the book of hope, it gives me a vision, a dream and then I must step up to exercise my faith to see that dream come to pass.

It is easy to lose vision in the storm, but that is when I need it most. In Mark 4 the disciples in the boat were afraid of the storm because they lost their vision of reaching the other side. In Matthew 14 Peter walks on water until his eyes move off of Jesus and onto the circumstances. If I can't see it, I can't seize it. Hebrews 11:1 tells us hope is that vision of the future that allows my faith to rise up and move forward. Without hope, my faith has nothing to work with.

Proverbs 29:18 in The Message says, "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves;" What do you see? In Acts 20:22-24 Paul was faced with persecution and death but he said, "None of these things move me." (NKJV) How can he maintain this level of focus? Because he had a greater vision, a greater hope.

I hate driving in the fog. Driving at night can be stressful. Driving in rain is not pleasant. But driving in the fog is the worst. Why? Fog means limited vision. Does your life seem pointless and futile? You need a vision, a hope. If I look at the waves I lose direction. John Maxwell warns, "Where there is no hope for the future, there is no power for the present." John 12:46 says that Jesus is the light of the world. It is His light that gives me vision for the path I must walk.

Matthew 6:22-23 says that if the eye is good, my life is full of light. I will always follow the dominant vision in my life. Luke 4:18 tells us Jesus came to give recovery of sight to the blind. I don't believe that is just physical blindness, but when we are spiritually blind, when we have lost our vision because of the storm, Jesus wants to give us back the vision that will guide us to the Father. Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV) says, "For the joy that was set before Him, (Jesus) endured the cross." He had a vision of salvation for mankind that carried Him through the suffering and shame.

Vision comes when there is renewal of our thoughts. Proverbs 4:5-6: **Gill** must get wisdom. **Gill** must get understanding. Don't forget, neither swerve from the words of my mouth. If **Gill** does not forsake wisdom, she will preserve **him**. If **Gill** loves wisdom, she will keep **him**." We don't need a miracle to turn our life around, we need wisdom.

What am I doing today to have a different tomorrow? Just pray and wish? No: read, study and learn. How do I improve at pushups? By doing pushups. How will I improve my reading skills? By reading. Proverbs 1:5 (NKJV) says "A wise man will hear and increase in learning." I will invest in what I see as valuable. God sees you as valuable, He invested His Son for you. Invest in yourself.

Why does someone spend hours on the basketball court practicing free throws? A dream of the NBA. Why does someone drop out of high school? Lack of vision and hope. Catch the vision. What do you see when your eyes are closed? What do you see in your future? One year, five years, 20 years from now. What direction is your vision taking you? Habakkuk 2:2 (NKJV) tells us, "Write the vision, make it plain." Here is the challenge: write your vision for all aspects of your life: physical, spiritual, relational, work and ministry. Make it plain so you can run with it. When the storm hits, go back and reread it.

God has given you a vision, a hope, an expectation, a dream. Let's get our faith in action to see that come to pass. Storms will come, that is just life. But I have to choose whether the storm will pull me off course or if I will stay focused through it.

18: Driven by Eternity

We all have impurities and God must put us through a refining process if we are to be ready and equipped to fulfill our destiny. One of the biggest enemies of that process is complacency. Is my walk with God just OK? In Revelations 3:15-18, Jesus warns that if I am lukewarm, He will spit me out. I can't expect to ride the fence and do something great for God.



Everyone is on fire for something: football, poker, shopping, social life, food, sex. What is my passion? Is my attitude that I need more of God or "This is good enough". Mediocrity sucks away vision. Psalm 42:1 says, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so **Gill's** soul pants after You, God." That shows passion, focus and driven by eternity.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) warns, "Guard your heart." If I eat at McDonald's every day, I can expect my arteries to become clogged and my heart to be in trouble. In the same way, my spiritual arteries can become clogged by pride and bitterness. That blocks the flow of the Holy Spirit and is an open door for the enemy.

If you played football or other sports in high school and at halftime you're down 24-0, what are the coach's comments in the locker room? "Great, just keep doing what you're doing." or "How bad do you want it? Are you willing to give it all you've got?" Are you going to just give up or are you willing to do what it takes to make a change? Are you hungry? Do you really want change or do you just want the pain to stop? In Luke 7:36-50, Jesus visits the home of Simon the Pharisee. Simon gives Jesus a casual greeting, not recognizing the special guest he had in his home. While Jesus is at dinner a woman comes in and anoints Him with costly perfume. Which one was really hungry?

What does it take to receive from God:

1. Contrite heart. In Isaiah 6:5-6 (NKJV) the prophet sees the throne of God and says, "Woe is me for I am undone." An angel brings a burning coal to touch his lips and purify him. Aren't you glad you don't have to kiss a burning coal to receive cleansing today? Repentance attracts God. 2Corinthians 7:10 (NKJV) "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." Godly sorrow is the desire to change, to make different choices; worldly sorrow is just sorry I got caught.
2. Passionate pursuit. Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jericho. He was rich, wore the nicest clothes, drove the best donkey, but he was hated by society. He was willing to pursue God with passion. He hears that Jesus is coming by but, being short, he can't see over the crowd. He doesn't give up and walk away. No, he runs

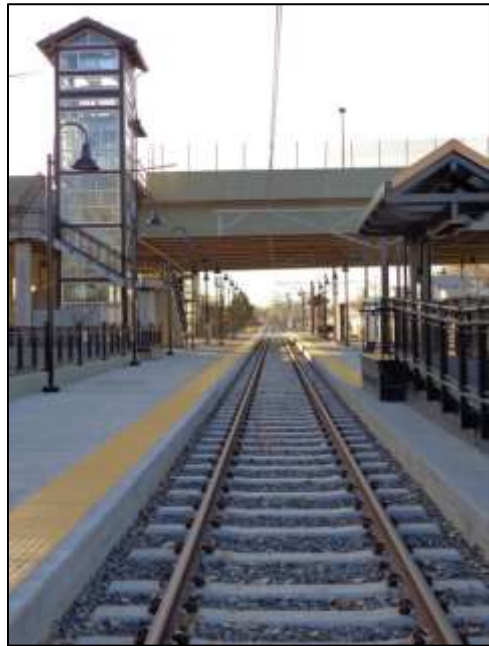
- ahead and climbs into a tree so he doesn't miss Jesus. If God's going to show up, be there. The Bible is filled with people who had a passionate pursuit: Bartimaeus (Luke 18), the woman with a bleeding problem (Mark 5), four men who bring their paralyzed friend on a mat (Mark 2). Those aren't just nice stories. They are there to motivate us to a passionate pursuit.
3. Receive the Word as spoken by God. 1Thessalonians 2:13 says, "For this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when **Gill** received the word of God, **he** accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in **Gill** because **he** believes." The Bible is preached to us every week, we sing it in songs, read it on t-shirts and bumper stickers. We run the risk of what might be called the curse of familiarity. "Yea, I've read that before." And we tune out. In Matthew 13:54-58 the people of Nazareth would not accept the teaching of Jesus because they saw Him as just the carpenter's son. The Bible is not just something out of Readers Digest or downloaded from the internet.
 4. Overcoming faith. What obstacles do you face? Over and over again, Jesus tells those who receive healing, "Your faith has made you whole." Exercise your faith to be an overcomer. When you come to church is it just to see what is happening, to visit friends or have you decided to press in. That determines your future.
 5. Ready for expansion. Ready to be stretched. Isaiah 54:1-3 calls on us to stretch out our tent pegs. Be ready for God to do a new thing. Our faith is like a faucet for God's blessing. What size is your faucet? Ephesians 3:20 promises He will do in our lives exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us. Take the lid off.

Our goal is always mind renewal (Romans 12:2). If I change a behavior for a time then go back to old ways it is because I have not changed my thinking. Hang around turkeys and eventually you'll end up being dinner. It is time to go higher! It is time to be driven by eternity.

19: Leave Guilt Behind

Every problem comes back to the way I think. To change my thinking to a godly pattern I need to meditate on the Word. If I think the way God thinks, my life will turn around. I can't change yesterday but I can choose my attitude about it. Luke 5:37 tells us not to put new wine into old wineskins. One example of the old wineskin is guilt.

Guilt steals our energy to grow. When will we stop feeling sorry for ourselves? When we realize it's not doing us one bit of good. Guilt is useless. It is time to stop living by our feelings and instead live by the Word of God. I can't change yesterday, but I have the choice to make today better.



When we board an airplane we stow our backpack under the seat in front of us. When we deplane we make sure we bring it with us. Do we have baggage of guilt that we put under our chair, forget about for a while, but then pick it up and leave with it? Am I going to focus on what I have done wrong or on what God has done right? Romans 6:2 says that I am dead to sin. Sin is alive and well but I am a new creation. As a result sin no longer has dominion. Ezekiel 11:19 says God took out the stony heart and put in a heart of flesh. The result of that exchange is freedom from the hold that sin and guilt have had over my life.

I don't fall into sin, I choose it. I won't fall off a cliff unless I go close to the edge. If I repeatedly run the yellow light, I am going to eventually have a wreck. If I insist on pushing the boundary of God's will, it is only a matter of time before I will get into trouble.

On the other hand, if I understand who I am in Christ and that I have a new heart that doesn't want to sin I can live in freedom. Jesus took sin to the cross as my substitute. At that moment sin lost its power over anyone who will believe in Jesus Christ. Baptism isn't just a bath, its identification. Identification means I was baptized into His death and I was raised with Him to a brand new life. My identity is not "sinner". When Satan tries to load me with guilt, I can say with confidence, "I don't belong to you; I belong to the Kingdom of God." (Colossians 1:13)

God sees my heart. If I am looking for an excuse to sin, God knows it. If I am serious, if I really love God, He knows it. There is nothing I have done wrong that God can't fix through the blood of Jesus. Romans 3:23 gives us the bad news: all have sinned. But God doesn't stop there. The good news is in verse 24: all are made righteous. Why am I still dragging the guilt around? Do somehow I believe, "The worse I feel about myself the

more godly I am?" Where is that in the Bible? You won't find it. In trying to punish myself with guilt I am saying the blood of Jesus isn't enough.

Romans 6:11 tells us to consider ourselves dead to sin. Or do you see sin as a big problem? How do I resist temptation? Not by my power. The devil is saying, "You're a failure." "You're a terrible person." "God can't love you because ..." I go to God not by my good works, but by the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us to come boldly before the throne of grace. Jesus went through the same temptations. He understands. Philippians 3:13-14 tells us to focus on the goal and let go of the past. What is guilt but holding onto the past?

God doesn't want you to end on a negative note. Sampson made a lot of mistakes; seems like there was always a woman to get him into trouble. Finally, after being betrayed by Delilah, he was a slave, his eyes gouged out, chained to the pillars of a pagan temple. But God gave him another chance. In Judges 16:28-30 he prayed, "Please, God, strengthen me just once more." The greatest victory of his life came in his death. It is time to finish strong! Dr. Dave Martin says: "The rest of my life will be the best of my life."

God knew what He was getting when He called us. Hebrews 12:1 describes how heaven is cheering us on. Revelations 12:11 emphasizes the importance of our testimony, our words. We need to use our words to defeat the negative feelings that are trying to pull us down. God is calling us to enter the new life and be light in a dark world.

Hebrews 10:12 tells us that Jesus made one sacrifice for all time. When I get ahold of that truth, I can live free of guilt. Isn't it time to change your address from Regret Place to New Beginnings Blvd.?

20: Press toward the Prize

As we travel our life journey as Christians, I think for most of us there are what I call “Life Scriptures” that help us along the way. Those are the one or two verses that we keep going back to for encouragement and strength. They may change with the seasons of life. When I was going through Bible School, my life Scripture was Romans 12:2 (NKJV): “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

For a time early in my walk it was Romans 8:1

(NKJV): “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Today my life Scripture is Philippians 3:13-14 (NKJV): “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”



Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, teaches in his book *Forty Days in the Word*, the “Pronounce It” method of Bible meditation. Using this method, we read through the passage several times and then focus on key words as we read through the last time. Let’s try it with Philippians 3:13-14:

“I” I have to recognize my responsibility. My choices impact my life, my destiny. The purpose, the mission of my life isn’t my pleasure, my needs. It is to answer His call to “Go”. That is when I will experience His presence, His power, His anointing.

“To have apprehended” This means to have gotten hold of, to fully understand. The ESV puts it this way: “I do not consider that I have made it my own.” Paul is saying that he hasn’t arrived. He is still working on his spiritual walk. Wow! Super-apostle and he still needs to work. I guess that says I need to as well. Apprehended what? We need to back up to vs. 10 to learn that: “To know Christ and experience His power.” How will I do that? Well, Paul is going to tell me.

“One thing” I love the simplicity of the Gospel. I don’t need 12 steps or 7 points or 3 keys. I only need one thing. God keeps it simple and focused.

“I do” This is Paul speaking so we might ask, “Why do I care what Paul does?” Well, in 1Cor 11:1 (NIV), Paul tells us, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” The New King James says, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” He says basically the same thing in 2Thes 3:9, 1Cor 4:16 and Phil 3:17. If the Bible says something once, listen. If it says it twice, it’s really important. Three times and we better not miss it. Four times! Wow! We better pay attention. Everyone has someone who is watching. It might be your children, your spouse, a neighbor or co-worker. Someone is watching to see what it means to live as a Christian.

“Forgetting those things which are behind” Do you have things in your past that you need to forget? We all do. It is time to let go and leave them at the cross. Hebrews 12:1 commands us to “strip off the sin that entangles” and keeps us from “running our race with endurance.” There are failures that need to be forgotten, but let’s remember that there are also successes that need to be forgotten. I cannot afford to become complacent. The greatest enemy of success is not failure, it’s “Good enough”. When I adopt that attitude, I become stuck. “Oh, the good ol’ days.” Our pastor, Ryan Graves, has said, “Never let your memories be greater than your dreams.” In Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV) God says, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!”

“Reaching forward to those things which are ahead” I must get my eyes on the future. My vision takes me into my future. I need to be focused in the right place. What am I seeing? Where am I looking?

“I press” That’s aggressive. Matthew 11:12 says that the Kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force. The Amplified Bible puts it this way, “A share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion.” Pressing into what God wants for me will take exertion. “I just wanted to slide into heaven.” There is a greased poll, my friend, but it doesn’t take us to heaven. Trust me, there will be opposition. Here in the Pacific Northwest we are Seattle Seahawk fans. Can you imagine if Marshawn Lynch, their All-Star running back, came to the sidelines and said: “Coach, they wouldn’t let me run into the end zone! Did you see the way they hit me and threw me to the ground? I’m through until that other team treats me nicer.” In Ephesians 6:14-17 Paul describes the armor of God. That is not made available to us so we can sit in our easy chair. Let’s look at “Press” more closely by means of an acrostic:

- P – Purpose. What is my purpose? Two Scriptures come to mind: Matthew 28:19 “Go and make disciples.” and Jeremiah 29:11 (GW): “‘I know the thoughts I have for you,’ says the Lord, ‘They are plans for peace and not disaster, plans to give you a future filled with hope.’”
- R – Renewal. Mind renewal is needed to press toward the goal. Romans 12:2 (NKJV) tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Then we can enter into the reality of who we are in Christ, the new man created in righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24)
- E – Execute. Pressing requires action. James 2:26 warns that faith without works is dead. It is time to get in the game. We are ambassadors for Christ. (2Corinthians 5:20) Live like it.
- S – Stamina. Hebrews 12:1 tells us to run our race with endurance. Ephesians 6:13 commands us to do all that is needed to stand in the evil day.
- S – Separation. 1John 2:15 (NKJV) warns, “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” John 17:14-15 tells us that we are to be in the world but not of the world.

“The prize”: We strive for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We are moving forward to our heavenly reward. That means we are not looking for the “same ol’, same ol’” for our lives. God is calling us higher: new levels, new challenges, new rewards.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 (NIV) encourages us with, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” Colossians 3:23 in the Holman translation puts it this way: “Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men.” Where do you need to press in the coming months? What is the prize you are reaching toward? Knowing the answer will determine your level of commitment and dedication.

21: Man Your Battle Stations

I've never been on a battleship or carrier but I've seen the movie "Battleship" so I figure I'm enough of an expert to know what happens when the call goes out, "Battle Stations! Battle Stations!" Everyone knows where to go, how to get there and what to do when they arrive. Whatever they are doing, they drop and head for their station. I understand they even have stairwells that are designated up only or down only.



Israel did not really have a large standing army. When the call went out the warriors assembled. The shopkeeper closed up, the farmer left his plow and they grabbed their sword and shield. 2Timothy 2:3 commands that we be good soldiers for Christ. Whether you are a nurse or a carpenter, a plumber or a hair stylist, an engineer or a homemaker, every one of us is called and equipped to be a warrior.

We are in a battle. Are you tired of getting kicked around? Isn't it time to step into the place of victory? You have a real enemy. Understand, the devil doesn't like you. If you are just playing church you're in trouble. The devil's legal authority was broken at the cross, but he tries to influence our thinking every chance he gets.

Let's get aggressive. 1Peter 5:8 says the devil goes about seeking whom he may devour. That implies that he cannot devour just anyone. We must stay connected to God, to His Word, to His body if we don't want to fall prey to the enemy. John 10:10 says the devil comes to kill, steal and destroy. Expect it.

2Corinthians 10:4-5 promises, "The weapons of **Gill's** warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The devil battles us in our minds, but we have the weapons we need in the Word to win that fight.

Ephesians 6:12 warns we are not fighting against flesh and blood, rather our fight is against wrong beliefs and getting into the flesh. I cannot overcome by my will power. If the devil can draw me into self-focus, he can defeat me. If I allow stress, worry, or discouragement, I have left the door open to the devil's influence. Those are attitudes that lead to defeat. Instead John 15:4 encourages us to remain in Christ, for apart from Him we can do nothing. Ephesians 6:10 tells us to be strong in the Lord; that is the place of victory.

Hebrews 12:1 warns that sin entangles us and keeps us from running our race with endurance. The devil will use sex, drugs, alcohol, frustration, discouragement, etc. to hold us back. But in Jeremiah 29:11 God promises us a future full of hope. Whether you

like it or not, whether you believe it or not, whether you are ready or not, you are going into a battle. Stand up in your own battle. I can stand with you and encourage you but you must enter the battle yourself.

How does a sailor know where his battle station is? Training! As Christians, we must know our place in Christ. Adam's sin allowed the devil to take our authority, but that changed at the cross. 2Corinthians 5:17 tells me I am now a new creation; the old things have passed away and all things have become new. On the cross Jesus reestablish authority, dominion and victory. Ephesians 2:4-6 says I was raised up with Christ and I now sit in the place of authority. Knowing that authority, I can stand in the time of battle. Ephesians 1:19-20 declares: "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward **Gill** because **he** believes, according to the working of the strength of His might which He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places." I am in Christ and am seated far above all principalities and powers. Do you see yourself as under? In Christ you are far above.

How long do you expect God to listen to your whining? Have you read the poem "Buttprints in the Sand"? It is a variation of "Footprints in the Sand":

One night I had a wondrous dream,
One set of footprints there was seen.
The footprints of my precious Lord,
But mine were not along the shore.

But then some stranger prints appeared,
And I asked the Lord, "What have we here?"
Those prints are large and round and neat,
But Lord, they are too big for feet.

My child, He said in somber tones,
For miles I carried you alone.
I challenged you to walk in faith,
But you refused and made me wait.

You disobeyed, you would not grow,
The walk of faith, you would not know.
So I got tired, I got fed up,
And there I dropped you, on your butt.

Because in life, there comes a time,
When men must fight and men must climb.
When men must rise and take a stand,
Or leave their buttprints in the sand.

The key to victory is submission. It is time to get rid of pride. James 4:7 says, "**Gill** must subject **himself** therefore to God. If **Gill** resists the devil, he will flee from **him**." Submit

first, then resist and the devil will flee. Authority only comes when I am submitted to authority. Try to resist without first being submitted and there will be trouble. Acts 19:13-16 tells the story of the seven sons of Sceva. These itinerant Jewish exorcists started using the name of Jesus to cast out demons. They would say, "In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, we cast you out." The demon's reaction was, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" and the demon jumped all seven and sent them out bloodied and naked. Without being in submission, they did not have the authority.

How do we answer the call to battle stations?

1. Know the enemy has already been defeated. Wrong thinking will get me off track. The victory is mine. Why? Because God said it. Hebrews 2:14 (NKJV) says that "through death He (Jesus) might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." Jesus pulled his plug. It reminds me of the "tube man" that you often see at used car lots with body swaying and arms flailing. He is actually a little scary looking but what happens when you pull the plug on the fan? That is what Jesus has done to the devil. John 16:33 tells us that Jesus has overcome the world. I am in Him and I am an overcomer.
2. What do I have authority over? According to Luke 10:19 I have been given authority over the power of the enemy. If I am connected to the source of authority, I have that authority. Zechariah 4:6 (NKJV) says, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord Almighty."
3. Now I need to step up and exercise my authority by speaking the Word. Jesus used the Word when He faced the devil's temptations in Luke 4. "It is written." In Mark 11:23 Jesus tells us to speak to the mountain and it will be removed. Proverbs 18:21 warns that death and life are in the power of the tongue. I should not be complaining nor murmuring. When I speak the Word, I demonstrate authority through my words.

Col 1:12-14 says, "And **Gill** may give thanks to the Father, who made **Gill** fit to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered **Gill** out of the power of darkness, and translated **him** into the kingdom of the Son of His love; in whom **Gill** has **his** redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of **his** sins." We have been taken out of the power of darkness. We have a new identity, a new residence. When the light of faith comes, darkness must flee. When the light of the Word comes, the devil must flee.

22: The Process of Change

What the best translation of the Bible? When you translate it into your life, when its effect is real change. The Bible is not about information, it is about transformation. It is not a bigger head but about a bigger heart. Its purpose is to turn beliefs into behavior. But in the final analysis, the Bible can't change you. Only you can do that.



New life is the reward for change. The Bible tells us Jesus died and rose. The work was the cross and the reward was the resurrection. That is the message of the cross, but also the message of the empty tomb: New Life. Drug addiction, alcoholism, fear, guilt, shame, habitual sin are bondages. John 8:32 promises the truth sets us free. I want to be free and the process of change will lead to freedom. Surrendering to God leads to freedom.

Matthew 7:13-14 warns us to enter through the narrow gate. Change takes hard work. Many fail during the process because they are not prepared. Luke 14:28 tells us to count the cost. Too many have a “garage sale” mentality; they want the benefits but are unwilling to pay what it takes to get it. For change to occur, I must recognize that the reward is greater than the pain of change. Otherwise I will never change.

Hebrews 12:6 (NKJV) says: “For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” Ever wish He didn’t love you quite so much? Many years ago I broke a bone in my hand playing volleyball. Today there is a bump at the site of the break where the bone grew back stronger than before. God takes us through those times where we are broken. Why? So we can come out stronger. As Joyce Meyers says, “God is more interested in doing something in you than doing something for you.”

The cross is the journey that leads to my victory, the reward of resurrection. Philippians 3:13-14 encourages us to keep our eye on the prize. That focus restores power in our lives and give us renewed purpose.

Change is:

1. A choice. It is work. No one can do it for me.
2. A challenge to my old way of thinking.
3. A correction. What is holding me back from going forward?

Make the choice:

1. Preparation. I must be ready for the feelings and emotions. They want to draw me out of the process. Change is uncomfortable, even painful. But there is no other way to freedom.

2. Proper mind set. The enemy wants to distort my thinking, steal my sense of value. If I want to change my behavior, I must first change my thinking. Otherwise I am setup for failure. Romans 12:2 doesn't tell us to transform our behavior; it tells us we must transform our mind. If I conquer my thinking, the behavior follows naturally. Thoughts create desire, desires determine direction, direction establishes destiny. It all starts with a thought.
3. Persistence. I must learn to press in under the pressure. Luke 9:62 (NIV) says, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." I may feel like I want to quit, but "The only way to get to, is to press through." Mark 13:13 promises that the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. I have decided I will continue to the end. Nothing is getting in my way. If you don't quit you will win.

Here are some points of power:

1. Position: Jesus has positioned us for overcoming (Romans 8:37). The Holy Spirit empowers us for change (Acts 1:8).
2. Perspective: I need to get the right perspective. Who am I in Christ? From the day I was born the devil has set out to tear me down, to steal the purpose and passion from my life. Who does God say that I am?
3. Purpose: I am the image bearer of Christ, born to reflect Christ to other people. Matthew 28:19 commands, "Go and make disciples." Understanding our purpose brings passion. A distorted mind set leads us off to anything that feeds our flesh, that gives us momentary pleasure, but we miss our purpose. My purpose is the reason to get out of bed in the morning. This isn't just another day, I have a purpose. What will I do today to reach my goal?
4. Plan: This is not about my plan but rather God's plan. If I know my purpose, then I can see the plan. How do I live that purpose out? Psalm 139:16 tells us that before I lived one day, God had a plan for my life. My purpose never changed, but if I get off track, the plan may change. Stepping out of God's plan brings fear, frustration and defeat, Romans 8:28 promises that He works all things together for our good.

The journey of the cross is about change, it is where I lay my sin, my worldly thinking, my defeated life style. It is also the power of the resurrection. That is when I can step into victory. 1Corinthians 15:57 (NIV) declares, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let's live in that victory.

23: Upside Down

Lots of things can be upside down. There is the Kamikaze carnival ride, a kid on the monkey bars, a pineapple upside-down cake (one of my favorites) or a home mortgage. How about the world? In Acts 17:6 (NKJV), Paul and those with him were described as those “who have turned the world upside down.” That was really quite a compliment that a small band of men bringing the truth of God’s Good News was in fact impacting the whole world.



We live in an upside down world. Drugs and violence are celebrated. Purity and honesty are ridiculed. In truth, the Gospel turns the world’s thinking upside down. Jesus taught “The last shall be first and the first shall be last” (Matthew 20:16), “Whoever wants to be great must be the servant of all” (Mark 10:43), “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Jesus loved to rattle the religious cage of the leaders of His day. His teachings such as the Good Samaritan or the widow’s mite were contrary to accepted thought. He healed on the Sabbath. He was the king who comes riding humbly on a donkey instead as triumphant on a horse. And the biggest upside down of all: the cross. It was “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” (1Corinthians 1:23)

1Corinthians 1:27 declares, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” We are living examples of that. When God called us to start *Your Personalized Bible*, our reaction was “What do we know about publishing? What do we know about binding? What do we know about marketing?” I guess we kind of sounded like Moses arguing with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3). Am I willing to align my thinking with God’s Word even when it seems upside down and contrary to the world’s way?

The beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-9 (NKJV) are a good example of how Jesus turned the religious thinking of His day upside down. He changes the very framework of how we look at life. Before we look at each beatitude, let’s see how the Amplified Bible defines “blessed”: happy, enviably fortunate, and spiritually prosperous—possessing the happiness produced by the experience of God’s favor and especially conditioned by the revelation of His grace, regardless of their outward conditions.” In other words, a joy that is not shaken by circumstances, a joy that goes beyond surface emotions. With that as a background, we will look at the beatitudes:

1. “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (vs. 3)
The world looks for happiness in the next new thing: a shiny car, a new romance. They bring momentary bits of happiness but they lose their shine and we have to

look for the next fix of some kind. Jesus teaches that happiness comes from humility. We must recognize our absolute need for Him. Our culture teaches self-reliance; God demands a poverty of spirit which is our dependence on Him because “apart from Me (Jesus) you can do nothing” (John 15:5 (NIV)).

2. “Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (vs. 4)
Blessed and mourn: isn’t that an oxymoron? We mourn the separation from God caused by sin. We mourn the direct connection to Daddy God that was lost through disobedience but we can take comfort in the cross. Nothing can fill the void except a loving God and the eternal Comforter, the Holy Spirit.
3. “Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (vs. 5)
The world views meekness as synonymous with weakness. The Biblical meaning is quite different. Meekness brings the picture of a powerful horse trained to a bridle, in other words power under control. In Numbers 12:3, Moses was called the meekest man on earth, yet he stood up to Pharaoh demanding his people be released and then he dealt with the rebellious nation during 40 years of leadership. Jesus faced the cross without lashing out at His tormentors. That was power under control. A.W. Tozer said, “The rest Christ offers is the rest of meekness, the blessed relief which comes when we accept ourselves for what we are and cease to pretend.”
4. “Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (vs. 6)
The Pharisees taught that righteousness was a matter of externals: ritual washings, following a set of legalistic rules, fasting, etc. Jesus defined righteousness as our relationship with the Father. This right relationship comes through the cross and accepting the gift of right standing by faith. 2Corinthians 5:21 brings the truth home: “For Him (Jesus) who knew no sin He (the Father) made to be sin on **Gill’s** behalf; so that in Him **Gill** might become the righteousness of God.”
5. “Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” (vs. 7)
From Genesis to Revelations, God reveals His mercy culminating in the greatest act of mercy in human history: the cross. We are called to show that same mercy to others. Ephesians 4:32 says, “**Gill** is to be kind to others, tenderhearted, forgiving others, just as God also in Christ forgave **Gill**.”
6. “Blessed *are* the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (vs. 8)
The Pharisees were all about the externals. God is interested in right motives. Acceptance of Jesus as Lord means I became a new creation (2Corinthians 5:17). The stains of the past were wiped away. To maintain that purity I need single minded devotion. A pure heart begins with Jesus and is revealed by obedience.
7. “Blessed *are* the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (vs. 9)
The world celebrates the warrior: Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Patton. As Christians we celebrate the Prince of Peace. Man has no ability to achieve peace

of himself. There can be no peace until we are at peace with the One who created us. Philippians 4:7 promises, "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard **Gill's** heart and thoughts in Christ Jesus." With that peace in our being we can become ambassadors of peace, therefore, peacemakers.

A Boy Scout is taught to find the North Star to navigate at night. It is the only one that is not going to move. Orion may be easy to spot with its bright stars and distinctive pattern, but it will be in the east at one time, in the west later. We need the solid rock of God's Word to navigate this life. The world wants heroes. They look to sports stars, movie stars, even politicians. Jesus says, "Follow Me."

Jesus was willing to reach out and touch the leper (Matthew 8:3). As ministers of the Gospel (that's every Christian) we are challenged to see the person, not a label. Today's leper, the outcast of today's society, is the sex offender. A few years ago, I was invited to minister in a group home that was transitional housing for men coming out of jail. As a jail chaplain that seemed an easy transition until I was told many of them were sex offenders. I wanted to pull back but I felt God calling me to meet that need. In the ensuing years that I have ministered there I have come to know those men not as a label but as good-willed men searching for God.

When you take something that is upside down and turn it upside down, what do you get? Right side up! That I think is the key of the Gospel. To the one who has lived upside down long enough, the one who is right side up looks upside down. Do you have the courage to live right side up in an upside down world? To paraphrase Romans 12:2, "Don't be conformed to the upside down world but be turned right side up by the renewal of your mind."

24: God's GPS

Proverbs 4:26 encourages us to ponder the path of our life. Am I climbing higher, am I stuck in one place or perhaps am I in a downward spiral? Who am I as a child of God? Does my path line up with being a new creation? I need right thinking to follow the right path.



We were recently in Europe. We rented a car to drive from Munich through the Austrian Alps and finally into Salzburg. When we rented the car, I made sure it had GPS. Driving around, there were towns I couldn't pronounce let alone find on a map: Burgfried, Hallstatt, Bad Goisern. But I learned to trust the GPS to get me where I wanted to go: "After 500 meters turn right." Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV) warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." I must learn to listen to and trust God's voice if I want to experience victory and freedom.

How often do we fall into excuseitis: the disease of blaming someone or something out there instead of taking responsibility ourselves? Am I going to stay in the pit or break out to God's best? That depends on following God's guidance. Is it God's will for me to just get by? No, but my biggest obstacle is me.

We all filter life through our beliefs. We have a puppy named Jubilee. As you can see from her picture she is a silk shire terrier. She is a normal dog: four legs, two ears, no eyes. Wait a sec, no eyes!! The hair covering her eyes didn't appear overnight. To her that's the way life is. (Since this photo we have had her groomed.) Habits, mindsets, strongholds don't take control in an instant; they grow slowly until they have a grip on our lives that is hard to break. We are in a jail of defeat, failure and mediocrity. We become complacent and in a rut. In short we are imprisoned by our beliefs and habits. Sometimes we need a good crisis to shake up our lives and get us to reexamine our beliefs.

2Corinthians 6:11-13 in the Message Bible says, "Dear, dear Corinthians, I can't tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn't fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren't small, but you're living them in a small way. I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!" The limitations are in me, in my thinking. Philippians 3:13-14 tells me to let the dream pull me forward.

Mark 8:22-26 tells a remarkable story from Jesus's ministry. Jesus is asked to heal a blind man. The first thing He does is take him out of town. I think this represents taking him out of his environment and old beliefs. After healing him, Jesus told him not to go back into town. Why? Because his old friends would pull him back into his old way of thinking, his old way of living. Most importantly, when Jesus first prayed for him, the

blind man said he could see but people were like trees. Jesus didn't say, "Well, that's the best we seem to be able to do today." Jesus prayed again and full sight was restored. Jesus would not be satisfied with mediocrity. He completes what He starts. Do we?

Many of the people we read about in the Bible led mediocre lives – mediocre that is until they encountered God. Look at Moses; at 80 years of age his life appeared to be a waste until he encountered a burning bush. Gideon considered himself the least of his house until one day an angel showed up at the winepress. David was an unremarkable young shepherd before Samuel anointed him. Elisha was just another farmer plowing in his field when Elijah walked by. Peter was a common fisherman focused on his sinfulness. Paul was a persecutor of the Church before being blinded by the light of God.

Ephesians 4:22-24 commands "that **Gill** put away, as concerning **his** former way of life, the old **man**, that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that **Gill** be renewed in the spirit of **him** mind, and put on the new **man**, that like God has been created in true righteousness and holiness." I will never change my behavior until I change my thinking.

2Corinthians 5:17 tells us we are new creations in Christ. God will help us be new creations but we have to do our part. The bridge from the way I live now to living like Christ is mind renewal. So I must choose my thoughts carefully. I understand the newest technology gadget is the forehead mind screen. A small video screen is mounted on your forehead and every thought is shown in living color for all the world to see. Any volunteers? (Just joking!)

When I lie in bed in the morning do I think about all the things that can go wrong today or do I start telling myself how much God loves me; that I am forgiven, redeemed, walking in victory. Don't run at your giants with your mouth shut. David didn't when he faced Goliath and neither did Jesus when He faced the devil in the desert. Speak the Word of God. Declare His promises.

Colossians 3:1-3 declares, "If then, **Gill** was raised together with Christ, **he** should seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. **Gill** is to set **his** mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For **Gill** died, and **his** life is hidden with Christ in God." We must keep our minds set. What does that take? Meditating. Rehearsing the good things. 2Corinthians 10:4-5 warns us about strongholds and imaginations. That is all about what is going on in our mind.

I find it easy to swear off junk food until I am driving by Dairy Queen and that Cookie Dough Blizzard is calling my name. Will you stand in time of trial? Ephesians 6:10 warns us that to stand takes preparation, it takes mind renewal. The thinking I have now will not get me where I want to go. Have you heard the expression, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." That, my friend, is a formula for failure. No, change first then try again.

How do we move into God's best:

1. Readjust our sights. In Isaiah 43:19, God promises, "I will do a new thing." It's like a pair of binoculars, we need to focus our sights further out. I received my first pair of glasses in the 4th grade. That was over 50 years ago but I still remember to this day the feeling of suddenly being able to see distant objects. A whole new world opened up. There was a clarity and beauty I had never seen before. My life will always go after the predominant picture in my mind. I need to make sure I am keeping the right things in sight.
2. Change our expectations. Until recently I drove a red Honda Pilot. I often was surprised by how many red cars there were on the road. Since I started driving that car, red had become a very popular color for cars. Then my red Pilot was totaled in a rear-ender. As a replacement I purchased a silver Subaru Forester. Overnight there were silver cars everywhere. Why? I saw what I expected to see. Often I need to raise the level of what I anticipate. Murphy's Law ("Whatever can go wrong will go wrong.") is not living by faith. 2Corinthians 5:7 encourages us to "walk by faith not by sight" remembering in Romans 8:28 (NLT): "We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."
3. Live a lifestyle of faith. But what is my faith in? Anticipate God's best, not the worst. In 2Kings 2:9 Elisha followed Elijah but he wasn't satisfied to just be equal. He sought a double portion of Elijah's anointing.
4. Our life's lid is created by the company we keep. 1Corinthians 15:33 warns that evil company corrupts. How do you keep a crab in a bucket? If you put one crab in a bucket he soon grabs the side, flips himself out and off he scurries. What do you do? Put two crabs in the bucket. As soon as one tries to pull himself out the other pulls him back. Are the people around me pushing me down or lifting me higher towards God and His destiny for me?
5. See what God has for us. Genesis 35:11 describes God as El Shaddi, the God who is more than enough, not the God who wants us to just get by. God is only limited by our lack of faith. Ephesians 3:20 tells us, "God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that **Gill** can ask or think, according to the power that works in **Gill**."
6. The key to our next level: Speak God's Word over our life or shut up! Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV) warns, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." I am imprisoned by what I speak. I must learn to speak consistent with new creation life.

Ask yourselves:

1. What type of person am I? Am I settling for mediocrity?
2. Is my life style consistent with who I am in Christ? (Do I know who I am in Christ?)
3. Am I living God's best for my life?

Connect to God's GPS and step up to a new level of faith, vision and victory.

25: Ready, Aim, Fire!

Hebrews 12:1 (NKJV) encourages us to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” If you ever participated in track, you know that a different strategy is needed for a marathon than for a 100 yard dash. We are in a race and it takes endurance. When my son was in junior high, I was a swim meet starter. As a starter, I learned not to hold them long because they were ready to explode off the blocks. Are you eager to get into the race?



Ready, aim, ready, ready, aim. We must fire, take action, live the call of God! There is a big difference between intentions and actions. 1Corinthians 4:20 (NLT) says, “For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is about living by God’s power.” The road to hell is lined with good intentions. The devil doesn’t care about your intentions; he wants to stop your actions.

Let’s look at the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25-34 as an example of ready, aim, fire:

Ready: This speaks of preparation. She heard about Jesus, knew His reputation and believed He could heal her despite all the disappointments of the past. She was preparing to receive her miracle. Ephesians 6:13 (MSG) promises, “Be prepared. You’re up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it’s all over but the shouting you’ll still be on your feet.” That preparation includes regular prayer and Bible reading. Joshua 1:8 (NKJV) tells us, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

Aim: She kept saying, “If I touch Him I will be healed. If I touch Him I will be healed.” She saw it long before she touched Him. We must keep the goal in mind. Philippians 3:13-14 (NLT) admonishes, “Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.” 2Corinthians 3:18 tells us we are moving “from glory to glory.” It is time to aim higher. Simon T. Bailey says, “Losers look at what they are going through. Winners look at what they are going to.” This is when the devil starts whispering in your ear. He doesn’t care how much you get ready or how carefully you aim. He doesn’t want to see you fire. He doesn’t want to see you take action.

Fire: Finally she took action. She was literally risking her life. Because of the bleeding, she was considered unclean and could be stoned for being in the crowd. But that was not going to stop her. It’s time to step out. Act. James 2:26 (NKJV)

warns, “Faith without works is dead.” 1John 3:18 in The Message commands, “Let’s not just talk about love, let’s practice real love.” Imagine the following conversation with a friend. “I’m believing for a job.” “How many applications have you put in?” “Oh, I’m believing God will provide.” They are going to be “believing” for a long time. To fire takes courage and character. Is there the possibility of rejection? Of course. Are we willing to trust God?

Jail ministry is the example of ready, aim, fire in my life. Long before He called me, God was getting me ready with studies, teaching experience and a growing heart for souls. Once He gave me the vision of being in jail ministry, the devil was all over me: “What do you have to give? They can’t relate to you. They don’t deserve your time. Is it safe?” But that decision to fire was one of the best choices I have made in my life.

I have read about the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War. After the battle, people collected rifles and other artifacts. They found some rifles with as many as 5 loads. Picture the situation. A squad of riflemen took their position. On the command “Ready” each soldier loaded his rifle with powder, wad and shot. “Aim” and they all raised their rifles in unison. “Fire.” A cloud of smoke rose and the report echoed across the valley. Masked by the smoke and noise was the fact that not every soldier had pulled the trigger. There were those who didn’t have the courage to fire. Unwilling to show their cowardice to their fellow soldiers, they loaded their rifle again on top of the unfired load.

There are many Bible examples of “Ready, Aim, Fire”:

- Gideon in Judges 7 was ready with an army of 32,000 warriors. God cut that number down to 10,000 and then to 300 before he released Gideon to “fire”.
- Four men carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus in Mark 2. Despite the crowd in the house around Jesus, they had their aim on their goal. How many others needed healing that day? God does not respond to need; He responds to faith.
- Peter walked on water in Matthew 14. That is a great story but have you ever asked what about the others in the boat? Peter was willing to act while the others were content to watch. Jesus went to the cross; He was willing to follow through to the end.

There is power of our words. Hebrews 10:23 tells us, “Let **Gill** hold fast the confession of **his** hope without wavering. For He who promised is faithful.” Speaking faith-filled words is the golden key that unlocks the supernatural flow of God’s power in our life. Are you tempted to say “I can’t?” Philippians 4:13 (NKJV) says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Mark 11:23 promises that we shall have whatever we say. That works for both the positive and the negative.

What problem do you need to face in your life? It might be relationships, addictions or fears? How do you need to get ready? Is your eye on the goal? Is it time to stop thinking, talking and praying about it and take action? Where do you need to take action today? Perhaps it is in completely a college degree, job skill training or a GED. Perhaps it is in developing new friends who will lift you up rather than pushing you down. Perhaps it is

in the most important step of all: surrendering your life to God and making Him Lord.
Let's remember Nike's motto: Just do it!

26: Experiencing the Peace of God

In Judges 6 Gideon is hiding in a winepress threshing wheat when an angel appears and addresses him as “Mighty man of valor.” Gideon’s reaction: “Who me?” But that day Gideon would encounter Jehovah Shalom, the Lord is Peace. (Judges 6:24)



John 14:26-27 says, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach **Gill** all things, and will remind **Gill** of all that I said to **him**. Peace I leave with **Gill**. My peace I give to **Gill**; not as the world gives, give I to **him**. **Gill** must not let **his** heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.” Peace is the nature of God. The world won’t give it to us. Material things, sex, drugs, etc. are all an imitation, but ultimately they are empty. Peace means freedom from strife. Does that mean we will have no problems? No, it means we do not need to let the problems penetrate into our minds, spirits or emotions. I recently spoke with a man who had just received a 20 year prison sentence. My heart broke at the news but he was upbeat and affirming that God had a plan and he was determined to keep his focus on Him. I pray for him to be able to keep that focus through those years.

Adam and Eve lost their peace through sin. They broke their connection to the God of peace through disobedience. Jesus came to reconcile us back to the Father. Psalm 29:11 promises, “The LORD will give strength to **Gill**. The LORD will bless **Gill** with peace.” His plan is strength and peace. Are there times when I don’t feel it? Of course. That is when I need to speak the Word and get my mind refocused. Isaiah 26:3 promises, “You will keep **Gill** in perfect peace because **his** mind is steadfast, because **Gill** trusts in You.” It is vital that we keep our mind fixed on the Word. Life will distract us, but if we remain fixed we will experience God’s peace.

Birds have built a nest under the eaves on our back deck. Our yorkie, Jubilee, will sit on that deck for hours watching for those birds to come and go. Her focus is fixed regardless of anything else that happens, regardless of how many times we call her. We must be fixed on God. Despite our feelings, despite the distractions of the world, we must stay focused. Philippians 3:13-14 is a Scripture I keep going back to: “**Gill** doesn’t regard **himself** as yet having taken hold, but one thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

John 16:33 says, “I have said these things, that in Me **Gill** may have peace. In the world **Gill** has oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.” Focus on God is not just praying over meals, it involves every aspect of life. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, **Gill** has peace with God through **his** Lord Jesus Christ.” That is something to get excited about! Join with the angels in praise for all He has done.

The junk of life is coming. The devil wants to beat the snot out of you. If he does, come back to God and be renewed, but wouldn't be better to come through victorious. Peace is part of our armor in Ephesians 6:15: feet shod with the Gospel of peace. Have that weapon in your arsenal. Peace in Galatians 5:22 is part of the fruit of the Spirit. The very character of God is revealed in us when we choose to walk in peace.

This is not just a "chill out" kind of peace. God's peace goes much deeper than just "calm down". Philippians 4:6-7 commands: "**Gill** is not to be anxious in anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, **Gill** is to let **his** requests be made known to God. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard **Gill's** heart and thoughts in Christ Jesus." God's peace is a place of strength. We can overcome. We don't need religion, we need Jesus. When we become a true follower of Jesus, we walk with the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Salvation is not just praying a prayer to get into heaven: it is a brand new life. 2Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if **Gill** is in Christ, **he** is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new." Don't keep dragging around the guilt and shame of your past. Philippians 3:10: "That **Gill** may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death." Knowing the power of His resurrection will change your life. Religion won't do that, only a relationship with the living God and walking in His peace. It is not so important how you began, what is important is how you finish. It is not important what is in past, what is important is where you are going from here. The Christian walk is not just wanting Jesus but surrendering to Him. God wants to be involved in everything I do. What I read, what I watch on TV, how I spend my money. I miss the power if I put God in a Sunday morning box.

People have said to me, "It's so hard to be a Christian!" Really? What's hard is hangovers, addiction to drugs, the shame of pornography, the guilt of adultery, condemnation, fear. What's hard is living in hatred, bitterness or unforgiveness. Walking with God is not hard. I just have to believe that I am a mess, believe that I can't change myself, only God can through His grace and empowerment. If I don't let Him in, I'll stay a mess. No amount of good works will put me right with God. God is not for sale; I cannot buy Him. Jesus paid the price for my sins so that I can be cleansed and God can live in me. Galatians 2:20a: "**Gill** has been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer **Gill** who lives, but Christ living in **him**." 1Corinthians 6:19: "**Gill's** body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." What is my response to that? Surrender!

Peace starts by first recognizing God's love. Jeremiah 31:3 tells me, "I have loved **Gill** with an everlasting love." God loves you, and He loves you with a love that you don't know anything about, because there is no human love comparable to divine love.

The way to peace is through Jesus. In John 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. **Gill** cannot come to the Father, except through Me." Many go through life unfulfilled, unfocused, searching. It is only a life lived for Jesus that has direction and meaning. No matter who you are or how you've lived your life, God will receive you into

His family. He will change you and make you complete. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”

Luke 15 relates the parable of the prodigal son. The young man takes his inheritance and wastes it on wine, women and song. When it is gone he finds himself feeding pigs wishing he could have some of what he was feeding them. The Bible says he came to his senses and returned to ask his father’s forgiveness. His father sees him from afar and runs to embrace his son; filthy, smelly, covered in pig slop, yet still the father embraces him. God isn’t waiting to judge you. God isn’t waiting to condemn you. He’s waiting to receive you with mercy, with love, with open arms, and forgiveness. Will you come to Him? Romans 10:9 (NIV) promises, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Why not take that step today and experience the peace of God in your life?

I want to leave you with the blessing of Numbers 6:24-26 (NKJV):

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you
and give you peace.

27: Counterfeit

In junior high one of my favorite hobbies was coin collecting. I had a wide range of coins, several over 200 years old, one was 2,000 years old. Today the collection is tucked away in a safe deposit box but I still enjoy looking at those bits of history. Oddly one of my favorite coins in my collection is in fact worthless. You see, it is counterfeit.



Have you ever been victimized by a con artist? We have a few times in our life: illegally copied software on eBay, a used car that broke down a week after we bought it. They can be pretty slick and very convincing. 2Corinthians 11:14 warns us that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. “Oh, this feels so right.” If I am indoctrinated in the world's way of thinking, the counterfeit will look just fine.

The worst thing about deception is I don't know I am deceived. I think I'm right. In fact I am absolutely convinced I am right. Might I be bringing false doctrines? I'll be the first to admit it is possible! I could be deceived. That is why everyone is responsible to go to the Word to verify what is being taught. 1Thesalonians 5:21 warns “**Gill** is to test all things, and **he** is to hold firmly that which is good.”

The world accepts the devil's counterfeit, but, like a mirage, it disappears. Try to grasp it and it is gone. Satan does not come in a red suit and pitchfork, knocking on your door saying, “I'm the devil. I'd like to come in and destroy your life.” If he did, who would let him in? John 8:44 tells us he is the father of lies. The devil is all trick and no treat. Hebrews 11:25 tells us sin is pleasurable for a season. The trap of sin is like a mousetrap. That cheese smells tasty, the color is so inviting until.. WHAP!

The temptation looks great, it brings immediate pleasure, but Satan twists the truth and hides the consequences. He shows the beginning but not the end. When was the last time you saw a beer commercial showing somebody throwing up in the gutter? The drug pusher highlights the pleasure and peer acceptance but skips over addiction and prison time.

1Peter 5:8 warns us to be sober, be vigilant. The devil is like a roaring lion. He can't devour just anyone, but if I allow deception, I give him authority in my life. If you have ever gone fishing, you know the bait must hide the hook. Our first line of defense is God's Word.

John 10:10 gives us Satan's job description: kill, steal and destroy. You don't have a friend in the devil. He wants to get you off God's path. Philippians 3:13-14 encourages us to keep our eyes on the prize.

Jesus' job description is to bring abundant life here and now. He will influence my marriage, my finances, every area of life. Deuteronomy 30:19 encourages us to choose life. I have a choice. If I don't like my life, I need to make different choices. Abundant life is always in my connection to Father God. We all know the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The son lost abundant life when he broke connection with his father.

How do we to unlock the door to abundant life?

1. Live under authority. Pride wants to be in control, but my life must be governed by the Word of God. John 15:4-5 tells us that life comes by being connected to the vine. Apart from God I can do nothing. (vs. 5)
2. Live within boundaries. The world's freedom leads to addictions and bondage. Galatians 5:13 warns that we are not to use liberty as an occasion for the flesh. 1Corinthians 6:12 in The Message puts it this way: "Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, I'd be a slave to my whims." Not every choice will benefit my life.
3. Live in fellowship with God. If I live like the world lives, I will get what the world gets. Galatians 6:8 warns if I sow to the flesh, I will reap corruption. Matthew 6:31-33 encourages us to live in dependence upon God not the world.

My wife says I have the body of a god! ☺...Buddha ☹ (No, she really doesn't say that.) The devil wants us to pursue the counterfeit of six-pack abs, a fancy car or a prestigious job title. I may want to think of myself as a handsome, virile stud, but eventually I have to look in the mirror and face the fact that I'm just an old, fat, bald guy. In Christ is where my value lies. I am a son of God. (John 1:12) I am a joint-heir with Christ. (Romans 8:17) I am seated with Him in heaven. (Ephesians 2:6) I am His workmanship. (Hebrews 2:10) Christ in me, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27) Discover who you are in Christ.

I want to conclude this teaching with a personal experience. I go back to Sunday, November, 5, 2000. I was in morning service when I heard Holy Spirit speak to me. God has spoken to me in visions and images many times but I think this is the only time I have heard a distinct voice. He said, "A big change is coming. Beware of the counterfeit." Two days later my boss called me into his office and told me, due to restructuring, my job had been eliminated. After 22 years with the same company, at age 54, I was out. The next two months was a lot of applications, interviews and seeking God. Finally we concluded that "the counterfeit" was to follow the world's security of a steady paycheck, health insurance, benefits, etc. Instead God was calling us to depend on Him and launch out with *Your Personalized Bible* (originally Personal Promise Bible). I can honestly say I would not have the relationship I have with my wife, my ministry in the jail and in writing and the worldwide impact of *Your Personalized Bible* today if I had not answered God's call at that time.

2Corinthians 2:11 promises we are not unaware of the devil's schemes. God gives us the ability to recognize the counterfeit if we do not think like the world thinks but rather seek

Him. Having a counterfeit coin in my collection can be entertaining. Holding on to the counterfeit in other areas can be destructive, whether that be beliefs, thoughts, attitudes or friends. It is my responsibility to find those areas and take action or I will suffer the consequences.

28: Silencing the Voice of the Enemy

This morning I got on our elliptical machine for my daily workout. 20 minutes later the readout said I had gone $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. I looked around and I was in the same place I had started. Does life feel like that sometimes? Life feels more like rabbit trails than a highway?

Guilt for the past can be like a treadmill. We work hard but just don't seem to get anywhere. Jer. 29:11 says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward **Gill**, says the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give **him** hope and a future." We need hope to move into the future. We need the picture of where God wants our life to go so we can get into agreement with Him.



Psalms 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed **Gill's** transgressions from **him**." God doesn't remember my sin. It is the accuser who wants us to be reminded of them. What is the devil whispering in your ear? "You've messed up so bad this time there's no hope. What an idiot! What a failure!" It's time to say, "No thanks, not going there."

The email program on my computer has an archive. All the old emails go there and can be retrieved later. The computer has a Recycle Bin. Any file I delete can be retrieved any time I choose. With God there is no archive, no recycle. I don't want to sour my future by bringing up the past over and over. I choose to believe what God says about my future.

Growing up we didn't have TV remotes. (Boy, am I dating myself!) I was my Dad's remote control. "Put on channel 5." "Turn the volume up some." We can use our God-given remote control to change our thought life. When I find my thoughts dwelling on past failure, I change the channel. When I tend to slide into a pity part, I change the channel. 2Cor 10:5 tells us to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. I choose the channel; I choose where my thoughts will focus.

I can't change yesterday's failure but I don't have to drag them into today or the future. Heb. 12:1 admonishes, "Let **Gill** lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles **him**, and let **Gill** run with patience the race that is set before **him**." Best-selling author John Mason puts it this way, "Do not lose tomorrow's opportunities because you are feeding on yesterday's failures."

We recently took a flight to Palm Springs, CA for the Bob Harrison Increase Summit. Airlines allow 2 carry-ons per passenger. Imagine I am about to board Holy Spirit Airlines to the city of Abundant Life. The agent sees my backpack and asks what I am carrying. I open it and show her: bitterness, unforgiveness, guilt, rejection, hurt. "I'm

sorry you can't bring that on board a Holy Spirit flight." "I'm willing to pay extra." "You don't understand. Jesus already paid the price so you can leave it behind." In Christ there is no baggage allowed.

I do pay a price to hold onto that baggage. It weighs me down and entangles me, keeping me from moving forward. The Good News is the price has been paid. John 8:32 declares the truth will set you free. God's mercy is bigger than any sin. Ever had pants with a hole in the pocket? Put in a couple of quarters and when you reach for them later, they're gone? That is where all the failures and disappointments of the past should go. If I focus on what I have done wrong, I am more likely to repeat it. It is time to get a new picture.

The right way to handle guilt is repent and move on. I cannot relive or change yesterday. It is time to get off the treadmill. Mercy is ours. Forgiveness is ours. Restoration is ours.

I read the story of a 10 year old girl who lived on a farm with her older sister and grandmother. For her birthday she got a slingshot. She had a great time shooting at different things until a rock went wild, flew toward the house breaking a window. Her sister was right on her, "Oh, I'm telling Grandma." "No, please don't." "OK, but you have to be my slave and do whatever I tell you." The older sister made her life hell with doing her own chores plus her sisters. Finally she couldn't take it anymore and confessed what she had done to Grandma. Grandma said, "I know. I saw you from the front window. I forgave you then but I wanted to see how long you would take to come to me." How long will you allow the devil make you his slave?

Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for **Gill** because **he** is in Christ Jesus, because **Gill** doesn't walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." In the flesh I beat myself up. In the spirit I repent and move forward.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the young man lost everything. He was working feeding pigs, as low as a Jewish man could get. But he finally "came to his right mind" and said, "I will arise and go to my father." He knew what family he belonged to. When I understand what family I belong to, when I truly accept the position I have before the Father in Christ, I will not hesitate to repent and return to Him when I sin.

1Peter 2:9-10 declares, "But **Gill** is a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that **Gill** may show forth the excellencies of Him who called **him** out of darkness into His marvelous light: though in time past **Gill** was not part of a people, but now **he** is part of God's people, though **Gill** had not obtained mercy, now **he** has obtained mercy." This is not about a feeling; it is fact it is truth. If my thoughts try to say something contrary to that truth, I need to change the channel. Because of Christ, I can leave the baggage of guilt and condemnation. I can put it in the dumpster. It is time for us to step into the victorious life God has for us. It is time to silence the voice of the enemy in our life.

29: Relentless

As a teenager, I wanted to go fast. My problem was my ride was a '61 VW bug: top speed 68 mph. When I was on the freeway it was always pedal to the metal. I still remember the day I caught a tail wind and saw the speedometer reach 72! Recently I saw a book title by John Bevere: Relentless. That is how we are to pursue God: Relentless. Regardless of the distractions of the world, I will be relentless. Regardless of the lies of the enemy, I will be relentless. Regardless of how many times I fall and have to drag myself back up, I will be relentless. Mark 9:23 promises, "All things are possible to **Gill** if **he** believes." By God's strength and grace, the impossible becomes possible. There is not one demon spirit who has power or authority over those who are in Christ. How am I going to live? Pedal to the metal! Relentless!



What does grace mean to you? Is it just forgiveness of your sins and a ticket to heaven? That view leads to a life of mediocrity, so far short of our potential. The underlying meaning that is lost today is grace is God's power working in my life. I can never save myself by my own effort. That's religion that tries to earn salvation through our good works. 2Corinthians 12:9 says, "My grace is sufficient for **Gill**, for My power is made perfect in **Gill's** weakness."

Grace = empowerment. When you read grace, think empowerment. When you read Scripture and see the word grace, substitute empowerment and it takes on a new depth of meaning. When the situation is beyond my ability to handle, that is when God's grace/empowerment steps in. That empowerment enables me to live as Jesus lived. Redemption took away my sin. Now I need to live out what I freely received. My sin has not just been covered over; by grace I can live a new life.

I can have repentance but no grace. Maybe you have experienced that. I have a desire to change but without grace, I don't have the ability to change. Romans 6:14 says, "For sin will not have dominion over **Gill**. For **he** is not under law, but under grace." As I walk in grace, as I experience God's empowerment, I don't go back over and over to the same behavior. I make new choices and step into the freedom that is only possible in Him.

Under law I am powerless to live free from sin, but under grace I have the empowerment I need. Ephesians 3:20 tells us, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that **Gill** can ask or think, according to the power that works in **Gill**." God is able to do exceedingly abundantly only to the extent that I allow His power/ grace to work in me.

2Kings 4:1-7 tells the story of Elisha and the widow's oil. The widow was told to collect as many jars as she could. Once she had them gathered in her home, she started pouring

oil from her small flask. The oil continued to flow until there were no more jars. Her miracle was limited by the size of her faith. How much power am I allowing to work in my life? In what way am I limiting God?

Ephesians 1:18-21 says, “Having the eyes of **his** heart enlightened, that **Gill** may know what is the hope of **his** calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in **Gill**, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward **Gill** because **he** believes, according to the working of the strength of His might which He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.” We sing a chorus from Hillsong in church: “The same power that conquered the grave lives in me.” Wow! I’ll take it.

Faith is the pipeline for grace. It is through faith that I experience grace and empowerment in my life. In Hebrews 4:2 we are told the Israelite nation did not enter into God’s rest because the Word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith. For the Word to be effective in my life, I must exercise faith.

I must expect opposition to my walk of faith. In Matthew 4 Jesus went into the wilderness filled with the Holy Spirit. After successfully standing against the temptations of the devil, He returned in power. I will come out of a battle better and stronger than when I went in if I allow God to work in and through me and don’t try to handle the temptation in my own strength. Faith is what gives me access to the grace/power I need to triumph. Romans 5:2 says, “Through whom (Jesus), **Gill** also has access by faith into this grace in which **he** stands.”

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar (Mark 10: 46-52) sitting beside the road in Jericho. He hears a commotion and asks what is going on. When he is told Jesus is passing by, he begins to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Those nearby told him to quiet down, but he was not going to let his blessing pass him by. Despite the opposition, he cried all the louder. His healing came because he pressed through. Phil 3:13-14 commands us to press toward the goal. The world will try to shut us up, the devil will try to distract us, but if we press through, God’s grace and power will be there for us.

Hebrews 12:1 tells me to strip off the weight that slows me down. How do I do that? The answer is in 1Peter 5:7: “Casting all **his** worries on Him, because He cares for **Gill**.” Mat 11:28-30 is one of my favorite passages: “Come to Me, **Gill**, when you labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, **Gill**, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy, **Gill**, and My burden is light.”

Jubilee is our little silk shire terrier. She is so excited and full of energy when we take her for a walk she constantly pulls and fights her harness. It is so bad that for the next couple of days she will be limping from a sore hip and paws. Yet when she settles down and walks next to us she doesn’t experience that discomfort. I want to experience His yoke being easy but that requires my obedience.

I cannot afford to bypass the training process. The trials I face today are preparation for the victories of tomorrow. Ignore the devil and he'll eventually go away? Fat chance! 1Peter 5:8-9 warns that I must be sober and vigilant, for the devil goes about like a roaring lion. I'm not going to ask God to remove the devil. I am going to submit to God and then resist the devil. That is exercising my authority in Christ. That is walking in His grace/empowerment.

Speaking the Word is my weapon against evil forces. The devil only has lies and intimidation. Isaiah 54:17 promises, "No weapon that is formed against **Gill** will prevail; and **Gill** will condemn every tongue that rises against **him** in judgment." My determination to be free from bondage must be greater than my adversary's determination to enslave me. I must be relentless in holding fast to what I have received.

The important thing is not how I start, but how I finish. What does quitting look like? Disobedience, compromise, apathy, religious externals, etc. Hebrews 12:1 commands me to run my race with endurance. In the Message translation of Hebrews 12:1 it says "Never quit." Professional athletes go through rigorous training so they can win a prize. Isn't our prize more valuable? Shouldn't I be willing to do whatever it takes. Pedal to the metal. Relentless.

30: Press through the Pain

We all have had painful experiences. The question is whether we will choose to get stuck there or choose to press through the pain to a place of victory. I want to take you back to March 4, 2001. At 4:00 in the morning we were awakened by an insistent knock on the front door. Looking out the window, I saw a police car in front of the house with its lights flashing. Our 22 year old son and his fiancée had been driving



from college in North Dakota to our home in Washington State for spring break. At 3:00 in the morning they were hit head-on by a drunk driver on I-90 in Montana. Amy was declared dead at the scene; Paul was airlifted to a hospital in Missoula, MT. We kept vigil at his bedside for three days until on March 7th when he was declared brain dead. I don't share that story to gain your sympathy. I share it to tell you there is victory possible despite the depth of pain. We have chosen not to stay in that place but rather to press through to God's plan for our lives.

If I don't live by the Spirit I will live by my flesh. I feel... I want... I need... Is my focus directed inward, directed outward or directed upward? You can't help the way you feel? Well, you can help the way you think, speak, and act, and that is where the feelings originate. Get hurt and Satan wants you to stop right there. You need to push past the feelings. How long will it take? You didn't ruin your life in two weeks. Give God equal time. We each have a choice to make: press past the pain now or stay miserable. There is no greater sermon than a transformed life. When we have pressed past the pain and reached the point of victory, we have a story that can encourage and strengthen others.

In Isaiah 61:3 God promises "to appoint to **Gill** when **he** mourns, to give to **him** a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that **Gill** may be called a tree of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified." Concentrating on the hard times only makes them worse. Philippians 3:13-14 tells us: "**Gill** doesn't regard **himself** as yet having taken hold, but one thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

How do we press through the pain:

1. Kill the flesh as directed in Colossians 3:5. How do we do that? Don't feed it by dwelling on fleshly desires. What I feed gets bigger. Anyone with a few extra inches around the middle knows that. It works the same in spiritual things. Giving in to the flesh feeds it. Stop feeding it and it will slowly die.
2. Focus on the reward. Hebrews 12:2: "Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of **Gill's** faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus

is the Author and Finisher of our faith. The Alpha & Omega (Revelations 1:8). He planted that seed of faith within us and He will give us what we need to bring it to fruitfulness. Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. What was that joy? The recognition that His sacrifice opens the door for salvation and eternal life to you and to me. In whatever we face, we have to outlast the devil. The story of Joseph in the Old Testament (Genesis 37-50) is a powerful story of pressing through the pain. Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob, one of the richest men on earth at the time. Joseph was on top of the world with his father giving him everything he wanted. Then one day his brothers turned on him and sold him into slavery. Entering Potifar's household, he was elevated to a high position until one day Potifar's wife falsely accused him of rape because he would not have sex with her. Joseph is in prison for 13 years for something he didn't do. Finally Pharaoh's cup bearer and baker are sent to the same prison. They each have a dream which Joseph interprets. The baker is executed and the cup bearer is restored. Joseph's hopes are high but the cupbearer forgets him. Two years later, Pharaoh has a dream and the cupbearer remembers Joseph. He interprets the dream, helps Egypt avoid a 7 year famine and is elevated to prime minister. Joseph's life was up and down, up and down. Yet he kept his focus on God. After his father died, his brothers were worried he would take revenge on them, but in Genesis 50:20 Joseph tells his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

3. Ask who do you need to separate from? In Genesis 12, Abraham was called out of his comfort zone, out of land of idol worshippers so that God could speak to him and lead him. Why did he have to leave Haran? Because we are a reproduction of who we are around. There is an interesting story in 2Samuel 13. Amnon is the son of King David; Tamar is David's daughter by a different wife. Amnon is consumed with lust for his sister Tamar and he confides to his friend Jonadab. What would a good friend do? "Amnon, get ahold of yourself! That's your sister!" But instead Jonadab tells him to pretend he is sick and ask for Tamar to take care of him, then when she comes in, rape her. Just the kind of friend Amnon needed! That would be like confiding to a friend that you struggle with pornography so he gives you the latest edition of Playboy. Our late pastor said, "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future." If you don't like the future that your friends are painting, find new friends.
4. Be an investor. How often do we trade a momentary thrill in the flesh for the long term reward of God? Sure, there is a rush in a card flip, or the spin of a slot machine, or watching lotto numbers pop up, but that's for losers. Don't be a gambler, be an investor. We make a wrong choice and hope to get away with it. No, make the right choice even if you give something up short term. The law we see over and over in the Bible is seed time and harvest. What you sow is what you will reap. You can't sow your wild oats and then pray for a crop failure.
5. Recognize that rejection will come. Press through the pain of rejection. God never rejects you. Ephesians 1:6 says, "By [His grace] He freely bestowed favor on **Gill** in the Beloved." In Christ I have been made acceptable. In John 10:10, Jesus promises, "I came that **Gill** may have life, and may have it abundantly." I have a choice to sit around and feel wounded, bitter and pitiful or to press past the

rejection. There are plenty who will accept me. Why should I give those who reject me that kind of power? How should we handle rejection? In Mark 6:11 Jesus tells His disciples to shake the dust off their feet.

I'm going to pray for you and all your problems will go away. Not! But do what God asks and then you can watch for the reward. Don't quit. Are there times when you don't feel like you are making progress? God is working. Hebrews 11:6 promises, "He will reward *Gill* if *he* seeks Him." I am reminded of the story of a farmer who had an old mule named Bessie. One day the farmer discovered that Bessie had fallen into an abandoned well. Try as he could, he could not get Bessie out of the well. Finally, with a heavy heart, he decided he would have to bury Bessie there in the well. He got out his shovel and started filling the well. Then an amazing thing happened: as the dirt got near the top, there was old Bessie. Every time he threw in a shovelful of dirt, she shook it off and stepped up. Another shovelful, she shook it off and stepped up until she finally walked out of that well. Shake off the rejection and step up to a new level. Shake off the guilt and condemnation and step up to a new level.

Do you remember what you came out of? Guilt, condemnation, failure. Why would you want to go back? You know too much to go back. You will never feel satisfied with that old life. You might as well go on to victory. Don't sink down into the pathetic mess the devil has for you. Say, "I'm pressing in. I'm pressing on. God has a reward for me."

Will this struggle ever end? How long will it take? How much will it cost? It will take longer than you think you can stand; it will cost more than you think you could pay; it will hurt more than you think you can endure. BUT in the end is a reward: freedom, victory.

I'm not where I need to be but thank God I'm not where I used to be and I'm not where I'm going to be. I don't have to have my own way to be happy. That's victory. When someone hurts me I don't have to stay mad. That's victory. I know who I am in Christ. In Christ I have victory. Do you have the victory?

31: Miserable Christianity

You have heard of oxymorons, two words that just don't go together. Some of my favorites are: boneless ribs, awfully good, pretty ugly, and my all time favorite: Jumbo shrimp. Here's an oxymoron for you: miserable Christian. Those are two words that should never go together. I can have salvation, be on my way to heaven but if I have no peace or joy, I will not be an influence on others for God. Sinners are talking loud, telling everyone about their sin. Let's talk louder about what God is doing.



In Genesis 11:31 (NIV) says, "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Harran, they settled there." But – that was where he gave up, that was the place of defeat, that was where he missed his destiny. Some will press through regardless, others will be wimpy and whiney. What will make you give up? What are the "potholes" that have caught you in the past and gotten you off track? Recognize them, plan for them or they will take you out again.

Romans 8:29 says we are destined to be molded into the image of Jesus. Everyday I am changing, looking more and more like Jesus. Isaiah 64:8 tells us God is the Potter and we are the clay. When that clay is put on the potter's wheel and spun, pressed, squeezed, and reshaped, it is not pleasant for the clay, but it is necessary if the clay is to become what the potter wants. It may not be comfortable to change but it is necessary. I will never be happy outside of God's will. What attitudes or behaviors have to go in my life? Unforgiveness, selfishness, pride? Change will cost me something. Am I willing to pay the price? Luke 14:28 warns us to count the cost. What will it cost to keep that behavior? What will it cost to let it go?

1John 3:8 (WEB) says, "To this end the Son of God was revealed, that He might destroy the works of the devil." I can choose the pain of change or the pain of regret. I can go through the struggle of change today or I can look back a year from now and experience the regret of missing what God has for me. I must be mentally prepared for the struggle. If I expect life to be smooth and easy because I follow God, I will be sorely disappointed.

Colossians 3:1-4 commands, "If then, **Gill** was raised together with Christ, **he** should seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. **Gill** is to set **his** mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For **Gill** died, and **his** life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, **Gill's** life, is revealed, then **Gill** will also be revealed with Him in glory." I must keep the right perspective, the right focus.

The Israelite nation was stuck in the wilderness, doing the same thing over and over. Israel was stopped not by their enemies but by their attitude. My complaining just opens the door to the enemy.

Ever feel stuck in the middle: don't want to go back but not sure you can make it to the finish line? Walking with God is OK until it costs something. It makes us uncomfortable because it calls for sacrifice and probably rejection. Holy Spirit came so I would have the power to go all the way.

2Corinthians 5:20 tells me I am a representative of God's kingdom, an ambassador.

When people look at me they should see Christ. In 1Corinthians 11:1 (NKJV)

Paul makes a remarkable statement: "Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ." In other words, "Do you want to know what it is to be Christ-like? Look at me." I'm not sure I'm ready to make that claim, but I want to be headed there.

When we go through a time of trial, our emotions can tend to pull us down. In those times, what I speak will lift me up or pull me further down. Deuteronomy 30:19 says, "I call heaven and earth to witness against **Gill** this day, that I have set before **him** life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore **Gill** should choose life, that **he** may live, **he** and **his** seed." Every day I face a choice between life and death, particularly in my words. I need to speak truth even in difficult times. The truth is wrong words bring destruction.

Do I sound saved?

- "My back is killing me." When did back pain become a fatal disease?
- "I love you to death." I would much rather you love me to life.
- "You drive me crazy." I may be crazy but I didn't need your help to get there, thank you very much.

And we wonder why we have problems! Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV) warns, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." I can hurt or help my future through my words.

I don't do the right thing in order to get something from God but because it is the right thing. Then I can trust God that He will bring the right result at the right time. I was thinking about the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16. They had been witnessing for the Lord when they were arrested, beaten and thrown into the darkest, dirtiest, smelliest part of the prison. The Bible tells us at midnight they were singing and praising God when an earthquake hit, opening the doors and loosing the chains. Do you really think Paul had leaned over to Silas and said, "Come on. If we sing loud enough, God will get us out of here!" Paul didn't have the New Testament to read; he didn't know how that night would turn out. All he knew was it was the right thing to do.

1Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT) says, "Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." That doesn't say when I feel like it or when life is going good. No, in all circumstances! 2Chronicles 20:22 is a remarkable story. King Jehoshaphat and the city of Jerusalem were in a hopeless situation: the city was surrounded by three massive armies. But God gave Jehoshaphat a plan: he opened the city gates and sent out singers ahead of the army. The result: the enemy was thrown into

confusion, they began killing each other and Jerusalem won the victory. When David faced Goliath, he used his words before he used his sling. Goliath said, “What am I, a dog that you send a boy with a stick against me?” But David was not moved. He said, “This day I will feed your carcass to the birds of the air.”

Godly character is built in hard times. Philippians 2:14 (NIV) commands, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing.” How do I live that out? Pay bills without grumbling or arguing; take out the garbage without grumbling or arguing; show up for work on Monday without grumbling or arguing; fix dinner without complaining.

God will work something good if I keep a good attitude. Look at Joseph in the Old Testament: sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused of rape by his owner, thrown into prison to rot. His situation was hopeless but he kept his hope in God and He lifted him up.

As Christians we were not meant to live small, miserable lives. We are to shine in a dark world. We can be different. We must be different.

32: I am an Addict

My name is Gill and I am an addict. Now before you go and judge me, hear me out. I was sitting in church this past weekend and the Lord spoke to me, “Look around. You are surrounded by a bunch of addicts.” I looked over a couple of rows and saw someone who was clearly addicted to food but beyond that I didn’t see anything unusual. He said, “There are those addicted to laziness, addicted to unforgiveness, addicted to bitterness, addicted to gossip, addicted to negativity, addicted to pride, addicted to selfishness.”



I don't have to go to the county jail to find addicts. Sin is sin. God sees no difference, but when the sin is socially acceptable, are we really desperate to break from the addiction? The enemy of change is complacency. Let's be addicted to the Word of God. We need a desire that is so strong nothing can keep us from it. Let's experience a new fire in our spiritual life.

My eternal destiny depends on the truth in the Bible. If I can't believe what it says on other topics, can I depend on salvation? Nearly every year we hear of powerful hurricanes that batter some part of the east coast. (We live in Washington State so we only hear about them.) Matthew 7:24-27 tells us, “If **Gill** therefore hears these words of Mine, and does them, I will liken **him** to a wise **man**, who built **his** house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. If **Gill** hears these words of Mine, and doesn't do them, **he** will be like a foolish **man**, who built **his** house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell — and great was its fall.” Storms will come in life. It doesn't matter how big the mansion is, how many rooms, how many crystal chandeliers it contains, if it is built on the wrong foundation it will fall. The smallest, poorest shack, if built on rock, will be able to stand.

Romans 10:17 tells us faith comes by hearing the Word. There are 168 hours in a week. If I spend an hour in church on Sunday but then the other 167 hours listening to Oprah, Dr. Phil, The Simpsons or something else from the world, what result can I expect? In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. How did that temptation come? Satan twisted Scripture. But Jesus knew the Word and could combat every half-truth. We need that same foundation on the rock to withstand Satan's lies.

Isaiah 54:17 says, “No weapon that is formed against **Gill** will prevail; and **Gill** will condemn every tongue that rises against **him** in judgment. This is **Gill's** heritage as a

servant of the LORD, and **his** righteousness which is of Me,' says the LORD." I can stand and be victorious. That is God's promise.

One of my favorite cartoon strips is Pickles. In one strip Earl, the old grandfather, staggers into the bathroom one morning, looks in the mirror and says, "Agh!!... Oh, I forget. I'm old, I'm supposed to look like that." I am at an age where the face I see in the mirror is a whole lot older than the way I picture myself.

When I read that cartoon, I am reminded of James 1:19-25: "So, then, let **Gill** be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for **Gill's** anger doesn't produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, **Gill** should receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save **his** soul. But **Gill** must be a doer of the word, and not only a hearer, deluding **himself**. For if **Gill** is a hearer of the word and not a doer, **he** is like a **man** beholding **his** natural face in a mirror; for **he** sees **himself**, and goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of **man he** was. But when **Gill** looks into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets but a doer of the work, **Gill** will be blessed in what **he** does." Let's look at this passage in detail:

1. Quick to listen. Vs. 19 In order to listen I first must be quiet. Obviously, I can't listen if I'm talking. If I am busy whining and complaining or having a pity party, I cannot hear God. In 1Kings 19 Elijah has had a great victory over the prophets of Baal. He even outran a chariot, but then Jezebel threatened to kill him and he ran. God led him to Mt. Horab and promised to speak to him there. A great wind tore the mountain, then an earthquake, then fire swept the mountain, but God was not in any of those. He was in the still, small voice that followed the chaos. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." To listen we must be still.
2. Get rid of evil. Vs. 21 Harboring evil keeps me from hearing. The Parable of the Sower talks about the farmer casting seed on different types of soil. The focus of the story is not the farmer, it is not the seed. The focus is the soil. What kind of soil am I for the Word to take root in? I want to prepare the ground and pull the weeds so I am ready to receive.
3. Humility. Vs. 21 The Word shows me my new self. 1Corinthians 5:17 tells me I am a new creation in Christ. I can choose whether I will look at the defeat of the past or who I am in Christ. I believe that is where a daily devotional helps. If I take time daily to come humbly to the Word, it will change me. If I "work" the Word by believing it, my life will be different.
4. Respond with action. Vs. 22 I must choose to do what it says. Do I really want my life to be different? It's not just knowing, but doing that will change my destiny. It is not important how much I read but what impact are the Scriptures I read having on how I live. Reading the Bible is ineffective if it is not turned into action.
5. Intently. Vs. 25 Blessing does not come automatically. Josh 1:8 says, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." Let's read that backwards. "Success good have will you then and..." Just kidding. We

are going to look point by point, backwards. Prosperous and successful: who doesn't want that, but how do I get there? Well, backup. "Observe to do" brings success. How will I do that? Meditate day and night. So am I to sit in the corner with my legs crossed and hum? Not! Backup one last time: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth." Biblical meditation is speaking, repeating, memorizing. That is the path to success.

6. Blessed. Vs. 25 The product of following the Word and living the Word is blessing and freedom. John 8:32 promises "The truth shall set you free." I'll take it. How? By choosing to act like who the Word says I am.

In Ezekiel 37:1-12, the Lord takes Ezekiel to a field of dry bones and commands him to speak to the bones. As he did, the bones came together, flesh came on the bones and life returned. There may be areas of our lives that seem dead but as we speak the Word and live the Word we will see life breathed into our lives.

During Christmas we receive gifts. What happens after Christmas? Everybody goes out and returns the gifts they don't like. I am gifted by God. The thing is God's gifts can't be returned or exchanged. God has called me to fulfill His purpose and He has gifted me with what I need to reach that end. In John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine. **Gill** is a branch. If **Gill** remains in Me, and I in **him**, **he** will bear much fruit, for apart from Me, **Gill** can do nothing." As I grow in the gifts that God has given me, as I fulfill His call, I experience His presence.

Colossians 2:6-7 says "As **Gill** received Christ Jesus, **his** Lord, **he** must walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, even as **Gill** was taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." As I sink my roots deep into the Word, I have the foundation to build, I have the strength for the storm, I have vision for eternity.

I choose to have my ears open. I choose to have my heart prepared. Are you ready to be blessed? Are you ready for freedom? Are you ready for new fire? Let's become addicted to the Word.

33: Escape from the Pound

Recently our daughter's dog, Edgar, got loose and wandered off. After she posted signs in the neighborhood, she got a call from a man several blocks away who had found the dog earlier that day and taken him to the pound. The two younger grandkids were napping, so I picked up the two older ones and headed over to rescue Edgar.



While the woman at the counter was filling out paperwork, her phone rang. She answered and said, "I can't talk right now. I am in the middle of a redemption." I stood at the counter and tears came to my eyes as I was struck by the parallel to what Christ has done for us. Just as those dogs were "redeemed" from the confines of their kennel, we are freed from the bondage of our past choices, released from all condemnation and guilt. Just as I paid a price to bring Edgar out of the dog pound, Jesus paid a price in His blood for our freedom.

Ephesians 1:7 "In Him (Jesus) *Gill* has **his** redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of *Gill's* trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." The idea of redemption that Paul was referencing is far different than what we think about today. In today's culture, redemption is using a coupon to get \$.25 off my box of Cheerios at the grocery store. Paul was speaking of the slave market. Imagine yourself next on the auction block, knowing you are destined for an oar on a war ship or the unending darkness of a distant mine, a beast of burden to be bought and sold, helpless, hopeless. Suddenly the auction master comes up and releases your chains saying, "Your redemption price has been paid. The buyer says you are free to go." Jesus paid the redemption price for you and me. When I really understand that, I'm going to talk differently, I'm going to live differently.

I remember going out to lunch with friends several years ago. I reviewed the menu, gave my order to the waiter and handed him my menu. About that time my friend across from me said, "Oh, by the way, lunch is on me today." I grabbed the menu back and said, "In that case, I'll change my order." I didn't actually change it but I thought about ordering a higher priced entree. The key thing to remember is that Jesus has already picked up the tab for our past. God does not need to punish me for my wrong choices because someone else was already punished for them: Jesus.

Romans 5:8 says that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. When I had turned my back on God, when all I wanted to do was go my own way, still Jesus had paid the price for my redemption. Any man worth his MacGyver merit badge knows that duct tape can solve any problem. The shortcoming is that duct tape really only masks the problem temporarily but does not get to the root. Leviticus 16 describes the ceremony of the scapegoat. Once a year on the Day of Atonement the nation of Israel came together and the priests placed their hands on a goat ceremonially transferring the sin of the nation to that goat. It was then led into the wilderness to die as a sacrifice for the nation's sin. The problem was, just like the duct tape, it did not get to the root problem: our sin nature.

In John 1:29 (NKJV) John the Baptist says of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Catch a revelation of this. Jesus doesn’t just cover over the sin. He gets to the root and takes away the sin. 1John 3:8 says Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. He is not just covering the sin but He eradicates its hold. I was on a greased pole to hell, hopeless, until God reached out His hand to me. I recognized I couldn’t save myself so I took his hand. Psalm 40:2: “He brought **Gill** up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay. He set **Gill’s** feet on a rock, and gave **him** a firm place to stand.”

Salvation is free, but it is not without cost. Jesus paid the price with unimaginable suffering and shame. That occurred not just in the physical realm but also in the spiritual as He took on the punishment for the sin of all mankind.

Religion is about being good so God will accept me; Christianity is about recognizing what Jesus has done and allowing that to change me. 2Corinthians 5:21 says, “For Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on **Gill’s** behalf; so that in Him **Gill** might become the righteousness of God.” Allow me to paraphrase that: the Father placed on Jesus my sin nature to take to the cross in my place so that I can have right standing before God in Christ. If you need a new beginning, you need Christ.

I don’t have to earn right standing, it’s a free gift. I only have to decide to put it on. If I am going to work on my car, change the oil or replace the spark plugs, I’m not going to wear a nice dress shirt. I will wear an old ratty one, but the grease and grime don’t belong at the dinner table. When my wife calls me in to dinner, she will say, “Dinner’s ready. Better change your shirt and clean up.” “What? Don’t you love me just the way I am?” “Yes, I love you. Now please go change your shirt.” Ephesians 4:22-24 says “that **Gill** put away, as concerning **his** former way of life, the old **man**, that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that **Gill** be renewed in the spirit of **his** mind, and put on the new **man**, that like God has been created in true righteousness and holiness.” That is like changing my shirt.

Before I can put on the new man, I must first put off the old man. Before I can take on the new way of thinking, I must first take off the old thinking. Some translations say, “Strip off.” That’s aggressive, something I do on purpose. When I got dressed this morning, I didn’t stand in front of the closet and a clean shirt jump out and onto my body. I had to take the action of putting it on.

The interesting thing about that new man is that it is too big for me when I first put it on. I have to grow into it. 2Corinthians 3:18 says we are “transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” I am not going to stay at the same level. I am going to grow to a certain level of “glory” but I can’t rest there. God is calling me still higher. Life is a journey.

That journey cannot be directed by what I want or feel. In Luke 5:1-7 Peter is on the shore mending and putting away his fishing nets after a long, fruitless night. Then Jesus comes along and tells him to put out his nets again. I’m sure he didn’t feel like going out again. He was tired and discouraged. Now here was a carpenter telling a professional

fisherman how to fish. That would be like me telling a mechanic how to fix my car. His reaction is likely to be, "You stick to your preaching; let me take care of the car." Peter's first words were, "We've worked hard all night and caught nothing." That was his feeling statement. Then he said, "At your word, we will let down the nets." That was his obedience.

When I wake up in the morning do I think about everything that is wrong, or do I think about the truth that God lives in me. Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) warns, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Where my mind goes, my life will follow. Am I just waiting for my feelings? I can't afford to let my feelings control me. I should not let my feelings vote. I choose to do what God says. In Joshua 3, the Israelite nation stood across the Jordan River from Jericho. The problem was the river was in flood stage. God told the priests to take up the Ark and step into the river and the waters would part. Now those priests could have stood up on the bank and said, "OK, God. We're ready. Go ahead and part the water." But they would have stood there for a long time. It wasn't until the feet of the priests touched the water that the water parted. They needed to act despite their feelings, despite the circumstances.

As I walked down the aisle at the pound, I saw dogs who were aggressive and angry, some that were scared and cowering, others were depressed and lethargic and of course there were those who were friendly and eager, tail wagging and jumping with excitement. Every individual reacts differently to God's gift of redemption: anger, indifference or openness. How will we react? I encourage you to live in the fullness of His love. God has His hand out to you today. Reach out and accept His free gift of redemption.

34: The Devil's Favorite Letter

Are you ready to have a little fun? What is the **D**evil's favorite letter? I'll give you a hint: what is the first letter of his name? The **D**evil's path is that of: **D**rama, **D**istractio**n**, **D**ivisio**n**, **D**iscord, **D**istance, **D**oubt, **D**enial and **D**eceit. It is a path that leads to **D**estruction, **D**eath and ultimately **D**amnation.



In contrast what is God's favorite letter? Again, I'll give you a hint: what is the first letter of **D**ivinity? God's path is that of: **D**evotion, **D**iscipline, **D**iligence, **D**ying to self and becoming **D**ead to sin. That path produces **D**eliverance, **D**irection and **D**urability. Following His path produces a **D**ream that takes me to my **D**estiny.

OK, let's talk **D**efense. How can I counter the **D**evil's purposes for my life while staying on course for God's purposes? Let's look at each aspect above in more detail. If I follow the **D**evil, I will experience:

Drama: This is the state of constant agitation, negativity and problems. Let's counter that by meditating on Psalm 23:1-3, "The LORD is **Gill's** shepherd: **Gill** shall lack nothing. He makes **Gill** lie down in green pastures. He leads **him** beside the still waters. He restores **Gill's** soul. He guides **Gill** in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Or how about Psalm 91:1-2, "If **Gill** dwells in the secret place of the Most High, **Gill** will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. **Gill** will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust."

Distractio**n**: We become distracted by the busy-ness of living, preoccupied with everyday life and sucked into the world's way of living. Matthew 7:13-14 warns that we must enter by the narrow gate. Broad is the way and easy is the road that leads to destruction. Narrow is the road, difficult is the way that leads to eternal life. In the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:22) the seed that falls among thorns represents the cares and distractions of life.

Divisio**n** and **D**iscord: Matthew 6:24 warns that we cannot serve two masters. Who does the devil want you to serve? Proverbs 6:19 warns that the Lord hates discord.

Distance: When the prodigal son in Luke 15 left home, he was putting distance between himself and his father. My sin distances me from God. Psalm 138:8 says that God gives grace to the humble but He knows the proud from afar. My pride puts distance from myself and God. The good news is found in Romans 8:35: Nothing can separate us from God's love.

Doubt and Denial: It started in the Garden of Eden when the Devil tempted Eve with doubt and, when the door of doubt is opened, in steps denial. In Genesis 3:1 the Devil questions Eve, “Did God really say...?” When she doesn’t shut that down, he follows in Genesis 3:4 with “You will not surely die.” If I am to withstand his planting of doubt, his denial of God’s truth, I must have a strong foundation on God’s Word.

Deceit: Proverbs 14:12 warns there is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death. Would anyone start using drugs if they saw the end result? The Devil never shows the final picture.

Following the Devils’ path inevitably leads to:

Destruction: John 10:10 says the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. Don’t get mad at the Devil when he tries to steal from you; it’s his job description.

Death, Damnation: Romans 6:23 warns the wages of sin is death. We have the Good News, of course. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved **Gill**, that He gave His one and only Son, that **Gill**, believing in Him, should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Discernment is needed. 2Corinthians 2:11 tells us we are not unaware of the Devil’s devices. Who is the Devil? Read Isaiah 14:12-17. The Wizard of Oz is a film classic. At one point, Dorothy and her friends come into the throne room of the Wizard. There is loud crashed, bright lights, smoke and the head of the Wizard speaking from the curtain. All very intimidating until someone peaks behind the curtain. The Wizard turns out to be a short, very unimpressive old man who uses trickery to influence others. That to me is a picture of the Devil. To paraphrase Isaiah 14:16, someday we will look at the Devil and say, “Is that all there was? This is what had us so scared?”

There is a better way. God has good things for you. He has dreams, purpose and destiny for you. Pursue God’s path through:

Devotion: Devotion is defined as ardent, selfless dedication. That is what God expects. Matthew 6:33 commands us to seek first the kingdom of God. God desires my devotion. God deserves my devotion. Deuteronomy 6:5 commands, “**Gill** shall love the LORD **his** God with all **his** heart, and with all **his** soul, and with all **his** might.” Give it all you’ve got.

Discipline: Proverbs 12:1 tells us, “If **Gill** loves correction, **he** loves knowledge, but if **Gill** hates reproof, **he** is stupid.” Hebrews 12:11 says that discipline may be unpleasant but “it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.”

Diligence: Galatians 6:9 encourages us, “Do not grow weary in well doing.” Hang in there. I often go back to Philippians 3:13-14: “**Gill** doesn’t regard **himself** as yet having taken hold, but one thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are

behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Press!

Die to self, Dead to sin: Romans 6:11 tells us we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. We have been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20) and therefore dead to pride, selfishness, unforgiveness and all of the ways the Devil tries to keep us bound. Dying to self is part of being born again; the old self dies and the new self comes to life. Only then can I experience the reality of 2Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if **Gill** is in Christ, **he** is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new.”

The product of that new life in God is:

Deliverance: Colossians 1:13 promises, “(The Father) delivered **Gill** out of the power of darkness, and translated **him** into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” It is in the Son that we receive redemption and forgiveness. It is in the Son that bondage to addiction, fear, anger and pride are broken. It is in the Son that we have abundant life (John 10:10).

Direction: Proverbs 20:24 (NLT) says, “The Lord directs our steps.” Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us, “**Gill** is to trust in the LORD with all **his** heart, and **he** is not to lean on **his** own understanding. In all **his** ways **Gill** is to acknowledge Him, and He will direct **Gill’s** paths.” I don’t have to live in fear of the future or in doubt of God’s purpose for my life. He gives me direction; He gives me purpose.

Durability: Another word for it is character, the ability to stand strong in any circumstances. But that doesn’t come all at once. We must develop that through trials and perseverance. Romans 5:3-4 promises, “Not only this, but **Gill** also rejoices in **his** sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.”

Dreams Determine Destiny. Read that again and again until you get ahold of it. Our dreams, our vision give our lives direction. Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the substance of things hoped for. Without hope, without dreams, faith has nothing to grab onto and carry you forward. Our 22 year old son and his fiancé were killed by a drunk driver. Is that the end of the story? Absolutely not! We carry on his memory through *Your Personalized Bible* and we hold strong to the hope of heaven. We will see him again. Ephesians 2:12 warns that to be without God is to be without hope. We all see this in friends, family, neighbors. **Dreams Determine Destiny.**

Anyone who wanders from God’s path becomes **Discouraged, Despondent, Depressed.** Look at 1Kings 18:1 through 19:4 Elijah had a great victory on Mt. Carmel. After demonstrating God’s power, he slew 450 prophets of Baal. Then he prayed and ended over 3 years of drought that had gripped the land. Then he hitched up his robe and outran a chariot. Wow, what a day! But Jezebel threatened to kill him and he ran. The Bible is the Book of Hope. In Jeremiah 29:11 God promises a future full of hope.

It is **D**ecision time: the Devil's way or God's way. The time is over when we can straddle the fence. We have a doormat at our front door that quotes Joshua 24:15 (NKJV), "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." What will you choose?

Let's look at two young men in the Bible (both with names starting with **D** of course). The first is **D**emas. He is mentioned in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24 and finally in 2Timothy 4:10 where Paul says Demas had left him because he "loved this present world". Here is a young man who was mentored by the greatest leader of church history short of Jesus Himself. Yet he chose the world's path instead.

In contrast, look at **D**aniel (Daniel 1). Here is a young man who saw the defeat of Jerusalem, the temple destroyed and most of his family and neighbors killed. He had every reason to turn his back on God, yet he remained faithful.

Again, what will you choose? We have to go one way or the other. James 1:8 warns that the **D**ouble minded man is unstable in all his ways. To stand strong with trials come, we must **D**evelop our spiritual muscle. Ephesians 6:10-17 describes the armor of God. This is not something God puts on us; we must put it on. Only then will we be a **D**oer of the Word as commanded in James 1:22.

Finally we must **D**are to be **D**ifferent. Romans 12:2 exhorts, "**Gill** is not to be conformed to this world, but is to be transformed by the renewing of **his** mind, so that **Gill** may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God." If I think like the world thinks, I will get what the world gets. I am called to a higher level. I am called to transformation, a new way of thinking, a new hope, a new **D**estiny.

35: I Didn't Win the Lottery, Thank God!

Every few weeks we hear about a big lottery jackpot: \$17 million, \$140 million, \$550 million! I didn't win. Of course the fact I didn't buy a ticket has some impact on that outcome. Did you win? Assuming the answer is no, count yourself as the lucky one. Again and again studies have looked at the lives of lottery winners one year later, five years later and they have often found that their lives are worse off than before winning. They didn't have the character to sustain them in the financial level they had reached.



Let's look at the Bible's perspective in James 1:2-4: "**Gill** should count it all joy when **he** falls into various temptations, knowing that the testing of **his** faith produces patience. **Gill** should let patience have its perfect work, that **he** may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." The lottery winner may think they lack nothing, but the Bible teaches us that we must go through trials if we are to be perfect and complete.

Count it all joy! "Nah, I'd rather complain." Do you mean that joy is not your first reaction? I guess you're human. But if I am unwilling to go through the trials of life I will short circuit the growth process and remain immature. I remember when I was about 12, I was playing up in the attic of our home. My folks had put a fan up there to make it more comfortable. The problem was that the prongs on the plug were bent out like a "Y". I squeezed the prongs together but they sprung right back out. I tried again, same result. Then my 12 year old mind came up with the solution: I just needed to hold the prongs together while I plugged in the cord. Next thing I knew I was flat on my back, looking up and thinking, "That wasn't too smart!" Don't short circuit; go through the process of growth.

Satan is a joy stealer. Nehemiah 8:10 (NKJV) says, "The joy of the Lord is my strength." Joy is internal. Happy is based on my circumstances, on what is going on around me. Joy comes from being connected to God. I must see beyond what I am going through, because this season of life will not last forever.

Paul's life was an example of being content in all things. In Philippians 4:13 (NKJV) Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That is a great verse that we love to quote, but let's look at the context. Let's read vs. 11-13: "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It doesn't matter if I am broke or a big lottery winner, if I am popular or rejected, I will keep my joy. Devil, you can't have my joy! Let me say it again: Devil, you can't have my joy!

Trials help me develop confidence in my Savior. I can talk about faith but if I never have to use it, do I really have it? Can that faith be trusted? I've read about it, I've heard of it,

somebody preached it, but until my faith is tested I don't really know if I have it. There is no hand-me-down faith. God has no grandchildren. We must each develop it for ourselves. In trials, faith is forced into the open and shows its true colors. That is when I learn to lean on God.

Have you ever been blackberry picking? Here in the Pacific Northwest, blackberry brambles are common, but you have to get beyond the thorns to get to the berries. Life is that way, isn't it? Our son, Paul, was killed by a drunk driver in March of 2000. Eight months later I was laid off from a company I had worked at for over 20 years. Those were tough things to go through, but I am who I am today because of those trials. And I count these years now as the best years of my life. James 1:4 says the result of trials will be that I am complete, lacking nothing. I am a witness that is true.

I'm not going to criticize someone because they have problems, because I know it's just a matter of time before I do too. Are there times when I get discouraged, down, wondering where God is? Of course there are. That is when I go to the book of hope, the Bible. I go back to His promises and encourage myself. What promise do you have? Here is a good one: Philippians 3:19: "God will meet all of your needs according to His riches in glory."

What do I do when the worst thing I can imagine happens? Habakkuk lived in a farming economy that faced total disaster. He said in Habakkuk 3:17 (NIV) "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls." The situation was pretty bleak, but he followed in verse 18 by saying, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior!"

Think about Job. In one day he lost his crops, his herds, even his children. His wife's attitude was, "Just curse God and die." But his faith held true during the trial when he said in Job 1:21 (NKJV), "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." I love Psalms 40:2: "He brought **Gill** up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay. He set **Gill's** feet on a rock, and gave **him** a firm place to stand."

Luke 19:10 (NIV) "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Feel lost, feel hopeless? Well, you are a candidate for a savior. Isaiah 53:6 (NIV) says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Jesus tells a parable in Luke 15:4-7: Would not **Gill**, if **he** had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until **he** found it? When **Gill** found it, **he** would carry it on **his** shoulders, rejoicing. When **Gill** comes home, **he** would call together **his** friends and **his** neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that even so there was more joy in heaven when **Gill** repented, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance." Sheep don't intend to get lost; it's just what they do naturally. The same is true of us. No one wakes up in the morning and lies in bed asking, "How can I screw up my life today?" By our nature, we follow our own way. When we do, we lose our way. Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV) says, "There is a way that seems right to a

man, but its end is the way of death.” Without God, we will follow the world’s way: money – empty, sex – empty, alcohol, drugs, peer acceptance – all empty.

Growth requires patience. It takes longer to get out of stuff than to get into it. It is easier to pull out the plastic than to pay the bill when it comes next month. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that all things work together for *Gill’s* good, because *he* loves God and is called according to His purpose.” God wants to use the difficulties of life to strengthen our faith, to mature us, to grow us up. Am I going to count it all joy to walk through the process or am I going to try to short circuit?

36: The Voice of Truth

“God is in control.” -- Really? Too often we use that statement as a cop-out to keep from taking responsibility for our decisions. Our role is not passive.



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Ephesians 6:10-17 says, “Finally, **Gill** is to be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. **Gill** is to put on the whole armor of God that **he** may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For **Gill’s** wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, **Gill** should put on the whole armor of God, that **he** may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. **Gill** must stand therefore, having the belt of truth buckled around **his** waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having fitted **his** feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking up the shield of faith, with which **Gill** will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. And **Gill** must take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

“Be strong” “Put on” “Stand firm” “Take up” “Resist”: those are all words that show we are actively involved. These verses are not about a belt, they are about truth; they are not about a shield, they are about faith. When we put on the armor we are putting on Christ’s character, His nature. In so doing, we take ourselves out of the realm of the flesh where we are vulnerable to attack and place ourselves within the dominion of Christ where the evil one cannot touch us (1John 5:18).

Donning the armor of God is each believer’s individual responsibility. I can pray for you, encourage you and support you, but if you go into the battle without your armor on, you will get hurt. What makes up the armor?

1. Belt of truth: If Satan can deceive me into believing a lie, he can control my life in that area. John 8:32 (NKJV) promises, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” We love to talk about “the truth will make you free” but let’s not miss that it is the truth that you know that will make you free. That takes being a disciple, studying the Word and making truth an integral part of your life.
2. Breastplate of righteousness: 1Corinthians 1:30 in The Message says, “Everything that we have – right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start – comes from God by way of Jesus Christ.” My life is not based on my righteousness, but on Christ’s. We need to recognize that our righteousness is as filthy rags before God (Isaiah 64:6). We must acknowledge our dependence on Christ. According to 2Corinthians 5:21, “For Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on **Gill’s** behalf; so that in Him **Gill** might become the righteousness of God.”
3. Feet shod with the Gospel of peace: Colossians 3:15-16 tells us the peace of Christ must rule in our hearts. I must choose to walk in that peace daily and refuse

to listen to guilt, shame or condemnation when it knocks on the door of my heart. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1 (NKJV))

4. Shield of faith: Satan's fiery darts are lies, accusations and temptations bombarding our minds. Our shield is faith in the Word of God, His promises and His provision which counters those darts. I must have that shield ready to stand against Satan's attack.
5. Helmet of salvation: The mind is where spiritual battles are fought. Romans 8:35 declares that nothing can separate me from the love of God. Satan may disrupt my daily victory, but he can do nothing to disrupt my position in Christ. When the enemy whispers thoughts like "How can you call yourself a Christian?", I have to decide if I will choose his thoughts or the truth of the Word? Philippians 4:8 encourages us to think on what is pure, lovely, admirable.
6. Sword of the Spirit: I need to be speaking aloud God's truths, to declare what God says about me. Joshua 1:8 tells us to meditate on His Word day and night. This is not eastern religion meditation to empty your mind. This is filling your mind with the Word. Did you know that worry is meditation, filling my mind with the negative? That is why a daily devotional is so important. It enables me to focus my thoughts on the right things.

I have all the resources and protection I need to live a victorious life in Christ every day. If I am not, it's my choice based on what I have chosen to believe and the actions I have taken based on those beliefs. When I leave a door open for the evil one by not resisting temptation, accusation and deception, he will come in.

My eternal destiny is secure but I am still vulnerable to Satan's lies. 2Corinthians 10:5 commands me to take every thought captive. That means choosing truth in the face of every lie. Why does a lion roar? To paralyze its prey with fear. Peace can only be found in the Prince of Peace. Psalms 23:4 says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because I am the biggest, meanest son of a gun in the valley." No, that only works until a bigger, meaner son of a gun shows up; then you are in deep trouble. Instead the truth is: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because You are with me."

The essence of temptation is the enticement to have legitimate human needs met through the resources of the world and the flesh instead of through God and His ways. Philippians 4:19 (NIV) promises, "My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus." Every temptation is an invitation to live independent of God. Push something beyond the boundary of God's will and it becomes sin.

1. Lust of the flesh: Food is a necessary part of life but pushed beyond boundaries it becomes gluttony; rest taken to excess becomes laziness; sex out of bounds becomes perversion.
2. Lust of the eyes: This comes in the form of greed, jealousy, envy, etc. I must choose if I will believe what I see or believe God's Word. 2Corinthians 5:7 says we must walk by faith not by sight.
3. Pride of life: Pride tells me I must direct my own destiny, but that attitude destroys obedience. The arrogance of "I know what is best" is destructive. I need

submission and humility before God because without Him I can do nothing (John 15:5).

On a daily basis I face the decision to walk by the flesh or walk by the Spirit. Let's compare Judas and Peter: for Judas condemnation led to death, for Peter conviction led to repentance, restoration and life. If I see myself as a worthless nobody, I will live as a worthless nobody. I can't model perfection, I can only model growth. As I begin to learn the truth of my identity in Christ I become free of the bondage of Satan's lies. 2Corinthians 5:17 declares, "Therefore if **Gill** is in Christ, **he** is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new." That's where I'm going to live.

Casting Crowns has a powerful song, *The Voice of Truth*. Here is a portion of the lyrics:

Oh what I would do to have
The kind of strength it takes to stand before a giant
With just a sling and a stone
Surrounded by the sound of a thousand warriors
Shaking in their armor
Wishing they'd have had the strength to stand

But the giant's calling out my name and he laughs at me
Reminding me of all the times I've tried before and failed
The giant keeps on telling me
Time and time again "Boy, you'll never win!
You'll never win"

But the voice of truth tells me a different story
And the voice of truth says "Do not be afraid!"
And the voice of truth says "This is for My glory"
Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth.

What is the giant in your life? We all have at least one. It might be fear, depression, addiction, pride. What is the "voice of truth" to counter the giant's voice you are facing in your life? What voice will you choose to listen and believe?

37: Habits for Success

A thought dwelt on becomes an action. An action repeated becomes a habit. A habit established becomes the foundation of my destiny. Science tells us 99% of our actions are automatic, our life is a mass of habits. Your habits are taking you somewhere; I hope it is where you want to go.



It is not the unusual events that define me, it is the daily things, the daily choices. One 30 min. workout a month will not make me fit; I must make a daily choice. My daily thoughts and actions establish my habits and those direct my destiny.

I remember my first (and only) cigarette. My best friend's mother smoked, so one afternoon he snuck a cigarette out of her purse and we lit up on his back porch. After coughing and turning green, I knew I never wanted to do that again. But so many people push past the initial reaction to develop a habit. Worse yet, how often does tobacco lead to weed that progresses to coke that opens the door to meth, heroin, etc.? And it all started with a decision on the back porch.

Habits start with the small choices and build: the habit of exercise, the habits and skills associated with learning a trade. How about the habit of faith, the habit of following God's Word? Those are habits that will bring blessing to my life. Or the habits of fear, worry or anger: where will they lead?

A habit is a behavior I don't have to think about. Do I have the habit of trusting God or the habit of worry? The habit of speaking the Word or the habit of speaking the problem? Ungodly outcomes are not a result of accidents or "just the way it is" but from ungodly habits. A new habit can redefine my life. Philippians 2:12 tells us, "So then, even as **Gill** has always obeyed, whether in the presence or the absence of **his** teachers, **Gill** must work out **his** own salvation with fear and trembling." The Message says, "Redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God." We want to hear about mercy and love and free stuff from God, but not the work involved in changing our belief system and habits, but it's all part of the package.

I suppose we all have times when we feel we are not connecting with God, just going through a routine. I go to church but just leave the way I came. In these times, I am on my way to heaven but is it evident in my life? Most likely there is a "thought virus" that has taken hold: "You'll never change." "What's the use?" "I'm tired of trying and failing." The longer those thoughts are left unaddressed the harder they are to root out.

Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, "As he thinks in his heart so is he." That verse is not addressing casual thoughts, but rather habits of thought, the thoughts we have allowed to take root. Luke 6:45 (NKJV) is another Scripture that addresses habits of thought: "For

out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” What is that abundance in our heart? Is it a worldly viewpoint or are we following after God?

2Corinthians 10:4-5 encourages, “For the weapons of **Gill’s** warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God.” That is pretty violent, but we have to take action if we are to “Bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Hebrews 10:23 promises, “Let **Gill** hold fast the confession of **his** hope without wavering. For He who promised is faithful.” What will be the fruit of my life when I stand before God? That will be the result of my habits. Some habits draw me close to God, some pull me away. Is my future decided by the Democrats or Republicans? Am I planning my future based on the lottery? Your reaction might be, “I’ve never been lucky.” Recognize that life isn’t about luck, it’s about habits. Don’t buy into the lie that you have no control. I decide if my future will be better than my past.

Matthew 12:33 (NKJV) warns us, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.” I decide the fruit of my life so I need to take responsibility. Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV) says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Saying something negative is perfectly acceptable in the world. On the other hand, if I say something positive, I will be considered weird. Imagine going up to your car in the parking lot and starting kicking it and yelling, “What a piece of junk!” People will walk by, nod knowingly and say, “Yea, I had a car just like that.” Now imagine standing in front of your car and declaring, “What a great car! I love it!” People will give you a wide berth as they try to avoid that “crazy guy”. Decide to be different. If I act like the world, talk like the world, think like the world, why should I expect different results?

I have read that you will speak the rest of your life with the accent you learned by 13. Maybe you were raised with divorce, drugs, abuse, negativity and you are still speaking with that accent. You “struggle with drama and trauma from your mama.” Yes, it is easier to stay where you are. Very few really want to change, to break out of negative habits. But what fruit do you want for your life?

We can’t live without habits, so we have to pick: good habits or bad habits. Our world has a habit of thought that it wants us to conform to. God wants us to be transformed. Romans 12:2 (NKJV) commands, “Do not be conformed to this world.” That is, don’t adopt the world’s habits. “But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Adopt Godly habits. That takes refocusing our thinking.

God doesn’t need to change. We need to change to move into the abundant life He has provided for us. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, “That **Gill** put away, as concerning **his** former way of life, the old **man**, that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that **Gill** be renewed in the spirit of **his** mind, and put on the new **man**, that like God has been created in true righteousness and holiness.” What I do daily will determine my family

relationships. What I do daily will determine my success on the job. What I do daily will determines my destiny. What one habit do you need to develop? Start a new habit and start a new future.

38: Foundation Stones

We declare, “Jesus is our hope.” What is hope exactly? Hope says that my life doesn’t have to stay the same, tomorrow can be better than yesterday. Hope lifts us up and propels us forward to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. The world sees a future without hope and hopelessness breeds helplessness. We feel stuck. We think, “Nothing is going to change. Whatever I do won’t matter. I’ve tried before to no avail.”



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God doesn’t speak about me that way. God says I am made in His image (Genesis 1:27); I have dominion (Genesis 1:28); I am more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37); nothing can separate me from His love (Romans 8:38). That’s what makes us as Christians different from the world.

Romans 12:2 says don’t be conformed to the world. The world’s view is that I am a victim, helpless and hopeless. Recognize that losers think a certain way; champions think a certain way. What makes the difference? Primarily what I am letting in. Is my choice of radio station: KLUV vs. KFunk? What books am I reading: trash or growth focused? Is my TV time saturated with Oprah, Day of Our Lives and The Simpsons? Mark 4:24 (Amp) warns: “Be careful what you are hearing. [The measure] [of thought and study] you give [to the truth you hear] will be the measure of virtue and knowledge] that comes back to you--and more [besides] will be given to you who hear.”

Change a thought, change your future. I might battle addiction to drugs, alcohol, pornography, fast food, or negativity. Only if I change a thought can I change direction. Repentance isn’t about feeling sorry. It isn’t about feelings at all. Repentance is above all a change in the way I think. It’s a 180° turn.

Why do I think the way I think? Is it because of the way I was brought up? Something Uncle Joe said? What I heard on Dr. Phil? Or is it based on the Word of God?

The devil is probably whispering, “It doesn’t matter. It won’t work.” How do we counter that? We need the right foundation. Construction of a skyscraper starts with digging a proper foundation. The higher the building, the deeper the foundation must be. In the construction of the Empire State Building, they first dug down 55 feet to bedrock. The Sears Tower in Chicago required a foundation 100 feet deep. Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the tallest building in the world, has a foundation that goes down 164 feet! Matthew 7:24-27 tells us we must build on the rock of God’s truth.

Here are a few key foundation stones you might want to apply to your life:

1. Identity: Do I know and believe who I am in Christ? 2Corinthians 5:16-17 says I am a new creation, the old things have passed away and everything about my life, my future is brand new. I am valuable, loved and chosen. I am what the Bible

says I am. Perhaps someone has told you, “You’re stupid.” or “You were just an accident.” We often blame ourselves for actions of others, whether that be divorce of our parents, physical abuse or sexual abuse. I can prevent God’s power from working in my life by my negative identity. Ever heard the saying, “God don’t make no junk.” It’s true! (The statement, not the grammar.) I am not defined by the flesh: black, white, brown, young, old, handsome or ugly (Do NOT point at the person next to you). Think about a newborn baby. (We just had our tenth grandchild and our first great-grandchild). All they can do is eat, sleep and poop but we call them precious. How much more valuable are you? Psalm 8:4-5 declares, “What is **Gill**, that You think of **him**? The **son** of man, that You care for **him**? For You have made **Gill** a little lower than God, and crowned **Gill** with glory and honor.”

2. Destiny: Philippians 3:12-14 encourages us to press toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I have a purpose from God. Am I just trying to pay the bills? To get a new truck? To just make it to the next paycheck? No, that is not my God-given purpose. What is that prize? It is to impact the lives of others, to call them into a relationship with the living God. Others are watching. How are you influencing others? Is it drawing them closer to God?
3. Strength through faith: Ephesians 6:10 (NIV) challenges us to “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” My strength is not from Red Bull, Rock Star, protein shakes or steroids. My strength comes from my spirit being connected to God. In Mark 9:23 (NLT), Jesus says, “Anything is possible if a person believes.” The more I build my faith, the stronger I will be when I face life’s challenges. I can do anything I choose with my time. I can choose to watch hours of football on TV, sleep in on Sunday morning instead of attending church or fill my afternoons with soap operas. Joshua 24:15 (NKJV) is the verse quoted at our front door: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” I choose to build up my spirit by reading my Bible, prayer and going to church. The economy may go up and down, but Psalm 121:2 (NKJV) says, “My help comes from the Lord Who made heaven and earth.” He is the source of my strength for living.

What motivates you, what is your passion? Is it prestige, possessions, peer pressure, power? In Matthew 9:36 we are told Jesus was motivated by God’s love, He was moved with compassion. 1Cor 13, the “love” chapter, ends in verse 13 (NIV) with, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” When this world fades away, what will be left? Our faith in God, our hope in His promises and the love we have shared with others. Love is not a feeling but a choice. What will you choose? What foundation are you building your life upon?

39: Breastplate of Righteousness

The devil is not intimidated by what I am on the outside, only who I am on the inside. To defeat him, it better be the right stuff. My attitude needs to be that I am the head not the tail, above only and not beneath. (Deuteronomy 28:13) My strength comes from God, not myself. (Ephesians 6:10)

Acts 19 tell the story of the sons of Sceva. They tried to cast a demon out by saying, "In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches..." but it was just a religious ritual, something they read out of a book. The devil said, "Jesus I know. Paul I know, but who are you?" He jumped on them and sent them out bloody and naked. "I go to church." So what! "I've got a Bible right here." So what!

What is on the inside? Stand up for your position in Christ that Jesus died to give you.



My focus today is on the breastplate of righteousness. (Ephesians 6:14) This is a message that changed my life. Most people serve God out of guilt. To them it is fire insurance. They see God's acceptance based on performance. If I do everything right God will accept me, but I can never meet that standard. My righteousness is like filthy rags before God. (Isaiah 64:6) All have sinned and fallen short of His glory. (Romans 3:23) If I try to live based on performance, the enemy runs rampant in my life, bringing bondage and condemnation. When I grasped the revelation that in Christ I am righteous before God, my spiritual walk moved to a whole new level.

Two Scripture verses you must have in your arsenal to use against the attacks of the enemy are: First, Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." I stand before God with no guilt or condemnation. Yes, I blow it. Yes, I have failed in the past and doubtless will again in the future. But my standing before God is not based on my deeds, not based on following a long list of do's and don'ts. My standing before God is based on what Jesus did. I will never be more righteous than I am today. I will grow in holiness but righteousness was established when I made Jesus Lord of my life. I am His workmanship in Christ Jesus created **for** good works NOT **by** good works. (Ephesians 2:10)

We live in a works based society. When we meet someone new the first questions are: "What is your name? What kind of work do you do?" We tend to bring that into our relationship with God. Is the cross not enough? Abraham believed and that brought right standing. (Galatians 3:6) His righteousness was not based on a bunch of good works. No one is justified by the law. (Galatians 3:11) Works do not have the ability to set me free. I am a friend of God. (John 15:14) What the law could not do Jesus has accomplished. I

am a new creation in Christ (2Corinthians 5:17), not a dirty rotten sinner. Yes, I must deal with sin but the real me inside is no longer under guilt or condemnation.

Second key verse, 2Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV): “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” That is the key. Don’t continue to rehearse sins of the past. We may still reap the harvest but that sin is under the blood. God is not bringing up past sin. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18) We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1) The work of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever. (Isaiah 32:17) That is the power of the Gospel. Every other religion is performance, do’s and don’ts. Too often Christian teachings are perverted to rules of performance. It is bondage. Religion cleans up the outside but misses the heart. Follow the path of the world; seek to satisfy the desire of the flesh; listen to the devil’s voice. Where will it lead? Bondage!

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1) If I am in bondage I need to look at my beliefs. Don’t take on a yoke of religious bondage. Try to be justified by law and you are estranged from Christ, fallen from grace. (Galatians 5:4) The enemy wants to destroy your freedom. If I see myself on God’s bad list, I won’t try to come to Him. He is not a heavenly Santa Claus with a naughty and nice list. In Luke 15 the parable of the prodigal son shows us the character of the Father. Despite everything the son had done, the father was there with open arms, forgiveness and restoration. Get confident in your relationship with Him.

The effect of righteousness is victory over accusations. (Isaiah 32:17) “Who do you think you are? Look at your past.” No, remember what Christ has done. God is faithful to forgive and to cleanse. (1John1:9) Let the guilt fall away and step into liberty. Is this too good to be true? Satan wants you to think so. It is time to put on the breastplate of righteousness and stand your ground. It is time to step out of the tomb of guilt, shame and condemnation. If God be for me, who can be against me? (Romans 8:31) Because of what Jesus has done, we can come boldly before the throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:16)

40: Welcome Aboard

We are going to start this study with a word game. I am thinking of a word and I'll give you hints to guess it:

- This might be the most important word in the Bible: 'Jesus', 'love', 'salvation'?
- It applies to every human being: 'sin', 'redemption', 'mercy'?
- It determines our eternal destiny: 'the Cross', 'forgiveness', 'grace'?
- Final clue, its only two letters: Did you guess it? 'in'.

When I was born, I was in Adam; when I was born again, I became in Christ. In Adam, I shared in his past defeat, his present defeat and his future defeat. In Christ, I share in His past, present and future victory. Here is the entire Gospel in two words: "In Christ". To me that is exciting, amazing and humbling. I was a Christian for over 10 years before I started to understand my identity. When I did, it changed my life.



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Hebrews 2:15 (NKJV) says, "Through death He (Jesus) might destroy him who had the power of death." At the cross, the devil was defeated and rendered powerless. Through sin, Adam surrendered authority on the earth to Satan, but Jesus paid the price to take back that authority.

Through the cross Jesus brought us into a new creation reality. 2Corinthians 5:17 is key: "Therefore if **Gill** is in Christ, **he** is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new." I am no longer tied to an old past, I have new life! Romans 8:29 in The Message says: "The Son stands first in the line of humanity He restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in Him." Jesus is the picture of who I am becoming. My true identity is not what the devil says about me. My identity is "in Christ".

As a new creation, I am qualified for an inheritance. Colossians 1:12-14 declares, "**Gill** may give thanks to the Father, who made **Gill** fit to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered **Gill** out of the power of darkness, and translated **him** into the kingdom of the Son of His love; in whom **Gill** has **his** redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of **his** sins." In Adam my inheritance was death. In Christ my inheritance is eternal life. That inheritance is mine not because of what I have earned, but because God made me a partaker. I have been removed out of the kingdom of darkness, out of the defeat, the fear, the oppression, the hopelessness. We were all there at one time, but we don't have to live there now.

Salvation is more than a ticket to heaven. It is living in my inheritance as a son of God here and now. The devil doesn't want us to understand our identity. When we do, his defeat is complete.

What aspect of your Identity do you struggle most to believe?

I Am Forgiven: Romans 3:24, Romans 8:1-2, Ephesians 1:7-8

I Am Valuable: 1Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 1:11, Ephesians 2:10

I Am Loved: John 3:15-16, Romans 8:38-39, Hebrews 4:16

I Am Victorious: Romans 8:37, Philippians 4:13, 1John 5:4-5

I Am Complete: 2Corinthians 5:17, 2Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 2:10

I Am Chosen: 2Corinthians 5:19-20, Ephesians 1:4, 1Peter 2:9

Matthew 7:21-23 is one of the scariest verses in the Bible: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of heaven; but **Gill** if **he** does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will tell Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work iniquity.'"

The Lord recently woke me up at 3:00 AM to a vision I want to share with you. (This was NOT a pizza dream, although I suppose it might have been a brownie sundae dream.) I was in the boarding area of our local airport. I saw the details of the TSA station, the gate seating and the boarding podium. All was normal until I looked out the window and saw lined up on the tarmac fiery chariots. It was then that I knew this was the place for souls to be taken to their eternal reward. The man just in front of me in line stepped to the boarding podium and announced, "I am Jonathan P. Quigley, III. I have given millions to charity, I was a deacon in my church, I was chairman of the building committee. I was..." The boarding agent interrupted, "Excuse me Mr. Quigley. Please step over here to the side." Once he did, the agent read from her book, "It is recorded here, 'I never knew you.'" With that a trap door opened and he disappeared from view. I was next, gulp! I was just ready to hand my ID to the agent when I looked at it. To my horror, the picture on my ID was not mine. I stammered to the agent, "I.. I don't know what happened. My picture is not on my ID." She took it and looked at it with a frown that quickly turned into a smile. "That's right. It's not your picture. It is Jesus. You are in Christ. Welcome aboard!"

When the Father looks at me, He doesn't see my failures, my sin or my past. He sees Jesus. Romans 5:1 promises: "Therefore being justified by faith, **Gill** has peace with God through **his** Lord Jesus Christ." That peace is mine in Christ. Hebrews 10:19-20 tells us, "**Gill** having therefore boldness to enter into the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He dedicated for **Gill**, through the veil, that is, His flesh." The Father opens His arms to everyone who is in Christ: "Welcome aboard."

41: Your Future Awaits the Burial of Your Past

You were never meant to just exist, but God created you to advance. Your life will go in the direction of your focus, not your desire. It is focus that brings results. I understand in NASCAR training, the driver is trained when approaching a crash, to look where you want the car to go, not on the crash. If the driver focuses on the crash they will themselves be drawn in. I will attract what matches my belief system. If I see myself as a loser, my life will move in that direction. If my thoughts are, "I'm not worth much" my life will manifest that. Our greatest battle is fought in the mind. 2Corinthians 10:4-5 tells us, "For the weapons of **Gill's** warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."



I become my most dominant image. Whatever it is, my life will move toward that image. Life doesn't move toward my desire but toward my dominant thoughts. Just wishing my life were better will not make it so. I have to change my thinking. What dominates me mentally will dominate the way I live. In other words, I will act the way I think. Are you stuck repeating the same patterns over and over? Go back and ask what is the dominant image? Henry Ford said, "Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're probably right."

Why not expect a miracle? In Luke 5:17-20, four friends bring a crippled man to Jesus for healing. When they found the house too crowded to get in, did they give up? No, nothing was going to keep them from their miracle. They broke a hole in the roof and let their crippled friend down in front of Jesus. Mark 10:46-52 is the story of blind Bartimaeus. You think you have it rough! As a blind beggar he was thought so little of, he didn't even have a name. He was just "Timaheus's son". Imagine the years, the lifetime of being told, "You're worthless, you're nothing." Then he heard that Jesus was passing by so he cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Those around him told him to shut up, but this time he wasn't going to listen to them. He cried out all the louder and ultimately received his healing. Psalm 23:6 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow **Gill** all the days of **his** life." Expectation is a magnet. What are you drawing to your life through your thoughts?

What is one of the first words a baby learns? No. "No, don't touch that." "No, you can't have candy." Pretty soon he is using the word. "Eat your vegetables." "No." "Share your toys with your sister." "No." "Time to go to bed." "No." We become conditioned to a negative reaction. "You are the righteousness of God in Christ." "No." "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ." "No." God wants to bless us and our expectation is negative. It is time to pull down the stronghold of "NO". We need to start using the language of "YES". I may not agree with many of President Obama's policies

but his campaign theme was brilliant: “Yes, we can!” We need to develop that same expectation in our spiritual life.

I heard of an experiment that was done where a barracuda was placed in a tank with smaller fish that were his favorite food. His problem was the smaller fish were on the other side of a glass barrier. Every time he went for them, WHAM! He hit that invisible barrier so many times he stopped trying. Finally the barrier was removed. The smaller fish swam right next to him but he ignored them. In his thinking they weren’t available.

You have a choice: become what you were meant to be or remain as you are. Don’t just accept what happens to you; believe in God’s vision for your future. We allow people, circumstances and events to distort our vision. Have the courage to not follow the crowd. Matthew 7:13-14 says, “**Gill** must enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it.”

Israel Houghton, 4-time Grammy winner, said, “Life doesn’t happen when the alarm goes off. It happens when you wake up.” It’s time to wake up from the deep hibernation of “same-old-same-old” living and of waiting and wishing for things to get better. Life changes when you get mad enough to change.

Ever play darts? Do you look at the opposite wall and throw the darts over your shoulder? No. We are meant to focus more on what is in front of us than what is behind. Philippians 3:13-14 tells us, “**Gill** doesn’t regard *himself* as yet having taken hold, but one thing **Gill** does. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are ahead, **Gill** presses on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Feel like you are in a rut? A rut is nothing more than a very long grave. The greatest obstacle to change is our mindset, our thinking. Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, “As he (a man) thinks in his heart, so is he.” There is a name for mindsets contrary to the Word: Sin.

Here is the key: Your future awaits the burial of your past. Good memories are a hammock. We just want to stop there and dream about “the good ol’ days.” Bad memories are a noose that hold us back. Bad memories can be wounds, hurts, our upbringing, a dysfunctional family. In reality, all families have defects. My dad was self-focused; my mom was manipulative. But that will not hold me back.

We learn more from tragedy than pleasant times, more from failure than from success. Winston Churchill said, “Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it.” Crisis will motivate you to change. I cannot change what I tolerate: temper, tardiness, greed, jealousy, overweight, smoking, drugs. What are you currently tolerating that you want to see changed? When I reach the decision not to tolerate something in my life, that is when I am in the position to change it. Don’t be content with the baggage of the past. Press forward.

Change is a permanent part of life. If you don't like what you are getting, don't tolerate it, change it. This season is over, don't try to stay there. What you need to succeed is inside of you.

How can you make your vision your reality:

See it. Write it. Read it. Say it. Act it.

1. See it. Proverbs 29:18 (NLT) says, "When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild." In the original Hebrew it says the people will wander aimlessly. Get a picture in your mind of where you want your life to go.
2. Write it. Habakkuk 2:2 (NKJV) says, "Write the vision, make it plain." Writing it down gives us commitment to that vision.
3. Read it. Repeatedly throughout the day, go back and read it over. When you get up, before lunch, before bed, read it again. Start changing the thoughts and strongholds by meditating on that vision.
4. Say it. Matthew 12:34 (NKJV): "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." That is part of the meditation. Tell trusted friends where you are going so they can hold you accountable and encourage you in the journey but avoid the naysayers.
5. Act it. Put feet to your faith. James 2:17 (NIV) says, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." If all I do is wish things would change. I will stay where I am. I have to get up and move.

42: Bouncing Back

2 Corinthians 3:17 (NIV) declares, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." I want to live in that freedom, but to do that I must be willing to let the Holy Spirit flow through me. I can't afford to be satisfied. Just this morning I read 1Thessalonians 4 in my devotional. Paul recognized what the church in Thessalonica had done but he said, "I urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to do even more." (vs. 1, NLT)

Will I allow past failures to take me out, to get me off purpose? In 2Corinthians 4:1 (NKJV), Paul says, "We do not lose heart." I like the way the New Living puts it: "We never give up."

When our children were small they loved to play with Weebles. These are little plastic characters with rounded bottoms. No matter how many times you knocked them down, they pop right back up. Their motto; "Weebles wobble but they don't fall down." I think we can take a lesson from the Weeble: when we fail, get back up. Bounce back.



There are many examples in the world of those who bounced back:

- Bill Gates failed in his first business venture, Traf-O-Data, but he went on to create Microsoft.
- Walt Disney was forced to declare bankruptcy early in his career.
- Albert Einstein was labeled a slow learner in school.
- Winston Churchill failed the 6th grade.
- Elvis Presley was told to go back to driving a truck.
- The Beatles were told forget it, guitar music is on its way out.

Look at those in the Bible:

- Peter denied knowing Jesus but came back to be the leader of the early church.
- David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged to have her husband killed, but he repented and went on to be a great king.
- Moses fled into the desert after murdering an Egyptian. At 80 years old, it looked like his life was wasted, but he led the Israelite nation out of Egypt.
- Paul the apostle described his life in 2Corinthians 11:24-27 (NIV): "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without

food; I have been cold and naked.” That would certainly be enough for most of us to give up. However, Paul’s reaction was recorded in 2Corinthians 4:8-9 (NIV): “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” No matter what the devil threw at him, he bounced back.

In my own life, I have had to make the choice to not let defeat stop me from becoming who God wanted me to be:

- Our senior pastor died of cancer in his mid-50’s.
- At age 54, I was laid off from a company I had worked at for 22 years.
- Our son Paul and his fiancé Amy were killed by a drunk driver.

No matter how many times I am knocked down, I will get back up. Proverbs 24:16 says that the righteous may fall 7 times but rise again. I will fall; it’s going to happen. It is a reality of life. We must decide if we will hit bottom like an egg and lie there broken and defeated, will we bounce back to the same level only to repeat the same cycle or will we use that failure to launch into new heights, new challenges, new dreams? Character means I get back up. Proverbs 24:10 warns that to fail in time of adversity means my strength is small. If I am to stand, I must prepare beforehand.

Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired? Let’s learn how to bounce back:

1. Recognize failure is not my destiny. Colossians 3:10 tells us we are created in the image of God. Is God a failure? I need to discover who I am in Christ. 2Timothy 1:7 promises God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. 1John 5:4 tells me I am born of God and therefore I can overcome whatever the devil puts in my path. My destiny is to overcome, to bounce back.
2. Keep a right perspective. Faith sees opportunity where the world sees problems. In the Old Testament, Joseph went through years of slavery and prison, but ultimately God lifted him up to a place of leadership. In Genesis 50:20 (NKJV), he tells his brothers, “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.” Romans 5:3-5 says, “Not only this, but **Gill** also rejoices in **his** sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope: and hope doesn’t disappoint **Gill**, because God’s love has been poured out into **his** heart through the Holy Spirit who was given to **Gill**.” What is the right perspective with regards to trials? James 1:2 gives the answer, “Count it all joy”.
3. 100% committed. “I’ll try” means you will take the first exit that comes along. “Guess it doesn’t work for me.” You weren’t committed. Luke 9:62 (NKJV) warns, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” When I was installing an underground sprinkler system in our home, I encountered one very large boulder. Could I let it stop me? Could I afford to say, “Aw, I’ll just let that part of the lawn die.” Of course not. I dug around it. I must have the attitude toward God’s call that nothing will stop me. I don’t have a price. We have been married for 44 years. That only happened because we were 100% committed, no plan B. Divorce is not an option (murder perhaps?). “If she squeezes the toothpaste from the top one more time, I’m out of here.” “If he

- leaves his socks on the floor again, I'm done." How silly. Commitment will rise above resistance. I have read that when a storm approaches, all other animals may hide, but the eagle heads into the storm. He uses the air currents to lift himself to higher levels. Commitment will cause us to soar.
4. Persistence. Have you heard, "By persistence the snail reached the ark"? Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) encourages us, "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Romans 8:37-39 promises, "No, in all these things, **Gill** is more than a conqueror through Him who loved **him**. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate **Gill** from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, **Gill's** Lord."
 5. Be aware of the timing. My wife and I work weekly with a personal trainer. As I get more and more tired, I can look at the clock and encourage myself: "Less than 15 minutes to go, 4th quarter." Let's recognize that as Christians we are in the 4th quarter. It is time to sprint to the finish line. Ephesians 5:16 warns that we need to make the most of our time because the days are evil. How many drop out close to the finish? You might be right on the edge of your breakthrough. Edison tried over 3,000 filaments before he found one that worked. He said, "Many of life's failures are men who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." Let's get a sense of urgency and finish strong.

Matthew 24:13 promises that if we endure to the end, we will be saved. We don't know when life's defining moments will come, but if we establish a pattern of obedience, those moments will not catch us unprepared. Psalm 19:11 reminds us that in obedience there is great reward.

In my devotional recently I read 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NLT): "For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." Focusing on what will last forever gives us the lift to bounce back.

Michael Jordan, one of the greatest professional basketball players of all time, was cut from his high school team. Michael Jordan spoke of his career: "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Weebles wobble but they don't fall down.

43: What Voice Are You Listening To?

I had a ring tone on my phone, whenever my wife called I would hear, “Corinne’s calling. Better answer the phone. It’s Corinne!” I knew what voice was important for me to respond to. What voices are important in your life?

I read an anonymous quote, “Your future is determined by the voice you trust.” How true. We must choose what voice we will listen to or the world will choose for us.



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Psalm 1:1-3 says, “**Gill** is blessed because **he** doesn’t walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor does **he** stand in the way of sinners, nor does **he** sit in the seat of scoffers; but **Gill’s** delight is in the LORD’s law. On His law **Gill** meditates day and night. **Gill** will be like a tree planted by the streams of water that brings forth fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither. Whatever **Gill** does shall prosper.” The wicked, the sinner, the scoffer: those are all influences of the world trying to direct our thoughts and actions. But thoughts directed by the Word of God lead to stability, prosperity and freedom.

Galatians 6:7 warns us whatever we sow, we will reap. The law of cause and effect, action and reaction cannot be altered or bypassed. To change my harvest I must change the seed. My world is being created by what I plant. I must recognize that every thought is a seed. What are TV commercials but a voice trying to influence my thoughts? Buy this beer and you will be popular. Buy this perfume and you will be attractive.

If I want to change my life, I first must change my thoughts. Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, “As he thinks in his heart, so is he.” 1Peter 1:13 tells us to gird up our minds. That is roll up our sleeves and get to work. I like the way The Message version puts it: “So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that’s coming when Jesus arrives. Don’t lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing.” John Wooden, legendary basketball coach at UCLA said: “The choices you make, make you.”

Romans 12:2 commands us to renew our mind. I can direct my destiny by controlling my thoughts. Most people just let their thoughts go wherever they want. Where is that? It generally goes to negativity, self-pity or condemnation. God has a different plan.

Matthew 1 lists the genealogy of Jesus. In it are listed 42 generations from Abraham, 42 fathers. How many mothers? Five. In addition to Mary, there is Tamar (She gave birth to Perez after incest with Judah in Genesis 38.), Rahab (She was a Philistine prostitute from Jericho in Joshua 6), Ruth (She was from Moab, a foreigner in Ruth 1) and Bathsheba (She was also a foreigner, a Hittite in 2Samuel 11-12). All were outsiders, rejected, second class, bottom of the food chain. Why are they specifically listed? I think it is so

we can realize that God can take our mess and make greatness, regardless of the rejection by man.

2Corinthians 10:5 commands us to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. I must take responsibility for my thoughts. Will I control my thoughts or let my thoughts control me? By controlling my thoughts, I control my emotions, my attitudes, my actions and my destiny. What I continually think about will eventually manifest in my life.

We must choose between victor or victim. When our son was killed by a drunk driver, we were encouraged to join MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. That organization does some great work but we could not stay in an atmosphere that taught us we are victims. Deuteronomy 28:13 tells me I am the head and not the tail, above only not beneath.

Joshua 1:8 commands “This book of the law shall not depart out of **Gill’s** mouth, but **he** shall meditate on it day and night, that **Gill** may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then **Gill** shall make **his** way prosperous, and then **Gill** shall have good success.” The way I will change core values and thoughts is by repetition. When I first learned to drive, it was difficult to coordinate all the actions necessary plus stay aware of everything going on around me. Today it is second nature. When I learned to type, I had to be extremely focused. After years of practice, my fingers go automatically to the right keys. Repetition. Meditating on God’s Word, repetition will change our thoughts.

Circumstances have no control over my happiness. It is the attitude I assign to the circumstance that determines my happiness. Several months ago, my wife came into the house crying and agitated. I asked, “What’s wrong?” She replied, “I wrecked my car.” “You seem to be all rights. Just tell me what happened.” “I ran into your car!” Well, let me tell you, that changed my perspective. We cannot allow problems to dictate our mood. I think of the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16. Here they were, beaten and bloody, in the darkest, smelliest depth of the prison. At midnight, what are they doing? Moaning and feeling sorry for themselves? No! They are singing and praising God. Sure an earthquake came and broke their bonds but that was after they had been singing. They didn’t know that was coming. They praised because they knew God and circumstances weren’t going to change that.

Casey Treat, pastor of Christian Faith Center in the Seattle area, said, “Your life will move in the direction of your dominant thoughts.” How I see myself determines the life I will experience. My life will never go too far beyond the picture of myself I hold inside. If I want a better life, I have to start with ME.

What has been tapping on the keyboard to my hard drive? Poor self image is like a virus in the operating system that leads to failure. I would never have started Bible publishing, I would never have gone into jail ministry, I would never have started writing, if I had let self-image rule.

What voice are you listening to?

"I'm so discouraged and hopeless."	or	Jeremiah 29:11 "God has given me a future full of hope."
"I'm such a failure."	or	Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ."
"I'm broke busted and disgusted. I guess God wants me poor."	or	Psalms 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."
"I'm an addict; I'll always be an addict."	or	John 8:36 "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed."
"My family has left me. I feel so alone."	or	Hebrews 13:5 "God will never leave me nor forsake me."
"I'll come to God when I get my act together."	or	2Corinthians 5:21 "I am the righteousness of God in Christ."
"With my past, I'll never be anything."	or	Philippians 3:13-14 "Forgetting what is behind, I press toward the goal."
"Everyone's against me."	or	Romans 8:31 "If God be for me who can be against me."
"I'm such a loser"	or	Romans 8:37 "I am more than a conqueror through Him who loved me."

Events happen in our lives. It might be physical, emotional or sexual abuse. It might be abandonment or betrayal. It might be ridicule by peers or rejection. And we create a story to explain those events, usually a destructive story placing blame on ourselves. It is time to rewrite the story. It is time to get God's perspective, God's thoughts.

Ephesians 4:24 commands us to put on the new man, that like God has been created in true righteousness and holiness. In Christ, I am new on the inside. 2Corinthians 5:17 promises we are new creations in Christ.

To succeed takes two things: discipline and perseverance:

- Discipline: 2Timothy 2:3 tells us to be a good soldier of Christ. We must be willing to do the hard thing.
- Perseverance: Hebrews 6:12 says that through faith and perseverance we will inherit the promise. Change doesn't come easy but the end result is worth it.

Goliath mocked David in a battle of thoughts. What giant is calling out to you? What voice will you listen to?

44: Dealing With Anger

I want to look today at the sin of anger. Oh wait, anger is not a sin; it's what I do as a result of the anger. Anger is an inevitable part of life. It cannot be avoided so we better learn to deal with it.

Actually anger is a very helpful warning light on the "dashboard" of life. Ever driven a car when it overheats and the "idiot light" comes on warning you of a problem. Anger is like that. It is not a sin but it is a warning of a potentially deeper problem. It shows that something may out of balance in our life.



When anger controls me, I am headed for trouble. To "vent" on another person, to use anger to manipulate is destructive. James 1:20 tells us, "**Gill's** anger doesn't produce the righteousness of God." 1 Corinthians 13:5 says love is not easily angered. According to James 1:19, we are to be slow to speak and slow to anger. On the other side, "stuffing" our feelings is also destructive. Paul said in Ephesians 4:26-27 "**Gill**, be angry, and don't sin. **Gill** must not let the sun go down on **his** wrath, neither is **he** to give place to the devil." Deal with it right away so the devil doesn't get a foothold.

I read about a long distance trucker in Indiana. He was at a rest area coffee shop when three bikers came in and sat down at his table. As one ate the trucker's burger, another helped himself to his fries and the third downed his soda. The trucker didn't say a word but got up, paid his check and left. One biker commented to the waitress, "He sure wasn't much of a man!" Her reply, "He's not much of a driver either. He ran over three motorcycles leaving the parking lot." Now that may not have been the healthiest way for him to deal with his anger but at least he didn't stuff it. Think of anger as jumping into a powerful sports car only to discover the brakes don't work. You better be careful where it takes you and how the ride will end.

Anger shows up early in the Bible. In Genesis 4, Cain became angry when Abel's sacrifice was accepted and his isn't. He didn't deal with that anger properly and the result was murder. Jesus showed righteous anger with the vendors in the temple (Mark 11) and also with the religious leaders when He healed a man on the Sabbath (Mark 3). If my anger is projected at injustice and oppression it is healthy. If it revolves around self-interest, it will be unhealthy. Anger arises from impatience, abuse, jealousy, or unmet needs. All of those sources are focused on self; they are all rooted in pride.

Perhaps role models in our lives have taught us to react in anger. Most often this can be our fathers. But it is time to break that generational curse. Proverbs 4:27 warns us, "**Gill** must not turn to the right hand nor to the left, but **he** must remove **his** foot from evil." In other words we are to live in balance. Vent or stuff: neither is healthy. The correct choice is "Trust": trust in God and turn the situation over to Him. To achieve this requires me to guard my heart (Proverbs 4:23). Anger results from a mindset that life is all about me: my rights, my feelings, my pleasure. I heard about a woman who contracted rabies from a

dog bite. The doctor broke the news to her that she was terminal and should get her worldly affairs in order. She took a piece of paper and began writing furiously. The doctor asked, "Is that your will?" "No," she replied, "It's all the people I want to bite." Not a balanced reaction.

The key to balance is to live restrained and controlled:

1. Choose to walk in self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of Holy Spirit which includes self-control. Have you found yourself venting at your wife in a way you would never do with your boss? We can exercise the same self-control in all circumstances because the Holy Spirit resides in us. Philippians 4:13 promises, "**Gill** can do all things through Christ, who strengthens **him**." Thomas Jefferson advised, "When angry count to 10; when very angry count to 100." Mark Twain rephrased it to: "When angry count to 10; when very angry cuss." You will have to decide which choice you will make.
2. Deal with the small things. Otherwise they build into an explosion. The earlier I deal with the feelings of anger, the less damage they will do.
3. Retrain your thoughts, your words, and your actions. Go back to those thoughts because they produce everything else. 2Corinthians 10:5 tells us we must take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Jesus offers an invitation to a higher way of life. He does not try to accommodate the existing belief system of the world but turns those beliefs upside down (Acts 17:6). Our spiritual walk is not about getting by, but rather transformation. Romans 12:2 says, "**Gill** is not to be conformed to this world, but is to be transformed by the renewing of **his** mind, so that **Gill** may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God." Too often we spend our lives dealing with the bad fruit of our behavior and never dig deep enough to get to the root of the problem. Are you willing to go through whatever it takes to be free or do you want to stay in the mess you're in for the rest of your life?

How can I resolve feelings of anger? The key is through forgiveness:

1. Extend and seek forgiveness of others.
2. Forgive yourself.
3. Be an agent of forgiveness.

2Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if **Gill** is in Christ, **he** is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new." I don't have to live in bondage to my past. I have stepped into a new future that is not determined by my past. In Revelations 21:5, Jesus declares, "Behold, I am making all things new." We don't have to continue to live under the curse of anger. Have the courage to stand on the Word, not your feelings. Vent/ Stuff/ Trust. Only one road leads to life and peace. Which will you choose?

45: Failing Forward

I want to address right now how to fail. Now I know your reaction is probably, “Hey, I’m already pretty good at that without your help.” We need to understand there is a right way and a wrong way to fail.

Reality is we all fail. Whether you sit in a corporate board room or in a jail cell, failure is a part of life. It’s because you are human. There is a way to fail that leads to more failure and a way that leads to growth. I’m sure you are with me in wanting to “fail forward”!



At our church I worked in the video ministry. Every mistake I make is shown immediately on a 20 foot screen for the whole congregation to see. Every new trainee I warn, “You will mess up and everyone will see it. Get used to it.”

What do they call someone who fails in baseball 2 out of 3 times at bat: a multi-millionaire! In 1927 Babe Ruth 64% failure rate at bat. That was a .356 batting average. He struck out 89 times. But none of that is remember because of his 59 home runs, a record that stood for 34 years. Kobe Bryant, professional basketball player, has a field goal percentage of .453; that is a 55% failure rate. There is truth in a statement by Wayne Gretzky, pro hockey hall of famer, “100% of shots not taken will not score.” The only person who does not fail is the one who never does anything.

Just out of college, we didn’t have a lot of money so I tried to do my own auto repairs. I had a 1961 VW bug so most maintenance was fairly straightforward. I remember the time I needed to replace the brushes on the alternator. No problem, just loosen this bolt and the alternator should come right off. I still can hear the clink-clank-clunk as I loosened the bolt and a nut on the inside of the engine dropped into the block. I had to get a friend’s help to drop the engine completely out to retrieve that nut. Shortly after that I bought a book, “VW Repair for the Complete Idiot”, and learned how to replace the brushes the right way. Did I fail as an auto mechanic? You bet. Am I a failure? No way!

What the devil doesn’t want you to know:

1. Failing is unavoidable. It is part of the fallen human condition. We don't want to fail, sure, but it's going to happen. Society puts a taboo on failing, says you are a failure, but don't listen to it.
2. Failing is not an event. Failing a test in school meant failing the learning process that lead up to the test. Success is a process, so is failure. What brought me to where I am today was not an event, it was a process.
3. Failing is not irreversible. Have you heard the saying, “It doesn't matter how much milk you spill as long as you don't lose the cow.” Keep the right

perspective. Failing is a stepping stone to success. Remember, “Be patient. God isn’t finished with me yet.”

In my junior year of college, I ran for office. I didn’t win. At the time I was crushed but when I look back, I am grateful I didn’t win. I realize how different my life would have been had I succeeded. The Bible is very realistic in relating the failures of key figures: Peter denied Jesus, King David committed adultery and murder, Moses killed an Egyptian, Noah no sooner got off the boat than he got drunk, and of course Adam ate the apple.

Look at the Apostle Paul. Ask the religious leaders of his day if Paul was a success or failure before he met Christ. As a Pharisee he was zealous and faultless. Paul described his attitude after meeting Jesus in Philippians 3:7-9 (NIV), “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.” What at one point can seem like failure can later be recognized as success.

Here are some facts to consider about failure:

1. Your future was created before your failure. God has a plan and a purpose for your life. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) says, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
2. Ignoring failure changes nothing. We need to honestly face what needs to change. Romans 12:2 tells us we need mind renewal. Part of that is to admit mistakes and don’t play the blame game. Sure, taking responsibility requires courage, but if we don’t we get “stuck on stupid”.
3. God uses failure to show His love, patience and grace. God is not like an earthly father who may use failure to condemn and berate. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is a story of failure but it is more focused on acceptance and restoration. Romans 2:4 (NKJV) declares, “The goodness of God leads you to repentance.” Recognizing God’s goodness makes it easier to return to Him.
4. The most certain sign that I am failing forward is it becomes a step to learning. Failing does not make me a failure if I am willing to learn. Thomas Edison tested over 3,000 materials before he had a workable electric light. He was asked if he was discouraged by all of the failures. He said, “No, I have learned 3,000 ways that don’t work.” Failing is painful so I better learn something valuable in the process. There is no shame in failing unless I fail to learn.
5. The mind storms that come with failing must be confronted with spiritual weapons. Let’s remember 2Corinthians 10:4-5: “For the weapons of *Gill’s* warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

6. Finally, failure is not final. Failure does not need to define the rest of my life. 1John 4:4 (NIV) promises, “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” Romans 8:31 (NIV) declares, “If God is for us who can be against us.” Add in Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward **Gill**, says the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give **him** hope and a future.” and we get a different picture of our future.

Let's get a different understanding of failing. It is a learning process, not an indictment of who I am. Three steps forward and two steps back is still one step forward. Let's use failure as a springboard to success.

Join me in the following declarations:

1. I am a child of God. (Galatians 6:26)
2. I am God's workmanship. (Ephesians 2:10)
3. No weapon formed against me shall prosper. (Isaiah 54:17)
4. If God be for me, who can be against me? (Romans 8:31)
5. Greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world. (1John 4:4)

46: Bloodline of a Champion

Did you have a pet growing up? I remember Butch, half German shepherd, half whatever climbed over the fence one night, but he was a great dog for a boy growing up. He would wrestle, swim and fetch. Our daughter's family has Edgar, a pug. He is unbelievably ugly; still he is a purebred, and therefore came at a high price.

I was speaking with a friend recently and he related an experience he had as a young man. He had worked at a ranch one summer and as the summer was drawing to a close, the owners told him they might not have the cash to pay him but instead were considering giving him a colt that had recently been born. He thought, "What am I going to do with a horse?" He was relieved when they were able to come up with the cash instead, but he came back to the ranch a couple of years later and learned the colt they were going to give him was now worth over \$1 million. Why? He was in the bloodline of a champion.



In Numbers 13, the Israelites sent twelve spies into the Promised Land. Ten of the spies forgot God's covenant; they forgot their bloodline. Joshua and Caleb kept focus. They were ready to follow God to victory. Christ died once for all. In doing so He established a new covenant. Hebrews 10:4 explains that all other sacrifices fall short, only the blood of Jesus can take away sin. Colossians 1:13 promises that God "delivered **Gill** out of the power of darkness, and translated **him** into the kingdom of the Son of His love." My life is different because of what Jesus did. 1Peter 2:9 says, "**Gill** is a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that **Gill** may show forth the excellencies of Him who called **him** out of darkness into His marvelous light." Does that sound like we are second class citizens?

We give the devil far too much credit. Our biggest battle is not outside but rather on the inside; it is the battle for our mind. Remember, the devil was defeated 2,000 years ago. It is not the devil's goal to get me to sin. I will just repent and get back on track. Rather he wants to change the way I think. If he can control my thoughts, he can control my destiny. You see thoughts produce actions. Actions form habits. Habits establish character. Character determines destiny.

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, "**Gill** is not to be anxious in anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, **Gill** is to let **his** requests be made known to God. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard **Gill's** heart and thoughts in Christ Jesus." God's peace comes as I allow His Word to direct my thoughts. 2Corinthians 5:17 promises that the old has passed away. I can live in the victory of a life made new. I am in the line of a champion.

1Peter 1:18-19 tells us we were redeemed by the blood. Today that has become little more than a religious cliché but to Paul's readers it meant much more. Redeemed was a term from the slave market. They knew it meant rescued from a life of misery and certain death and set free to live the life God meant for them.

According to Revelations 12:10, the devil is the accuser. What about God? We are told in Romans 8:33-34, "Who could bring a charge against **Gill**, because **he** is one of God's elect? It is God who justifies **Gill**. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and more than that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God and makes intercession for **Gill**." Because of Jesus's blood, we are free from condemnation. Colossians 1:19-20 tells us we have peace through the blood. When I need peace, I need to remember the blood. Revelations 12:11 (NKJV) says, "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." We need both parts: what Jesus did on the cross and what we do by our words.

Being in the bloodline does not guarantee a champion. We must grow into a champion. Whether it be in sports, apprentice for a trade or any skill, we must be trained and practice. It is the process of Tell/Show/ Do. We recently hired a new employee and had to take her through an extensive training process to learn all of the details of our business.

1. Tell – Training starts by telling the person what is expected, what must be done. In our spiritual walk, the Bible is our training manual. Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV) tells us, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword." God provides the direction and wisdom that we need.
2. Show – After telling what is needed, we need to demonstrate the actions. We need pastors, leaders and godly friends in our lives to live out the Christian walk for us to follow. In 1Corinthians 11:1 (NKJV) Paul makes a remarkable declaration, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." He understood the need for not just preaching the Gospel, but also living it out in front of those he taught.
3. Do – Before a new skill is really ours, we must practice, we must "do it". That means incorporating it into daily living. For daily living Philippians 4:9 (NIV) says, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."
4. Coach – The final step is we need correction and accountability. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus instructs us to "make disciples". He isn't just looking for numbers; He wants dedicated followers who are learning and growing. We must be teachable as well as accountable not only to God but to whomever He establishes over us.

To reach a goal takes focus. I recently read "No Easy Day" about Seal Team 6 and the killing of Osama ben Laden. That operation took planning, training, and focus. What I focus on becomes magnified in my life. If I focus on the negative, it will get bigger. If I focus on God's blessings, they will be also be magnified.

Did you know that I can foretell the future? There is nothing magical about it. If you don't change, if you don't focus, your future will look a lot like your past. The important question is does that give you a warm, contented feeling or does it strike terror?

Where should I have my focus?

1. Focus on Christ: Hebrews 12:2 commands us to “look unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” If I focus on sin, it gets bigger. If I focus on Jesus, He gets bigger.
2. Focus on others: Luke 19:10 tells us Jesus came to seek and save the lost. If my focus is on me, “I want, I need, I feel”, how can I be a positive influence in the world?
3. Focus on the power of God: When David faced Goliath, he needed that focus. In the natural, he would have said, “Who am I kidding? This rock isn’t big enough!” (1Samuel 17) But he knew it wasn’t about his slingshot but the power of God working in and through him.

Let me leave you today with one last Scripture. The doormat in front of our house proclaims Joshua 24:15 (NKJV): “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” When you were born again, you were born into a new bloodline, that of a champion. Are you going to live like the world and become a plow horse or will you choose to serve the Lord, live by His leading and experience His victory as a champion?

47: The Burden Bag

Do I need to change? Of course I do. The problem is I cannot change myself. I can only change by the grace of God. I need His power working in me. That process of change is a lifelong journey. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that it is faith in Christ that makes me right with God, not the good things I am trying to do.



I have everything I need, but it comes as a seed that I need to water with the Word so that it grows and pushes out the unrighteousness in my life. Isaiah 61:3 (NIV) describes us as “oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of His splendor.” Oh yea, I want to display His splendor.

Religion gives us rules and regulations, but it deals only with externals. It doesn't get down to the real issues in my life. Jesus had trouble with the religious people of His day. In Matthew 23:27 He described them as white washed tombs. It is not religion that I need, it is intimacy with God that will enable me to fulfill my call. Romans 5:1 tells us we have peace with God through Jesus. It is only when I take hold of that peace that I will begin to enjoy the journey.

Often we each carry what could be called a “Burden Bag”, carrying our past failures and sin. What is in your bag? In Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV) Jesus declares, “My yoke is easy, My burden is light.” If I am burdened by a heavy load, I haven't gotten yoked up to the right partner. Joyce Meyers described a time that God spoke to her: “How are you going to get rid of this sin?” Joyce replied, “I'm going to surrender it at the cross and receive the restoration that comes from Jesus.” “When are you going to do that?” “Oh, I need to feel guilty for a bit longer.” Are we trying to pay for our sin through guilt? Jesus's sacrifice is just as good today as it will be 4 days from now. He doesn't need my help. He doesn't need me to add my works to His grace.

John 8:36 (NIV) tells us, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” “But I don't feel free.” Are we going to believe our feelings or believe God's Word? 2Corinthians 10:5 commands that we cast down everything that exalts itself above the Word. Couple that with Philippians 3:13-14 in which we are told to press toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. If I press through the feelings, I can be free from the power of sin, shame and guilt, free from people pleasing, free from the fear of rejection. I am free to move forward, free to fail, free to enjoy life, free to like myself. One thing I have learned over many years: where ever I go, there I am. I can never get away from me so I had better learn to be happy to be me.

Zechariah 3:1-5 is a fascinating passage. In it Joshua the high priest stands before God in filthy rags that represent the righteousness of his own deeds while Satan throws accusations at him. Finally the Lord rebukes Satan and commands that the filthy rags be removed and replaced by fine clothing representing the righteousness given to us by God.

In Christ that is me. My righteousness is like filthy rags. But when I put my faith in Him, I receive His righteousness. Such a deal!

Isaiah 61:10 (NIV) says, “For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” When I first get it, that robe of righteousness may be too big, and I may spend a lifetime growing into it, but it is already mine. The devil can’t take it. 2Corinthians 5:21 promises, “For Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on **Gill’s** behalf; so that in Him **Gill** might become the righteousness of God.” Maybe I don’t always act like it? Well, I’m growing into it. A year from now, 10 years from now it will fit better.

Romans 8:17 says we are heirs of God. John 1:12 declares we are sons and daughters of God. 1Peter 2:9 describes us as members of a royal priesthood. A king walks with attitude. As a king I am called to rule over:

1. My thoughts. 2Corinthians 10:5 commands that I take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
2. My emotions. 2Timothy 1:7 tells me I have not received a spirit of fear but of power, love and self-control. When anger wants to rise up, I need to go to James 1:20 (NKJV): “For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Luke 6:36 (NKJV) commands, “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” Forgiveness is the greatest sign that I rule over my emotions.
3. My fleshly desires. Romans 6:11-14 tells me I am dead to sin and alive to God. I can now live in the freedom of God’s grace.

“Be all that you can be, in the Army.” (Our grandson, Chris, followed that motto and serves in the Army. We are very proud of him, but that is not the point here.) Be all God wants you to be in the army of God. How do I do what is right? It starts by thinking right. Matthew 7:13-14 says I must enter through the narrow gate. Guess what: The burden bag won’t fit through. Put down the burden bag and step into true freedom.

48: The Best Gift I Can Give Myself

A quote from an unknown source says, “Forgive your enemies. It’ll drive them crazy.” We are going to focus on one of the most important subjects of our Christian walk: forgiveness.

I will not let the past determine my future. How I handle hurt determines how I will move forward. I may have had a friend who wronged me, a parent who abused me, or a mate who betrayed me. The key is forgiveness: nothing is more difficult, nothing is more essential.



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What is God’s attitude toward us? Romans 8:1 says there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. 1John 1:9 promises that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God is all about reconciliation, restoration and forgiveness. Romans 4:8 (NIV) says, “Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.” Colossians 2:13-14 from The Message puts it this way: “When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant cancelled and nailed to Christ’s cross.” I remember the day we paid off the loan on our house and received the mortgage back stamped: Paid in full. On the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished.” The payment was complete.

If God has forgiven me how can I not forgive others? In the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:14-15), Jesus instructs us to pray, “Forgive us our debts AS we forgive our debtors.” God, forgive me to the extent I am willing to forgive others. Don’t like that? Maybe you want to tear that out of your Bible. You will have to tear out quite a bit. Jesus says the same thing in five places in the Gospels. If He says something once, I want to listen. If He says it twice, I’m really going to pay attention. FIVE TIMES: Matthew 6:12, 14-15, Matthew 18:35, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:37 and Luke 11:4.

We have often heard the story of the prodigal son. The son takes his inheritance and wastes it on wine, women and song and finds himself destitute feeding the pigs. He comes to his senses and goes back to his father to ask forgiveness and his father welcomes him back and throws a party in his honor. The part of the parable that is often overlooked is the older brother. In Luke 15:25-30 we see a typical picture of unforgiveness. But the interesting thing is that the brother’s attitude didn’t stop the party. Your unforgiveness will not change that other person. He has probably gone on about his life and is oblivious to the impact he has had on you. But that unforgiveness continues to eat away at you like an acid. The only one who is happy is the devil. Get over it. It’s not easy, but life is not all about you.

Let's look at the signs of unforgiveness. To do that we will look at the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. If you are not familiar with the full story, you can read it in Luke 15:25-30.

- Unforgiveness keeps score. The older brother whines, "All these years I've served you." Peter was doing that in Matthew 18:21, "How many times must I forgive? Seven times?" Jesus corrected him, "Seventy times seven times." 1Corinthians 13:5 warns, "Love doesn't keep count." Our flesh wants to keep dragging things up from the past and the result is the list of offenses gets longer and longer, the bondage stronger and stronger.
- Unforgiveness has a superior attitude. "I've never transgressed your command." The older brother is saying, "I'm the good one and he's bad."
- Unforgiveness is a complainer. "You never did anything for me." In unforgiveness we see only negative, not positive.
- Unforgiveness has a martyr complex. "I did all the work." This is an exaggeration, of course, but the hurt and bitterness blinds us.
- Unforgiveness brings division. The older brother doesn't refer to "my brother" but rather "your son." Unforgiveness causes us to withdraw and see the world as "them" against "me".

"But they never asked for forgiveness!" That doesn't matter. I once had a boss who said glowing things about me to my face and then cut me down behind my back. The result was I lost my job. Several years later I was walking into the grocery store just as he was walking out. I said, "Hi" and continued into the store. Once inside the Lord stopped me and said, "You haven't forgiven him, have you?" "Darn right I haven't!" (pause) "Well?" (longer pause) Finally through clenched teeth I said, "I forgive him." "Again." "I forgive him." It took a few times but eventually it took root in my spirit. A few years later I saw him again in a restaurant and I was able to go up to him and say, "It's good to see you. I hope all is going well for you." And I meant it. There was no sign of repentance on his part but now I was free.

When we choose unforgiveness, we choose bitterness. Our son and his fiancé were killed by a drunk driver. At that time we faced the opportunity to adopt a victim mentality. We went to Ephesians 4:31-32 where we are told we must forgive one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven us. Hebrews 12:15 warns us to see to it that no one misses the grace of God, that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble defiling many. We can miss God's grace through unforgiveness. That root can go down deep. The longer I hold on, the deeper it goes. It affects every aspect of my life: relationships, job, and spiritual walk. Ultimately it will defile those around me.

OK, sure. We know we need to forgive. But there is a difference between knowing and doing. Here are six things to keep in mind in order to step into forgiveness:

1. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. Ephesians 6:12 tells us, "For *Gill's* wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the spiritual

- hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Don’t give Satan an open door through unforgiveness.
2. Forgiveness is not forgetting. We will always remember the death of our son, but we can still choose to forgive. Healing cannot occur until forgiveness takes place. Until then Satan has the advantage.
 3. Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. Without forgiveness I am still hooked to them, still chained to the past. Do I keep a doll up on a shelf to remind me of that person and take it down periodically to beat on it? Who is that hurting? “You don’t understand how much so-and-so hurt me.” And they continue to hurt you until you let go. I don’t forgive for their sake but for mine. I will live with the consequences of their actions. It is my choice whether I will live in bitterness or freedom.
 4. Change the channel. When thoughts of unforgiveness and bitterness come in, don’t grab the popcorn and settle back in your recliner. With that approach, is there any wonder you are bitter and depressed? 2Corinthians 10:5 warns us to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”. Choose where your thoughts will focus.
 5. Forgiveness does not necessarily entail reconciliation. It is a good thing but not always possible. An abused wife can forgive but not reconcile to her husband. Reconciliation requires reestablishing trust through repentance, rehabilitation and restitution by the offending party. (That is an important process to remember when we are the offender: repentance, rehabilitation and restitution.) Unforgiveness by the offended party only keeps them bound to that hurt. Unforgiveness is a prison. Let God be the debt collector so you can get on with your life.
 6. Don’t wait for them. Jesus didn’t wait for you. Romans 5:8 says that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. When we choose to forgive, Satan loses his power in that area. At the cross, Jesus defeated Satan’s power. Let’s not give it back through unforgiveness. Rom 12:21 commands, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Here is the challenge: Take the time to recall each of those who have hurt you. It might be father, mother, brother or sister. Perhaps a girlfriend, boyfriend or spouse. Maybe a friend, employer or another employee. We may have to forgive God if we have felt He didn’t come through in a way that we wanted. Most certainly we need to forgive ourselves for poor choices that have brought unwanted consequences. Now, pray this prayer: “Lord, I forgive each of those who have hurt me. I choose not to hold any of these things against them any longer. I thank you for setting me free from the bondage of bitterness. I ask You to bless each of them with the fullness of your love in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Maybe you felt a burden lift as you said that prayer; maybe you felt a warmth flood over you; maybe you felt nothing. The feeling is not the important thing, the decision is. Corrie Ten Boom, a survivor of the Holocaust death camps, wrote, “Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was me.” Don’t live in bondage to that hurt any

longer. Do yourself a favor, step into freedom. The best gift you can give yourself is to forgive.

49: Run to Win

We give the devil far too much credit. Our biggest battle is not outside but inside. We need to develop a winner's mentality. I am here to challenge your thinking. We can't afford to defend small or ungodly thinking. We need to be open to Holy Spirit's guidance if we are to grow.

My objective is not to make anyone feel bad about themselves. We are not talking about acceptance by God or my value to Him but growth. Joyce Meyer says, "I must address my thoughts before I can address my behavior." Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) warns, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." What I think of myself defines my life. I read about an interview with a tattoo artist. The interviewer commented on what he considered to be a negative tattoo that said, "Born Loser." The tattoo artist responded, "That tattoo is in heart before on skin." Ephesians 4:24 tells us to put on the new man. In other words we are to put on a new way of thinking.



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I must think like a winner before I can expect to be a winner. The Israelites came out of Egypt, but they still thought like slaves, like grasshoppers. In Numbers 13:33 (NKJV) they whined, "We were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." Joshua and Caleb had a different mindset and so they spoke differently. In Numbers 13:30 (NKJV) Caleb said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." Those are a winner's words.

Our grandson played T-ball last year. After a couple of innings I asked, "What's the score?" Can you believe they didn't even keep score! That is not real life. Every day my company sales record tells me whether I won or lost. Every month my checkbook and credit cards tell me whether I got ahead or fell behind. We must run to win. 1Corinthians 9:24-27 says, "Don't you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run like that, **Gill**, that you may win. Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but **Gill** an incorruptible. I therefore run like that, as not uncertainly. I fight like that, as not beating the air, but I beat my body and bring it into submission, for fear that after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected."

A winning attitude shows character, inner strength and commitment. No one starts a marriage or a business with the expectation of failure. Not everybody will finish, but Jesus promises if you endure to the end, you will be saved. (Matthew 24:13, Matthew 10:22, Revelations 3:10) We need discipline to stand firm to the end. Our son Paul was in competitive swimming for several years. He found it fun when he was winning, but once

he was not coming out on top he lost interest. Mental attitude has got to be the starting point. We need a “checkup from the neck up.” We need the right thoughts and the right words.

Just as winning reflects an inner attitude and belief system, so does quitting. Do you know those who always quit: marriage, job, trying to overcome habits or addictions? Trials are like a mirror. I may have a false belief about my physique: 6-pack abbs, wavy dark hair, etc. but the mirror reveals truth. My response to trials reveals what I truly believe on the inside.

Do you recognize that misery is portable? People talk about going on vacation to “get away.” Really? I bring me wherever I go. There is a story of an elder sitting at the city gate many centuries ago. A family came up to the gate leading a wagon which obviously held all their possessions. They asked the elder, “We are considering settling here. What are the people like?” “What were they like in the city you came from?” “They were a miserable lot: negative, gossiping, cruel. We couldn’t wait to leave.” “The people here are just like those you left. I suggest you move on.” A short time later another family approached him and asked the same question. His initial response was the same: “What were they like in the city you came from?” “They were wonderful: kind, supportive, generous. It was so hard to leave.” “The people here are just like those you left. We welcome you.” Misery is portable. So is joy.

Negativity has a profound effect on our lives:

1. Negativity reflects inner defeat. In Judges 6, Gideon’s negativity reflected a mind set of defeat and despair. In Exodus 3, God speaks to Moses from the burning bush and Moses’s response is negativity and defeat. In 1Kings 19, Elijah comes to God on Mt. Horeb downcast and fearful. In each case, God gave them a picture of hope to counter the negativity.
2. Negativity chooses my friends for me. Positive people don't want negative people around. “Birds of a feather flock together” is not a Biblical quote but it certainly it is reality. Proverbs 13:20 (NLT) warns, “Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.”
3. Negativity distorts the truth. Have you heard of the fellow who fell asleep on his sofa and his kids spread Limburger cheese on his mustache? He woke up and sniff..sniff, “The living room stinks”. He went into the kitchen and sniff..sniff, “The kitchen stinks.” He stepped out onto the patio and sniff..sniff, “The whole world stinks!” If I let negativity take root in my life then the whole world stinks.
4. Negativity stops the work of Holy Spirit. In Mark 6, the people of Nazareth were critical of Jesus because they knew Him growing up. As a result He could not do many miracles there.
5. Negativity contaminates the atmosphere. In Matthew 9:25 Jesus was called upon to heal a young girl. When He arrived at the house the first thing He did was put out all except His disciples and the parents. He needed an atmosphere of faith to work in.

God is not ordinary; He is not run-of-the-mill. I am made in His image. I need to allow the blood of Jesus to change my outlook, my thoughts and my future. Don't give up. Live in accordance with Hebrews 12:1: run with endurance, run to win.

50: Get Ahold of Hope

There really is something worse than being poor, sick or in jail. It is living without hope. We need to get ahold of hope. The Israelite nation was delivered out of slavery in Egypt. They saw God perform great miracles, even parting the Red Sea. Yet, when they came up to the border of the Promised Land, they faltered. They had not grasped the vision of possessing the land God promised them.



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I am not going to spend my life talking about the Promised Land; I am going to go in and possess it. I have decided that I am going to have everything Jesus died for me to have. Sure, that is a big goal but Ephesians 3:20 says that God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that **Gill** can ask or think, ACCORDING to the power that works in **Gill** (emphasis added).” What is the source of energy in my life? I had better not be looking for energy from Starbucks or Red Bull or meth. My energy does not come from what I smoke, snort or shoot. I seek to be plugged into the power of Holy Spirit.

Our Christian walk cannot be just a Sunday morning ritual, fulfilling our “obligation” for an hour once a week. If we want constant victory, we need to take God out of our “emergency only” box and invite Him into our everyday lives on a minute by minute basis.

If we believe the right thing, we can live the way. God transferred all of my sin onto Jesus's record. It was put on the MasterCard of heaven. Romans 4:8 promises, “Blessed is **Gill** because the Lord will by no means charge **him** with sin.” The more I focus on past sin the more I am drawn back to that behavior. Does a butterfly consider himself a recovering caterpillar? If I stay focused on my righteousness in Christ, victory is inevitable. The devil can't stop me.

Have you ever had your cell phone battery go dead? When that happened to me, my wife complained, “I’ve been calling and calling but you didn’t answer.” Well, God is calling but if I am not plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit, I’m not getting the call. Is your battery down to 10% in the red and dropping? Better get to the power source. God is working in me energizing me.

I remember an incident when my wife and I were dating. I was driving a 1961 VW Bug. It had no gas gauge but it had a reserve tank so that when the main tank went dry, you flipped a lever by the accelerator to reserve and you had another 30 miles you could drive before empty. We were driving across the Bay Bridge in San Francisco when the car started to cough and stop. I told her, “We’re out of gas. I need you to flip to reserve.” She

didn't know about the reserve switch. Well, all she heard was "Out of gas" and she pictured traffic jams, tow trucks and huge fines. I flipped to reserve myself and on we went, but it is a reminder that we need power to keep going. Without it, the fun of serving God becomes labor. Do you know how to plug into Holy Spirit power?

It is not something out there that will make life better but it is what is going on inside my head. When I need to recharge, where am I going to go? Red Bull? Philippians 2:13 in the Message says, "Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God. That energy is *God's* energy, an energy deep within you." 1Cor 13:8 (NIV) reminds us, "Love never fails."

Guilt is tiring. Trying to live with religious guilt and condemnation instead of grace will wear you out. There is not enough power in guilt to get me to live right. But grace brings energy and drive. The world is trying to find the right drink, the right pill to energize. The reality is that power, energy and grace come only from God. Acts 1:8 promises God's *dunamus*, His dynamite power to the believer. Embrace the Word of God and receive it.

On a recent trip we were on a number of airplanes. An airplane flies only when it has enough energy (speed) and the right attitude (flaps, wing position, etc.). God's Word will lift you above the circumstances. Allow His Word to energize you and correct your attitude so you won't crash and burn.

Isaiah 43:18-19 declares, "**Gill** must not remember the former things, and **he** must not consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing. It springs forth now. Doesn't **Gill** know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert." Get your mind off the past. Think about God's blessing. He is doing a new thing. Thinking about the past pulls us right back there. The Israelites had a bad attitude when they faced the Promised Land. It wasn't the Cananites or the Hivites or the Jebusites. It wasn't something "out there". Their attitude stunk. You will never live in the Promised Land with a bad attitude. Nelson Mandela said, "If I am thinking small, I cannot do big things."

Who do I blame for where I am today? An abusive father? Over stressed mother? Corrupt politicians? As long as I blame others I have no power to fix it. According to Bishop TD Jakes, "If you are disciplined in your perspective you will be victorious in your outcome."

I cannot erase failures from my past. There is no rewind button. So how do I start over? It begins by admitting my mistake and experiencing God's forgiveness. "If only..." Yea, I know. We all have regrets. Romans 3:23 tells us we have all sinned. Through one man, Adam, sin entered the world. We were all born prone to mess up. And sometimes it seems like I will pay the consequences for messing up for the rest of my life. We need to remember we are justified children of God. Psalm 103:12 promises, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed **Gill's** transgressions from **him**." Think of sin like a stain that keeps coming back, but Jesus's blood is the eternal stain cleaner.

I love Psalm 118:6 (NKJV): “God is on my side.” When I get discouraged or frustrated I go back to that verse. The Israelites let their future be determined by their past. They had a slave mentality, a poor self-image, a grasshopper mentality. They wanted to go back to Egypt, because they had no positive vision for their life. They knew where they had been and they knew where they were and they didn’t like either one. But they had no vision of where they were going.

We talk about our problems way too much. We need to glance at our circumstances but stare at God. How can I overcome any bondage, addiction, or broken past? Get ahold of hope; get ahold of vision. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith gives substance to things hoped for. Faith is important, but it first must have hope to work with. Without hope, faith is aimless. With hope, faith can produce our future. In Romans 4:18 we are told the story of Abraham and how he continued to hope for the fulfillment of God’s promise even when his situation looked hopeless. Hebrews 12:2 tells us how Jesus faced crucifixion: for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.

If you have no reason to hope, still hope. If you don’t have a positive vision for your future, go to the book of hope, the Bible. Look at the Word and say, “That can happen to me.” And if you get ahold of hope it can.

