

Note: All Scripture has a corresponding slide which are not noted here because they are assumed.

## 1 Introduction

“How can I be happy?”

“Where can I find peace?”

“I want joy; where can I find it?”

“I need some stability in my life.”

“I need to forgive, and I want to be forgiven.”

“Where is love? Where is hope?”

These are all questions that many, if not all, of us have asked at times. The answer leads us to an interesting passage in John 14:1-5.

**“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be. 4 And you know the way where I am going.”** [This is the key verse.] **5 Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?”**

As a sidenote, notice in verse 1 how Jesus tells the disciples to believe in God. God is unchanging truth. He is, above everything and everyone else, 100% reliable, 100% faithful, 100% trustworthy. Is there anyone else that we can totally and forever depend on? Politicians? Celebrities? Popular Christian leaders? No. These qualities to this degree are unique. Only God has them.

But then Jesus says that we should believe in Him in the same way that we believe in God. Here, Jesus is putting Himself into the same category as God. Jesus is saying that He also is 100% reliable, 100% faithful, 100% trustworthy. Here, Jesus is saying that He is God. But I diverge.

What we are focusing on here is verse 5, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?”

Notice that Thomas is asking for directions. He is asking for steps, for a process. He wants a “How to...”

But look at Jesus’ answer in verse 6, “Jesus said to him, **‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.’**”

Jesus doesn’t tell us how to reach the ultimate goal. He tells us that He is the ultimate goal.

- Jesus didn’t tell us the steps to being happy. He told us that to be happy, we should be like Him.
- Jesus didn’t tell us the steps to having peace. He told us that to have peace, we should be like Him.
- Jesus didn’t tell us the steps to being filled with joy. He told us that to be filled with joy, we should be like Him.

Jesus didn’t say, “Let me show you the way.” Jesus said, “**I am** the way...”

And this is the foundation of this entire study. The foundation is knowing who Jesus is and why He did what He did. It is only by knowing these two things that we can then imitate Him.

Why imitate Jesus?

There are many reasons. Here’s one.

You want to help people. If your children imitate you, you'll be satisfied that they'll be OK. You want to do good, but why do you have to imitate Jesus? Just do good things and you'll be fine. That's all that really matters.

But consider this passage.

Matthew 7:17-20

**17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.**

**18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.**

**19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

**20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.**

Did you catch what that says? What you do flows out of who you are. A good tree will produce good fruit and a bad tree will produce bad fruit. The quality of the tree is what determines the quality of the fruit. Yes, people can fake things, but over the long-haul, people will act the way that they truly are.

In verse 20, "You will know them by their fruits." A person's fruits, i.e., what they do and say, will tell you what kind of person they are on the inside. The fruits do not come first. Character comes first.

Realize this, God's primary work is not so much what you do. God's primary work is what you are. It is shaping who you are. It is shaping what you are.

But how do we develop excellent character? Do we read, "Excellent Character for Dummies"? No, we read the Bible. Consider Proverbs 29:19, "**A slave will not be instructed by words alone; for though he understands, there will be no response.**" Words alone are generally not enough. We need examples. A child does not primarily learn from what you say; she learns primarily from what you do. If you use profanity but tell your child not to curse, what do you think—will that child use profanity or not? Our greatest and most perfect example is God.

We imitate Jesus because that is how our hearts change. That is how our attitudes change. That is how we learn to forgive, to show mercy, to be kind, to be patient. You can go wrong imitating a celebrity. You can go wrong imitating a sports hero. You can even go wrong imitating your parents. But you can never go wrong imitating Jesus Christ.

God created us in His image. The closer we come to that image the more joy we will have. The more peace we will have. The more we will forgive, show mercy, be kind, and be patient.

When a car manufacturer wants a new car, one of the first things that they do is to design that car. They will then build a prototype and ensure that that car is everything they want it to be. If it is a sedan, then it is expected to be driven on a road and, really, nowhere else. That is its expected behavior. If it is truck, then it is expected that it could be driven over rough terrain and hold up just fine. Then every vehicle that is of that model will be built to that same concept and image.

But what happens if you drive a sedan where it wasn't built to go?

[Slide – Car in woods]

They oftentimes don't make it.

It is the same with us. We were created in the image of God. In that way, we are models of God. Therefore, we are expected to behave like God in His character. We are to be righteous, kind, gentle, loving, joyful, and so on.

[Slide – List of sins]

But when we deviate from this by sinning, we wreck our lives. We leave the path that we were designed for and sin tears us apart. We become something that God didn't intend. It's not God's fault; it's ours.

How do we escape? By coming back to God. By becoming more like God. By becoming the person that God created us to be and leaving behind the wreck that we made ourselves.

Philippians 3:13, **"Brothers and sisters, I do not regard myself as having taken hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead"**

[Slide – Car on road]

How do you forget things in your past that depress and weigh you down? Reach forward to what lies ahead. Press on to God. Look through the windshield and not focus on the rearview mirror. That is why the windshield is so much bigger. It is because that is where you should be looking most of the time. Leave the dirt and the mud behind and press on to the glory that is ahead.

Psalms 119:67, **"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word."**

Notice what this verse is saying. At one point in his life, David was afflicted. Things weren't going well. It could have been his finances or his health or his emotions; we don't know. But what was the cause? He had gone astray. He was in sin. But he learned from that. Now he learns and keeps God's word. Of course, this doesn't mean that every time something goes wrong it is because we sinned. Sometimes things go wrong, and it isn't our fault. Jesus was mocked and insulted yet He was perfect. But if things are going wrong, don't discount that it might be your fault.

Why spend an entire seminar studying Jesus in depth? How does that really help? Why not just simply skim Jesus' character qualities and spend the rest of the time on application?

Here is a painting by Caspar David Friedrich. It is called, in English, "Winter Landscape with Church." Let's look at it quickly.

[Slide]



[Slide]

What did you see?

With a quick glance, you see a bleak, cold wintery landscape. There are a few trees and some boulders. A heavy mist shrouds the background nearly obscuring a church. It does not do anything for you, and so you move on.

But now let's look a lot more closely. Let's study it a little more.

[Slide]



Here leaning against the large rock there is a man, and he appears to be praying. You follow his gaze and see a crucifix in the trees.

[Slide]



The man is praying to Jesus. He is a Christian.

[Slide]

Furthermore, you see two crutches in the snow, one dropped further away and one closer.



What is going on here?

This man was coming from a cold, harsh wilderness. He was crippled. Perhaps, metaphorically, crippled by sin. He sees Jesus on the cross hanging in trees. But not just any trees, evergreen trees. Evergreen trees here represent life, eternal life because even in the harshest of circumstances, they remain green. Jesus is our hope, our only real hope even in the harshest of circumstances.

As the man gets closer to Jesus, he drops one crutch. As he gets closer still, he drops the other crutch. The closer he gets to Jesus, the more Jesus has freed him from his crippling sin.

The man is leaning against a large rock. Jesus is our rock. He is our foundation, our solid rock. This man has found a refuge in Jesus from the harsh world. He has Jesus the rock covering his back, and Jesus our hope in front of him. It also appears that Jesus is looking down on him.

Notice, too, that all around him is a stark, cruel and baren landscape. This is the world. But with Jesus, he is nestled into a safe oasis. There is life here. He is protected from the harshness of the outside world.

[Slide – Main picture again]

In the background is a church. Churches in that time oftentimes represented eternal life or Heaven. The man could see eternal life, he could see his eternity with God in Heaven, but he wasn't quite there yet.

Notice how the trees, jut upwards in a similar pattern as the church. Jesus is our promise of eternal life. Both the trees and the church point to the warm, peach-colored sky above. That is the man's ultimate destination. From the bleak, cold world with its crippling sin to the warmth and beauty of eternal life.

[Slide]

Friedrich's prior and companion piece to this work is called "Winter Landscape." This puts our first painting in context.



We see probably the same man. But now we have this immense feeling of pathos, of sadness. The man has his crutches but before him there is no hope, only a dark, barren horizon. There is no dawn, no sun. There are many tree stumps indicating life that is now and forever gone. The many tree stumps give the impression of a graveyard. The man is next to a gnarly, lifeless tree that is hollow inside and nearly falling over. It offers no shelter, no hope for this lonely man. This is the world.

[Slide – Both pictures]

Now back to the painting that was done after "Winter Landscape." This same man, once desperate, has found his refuge in Jesus. And not just present refuge, but eternal life also. Life without Jesus is despairing, it is futile, and lonely. Life with Jesus has not only present peace but, also, future hope.

“Winter Landscape” is our life before salvation. “Winter Landscape with Church” is after we come to Jesus.

What do these two painting have to do with studying the Bible and imitating Jesus? Everything.

If you looked at “Winter Landscape with Church” quickly, you probably didn’t get much out of it. If you were in the National Gallery in London and you saw this painting, you might move onto the next display and think nothing more of it. But if you take your time, and study it, see how much you can get out of it? How much depth there is. And when you put it in context with its companion piece, it brings out even more.

Years ago, I saw this painting in the National Gallery in London and it transfixed me. I stood in front of it and stared at it more than any other painting in the gallery. It moved me. When I came back home to NJ, I ordered a copy of this painting, framed it, and now it is hanging in my living room.

These two paintings illustrate how we should study our Bible; how we should study Jesus. We shouldn’t read a chapter quickly so that we can feel that we’ve done our daily duty of reading God’s word and then go onto the next chapter. We shouldn’t read about Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, get it over with, and then on to Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee and then on to Jesus calling Peter and Andrew and then on to Jesus teaching in the synagogue and then on to...

No, we should stop, study that story, be transfixed by it, see details, put it in context, love it, and display it in our heart. The Bible is not a book that we read so that we can consider ourselves to be good Christians. We read the Bible so that it can change our lives, so that we can become more like our Creator. This is what we want to do in this class.

Today’s culture and technology can tear us away from that deep study of God. We can too easily get caught up in issues. The politics of abortion. “He was the best president ever.” “He was the worse president ever.” Is LGBTQ going to destroy our society or is LGBTQ a ministry field where the church can have a positive influence in people’s lives. What should we do about racism? How much should politics and religion intertwine? We shout. We have passions about these. And these are issues that we should care about and do something about. But have they grabbed too much of our attention? Has God been pushed to the background?

With Twitter and SnapChat and TikTok and other quick, attention-grabbing technology, we are losing our ability to meditate, to sit and focus on one story, one incident, one verse long enough to pull substance out of it. God is opening His mouth to tell us something, but before He can utter a word, we have swiped onto the next thing.

[Slide – Verse]

**“Be still, and know that I am God.”** Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

“Be still.” Stop. Listen. Think. Ponder.

Devices will tell you what other people think. Devices will let you watch other people’s lives. God wants to tell you how you should think. God wants you to live your life.

When was the last time that you were alone with God, focusing on Him, listening to Him, deeply meditating on what He says in the Bible? When was the last time that you did a Bible study? Have you ever done a Bible study? If not, is that to your shame?

You will not imitate Jesus from watching a two-minute video clip. You will imitate Jesus when you spend time, much time, quality time, meditative time, with Him.

[Slide – No Devices/Praying]

“Turn off that device, and know that I am God.”

[Slide – Quote]

Let these words by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola speak to us:

“Let some holy ambition invade our souls, so that, dissatisfied with mediocrity, we shall eagerly desire the highest things and shall toil with all our strength to obtain them, since we may if we wish.”

If the desire is there, grace will assuredly follow.

[Slide]

## 2 A person; not a project

### 2.1 Scripture – Mark 5:21-24, 35-43

Mark 5:21-24, 35-43

**21** When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. **22** One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet **23** and implored Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.” **24** And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him.

[We’re going to skip the passage about the woman with the hemorrhage.]

**35** While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, “Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?” **36** But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.” **37** And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. **38** They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. **39** And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.” **40** They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child’s father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. **41** Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” [pronounced Tally-Ta Kum] (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). **42** Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. **43** And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.

The parallel passage is in Luke 8:40-56.

Jesus had just been in the Gerasenes [pronounced Jer-a-scenes] where He had exorcized a man of a large number of demons who collectively called themselves “Legion.” The demons then entered a herd of pigs who proceeded to jump off of a cliff and into the Sea of Galilee.

[Slide – Sea of Galilee]

The Gerasenes are on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is also called the Lake of Gennesaret. The eastern side of the Sea of Galilee is the Gentile side. After the Gerasenes, Jesus went to “the other side.” Many commentators think that Jesus ended up near Capernaum. The western side is the Jewish side. Thus, in this same day Jesus ministered both to the Gentiles and to the Jews. Jesus saw no superiority in one type of people over another.

Fairly quickly, a large crowd gathered. They might have seen Jesus coming and were gathering before He even got there. Jesus, never one to put anyone off, stayed with the crowd. Jesus didn’t stay just for selfies and to chat. I’m sure that He ministered to the people that were there. And while He was ministering, a synagogue official came up to him. This would have been a lay official. Most likely he was responsible for the physical management of the synagogue building and of the security of the scrolls, the selection and oversight of worship leaders, and of the worship services. Here, this synagogue official is coming to Jesus for His help.

It is interesting that the last time that Mark records Jesus interacting with a synagogue official it is in Mark 3:6. It also had to do with healing, and in that instance, they were trying to kill Him.

Mark 3:1-6

**He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2 They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward!” 4 And He said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. 5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.**

In both cases Jesus the situation was related to a synagogue.

In Mark 3, the event happened in a synagogue with the Pharisees watching. In Mark 5 it was a synagogue official who came to Jesus.

In Mark 3, Jesus healed a man. In Mark 5, Jesus was asked to heal a young girl.

But in Mark 3, the result was that the Pharisees wanted to have Jesus killed. In Mark 5, the result was that the synagogue official wanted to honor Jesus.

What was the difference?

In the first instance, the Pharisees thought that Jesus was going to take something away from them: their congregates, their respect in the community, their position as the top spiritual leader among the Jews. In the second instance, the synagogue official wanted something from Jesus, namely healing for his daughter. How much do we base our friends and enemies on what we can get from them or by what we perceive they may take from us? In one instance we love them for what they give to us and in the other instance we hate them for what they can take from us. Is this right?

Jairus came to Jesus to tell Him that his only daughter was dying. We know that it was his only daughter because the parallel story in Luke 8:41-42, **“And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus’ feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house; 42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the crowds were pressing against Him.”**

Put yourself in Jairus’ shoes. He only has one child, a daughter, who is twelve years old. He says, “My little daughter...” That word “little” just doesn’t mean small. It has a sense of endearment. Jairus loved his daughter. This was his only



daughter; his beloved daughter. And she was dying. But not just dying. She was in the last stage of death. She was at the last point. The Greek phrase means “in her last gasp.” What was this loving father to do?

There was a large crowd there. You see Jairus frantically pushing his way through the crowd. He couldn’t wait and hope that Jesus would walk past him and he’d be able to call out and catch Jesus’ attention. No, he pushed and squeezed and forced his way through the herd of people. “Let me through! Please, I need to get to Jesus! Please, please, let me through!”

[Slide Jairus kneeling before Jesus]

And once he reached Jesus he didn’t hesitate. He immediately fell at Jesus’ feet and he implores, he begs Jesus. “My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.”

You can feel Jairus’ emotions. You can feel his despair; his love for his daughter. He had nowhere else to turn, except to Jesus.

Isn’t that still true today? Can’t we still echo the words of Simon Peter in John 6:68-69, “**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.**”

And likewise, in Psalm 73:25-36, “**Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**”

Those words were true then, they are true now, they will be true forever. Because God does not change, our refuge will never change. In our most painful times. In our most desperate times. Don’t turn to alcohol. Don’t turn to anger, bitterness, and complaining. Turn to Jesus. Push desperately to get to Him. It may not be crowds that you have to push through. Instead, it may be your emotions, your confusion, your anger. But push! Push! Push! Go to Him, and then fall on your knees before Him, and beseech Him.

It is important to note that Jairus’ plea was centered around his daughter. This was all about her. Jairus didn’t say, “Please help me. What am I to do if my daughter dies?” His daughter was the focus. And this made her the object of Jesus’ compassion. How too often do we make ourselves out to be the victim when someone close to us is hurting? That was not Jairus.

Jairus wasn’t even one of Jesus’ disciples, but he had a faith that knew what Jesus could do. “Lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.” His faith was honest and trusting. As a Jew, he knew that Jesus had conflicts with the Jews. But he didn’t come as a Jew. He came as a broken person. A desperate person. And he knew that Jesus would hear him.

When you come to Jesus, don’t try to fool Him by dolling yourself up spiritually. Don’t put on a super spirituality and act like you are something more than you are. You don’t have to. Jesus will take you as you are. Come as the real you with all of your faults, all of your rawness, all of your past. But come to Him. Then let Jesus do the work in your life.

Jairus’ act was simple and straightforward.

- He didn’t clean up his act before coming to Jesus.
- He didn’t first go to the synagogue and make a money offering.
- He didn’t bring gifts to Jesus.

He came as himself, not even as one of Jesus’ disciples. He came with his raw emotions and with his simple faith. His words were simple. But the result... what was the result? Jesus went with him.

Notice that Jesus never ignored the individual, the person, for the crowd. His focus wasn't on numbers. Jesus' focus was on each person standing before Him. This, too, should be the ministry model for most of us. Most of us won't stand before vast crowds and preach to many. Most of us will work with that one person. We'll spend a lot of time with that one person. But don't get discouraged if you aren't bringing large crowds to Jesus. After all, Jesus often worked with one person at a time also.

While on His way, we read the event of the woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years. And Jesus heals her.

Do you see a slight connection between the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage? The woman had a hemorrhage for twelve years and the girl was twelve years old.

[Slide – 12]

In the Bible, the number twelve is associated with perfection, authority, and government. It occurs 187 times in the Bible. Some instances are:

- Jesus spoke in the temple when He was twelve years old.
- There were twelve sons and, therefore, twelve tribes of Israel.
- Jesus called twelve apostles.
- Twelve spies scouted out the Promised Land.
- After Jesus fed the 5,000 there were twelve full baskets left over.
- In Revelation, the Tree of Life will bear twelve types of fruit.
- The high priest's breastplate had twelve stones in it.
- In the book of Revelation:
  - The new Jerusalem will have twelve gates of pearl manned by twelve angels.
  - Twelve precious stones will be its foundation.
  - The church will wear a crown with twelve stars.
  - There will be 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel for a total of 144,000 who will be preserved through the Tribulation and who will preach the Gospel.

And there are many more examples of twelve in the Bible.

So, what does this mean in these two events here in Mark? It could be that because this woman had this hemorrhage for twelve years that it was incurable. It wasn't going to go away on its own and no one could cure it. It took Jesus' authority over health and all creation to heal it. And she was healed perfectly. Verse 29 reads, **“Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.”** “Immediately.” And “Healed.” Two key words that demonstrate Jesus' authority (“Immediately”) and perfection (“Healed”).

[Slide – Jesus with Jairus' daughter]

Then we come to the twelve-year old girl. She was beyond having a physical ailment. She was dead. Can anyone, with their own skills and power, raise someone from the dead? Once again, Jesus displayed His authority over all things and gave this girl life. And... He did it perfectly.

[Slide – Zombie Girl]

But she didn't come back as a zombie and eat the brains of everyone in the room.

[Slide]

She came back as herself before she died. All of the effects of dying: rigor mortis, decay, brain death. All of that was wiped away. Acts 26:8, **“Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?”**

We see here again, authority (she was raised immediately) and perfection (she was healed to the full).

Was this double twelve a coincidence? Maybe. But maybe not. As with all of Jesus’ miracles, He proved His authority, He proved His perfection, He proved that He is the creator, sustainer, and ruler of all governments.

But we got a little ahead of ourselves so let’s get back to our story. Jesus is walking with Jairus to his house.

Verse 35, **“While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, ‘Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?’”**

While Jesus was delayed by the woman with the hemorrhage, the little girl died. So why should Jesus come anymore? Jesus was a healer, but He certainly wasn’t anything beyond that was their reasoning. Jesus could heal, but only God could resurrect.

Jesus was still speaking to the woman with hemorrhage when they arrived. Notice the whirlwind of events this day, and imagine yourself in Jesus’ position. You’d be exhausted.

- 1) First Jesus heals the demon possessed man in the Gerasenes and the now demon filled pigs commit suicide by jumping off of a cliff into the sea of Galilee.
- 2) The crowd tells Jesus to leave.
- 3) He gets close to the other shore and there is already a crowd gathered.
- 4) He barely gets onto the shore and a man rushes through the crowd to get to Him and falls at His feet.
- 5) Jesus goes with this man with the crowd pressing in on Him from all sides.
- 6) A woman with a hemorrhage is healed by Jesus but, just as that ended, another group of men come to Jesus and tell Him that the little girl is dead.
- 7) Then Jesus goes to the house and raises the girl from the dead.

Whew! Talk about an exhausting day. Yet Jesus did it because He cared about people. He didn’t say to Jairus, “You know, why don’t we pick this up tomorrow morning? I need to get some rest. What’s your address? Better yet, here’s My card; call Me in the morning.” Instead, He went.

Once again, place yourself into Jairus’ shoes. He heard that Jesus was coming, so he immediately came to Him and fell at His feet begging that He might come and heal his daughter. On the way there, there is an interruption. Jairus must have been a nervous wreck at this delay. And before Jesus is even finished with this woman, members from Jairus’ house come to them. Maybe Jairus saw them coming. If so, he probably blanched. He might have started shaking. He suspected why they were coming and that all of his efforts went to waste.

His only daughter was dead. How horrible that news was. All of his efforts and this was the outcome. He was shaken to the core.

Verse 36, **“But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.’”**

Jesus looked at Jairus, probably pale as a sheet and said, “Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.” Believe what? The men who brought this news thought that Jesus was just a teacher. Jairus considered Jesus a healer. But to raise someone from the dead?! Only God could do that. Why, indeed, bother Jesus anymore? It was over. Jairus lost.

[Slide]

But then came those words: “Only believe.”

The first part of the phrase “Do not be afraid any longer, only believe” means to immediately stop doing something. Literally it is, “Stop fearing.” It is blunt, but not rude. The second part implies a continuous or continued action, “Be believing.” Continue to believe even in the presence of death. You can paraphrase this as “Immediately stop fearing, stop it right now, but, instead, start believing and go on continuing to believe.”

Notice the connection here. Jesus ties peace with belief. Think in your own life what things you are afraid of.

- Fear of poor health.
- Fear of death.
- Fear of financial ruin.
- Fear of speaking in front of people.

When you think of something that you are afraid of, what comes to your mind the most? Is it God? Or is it the consequences of that situation? I bet that it is the latter. You fear because your eyes are not on God. And your eyes are not on God because you doubt.

Faith leads to confidence.

**Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”**

**Matthew 10:31, “So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” You have fear because you doubt your value to God.**

**John 3:20, “For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” You have fear because you doubt God’s forgiveness.**

**John 12:42, “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue;” You have fear because you doubt that God’s approval is more important than man’s approval.**

**1 Peter 3:14, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,” You have fear because you doubt that doing what is right is more blessed than doing what is comfortable.**

Whatever you fear, do a Bible study on that subject. Peace will only come from God and that by knowing and trusting God.

**Verse 37 “And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James.”**

Why did Jesus allow only those three?

- Maybe it was because He knew that the house would be too small to fit the crowd.
- Maybe it was because He didn’t want any more interruptions.
- Maybe it was because this was an intimate moment with a shaken and grieving father, and He didn’t want it to become a spectacle.

The definite article in this sentence appears only with Peter and not with James and John. Therefore, it is as though these three are like one unit. They are bound together. And we see that in other parts of Scripture. These were the three that appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transformation (Mark 9:2, **“Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves.”**). They were also the three who were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane right before Jesus’ crucifixion (Mark 14:33, **“And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.”**). Jesus brought His three most intimate friends with Him as witnesses to this girl’s resurrection.

Verse 38 **They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39 And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.”**

Jeremiah 9:17-18 says, **“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for the wailing women, that they may come! 18 Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may shed tears and our eyelids flow with water.’”**

And in Amos 5:16, **“Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, ‘There is wailing in all the plazas, and in all the streets they say, “Alas! Alas!” They also call the farmer to mourning and professional mourners to lamentation.’”**

If they could afford it, part of the ritual of Jewish mourning included professional mourners. The word “wailing” is an onomatopoeic word, which is a word whose sound is similar to its meaning. Examples are: cuckoo, whip-poor-will, baa, beep, moo. In this case the sound in the Greek was like “alala.” The mourners would monotonously wail “alala, alala, alala” with much exaggerated passion and loudness. The word “commotion” in the Greek means “turmoil or uproar.” Jesus entered a loud chaotic house. There was loud chanting. The mourners were probably swaying and dramatically carrying on. The fact that these mourners were active proves that the girl had indeed died.

Jesus then tells everyone that the child is not dead but is asleep. Jesus, of course, knew that the child was dead, but, here, He is making a statement about the future. Jesus knew what He could do, and He knew that in a few moments, the child would be alive again as if woken from a deep sleep.

Verse 40 **They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child’s father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was.**

The word “laughing” actually has the meaning of jeering. The word is in the perfective tense signifying an intense jeering. Their laughter wasn’t because the mourners thought that Jesus was funny, but, rather, they were more like ridiculing Him and hissing at Him. They were shouting derisively at Him. The scene had become very inappropriate for such a solemn and disheartening occasion. On one side was Jesus sincerely telling the mourners that the child would arise alive again and on the other side was a group of mourners jeering at Him. Jairus was in the middle. Whose side to choose? He knew that the child was actually dead so the mourners were right in jeering at Jesus for coming in and saying something stupid. But... did Jesus know something?

“Putting them all out” literally means “to throw out.” Jesus used force to eject the people from the house. While Jairus was caught in the middle and standing there shocked, Jesus took charge of the situation. He became the master of the house. What Jesus was about to do was a momentous occasion for the parents, a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy for the disciples, and a moment of joy for Jesus. It couldn’t be ruined by a group of jeering guests.

Once the house was cleared, Jesus took the parents and the three disciples to the child’s room. “Took” has the idea “to take alongside” as in “under His care.” Jesus could see the shell-shocked and grief-stricken parents. They didn’t know

what to do or think. The disciples also didn't know what was going on. It was like Jesus was gently guiding the parents and disciples as a loving shepherd might guide some sheep to safety.

We can see the contrast here. Jesus basically pushed the jeering mourners out of the house but gently guided the parents to the dead girl's room.

The disciples went with Jesus from the shore with an adoring crowd. They came to a house whose crowd turned hostile on Jesus and jeered Him. Now there were just six of them plus the death girl. Jesus knew that all of these people needed reassurance. He didn't just give them kind words or throw a verse at them, pat them on the back, and walk away. Rather, He took them under His care, and He brought them to the place where all would make sense.

[Talitha Kum (pronounced Tally-ta Kum)]

Verse 41 **Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded.**

This is a private moment with Jesus, the parents, the three disciples, and the dead, little girl. Not everything that Jesus did had to be a show. Jesus could have had the dead child carried outside and, with the crowd gathered around, made it into an event. But this was not to show off what He could do. This was a moment for the grieving parents.

Jesus took the dead child's hand. This is significant because it would have caused the live person to be impure.

Numbers 19:11-13

**11 The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. 12 That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and then he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. 13 Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him.**

The key is verse 11, "The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days."

The Law stated that if anyone touched a corpse of any person, then that person would be unclean for seven days. Touching the corpse of a dead person was regarded as the most serious offense of permitted impurities. In later rabbinic traditions, touching a corpse was called "the father of fathers of uncleanness." "The father of uncleanness" meant that a certain impurity could result in further impurities. That was pretty bad. It was a second level sin; one that created more sins. But touching a human corpse was a level one impurity. It created impurities that then created more impurities. This was a serious violation. This is why it was called "the father of fathers of uncleanness." But this is what Jesus did, and He did it willingly and without hesitation.

The judgment for touching a dead person is pronounced in Numbers 5:2-3, "**Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a dead person. 3 You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst.**"

The offender was to be sent outside the camp lest they defile others. They were temporarily exiled.

Numbers 19:12 tells how that person was to become clean again.

**12 That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and then he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean.**

After touching the dead girl, Jesus should have been unclean for seven days, and He would have had to perform the purity rites. He would have had to purify Himself with the water on the third and seventh days. Then He would be clean.

But Jesus did not purify Himself. Mark 6:1-2 tells us, **“Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. 2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?’”**

Jesus did not go outside the camp, or in this case—city. In fact, He went to His hometown.

Notice Numbers 19:20, **“But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself from uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord; the water for impurity has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean.”**

To delay or refuse to cleanse oneself of impurity was itself sinful and demanded a terrible punishment—permanent exile.

Then on the next Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue—of all places—and taught. He who, according to the Law, was unclean and who did not purify Himself. Jesus should have been cut off from the midst of the assembly.

Impurity reminded the people that God is infinitely pure and holy and that sin corrupts and has devastating effects. Habakkuk 1:13 tells us that God’s **“eyes are too pure to approve evil...”** Unclean people had to purify themselves or else how could they stand in the presence of such a holy God? They would never, just spontaneously, become clean again. Rather, they would defile the rest of the congregation. Just like sin, which left unrepented of, will defile many others. Hebrews 12:15 attests to this, **“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled...”**

The people seeing this would have known that Jesus was unclean after touching the little girl but did not cleanse Himself. So why wasn’t He exiled?

Because the girl rose from the dead. Sin did not flow from the corpse to Jesus and defile Him. Rather, life flowed from Jesus and purified the corpse. Jesus is the victor over death and impurity. Jesus is the conqueror of sin. None of these can conquer Jesus. He is the holy one. He is the Lord. He is the King. He is the healer.

The intent of the Law was to show us our sin and, by doing that, point us to God, the only One who can cleanse us of our sin and its defilement. Jesus, by fulfilling the Law, showed that He was the one to whom the Law pointed to for cleansing and healing. Jesus was indeed the Savior.

Thus, no one challenged Jesus as being unclean because they recognized Him as the one from whom life flowed rather than the One whom sin defiled.

Notice here in Haggai the natural flow of corruption.

Haggai 2:11-13

**11 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Ask now the priests for a ruling: 12 If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?’” And the priests answered, “No.” 13 Then Haggai said, “If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?” And the priests answered, “It will become unclean.”**

If something or someone clean comes in contact with something or someone unclean, the natural flow of corruption is from the unclean to the clean. Thus the clean object or person will be unclean leaving both unclean, rather than both becoming clean. Unrepented sin is powerful.

But see what Matthew says about Jesus.

Matthew 12:6, **“But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here.”**

Jesus was the exception. He was the only one from who corruption would flee and so His touching something unclean, such as a corpse, would cause it to be clean, thus leaving both as clean. Jesus could never be corrupted by sin.

Verse 41 again Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” (pronounced Tally-ta Kum) (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).

[Slide – Jesus raising Jarius’ daughter]

The healing hand of Jesus. Notice, in this case, how Jesus’ healing is not accompanied with any fanfare.

Talitha Kum (pronounced Tally-ta Kum) wasn’t a rough command yelled to get someone’s attention. Rather, it was a gentle, affectionate term. The girl was not a prop. She wasn’t just something to validate Jesus’ ministry. She was a real person. Jesus was connecting with her. He cared specifically about her. You can picture Jesus bending over and taking her hand. Then with a smile on His face, softly telling her to arise.

Verse 42 **Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded.**

Notice, “immediately.” Sometimes God heals in stages and sometimes He heals immediately.

The parents were “astounded.” That word “astounded” in the Greek is from where we get our word “ecstasy.” It literally means “to put out” in the sense of removal. Like a person who is removed from their senses. Or as we might put it in today’s vernacular, her parents were “out of their minds with ecstasy.” This was not just a sense of quiet weeping and firm hugs. They were going crazy with joy. They were probably yelling and dancing and jumping around with joy. They were out of their minds with joy.

Oh, that we should be that way with the ways of God.

[Slide – Picture of our black Labrador]

We have a rescued black Labrador dog. She usually walks around the house relaxed with her ears comfortably down and her mouth slightly open. One day in the kitchen I accidentally dropped a very small piece of food onto the floor. As the dog was calmly walking by suddenly her ears stiffened up. She closed her mouth and focused intently on that small scrap of potential food. She leaned towards it and sniffed. It seemed desirable so she happily lapped it up. Once she realized that there was nothing else her ears went back down, she slightly opened her mouth, and she continued her meander across the kitchen floor but now a little bit happier.



Our lives should be something like that. We are traveling through our day when suddenly we notice God breaking through the usual routine. It doesn't have to be children being raised from the dead. It may be something of natural beauty or an unexpected kindness. It may be a reminder of forgiveness or the power of grace just when we need it. Those moments catch our attention. We lean into them and happily lap them up. And for that instant we are transported to the eternal. We become strikingly aware of God's presence and how good He is. Then we return to the rigors of life but somewhat more blessed than we were a few minutes ago.

God is always there. He is always breaking through. We just need to be more alert to those moments. We will then always be much more blessed. We need to be more crazy with joy for God.

Verse 43 **And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.**

Why did Jesus command them not to tell anyone about this miracle? Wasn't His own mission to tell people who He was and why He was there?

We see many instances where Jesus told people not to tell anyone about what He had just done.

Matthew 8:4

**And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."**

Matthew 9:30

**And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them: "See that no one knows about this!"**

Matthew 16:20

**Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.**

Mark 9:9

**As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.**

Mark 3:12

**And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was.**

Mark 5:43

**And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.**

Mark 8:29-30

**And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." And He warned them to tell no one about Him.**

There are several reasons for why Jesus told people not to say anything about who He was or what miracle He had just done.

- 1) It could have caused the focus to be on the miracles and not on the teaching

We see this in Mark 1:40-45

**40 And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."**

**41 Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and \*said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.**

**43 And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away,**

**44 and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."**

**45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.**

Jesus told the leper not to tell anyone, but the leper went and told everyone. And it had the very result that Jesus didn't want: "Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city." If Jesus was all about healing, He would have relished going into cities, being surrounded by people, and healing them. But that was not His main purpose. And if people came to Him only to be healed, and He didn't heal them but only taught them, then they would have been disappointed and would not have listened to Him.

Jesus healed for several reasons. 1) He felt compassion for people and truly wanted to help them. 2) The miracles fulfilled Old Testament prophecy confirming that He was the Messiah.

But the miracles were not the reason why Jesus came. He came to die for the sins of the world. That reason was proclaimed through His preaching. But the people wanted healing and wonders and miracles, not preaching. But the more that they heard about the miracles the more they crowded around Him wanting to touch Him. He didn't have the chance to preach and teach. This was a wrong focus. Jesus didn't come so that people would be dazzled by His miracles. That would have been a distraction.

In Luke 23:8 we read about Herod even falling to this temptation: **"Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him."**

We see this problem in two other verses.

Mark 1:45, **"But the man went out and openly began to proclaim and spread the news. Consequently, Jesus could no longer enter a town in plain view, but He stayed out in solitary places. Yet people came to Him from every quarter."**

In John 6:15 we read **"So Jesus, aware that they intended to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself, alone."**

Jesus wasn't Messiah the King. He was Messiah the Sacrifice.

[Slide]

2) Jesus had a timetable

A number of Scriptures indicate Jesus' timetable.

John 2:4

**And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come."**

John 7:6

**So Jesus \*said to them, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune.**

When was Jesus' proper time to reveal Himself? It was on, what we now call Palm Sunday, in Matthew 21:1-10. The crowds were shouting:

**"Hosanna to the Son of David;  
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;  
Hosanna in the highest!"**

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Why this moment?

Because it was the start of the Passover week. These voices, who on this day, were crying out "Hosanna," five days later were calling out "Crucify Him!" Then after that, Jesus was crucified to pay the complete debt of our sins.

In Matthew 21, Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah 9:9

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

That day Jesus was King. A few days later, He would be murdered as a criminal.

The timing was to show to the world that He did not come merely to preach.

He did not come merely to be a good example.

He did not come merely to heal people.

He came to die for their, and our, sins.

In the Gospel of John, there are eight times when Jesus speaks of that current moment in relation to the timing of His glorification.

In the first four references, Jesus says that His time or hour had not yet come (2:4, 7:6-8, 7:30, 8:20). In the next four instances, Jesus says that His time had come (12:23, 12:27, 13:1, 17:7).

Jesus' hour was not when His disciples thought that it should be.

John 7:3-6

**3 So His brothers said to Him, "Move on from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret when he himself is striving to be known publicly. If You are doing these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 For not even His brothers believed in Him. 6 So Jesus \*said to them, "My time is not yet here, but your time is always ready.**

It was not when His enemies thought that it should be.

John 7:30

**So they were seeking to arrest Him; and yet no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.**

Rather, it was at the hour that His Father had decreed.

Here is the timetable of Jesus' last week according to Mark.

[Slide]

Sunday	Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey.
Monday	He throws out the moneychangers in the Temple. Teaches His disciples.
Tuesday	He teaches His disciples.
Wednesday	Judas betrays Jesus to the Jewish authorities.
Thursday	Jesus has His last meal, Passover, with the disciples. He is arrested that night after Judas' kiss.
Friday	First Trial: Nighttime, maybe 2-2:30 A.M., before Annas. Second Trial: Nighttime, somewhere between 2:30 and 5 A.M., before Caiaphas. Third Trial: At dawn around 6 A.M. before Sanhedrin. Fourth Trial: At 6:30 A.M. Jesus is brought before Pilate. Fifth Trial: Before Herod at around 7 A.M. Sixth Trial: Before Pilate at around 7:30 – 8 A.M. At 9 A.M. He is crucified. At 3 P.M. He dies. By sundown He is in the tomb.
Saturday	Jesus lies in the tomb.
Sunday	He is alive!

Back to Jesus raising the dead girl. The main drama of this passage is over. The girl is alive, the parents are besides themselves with joy, the disciples are astonished. Are we done? No, because the main focus of what we want to look at is still to come.

Verse 43b **“and He [Jesus] said that something should be given her to eat.”**

After a day of exorcising a demon out a man, healing a woman of a hemorrhage, and raising a girl from dead you'd think that Jesus had done enough.

- He could have rubbed His hands together and called it a day.
- Or He could have sat back and recounted all of the exciting things that He had done that day.
- Or He could have gathered everyone around and taught how those miracles proved that He was the Messiah.

That's what I would do. Won't you? With that kind of day, I'd stand on the roof and tell everyone.

But that wasn't what Jesus did, was it? No, instead He focused on the little girl's needs.

[Slide]

- The girl wasn't a project.
- The girl wasn't a means to make Himself look better.
- The girl wasn't an event.

[Slide – Jesus with the girl]

Even after raising her from the dead, Jesus wasn't done. The girl wasn't a means to an end; she was a person, and Jesus was still concerned about her needs. While everyone else was ecstatic and jumping around with joy, Jesus recognized that the girl was hungry. He was thinking about her. And He asked that someone bring her some food.

Too often after we've done something, we think about ourselves.

I just taught a Bible study; did I make any mistakes? How did I do? Rather, I should be thinking, how are these people doing? Did they draw closer to God?

Or I just finished setting something up for ministry. I wonder what everyone thinks about it? Did they notice all of the work that I did? Rather, now that the setup is done, how can I minister to someone here?

[Slide – Following sentence]

People are not there to validate you. Rather, you are there to minister to people.

[Slide – Seeking attention]

People want validation; people want attention and praise.

[Slide – rather, give]

But God tells us that by giving to others, then we will see our own light shine.

Isaiah 58:10, **“And if you offer yourself to the hungry and satisfy the need of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday.”**

Notice that: You give and then you get.

Look for opportunities.

- “That person needs someone to talk to.”
- “That woman lost her job; how can I help her.”
- “Give that girl something to eat.”

Though Jesus did a great thing, He never took His eyes off of the needs of the people around Him. True greatness does not come from doing mighty works. True greatness comes from meeting the small needs of the people that God has put near you.

Imagine today if the world was told that God was going to come and born as a baby and then pay for our sins.

[Slide-Click on each button point]

- Sponsors would line up.
- Cameras would be packed miles deep.
- Giant screens around the world would televise and analyze every moment, every twitch, every meal eaten.
- People would barely leave their living rooms for 33 years.
- Then when the time came for Him to die, the build-up, the pomp, the pageantry would be extraordinary. We would see His death from every angle. There would be poems and music created just for the event.
- Then when He rose from the death, the fireworks would be deafening. Music would reach a crescendo. Jesus would come out of the tomb and raise His arms in triumph and smile broadly at the cameras. The Earth would be bouncing from the celebration.

Is that what happened? It could have. But it didn't. This is what happened.

[Slide – Man of Sorrows]

He was a Man of Sorrows. Jesus, bloodied and battered, carried His cross down a street for 1.2 miles while a crowd jeered at Him. He was hung on a cross on the top of a rocky, barren hill with few of His friends and family.

When He rose from the tomb three days later, the only people there were the guards who appeared as dead men. Then only five of His disciples came to the empty tomb. When Jesus was on the road to Emmaus, He ran into two disciples, one of whom was Cleopas, and neither of them recognized Him.

God's reality was so much different than what we would have planned. Why? Because Jesus didn't die to be a spectacle. It wasn't a show. We don't experience Jesus' death and resurrection by watching it on a DVD. We experience Jesus' death and resurrection individually and personally in each one of our lives when we are born-again.

[Slide – Lamb of God]

Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

- The weight of sin is rolled off.
- We are washed clean by God's forgiveness.
- We are adopted as sons and daughters.
- We are, one-by-one-by-one, transformed.

Jesus doesn't look at us sinners and say, "Let's make that woman the centerpiece in our show!"

Rather, He looks at us as sinners and says, "Forgive that woman her sins." "Give her something to eat."

God **IS** interested in even the minutest aspects of our lives. Don't think that there is anything too trivial to bring to God. God will always feed those who He raised from the dead. And we, by being born-again, have risen from a spiritual grave.

But notice, that Jesus did not Himself feed the girl. He said, "something should be given her to eat."

[Slide – Feed My sheep]

This ties to John 21, "Feed My sheep." We are the vessels that He uses.

Here is where we imitate Jesus. We actively look for the needs of others. And not just the big, showy needs that will make us look the most spiritual. But the small ones especially. And sometimes, even the ones that no one else sees. And then, by the grace and provision of God, we meet that need. We see the person. We minister to that person.

## 2.2 Treating people as people

[Much of the following is from "The Table Briefing" in Bibliotheca Sacra issues 698 and 703-706]

Just over a decade ago, most people knew and probably believed the basics of Christianity: Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, He did some miracles, was a good man, was crucified for our sins, and He rose again. Their main obstacle was their thinking that leading a good life was enough to get into Heaven. They did not understand that they were a sinner who needed a Savior.

[Slide – If you died today...]

A question Christians liked to ask was "If you died today and stood before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates and he asked you 'Why should I let you in?' what would you say?"

This question showed that the issue wasn't the existence of God or who Jesus Christ was and what He did. This question challenged the last step in the process: someone's personal salvation.

[Slide – Graphs]

Today it is different. In 2007, 78% of Americans called themselves Christian. In 2019, it was down to 65%--13 percentage points less. Is that drop because of an influx of Muslims, Hindus, and other religions? No. The fastest growing category of people are the "nones." They are now at 26% of the American population. Atheists now account for 4% of U.S. adults. Agnostics make up 5% of U.S. adults, and 17% of Americans now describe their religion as "nothing in particular."

[Slide – Graph across generations]

That gap is increasing and it isn't promising for the future.

Our obstacle now is people whose response is "Why should I care?" or "Do I really need this?" What do you say to people like this?

Instead of being confronted with "I'm a good person," we now face "I'm a somewhat spiritual person, but I don't believe in any religion."

[Slide – Hands praying on a Bible]

Not too long ago, the Bible was a sacred book. If you quoted from it, people paid attention.

[Slide – Dusty Bible]

Now the Bible is just another good book that offers suggestions on how to lead a good life. If you quote from it now, you get "That's what you believe." The universal reverence is no longer there. Therefore, we can't just quote a string of Bible verses at people and expect them to be convicted.

Christianity used to be woven throughout much of our culture. Now it has been marginalized. In the movies, the one who was religious was the noble one, the one who was the glue that maintained a moral and sane foundation when everything else was falling apart. Now, the religious person is the nutjob, the one that we laugh at for their naiveté and ignorance.

So how do we reach people today?

Oftentimes our tendency in evangelism is to rush in with both guns blazing. We are going to show them who's right and, if they don't come over to our side, then we dump them for the next person who will, hopefully, be more open. That method does work sometimes, but rarely, and instead of believers, we wind up with a trail of the unsaved and unconvinced who now have a reason to be anti-Christian.

We feel safe with familiarity, and so we tend to make every Gospel presentation the same. No matter where that person is at spiritually, we give them the same Four Spiritual Laws or the same Bridge illustration, or whatever the presentation is that we favor. There is nothing necessarily wrong with these methods, but people are different and we need to adjust our presentation to where they are at.

[Slide – Boys at a baseball game left side]

Look at this slide. You have three people watching a baseball game. Each person is different, but we have given them the same solution, an identical box. What's the problem here? One person can't see. Our method has left one person out.

So if each person is different then how do we adjust our Gospel message? We engage them. We ask sincere questions and draw people out. We find out what is different about that person; what concerns them, and then we speak to that. We treat them as people and not as projects.

[Slide – Boys at a baseball game right side]

Here we see that, using the same resources—three boxes—we have adjusted them according to the needs of the three boys and now all of their needs are met. The Gospel—our resource—is always the same. But how we adjust it for each person may be different. What angle we come from may be different.

What do we do? We start with questions to understand their perspective and their reasons behind it. These do not have to be spiritual questions. We primary want to show sincere interest in who they are. But if they do give us answers that we don't like, we don't immediately refute and challenge their response. We want to avoid shallow judgements; rather, we want a deeper understanding of their needs. This does not necessarily need to take weeks or months. In fact, we may be able to get to this point in an hour or so depending on the person and situation. But it could take weeks or months. We have to be prepared for that.

Once we have opened the door to discussing spiritual matters, we start by asking questions:

[Slide – Each of the following quotes]

- “Why is it that you don't believe that?”
- “When you said [repeat their statement], what influenced you to think that?”
- “How did you come to that conclusion?”
- “Do you think that it is possible for someone to be forgiven by God?”

But make sure that you ask with sincerity and not with a tone of sarcasm.

By asking the right questions, it 1) shows that you are listening and 2) draws them out further. But the key is to listen. It is not asking them questions so that you can chop up what they say with a machete. If they know that every time they say something, you are going to contradict it, then they will just stop talking and probably stop listening. They will only respect what you are saying if you respect what they are saying.

[Slide – Your goal is not to win the debate...]

Your goal is not to win the debate; your goal is to win the person. That person is not just another cardboard sinner who just needs to hear the simple Gospel. That person has a history. Perhaps something painful or tragic happened in church. Or they felt condemned. Maybe they were abused and did not feel that God was there for them. Maybe they know Christians who readily condemn others but who are hypocrites. Their actual stumbling block may not the Gospel; it may be the lives of Christians. And by ignoring their obstacles and their history and simply plowing through with your presentation, do you really think that they will get it?

As tempting as it is to pull the trigger on the takedown when we hear something that we don't like, we need to be patient.

[Slide -- Football]

When a football team first gets the ball, they don't think for every play, “OK, on this play we're going for a touchdown.” No, they design small plays to move the ball down the field hoping and expecting to score eventually. That's usually how



we should share the Gospel. We don't spend a few minutes sharing the Gospel and then ask, "Are you ready to pray for salvation now?" We move closer and closer to the goal hoping that in the end, they'll understand and receive Christ.

Once we have established trust and respect, then when the hard and disagreeable part of the conversation comes, we can lay out our position and they should listen to us because we listened to them.

What we want to develop is a person-centered dialogue and not an issue-centered dialogue. The reason they aren't saved isn't because someone being in the belly of a large fish for three days is impossible or because a donkey talked. They more than likely aren't saved because something happened that turned them off. Or it could be because they've never heard the Gospel before. But those are two different approaches to our presentation.

In the past, the Bible was the answer, now it is the question. "The Bible's a good book, but it's full of contradictions." Or "The Bible is on the same level as every other religious book, and I don't believe them either."

But everything in the Bible is true; we know that. But you can engage them without starting every sentence with "The Bible says..." For example:

- "Everyone, including yourself, has an innate sense of things that are right and wrong. Where do you think that comes from? Can you even evolve a conscience? How do you evolve guilt and shame? Is there really a guilt gene or does that come from something higher?"
- "Do you believe in ultimate justice or do you believe that most people get away with their wrongs? But if you believe the latter, then doesn't that seem to rub against what you really feel? Don't you have an innate sense that ultimately justice will prevail?"
- "I understand what you're saying, but here's another way of looking at it. Tell me what you think about this."
- "Because we have all done something wrong, we all have some guilt, some shame. How will you resolve your guilt? Do you have a solution?"

All of these lines of discussion can easily lead to the Gospel at some point.

If someone says something opposite to what you believe, don't feel like you have to instantly shot them down and defend all of Christianity.

[Slide – What do you mean by that?]

Perhaps ask them, "What do you mean by that?" Let them explain what they mean. Oftentimes they really won't know how to explain themselves; they are just repeating something that they heard and liked without even thinking it through.

"All religions are the same."

"What do you mean by that?" "Do all religions have the same solution to the sin/guilt issue?" That might open up a discussion of how Christianity is different in that God forgives our sins by paying for them Himself rather than you having to lead a good life to balance the sins out. No other religion has that.

"All that matters is that you try your best."

"What do you mean by that?" "We all fail. How many failures does it take before we are not trying our best anymore?" That might open up a discussion of how everyone's best is different and that some people's best is still evil and selfish. "If someone is a psychopath and their best involves killing someone, then is that OK? How many times in your lifetime can you fail to do your best before you cross some line and now are forever condemned? One thousand times? One hundred times? How many times today have you not done the best that

you could? Is there a line and, if so, who determines it? If you do cross that line of 1,000 or 100 failures then are you doomed forever with no hope? I believe that God always extends hope to everyone no matter how many times they fail. Tell me, what do you think about that?"

Realize that when you are engaging someone with Christianity, you are critiquing their life and their worldviews. In order for them to let you do that, you must show that you are sincere and that you care.

In Acts 17, Paul is talking to a diverse group of people in Athens that included:

- Jews
- God-fearing Gentiles
- those who happened to be present
- Epicurean philosophers
- Stoic philosophers

Though there is a lot that we can glean from this passage, we are going to look at two points.

[Slide – Acts 17:22-23]

Acts 17:22-23

**So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in all respects. 23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.**

Notice that he was aware of their religious inclinations. He familiarized himself with their worldview. Then he worked off of that.

They:

1. Were very religious in all respects
2. Devoted much time and money to creating objects of worship so they proved their faith; it wasn't just talk
3. Weren't entirely sure of who or what they worshipped and they didn't take any chances and so they built an altar to a god that they might not have known about

The people that we talk to probably won't be that obvious so we have to draw it out of them. Paul was bringing the people that he was talking to and their world into the Gospel. “This is what you believe? Let's work with that.” He was just not blindly throwing verse after verse at them.

[Slide – Acts 17:28-29]

Acts 17:28-29

**for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His descendants.’ 29 Therefore, since we are the descendants of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and thought.**

Notice here that he quoted their own pagan poet. Paul was using the voices that they were listening to. Paul connected their culture to God. Again, he was able to do that because he knew where they were at.

Let's summarize

[Slide – 2 Timothy 2:24-25]

2 Timothy 2:24-25

**The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, skillful in teaching, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth**

Notice in this passage, the end goal is “repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” What are the suggestions to get there?

[Click for each point]

**Not quarrelsome:** To quarrel is to argue or disagree angrily oftentimes causing a rift in a friendship. Have you had a break in a family or friend relationship because you got frustrated and said something too aggressively even if it was true?

**Kind to all:** To be kind is to be sympathetic. It is to understand that person’s needs and weaknesses and to direct your compassion to those areas of struggle. You cannot be kind if that person is just another assembly line sinner waiting for your standard 1-2-3 Gospel presentation.

**Skillful in teaching:** To be skillful does not mean pounding the exact same thing at every person no matter where they are at in their thinking or emotions. A skillful football running back does not run the exact same route every time. He evaluates each situation and then adapts. If that spot is blocked then he cuts to a different spot. A skillful musician does not play the same notes every time. To teach skillfully is to know your audience and then to adjust your message so as to have the greatest impact.

**Patient when wronged:** When they flat out disagree with you, you ask them why they think that way. You guide them to your side. You don’t try to punch them into submission.

**With gentleness correcting:** What is a gentle slope? It is one that is not jarring. It is not one that causes you to lose control and go slipping and tumbling all over the place. A gentle slope takes some effort, but it leads us to where we want to go. A gentle person knows how to calm someone else, how to be merciful, how to pacify. We will encounter people who will be hostile to our message. Our goal is not to win. Our goal is to win that person.

And, ultimately, realize that it is God who may grant them repentance. Remember that we are not presenting to them our clever arguments and slick comebacks to every contrary opinion. We are presenting to them God.

Our attitude is not “HA! I destroyed that argument.”

[Slide – Jeremiah 31:3]

But rather Jeremiah 31:3, **“The Lord appeared to him long ago, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you out with kindness.’”**

[Slide – 1 Peter 3:15]

1 Peter 3:15 tells us to **“being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, but with gentleness and respect...”**

Notice three things here:

- 1) As with 2 Timothy 2:25, we are to evangelize with gentleness.
- 2) We are to show respect. That means listening to and understanding where that person is coming from. Respecting them.
- 3) We are to give an account for the “hope” that is in us. Not the fear of damnation. Not the terror of Hell, though those are part of the Gospel and should not be ignored. But, today, people do not need more fear or terror. What they need is hope. God alone gives us that true, everlasting hope and that is what we want to pass on to others.

But before we can properly do any of this, this verse tells us something that we need to do ourselves first: “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” We first need to set apart Christ in our hearts as Lord. He is not just one in a mix of many. He is Lord. We are presenting God to others and so God needs to be primary in our own hearts first. That is not to say that your life must be perfect before you can share the Gospel. We should share the Gospel at any opportunity no matter how young we are as Christians. But if we come across as “I’m special and you’re not, and now I’m going to tell you what you are lacking in your life” then we will not win people. We will only win arguments.

The goal is to bring them to Christ; not to prove that we are right. We want to show people the heart of Jesus; not how much we know.

All of this does not mean that we should not communicate Biblical ideas or defend the faith. It is how we are saying it and in what context. Are we just going to shoot Bible bullets at them and hope that one strikes home or are we going to try to take their hand and win them over to our side?

We want to reach more than the mind; we want to reach the person. We want to engage people with the hope of the Gospel. And to do this, we must be like Jesus: gentle, kind, loving, sincere and, ultimately, deeply caring about that person and their needs, their hurts, and their thoughts. We want to imitate Jesus.

## 2.3 Meeting needs

What we were just discussing was mostly related to evangelism although it could relate to other aspects as well.

But there are people that you know who have deep needs. People are fearful, people who are confused, people who are doubting and vulnerable. These are different types of needs

Let’s look at ways that we can meet those needs.

Colossians 3:12-13. **“And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”**

[Slide]

He tells us to have	Why?
Compassion	Because Christians can be hurting and suffering and in confusion.
Kindness	Because Christians can be needy.

Humility	Because Christians can be overbearing.
Gentleness	Because Christians can be vulnerable and fragile.
Patience	Because Christians can drive you crazy sometimes with their stupidity, with their self-centeredness, and with their weaknesses.
Bear with one another	Because Christians can be intolerant at times.
Forgive each other	Because Christians can sin against you.

Looking at “one another” in other passages.

[Slide]

To “one another” we should	Scripture	Why? Because...	How?
Be devoted	Ro 12:10	Christians can be me-first	Stay loyal even when they are intolerable.
Give preference	Ro 12:10	Christians can be self-absorbed	Think of others before you think of yourself, let them speak first, show them interest first
Be of the same mind	Ro 12:16	Christians can be divisive	Do not be deliberately contrary, do not treat some as more contemptible than others
Love	Ro 13:8	Christians can be unlovable	See people as God sees them and then be to them as Jesus would
Not judge	Ro 14:13	Christians can be judgmental	Do not expand their one small sin into a mountain of sin and do not recall their previous forgiven sins
Build up	Ro 14:19	Christians can falter	Praise people for the good that they do, work with them on those areas where they are weak
Persevere	Ro 15:5	Christians can be uncomfortable	Stick with people even when you aren’t getting anything from the relationship
Accept	Ro 15:7	Christians can hold others in contempt	Do not categorize people, if they are not as smart or rich or popular or attractive or socially adept as others still treat them as one for whom Christ died and loves
Admonish	Ro 15:14	Christians can sin	“Brothers and sisters, even if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you are not tempted as well.” Galatians 6:1
Greet	Ro 16:16	Christians can be snobbish	Be friendly to all, ignore no one, never give anyone the cold shoulder. Go up to new people and introduce yourself.
Do not sue	1 Cor 6:7	Christians can be greedy or arrogant	Work things out, talk to each other, get an arbitrator. Be careful about using litigation as your first resort.
Wait for	1 Cor 11:33	Christians can be insensitive	Do not grab the best before the others arrive

Show the same care for	1 Cor 12:25	Christians can be prejudiced	Give the same to those who can give back as those who cannot, do not exclude or belittle anyone because they are outside of your group
Serve	Gal 5:13	Christians can only want to get and not to give	Put that other person's needs above your own
Not challenge	Gal 5:26	Christians can be wrongly competitive	Rejoice with those whom God has blessed more than you, let others get the promotion, the recognition, and the praise without jealousy
Not envy	Gal 5:26	Christians can want what others have	Rejoice with those whom God has blessed, be content with what God has given to you
Bear the other's burdens	Gal 6:2	Christians will struggle	Be with that person in their trials and despair, listen, pray, comfort
Show tolerance	Eph 4:2	Christians can be irritating	Do not respond in kind to a harsh remark, do not give anyone the cold shoulder, do not scorn someone because they have an annoying habit
Speak the truth	Eph 4:25	Christians can lie or be deceptive	Always speak what is right even if it diminishes your reputation
Be kind	Eph 4:32	Christians can be cruel and hurtful	Do not belittle, snap at, or injure someone with your words, help others who are needy even to your own sacrifice, do not gossip
Be subject to	Eph 5:21	Christians can act superior	Be the first to serve others, do not just sit around and wait for others to serve you first, defer to other's opinions or wishes if you do not see any good reason to disagree
Regard others as more important than ourselves	Phil 2:3	Christians can be egotistical	Put other people's desire, goals, and needs above your own
Forgive	Col 3:13	Christians will sin	Just as God forgave you your ocean of sin, forgive that person their one drop of sin
Comfort	1 Thess 4:18	Christians can hurt and be confused	Be a good listener, pray with them, offer advice where it can help
Encourage	1 Thess 5:11	Christians can be discouraged or depressed	Support them with words and/or actions, be there for them
Live in peace	1 Thess 5:13	Christians can be very annoying	Do not harass, be friendly, do them favors, seek their good
Seek after that which is good for	1 Thess 5:15	Christians can be spiteful	Ask for God's blessings upon them and you give what would help them the most
Stimulate	Heb 10:24	Christians can be lazy	Help them make goals and do what you can to enable them to achieve those goals
Do not speak against	Ja 4:11	Christians can gossip	Do not tell others about someone else's shortcomings
Do not complain	Ja 5:9	Christians can be grumblers	If you are not sincerely seeking a solution then do not condemn other people or circumstances

Confess your sins	Ja 5:16	Christians can be proud and act perfect	If you have sinned against another then humble yourself before them
Pray	Ja 5:16	Christians can forget about God	Pray with them, pray for them, pray frequently
Be hospitable	1 Pet 4:9	Christians can want to take and not receive	Have people over for lunch or dinner, lodge temporary visitors at your house
Be humble	1 Pet 5:5	Christians can be competitive	Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, considering them as more important than yourself

How can you obey even one of these commandments toward “one another”? You must first stop looking at yourself and look at that other person in an understanding and sympathetic way. You must first get to know even one thing about that person.

How about this as a start. Ask someone what you can pray for them. It can even be just one thing. Then actually do pray that at least once a day for at least the next week. Then the next time that you see that person tell them that you have been praying for them and ask them how that is going. You can even do this for people at your job. Wake people up to the idea that pray works and that you care about them.

Perhaps pick one of these from the list and make every effort to incorporate it into your life. Then see what a positive change it makes in you and in others. Then you will be truly imitating Jesus.

## 3 Temptation

### 3.1 Scripture

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'"

7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

#### 3.1.1 Baptism

What just occurred before this event in Matthew 4?

Matthew 3:16-17

**After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."**

There are some key points related to what we are discussing in these two verses.

[Slide click on each point]

- 1) Jesus had just started His priestly ministry. Up until this point, except for an account in Luke 2:41-52 when Jesus was 12 years old and appeared in the Temple, there are no other stories of Jesus in the Bible. This is Jesus' coming out party so to speak.
- 2) We see the Trinity coming together in one visible place for perhaps the first time ever. So we have all of God's attributes concentrated in one spot.
- 3) God the Father affirms that He is well-pleased with His Son, Jesus.

There are many other topics that are addressed in this short passage:

- 1) Jesus' ministry was started with baptism.
- 2) Jesus' baptism was immersion.
- 3) God came from the heavens.
- 4) The Holy Spirit is represented by a bird, specifically a dove. Why that?
- 5) God needed to verbally confirm what had just taken place.
- 6) Jesus is referred to as the Son.
- 7) Jesus is a beloved Son.



But those themes are out of our current topic so we won't examine them. But you can see how much we can get from a short Bible passage. The Bible is rich. You could spend a lifetime studying just one chapter in the Bible and still not plumb all of its depths.

But there is one point in this section that is crucial to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Look at verse 17. I'm going to read it in the NIV because, even though it is saying the same thing, it comes out a little clearer, "This is my Son, whom I love." Notice at the moment, right before Jesus' great temptation, He was reaffirmed of His Father's love. So when Jesus quotes Scripture against the Devil, He knows that His Father is faithful because Jesus knows that the Father loves Him.

Remember this for later. And remember this for your own lives.

We see a contrast between Jesus' baptism and His temptation.

[Slide]

Baptism	Temptation
Jesus is surrounded by admirers	Jesus was in the company of the one who hates Him the most
This had an affirmation of His deity	Satan was trying to deny Him His deity by getting Him to sin
Jesus was in a lush lake	Jesus was in a barren wilderness
The Holy Spirit descended onto Jesus as a gentle dove	The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted
Jesus was anointed	Jesus was tempted
Jesus began His priestly ministry	Satan tried to end His priestly ministry
We saw a glimpse of heaven	We saw a glimpse of hell
His Father spoke to Him	The Devil spoke to Him
There was excitement and joy even if they were short-lived	The torment went on for at least 40 days

### 3.1.2 Back to the main passage

[Slide]

This desert is traditionally near Jericho.

[Slide]

It was a vast, dry and inhospitable place.

Notice that at the very beginning of His ministry the first thing that Jesus did was to fast. What is the purpose of fasting? There are several spiritual reasons and benefits.

[Slide]

- 1) It shows how serious we are when repenting of sin.

When the prophet Jonah proclaimed to Nineveh that God was going to judge them for their sin we read in Jonah 3:5-11,

**5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. 7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let**

**them eat or drink water. 8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”**

In this case, fasting showed God that they were serious about their repentance. They didn't just toss up a glib "sorry" and expect to go on their way. Just as sin will seriously destroy us, fasting will show that we seriously will sacrifice to get rid of it.

[Slide]

2) Fasting moves us to an intense seeking of God when in a rough situation.

In Daniel 6:16-18 when Daniel was thrown into the Lion's den, the king was so distraught and concerned for Daniel that he fasted all night.

**16 Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you." 17 A stone was brought and laid over the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing would be changed in regard to Daniel. 18 Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.**

The king, Darius, was a pagan man. Yet even in their false religion they recognized the power of fasting and how it brings a person more in tune with God. Fasting puts off the distractions of the fleshly and worldly so that we can focus on the spiritual.

In 2 Chronicles 20:1-4 when King Jehoshaphat was being attacked, he called a fast.

**Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites, came to make war against Jehoshaphat. 2 Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)." 3 Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4 So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord.**

These united armies gathered together to attack Jehoshaphat who was the king of Judah. This army was already at Hazazon-Tamar which is also called En Gedi or Engedi. Engedi means "spring of the wild goat" and is about 35 miles southeast of Jerusalem.

[Slide – Engedi]

The battle was within a couple of days. Jehoshaphat and Jerusalem were in a tight spot. There was only one hope: God. So Jehoshaphat called everyone to fast and to call upon the Lord. In a desperate situation, Jehoshaphat didn't want to take any chances. He didn't want to offer up a quick prayer and hope for a positive response from God. That would be like a quarterback in football throwing up a blind pass and hoping it gets caught for a touchdown. Fasting gave power and focus to desperate prayers.

[Slide]

3) Fasting requests God's anointing and guidance when starting a new ministry, project, or spiritual venture.

Acts 14:23, **“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”**

Here in Acts 14, when they had established elders/pastors in the churches, they just didn’t give them a book on leadership and wish them luck. They prayed and fasted for them.

In Matthew 4, Jesus stopped being a carpenter and was now publicly the Messiah. He began this transition by fasting.

[Slide]

### 3.1.3 The First Temptation

And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

Notice several of the subtleties of this first temptation.

First the Devil tries to get Jesus to doubt who He really is: “If You are the Son of God...”

Satan would have known that Jesus would not turn the stones into bread. After all, if there was no harm in doing that then the Devil wouldn’t have bothered. Why would the Devil waste his time tempting Jesus with something that is meaningless? But, the Devil was trying to spin Jesus with logic. “You’re hungry, Jesus. If You are God, it would be easy to turn these stones into bread. That would be nothing for You to do. Then You can eat and not be hungry anymore. There’s no harm in that, now is there? But if You don’t turn these stones into bread then maybe it is because You can’t. Maybe You really aren’t the Son of God.”

Now both Jesus and the Devil knew that Jesus was indeed God the Son. But if Jesus listened to the Devil rather than to the Holy Spirit then He would no longer be holy and, therefore, could not then die for our sins and we would all be Satan’s.

Notice also the subtlety in what the Devil is saying. “Jesus, You just finished seeking God through forty days of fasting. Now You’re hungry. But has God supplied you with what you need? No! You have to do it Yourself. God doesn’t care about You. God isn’t watching out for You. If you want something done then clearly You’ll have to do it yourself because God certainly isn’t going to take care of You. You need to lookout for number one.”

This temptation was more than about food. It was more than being hungry. It was about God not being there in our time of need. It was about having to fend for ourselves because God surely isn’t going to be of any help.

This is the same tactic that the Devil used in the temptation of Adam and Eve. Notice Genesis 3:1-4

**3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3 but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” 4 The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 5 For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”**

First notice that this tactic is called “crafty.” This word means “skillful in underhand or evil schemes; cunning; deceitful; sly.” It is “skillful.” This type of temptation is not a random effort by Satan. This temptation takes thought and planning. It aims at our biggest weakness, which is what? That we feel that we are alone. That no one is looking out for us. That we have to look out for number one because no one else will.

Looking up a list of our most common fears, one website (<https://www.learning-mind.com/top-10-most-common-human-fears-and-phobias/>) had fear of loneliness as number one. And that makes sense. God created us for relationships. Most animals live in groups or at least in pairs. They were made for one type of relationship and that is with other creatures. But we, as humans, are unique in that we are the only creatures that can relationships with two types of beings: other creatures and with God. We are the only ones who have both horizontal and vertical relationships.

God created us needing relationships. We see this in Genesis 2:18, **“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”** Even before the first sin when everything was still perfect, God recognized that someone constantly being by themselves is not healthy.

In the Bible, who is someone who lived for a time in isolation? Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 4 we read that because of his arrogance and self-centeredness he was driven away from mankind where he went insane.

Loneliness is not God’s plan.

Years ago I made the foolish decision that if anyone wanted to be my friend, then they would have to initiate it with me. That would then prove that they were sincere. So I wasn’t going to initiate any conversations. I went the next year hardly talking to anyone. I finally realized that that was a stupid experiment and went back to starting conversations.

You have to realize that everyone else is just as much afraid of rejection as you are. Someone has to take that first step.

When we are lonely, what are some of the lies that we can believe?

[Slide]

### ***3.1.3.1 I am a bad person. There is something about me that is so wrong that I deserve to be rejected and shunned.***

Maybe you are a bad person. Maybe you are alone because you drive everyone away with your obnoxious and/or self-centered behavior and attitudes. Maybe people avoid you because every conversation is about you. But realize that there is no depth of sin in anyone’s life that is so rooted and pervasive that God’s grace and forgiveness cannot completely remove it and restore. By God’s grace, you can change.

Look at the nation of Judah in the book of Jeremiah. Here is a summary of their sins.

[Slide]

- Revolted against God
- Spiritual adultery
- Lack of reverence for God
- Idolatry
- Contempt of God
- Corruption in government and in ministry
- Vain confidence
- Lying
- Mocking God’s prophets

A pretty nasty list of sins. But despite all of these sins we read something almost startling in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

**31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,**

**32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.**

**33 “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**

**34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”**

What Jeremiah is saying here to Israel, and by extension to all of us, is that our future does not have to be a continuation of our past. Even though Israel’s sins were entrenched for many generations, it was possible to change. Deeply rooted patterns can be reversed. Destructive attitudes can be reversed. Behaviors that caused the breakdowns of relationships with others and with God can be reversed. The past does not have to determine the future. The past can be left behind. The future can be a time of renewal. We are not without hope. But what is the key? Verse 34: “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” All of this change, all of this reversal, all of this newness spoken of in the previous verses starts with this “for.” “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” The key is forgiveness. Forgiveness from God which comes with cleansing. 1 John 1:9 confirms this, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** We must forgive others which results in peace and restoration. And we must forgive ourselves which frees us from guilt and shame.

Once we shed the constricting bonds of sin, we are then free to be confident in who and what God has made us and we are free to become more like Him.

That we are lonely because we deserve to be because we are bad is a lie. The truth is that, by God’s grace and forgiveness, we can leave the past behind. It does not have to shape our future. We can be renewed in Christ. Don’t use your sin as a crutch, because God is the great healer.

[Slide]

### ***3.1.3.2 Neither God nor anyone else cares about me.***

“I am unloved and unlovable. That is why I am alone.”

You may think that God does not care about you because your circumstances are not going as you would hope. That could be your finances, your health, your relationships, your guilt or your shame, your living situation, your job, or a myriad of other things. But whenever you are tempted to think that, remember one thing.

[Slide]

- Jesus Christ allowed Himself to be whipped for you.
- He allowed Himself to have thorns driven into His forehead for you.
- He dragged a harsh, wooden cross down a street lined with people mocking Him for you.
- He had large, possibly nine-inch, nails hammered into His wrists and feet for you.
- He took your sins upon Himself and suffered the wrath of His Father for you.
- Jesus Christ died for you.

No adverse circumstances will ever out-weigh that. No matter how the current situation is going against you, always look back and consider what Jesus Christ did for you. Then see if you can still claim that God doesn't care about you.

God does care about you and there are plenty of verses to prove that.

[Slide]

1 Peter 5:7, "casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

Isaiah 49:13, "Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted."

Picture that. The entire earth bursting into joyful shouting hardly able to contain itself. Why? Because God did miracles that no one has ever seen before? Because God raised up great and righteous leaders in every country? No, the earth is bursting with joy because God has compassion on those who are afflicted and downtrodden.

Lamentations 3:22-23, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Luke 12:7, "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."

Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

What about other people? Do they care for you?

There are people who care about you a whole lot more than you think. The problem is that all too often you would rather play the victim and believe that no one does. How can you know this? Talk to these people. See if they listen and are concerned. Communicate.

But let's say that you have tried that and no one really does seem to care. Then take the initiative yourself. Show interest in other people and they will show interest in you.

Look at Isaiah 58:10-11

**10 And if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday.**

**11 "And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail."**

In these two verses there is a three-stage progression. It is a mini-story. Do you see it?

[Slide]

Stage 1

You feel like you are in darkness. Your life is gloomy.

[Slide]

## Stage 2

You give yourself to those who are in greater want than yourself (the hungry) and to those who are even more oppressed than you (the afflicted). This is the pivot. This is what flips the card from the back to the front.

[Slide]

## Stage 3

Here are the results:

- 1) Your light will rise
- 2) Your gloom will dissipate like dew in the morning sun
- 3) The Lord will continually guide you
- 4) Your desire will be satisfied
- 5) You will be strengthened
- 6) You will flourish and grow like a watered garden
- 7) Your life will be like a clear, refreshing spring of water

What a contrast.

The difference is taking your eyes off of you and your circumstances and filling the needs of others.

[Slide]

### ***3.1.3.3 No one understands me, not even God.***

When we are going through a struggle, we oftentimes think that we are the only ones who understand what it is like. But that is not true. Thousands, maybe millions, of people are going through the same thing that you are. Maybe one of them is even in this church.

And if you don't believe me then read 1 Corinthians 10:13, "**No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man**"

It is not "most temptations are common" or "other people's temptations are common." It is "all temptations are common."

The main reason why you don't think anyone else can relate is because you are not out there connecting with other people.

But even if you want to argue that truly "no one knows the troubles I've seen" (as the song goes). We know that God understands us. In fact, He understands us better than we understand ourselves.

One reason that He understands is because He has been through it all.

Hebrews 2:17-18

**17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.**

Hebrews 4:15-16

**15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Here are some negative things that Jesus experienced. See if any of them match your situation.

[Slide click on each one]

Homelessness: Matthew 8:20, "Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'"

Temptation: Mark 1:13, "And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan."

Hunger: Matthew 4:2, "He then became hungry"

Loneliness: Matthew 27:46, "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'"

[Slide click on each one]

Betrayal: Matthew 26:72, "And again he [Peter] denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.'"

Rejected by family: John 7:5, "For not even His brothers were believing in Him."

Rejected by an entire community: Matthew 8:34, "And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region."

Oppressed: Isaiah 53:7, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted..."

[Slide click on each one]

Physically weary: John 4:6, "So Jesus, being wearied from His journey."

Disappointment: Matthew 26:40, "And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?'" Jesus was in His hour of distress, and His three closest friends fell asleep. They couldn't even stand with Him in His hour of need.

Rejection by friends: John 6:66, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."

Sorrow: Isaiah 53:3, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..."

[Slide click on each one]

Ridicule: Luke 23:35-37, "And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!'" The man is dying, and they are making fun of Him.

Grieved: Matthew 26:38, "Then He [Jesus] said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death;'"



Distressed: Matthew 26:31, “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.”

Death of a friend/loved one: Matthew 14:13, “Now when Jesus heard about John [the Baptist’s murder], He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the [i]people heard about this, they followed Him on foot from the cities.”

Do you really think that there is anything that you have gone through, are going through, or will go through that Jesus hasn’t already experienced in some way? Do you really think that He can’t relate to your suffering, to your situation?

Just once, when you read the Gospels, write down every emotion of Jesus and the situation that He was in. It will be eye opening.

[Slide]

### ***3.1.3.4 Because I don’t have any joy from others it is justifiable for me to find happiness in sin.***

“I don’t get any peace from God, so I’m going to stress eat.”

“I don’t get enough physical pleasure, so I’m going to watch pornography.”

“God is not going to provide a good Christian spouse in my time frame, so I’m going to date and marry a non-Christian.”

“God doesn’t provide enough of my financial needs, so I’m going to steal or cheap on my taxes.”

Notice how in all of these justifications, God is to blame. It’s not my fault that I gave in to temptation, God didn’t do what I expected Him to do. This justification goes back to the first sin.

In Genesis 2, God told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree except for “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” So of course they ate from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Then we read in Genesis 3:11-13

**11 And He [God] said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.”**

What was the first thing the man did when questioned about his sin? He blamed the woman. No, it wasn’t his fault, it was someone else’s fault.

**13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”**

Then God asked the woman why she had sinned. What was her response? She blamed the serpent. No, it wasn’t her fault, it was someone else’s fault.

It is our inherent nature to not take responsibility.

Once I was running a church table at a county fair. A man and woman were coming towards the table. The woman was a couple of feet behind the man when she tripped. She furrowed her eyebrows and said to the man, “You made me trip!” The man just looked at me and shrugged. Even in something that common and innocent, she felt the need to blame someone else.

When you sin, do you first look to blame someone else? Or do you humbly think, “Did I just do something that I shouldn’t have that caused this to happen?”

We all sin. That is not in question. The actual question is what our response to it will be. Will we:

[Slide]

- Deny it?
- Ignore it?
- Blame other people?
- Blame God?
- Justify it?

[Slide]

- Or will we confess it?

Let’s take a quick look at Psalm 38 and see David’s response.

Verses 4 – 8

**4 For my iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me.**

Notice first that David acknowledges that they are his iniquities. There wasn’t any “You made me do it.”

He recognizes the true nature of sin. What is the true nature of sin?

- Does sin give ultimate pleasure?
- Does sin give ultimate power?
- Does sin ultimately satisfy?

No, sin’s true face is that it is a burden. It is a cancer on your soul. It will rot you from the inside and from the outside. It has no mercy. It never grows weary.

- Sin will callus your conscience.
- Sin will prevent God’s blessings.
- Sin will burden you with guilt.
- Sin will ruin relationships, ruin finances, ruin your reputation, and ruin anything and everything that it touches.

David saw this. He called his iniquities, “a heavy burden” that weighs “too much.”

Don’t let sin play you for a fool.

Repent of your anger.

Repent of your lust.

Repent of your selfishness.

Repent of your disobedience.

Repent: “Turn from sin, and turn to God.”

**5 My wounds grow foul and fester because of my folly.**

Sin is not content to sit on your shoulder like a dirty spot. Sin will continue to grow. It will become more and more foul if not repented of. It will fester like an open sore. It will stink up your life.

Notice Hebrews 12:15, **“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;**”

“Many be defiled!” Sin in your life just doesn’t bring you down; it will bring down everyone around you also.

That pornography that you look at in secret. “No one sees me. No one knows what I’m looking at right now. Tomorrow morning, no one will even know that it happened.” Not true! That pornography can ruin your marriage. It can ruin your dating. It can ruin your relationships. Why? Because there are three parts to each person: spirit, soul, and body. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 list all three, **“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Hebrews 4:12 tells us that the soul and spirit are separate, **“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** The order of importance is: 1) spirit, 2) soul, and 3) body. When you look at pornography you are making the body the most important and that is the opposite of God’s plan. When you are focused on the physical aspect of other people, you are fooling yourself and missing out on what matters most.

Back to Psalm 38

**6 I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long.**

**7 For my loins are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh.**

**8 I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart.**

Notice how David wasn’t proud of his sin. I’ve heard more than one conversation where someone was talking about being at a party and would say to the effect, “Of course, we were all drunk” and have a smirky, proud look on his face as though being drunk is something special. No, anyone can get drunk. It takes no skill, no intelligence, no talent. You just have to drink a lot of alcohol. How hard is that? If you can drink water, you can drink too much alcohol. Does that make you clever or special? No, you’re just like every other stupid person out there who drinks too much. Yet somehow, these people are proud of that.

The wicked are proud of their sin.

- “Sure, I cheat on my tax forms. Who doesn’t?”
- “I snuck into the theater and saw the movie for free.”
- “The cashier gave me too much money back, so I kept it and essentially got the item for free.”
- “Of course I hit him; he insulted me.”

But the righteous are bowed down—burdened—by their sin. Their sin is a badge of shame that must be removed.

Then notice David’s response as a result of his sin.

**9 Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You.**

**15 For I hope in You, O Lord; You will answer, O Lord my God.**

David’s sin caused him to no longer seek the pleasures of the world, but rather to desire the pleasures of God. He didn’t put his hope in pornography or getting his way or looking good. He put his hope in God and to let God determine the results.

Don’t let discontentment turn you to sin. Let discontentment turn you ever more rigorously to God.

[Slide]

### 3.1.3.5 *Any more rejection will break me so I am isolating from others*

When we are rejected and defeated, it is not uncommon to want to isolate from others.

Let's look at four people.

#### **Moses**

Moses, as we know, led Israel out from Egypt. Today, Moses is usually considered to be the greatest Hebrew/Old Testament prophet. Yet, it wasn't all that rosy. In Numbers 11, the people started to complain. They complained because they wanted meat and cucumbers and melons and leeks, onions, and garlic. They were sick of eating the Lord's miraculous provision which was manna.

Then we see Moses' breaking point. We see several instances where Moses took things into his own hands. He killed the Egyptian and he struck the rock to get water out of it when God told him to speak to it. Here, once again, we see Moses taking everything onto himself. We read his response in Numbers 11 verses 11 – 15.

**11 So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me?"**

**12 Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers'?**

**13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!'**

**14 I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me.**

**15 So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."**

[Slide click on each one]

Moses blamed God for his difficulties: "Why have You been so hard on Your servant?"

Moses tried to offload any responsibility: "Was it I who conceived all this people?"

Moses claimed inability and lack of resources, i.e. he just can't do it: "Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?"

Moses claimed that no one is helping him, that he was all alone: "I alone am not able to carry all this people."

Moses' solution was to die: "Please kill me at once."

Moses saw himself as wretched: "Do not let me see my wretchedness."

God then provided the solution.

**16 The Lord therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.**

**17 Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone.**

First, God brought wise people into Moses' life to assist him.

**31 Now there went forth a wind from the Lord and it brought quail from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits deep on the surface of the ground.**

Then God brought quail so that the people could eat meat. I.e., God provided resources.

Why did this work? Several reasons.

- 1) Moses did not run from God. Instead, he listened to God.

[Slide]

When times are tough in our lives, we don't crawl under rock and hide.

[Click again]

Rather, we climb up on that rock and talk to God.

[Slide]

- 2) Moses allowed people to come into his life. When God brought the seventy elders, Moses didn't run from this. He didn't give them the cold shoulder or shoo them away. Rather, he allowed them to come into his life.

The result was that Moses got out of his funk and was successful.

## **Job**

All in one day, Job lost his oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, servants, and all of his sons and daughters. Yet in Job 1:22 we read, **"Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God."**

His wife told him to, "Curse God and die!" Now there's support for you. Then Job got a wasting disease.

Job lost his wealth, his children, his health, and, as a bonus, his wife turned against him. Job loathed his own life and wished to die (Job 10:1).

So what happened? When Job's friends came by, he disagreed with them, he argued with them, but he did listen and discuss with them. He didn't tell them to go away or turn his back on them.

Then God spoke to Job, and Job, once again, listened.

I think that the pivot of the entire book occurs in the last chapter. In Job 42:5 Job says, **"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You."**

Job was perhaps the most righteous person on the earth. God even says so Himself. In Job 1:8 we read, **"The Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.'"**

Yet as righteous as Job was, he said in 42:5 that his relationship with God was distant. Job knew of God only from what he had heard. There was no intimacy.

But after Job had gone through all of his trials, and after he had heard God's voice, he could now say "but now my eye sees You." Job went from hearing to seeing. God was close. God was intimate. God was right there.

Job's response is in verse 6, **"Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."** Job realized that the problem of his feeling that God was distant and that God was against him was not God's fault. God wasn't distant; it was Job who had pulled away from God. Job then repented.

So, we see in Job, though his tendency was to pull back and wallow in his pity, he allowed friends to come near; he allowed God to speak, and, in the end, that brought him into a closer, more intimate, relationship with God. If Job had not done that then we would not be reading about him today. Job would have been just another loser who ran from God when things got tough. But that is not what happened, and we are blessed with this amazing book because of it.

[Slide – Two paintings]

In painting there is something called aerial perspective also known as atmospheric perspective. Without getting into details, this is where distant objects appear blurrier and less defined than objects that are closer.

Look at the painting on the left, "Banks of the Seine in Autumn" by Alfred Sisley. Notice how the trees in the front and the boat are fairly defined. You can see fine branches on the trees. You can see two people in the boat. Now look at the mountains in the background. Notice how dull and gray and blurry they are? The further back that you look in this picture, the less clear the objects are.

Now look at the picture on the right. Notice how clear the wrought iron is on the bridge. Look at the tree on the left. You can see individual leaves. Now look at the trees in the middle back. You can't see any individual leaves. The trees are masses of colors. It looks like four different colors. Now look at the trees all the way in the back, the green ones. They are even less defined. They are only two colors. You can barely identify them as trees.

The closer things are, the more clearly we see them. The more defined they are. The more we can see details. But as they move further away, they become blurrier, less defined, less detailed.

This is the same with God. When we are close to God, He is clear, well-defined and trustworthy. But when God is distant and in the background of our lives, He is blurry. We don't see Him as well. His attributes such as love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace are not well defined. The result is that we don't know Him well. And when we don't know someone well, we find them to be less trustworthy.

Bring God as close to you as you can. Don't just hear about Him with your ear; see Him with your eyes.

## Elijah

In 1 Kings 17, Elijah multiplied the widow's flour and oil. Then he raised another widow's son from the dead.

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah performed two of his greatest miracles. He challenged the prophets of Baal. It was 450 prophets of Baal versus Elijah. Each side was to build an altar and sacrifice an ox on it. Then they would see which god would accept the sacrifice with fire. As you may recall, the prophets of Baal leaped around the altar and cut themselves and ranted. But nothing happened. Then Elijah prepared his sacrifice and **"then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering."** This proved that the true God was superior to Baal.

Then he prayed and ended the famine and drought in the land. Elijah was on a roll. He was helping needy, vulnerable people, destroying false gods and religion, and bringing a country back from the brink of disaster. God was clearly with him, and he was doing great things.

Then in 1 Kings 19:2 we read, **“Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, ‘So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.’”**

Elijah, after doing all of this great work, got one threat, one criticism, and what did this mighty man of God do? He went into a tailspin. We read in verses 3-4:

**And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”**

Elijah lost his confidence, went off by himself, and wanted to die.

All of the great ways that God used him, all of the great works that he did were outweighed by one negative event. And it wasn’t even anything that he did wrong; it was no sin on his part. It was the rant of a sinful, evil woman. But it was enough. Elijah didn’t have enough confidence in God to overcome this. So he isolated himself and got depressed.

What was God’s response to this? God brought him food and drink to strengthen him. Then God gave him a task. Then God spoke to him.

After that, Elijah went on to do great things including anointing Elisha.

Even when he was on the top of his game, it only took just one setback for Elijah to crash. On one scale was all of this amazing stuff that Elijah was doing and how God was using him. And on the other side was one negative comment by one person. Which weighed more? The one negative comment.

Does that sound familiar? It should. Elijah was just like us. James 5:17 tells us, **“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours”** or as the NLT puts it, **“Elijah was as human as we are.”** Haven’t we all been there? Isn’t it all too easy for us to lose our confidence? It doesn’t take much to send us spinning into the ground.

But after Elijah had his pity-party, he listened to God, realized that God still had good plans for him, and he went back out and obeyed God.

Elijah did what God told him to do and that set him back onto his feet. Obeying God will always set things right again.

## **Peter**

Peter was one of Jesus’ top three men. He had seen many of Jesus’ miracles, he had heard Jesus’ teaching, and he had walked on water, to boot. Jesus had been cheered. He had been gathering followers. The going was good for Peter. But that was over. Jesus had been arrested and beaten. Jesus was on the backend of the curve. He was going down fast.

And so Peter didn’t stick with his friend. He did nothing to help his friend and teacher. And even worse, he denied Jesus to save his own skin and to a servant girl at that. We read in Mark 14:72, **“And he [Peter] began to weep.”** Peter went from being top man to crying in a courtyard. Once Jesus was past His peak, Peter changed his loyalties back to himself. Is that the way it stayed? Did Peter go down in history as being a fickle friend?

The next time that we read about Peter is in Mark 16. This is the resurrection. We read verses 1 – 7

**When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance**

**of the tomb?” 4 Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. 5 Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6 And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’”**

The key word here is in verse 7. Did you catch it? The angel said to the women about Jesus being resurrected, “Go, tell His disciples and... Peter.” There were a number of Jesus’ disciples and Peter was one of them. So why single him out? It was because God knew that Peter was in a bad way. When we last saw Peter, he was weeping. Peter was despondent. He had turned his back on Jesus and he knew that what he had done was terrible. But even though Peter had betrayed God and had been faithless, God was still faithful. God wanted Peter to know that He was concerned about him. God wanted Peter to know that he wasn’t forgotten, that he wasn’t put on the shelf because he had made a mistake no matter how terrible.

And when the women came back to the group Peter might have been hunched over in the corner sullen and despondent. The women flung the door opened and yelled, “The tomb is empty! Jesus is alive! And Peter, the angel specifically wanted us to make sure that you understand. Jesus is alive! Everyone, come and see!” Peter probably at first looked up in confusion. Then he realized. “Jesus, the man whom I betrayed, wants me, of all people, to know of His victory?!”

The next thing that we read is Peter and another disciple running ahead of everyone else and then Peter entering the tomb first. Peter became the spokesman for the early church. And it was Peter, the man who denied Jesus, who wrote in his last recorded sentence in 2 Peter 3:17-18

**17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.**

Notice in Peter’s last recorded written words in the Bible, this man who said, “I don’t know Him” encouraged other to not fall “from your own steadfastness.” Peter had truly become the “Rock” that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 16.

What was the difference? Peter, who was down in dumps, realized that God cared about him. And then he ran to where Jesus was last seen. Nothing had actually changed in Peter’s circumstances: he didn’t come into money or get a promotion at work or get his book published. What changed was Peter realizing that God had never left him. That even the worse mistakes can be forgiven by a loving God.

And the one who had once denied his Lord, died a martyr by being crucified upside-down because he said that he wasn’t worthy to be killed in the same manner as his Lord.

So we see here, four men who had been rejected, despondent, miserable, and isolated. But they all came back even stronger because of two things.

- 1) They let their friends minister to them or, at least, be friends to them.
- 2) They didn’t push God away. They listened when God spoke.

Today, we listen when God speaks by reading our Bibles and going to church and by praying.

[Slide]

Psalm 31:7, **“I will rejoice and be glad in Your lovingkindness, because You have seen my affliction.”**



Isaiah 63:9, **“In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His mercy He redeemed them, and He lifted them and carried them all the days of old.”**

James 4:8a, **“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”**

### **3.1.4 The Second Temptation**

Matthew 4, Verses 5-7

**5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,**

**6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”**

**7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”**

In the first temptation Satan tried to get Jesus to disobey His Father by claiming that the Father didn’t care about Him.

In this temptation Satan is trying to cause Jesus to doubt what He is. Jesus was, and is, the Messiah--The Savior. The Messiah was clearly associated with the Temple. For example, a key passage about the Messiah is Malachi 3:1, **“[The Purifier] ‘Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,’ says the Lord of hosts.”**

Malachi, written about 445 years before Jesus was born, correctly prophesies about the Messiah coming into His temple. This is important because it, therefore, identifies the Messiah as being God, because the temple is His.

So to emphasize this association, Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple which was the highest and most visible part of the Temple. This was about 600 feet about the ground.

We see how in the first temptation Jesus rebuked Satan by trusting in His Father. So in this temptation, Satan says, “OK, you want to trust your father? Then throw yourself down and see if he protects you.”

Notice how Satan used the surrounding circumstances to add to the temptation. When Satan was tempting Jesus regarding hunger they were in the desert. When Satan tempted Jesus with His claim to being the Messiah, he brought Him to the Temple in Jerusalem. Circumstances matter. Satan won’t tempt you with hunger at a buffet, but he might tempt you with laziness and gluttony. Satan won’t tempt you with your mortality when you’re young and healthy, but he will tempt you with “Go for what you want now no matter what it is. You’ve got the rest of your life to make up for it.” Watch your circumstances because, no matter what they are, Satan will use them against you. If you are rich, Satan will tempt you with fear of losing it; if you are poor and struggling, Satan will tempt you with fear of never getting it.

Since Jesus rebuked Satan’s first temptation by quoting Scripture, Satan returned the favor by quoting Scripture back to Jesus to make his point.

Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12 sort-of. He said.

**11 ‘He will command His angels concerning You’;**

**and**

**12 ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”**

Here is the actual passage:

Psalm 91:11-12

**11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you,**

**To guard you in all your ways.**

**12 They will bear you up in their hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone.**

Notice what Satan left out. He replaced “To guard you in all your ways” with “and.” So he skipped over that part of the passage. Why that phrase? What was so important about the phrase “To guard you in all your ways?” Jesus’ ways were the Father’s ways. John 6:38, **“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”** Jesus fulfilled Old Testament Messianic prophecy such as healing the deaf and blind. He was not called by the Father to put on a pretentious and showy display by flinging Himself off of the Temple and expecting angels to glide Him slowly to the ground while crowds ooh-ed and aah-ed.

Satan was basically saying, “Go ahead and do this, God will take care of you, and no harm done. It’ll all work out in the end. And look how much you’ll impress everyone.”

Someone who is secure in who they are as God created them and who knows that they are walking in God’s ways, does not need to prove it by jumping off of a tower and expecting God to float them to the ground unharmed. “To guard you in all your ways.” Yes, the Father will guard Jesus as long as He is walking according to the Father’s will, which is a given. But jumping off of a roof was not in the Father’s will and Satan knew this. Therefore, there would be no promise of protection. So Satan left this part out.

This was kind-of the opposite of the first temptation. In the first temptation Satan said, “God doesn’t care about you so you have to look out for yourself.” In this the second temptation Satan is saying, “In the end, God will take care of you so go ahead and do whatever you want in the meanwhile. If you do something opposite of Your Father’s will, don’t worry, He’ll still protect You.” But that is not what the passage says.

Satan was emphasizing the benefits of sin without mentioning the costs.

If Jesus did jump off of the Temple He couldn’t do what any longer? He couldn’t save us from our sins because He would have disobeyed His Father and so wouldn’t have been sinless any more. If He wasn’t sinless then He couldn’t pay for our sins because He would have had to pay for His own. That little “Go ahead and jump; God will take care of you” would have doomed the entire world.

How did Jesus counteract this temptation? Once again He quoted Scripture. This time He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, **“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.”** How would Jesus be testing God? By expecting God to still take care of Him even in disobedience.

The reference to Massah if referring back to Exodus 17:1-7. Verses 2-3 state,

**2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”**

And then verse 7,

**7 He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us, or not?”**

Israel doubted God’s provision and so challenged God to prove Himself. Here, Satan is trying to get Jesus to do the same thing.

Satan can use this same method of temptation today this way, “You’re a Christian. Go ahead and do what you want. God will still take care of you.” Or “You can sin. God has said that He will forgive you. You’re safe. You can do whatever you want, and God will cleanse you from all unrighteousness.”

Don’t fall to this temptation. Don’t test God. You do what God tells you to do. Don’t tell God what He needs to do to prove Himself. God already proved Himself at the cross. He doesn’t need to prove anything else.

### **3.1.5 The Third Temptation**

Matthew 4:8-10

**8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;**

**9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”**

**10 Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”**

There is no mountain high enough to be able to see all the kingdoms of the world. Even from the tallest mountain in the world, Mt. Everest, you could only see the countries of Nepal, Tibet, India, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Hardly all of the kingdoms of the world.

So more than likely this was a figurative or a visionary mountain or something temporarily created by Satan. In Ephesians 2:2, Satan is called **“the prince of the power of the air.”**

But notice, once again, how Satan works. He shows Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world” and what? “And their glory.” He doesn’t show Jesus the decay, the sin, the corruption, the violence. Rather he shows “their glory.” Sin will only reveal its “good” side. It will only show you the pleasures.

In a summary, here is what Jesus’ life will be from that point:

[Slide]

- 1) Minister on earth for three more years
- 2) Be crucified and pay for everyone’s sins
- 3) Resurrect
- 4) Ascend into heaven
- 5) Return in glory to claim the kingdoms of the world as His own

Notice what Satan is doing. He is offering to Jesus the end result—Number 5--without enduring the first four.

[Click]

- 1) Bow to Satan
- 2) Claim the kingdoms of the world as His own

Satan is offering the glory without the pain. That is indeed tempting. Jesus can skip right to the end goal. Who wouldn't want retirement without decades of job after job? Who wouldn't want the final cure for a disease without enduring the treatments and needles? Jesus can have the world without the death. But what would that mean? No one's sins would be paid for. Satan would give away the world if, in return, everyone went to hell.

Does Satan actually have the world to offer?

John 14:30, **"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me..."**

1 Corinthians 4:4, **"in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."**

Satan is indeed a liar, but that doesn't mean that everything that he says is a lie. Many times he will tell the truth, but there is always a twist to it or something that is left out.

Notice Satan's tactic here. "Make your life easier. Take the shortcut. Why sacrifice? Why suffer when you can have it all right now?" "Why give up pornography when you can have that pleasure right now?" "Why not eat another donut? In a few seconds it'll taste so good." Why not insult and be angry? You'll feel so much better afterwards and, after all, you deserve to be treated better anyhow." It is all about satisfaction of the self. Instant gratification.

In 1954 Douglass Wallop wrote a book, "The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant." Every year the New York Yankees beat the Washington Senators for the pennant. One day, a middle aged, overweight man, who is a Senators fan, is approached by a stranger. The stranger will transform this man into a great major league baseball player but for a very small price. The man must give his soul to the stranger. The stranger is, of course, the Devil. The man becomes Joe Hardy, a national phenom. For several years, Joe Hardy was a hero. But what about eternity? Was the sacrifice worth it? Is your soul worth momentary fame? Is your soul worth momentary pleasure? How much momentary satisfaction is worth giving up an eternity for?

How much will you be willing to give up for that temptation? Satan is no fool. He won't go all the way, certainly not at first.

If temptation comes to you and says, "You can watch all the pornography that you want, but it will destroy your marriage and then your wife and children will be taken from you." Would you agree to that? I certainly hope not. But if temptation comes and says, "You can look at pornography for a half an hour a day, and I'll make sure that no one finds out about it. Oh, and, it will cause the occasional squabble between you and your wife when she catches you looking at other women." Would you agree to that? I would hope not, but if you have a problem with pornography, then that may seem appealing. You might go for it. But then a few months later, it is an hour of pornography a day, and the tensions between you and your wife rise. Then a little more and a little more. And eventually, you've destroyed your marriage and your wife and children are gone. And you're sitting there alone in the dark wondering how it ever came to this? How could you have been so stupid? You were stupid that very first time, and once you opened the door even a little bit, it was only a matter of time. Stop temptation when it is knocking on your door. Don't even look through the peephole. Stupid often starts small. Satan is no fool.

[(Probably skip this next part)

Thomas Fuller said, "That four things make a Divine [an old-fashion word for a minister], namely, reading and Meditation, Prayer and Temptation."

Referring to the Temptation part he wrote:

there is the tentatio, testing (Anfechtung). This is the touchstone. It teaches you not only to know and understand but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's word is: it is wisdom supreme. This is why you observe that in the psalm indicated David so often complains of all sorts of enemies...For as soon as God's Word becomes known through you, the devil will afflict you, will make a real [theologian] of you."

Psalm 119:67, 68, 71

**67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word.  
68 Thou art good and doest good; teach me Thy statutes.  
71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes.**

Notice in this verse the order. First came affliction then keeping God's word.

]

Martin Luther

"I want you to know how to study theology in the right way. I have practiced this method myself...The method of which I am speaking is the one which the holy king David teaches in Psalm 119...Here you will find three rules. They are frequently proposed throughout the psalm and run thus: Oratio, meditatio, tentatio" (prayer, meditation, temptation)."

Resisting temptation makes you stronger, in character and in faith. Giving in to temptation makes you weaker.

Notice Jesus' first words in this third temptation, "Go, Satan!" Jesus didn't negotiate with temptation. "I'm only going to look at this magazine one more time and then I'm going to get rid of all of them." That is negotiating.

Jesus didn't reason with temptation. "I'm not paid what I desire at work. It would even out if I take a few things. They can always get more and no one would even notice." That is reasoning with temptation. Once you start doing that, you are sunk.

Jesus didn't hesitate. He didn't mindlessly stare at temptation for a few seconds. Rather, He immediately pushed it away from Him. He didn't just turn and walk away. He immediately pushed it out of His life.

"I'm going to throw away all of these magazines right now and dump raw garbage on them so I'm not tempted to come back later." Immediately and quickly rid yourself of that temptation.

"I will not steal from work. If I don't like what I'm being paid then I need to put my resume together and look elsewhere."

When tempted. Don't hesitate. While you're doing nothing, temptation is not silently standing there with its arms crossed waiting for you to make your move. Temptation is always whispering in your ear.

Satan was offering Jesus something appealing. By sending Satan away, Jesus was essentially saying, "Satan, you've got something that might interest Me. But, guess what, I have something better. So, go away. Don't try to fool me. Don't offer me roller-skates when I have a Lamborghini right behind Me."

Then, once again, Jesus falls back onto Scripture. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only." This is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:11-14 which reads,

**12 then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. 14 You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, 15 for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.**

Notice the consequence in verse 15, “and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.”

Satan knew how God is jealous for His glory.

Here are the words of Satan in Isaiah 14:13-14 before he fell from heaven,

**13 “I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,  
And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.  
14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.”**

These are the words of a creature who wants the adoration that only God deserves.

But then look at the consequence.

**15 “Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit.”**

You can see this same judgment in Ezekiel 28:16b, **“And you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.”**

Satan knows the Bible. Don’t think that Satan doesn’t know about this final judgment. It only increases his hatred and fury. And because of the remembrance of that, it is no wonder of the result in Matthew 4:11, **“Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.”**

Resist this temptation. Just because sin looks easier does not mean that it is better. In fact, it never is.

### **3.1.6 Summary of the Three Temptations**

The first temptation is thinking that God doesn’t care and that we need to do it on our own.

The second temptation is trying to put God into a position where if He doesn’t do what we want, then it proves that He doesn’t care.

The third temptation is thinking that we can have whatever we want without any consequences.

Why didn’t the devil continue his temptations until one stuck? Was he limited to only three, sort-of like the wishes from a genie? I believe that it is because Jesus’ quoting of this Scripture and the consequence in Deuteronomy 6:15. That brought back the devil’s fall and the horror of that put him in his place and caused him to flee. Satan didn’t want to experience anything like that again. So, he cut his losses and left.

### **3.1.7 How to Resist Temptation**

Now we are going to further look at how to resist temptation by examining Proverbs 7:6-27.

[Slide]

<sup>6</sup> For at the window of my house  
I looked out through my lattice,  
<sup>7</sup> And I saw among the naive,  
*And* discerned among the youths  
A young man lacking sense,  
<sup>8</sup> Passing through the street near her corner;  
And he takes the way to her house,  
<sup>9</sup> In the twilight, in the evening,  
In the middle of the night and *in* the darkness.  
<sup>10</sup> And behold, a woman *comes* to meet him,  
Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.  
<sup>11</sup> She is boisterous and rebellious,  
Her feet do not remain at home;  
<sup>12</sup> *She is* now in the streets, now in the squares,  
And lurks by every corner.  
<sup>13</sup> So she seizes him and kisses him  
And with a brazen face she says to him:

[Slide]

<sup>14</sup> "I was due to offer peace offerings;  
Today I have paid my vows.  
<sup>15</sup> "Therefore I have come out to meet you,  
To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.  
<sup>16</sup> "I have spread my couch with coverings,  
With colored linens of Egypt.  
<sup>17</sup> "I have sprinkled my bed  
With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.  
<sup>18</sup> "Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning;  
Let us delight ourselves with caresses.  
<sup>19</sup> "For my husband is not at home,  
He has gone on a long journey;  
<sup>20</sup> He has taken a bag of money with him,  
At the full moon he will come home."  
<sup>21</sup> With her many persuasions she entices him;  
With her flattering lips she seduces him.  
<sup>22</sup> Suddenly he follows her  
As an ox goes to the slaughter,  
Or as *one in* fetters to the discipline of a fool,  
<sup>23</sup> Until an arrow pierces through his liver;  
As a bird hastens to the snare,  
So he does not know that it *will cost him* his life.

[Slide]

<sup>24</sup> **Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,  
And pay attention to the words of my mouth.**

<sup>25</sup> **Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,  
Do not stray into her paths.**

<sup>26</sup> **For many are the victims she has cast down,  
And numerous are all her slain.**

<sup>27</sup> **Her house is the way to Sheol,  
Descending to the chambers of death.**

Steps to Temptation

**Verse 7: And I saw among the naïve, and discerned among the youths a young man lacking sense**

We see at the start, the character of this person. He is naïve, meaning ignorant, and he is lacking sense. He does not understand the consequences of sin. He is not stupid; he just hasn't trained himself to discern between good and bad.

Romans 16:17-18

**<sup>17</sup> Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. <sup>18</sup> For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.**

False teachers were coming into the church and deceiving the brethren. But not all brethren, only those who were unsuspecting or as some translations have it "naïve." These are those who are not mature enough to discern truth versus lies or righteousness versus sin. They are like the young man in verse 7.

But then read the next verse in Romans 16.

**<sup>19</sup> For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore, I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.**

Here it says that we should be innocent in what is evil. First Paul, in a way, rebukes those who are naïve about sin for so easily falling into it but then tells them to be innocent to evil. Is this a contradiction? The difference is that being naïve means lacking knowledge and understanding whereas innocence means not having played with or experienced sin. The Greek means "unmixed, pure, as wine, metals, without admixture of evil." Here, innocent means not guilty. It does not mean ignorant.

God wants us to be aware of sin, to know what it looks like, but, even more critically, to know what is good and pure and holy. And though He wants us to know what sin looks like, He also wants us to be unstained by it.

[Slide – Dollar]

There are real dollar bills and counterfeit dollar bills. How can you tell that a bill is counterfeit? The Secret Service and the U.S. Treasury give us some tips and they all relate to what the true bill looks like. Here are five:

1. Hold a bill up to a light and look for a holograph of the face image on the bill. Both images should match.
2. Looking at the bill through a light will also reveal a thin vertical strip containing text that spells out the bill's denomination.



3. Watermark: Hold the bill up to a light to view the watermark in an unprinted space to the right of the portrait. The watermark can be seen from both sides of the bill since it is not printed on the bill but is imbedded in the paper.
4. Ultraviolet Glow: If the bill is held up to an ultraviolet light, the \$5 bill glows blue; the \$10 bill glows orange, the \$20 bill glows green, the \$50 bill glows yellow, and the \$100 bill glows red – if they are authentic.
5. Comparison: Compare the feel and texture of the paper with other bills you know are authentic.

Counterfeit bills can have any of hundreds or thousands of discrepancies. What is better, to try and keep up with all of those discrepancies or to know everything about what a real bill looks like? In all cases, you won't be duped by a counterfeit bill because you know what is in a true bill.

You're in a store and you see a woman take a watch off of the countertop and put it into her purse. Is that wrong? How do you know? The Bible never speaks directly to taking watches from a store that you didn't pay for. You know because the Bible tells us not to steal. You recognize the sin because you know the truth.

You see a shabby guy walking down the street bumping into the side of each car as he passes by. He pauses at one very expensive car while looking through the window. You watch him as he leans against that car for a few minutes. Then he nervously opens the door and gets in and drives off. A few minutes later a well-dressed man walks up to the now empty spot and looks around. Then he calls someone on his cell. A minute later he is talking to the cops. Is what the shabby guy did wrong? How do you know? The Bible never addresses someone taking a car that isn't their own. You know that it was wrong because the Bible tells us not to steal. You recognize the sin because you know the truth.

Finally, a woman is sitting on a bench with her purse next to her. She is feeding the birds. A man sits down next to her and ties his shoe. When he is finished tying his shoe he gets up. The purse is no longer there. Did the man do something wrong? How do you know? You know because the Bible tells us not to steal. You recognize the sin because you know the truth.

All three sins were different in a way but all were stealing. How did we know that each one was wrong? Because we knew the one truth that we should not steal. We didn't have to know every permutation of stealing. We just had to know the one truth. Taking something that is not yours is stealing.

Sin comes in a nearly infinite variety of actions, words, shapes, and temptations. We can't possibly know every one of these. All that we have to know is the one truth that is God's truth. Once we know that, we are "wise in what is good" (Romans 16:19).

How do we know what is true? The three best ways in order are:

- 1) Read the Bible every day. But don't just read it. Understand it. Don't whip through the pages. Read them slowly thinking about each story, each verse. Ingest the word of God. Take notes.

[Slide – Forest on road]

For many years I quickly drove past a forest alongside of the highway. To me it was a bunch of trees that I paid little attention to. Then one day the traffic was at a standstill. Looking at the forest I noticed a walking path. I am always searching for new places to explore so that weekend I hiked down the path.

[Slide – In a forest]

I saw many varieties of mushrooms, elegant ferns, complaining squirrels, and scampering chipmunks. When I looked straight up I saw beautiful rays of sun stabbing through the canopy of leaves. It was amazing how everything balanced

together perfectly to create a complete environment. It was very tranquil and stunning. While driving by fast it was just a bunch of trees, but while taking the time to slowly walk through it I saw that it was so much more.

Too often this is how our spiritual lives can be. We quickly zip through our daily reading of the Bible and close the cover; done for the day. Rather, we should slowly walk through each verse noticing the words and what they mean. We will see things that we never noticed before: the people and their struggles, the events and how they are resolved, and how God is sovereign over all. We will see how this passage fits perfectly with the rest of the chapter to ultimately create a complete book. We will find it reassuring and stunning. Slow down and see that there is so much more.

- 2) Go to church and listen carefully to the sermons. Think about what is being taught. Don't sit there and think about scoring the winning touchdown or what you are cooking for dinner this week. Realize that the preacher/teacher has put hours and hours of sincere study into this message and is wanting to convey God's glory in the most reverent way.
- 3) Read good Christian books. And not just those whose subject matter interests you the most. Branch out. If you aren't into the End Times then read a book on the End Times. If you aren't into biographies then read a book about George Mueller or some other great Christian. By reading books, you are following in the footsteps of those who have wrestled with these subjects and, hopefully, have something enlightening to share.

Don't be among the naïve. Be wise in discerning evil. Know the truth. That is your first defense against sin and temptation. If you push temptation away at the very beginning and don't let it get its foot into your door, then you will be much more successful at leading a holy life.

#### **Verse 8: Passing through the street near her corner; and he takes the way to her house**

If temptation gets past the first defense then its next step is to put you in the vicinity of temptation, of being near to it.

You can bring the temptation to you by thinking about it. This can be seen in sins such as:

- Revenge: where you turn over in your mind how awful that person was to you and how they deserve bad things to happen to them. This can result in a cold shoulder, gossip, or worse.
- Lust: where you picture things that you should not be thinking about or look at things that you shouldn't.
- Greed: where you scheme about how to get something that you don't have.

But all of these sins started with initially being near to the temptation in one way or another.

- You let unforgiveness stay near to you and so now you are fuming with revenge.
- You looked at pictures or people in a way that you shouldn't have and now you have that picture in your mind.
- When you saw the success of someone else you didn't rejoice over their blessings; instead, you resented that they had it and not you.

There are times when you just need to avoid the situation.

If you have a problem with overeating then don't buy snacks. If they aren't there then you won't and can't eat them.

If you watch too much TV then purposely schedule time with your family or with friends. Play board games. Go on a bike ride or a hike. Go to an outdoor flea market or a theater play. You'll find those activities a lot more fulfilling.

But there are times when the temptation comes to you and you can't avoid it.

Someone gossips about you at work or at church.

A relative gets mad at you for some unfathomable reason and makes a scene at family gatherings.

A thief breaks into your house and steals some of your belongings.

What about then? You were minding your own business when this sin, like a bull, raged into your life.

First go to that person if possible and make every effort to understand the situation and be reconciled.

Matthew 5:23-24, **“23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”**

Romans 12:18, **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”**

Here it says do your best to be at peace. Don't just give a cursory stab at it and then declare it futile just so that you can remain enemies. Give all that you have to make it work. Sacrifice your pride. Sacrifice your anger. Sacrifice your desire for revenge. That is what God wants.

Second, forgive.

Ephesians 4:32, **“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”**

You had a slate completely filled with a list of your entire lifetime of sins. Jesus wiped it completely clean. Can you at least, in your love for God, wipe away that one sin that that person has committed against you?

Colossians 2:13-14, **“13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”**

You can even forgive the thief who broke into your house and who was never found. Forgiveness is always offered from your willingness and never because of their response.

Here are two instances of forgiveness.

### **Cop Forgives Teen Who Tried to Kill Him**

[Slide – McDonald]

Forgiveness is never easy, but it may be easier to forgive someone for what he has done to a loved one than for what he has done to you. Not so in the case of Steven McDonald. In the 1980s, McDonald was serving as a New York City police officer. He was on patrol in Central Park when he came upon a group of teens who were suspected of armed robbery. A chase ensued, but McDonald caught up to the trio. As he was patting down one of the suspects, another shot him three times. The shooting left him paralyzed from the neck down and unable to breathe without the aid of a respirator. However, McDonald was a devout Christian, and so he turned to the pillars of his faith in his time of need. He was angry, but he was also alive. Nine months after the incident, McDonald announced in a news conference that he had forgiven the young man who altered his fate.

### **Forgiving the Holocaust**

[Slide – Corrie Ten Boom]

If there were one crime in the history of the world that most everyone can agree cannot be forgiven, it would have to be the Holocaust. Corrie Ten Boom thought otherwise. Living in Holland, Corrie was just a girl when World War II broke out across Europe. Her family were devout Christians who had made their home a refuge for those in need since before the war. When war came, the family made their home a safe place for those who were wanted by the Nazis. Eventually, the Nazis were alerted to what was going on in the Boom house and came calling. The entire family of ten, including Corrie was arrested. Four of the Booms died in the Nazi camps, but Corrie survived. She went on to minister forgiveness in the public arena, even praying for the forgiveness of those who had committed the atrocities of the Holocaust against millions and her own family. She died, peacefully, at 91 years old. Here are five quotes from Corrie Ten Boom.

[Slide]

- "When I try, I fail. When I trust, He succeeds."
- "Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart."
- "Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him... Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."
- "You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have."
- "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you."

If they can forgive these atrocities by the grace of God then so can any one of us.

By reconciling, by forgiving, you can push those temptations away from you.

But other temptations can come at you that don't demand reconciliation or forgiveness.

- You can lose your job and be in financial straits.
- You or someone you are close to develops a severe health issue.
- Your house may be destroyed by fire or flood.
- Your car broke down and you can't afford to fix it.

These are trials and temptations that can't be fixed by forgiveness. But you can trust God that He wants to do the best for you. Romans 8:28, **"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."**

To resist the second stage of temptation, push it away by having a good heart that wants to obey God, to become more like Him, and to trust Him for wanting your best.

**Verse 9 In the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness.**

The third step is that sin wants you to keep going. It tries to get you in deeper and deeper because the deeper you are in, then the harder it is for you to get out.

[When we talking about sin here, it sounds as though sin is a separate, intelligent creature. It is not. Temptation comes by three means: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. 1 John 2:16 tells us, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."]

Sin usually isn't like a bear trap that suddenly and completely snaps on you in a second. It is more like a constrictor snake that slowly squeezes you.

Notice in verse 9 how the longer it goes the darker it gets: twilight to evening to midnight to total darkness. The darker it is, the harder it is to see your way out. We fear the darkness because we don't know what lies in the shadows and also because we can be more confused and unsure of where we are and where we are going.

The key here is to resist and get out as quickly as possible. The longer you hold that thought, the longer you look at that picture, the longer that you refuse to forgive, the harder it will be to say no. Once you see the temptation, run.

Notice how Jesus stopped the Devil at each temptation right at the beginning. The Devil wasn't given a chance to give a drawn-out attack because Jesus quickly cut him off.

## **Verses 10-12**

**10 And behold, a woman comes to meet him, dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.**

**11 She is boisterous and rebellious, her feet do not remain at home;**

Sin is boisterous. A boisterous party is one that is loud and rowdy. It gives the impression that everyone is having a great time and wants you to be part of it. It is a loud laugh and a slap on the back. But it is not joy. It is not peace.

Sin wants you to think that if you join in with it that you will have a great time. But it is superficial and it never, ever tells you about the cost. Sin is only about the here and now.

Sin is like the person who drinks to excess at a party and acts like the most fun person there, but then the next day is hungover and miserable. Sin always demands a price to pay.

Sin never sits still. It is always looking who to grab next.

**Verse 12 She is now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner.**

Sin is everywhere. You can't get away from it. You can't even escape from it in church because your thoughts and your flesh are always with you. Sin isn't just coming. It is here, it is now. Temptation is always knocking on your door. It is always whispering in your ear.

Don't ever think that you are in such a good place spiritually that sin can't sneak in or barge its way in.

You can never take a break from watching out for sin and temptation because it is never going to give you a break.

Foolish men think to hide themselves from God, by hiding God from themselves.

## **Verses 13 - 21**

**<sup>13</sup> So she seizes him and kisses him**

**And with a brazen face she says to him:**

**<sup>14</sup> "I was due to offer peace offerings;**

**Today I have paid my vows.**

**<sup>15</sup> "Therefore I have come out to meet you,**

**To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.**

<sup>16</sup> **“I have spread my couch with coverings,  
With colored linens of Egypt.**

<sup>17</sup> **“I have sprinkled my bed  
With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.**

<sup>18</sup> **“Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning;  
Let us delight ourselves with caresses.**

<sup>19</sup> **“For my husband is not at home,  
He has gone on a long journey;**

<sup>20</sup> **He has taken a bag of money with him,  
At the full moon he will come home.”**

Since this person did not appear to make even the slightest effort to resist this temptation, we see the outcome.

Sin seizes him in verse 13. “Seizes” comes from a word that means “to bind.”

[Slide – Hands in chains]

It is like it says in Proverbs 5:22, **“His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin.”** At this point there is pretty much no going back. Of course, God’s grace is strong enough to overcome sin at any stage, but the problem here isn’t grace, the problem is that this person is more interested in the passing pleasures of sin than in the eternal blessings and freedom of grace.

Notice the tactics that sin uses to entice him.

[Slide]

- 1) Quick pleasure. “and kisses him.” Sin is not usually patient. It wants to strike quickly at the first opportunity so as to pull you in.
- 2) Makes the occasion seem special. “I was due to offer peace offerings; today I have paid my vows.” Sin says that this is a special time. You have to act now or it will be lost forever. Sin’s tagline could be “For a limited time only” or at least sin wants you to think that.
- 3) Notice also in this same phrase she talks about peace offerings and vows. Sin sometimes puts on an air of righteousness and religion if it knows that is necessary to catch its prey. How much horror has been done in the name of religion?
- 4) Flattery, making you seem special. “Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.” Sin wants you to feel like you and only you deserve what she has to offer. “Today is your lucky day” sin says to the gambler. “I’ve had my eye on you” sin says to the co-worker. “You deserve better than that” sin says to everyone.

[Slide]

- 5) Appeal to your desires. “I have spread my couch with coverings, with colored linens of Egypt. I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.” What do you want that you don’t have? Sin will figure out a way seduce you with that desire. “I have something special for you; something that you really want.”
- 6) Promises guaranteed satisfaction. “Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with caresses.” Sin makes you think that it will satisfy you, but it will always leave you wanting more. More alcohol, more unearned money, more fooling around, more bitterness, more, more, more.

- 7) Promise of safety. “For my husband is not at home, he has gone on a long journey; he has taken a bag of money with him, at the full moon he will come home.” Sin always lets you think that there will be no repercussions. “It’s OK. No one will see you.” “You have plenty of time.” When Eve was tempted by the serpent in the Garden and was trying to refute him, what was the serpent’s first response? “You certainly will not die!” – Genesis 4:3. Lie and minimize the consequences. That’s sin’s way.

### Verses 21 - 23

**<sup>21</sup>With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him.**

**<sup>22</sup>Suddenly he follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as *one in fetters* to the discipline of a fool,**

**<sup>23</sup>Until an arrow pierces through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare, so he does not know that it *will cost him his life*.**

The act is committed. Sin has won. The pleasure is small but the cost is huge.

If you don’t actively resist sin then sin will take over and take away your power.

Notice that sin has “many persuasions.” “Date that unbeliever, you’ll convince him to be saved.” Then “Go ahead, go on a date with that unbeliever. An opportunity for the Gospel will come up.” Then “How will someone get saved unless you spend quality time with him?” And on and on until you give in. But the truth is that you listened because you wanted to give in. You were hoping to be convinced. And sin can be very convincing.

### Verses 24 – 27

**<sup>24</sup>Now therefore, *my sons*, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth.**

**<sup>25</sup>Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths.**

**<sup>26</sup>For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain.**

**<sup>27</sup>Her house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death.**

Other translations of verse 26 are:

“for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng.” -- ESV

“For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.” -- KJV

“For she has cast down many [mortally] wounded; Indeed, all who were killed by her were strong.” – Amplified

Some commentators view this verse as being military in tone.

- Great armies are slain by sin.
- Strong men are slain by sin.

[Slide – Bedroom then Battlefield]

Sin wants you to think that you are being invited to a beautiful bedroom. But in reality, sin is taking you to a battlefield where you will be slain to lie there a corpse in the bloody mud.

You may think that you are strong enough to resist sin on your own. But this verse does not read, “Indeed, all who were killed by her were weak.” The battlefield of sin is piled with the corpses of those who thought they were strong. Do you think that you are strong? Is there any sin that you don’t think that you could ever commit?

Years from now, some of you will have fallen away from Christianity. Look back at this moment. At that time in the future did you ever think that you would wind up there? Probably not. And, at that time, you'll have plenty of excuses and blame as to why you are where you are. But the truth is, you are where you are, because you thought that you were strong. You were unteachable. You had pride. And now, you are one of those corpses.

1 Corinthians 10:12 is a telling verse, **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”**

The answer is in verse 24 of Proverbs, **“Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth.”**

- Don't listen to yourself.
- Don't listen to your excuses.
- Don't listen to your blaming others.

Instead, listen to the wisdom of God and fall on His grace. In the battle against sin, you will only win when you cling tenaciously to the grace of God.

How did Jesus counter Satan's temptation? He quoted Scripture. Jesus clung to the word of God.

Remember back to Jesus' baptism? What was the crucial phrase? Verse 17, “This is my Son, whom I love.” Jesus didn't resist the Devil based on His own divinity. If He did Jesus would have said, “Satan, you can't tempt Me. I am God the Almighty. I am the Alpha and the Omega. The First and the Last. I created you, and I hold you together.” No. Jesus clung to the Father's power. He clung to the Father's faithfulness.

And this gives us hope. We too can resist temptation just like Jesus. Not because He relied on who He was but because He relied on who His Father was. We can do the same.

## 3.2 Imitating Jesus

What can we learn from this passage about how to imitate Jesus?

[Slide]

### 1) Scripture

We learn that Scripture is the key. Not because they are magic words like abracadabra. But because they deepen our faith and motivate us to rely on the abundant grace of a faithful God.

### 2) Faith

As we quote Scripture, we realize that any temptation is greater than we are. Therefore, we look to God and remember that the battle is His. This is not some mystic mumbo-jumbo. This is knowing that there is a supernatural world beyond that is much greater and real than this one.

### 3) Grace

God will give us the grace to escape any temptation. The only temptations that we fall to are the ones that we want to.

### 4) God's faithfulness

God did not create the universe and walk away. He is not an absent God. Jeremiah 23:23, **“Am I a God who is near,” declares the Lord, ‘And not a God far off?’”**



That God is faithful should give us much peace and confidence. We can be assured that He will never desert us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Life may hammer us, friends or family may betray us, our health or finances may crumble, but God will always be there to comfort us and give us hope. There is many a believer who forsakes God, but there is never a believer whom God forsakes. As senseless and ignorant as we may become, as much as we may feel that we have been abandoned by God, and regardless of the self-indulgence of our condition, we can always say with Asaph in Psalm 73:23, "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee." We are constantly in the concern of the Lord God Most High. No matter how vehemently we may deny this or how circumstances may make this seem to be untrue, the truth of its reality forever stands firm.

What is one of the greatest passages on this? 1 Corinthians 10:13, of course.

**No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.**

Notice some of the key words.

"No" No temptation can overcome you. You are not just guaranteed safe from the small, easy ones. You are guaranteed to be safe from every temptation: big, small, seemingly insurmountable, all. Even that over-bearing brother-in-law. Even that person who so deeply offended and wounded you. Even from losing your faith because of health issues. The choice is yours, it is always yours.

"Such as is common" Your temptation is not unique. It is not special. It is common. At least hundreds of thousands of people are probably experiencing that same temptation as you that same day. There might be slight variations. There might be different faces. But at its base, it is the same temptation. But realize, that gives hope. God is not up there stroking His chin going, "Hmmm, this is a new one. I wonder how best to resist this one. I need some time to think about it."

"God is faithful" This is the key. It is God who is going to overcome the temptation, not your willpower, not your experience, not your cunning.

Psalm 106 lists three instances where Israel was tempted. See what is the common reason as to why they fell.

Verse 6—the sin

**6 We have sinned like our fathers,  
We have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly.**

Verse 7—the reason

**7 Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders;  
They did not remember Your abundant kindnesses,  
But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.**

"They did not remember Your [God's] abundant kindness."

Verse 14—the sin

**14 But craved intensely in the wilderness,  
And tempted God in the desert.**

Verse 13—the reason

13 They quickly forgot His works;  
They did not wait for His counsel,

“They quickly forgot His [God’s] works.”

Verses 19 and 20—the sin

**19 They made a calf in Horeb  
And worshiped a molten image.  
20 Thus they exchanged their glory  
For the image of an ox that eats grass.**

Verse 21—the reason

**21 They forgot God their Savior,  
Who had done great things in Egypt,**

The reasons were all the same: “They forgot God their Savior.”

Leave God out of the temptation and you will fall to it.

Keep God in the picture and you will defeat it.

The second you let God go is the second that sin will wrap its chains around you.

“Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”

But you may say, “I gave in to that temptation. So, it was beyond what I was able.” With that logic, no one will ever sin because God will always keep us from falling. Rather, it means that, with God’s grace, you are able to overcome any temptation that comes your way.

“But with the temptation will provide the way of escape also. So that you will be able to endure it.”

The way of escape may not be easy, but it is always there.

- Turn off the computer.
- Bite your tongue before you speak.
- Consider what is right rather than what is easy before making that choice.

When Peter was sinking in the sea he cried out, “Jesus, save me.” That was good enough. When asking God for help, your words do not have to long or eloquent. They just have to be sincere.

Temptation will come like the wind blowing into your face. Even Jesus was tempted, but He resisted without sinning. Let us use His example to learn how to resist our temptations.

## 4 Determining God's Will

### 4.1 Scripture

Luke 6:12-16

**12 It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. 13 And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: 14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; 15 and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; 16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.**

Jesus was about to determine and call His disciples. Before this He went to the mountain to pray.

In the Bible many significant events happened on mountains.

[Slide]

- Noah's ark rests on Mount Ararat.
- On Mount Sinai Moses was given the Ten Commandments.
- Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah.
- The Temple was built on Mount Zion.
- Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.
- The glory of the Lord appears like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain (Exodus 24:17)
- When the Israelites entered into the promised they passed between two mountains. Mount Gerazim represented the blessing for serving God and Mount Ebal represented the curse for rejecting God.
- Moses died on Mount Pisgah. Aaron died on Mount Hor.
- When Jesus returns at the Second Coming His feet will touch down on the Mount of Olives.

[Slide]

Jesus had several key events on mountains.

- 1) Temptation by the Devil (Matt 4:8)
- 2) Before calling Apostles (Luke 6:12-16)
- 3) Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-12)
- 4) Many healings (Matt 15:29-31)
- 5) Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Matt 17:1)
- 6) Final discourse (Matt 24:3)
- 7) Prays on the Mount of Olives before His arrest and crucifixion (Luke 22:39-49)
- 8) Commissioning of the Apostles (Matt 28:16-20)

[Slide]

Mountains symbolize:

- Power  
(Psalm 30:7, "O Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong...")
- Authority

(Isaiah 2:2, "Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it.")

- Blessings and plenty

(Isaiah 25:6, "The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine.")

- Understanding God and His ways

(Micah 4:2, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths.")

- Meeting God

(Exodus 19:3, "Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel...'"")

- The presence of God

(Psalm 24:3, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place?")

Mountains are quiet. They allow us to focus on God and not be distracted by the goings on around us. A.W. Tozer said, "More spiritual progress can be made in one short moment of speechless silence in the awesome presence of God than in years of mere study."

Mountains give us the feeling of being closer to God. God is thought of as "up there." Though climbing high doesn't actually bring us closer to God it does give us that sense.

From mountains we can often see a grand sweep of God's beautiful and magnificent creation.

Mountains are usually isolated. There usually is not a lot of foot traffic on mountains and so a person can be alone with God.

Mountains somewhat imitate God by being solid and unmoving.

So in this important moment in Jesus' ministry, He did not just take a minute and offer up a quick prayer and expect that to be good enough. He went to where He could be alone with His Father and spent long, quality time in prayer. When Jesus needed to make an important decision, the first thing that He didn't do was to form a committee. He didn't draw a vertical line down the center of a piece of paper and write down pluses and minuses. The first thing that He did was to pray.

God knows all things. He knows all outcomes. He knows all circumstances and variables. If you want to know which choice to make, wouldn't it make sense to first consult with the One who knows everything?

After this time of seeking God, Jesus came down from the mountain and gathered His disciples to Himself. This implies that He had a lot more than the twelve. Then out of that group He chose twelve. Why twelve?

In the Old Testament there were twelve tribes from Jacob. In the New Testament there were twelve apostles. In both instances there is the formation of a community. In the OT the community was Israel, a nation that was opposed and persecuted by other peoples and nations. They had to stay close together to resist their antagonists and to maintain

their divine calling. No one person in Israel could maintain all of the laws and rituals and traditions. Hence there were priests and judges and Levites and rulers.

In the NT, the community is the church, a group that is opposed and persecuted by other peoples and religions. We have to stay close together to resist our antagonists and to make our divine calling. No one person can maintain all of the commandments and sacraments and ministries. Hence, we have pastors and counselors and teachers and all of the others with gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We see a continuity in that the God of the OT and Jesus are one in the same. But that doesn't mean that Israel and the church are the same.

Numbers are important in the Bible.

[Slide]

The number twelve in the Bible represents God's authority and government.

- Twelve tribes of Israel
- Twelve Apostles
- Ishmael had 12 princes
- Twelve unleavened cakes of bread be placed every week in the temple
- In Revelation, 12,000 are called from each of the 12 tribes to be 144,000 witnesses
- The New Jerusalem will have 12 gates and its walls will be 144 (12 x 12) cubits high and will be 12,000 furlongs square
- Jesus' first recorded words were when He was 12 years old
- The Tree of Life in the new creation will bear twelve kinds of fruit (Revelation 22:2)

Jesus called these "apostles." The word "apostle" means "a messenger" or "one who is sent out."

Here is a synopsis of the Apostles.

[Slide]

Name	A.K.A. (Also Known As)	Trade	Significance in the NT (not complete)
Simon	Peter. Cephas (meaning "Rock").	Fisherman	Walked on water (Matt 14:28-33). At Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13). Denied Jesus (Luke 22:54-62). Early church leader (Acts 2, 10).
Andrew (Peter's brother)	Protokletos (by the Orthodox church with means "first-called.")	Fisherman	Finds the boy with the bread and fish in the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-15).
James son of Zebedee	James the Greater. Boanerges, Son of Thunder (with John) (Mark 3:17).	Fisherman	Wanted to call down fire on an inhospitable village (Luke 9:54). Asked Jesus if he and John could sit on either side of Jesus' throne in heaven (Mark 10:35-40).
John son of Zebedee	Boanerges, Son of Thunder (with James) (Mark 3:17). Beloved disciple. The elder (2 John 1:1)	Fisherman	Wanted to call down fire on an inhospitable village (Luke 9:54). Asked Jesus if he and John could sit on either side of Jesus' throne in heaven (Mark 10:35-40).

			Asked by Jesus to take care of His mother, Mary (John 19:26-27). Sits next to Jesus at the Passover meal (John 21:20).
Philip	Philip the Apostle to distinguish from Philip the Evangelist (Acts 6:2-6).		Brought Nathanael (Bartholomew) to Jesus ("come and see") (John 1:45-46).
Bartholomew	Nathanael.		Jesus called him by seeing him under the fig tree (John 1:45-51).
Matthew	Levi son of Alphaeus.	Tax collector	Jesus and sinners ate at his house (Matt 9:10-13).
Thomas	Doubting Thomas Didymus (which means twin). The Twin.		Doubted Jesus' resurrection (John 20:25-29).
James son of Alphaeus	James the Lesser		
Simon the Zealot		Maybe fisherman	
Judas of James	Jude. Jude of James. Thaddeus. Judas Thaddeus. Lebbaeus.	Maybe fisherman	
Judas Iscariot			Complained about Mary wasting perfume by anointing Jesus (John 12:1-8). Agrees to betray Jesus (Matt 26:14-16). Kisses Jesus to indicate who He was (Matt 26:47-49). Returns the betrayal money (Matt 27:3-4). Committed suicide (Acts 1:18-19).

[Slide]

Some additional facts about the Apostles.

Name	Death	Wrote	Noted	Symbol
Simon	Crucified by Nero around 64. The "Acts of Peter" claim that he was crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as Jesus did.	1 Peter 2 Peter	Andrew's brother.	Upside down cross with keys
Andrew (Peter's brother)	Crucified on an "X" shaped cross (known as St. Andrew's Cross) in Patras in Greece at around 60 AD.		Simon Peter's brother. First disciple called. First disciple to recognize Jesus as Messiah (John 1:41-42). Was a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-40).	Two crossed fish

James son of Zebedee	Killed by the sword (beheaded?) by Herod (Acts 12:2). Only martyrdom recorded in the Bible.		Brother of John.	Three shells
John son of Zebedee	Old age (only one not martyred) possibly lived until 100 AD.	Gospel of John 1 John 2 John 3 John Revelation	Brother of James. Disciples include: Polycarp of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch	Chalice with a snake in it
Philip	Probably martyred around 80 A.D. in Hierapolis, Phrygia but texts vary as to the means (stoning, beheaded, crucified).			Basket
Bartholomew	Martyred but year and how is debated. Most common is that his skin was stripped off while alive (flayed) and then beheaded. Ouch.			Three parallel knives
Matthew	Probably martyred although the year and means are debated. Some say that Hircanus the king had him killed with a spear.	Gospel of Matthew	A tax collector was among the most reviled jobs and so considered to be a traitor.	Three money bags
Thomas	On July 3, 72 AD he was pierced with a lance in India.			Group of spears, stones, & arrows
James son of Alphaeus	Probably martyred. He may have been crucified in Egypt or stoned in Jerusalem or sawed in pieces.		Some think he may have been Matthew's brother.	Saw
Simon the Zealot	Probably martyred but year and how is debated. Some say he was crucified in England in 74 AD.			Fish on a Bible
Judas of James	May have been clubbed to death or killed with arrows at Ararat.			Ship
Judas Iscariot	Suicide by hanging.			Hangman noose

[Slide]

What distinguished the Apostles from the rest of Jesus' disciples?

- 1) They spent more time with Jesus being taught and trained by Him.

"And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases." – Luke 9:1

- 2) Whereas the disciples followed Jesus, the Apostles were sent out by Jesus. Matthew 28:16-20 known as "The Great Commission,"

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

[Slide]

- 3) After Jesus’ ascension the Apostles were given power from the Holy Spirit to be witness to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:1-5,

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. 4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

[Slide]

There were at least four purposes of apostles:

Purpose	Scriptural Proof
They received new revelation from Jesus such as the church, the Second Coming, salvation, and many other doctrines.	Much of the Gospels; 1 Peter 1:12
They were the validation and core from which the church was built.	Matthew 16:18; Acts 2
They set the precedence of evangelism by taking the Gospel to all nations.	Matthew 28:18-20
They were with Jesus and so witnessed His life, sinlessness, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension. Therefore, they could record this for future generations.	The Gospels and 21 of the 27 New Testament books, if you count Paul as an Apostle.

## 4.2 How to discern God’s will.

[Slide]

How you view discerning God’s will can be on a sliding scale. At one end is the idea that God does not care at all what you decide, and so it does not make any difference trying to figure it out. The other end is an obsession with trying to definitely figure out God’s will for nearly everything. The first can result in a total lack of concern over doing the right thing and instead letting the chips fall where they may. The latter can lead to paralysis if there is doubt over what God is saying.

Realize that the great majority of decisions that you will make in your life do not require insight from God. You don’t need to go into the woods and pray about next week’s dinner menu. When you are in the food store you don’t need to balance a package of chicken in one hand, balance a package of pork in your other hand, close your eyes and pray for God’s guidance as to which package to choose.



Many of your decisions are just common sense. Probably nearly 99% of all decisions that you make are based on common sense or on the general commands and examples in the Bible and don't need any personal divine guidance from God.

In fact, we should be careful not to tack on a "Thus saith the Lord" when there isn't one or doesn't need to be one.

A few years ago a guy who was one of my best men at my wedding died. Before he died, he foolishly asked me to sing at his memorial service. I called someone who knew my friend and who is a musician and asked him if he would play for me at the funeral. He told me that God told him not to go to the funeral. Could God have told him this? Possibly, but I think that it is highly improbable. Why would God tell someone not to go to their friends' funeral? Was an assassin going to be there who would kill him with a poison dart? My feeling was, "If you don't want to go to your friend's funeral then don't go. But don't try to pin your lack of attendance on God." The point is, don't try to justify something by tagging on a "Thus says the Lord."

Let's take a look at seven methods for discerning God's will.

### 4.3 Methods for discerning God's will

[Slide]

#### 4.3.1 Bible (Ps. 119:105)

Psalm 119:105, **"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."**

Romans 15:4, **"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."**

What was written earlier was written for our instruction. The entire Bible was written in earlier times for us, so all of it is for our instruction.

Two primary ways of using the Bible to discern God's will.

[Slide]

- 1) Know God's commandments and examples

Some choices are clearly indicated by the Bible.

As a Christian, should I marry a non-Christian?

**2 Corinthians 6:14 - 16, "Do not be bound [unequally yoked] together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'"**

God is abundantly clear that a born-again Christian should not marry someone who is not saved.

Should I commit to a church and should I attend regularly?

**Hebrews 10:24-25, “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”**

Yes, if possible, you should commit to and attend a church. There are no “radio Christians” who substitute the radio or TV for attending church. There are no “radio Christians” because the real description is “disobedient Christians.” Of course, there are legit reasons for not being able to attend a church, but you had better be pretty solid in your justification because God won’t take kindly to your lying to His face.

The Bible gives us many instructions on major areas of our life.

Should you leer at that man or woman at work?

**Matthew 5:28, “but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”**

No.

Should you go out after work and have some drinks with your colleagues and get a little tipsy?

Ephesians 5:18, “**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit...**”

No.

Should you have an affair?

1 Corinthians 6:18, “**Flee immorality...**”

No.

Something bad happened. Perhaps you lost your job or there is a major health issue. Should you still be thankful?

1 Thessalonians 5:18, “**in everything give thanks**”

Yes.

[Slide]

You are tempted to fudge a little on your income tax. Should you? That’s more money that you can give to the church.

Romans 13:9, “**You shall not steal**”

No.

Someone just offended you very badly and with absolutely no reason. Should you still forgive them?

Ephesians 4:32, “**Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**”

Yes.

Your child has several scheduled sports events on a Sunday morning. Should you skip church on those days?

Hebrews 10:25, "**not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

No.

[Slide]

Should you glance at that pornography even for a second?

Colossians 3:5, "**Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.**"

No.

Should I curse even if it is in a joke, a really good joke?

Ephesians 4:29, "**Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.**"

No.

This one person that I love really loves me, too. We have great chemistry together and are clearly soul mates. We want to spend our lives together. However, they are not a Christian. Can we still get married?

2 Corinthians 6:14, "**Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?**"

No.

These are things that you do not need to pray about. You simply need to obey what God has already said. They are not negotiable. There are not shades of interpretation. They are clear.

There are also many examples in the Bible of what to do or not to do.

[Slide]

There is no indication that heavy rains or flooding was even known in **Noah's** time. Yet when God told Noah to build an ark, Noah obeyed even though it took him probably between 55 and 75 years to build the ark and to see any good come out of it. But he obeyed none-the-less. We don't obey God because it makes us look successful or spiritual. We obey God because we should and because we must.

**David** took on and conquered Goliath. We may think that besetting sin in our life is too big. We may think that we don't have enough forgiveness for that offense. We may think that our marriage is too far gone to ever repair. But David conquered because he didn't focus on how big Goliath was. He focused on how much bigger his God was.

**Ruth** can teach us about loyalty.

**Joshua** can teach us about courage and trust in God.

**Esther** can teach us about standing for what is right and actively opposing evil.

**Peter** can teach us that no matter how many times we blow it, God can still use us and make us into a great vessel for His glory.

**Herod** can teach us about how taking glory for yourself can have terrible results.

**Jezebel** can teach us not to put money or power over doing what is right.

The first way that the Bible can help us to discern God's will is by commandment and by example. This is probably the primary way for us to know what we should do, what choices we should make.

[Slide]

## 2) Reading the Bible carefully and slowly and letting God speak to you personally

Though every passage in the Bible has only one interpretation it can have many applications and God can use one of its many layers to speak to you personally.

Here, as example, are three people.

Russell is thinking about becoming involved in a church ministry, but he is fearful of not doing well and looking bad. If that happens then he thinks that people will look badly on his spirituality and he may have to leave the church out of shame. He doesn't know what to do.

Joan has been going through some trials for a while. She realizes that she has been slipping into some bad habits in order to cope such as isolating herself from others, being grumpy, and sometimes drinking a little too much alcohol. But she is at the end of her rope and doesn't know what to do.

Viola was struggling with her prayer life. She didn't know how long and elaborate her prayers should be. She didn't want to offend God with irreverent prayers. The result was that she didn't pray at all.

In their own personal Bible reading time they all read this passage.

Matthew 14

**22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. 23 After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. 24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."**

**28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"**

Russell reads this passage and what strikes him is that there are two groups of people in this dramatic passage. There is the group referred to as "the disciples" and there is Peter. Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water. Yes, he walked maybe only a few steps, got afraid, and sank. But he cried out to Jesus and was rescued. Peter is the only one

mentioned by name. The others who stayed in the boat were “the disciples,” an anonymous group. Only Peter took a chance and only Peter is mentioned by name. All throughout his life, the other disciples might have laughed at Peter and said, “It was so funny watching you look around, panic, and sink straight down into the water like an arrow.” But then Peter would respond, “Well, all of you sat in the comfort of the boat and watched me. But I’m the only one who walked on water.” And Russell thought, “Two thousand years later and we’re still reading about this. Even though Peter ultimately failed, still, he tried. And even in his failure, Jesus pulled him out of that failure. Maybe I should join that ministry after all.”

Joan reads this passage and what strikes her is the ferocity of the storm. Here were seasoned sailors and the storm was so violent they were terrified. In that culture, if you saw a ghost it meant that you were close to death. When they saw Jesus walking on the water, they thought that He was a ghost. They thought that they were going to die. Joan thought about how her life was one big storm. Just like the disciples she didn’t know if she was going to make it through or if she was going to sink. But then she thought about how Jesus came walking on the water. How He came walking on the very storm that was terrifying them. And she thought about how the Person who calmed and reassured the disciples was Jesus and how He was the One who would calm and reassure her. She determined to not focus on the problems all of the time and instead to focus on Jesus, to use His grace for solutions, and to trust Him that it will all be OK in the end.

Viola reads this passage and what strikes her is that when Peter is sinking he didn’t formulate some precise and elegant prayer, “Dear Father in heaven. May You be most blessed in heaven and earth. Please hear the request of your humble servant and rescue me from this watery grave. To You be all glory and power and honor. Amen.” Peter would have drowned halfway through this supplication. Instead he shouted, “Lord, save me!” Short. Simple. To the point. And it worked. “Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him...” God knows that we are but dust. He knows that we don’t know how to pray. Romans 8:26, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” As a result of this, Viola realized that she doesn’t have to stress about creating perfect prayers. She just needs to prayer her heart and God will understand and figure it out.

Three different people. Three different situations and problems. One passage. Yet God was able to speak specifically to each of these personally.

What is common in all three of these accounts? They READ the passage. And they thought about it. They were reading the Bible and they were thinking about it. If you don’t read your Bible then God will not be able to speak to you. But beyond just reading it; study it, mediate on it, think about it.

The Bible is our most solid and reliable source of God’s will in our lives.

What happens if you don’t know the Bible well enough to find appropriate passages?

You can use a book that lists Scripture by topic:

- Nave’s Topical Bible
- The Biblical Counseling Reference Guide: Over 580 Real-Life Topics
- Scripture at Your Fingertips: With Over 200 Topics and 2,000 Verses
- God’s Promises for Your Every Need
- Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling

You can also talk to mature Christians.

[Slide]

An article titled “Finding God’s Will for Your Life is Easier than You Think” by Karl Vaters says, “Finding God’s will for your life is not as difficult as we make it out to be. In fact, 90 percent of God’s will for my life is the same as 90 percent of God’s will for your life. (Actual results may vary.)” And he also wrote, “I believe it’s because most of us tend to overplay the importance of God’s specific will for our life, while underestimating the value of knowing and doing God’s universal will for all our lives. We often want to skip past the 90 percent (the Essentials) and jump straight to the 10 percent (the Specifics).” “Jesus never asked us to be unique. He told us to be faithful.”

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2016/september/finding-gods-will-for-your-life-is-easier-than-you-think.html>

Don’t pray about a situation that the Bible clearly speaks against. Don’t ask God as to whether you should marry this unbeliever that you are dating. The Bible already clearly tells us that a born-again Christian should never marry a non-Christian. If you do pray about this, you are not asking God for His guidance; you are merely wanting to feel like you sincerely sought God for something that you are going to do anyway regardless. That way you can tell people that you prayed to God about it, and you felt peace. But that wasn’t God’s peace. That was you trying to feel good about disobeying God. But you will enter that marriage without God’s blessing. As a Christian, you are spiritually alive. That other person is spiritually dead. Every time you lie in bed with that person, you will be lying next to a corpse.

We are made up of body, soul, and spirit. You may be soul mates. You may be physically attracted to each other. But you will never be a complete marriage because you will never be able to unite or connect on the spiritual level. That other person is spiritually dead and the dead aren’t compatible with anything. So, right off of the bat, no matter how great everything else goes, that will be a marriage that will, at the most, only be 2/3’s compatible and united. It could never be any more because you will never be compatible on the 1/3 that is spiritual.

The Bible, our number one method for discerning God’s will.

[Slide]

### 4.3.2 Prayer (Philippians 4:6)

Philippians 4:6, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”**

I was trying to determine how best to invest my savings so I spoke with a financial advisor.

Another time I needed to install an outdoor electrical circuit so I hired an electrician.

Once, my mower broke, so I brought it to a small engine repair shop.

In all of these three instances, the competence that was needed was beyond my knowledge and skills. So I went to an expert.

Then why, when it comes to important life matters, do we insist on relying exclusively on our own wits? When it comes to guidance and understanding all aspects of a situation, not to mention the future, there is no one more capable than God.

- Should I get married to this person? Take it to God.
- Should I look for another job? Take it to God.
- Which is the right church for me? Take it to God.

- [At the end of this Sunday School semester, should I give the teacher \$500 or \$1,000? Take it to God.]

God is the expert. But not just in the big matters, even in the small ones. So what do we do? We talk to Him. We tell him what we think; what is going on. We be honest. If we are mad with God, then we tell Him so. He can handle it. He knows what we are thinking and how we feel anyway. It is not like we are going to pull the wool over His eyes. It's not like He is going to be stunned by what we say.

The Psalms are a great collection of chapters that pull us in deeply to what the writer was thinking or feeling. In many of the Psalms, the author pours out his heart. He shares his feelings both good and bad, uplifting and disturbing. But always honestly.

Studying the Psalms is a great way to see how other people have talked to God. And to see what conclusions they came to.

The Psalms can be put into categories. Mostly, people will create anywhere from five to seven categories of Psalms. Here is a list utilizing seven categories in alphabetical order.

[Slide]

- 1) Confidence/Trust
- 2) Kingship/Royal of both God and of a human king
- 3) Lamentation, sometimes further divided into personal and communal
- 4) Praise hymns
- 5) Remembrance
- 6) Thanksgiving
- 7) Wisdom

Of these seven categories, which one has the largest number of Psalms? It is Lamentation numbering about 1/3 of the Psalms.

[Slide]

The writers cover a number of topics.

- Abuse by enemies – Psalm 3
- God feeling distant – Psalm 13
- Sorrow – Psalm 137
- Feeling overwhelmed and helpless – Psalm 69
- Suffering – Psalm 22
- Isolation – Psalm 102
- Feeling vulnerable – Psalm 31
- Guilt – Psalm 32
- Feeling crushed and oppressed – Psalm 38
- Betrayal – Psalm 55
- A sense of injustice – Psalm 58
- Envy of the wicked and rich – Psalm 73
- Feeling needy – Psalm 86
- Disappointment – Psalm 74

- Depression/Discouragement – Psalm 88

You can verbalize your own psalm. All you have to do is talk to God. It doesn't have to be as eloquent as one of the Psalms. It just has to be honest and heart-felt.

Or choose an appropriate Psalm and substitute yourself. Pray it to God.

Go to a quiet place. Maybe go for a long walk. Talk to God. Be honest. If you have to, tell God that you are disappointed with Him. It's OK.

But at the end, thank God, praise God, tell God that, ultimately, you trust Him and that, together, you'll figure this thing out. Of all the Psalms of lament, every one ends on a positive note except for one—Psalm 88—a psalm from the sons of Korah. What does that mean? That we should always try to end our prayers on a positive note, but if we just can't, if we are just too broken, too confused, too crushed, then it is OK to end where we are. There will be other days, other times with God. God would rather hear an honest prayer that doesn't end on a high note, then one that is phony because you are trying to be something that you are not.

Ask God for guidance. Give Him permission to open doors that should be opened and to close doors that should be closed.

Here's a tough one. Give God permission to correct us where we need to change. Whether it is our thoughts, our behavior, our attitudes, whatever it is, give God permission to work with us to change it. It will hurt, but we will come out the back end in a much better place.

When I was laid off, three times, in my career, each time when I was job searching for my prayers, I would tell God to close any jobs that would not be good for me no matter how much I felt that I wanted that job. But also to open whatever door is the best one according to God's wisdom and not my own.

James 1:5-8 is a great passage on praying to God for guidance.

**5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

In this passage, God tells us that He will generously give wisdom to those who ask. But He adds a qualification: we must ask in faith. What does this mean? He immediately answers that. We must not doubt, or as the Greek reads, "to not be double-minded" or "double-souled." A person who is double-minded is divided. Part of him wants to hear God and do what He says. But the other part prefers the pleasures of this world and is hoping that they will convince him instead. He is not sure that even if he did hear from God that he would pay attention.

Were you ever talking to someone when, after a while, you realized that they weren't listening to you? Maybe they were more interested in their cell phone or maybe they were simply gazing off into space. What did you do? You probably either said, "Hello?! You aren't listening to me at all, are you?" or you just stopped talking. But I bet that you didn't just continue talking as though you hadn't noticed their inattention. You would have just been wasting your time and breath. That person was a double-minded person. They were sort-of/kind-of pretending to be listening to you, but their thoughts were elsewhere.



If we ask God for guidance but cast our mind into the desires of the world then why should God keep talking to us? He knows what we really want, and it isn't His advice.

Once when I was driving out of state, I made a wrong turn and was quite lost. This happens frequently to me. I get lost in my own driveway. The first person that I saw I asked for directions. As she told me how far to go and which turns to make, I focused completely on what she was saying and repeated them in my head. I was determined to understand and remember what she said.

That is how God wants us to be when we Him for guidance.

Of course, we will almost never hear God's audible voice telling us which way to go. But we need to be alert to those subtle indications that He gives to us.

But "without any doubting" as we just saw in James 1:6 does not mean that we must first muster up 100% confidence and faith before coming to God. If that were the case, then God would be awfully lonely. You only need faith like a mustard seed, not like a coconut. God knows how frail we are, and He doesn't require perfection.

Hebrews 4:14-16 confirms this:

**14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let's hold firmly to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let's approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need.**

Notice some of the key points:

- 1) Jesus has already been before the Father.
- 2) Jesus understands our weaknesses.
- 3) Therefore, we can approach God with confidence.
- 4) God will be merciful and gracious.

Go to God. It's like He has this giant overflowing basket of grace and mercy that He wants to give away. And there we are, running all over the place and going from here to there but never going to God.

Consider the story in Mark 9 where the boy was possessed. The demon made him mute and slammed him to the ground. The boy foamed at the mouth, ground his teeth, and stiffened out. Jesus said to the boy's father, "**All things are possible to him who believes.**"

Then in verse 24 we read, "**Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, 'I do believe; help my unbelief.'**"

[Slide click each one]

We see here in the father's simple plea four things:

- 1) The father's desire. He hoped to believe. He wanted to believe. He felt that, in some small way, he did believe.
- 2) The father's understanding of his shortcomings. He knew that he didn't believe as much as he should. He knew that he had doubts. He knew that he was weak.
- 3) The father's heart to grow. He wanted to replace his weakness with strength, to replace his doubts with faith.

- 4) The father's dependence on Jesus. He knew that he couldn't grow his faith by himself. He knew that he needed God to help him. And so he placed his son's life at the feet of Jesus.

This father's doubt was different from the double-minded person in James 1:6. This father wanted to put all of his faith into Jesus, but he recognized his doubts. His focus was on Jesus. The James 1:6 person doesn't really care. His attention is just as much on the world as it is on Jesus or maybe even more so. The father wanted to move closer to Jesus. The James 1:6 person just wants his desire filled regardless of where it comes from.

Every person in the Bible had glaring weaknesses yet many of them went on to do great things for God.

- Peter denied Jesus to save his own neck, yet he became one of the predominant apostles.
- Moses dishonored God by striking the rock instead of speaking to it, yet he led Israel to the Promised Land.
- David was an adulterer and murderer, yet he became Israel's greatest king.

God wants all of us. The beautiful and the ugly. The strengths and the weaknesses. The godly and the sinful. The good and the bad. He can work with us. He wants to work with us. No one is beyond God's repair. But He can't work with someone who keeps running away.

What is important is not so much where we are at, but where we are going. Are we pressing on towards God, or are we standing still, content with where we are at?

Do you want to know where you should go? Do you want to know what you should do for God? Pray. Face towards God and pray.

[Slide]

### 4.3.3 Counsel (Proverbs 15:22)

Proverbs 15:22, **"Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."**

When King Solomon died, Rehoboam, his son, became king. Right after he became king, Jeroboam came with the people and asked Rehoboam how he would treat them as their new king. Rehoboam first asked the elders and they told him to be kind to the people and they will be his servants forever. But then Rehoboam asked his friends and they told him to treat the people harshly so that they would fear him. Rehoboam took the advice of his friends and in 1 Kings 12:13-14 we read, **"The king answered the people harshly, for he forsook the advice of the elders which they had given him, 14 and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'" The people then rebelled against Rehoboam.**

We see in this story two problems with Rehoboam's counsel.

- 1) He sought counsel from those who were not wise, namely his friends. Not that asking your friends for advice is wrong by any means. Sometimes your friends are those who know you and your situation the best. But we see by their advice, they weren't in tune with the situation.
- 2) Rehoboam went with the advice that made him look the most powerful and was probably the advice that he wanted to hear. We might be able to surmise that because the first thing that Rehoboam did after the rebellion was to gather the troops and want to go to war. We also see later that Rehoboam built idols and turned the people from God. So it wasn't like Rehoboam was a good man who was confused and misled by bad people with bad advice. He took the advice that he preferred. It may be

surmised that he went to his friends for advice because he didn't like the advice of the elders. He may have kept going down the ladder until he found someone who told him what he wanted to hear.

[Slide click each point]

How to choose a wise counselor (or, looking at it from the other side, how to be a wise counselor).

1) Someone who relies on the Bible.

That doesn't mean someone who does nothing but throw Bible verses at you like throwing fish to a cat. They should also explain and help apply those Scriptures. In the end, all counsel, should bring us back to God, who He is and what He says about our lives.

We are a people who, more than anyone in history, have an ocean of knowledge at our fingertips. I could probably ask this group any question and within seconds you'd have your smart phones out and within a minute give me the answer. Knowledge isn't what's lacking; godly wisdom is what's lacking.

The counselor should view life from a spiritual perspective. Sin is the problem. Get to the root of that sin whether it is yours or how you are reacting to someone else's sin.

2) Someone who cares

If you just want facts then read a book. But if you want someone who is going to listen to you, someone who is going to ask the right questions, someone who is going to tailor the advice to your situation then seek out someone who cares. They may not know you at first, but you have confidence that they will make every attempt to get to know you.

You want someone who is compassionate. You want someone who doesn't just look at facts but who also considers people and how they can be very different. You don't want someone who, when presented with a difficulty, flips open a book and reads the top five verses on that issue and is done.

Compassion also means that the counselor doesn't look down at people. He or she is not the guru on the mountain top. The counselor meets people where they are at. Jesus bent down to the two blind beggars sitting on the side of the road.

3) Someone who has experience and maturity

This means that the counselor is able to apply Biblical knowledge to life's experiences usually through their own experiences or having dealt with similar experiences with others. This takes humility and insight.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us this:

**3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**

[Click again]

Notice the progression. God gives to us so that we might give to others. We get, so that we can give.

[Slide – Stagnant Pond then Flowing River]

We are not ponds that just sit there and get stagnant. We are rivers that flow.

But realize that age doesn't guarantee maturity. Nor should we necessarily disregard someone who is young.

1 Timothy 4:12 tells us, **“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”**

Notice that the key is character over age.

We see this same principle in Job 32:6-9

**6 So Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite spoke out and said, “I am young in years and you are old; therefore I was shy and afraid to tell you what I think. 7 “I thought age should speak, and increased years should teach wisdom. 8 But it is a spirit in man, And the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding. 9 The abundant in years may not be wise, Nor may elders understand justice.**

Experience and maturity isn't necessarily a consequence of age. It is the consequence of godly character.

[Slide]

#### 4) Abundance of Counselors

Proverbs 11:14, **“Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.”**

Proverbs often set up a contrast. Wise versus foolish. Good versus evil. The format is something like this: “If you want to be stupid, this will be your consequence. But if you want to be wise, here is what will happen.” To understand one side, it helps to understand the other side. They play off of one another. “I sort-of understand the first half, but when I contrast it to the second half, I now understand the first half better. But by knowing the first half better, I now understand the second half even better still.” And so on.

This verse in Proverbs 11:14 is like that.

[Slide – Ship crashing into cliff and Ship sailing into port]

The guidance is used here in a nautical sense as in navigating a ship. No good can come of a ship that has no guidance. It will usually either wander into unknown waters and be lost or it will crash upon rocks or icebergs and sink. It is a disaster: the ship is destroyed and the crew is lost. Contrast this to the second half. When there is an abundance of counselors or, you can say, an abundance of navigators, there is victory. A ship with excellent, wizened navigators will get to where it is supposed to.

[Slide – Dallas]

Once, I had to fly to Dallas on business. I flew into the airport which is several miles from Dallas. I had a rental car with a GPS system. It was the first time that I had ever used a GPS and I thought that it was kicking. I was on the major highway leading to Dallas when the GPS stopped working. Uh-oh. I didn't know where I was going. There are several highways that form a circle around Dallas such as 635 and 20. You can go around Dallas in a circle for the rest of your life or until you run out of gas, whichever comes first. Never having been to Dallas, at one point, I believe, after my second complete circle around the city, I wound up going west on Route 20 heading towards Fort Worth. After about 15 miles, I managed to turn around and head back to Dallas. Finally, I just exited the circle of highways and headed into Dallas hoping for the best.

I had lost my guidance and, subsequently, I had lost my way.

Counsel is guidance from people who have already been there.

Proverbs 11:14, therefore, gives us the two sides of a contrast. The negative side has no guidance. The result is failure. The positive side has an abundance of guidance. The result is victory.

Think about Matthew 7:24-27

**24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”**

Two men, two situations.

One man wise, one man foolish.

[Slide – Two houses]

The wise man built upon a rock, the foolish man upon sand.

The house on the rock resisted the trials, the house on the sand, fell.

Question, why was the wise man wise? It wasn't because he built his house upon a rock. That proved his wisdom. He was already wise. How he built his house was the result, not the cause, of his wisdom.

Because he was wise, he thought about the situation. Because there was flooding, we know that he was building near water. He, therefore, had to consider what might happen in the worst of circumstances and then plan for it. “What might happen?” “How can I protect against those circumstances?”

The foolish man, on the other hand, also built near water, but he did not consider what might happen. He wanted a house, so he built a house and hoped for the best.

An abundance of wise counselors can help us consider all of those circumstances and then how to prepare for them.

[Slide]

5) Calls sin, sin and righteousness, righteousness

Here are some examples of how the world explains why we sin.

Explaining why good people do bad things, Efron, Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour at the London Business School said, “Rather than asking themselves if they can get away with it, they instead ask if they can do it without feeling like a bad person.”

<https://ethics.org.au/good-people-bad-deeds/>

He said that people will do wrong right up to the point where they would feel bad about it. Below that point, anything goes.

Here is another explanation for why people sin.

"The compensation effect refers to the tendency for people to assume they accumulate moral capital. We use good deeds to balance out bad deeds, or alternately, we give ourselves breaks from goodness, like a piece of chocolate after a week of salads. This makes people more inclined to do bad things under the guise of 'I'm a good person' or 'It's just this one thing.' A great example of this is a study in which people were observed lying and cheating more after they made the decision to purchase products that were good for the environment."

<https://www.inc.com/travis-bradberry/14-psychological-forces-that-make-good-people-do-bad-things.html>

That says that we weigh our good and our bad and as long as, in our mind, our good outweighs our bad, then it is OK in our minds.

Here is one more.

"That line between good and evil is permeable," Zimbardo said. "Any of us can move across it.... I argue that we all have the capacity for love and evil--to be Mother Theresa, to be Hitler or Saddam Hussein. It's the situation that brings that out."

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/oct04/goodbad>

Yes, certain situations do make us more likely to sin. But it is not the situation that is the cause. The situation makes it more likely. The cause is the evil in our hearts.

When seeking counsel, you don't want someone to give you excuses. Isaiah 5:20, "**Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!**" You want a counselor who is going to call sin, sin.

But, on the other hand, you don't want someone who is going to be judgmental and wag the finger and claim that every problem will be solved with repentance. No one wants to come out of a counseling session feeling like you were beat up.

[Slide]

## 6) Understands forgiveness

Many of our problems come from our own bad behavior and needing to seek forgiveness or from someone else's bad behavior which we need to forgive.

Applying forgiveness cuts from both directions. We need to forgive others.

Ephesians 4:32, "**Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**"

And we need to repent and seek forgiveness.

Proverbs 28:13, "**He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.**"

A good counselor will not just know how to uncover sin but will also know how to resolve it in a Biblical manner.

[Slide]

7) Emphasizes personal accountability

Proverbs 27:17, **“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”**

This means that one person knows the other well enough to know what areas are dull, what areas need to be worked on. And then there is that whacking of metal against metal. It shouldn't be callous and brutal, but it will probably be work. It will not be a gentle tap of one piece of iron against another, but a repeated banging against an anvil over and over until the edge is sharp, until those burrs are removed.

This takes accountability. This takes working together. And this takes knowing that the other person truly wants your best and is, hopefully, not being overly vicious.

James 5:16, **“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”**

We need to be able to go to Christians who we can be vulnerable with. Someone who we can trust will be discrete and not tell others about what we just shared. Notice the primary response of the person to whom we just confessed our sins. Not judgment. Not ridicule. Not lambasting. Not a sense of superiority. Rather, prayer. A taking of the sin and presenting it before the grace of God to bring repentance, forgiveness, and the power to “sin no more.”

Notice also that this is a righteous person. This is a person who desires to be like God. This is a person who wants to do what is right.

The result is that much can be accomplished.

Getting the right counsel is important. It can make the difference of wandering into trouble and sinking or being guided to our destination.

[Slide]

#### 4.3.4 Reason and wisdom (Proverbs 14:8, 15)

Proverbs 14:8, 15

**8 The wisdom of the sensible is to understand his way, But the foolishness of fools is deceit.**

**15 The naive believes everything, But the sensible person considers his steps.**

I've worked all of my life and have saved up \$500,000. (This is a fictitious story. So don't kidnap my children and put a \$500,000 ransom note on my door. I'll know that it is you.) I'm thinking about investing all of that into a factory that makes VCR players. Should I do it? Scripture doesn't speak directly to that. Should I pray about it? NO! When was the last time that you used a VCR? [I know, someone's going to raise their hand and say, “I used one yesterday.”] There's your answer. I don't have to pray about it because reason and wisdom tells me that I'd lose all of my money. Practically no one buys VCR players anymore. The last VCR tape was made in 2006. It was the movie “The History of Violence” if you are into trivia. God doesn't need to give me any great spiritual insight for that one.

What about if I'm grocery shopping and I'm in the produce department. Should I drop to my knees and pray about whether or not I should get a three-pack or a six-pack of romaine lettuce? Probably not. If you eat a lot of lettuce then get the six-pack, it's cheaper. But if produce tends to rot on you because you'd rather eat bacon and ice cream for every

meal, then get the smaller three-pack. That's just reason. But certainly don't drop to your knees in the produce department and lift your hands in prayer. You'll probably find yourself protesting while being wheeled into a white van.

We don't need to pray about things that are rather obvious. That is called discernment.

Luke 1:1-3

**Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus...**

What's the key phrase here? "It seemed fitting." Or as The Amplified Bible says, "It seemed good and desirable to me." Luke didn't say that he wrote the Gospel because "A voice from Heaven commanded me to" nor did he say because "a prophet came to me and told me 'Thus sayeth the Lord, you must write a Gospel.'" No. He wrote it because it made sense to write it. It was a reasonable thing to do. Yes, it was God inspired, but its initiative was not necessarily supernatural.

[Slide]

A key to using reason and wisdom to make decisions is to ask ourselves, "Who do I trust?" If our answer is "God," then we will make decisions based on the right thing to do and not on the most convenient or most profitable to me. For example, you are in a store and the cashier gives you back \$5 more than she should have. The most profitable thing is to keep the money. It might even be legal to keep it (I don't actually know). But the right thing would be to return the money. You do that because you know that God is the one who blesses, and God is the one who curses. You give it back because you want to honor God.

Another example. You are madly in love with a non-Christian. Should you marry him or her and hope for the best? No. Because you trust God first and foremost, you know that He will bless a marriage that is according to His will and desires. But if you trust your feelings more than you trust God, then you will go ahead with that marriage.

You are on your computer and somehow a sexually tantalizing picture appears. If you trust God the most, then you will immediately move past that picture. But if you don't trust that God will fulfill your needs and desires, then you will linger on that picture. But you know what? That little bit of satisfaction that you got from that picture will be all that you will get. And the downside will be greater and last longer. But if you trust God and quickly move past that picture, then your blessings will be more fulfilling.

"What would Jesus do" is a valid and crucial question. But when confronted by a situation that requires you to make a decision, ask yourself "Who do I trust?" Hopefully, you will answer, "God," and do the right thing.

In Matthew 7:6 God tells us, "**... do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.**" Generally, we apply that to us not giving God's wisdom to scoffers lest they mock us and then turn against us because we didn't give them what they really wanted. But we can also apply that to God and us. God will not give us His pearls, His wisdom, if we are not going to heed it because not only did He waste good pearls, and not only because we will be held accountable for our sin of ignoring God, but, also, because we might have a tendency to then turn against God because He didn't give us what we wanted.



“God, I didn’t marry that non-Christian because I knew that it wasn’t right and now here it is a year later, and I don’t have anyone in my life. I should have done what I wanted to do because You certainly haven’t taken care of me.” That person turned against God and, in their mind, tore Him to pieces.

“God, I did what I thought was the right thing and went to that person about their sin and not only doesn’t he talk to me anymore, but he managed to turn some other people in the church against me. I should have just left it alone. You certainly didn’t protect me, did you God?” That person turned against God and tore Him to pieces.

God gave us minds. He expects us to use them. Notice Isaiah 1:18, **“Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.’”** Notice that God doesn’t say, “Be forgiven because I told you so, and if I tell you to do something then that is it; no questions asked!” No, He says, “Think this through. You are guilty. You are covered with the stain of your own sin. I can completely cleanse you of your sins. And it is free. Well, free to you. It cost me a great price. So go ahead and do it. Why wouldn’t you?”

In Acts 27, Paul commanded the soldiers to cut away the ropes holding the ship’s lifeboat lest the sailors escape and doom everyone else. He didn’t pray and fast about it first. There is no indication that he prayed at all. It was a decision based on commonsense and reason.

Discerning God’s will doesn’t always have to be supernatural. Part of being made in the image of God is to be able to think, to reason, to be creative, to have wisdom. Use it.

[Slide]

#### 4.3.5 Peace (Colossians 3:15)

Colossians 3:15 is the key passage for using peace to discern God’s will, **“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”**

The Greek word for “rule” is often used in reference to the Olympics or other games. It refers to the person who is the umpire or arbitrator or judge of the games. This person is the one who job is to maintain order and determine to whom the prizes will be distributed. The Greek word literally means “to sit as umpire.”

Therefore, the peace of Christ is to help us make right decisions.

God is a God of peace. When we walk in His ways, we will have confidence and peace. This peace is not something that necessarily makes us comfortable. It is not necessarily a peace that guarantees an easy life. It is not necessarily a peace that removes all conflicts, obstacles, and trials. But it is a peace that is deep inside. It is a peace that gives confidence and trust even when life is flying around us like a hurricane that picks up everything in our vicinity and throws it at us.

Notice these words that Jesus spoke in John 16:33, **“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”** Peace doesn’t mean no tribulation. It doesn’t necessarily mean relaxing at a beach with money in the bank and a lemonade in your hand. It could mean being in a foreign land as a missionary eating food that doesn’t agree with you and sharing the Gospel with people who don’t want to hear it.

**“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”** -- John 14:27

[Slide]

Horatio Spafford was a successful lawyer who had significantly invested in real estate in Chicago. But then his four-year old son died of scarlet fever. Shortly thereafter, in 1871 the Great Chicago Fire damaged much of his real estate investments. Needing a vacation, he, his wife, and four daughters were going to sail to Europe. He was delayed because of zoning problems resulting from the Great Chicago Fire, so he sent wife and daughters ahead on the SS Ville du Havre. While crossing the Atlantic Ocean on November 19, 1873, the ship collided with another ship, the Loch Earn. 226 people died including all four of Spafford's daughters. His wife, who survived, sent her husband a telegram that started, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Quickly, he boarded a ship to England. At one point during the voyage, the captain of the ship, told Spafford that they were now passing over the spot where the ship with his family had sunk. Spafford was inspired to write these words:

[Slide]

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain

It is well, (it is well),  
With my soul, (with my soul)  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:  
If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,  
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.

These are the words of a man who had experienced severe tragedy, but whose confidence in the faithfulness of God was unshakeable. Peace in the midst of tragedy.

**“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!”** -- 2 Thessalonians 3:16

How do we allow the peace of Christ rule in our hearts? Here is Colossians 3:15 in the Amplified version.

**And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ's] one body you were also called [to live]. And be thankful (appreciative), [giving praise to God always].**

Let...Rule (1018) (brabeuo; (pronounced ba-rah-biew-o, biew rhymes with view) related word = brabeús = an umpire) (Only use in the NT here) means literally to award the prize. This is a reference to the athletic contests that were popular in the Greco-Roman world. The athlete who won would have a wreath placed on his head. He would be greatly honored, exempt from taxes, and in many cities given a subsistence out of the public treasury.

But if they broke the rules, then it was great shame and dishonor. This is still true in today's games.

In the 1988 Seoul Olympics in the 100-meter dash, Ben Johnson crossed the finish line first. He had beaten the great Carl Lewis and won the gold. However, after the race, Johnson tested positive for an illegal substance and was stripped of his gold medal. With it came shame and humiliation. He did not compete according to the rules.

Lance Armstrong had won seven Tour de France medals. This is the most prestigious bike race in the world. In June, 2012, the United States Anti-Doping Agency accused Armstrong of doping and using banned drugs. Armstrong denied it. But on January 13, 2013 in an interview with Oprah Winfrey Armstrong admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs throughout much of his career. He said that he lied because he was “a guy who expected to get whatever he wanted, and to control every outcome.” He further said that while he was using banned drugs and doping, he neither felt that it was wrong nor felt bad about what he was doing.

These were two great athletes who might have won even if they hadn't cheated. But they did, and they were caught, and now we are still talking about their shame and dishonor.

That is how the peace of Christ works. When we do what is right, we feel peace, we feel good. But when we go outside the rules, we feel shame or at least we should. Then we have to justify our decision, we have to make excuses.

There was an unmarried woman who was in seminary. She wrongfully had sex and got pregnant. When questioned about it she said that if God didn't want her to get pregnant then she wouldn't have. That is doubly bad, first she expressed no repentance, no remorse, and second, she blamed God for the results of her sin.

That's like saying, “If God didn't want me to steal that, then He would have stopped me.”

Stay within God's rules when making a decision and you will have peace. Break the rules and you will have shame and guilt.

[Slide]

#### **4.3.6 Fasting (Ezra 8:21-23)**

There are many instances in the Bible about fasting to gain God's guidance and favor.

**21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions. 22 For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him." 23 So we fasted and sought our God concerning this matter, and He listened to our entreaty.**

Notice the key connection here, they wanted to humble themselves before God and to seek Him for guidance concerning a situation, and they did this through fasting.

A fast is a person temporarily giving up something desirable and/or necessary so that they can better focus on God and spiritual matters. Usually a fast involves giving up food and/or drink.

[Slide]

There are several types of fasts.

A **Partial Fast** is one where you give up a certain item or category of items. For example, in Daniel 10:3, Daniel said that for three weeks "I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth."

A **Complete Fast** is where you give up all food and drink except for water and, maybe, juice.

An **Absolute Fast** is where you give up all food and drink, even water.

A **Timed Fast** is where you only eat for a portion of the day and then fast the rest of the time. For example, you may allow yourself to eat only from 7:00 AM to 2:00 PM and then abstain from food the rest of the day. You might do this for a week or for a month.

As with all fasts, they are voluntary, and your medical situation must be considered.

You should never fast to do penance for your sins. Jesus Christ paid the full price as the sacrifice for our sins. It would be blasphemy to consider that we need to add to His sacrifice.

Hebrews 7:26-27 confirms this.

**26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens; 27 who has no daily need, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because He did this once for all time when He offered up Himself.**

But why fast at all? What is the benefit of a fast? Consider these verses.

**"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." – Galatians 5:17**

**"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." -- John 6:63**

**"For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace..." Romans 8:6**

We see in these verses that there are two forces at work in us. There is the flesh, and there is the spirit.

The “flesh” in these contexts does not mean our physical selves or the physical world. This is a misunderstanding that has been the basis for some heresies. Here are three of those heresies.

### **Catharism**

Catharism was a dualist religion in the 12<sup>th</sup> through 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The word means “the pure” and they were called “Good Christians.” They believed that there are twin, opposing gods. The good god is the god of the New Testament and is associated with spirit. The evil god is the one who created the material world. Everything that you can see, including our bodies, was created by the evil god and, therefore, all flesh is evil.

### **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism set up a dualism. There is the hidden god who is spirit. This god is understood only through personal experience. On the other side is the evil, and usually lesser, god who created the material universe. This material universe is corrupt and evil.

### **Manichaeism**

Manichaeism was once one of the main rivals to Christianity. It was also a dualistic religion. Their claim was that there is an ongoing struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness.

Of course, we don’t believe in dualism. There are not two opposing gods. There is only one God who is maker of heaven and earth.

“Flesh” in the Bible has two meanings. There is the lower meaning of the physical body. This is our hands, skin, etc.

Then there is the higher meaning of the “flesh” which is our desires that want to focus on fulfilling the physical and natural pleasures in contrast to seeking the spiritual good. The problem is that these above heresies confounded the two. They made them one in the same.

The “flesh” in the context of the verses that we looked at, represents our natural desires. See how Galatians 5:19-21 describes this higher meaning of flesh.

**19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,  
20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,  
21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

When we are born-again, we become spiritually alive. Ephesians 2:1-5

**1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,  
2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.  
3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.  
4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,  
5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

As born-again Christians, we still have the flesh. That will not go away until we get to Heaven. But now we also have a spirit that is alive and wants to please God.

The spirit has the character of God that the Holy Spirit invests in us.

Galatians 5:22-23

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.  
24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

Therefore, we, as Christians, are always in a state of wanting to satisfy both the physical desires (the flesh) and our heavenly desires (the spiritual). We have two competing masters. They cannot compromise. They cannot get along. It is like two dogs fighting over one piece of meat. Which one we will feed will always be our choice.

Before we are saved this conflict does not exist because we are spiritually dead. Yes, the unsaved person has conflicts, even more conflicts, because they are at war with God. They are also at war with themselves because they are rebelling against how God created them. And they are at war with other people because their tendency is toward selfishness. We read in James 4:1-3,

**“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”**

But the one conflict that they do not have is the one between the flesh and the spirit.

That brings us back to our “conflict” verses.

**“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” – Galatians 5:17**

One way to let the spirit gain mastery over the flesh is to fast. Fasting temporarily suppresses the flesh’s desires.

[Slide – Garden with weeds]

Every year I plant a vegetable garden. And every year two types of plants grow in my garden: vegetables and weeds. If I do nothing, then eventually the weeds will grow taller and more numerous and the vegetables will be scrawny from lack of sunlight and nutrients. So to get bigger and stronger vegetables, I have to suppress the weeds. Usually, I pull out the weeds. Then the vegetables have a chance to grow more vigorous. Eventually, the weeds come right back, and I have to do it again and again and again.

But this is what fasting does. It temporarily removes the fleshly desires—the weeds--so that the spirit can more focus and receive God’s light. It puts us in better tune to what God is indicating because we are removing the static of the world.

[Slide – Vinyl record]

In the old days, music came on vinyl records, or platters as they were sometimes called. They were pressed plastic with clearly visible grooves that went round and round the record in a spiral. A record needle would travel along the spiral and tiny grooves would cause the needle to vibrate. This vibration was later translated into music. It would be easy for

dust to get into the grooves. When that happened, it would cause additional vibration that came to the listener as static. The more dust, the louder the static. The more static, the more difficult it would be to hear the actual music. To get rid of the static caused by dirt, some people would wash their records with distilled water or use a special disk-washer device to clean the disk. That would get rid of most of the static and the actual music would come through much brighter and clearer.

Again, this is what fasting does. It gets rid of the static of our fleshly desires so that we can hear God's voice so much brighter and clearer.

If you have an important decision, consider taking a day off and fasting. Go somewhere private where there will be no interruptions and plan out a day of prayer, meditation, reading, repentance, and so on.

Psalm 81:10, **"I, the Lord, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it."**

[Slide]

#### **4.3.7 Circumstances (Romans 1:10-13)**

I would consider circumstances to perhaps be the weakest means of discerning God's will. Here are two passages that are often used.

Romans 1:10-13

**10 always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.**

**11 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;**

**12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.**

**13 I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.**

Acts 16:6

**They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia;**

In these two verses it is never stated how Paul was prevented or forbidden by the Holy Spirit. It could have been a vision, a prophecy, or circumstances.

How does one interpret circumstances? Here is a real-life example. A friend, who was in his 20's, wanted to go to a Christian conference. His parents, who were solid Christians, didn't think that the conference was good and that he shouldn't go. While he was driving to the conference, he hit a deer and his car broke down. His parents interpreted that as coming from God telling him not to go to the conference. My friend interpreted the accident as coming from Satan because Satan knew that it was going to be a great conference and was trying to prevent him from going. That thinking made him even more determined to go. Who was right? Each side interpreted the circumstance to support their own opinions.

However, that being said, I do believe that God can use circumstances. When I was out of work, those several times, I would pray sincerely that God would close jobs that weren't good and open those that would be. I would interview for a

job that I wanted, and I thought that it went well. Nothing came of it. Because of my prayers, I felt that God closed down that job because it wasn't the right one for me at that time. I felt peace. I didn't feel despondent or beaten. I simply pressed forward and kept going.

You think that this person is the one for you and then you find out that they are moving to New Zealand. Maybe it will still work out but just not right now.

Some say that there are no coincidences with God. But, on the other hand, God does not move us around like chess pieces. Just because you saw that guy or girl twice in one week, that does not necessarily mean that it is destiny that you will both marry.

Yes, God can use circumstances. Just be careful. If you are going to use that circumstance to determine God's will, then, at least, look at it from all angles. Maybe it is a sign from God, but, then again, maybe it is nothing more than something that just happened.

Remember that circumstances will never contradict what the Bible says. All circumstances must be weighed against the Bible.

#### 4.3.8 Summary

**“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”** Romans 12:2

[Slide]

We briefly looked at seven ways that we can use to discern God's will:

- 1) The Bible
- 2) Prayer
- 3) Counsel
- 4) Reason and wisdom
- 5) Peace
- 6) Fasting
- 7) Circumstances

For any decision, we may use one or several. The key is to be open to any and all of them. If you feel like you should fast about the decision, then go ahead and make plans for your fast. If you don't know which way to turn, then schedule some counseling.

Be patient. God is not obligated to answer you according to your timing. He will answer you according to His timing. You didn't get an answer today? Keep seeking. You didn't get an answer next month? Keep seeking. You didn't get an answer for ten years? Keep seeking. But sometimes you have to ask yourself: Am I seeking something that I shouldn't? Perhaps God has another direction to take me in. Seek God about that, too.

But always be aware, God will never lead you against what the Bible says. He will never tell you to marry an unbeliever. He will never tell you to cheat on your taxes no matter how worthy the cause that you will use that extra money for. He will never give you permission to sin.

The bigger the decision, the more careful you should be in discerning God's will.



In our passage, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer. It is likely that He also fasted. He took the decision seriously and sought His father's will. So should we.

[Slide]

#### 4.4 Pitfalls in discerning God's will

- 1) How is fear, insecurities, and biases affecting my decision?

For example, I am praying about joining a ministry, but is my fear of people influencing what I think, or am I willing to let God give me the grace when I need it the most?

- 2) Am I choosing and forcing my methods so as to ultimately agree with what I want in the end?

I want to marry this person even though he isn't really a solid Christian or may not be a Christian at all. So when my counselor points out a Bible passage warning about this, I dismiss the passage as being cultural and, therefore, not applying to today. Or when the person tries to talk me out of going to church today because it is such a beautiful day and, besides, we can enjoy God's created nature on a walk instead, rather than seeing that as a red flag, I think that it is sweet and a clever idea. Or when I am reading my Bible, and I feel uneasy about refusing to forgive someone, I chalk it off to nerves and continue to not forgive.

- 3) Am I using "God's will" to justify something that I know is wrong or sin?

God told me that I should give more money to the church. Sounds good, but I don't have any extra money. So I'll cheat a little on my taxes so that I'll have some extra money to give. If I'm giving the money to the church, then it has to be OK, right?

God's no fool (Well, that's certainly an understatement). He is not going to throw His pearls before swine if He knows that we are going to do what we want anyway.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

[Slide]

F.B. Meyer was an English preacher who lived from 1847 to 1929. In his book "The Secret of Guidance" he told a story. He was on a ship that was approaching Liverpool at night. There were thousands of lights along the shore reflecting in the dark water. Meyer went up to the bridge to ask the captain how he knew where to steer with all of the confusing lights. The captain replied, "You see, sir it's really very simple and I'll show you how. Do you see that big light over there to the left? And do you see that other big light over there to the right of it? And now do you see that third outstanding light further still this way? Now keep your eyes on those three lights, and see what happens." As the ship navigated, the left-most light lined up with the middle light and became one. Then that light merged with the one on the right. The captain continued, "Now, all I have to do is see to it that those three big lights become one; and when they have become one, then all I have to do is go straight."

Meyer wrote that the three lights in God's guidance are: the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and circumstances. In our pursuit of following God's will there may be at times three lights, sometimes seven lights, and sometimes just one. But no matter how many lights, we should always head straight for the ones that come from God.

One day, not knowing where I was, I woke up in a completely dark and silent place. I could feel the ground. It was smooth and hard. I knew that I was in a place with a concrete floor. I could smell mustiness so I figured that it must be

enclosed and maybe underground. I then heard something mechanical turn on. It was a low, steady noise. Perhaps I'm in a basement and that was a furnace. I wandered around a bit in the dark until a string hit my face. I yanked on the string and a light bulb came on. I looked around and saw that I was in my basement. No, this didn't really happen. But each one of my senses gave me a clue as to what was going on. When they were all put together, I knew the answer.

Discerning God's will can be like that. Scripture kind-of points us in some direction, but there are lot of ways to go in that direction. Prayer narrows that down to just some ways to go. Counsel and reason make clear that now there are only two solid choices. Finally, peace illuminates the one correct way to go. Each method helped to define the correct path.

Or, another time, not knowing where I was, I woke up in a completely dark and silent place. I stood up, felt a string hit my face. I yanked on the string and a light bulb came on. I saw that I was in my basement. That time it only took one method to determine where I was.

Jesus was at a point where He had to make one of the most crucial decisions early on in His ministry. So what did He do? He sought out His Father for guidance. And when He had that guidance, He came and made His decision. He picked His twelve disciples and the thirteen of them changed the world.

In all aspects of our lives, in all decisions, in all thoughts and actions, in all relationships...

[Slide]

## **Imitate Jesus**

[Slide – [www.disciplescorner.com](http://www.disciplescorner.com)]