



## **FRESH START**

- **Who is God?**
- **Who is Jesus Christ?**
- **Who is the Holy Spirit?**
- **What is the Bible and how can I understand it?**
- **What is faith?**
- **How do I learn to pray?**
- **What is the Kingdom of God?**
- **Why do I need to go to church?**
- **Who is the devil and how can I stand against his powers?**
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- **How can I get victory over all the sin in my life?**
- **What can I do to help my friends and family believe?**
- **Why do I live a Life of Generosity?**

## **FRESH START: WHO IS GOD?**

What a question? That is like asking one of those “tell me about the universe” questions. What we know about God is so little compared to who He is. He is so awesome and glorious and so far beyond what our natural minds can fathom. Our greatest source of knowing who God is comes from the Bible and especially the teachings of Jesus Christ who said that He was the only one who had ever seen God. The Bible gives us an overall picture of the nature and character of God. God has likes and dislikes. He has a personality and has the ability to see and know everything all at once. God has plans for His kingdom and for the lives of all people. God isn't hiding and wants people to know Him.

You can discover things about an artist by studying his pictures. You know something about a song writer by listening to his words. God is also known by the world which He has created. The mountains and the sea speak to us of His majesty. The beauty of a sunset speaks of his wonderful peace. The sunrise each morning reminds us of His daily faithfulness. The tenderness of a mother with a nursing child is a reflection of the love He has for us.

Even though our understanding of who God is may be small in comparison to who He is in His fullness, we can still highlight some of the more obvious qualities about Him.

1 John 1:5 And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.**

1 John 4:16 And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. **God is love,** and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

John 4:24 “**God is spirit,** and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Matthew 7:11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your **Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!**”

Mark 14:36 Jesus prayed just before He was arrested and later crucified, “Abba! Father! **All things are possible for Thee;** remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt.”

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the **high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit** in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Jeremiah 9:23,24 Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that **I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,**” declares the Lord.

Revelation 4:8&11 (The hosts of heaven cry out) **Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God,** the Almighty, **who was and who is and who is to come. Worthy art Thou,** our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for **Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.**”

## FRESH START: WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

The Bible teaches that “God is love.” Love is contained only within the one who loves until it is expressed. Love must be expressed for others to know that they are loved. God showed His love for us in sending us His Son. Jesus is God’s expression of love for mankind. The deep, intimate relationship between the Father and the Son is at the heart of knowing who Jesus really is. The following verses will reveal some of the Lifechanging truths about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Luke 1:30-35 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and **you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end**” And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered and said to her, “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.**”

Luke 3:21-22 Now it came about when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also was baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “**Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.**”

Luke 4:17,18 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, “**The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord**”

Luke 5:20&24 And seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you. **But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,**” He said to the paralytic-“I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home.”

John 3:16,17 “For God so love the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.** For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that **the world should be saved through Him.**”

John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them saying, “**I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.**”

John 11:25,26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and **everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.** Do you believe this?”

John 17:4,5 “**I glorified Thee** on the earth, having **accomplished the work** which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, **glorify Thou Me** together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee **before the world was.**”

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore also **God highly exalted Him**, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow**, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.

## FRESH START: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all of the same essence, yet living out different roles and tasks in the affairs of mankind and creation. This Holy Unity has been studied by religious men for thousands of years, yet our natural minds will never understand this unfathomable mystery. Personally, I find it best understood from what one learned man of God, Whinkey Pratney, taught. Our western modern minds think of the trinity as represented like this mathematical formula. Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1+1+1=3). The trinity is best understood with another mathematical formula that contains the power of multiplication. Father, Son and Holy Spirit (1x1x1=1). The Holy Spirit is not less than God and not more than God, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. The following verses will reveal some of the wondrous ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:1,2 **In the beginning** God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and **the Spirit of God was moving** over the surface of the waters.

John 16:12-15 I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, **the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth:** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, **He will speak;** and He will disclose to you what is to come. **He shall glorify Me;** for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore, I said that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.

John 14:16 “And I will ask **the Father,** and He **will give you another Helper,** that **He may be with you forever;** that is **the Spirit of Truth,** whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and **will be in you.**

1 Cor. 2:9-16 Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us **God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.** For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? **Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.**

John 6:63 “**It is the Spirit who gives life;** the flesh profits nothing; the words that I (Jesus) have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

Matthew 12:28 (Jesus said) “But if **I cast out demons by the Spirit of God,** then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Acts 1:8 (Jesus said) but **you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;** and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

There are a number of names referring to the Holy Spirit in the Bible. All speak of the one and same Spirit. Some of these names are: Spirit of God, Spirit of Truth, the Anointing, Power from on High, the Gift, the Helper, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of the Living God, Spirit of Grace, the Spirit of Glory, and the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit provides weapons to fight against spiritual forces, gifts to grant us powerful and effective ministry fruits that make us like Jesus. He is the power and presence of Jesus in us. (Ephs. 6:10-18, 1 Cor. 12:4-11, Gal. 5:22,23.)

# FRESH START: WHAT IS THE BIBLE AND HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND IT?

The Bible is the Book of Faith for Christians. It was written over a 1500 year span by over 40 authors from every walk of life including kings, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars ect. It contains 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. The Bible was written in three different continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in three different languages. Hebrew was the language of the Old Testament, Aramaic was the language of the Near East until the time of Alexander the Great, and Greek was the international language used at the time of Christ. The Hebrews divided the Old Testament into three classes: The Law, The Prophets and The Writings. All the New Testament books were written within 90 years of Christ's birth. The complete acceptance of all of the books in our present New Testament may be dated from the Councils of Laodicea in 363A.D.

Jesus declared that, "all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms (The Writing) must be fulfilled." In saying this Christ declared His belief in the Old Testament as the word of God. After His resurrection the Bible says of Jesus that "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, **He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.**" Luke 24:27&44

Jesus also declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but **My words shall not pass away.**" Matthew 24:35

Jesus therefore answered them, and said, "**My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.**" John 7:16

Again, Jesus revealed the source of His teachings when He said, "I do nothing on My own initiative, but **I speak these things as the Father taught Me.**" John 8:28

The Bible declares of itself, "**All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training** in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2Timothy 3:16,17

The Word of God is a powerful spiritual weapon for the Bible says, "And take up the helmet of salvation, and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**" Ephs. 6:17

"Is not My word **like fire,**" says the Lord, "and like a **hammer** which shatters a rock?" Jeremiah 23:29

Jesus prayed to His Father in Heaven for His followers and said, "Sanctify them in the truth; **Thy word is truth.**" John 17:17

The Holy Spirit inspires the Word of God in 2Peter 1:21 "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**:"

## WAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

1 Always translate the Bible with the Bible. Don't base your understanding on just one verse. That would be like trying to understand the workings of a car by just looking at a spark plug.

2 Understand that the Bible writers wrote in various forms: poetic, historical, prophetic, literal and figurative language. Part of understanding the Bible is understanding the situation in which the book was written.

3 Start with the New Testament and especially the gospels so you can learn about the words and works of Jesus. The most important reason to read and study the Bible is to know and follow the Lord better.

4 Begin at the beginning of a book and read it to the end. Get a feel for the themes and key messages.

5 Look for verses that really jump out at you for instruction, inspiration and revelation. Don't worry about what you don't understand yet. Focus on what you do understand. Look for Goldnuggets!

## FRESH START: WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is trust, assurance and belief in God's character, ability and promises. God has chosen to reveal Himself and many divine truths to us so that we may live in fellowship with Him. Our proper response to God is faith. Anything short of faith insults His character, diminishes His ability and declares His promises to be lies.

Someone may say "I only trust in my five senses." Our senses are avenues of understanding, but not the final judge of reality. If you have ever seen a magic show, it is obvious that our senses can be totally fooled. When man's senses and body of beliefs told him the world was flat, his beliefs and senses were mistaken.

Another may take the position of, "if I can't see it, I don't believe in it." This is flawed thinking because that same person believes in the existence of a microscopic world of molecules and solar galaxies unseen. Without ever seeing them for himself, he will choose to believe the testimony of another that they exist.

Someone else may say, "I don't do anything by faith!" That same person will board a jetliner and soar to 30,000 feet at speeds of over 600 m.p.h. without personally knowing the pilot or the mechanics who worked on the plane. They have placed their life in the hands of these people that they assume are competent. They are operating by faith! Does God ask for anything less? Our faith in God does the same thing by trusting in His word, His faithfulness and His ability to do what He says He can do.

Faith is synonymous with believing and trusting. In the Greek language faith means "to persuade". The person who has faith is persuaded that what he believes is truth. Faith calls for action. Real faith is a confidence in God that produces good works in the one who believes. True saving faith causes us to act in accordance with what we believe. The Bible teaches that "faith without works is dead". James 2:17

The following verses teach us some of the things we all need to know about faith.

The Bible defines faith when it declares, "Now **faith is the assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. Hebrews 11:1,2

Hebrews 11:6 declares the importance of our faith in God's sight when it records, "And **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, (God) and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

It takes faith to activate the promises of God in our lives when it says in Hebrews 6:12 "you (be) imitators of those who **through faith and patience inherit the promises.**"

In Matthew chapter 8 the Bible tells of two incidents one in which **Jesus applauded someone's faith** (vs5-13) and the other when **He scolded** His disciples for **their lack of faith** (23-27). Read these sections and consider what can be discovered about faith or the lack of it.

**Faith is something that can be seen by the actions** that are done in response to the faith that is within the person. Mark 2:1-5 & 11-12.

**Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith.** The key for developing faith is to keep our eyes fixed upon Him. Hebrews 12:2.

"So **faith come from hearing**, and hearing by **the word of Christ.**" Romans 10:17

**Faith justifies us** before God. Romans 5:1 **Faith cleanses us** Acts 15: 9 **Faith saves us** Ephs. 2:8

The scriptures declare that, "**we walk by faith, not by sight-** (or appearance). Christians believe in a kingdom that is not of this realm and a resurrected Lord that we have never seen. John 18:36 ,1 Peter 1: 8

## **FRESH START: HOW DO I LEARN TO PRAY?**

Prayer is simply communication with God. Prayer is a foundation block of our relationship with the Lord. In prayer we bring before the Lord our deepest concerns and needs, believing that He has the power to answer. Prayer is also about letting God conform our hearts to what He is doing. So often we try to talk God into what we think is best for our lives. Instead He desires that we come into harmony with His will. Prayer is our heart embracing God. The following are six aspects of prayer that are necessary parts of our Christian walk.

**PRAISE-** This is the purist of prayer because in it we focus entirely on who God is in all His glory, majesty and wonder. Praise is all about worship. Praise lifts us beyond ourselves to focus upon God alone. Praise glorifies the Lord for who He is in all His attributes. Praise involves expression. Psalm 150, Psalm 34:1-3

**THANKSGIVING-** With words and attitudes we can express gratitude for all that the Lord has done for us. Our God is our Father and as such is our source for every blessing, for all good things flow from Him. The scriptures are full of thanksgiving for God's provision, grace and guidance. Hebrews. 13:15

**REPENTANCE-** A willingness to confess and turn from our sins. Instead of pulling away from God in our sin, repentance calls us to the light and breaks the darkness of secret sin and self rule. Repentance is all about surrender to the will and ways of God. True repentance is a decision to stop the sin and begin to walk another way that pleases the Lord. King David prayed a prayer of repentance after committing adultery in Psalm 51.

**INTERCESSION-** This involves standing in faith for another person before God to make requests on their behalf. There is often an element of spiritual warfare involved which stands against and thwarts the efforts of Satan in the lives and situations of others. It also involves praying in partnership with the Holy Spirit to see the will of God fulfilled in other people's lives. 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, Colossians 1:9-12, Luke 22:31-32.

**SUPPLICATION-** This is a personal cry for God's mercy and favor to be shown in response to need or trouble. This type of prayer is where we pour out our hearts to God and leave our troubles in His hands. Much of the Psalms contain examples of this type of prayer. Supplication brings us understanding of the intimate Father-child relationship that we were created to experience. Psalm 34:15-18, Psalm 57:1-3

**WAITING-** Sometimes silence is the best prayer. In this we express attitudes of surrender, humility and dependence. Sometimes silence is a response to the awareness of His holiness. In silence and waiting we express a willingness to put aside other agendas and seek Him. There is an attitude of expectation that accompanies this type of prayer. With a quieted heart, we learn to know His voice and receive revelation of who He is. This type of prayer grates against our rushed lives. Many blessings are missed if we neglect this facet of prayer. Psalm 25:4-5, Isaiah 30:15

### **ATTITUDES NECESSARY IN PRAYER**

**TRANSPARENCY-** The awareness that God sees all and knows every deep part of us, this awareness compels us to come to the light of His presence with no secrets and no hidden agendas. Complete openness is an important expression of trust.

**HUMILITY-** With no sense of personal merit for approaching the Lord in prayer, we are aware of our dependence upon His grace and mercy shown. We place ourselves in proper perspective in the light of the greatness of God.

**SEEKING-** This attitude in prayer is that which compels us to press on to know the Lord because we are hungry for Him and His provision. God is looking for seeking hearts to reveal Himself. You don't find gold lying on the surface of the ground you must dig for it.

**FAITH-** This is vital in prayer for without faith we will nullify our prayers through double-mindedness. Faith is required to please God. Faith is our response to the faithfulness and character of God. Faith is received, strengthened and stirred by the word of God. Faith agrees with God.

## FRESH START: WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

The Kingdom of God is best understood by beginning with the knowledge that God is the King of all creation. In heaven His rule is already obvious and His glory prevails over everything. In the Kingdom of God there are buildings, rivers, trees, animals, music, a multitude of angels. The Kingdom of God is a real place. From every nation and race of people on this earth, those redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ will also dwell there. In the Kingdom of God there are certain values and priorities that are clearly demonstrated by all those who live in the Kingdom. In our world the dominion of God the King is yet to be an obvious and glorious reality. To the natural eye and to man's way of thinking, governments, presidents, councils, armies, courts and economic powers run this world. Our worldly values and priorities are directly opposed to those of the Kingdom. This world is fueled by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life". I John 2:16. When Jesus Christ returns in power and authority as King of Kings, all of these worldly powers will be nullified and the Son of God shall reign as supreme in this earth. Until then the Kingdom of God is expanded on earth one life at a time. As people surrender to the Lordship of Christ and begin to reflect His life, values and priorities in this world, the Kingdom of God advances. From that point on, we are no longer citizens of this world, but our citizenship is in the Kingdom of God. As the Bible teaches, we live here as aliens who are only temporarily away from home.

The Bible has much to say about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Someday Jesus will reign over all the earth.** Rev. 11:15

We are to **seek first God's kingdom** and God's righteousness. Matt 6:33

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**" Matt. 6:10. His kingdom comes as more and more people accept Him as King in their lives and do the will of God. Doing the will of God is a sure sign that the Kingdom has truly come to a person.

Jesus taught that **there are certain qualities of a person who will enter the kingdom of God.** These qualities are the result of and fruit from the presence and power of the Spirit of God abiding in the person.

"Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." Matt 18:3

"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Jn. 3:5

"Poor in spirit," Matt.5:3

"Persecuted for the sake of righteousness" Matt.5:10

"Righteousness must surpass the scribes and Pharisees" Matt.5:20

"Doing the will of the Father in heaven." Matt 7:21

Those who practice mercy will enter into the kingdom. Matt. 25:34-40

The Kingdom of God is **covered in mysteries** that are hidden until **Christ Jesus by His Spirit reveals them.** Mk. 4:11

The greatest in the kingdom is one who **humbles himself** as a child and **becomes a servant.** Matt. 18:3,4 & 20:26

"The Kingdom of God is- **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**" Romans 14:17

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is "**in our midst, and at hand**" Lk 17:21, Matt. 10:7

Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for **your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.**" Lk. 12:32

The kingdom of God "is **not of this realm**" and "**not of this world.**" John 18:36

For more teachings by Jesus about what the Kingdom is like read Matthew chapter 13.



## FRESH START: WHY DO I NEED TO GO TO CHURCH?

When most people think of church, they think of a building. In our country we have many different denominations. These are because people prefer different styles and means of governing the church, or choose to emphasize different aspects of the Christian faith. It's like ice cream, there are lots of different flavors to choose from because people have different tastes. Yet when the Lord looks upon His church, He sees one living, growing church. It is not made of brick, but of people whom Jesus "purchased for God with (His) blood from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Rev. 5:9. Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." Matt. 16:18. The church that Jesus is building is "God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone," Ephs. 2:20. The church has been called to be the people of God through whom He shows His presence, power and love. The church is called the "bride of Christ" and as such is His delight. What He desires to see is a bride entirely devoted to Him, dwelling in Him and with one another in unity.

One may say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, but I don't want to go to church. I don't feel comfortable there and I don't see why I should go." Listed below are four reasons to be involved with the church, which remember is made of people. The Christian faith is all about relationships. Where else in this world can you unite with other Christians to actively grow and serve God together in the following four areas of our faith?

**TO WORSHIP** is not just an individual thing. It is an expression of honor and devotion to God and it pleases Him that it is done in an atmosphere of His people dwelling together in unity. In heaven the scene is a multitude of people worshipping the Father. In the days of the Old Testament, God prescribed certain days or feasts for the nation of Israel to come together and worship Him. It delights our Lord for His people to come together and worship Him. It is also in this atmosphere of worship with other believers that the gifts of the Spirit are used.

**TO BE DISCIPLED** in our faith. The word disciple means one who comes under the discipline of another. The Bible teaches that one of the calls upon the church to fulfill is to make disciples of all nations. This is done as one comes under the training of leaders, teachers and disciplers in the church so that they can mature in Christ. Every athlete knows how coaching makes the difference in the development of their game; so it is with developing Christian maturity and character.

**TO HELP BUILD THE KINGDOM.** We can do this by investing our time, talents and treasures in what God is doing in the world and in His Church. As we become more like Jesus, we will love what He loves. God has sovereignly chosen to work through His people to build His Kingdom. As we unite our resources with other believers, we multiply the effectiveness and fruitfulness of our labors. God desires that His people join together with Him into one mighty spiritual army and advance the Kingdom under His leadership.

**TO PRACTICE THE "ONE ANOTHERS".** It is in the church that relationships are formed with other Christians with whom we put these "one anothers" into practice. A Christian who stands alone can neither give nor receive these things. Remember, Christianity is all about relationships. You have seen the wildlife shows in which the predator attacks the animal that is away from the pack. There truly is strength in numbers. We gain strength to carry on as we see others in the faith sacrifice and persevere against hardships.

Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you **have love for one another.**" John 13:35 "**Be devoted to one another** in brotherly love, **give preference to one another in honor.**" Romans 12:10 "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the **building up of one another.**" Romans 14:19 "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all **humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another** in love, being **diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**" Ephesians 4:1-3 "**we are members of one another.**" Ephesians 4:25 "**bearing with one another, and forgiving each other,** whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." Colossians 3: 13. "**Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**" Proverbs 27:17 "and let us consider how to **stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 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." Hebrews 10: 24,25

## **FRESH START: WHO IS THE DEVIL AND HOW CAN I STAND AGAINST HIS POWERS?**

“The devil made me do it!” “The devil is going to get you if you don’t watch out!” These are only a couple of sayings that reflect some societal beliefs about Satan. Unfortunately, Hollywood has also been a major source from which many people have formed their beliefs about the devil. Can he really make people do things against their will? Can he really “get you” if he really wants to do so? What powers does he have in the earth and in the lives of Christians? Is he able to be everywhere at once, like God?

The Bible is the greatest source of truth about this angelic personality. He is most frequently also called the Devil or Satan, yet is referred to as the evil one, the angel of the bottomless pit, the Prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, Beelzebub and the serpent. He is not like God who knows all things, can see all things and can be everywhere all at once. He is a created angelic being and has limited powers. Yet God has allowed him much access to the world and to people.

### **Satan’s origin**

Satan was a beautiful arch angel who was mighty in heaven before his rebellion against God. A large portion of angelic beings followed his lead and now are demons who make up the kingdom of darkness. Satan has a kingdom over which he rules a multitude of demons. It is organized with an hierarchy of demon powers. He has been given power over the world and is the major influence of evil and deception over mankind. Rev. 12:7-9, Ezek.28:12-19, Jude 6, Luke 11:17-20, I John 5:19, (possibly Isa.14:12-14 and Rev.9:1-11.)

### **Satan’s tactics**

One of His main tactics is to bring temptation to people. Luke 4:13

The Devil is a deceiver and wants to cause people to believe His lies.

When he speaks, it is a lie and deception is his motive so he can destroy. John 8:44, John 10:10

He steals the word away from people who do not understand it; he sends people to persecute Christians and he stirs worry and the love of things to choke our spiritual growth. Matt. 13:19-23 .

Another tactic is to blind people from the light of Christ. 2 Cor. 4:3,4

Satan is crafty and will deceive a person and lead them astray from their pure devotion to Christ. He will try and make us ineffective in our walk. 2Cor. 11:3

He controls people by their lusts and keeps them on the world’s course of destruction. Ephs 2:1-3

The word categorizes three major areas of Satan’s worldly influence 1John 2:15,16

Realize that he is the accuser of the brethren and he will utter words of condemnation to you and brings accusations before God against believers. Rev. 12:10

### **The Believer’s victory**

We resist the enemy with our faith. 1Peter 5:6-10 1John 5:4

We have been given Spiritual Weapons to use in the battle against Satan. Ephs. 6:10-18.

We stand in the victory of Christ over the devil. Hebs. 2:14-18 and 1John 3:7, 8

We must realize that the name of Jesus is above every name and as we use His name in faith, we repel the enemy. Phil.2:9-11

Our victory is found also in the blood of Christ, the word of our testimony and by laying our lives entirely in the hands of God. Rev 12:10, 11

We must know that the Lord in us is greater than the lord of darkness in this world. 1John 4:4

## FRESH START: HOW DOES GOD WANT ME TO LIVE?

God is our Father. He wants His very best for us. If you are a parent you know the desire you have for your children to be whole, healthy and prosperous. Jesus once said, “if you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!” Matt. 7:11. How He wants us to live is consistent with His highest purposes and plans for our lives. If we obey Him, following His direction and His word, we will experience His best for our lives. The following passages reveal some of the primary, foundational teachings in the Bible regarding how God wants us to live.

In prayer to His Father, Jesus declared, “And this is eternal life, **that they may know Thee**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” John 17:3

Jesus also taught His disciples saying, “**Abide in Me, and I in you**. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” John 15:4

One of God’s highest purposes for our lives is to become like His Son Jesus Christ; “for whom He foreknew, He also **predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.” God is always at work in us by His Spirit so that on an increasing basis we will be like Jesus.

The character of a Christian is best described in one of the Lord’s most famous teachings called, the Sermon on the Mount. What Jesus wants to transform us into is in bold, what He wants us to receive is in italics. Jesus stood before a crowd of people who had followed Him up to a mountain side and there He taught them. “Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven*. Blessed are those who **mourn**, for they shall be *comforted*. Blessed are the **gentle**, for they shall *inherit the earth*. Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they shall *be satisfied*. Blessed are the **merciful**, for they shall *receive mercy*. Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they shall *see God*. Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they shall be *called sons of God*. Blessed are you when **men cast insults at you, and persecute you**, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, **on account of Me**. Rejoice and be glad, for *your reward in heaven is great*, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:3-12.

The conduct to which we are called can best be summarized with two words: **love and righteousness**. Love because Jesus gave us clear direction and set His highest priority for our conduct when He said; “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34,35 Righteousness is emphasized because it is our proper response to the holiness of God. “God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.” 1John 1:5. The distinguishing marks of a true Christian are Love and Righteousness for the Bible declares, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.” 1John 3:10

Another key passage for summarizing how we should live is found in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippian church. He was teaching the people the difference between a true believer and one who was not. He said, “for we are the true circumcision (people of God), who **worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh**.” Phil. 3:3

God is a giver and if we are to be like Him, He wants us to be givers also. Jesus said, “Let your lights shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matt. 5:16 Again the Bible instructs us to “do good, to **be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share**.” 1Tim. 6:18 With these good works God is well pleased and it seems that these deeds of kindness and giving ascend as a memorial to the Lord in heaven. Acts 10:9

We are also told to **walk in the Spirit**. These means to be inspired by, lead by, strengthened in and receive our life through the Spirit of God. This in turn goes hand in hand with the command to walk in, and **live by faith**. Gal. 5:16 and Hebrews 11:6

## **FRESH START: HOW CAN I GET VICTORY OVER THE SIN IN MY LIFE?**

The Lord loves His kids. He wants us to be like Him. We know from scripture that our heavenly Father is holy. 1Peter 1:14-16 declares, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “you shall be holy, for I am holy.” You might think, “holy, what is that; how can I *ever* be holy? I am full of sin!” To answer this question, we must begin with Jesus. **Everything in the Christian life begins and ends with Him.**

Jesus is the only one who the Father in heaven ever declared, “this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:17. The word holy means to be set apart, sanctified or consecrated to God in purity. Jesus is the only one who has ever lived a holy, sinless life. We don’t need to think of some other way to become holy ourselves; we just need to abide in Jesus who is already completely pleasing to God. As we abide in, dwell with, love and follow Jesus, His life will begin to shine out from us. If we love Him, we will begin to love what He loves and hate what He hates. The life-long, ongoing process of becoming more and more like Jesus (sanctification) causes the sins that plague us to fall powerless from us. Because we are “in Christ”, when the Holy Father looks at us, He will see the holy life of Jesus who is our righteousness. 1Cor. 1:30,31

### **12 KEYS TO GAINING PERSONAL FREEDOM FROM THE POWER OF SIN IN OUR LIVES**

1. Know and believe the power of Christ Jesus to cleanse us from sin and the great position of authority He has before God as our intercessor. Heb7:25-8:2&6, Heb.10:19-22, I John 1:8-2:2. 1Tim. 2:5,6
2. Know that you have been called to a higher calling than you ever could have imagined for your life.
3. Gain great assurance of your forgiveness in Christ so that when your spiritual enemy whispers condemnation in your ear, you can stand your ground in faith. Romans 8:1,2
4. Jesus has given us His Spirit to lead us in walking in obedience. The Spirit of God is the power source for living the Christian life. You fight sin with Spirit power, not will power! Gal. 5:16-18
5. Much of the battle with sin is waged and won in our minds. If we set our minds on trash, we will be dominated by the patterns of sin in our lives. The mind set on the Spirit of God brings us victory and peace. Romans 12:2, 2 Cor. 10:3-5, Romans 8:5,6
6. Use the word of God as the tool to renew your mind according to God’s will. By using the Word, you can begin to think like God thinks. You begin to speak God’s language. Heb. 4:12
7. Know and use the weapons of spiritual warfare to gain the victory. Ephs. 6:10-18.
8. Practice true repentance. This means to stop and turn the other way and begin to walk away from the sin that plagues you.
9. Learn to hate the sin in your life. There is a big difference between hating the consequences of sin verses really hating the sin itself. Gain the Father’s perspective on the sin and learn to hate it. It was that sin that caused Jesus to be crucified. Hate it for what it caused Jesus to go through on the cross for you. Think about it, if you really hate a certain food, you are not tempted to eat it when it is set before you. It repels you and you turn from it easily. Learn to hate the sin in your life.
10. Let your obedience be a way of showing Jesus that you love Him. John 14:21
11. Love the truth! Become determined to walk in the truth every day. If telling the truth (to God, others and yourself) becomes your standard, it will guard you from much sin.
12. Remove yourself from the temptations you face in life if at all possible. This includes places, people and things that tempt you to sin. Break soul ties with anyone from your past.

## **FRESH START: HOW CAN I HELP MY FAMILY TO BELIEVE?**

When we come to Christ and experience His grace and love for us, we want everyone to have a relationship with Jesus. We know that heaven is real and so is hell. Our love is mixed with fear that our family and friends will not accept God's gift of salvation. Our excitement and fear can sometimes cause us to become pushy or insensitive to the feelings of others. Instead we need to proceed with faith and wisdom.

We can not save anyone. The Holy Spirit is the one who has the task of bringing lost sinners to conviction about their lives. Without this conviction, men will not repent. "And when He (the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment" John 16: 8 The Holy Spirit has indeed come and that is part of His ministry today. In the story of the prodigal son, (Luke 15: 11-32) it was the young man's difficult circumstances that caused him to stop and consider his wayward life; then he realized the deep need in his life to repent. People are usually their own worst enemy, by being determined to live "my own way", we cause much hardship in our lives. God uses this pain we cause to bring us to the point of surrender to Him.

Jesus further taught that, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:44. The Bible declares that the "word of the cross is, to those who are perishing, foolishness." 1 Cor. 1:18 After Jesus told His disciples how hard it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, they asked, "then who can be saved?" The answer Jesus gave reveals the secret by which men actually come to faith in Christ. He said, "the things impossible with men are possible with God." It is God who saves men and no one is beyond His reach. When the light of the truth about Christ really shines on a man, if he wants to know the truth, he will find himself humbled with his need for the Savior. At that point if he is willing to repent and believe, he can receive the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Yet there is opposition for the souls of men. The Bible declares, "and even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world (the devil) has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 2 Cor. 4:3,4

All this is true, yet the Father has placed certain tasks in our hands to influence mankind toward salvation. We are called to enter into divine partnership with God as He fulfills His desire to see all men come to eternal life in His Son. The Lord of heaven and earth has chosen believers to share the authority and the responsibility of winning this world to Christ. If we fail to do our part, the impact is severe. If we are faithful with the tasks He has given us, we will be fruitful participants in the harvest.

### **The three tasks of believers that make us partners with God in bringing people to Christ are:**

**PRAYER:** Intercessory prayer is a powerful force that the Father has placed in the hands of His church. As we pray with faith and spiritual knowledge gained from the Word of God, we influence the spiritual battle that wages for the souls of our loved ones and friends. Intercessory prayer occurs when a believer prays for and wrestles with the spiritual forces that are blinding and binding a non-Christian from receiving the truth.

**CARE:** Our love for fellow Christians and the unity we maintain because of our common faith in Christ is a powerful testimony to unbelievers. Jesus prayed to His Father on our behalf and said, "I in them, and Thou (Father) in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me." John 17:21 We are also called to be full of good works and service to the lost. The Apostle Paul said that, "I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more." God has good works which He had prepared beforehand that we should walk in. Ephs. 2:10 The impact will be a mighty witness to the lost.

**SHARE:** The gospel message (the good news about the life, sacrificial death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus) is what a person without Christ needs to hear for "it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;" Romans 1:16,17 Christian books, tapes, and music can also be powerful tools to implant the gospel message in a loved one's mind. Testimonies of the goodness, power and reality of God are helpful in sparking interest and stirring faith. The "life message" of a Christian involves the person's unspoken testimony of a person's character that witnesses to the life changing power of Jesus. As the world becomes more lost and also more skeptical, non-Christians need to see the integrity of a consistent dedicated walk with Jesus before they will believe your verbal message.

## FRESH START: WHY DO I LIVE A LIFE OF GENEROSITY?

**Living with Generosity:** *Why are Good Works, Offering, Gifts and Sacrifices so important to God?*

Christians are called to reflect the amazing goodness of God through their love, generosity and good works toward others. Jesus was known for His good works. We are called to good works through our giving. Generosity and goodness are the natural response of a grateful heart. Sacrificial giving is a beautiful and practical expression of devotion and consecration toward God. It is birthed in our understanding of the greater sacrifice given by God in the life and death of His Holy Son. We are called to live life with open hands and open hearts. This is the way of the Kingdom of God.

To live without giving of our possessions and ourselves is to live in contradiction to the life God has modeled and what He expects of His children. Freely we have received every blessing from God and we are to freely give from the abundance of those blessings. In the Old Covenant, every tenth animal and harvest was considered to be God's. With an even greater consecration in the New Covenant established in the life of Jesus, believers have the opportunity to consecrate everything they have and everything they are to the Lord. It speaks of ownership. For we have been bought with a great price and we are not our own any longer. The blessings of God flow in the lives of His children who have given Him dominion over their finances and their possessions.

The greatest reward for living this way is to be in harmony, alignment and life flow with God. As God our Father has demonstrated great generosity, in doing the same we become like Him. Therefore, as the governor of our own lives, we each have opportunity to invest in the things that matter to the Father. As we invest in our Father's priorities, our account and our influence in the Kingdom increase. In wisdom, we lay up treasure in Heaven. As governors of our own lives, we have at our disposal the gifts of our time, our talents, our hearts, our efforts and our resources.

*The Tithe serves as a baseline for New Covenant Generosity*

We are to live with generosity as our core because our Father is generous. But what does generosity look like? In the "Sermon on the Mount" Mt. 5-7, Jesus taught that the Laws of God in the Old Covenant are exceeded by those who will live according to their devotion to the Kingdom of God in the New Covenant. Instead of hating our enemies who have wronged us, we are to do good toward them and to serve them by going the extra mile. With this principle in mind, the Old Covenant command to offer a tithe of 10% should serve simply as a baseline for financial generosity. God loves it when we do good and are generous givers. With such sacrifices He is well pleased. Our desire is for every person in Radiant Church to experience the blessing of God to the fullest extent and in every area of their lives. It is never acceptable that God's people would not be generous in good works and offerings. Generosity is one of the markers upon the life of a follower of Christ.

*The Makings of a Beautiful Offering of our Treasures, Time and Talents.*

- 1 Co 4:2 it is required of stewards that they be found faithful
- We are to guard our hearts from giving or doing good in order to be noticed by people.
- Luke. 12:33 By giving sacrificially to the poor, we lay up treasures in heaven.
- Luke 10:29,30 Big sacrifices are reasonable, noticed and rewarded –Jesus noticed the sacrifice of the poor woman who gave it all and of the wealthy woman who ministered worship as she gave a costly gift of pure nard.
- Mt. 25 Our high touch offerings of compassion toward Christians are highly esteemed by the Lord
- 2 Co. 8:2 Offerings given in hardship with joy are commended by God.
- He who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly.
- We must not give grudgingly or under compulsion. We should make sure our gifts are not affected by covetousness, fear or selfishness. God loves a cheerful giver whose gift comes from the heart.
- We are to be in harmony with man and consecrated to God as we give our gifts. Repent and be reconciled then give the gift.
- Proverbs 3:9-10 <sup>9</sup>Honor the Lord with your capital *and* sufficiency [from righteous labors] and with the firstfruits of all your income;<sup>10</sup> So shall your storage places be filled with plenty, and your vats shall be overflowing with new wine.
- Luke 6:38(NLT) <sup>38</sup>Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."