

THE POWER OF OUR  
**RELATIONSHIPS**

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BETTER FRIENDS MAKE BETTER FRIENDS

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# INTRODUCTION

“Show me your friends, and I’ll tell you who you are.”

What about that? Could that be true? If I know your friends, do I really know you?

What is a friend anyway? We might think of friends as people we spend quality time with because we want to. No other reason. But is that true?

Our earliest friends may be family members. There is nothing more enjoyable than seeing a young child enamored with his or her newborn sibling. A friendship develops there because of sheer proximity. Thrust together by shared parents, siblings become friends because . . . well, they are always there with one another.

As we grow, our friend base expands. First, it’s other family members who keep showing up. Perhaps it’s neighbors whose paths cross your path repeatedly. Day care comes and there begins to be interaction with others strictly on the basis of being in the same facility all day. This type of setting may be where you first identify someone as your “friend.”

The more places we go, the more people we interact with, the more friends we identify.

As a young child, my world was pretty large. I was born into a two-parent family with two sisters. We lived on the second floor of a four-story brownstone. On the first floor lived my grandparents and my aunt on my mother’s side. Our landlord, his wife and son lived on the third floor. The fourth floor was a more distant place, so I don’t remember much about the people who lived up there. I do know that there were several tenants up there in the sixteen years that I lived in that building.

Because my parents were involved in a very large church, that was my first “day care” type setting. We had Sunday school time with other babies, with whom I grew up.

There were other children on “the block” with whom I played almost daily in the summer; but during the school year, I attended a school across town, which expanded my world some more.

In every setting, however, I found that there was always someone, even several someones, to whom I was drawn. I spent my time with them. I studied with them. When there was food, I ate with them. I played with them. I took down their phone numbers and gave them mine.

Sometimes I changed out a friend for a different choice. Maybe it was because we had a “fight” . . . but that wasn’t often the case at all. Usually there was something that just drifted us apart. They moved. We were put in different classes. . .

As I grew, I found that friends were not always people. Books were wonderful friends. So was music. Certain activities became friends: sports, eating, movies . . . The list of my “friendships” just kept on growing.

By the time I entered junior high school, I had friends of all sorts: males and females, people of all hues, those my age, older or younger, some who are financially independent and others who are dependent on the government. Then there were the inanimate friends: foods I loved, activities I enjoyed, places I went.

Equally important is the way we carry out our relationship roles in the lives of others, which I am exploring in these writings. As in many areas of life, we have become consumers of relationships rather than producers of relationships. We look at what others bring to us without looking at what we bring to others. We become victims of our relationships instead of victors in the relationship processes. Being victorious in our relationships means we gain and give abundantly in our interactions with others.

I did not find the subtitle “Better Friends Make Better Friends” anywhere else, but that phrase accurately expresses the basic premise of this book. If I am a better friend to others, I will find that I have better friends in return. As I become more intentional in relating to others, in whatever capacity, I will find that others in those capacities are giving me more value in return.

By taking this time to examine our relationships I hope that you (and I) will become further empowered to choose relationships rightly and make the most of the relationships we do choose.



# MAKING THE MOST OF THE POWER OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS

There are several ways you can approach this book. Whatever approach you take, please remember to let the Bible be the informant of your learning. The Bible, although written by more than 35 writers over a span of 1,500 years, bears one message. It is not schizophrenic, rather it shares a message of God loving us so much that He gave us wonderful guidelines for living life in the world He created. The Old Testament shows us how much He despises the behaviors that violate His plan for us. The New Testament shows us how much He loves, encourages, and empowers us, even as we learn how to apply His standards to life in this world.

You may come across additional passages of Scripture that shed more light on a topic, and that is a good thing. Please share your Biblical insights with me, I would love to glean from what God's Word is teaching you about relationships.

This work is not designed to create any new legalisms, rather we explore what God has in place so that we can be aware, as we build relationships with others, of what the Word teaches. We can then seek to walk in His way, for His Glory and our good. We can walk in the confidence that as we explore the Bible asking God for His insight, and obeying the insights He shares, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1).

**As a personal study.** There are 15 topics, each with a set of reflection questions and a place to compose your prayer around the topic. You may choose to do an entire study (The readings, reflection questions, and the prayer) in one session. You might prefer to read the Scriptures and the content in one session then, on the next day, answer the reflection questions and compose your prayer.

**As a group study.** Depending on the number of people in the group, (from two to eight) you may choose to cover one or more chapters independently as if a personal study. When the group comes together (weekly or every other week), take turns answering the following questions for each chapter read:

1. What is one thought that really caught your attention in this chapter? Did you agree or disagree with it? What Scriptures inform your decision?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, ten being a 100% master of the topic and 1 being someone who applies no attention to living the topic, how do you rate yourself for living according to

the biblical standards for the relationship in this chapter? Why do you give yourself that score?

3. How would life improve for you if you were to increase your score for this relationship?
4. Who do you know who is a good role model for this relationship? What do you admire about them?
5. What is one specific thing you can apply to your relationship before the next group session that will help you be better in this relationship? (What will you do? Who will you do it with, for, or to? Where will you do it? When will you do it?)

After the first week, begin each session by going around and sharing how well you were able to apply your goal from the previous lesson, and what results you saw because of applying it.

Remember, whether alone or in a group, to begin and end your times of study with prayer.

Additional copies of this book may be obtained at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

May your relationships be strengthened, enriched, and filled with love as you invest in yourself and those around you through this study.

Resting in Jesus' Love, always

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## Chapter 1

# Best Friends

**I Samuel 18:1** *After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.*

I really do enjoy Facebook. Here I find a place where I can keep in touch with friends, old and new. We can celebrate joys and mourn our sorrows. We can see pictures of family members and keep up with important dates, like birthdays and anniversaries. We catch glimpses of what we think on various “issues of life.” Yes, Facebook can be quite a handy tool for keeping relationships alive.

There’s something precious and rare about those friendships that last through the years. I count it a privilege to have carried on friendships from each stage of life that I would trade for nothing. My “Friend Forever,” as my son calls her, is Gerri, who has been in my life since kindergarten. There’s Denise, who has been a friend since high school and grew even closer during college; and Barbara, my running buddy and partner-in-crime through the seminary years.

These are friends who have been in my life and remain in my life to this day. We don’t live in the same town. We may or may not even talk to one another regularly, but when we get the chance to connect, it’s obvious from both sides: “This is a person I value having in my life.”

There is also that “best friend.” Best friends are there, period. Although they may not have been in your life for as long as another friend, best friends are there now. Situations and circumstances may have thrust you and your best friend together, but an undeniable bond has knit you together.

Any reason, even a frivolous one, is a good reason to be with your best friend. Feeling good . . . feeling bad . . . need to shop . . . redecorating . . . trying a new recipe . . . good news to share . . . have to vent . . . lonely . . . needing advice . . . just want an ally in the midst of the crowd. . .

The account of the friendship of Jonathan and David is a poignant reminder of the power of our relationships with “best friends,” and of the need to select them wisely.

I Samuel 18:1 says that when David had finished his conversation with Saul, Jonathan and David became one in spirit, and Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Those words are easy to say, but in the relationship between Jonathan and David, we see more closely what such a friendship is really about.

First, such a friend loves you for your strengths and without regard for your weaknesses. The

conversation that David had just finished with Saul was the conversation that followed David's slaying of the Philistine giant Goliath. David had put his life on the line to take down this enemy of Israel that not even the highest military officials would touch. David's bravery and skill were commendable. David's devotion to the LORD was unquestionable. Jonathan was drawn to David for these good qualities . . . and David's weaknesses were disregarded.

Please understand that I am not talking about ignoring character flaws here. David's weaknesses were laid out by his father, Jesse, in I Samuel 16, when Samuel asked Jesse to bring out all of Jesse's sons . . . and Jesse forgot about David. David's weaknesses were that he was a shepherd who, therefore, smelled like sheep; that he was the youngest, therefore not to be taken seriously. Jonathan didn't care about those things. He was drawn to the courage and faithfulness of David.

Second, Jonathan cared more for David's well-being than for his own advancement. David had already been anointed to replace Saul as king. Jonathan, as Saul's son, should have been the next king. While the fact of David's anointing may not have been known to Jonathan at the time referred to in 18:1, Saul makes it plain to Jonathan in I Samuel 20:31, as long as David is alive, Jonathan can never be established as king. Not even that fact takes away Jonathan's commitment to the well-being of his friend David.

Third, Jonathan confronts David when he believes him to be wrong and defends David when he proves to be right. In 1 Samuel 20:1-4, David appeals to Jonathan because Saul is trying to kill David. At first, Jonathan does not believe David, and he says so. Such honesty in friendship is crucial. Because Jonathan expressed his disbelief, David had the opportunity to make his full case before him. Jonathan, being a true friend, loyally stands with David instead of with his father, Saul, in this conflict.

It is no wonder that David trusted Jonathan so! This is a true BFF scenario. Someone who loves and encourages your strengths while disregarding your weaknesses will help you move into your greatness. Your greatness, you see, does not come by working on your weaknesses, but rather on your strengths. For example: Michael Jordan was, and in some circles still is, considered to be the best basketball player of all time. Then, he determined that he should try Major League Baseball. It didn't take long for Michael and the world to realize that Michael should stick with basketball. No matter how hard Michael worked, baseball remained one of his weaknesses. Michael's greatness came in building up his strength, basketball, not in trying to improve his weakness, baseball. True friends build up your confidence in and commitment to your strengths.

Someone who wants to see your success even more than he or she wants to be advanced will always have your best at heart. Such a friend will help you be your best in all the right places. He or she will stand back and cheer while you shine, without feeling the need to share your spotlight. This is not to say that if you and your best friend work for the same employer, that your friend should never accept an advancement offer that you are pursuing. After all, if this is your best friend, shouldn't you be his or her best friend also? A true best friendship can withstand the test of an occasional competition. Let the better person win . . . and the best friend congratulate the other heartily.

Someone who challenges you when he or she believes you are wrong and then supports you unwaveringly when realizing that you are right grants you the gift of self-confidence. This type of friend will keep you from being blindsided by helping you evaluate not just what you do, but why you do it. This friend will never leave you to fight alone, even if he or she battles only from the sidelines, because a friend of this quality shares your belief in your battle.

To have such a friend, you need to be such a friend in return. If you can't be that in return, be honest enough to acknowledge that to the person involved. Be the best friend you can be, but don't let them believe you to be a better friend than you are. Such honesty now may actually lead to that "best friends" relationship down the road when the time is right.

It has been said that we should never make anyone a priority who considers us to be only an option. That is most true in the formation of "best" friendships. Choose wisely. True best friends are one another's best friend.



**Consider the power of your relationship with your best friend(s) . . .**

What qualities make your best friend relationships good for the both of you?

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In which area(s) is the relationship lacking? Love? Faithfulness? Truthfulness? Honesty? Trust? Something else? How is it lacking?

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Are you in a one-sided best-friend relationship, where one of you is truly more invested in the relationship than the other is? How so? Is this something you want to correct? If so, how?

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Are you overlooking a relationship that has great potential from both parties to become a best friend relationship? What can you do to develop that relationship?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with your best friend(s)?**

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## Chapter 2

# Old Friends

**John 4: 28 – 28** *Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”*

Whether you have been a follower of Christ for years or have not yet committed to His Lordship, by virtue of the fact that you are reading and considering this article, you now have some relationships that qualify as “old friends.” Old friends, from the viewpoint of this writer, are people who knew you before you were as committed to Christ as you are now.

Perhaps you are reading this study thinking that there might be some value to building relationships the way God teaches us. When you finish, inspired by new insights you have gleaned, you may choose to begin relating to old friends in new ways. That is when you may experience resistance. Your friends who have not shared this enlightening experience may expect to continue your relationship as always, which may not be in a mutually beneficial way.

If, in the process of reading these chapters, you become convinced that you want to do some things differently in regards to your relationships, then you will have some old friends who won't know this new you or this new perspective that will color your world.

If you have been in church, but not in Christ, but you now want to change course and live your life in Christ, you have some old friends who have been “playing church” with you and may not realize that you are getting out of that game.

If you've been a Christ-follower for years, faithfully reading the Word and materials that help you apply the Word to life, and you've been changing and growing in Christ for a long time, you still have some old friends who knew you at your last level of maturity but don't know what this new level of maturity will mean to your relationship with them.

In today's passage, excerpted from the first 30 verses of John chapter 4, a woman of Samaria encounters Christ and the encounter takes her to all sorts of new levels.

First, Jesus, a Jew, talks to her, a Samaritan. She meets the Christ who makes no distinction among people because of ethnicity or cultural differences. In the full account, we get a bird's eye view of the application of diversity. Jesus respects this Samaritan, but He will not allow her to maintain the limiting beliefs of her culture that keep her from placing Him where He belongs in her life.

Second, Jesus, a man, talks to her, a woman. In Jesus' day, in the Roman Empire, women were regarded as second-class citizens. So much so that no crime would be charged against a Roman who chose to leave a newborn daughter outside of the house to die. Females were property, not persons. This is similar to the modern-day notion that women exist for the physical pleasure they bring to men. Sadly, our efforts to "correct" that misconception have led to an equally false notion that women exist for the physical pleasure they can get from men.

Jesus elevated women in many ways through His ministry. Here he demonstrated that if engaged in intelligent conversation, a woman can be made aware of, and changed by, loftier thoughts and spiritual insights.

Third, Jesus sees her shortcomings not as what define her, but as something she can overcome with His intervention. It starts with her honest assessment of her own situation. When Jesus asks where her husband is, she does not lie and say "He's at the house." No, she admits that she has no husband. Jesus commends her honesty. She has had five husbands and man number six, apparently her live-in lover, is not her husband.

Her relationship struggles have not gone unnoticed. She has come to the well in the heat of the day, something that no one would ordinarily choose to do, because she just cannot take the looks and the harsh words people direct her way because of how she lives. But Jesus is different. He speaks matter-of-factly. He calls her out, but there is no condemnation . . . only an implied invitation to rise to her true self.

Because of her encounter with Jesus, this woman now has a town full of "old friends." Everyone knows her as a moral failure. Everyone regards her as undesirable. Everyone knows she has nothing to offer.

But now she knows Jesus' unconditional love for her. Her first response needs to be our immediate next step; she tells those "old friends" about her new LORD. The scripture is clear; her witness is effective. The very people who despised her in her weakness are impacted by her newfound strength. She no longer lets them silence her; in fact, she goes to them to tell her story. The change Jesus makes in infusing just that new boldness is enough to draw the people.

When an encounter with Jesus takes us to a new level of understanding ourselves, we need to quickly let our old friends know. Don't believe the lie of the enemy who says that we should just quietly change so that if we fail in our new commitment, no one will know. The very fact of publicly acknowledging our new commitment to Christ will activate His power to keep us. It's the reality of those words in the 23rd Psalm, "He leads me in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake." Defeated by secrecy, we are more inclined to fail than when we demonstrate our trust in His unfailing power by sharing what we have received from Him.



May I share one more thought here? If we find that our lives are not changing in the way our words are saying we know they should, we may need to acknowledge that our first enemy is self-deception. We are lying to ourselves and to God. He knows that . . . and it grieves Him. This is good evidence that therapy is in order. It may be the counsel of a faithful pastor or may require the intervention of a professional who can help break down the barrier between self and truth. Until we find out why we love our defeats more than we want our victory, we will even deny Christ's power to set us free.

Old friends, even if they are just five-minutes-ago-old-friends, need to know how your latest encounter with Christ is changing your life. Even more, they need to know that He is available to change their lives too.



**Consider the power of the influence of your relationships with your old friends . . .**

Is your faith in Christ one of the things you have in common with some of your old friends? Which ones?

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Who just became an “old friend” because you are learning something that will change your current friendship if you were to act on what you learned? In what way?

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How do you anticipate this old friend will respond to the “new” you?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with your old friends?**

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## Chapter 3

# Parents

**Exodus 20:12** *Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*

**Ephesians 6:1** *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

**Colossians 3:20** *Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*

How is it that words so simple to write are so hard to see in action? While every one of us began life as someone's child, the variations upon that relationship begin even before life does.

Think about some of the possibilities:

- Your parents were a loving, married couple who longed for another child . . . and you came along . . .
- Your parents had a great marriage and the three children they had longed for . . . and then you “happened” to them . . .
- Your parents were in high school when they found out about you. Your father wanted no part of you, but your mother refused to have an abortion. The people who adopted you love you . . . a lot . . .
- Your parents had been dating a while but they didn't plan to marry one another . . . until you happened. The marriage was rocky, but because they wanted you to have a strong home, they worked through the challenges and actually have a great marriage now . . .
- Your parents were convinced that they were practicing safe sex. That was important because life on the streets, addicted to drugs was tough enough. Somehow, you happened and they had to make choices. Marriage was out of the question, but so was abortion. You were born addicted to heroin and abandoned. Never adopted, you went from one foster home to another until you turned 18 . . .
- Your mother didn't even know your father's name . . . until the trial where he was convicted of the rape that produced you. She didn't like the idea of either abortion or adoption, so she raised you herself . . .
- You may still have to add your own story here.

Whatever the story, we all have parents. We also all have people who raised us. Sometimes they weren't the same people.

Is it possible that such simplistic instructions to children could relate to you? Are you really expected to obey and honor your parents?

During my career as a public school teacher, I taught nearly 6,400 students. I saw the power of these commands over and over again. Children who were obedient to wise parents were generally well-adjusted and successful academically. They chose friends wisely and came through the challenges they faced with grace, even though going through them may have left scars. Disobedient children simply did not fare as well.

We can extend that to all phases of life. The principle is true. Obedient children of wise parents tend to do better, spiritually, academically, emotionally, and socially.

Scripture is not blind. There is the qualifier – in the LORD – that cannot be ignored. Children of foolish, even unruly parents, fare better when they are able to identify and learn from others who model wise living. So, while being obedient to unwise people who are rearing them, they can learn from the examples of people nearby such as teachers and coaches, neighbors, other relatives. . . .

A strong reality is in the reference from the Ten Commandments in Exodus: “Honor your father and your mother.”

Sometimes, all we can do is honor our parents, even when they are not there for us. That means learning the best way to live and living it – even if your parents aren't teaching or modeling it.

This can be especially important as we become adults. Sometimes our well-meaning parents want us to make wrong choices – about career, about parenting our own children, about finances. That is when we may have to honor them rather than obey them. When we have matured and grown in wisdom, our wise choices honor our parents; even if we have to go against their wishes to make those wise choices.



*Consider the power of your relationships with your parents . . .*

How well are you obeying your parents today? What is that area where you need to obey them?

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In what way are you obeying parents who are leading you to do something that contradicts the way of the LORD? How can you honor them in those areas instead?

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How can you best honor your parents (be specific)?

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If you are not a parent now, how can you add value to a child who needs a positive adult influence? What is keeping you from doing it?

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**What is your prayer for your relationships with your parents?**

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## Chapter 4

# Grandparents

**Leviticus 19:32** *Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.*

**1Timothy 5:4** *But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.*

I didn't know my father's parents at all. My mother's father lived from 1883 to 1980. My mother's mother lived from 1905 to 1993. Yes, my grandfather was 22 years older than my grandmother. He was a widow when he married her and, I guess the age difference didn't matter.

Just think about the changes my grandparents lived to see. Our country literally moved from the age of horse and buggy travel to the age of space shuttle flight during their lifetimes. (My grandfather missed the first shuttle flight by 15 months).

The Bible doesn't speak much about the influence of grandparents on the lives of their grandchildren, but if you've had grandparents, you have stories. Grandparents are often the first babysitters, giving new mothers time off when the task of motherhood becomes simply too daunting. Visiting grandparents who live a long distance away is often the first road trip we take. Whether your grandparents are near or far, they have influenced your life.

Some influence was direct, as they told you stories, read books to you, or joined you in hours of endless play. Other influences were more indirect as they interacted with your parents regarding how to raise you or some other vital issue.

The influence of grandparents goes along with that of parents, then. Some of the stories behind the relationships will be similar. Some of the blessings and challenges will, therefore, be similar.

I found only two instructive scriptures regarding how to relate to grandparents. One, which actually references the aged in general, lifts up a practice that I have not seen in my lifetime; standing when elders are in a room – or perhaps just when they enter a room. WOW! That would certainly change the dynamics of most of our lives. Even if we don't take it to that length, what can we do to show honor and respect to those of prior generations who are still among us? One practical clue is the second biblical reference – take care of them when they are aged and alone.

One of the saddest commentaries of our day is the abuse of our elderly population. Stories arise daily of how monies have been misappropriated, food denied, medical care neglected, and even physical injuries inflicted. This will not stop as long as those who are younger do not take seriously the biblical charge to take care of grandparents (and parents).

Most commonly it is actually parents who are being cared for. Longevity is now of such that retirees find their first task of retirement is to care for aging parents. The grandchildren are often far away or inundated with the tasks of building families and careers of their own.

Let me suggest, however, some ideas for those of you who have the opportunity to implement them.

1. When possible, live within an easy drive of your parents and grandparents. I know that our society is all about upward mobility, therefore we believe with all of our hearts that to be upward in your career requires being mobile in relocating away from your family. Seek wisdom and perspective in making these decisions. Sometimes, being near family brings a wealth beyond what money can provide.
2. Stay in communication with your parents and grandparents. The more you know about them, the easier it will be to help provide care for them should the time arise. It's not always enough to simply move them into your world. They want, and should be able, to maintain as much of their world as possible.
  - In a recent telephone conversation with a 90-year-old friend, who I'll call Louisa, I learned that when Louisa relocated to the town where her children live, they placed her in an independent living community, populated with working adults and their children. Louisa was moved there from an assisted living facility. This means that her family has taken her from an environment where everything was easily accessible to one where nothing is easily accessible. While the assisted living facility was bustling all day long and quiet at night, this new community is a ghost town by day as most residents are at work and school, and community activities are at night, when Louisa prefers to be winding down and relaxing.

Louisa's children live fairly close, but not close enough to be there every day. Louisa has no access to a public transportation system to do basic things like get to a grocery store. This was a serious case of being out of communication. Her children wanted their mother nearby, but they did not take into account what would be needed to keep her life full.

3. Make decisions practically, not solely based on emotions. Everything from your own lifestyle to the financial preparations for senior living should be explored. Things like long term care insurance make a major difference in the quality of life for all concerned when the elders are being cared for. Even when the desire is to "never go into a nursing home" long term care insurance needs to be considered. The funds received from long term care insurance can be used to pay a family member who is asked to leave a job in



order to provide care for their loved one. These funds also cover bringing in professional caregivers to assist the family with care,

- As an insurance agent, I saw products that offer long term care coverage with return of premium if the long-term care benefit isn't used. Other products offer significant return on investment. The younger a person is when they purchase coverage, the lower the premiums are. It may not "feel good" to sacrifice to have long term care, but it will feel great if you have to use it and family members are able to be at peace while caring for you. Many young adults who are beginning to see financial stability are paying for long term care coverage for their parents/grandparents because they know that the burden of care will one day be theirs and they want to be able to do it well, with options.

One of God's principles that we have allowed ourselves to ignore to our own detriment is the law of the harvest . . . you reap what you sow. Whereas it was once the norm to establish lives that included caring for the elderly within the family, we have become a nation that expects to be able to pay away the needs of those who need special care. The elder abuse I mentioned above is but one of the harvests of such thinking. Wise are we to sow care for those ahead of us so as to reap the care of those behind us.



**Consider the power of your relationship with your grandparent(s) . . .**

What characteristics make good grandparents? If you are a grandparent, are you incorporating those factors into the lives of your grandchildren?

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If you are involved in taking care of any senior adult, how has this impacted both of your lives?

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How can you add value to your parents, grandparents and senior relatives today?

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**What is your prayer for your relationships with your grandparents?**

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# Associates

**Matthew 9:9-10** - *As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.*

Some of my most cherished relationships began as casual associates. Ethel was a volunteer in our summer lunch program; Teri, a co-worker from a part-time job; and Nora, a soloist at a church where I was on staff. Now, I cannot imagine life without their friendships.

An associate is a relationship that is rather thrust upon us, with little to be done about it. These may be people with whom we work from day to day: coworkers, supervisors, and those we supervise. Other associations are less frequent: church members, club members, the grocer, the banker, the plumber, the mechanic and so on.

Relationships with associates are most important because those associates impact the "stuff" that gives quality to our lives . . . or takes it away. Each of us probably has at least one horror story of an occasional association that proved devastating. One all-too-common story is the roofer who came by after the storm, gave an excellent bid for the work, requested 50% up front to cover materials . . . and was never seen again. We hear these stories and are moved with compassion for the victims, anger at the perpetrators, and frustration with "the system" that allows these things to occur.

Even more harmful, however, is a professional associate who takes from us our integrity, our very character. It's always such a gradual process. Someone asks if he can use your employee discount to purchase a gift for a spouse or parent. Your discount is higher than his, and it's a pretty big purchase so that extra savings will really make a difference. He assures you that it's done all the time, and it would mean so much to his loved one. Wanting to be a good friend, you go along with the request.

Soon you are being asked to write off broken merchandise that isn't really broken, "It's been around a long time and isn't selling. Writing it off will save the company at tax time because it will be counted as a loss instead of being considered inventory with value. That's how profits are kept high and bonuses are based on profits. You do want a good bonus this year, don't you?" You're not fully comfortable with what you're hearing, but you want to be a team player, so you

do as you're told . . . besides, you've already made plans for using your bonus money for a family vacation. "You don't want to wind up on a staycation because profits turn down, now do you?"

The requests increase, and you continue to comply. One day a team shows up from corporate. They have done an audit of records and yours have proven suspicious. You are escorted out of the building carrying only your personal effects that were put in a box for you. As you leave, you ask about the one who had been asking you to make the changes and falsify the records. His records were crystal clear! In fact, his record keeping is what gave away your misrepresentations. He will be promoted now, because of his great work.

As sad as it is that you've lost your job, even sadder is that your reputation is destroyed and your character has been compromised.

We want to find, and be, associates like Matthew was in the scripture referenced at the beginning of this chapter. Matthew had a life-changing encounter with Jesus. Matthew was a prosperous tax collector when he met Jesus. In the Roman Empire, the tax collectors bid for the right to collect taxes in a certain region. The winning bidder paid the taxes for the entire region in advance, and then collected what was due from the people. Rome would repay the tax collector, with interest, when the actual taxes were turned in. In cases where the taxes were collected as property instead of as currency, the collectors would sell the property and turn the money over to the state. This became a profitable enterprise when the tax collector was able to convert the merchandise into more money than was actually owed for taxes. Rather than take less property from the people and actually sell it for what was owed, the tax collectors' greed led them to take more than they were owed and pocket the excess. No wonder tax collectors were despised!

When Matthew met Jesus, he knew there would have to be a choice: continue to prosper as a crooked man or walk straight in the way of Jesus. The choice was a no-brainer for Matthew. Not only did Matthew want to walk the straight and narrow way with Jesus, Matthew wanted his fellow tax collectors to meet Jesus too.

In our associations, we must be careful to position ourselves in such a way that the people with whom we are doing business will recognize that we have no interest in becoming part of anything less than honorable. While we must be politely professional with everyone, we can be discriminating about with whom we "pal around."

Define your values before each day begins. What are you unwilling to laugh and joke about? Where do you draw the line on helping others at the expense of the company? If you are a person who believes in God, how do you want to live out that belief? Determine how far you will go to entice others to examine your faith, but without offending them.

The key word is often *intentionality*. While profits and perks are very desirable, be careful about making them all-important. Better to gain a little bit and consistently build it with integrity than to break all records by questionable means and find yourself suddenly disqualified from everything. Of course, breaking the records with integrity is best of all.

We are placed among our associates to be what Christ called salt and light. We are to add flavor and clear vision wherever we are. Find one or two other associates who share your faith and begin praying for one another to remain faithful, as well as for others who do not share your faith to become open to hearing about yours.



**Consider the power of your relationships with associates . . .**

How do your associates influence you as you seek to live out your beliefs?

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Are there some relationships with associates that should change? How?

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Which associate(s) encourage your faith? How?

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How do/can you encourage associates to have or exercise faith in God?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with your associates?**

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## Chapter 6

# Teachers

**2Timothy 1:5** *I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

During the Governorship of Paul Patton (1995 – 2003), the Commonwealth of Kentucky had as its slogan, “Education Pays,” to remind Kentuckians of the importance of a college degree. In the years since, we are often reminded through media moments that a person with a college degree will earn an average of \$1,000,000 more over his or her lifetime than a person with just a high school diploma.

Yes, education can pay rich rewards in life. Yes, good schools are important. But let’s not forget the heart of good education . . . the teachers.

I remember some of my own. Laura Marra, my third-grade teacher, was so very firm . . . but paused at every student’s birthday to give birthday “licks” followed by a neat treat. Trust me, there was much drama but no pain in the giving of “licks”.

Sheila Steinbaum, my fifth-grade teacher, who wanted so much to take our class from Brooklyn, NY to Jamestown, VA on a field trip, only to be told that out-of-state field trips were not permitted. She did take us to the World’s Fair in Flushing, NY, though.

Karl Grebanier, the school’s bookkeeper and our eighth-grade French teacher who, often displeased with the class conduct marks received from the teacher in the period before his class, decided to leave bookkeeping and become homeroom teacher for us in 9th grade so he could straighten up the conduct grades. He did, and he did! An interesting side note is that Mr. Grebanier died the year after being our homeroom teacher. I’ve often wondered if he sacrificed his life in taking on the extra duty of homeroom teacher one last time.

There were others . . . Jacqueline Hunt, Jacqueline Landers . . . I’m sure you can add some names of favorite or most memorable teachers to the list.

But does your list of best teachers end in the classroom? Mine doesn’t. In fact, the list of teachers outside of the classroom is far longer than the list inside. People like my Aunt Belle, who taught me the joy of singing with full abandon, and kindled the flame of entrepreneurialism within me. There was my godmother, Belle Rutledge, who, in so many of our conversations used the phrase, “Take a fool’s advice,” to encourage me to go further than she had gone in life. There

were church members, far too many to name here, who invested in developing my skills and interests to help me be a productive citizen of the world.

By now your brain should be working in overdrive. Think of the people who taught you some of life's most valuable lessons. Maybe they were your parents, other relatives, friends, neighbors or co-workers, or the occasional total stranger.

All I know is that my life would be significantly poorer if there had not been people around, nearly all of the time, to teach, encourage, inspire, and, yes, correct me along life's way.

So, what about you? Who invested in you when it wasn't really required of them to do so? Can you think of someone, anyone, whose life you, in turn, are reaching into?

The greatest problem in education today is that for too many people, learning stops when they leave the school building. Data shows that one-third of high school graduates and 42 percent of college graduates will not read another book for the rest of their lives after graduation. Those numbers rise significantly if you factor in those who read nothing nonfiction, nothing designed for personal development. Just imagine if everyone stopped growing emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually on the day they received their last educational degree.

Do our children see us reinforcing the lessons of their teachers academically, physically, and spiritually? Do we even know what they are being taught in one setting and how it may be conflicting with what they are learning in another setting? How are we teaching them to resolve these conflicts?

Are preachers and Sunday school teachers really the only spiritual teachers? We impact the spiritual walks of others, and they do the same for us by the invitations we extend and accept, by the conversations we have, by the way we spend our leisure time, in solitude or with others . . . the list goes on and on.

Teachers are everywhere. Teaching is an everyday activity. Someone is waiting to be taught by you!





**Consider the power of your relationship with teachers/students . . .**

Who are some of your most memorable teachers in school? What life lessons did they teach you?

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Usually, our first teachers are our parents and families. What significant lessons have you learned from your parents, brothers, and sisters?

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Who are your spiritual teachers; what have they taught you? How have they affected your life?

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What great lessons have you learned in your life that you wish to pass on to others?

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In whose lives are you investing valuable lessons, taking the time to encourage, challenge, inspire, teach, and bless? Who should be on this list but isn't yet?

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**What is your prayer for your relationships with your teachers? Your students?**

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## Chapter 7

# Lovers

**Genesis 2:22-24** *Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

**Genesis 24:67** *Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So, she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

I must confess that I bristled when it was suggested that I write about the power of our relationship with our lovers, for several reasons. The basic reason is that because "lover" as generally used in our culture is a relationship that does not legitimately exist in the culture of Scripture. Then, the teacher in me arose. This is an opportunity to share with a fellow believer how God thinks. There is, then, no better place to talk about our lovers. Read this topic carefully, prayerfully, and completely, please.

I began my search at dictionary.com, where I uncovered three definitions that apply to our context. A lover is:

1. a person who is in love with another.
2. a person who has a sexual or romantic relationship with another.
3. a person with whom one conducts an extramarital sexual affair.

The first definition does not automatically include the second and third definitions. You can be a lover without being physically involved with another person. In fact, the use of the word "or" in the second definition once again raises the possibility that there is no physical activity involved.

A large part of our confusion about and misuse of the notion of lover arises as we further and further deviate from the biblical view of what constitutes marriage. In biblical times, there was no preacher required for the marriage process. There was not even a justice of the peace. In fact, there was no ceremony. The Genesis passages at the beginning of this chapter show us that sex is the defining act of marriage. The Genesis 2 passage is rather vague, applying veiled terms for what happened when Adam and Eve came together. Genesis 24 is much clearer. When Isaac was

presented with Rebekah to become his wife, he took her into his mother's tent and he married her. Trust me on this; there was no organ playing, no wedding party, not even an officiate. The marriage was the moment of physical union.

That explains the first century Jewish wedding. I found this description on a blog entitled: *Scripture in the Light of First Century Customs* at [newjerusalem.blogspot.com](http://newjerusalem.blogspot.com)

“Shortly after their arrival, the bride and groom were escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber. Prior to entering the chamber, the bride remained veiled so that no one could see her face. While the groomsmen and bridesmaids waited outside, the bride and groom entered the bridal chamber alone. There, in the privacy, they entered into union for the first time, thereby consummating the marriage that had been covenanted approximately one year earlier.

After the marriage was consummated, the groom came out of the bridal chamber and announced the consummation of the marriage to the members of the wedding party. Then, as the groom went back to his bride in the chamber, the members of the wedding party returned to the wedding guests and announced the consummation of the marriage. The couple would then leave the banquet hall and begin going to the place the groom had prepared for his new bride.”

Again, there is no grand, protracted ceremony, although we do see where there is a wedding party of bridesmaids and groomsmen. At a wedding, people gathered for a huge feast that officially began once the announcement of consummation was made.

The modern notion of having a wedding ceremony comes through ancient civilizations in which marriage was a business arrangement made by parents. The public ceremony was basically a demonstration of the financial solvency of the parties involved. “Love” as we know it was not a relevant component in the marriage process.

Christianity, being a relative newcomer on the timeline of history, is actually the source of marriages by the choice of the bride and groom without so much parental investment in the selection process. In the Roman Empire, the civilization in which Christ Jesus lived and ministered, and Christianity was birthed, marriages were being arranged when the couples were extremely young, often infants. The intended bride and groom grew up knowing who they would one day marry. In order for there to be greater likelihood that both partners would be believers, the emerging Christian church frowned upon arranging marriages between infants. The presence of clergy in the wedding process was intended to assure that the couple being married was, indeed, “equally yoked”. This meant not only that both attended church but that both actually lived in keeping with the teachings of the faith.

There is one more interesting tidbit to put into this equation. At the climax of a physical union, endorphins are released into the body's neurological system. Endorphins are also released during strenuous physical activity, laughter, or even when simply touched in any positive way (hugs, massage, pat on the back, etc.) Endorphins are credited with producing a sense of general

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wellbeing, stress reduction, and even slowing the aging process . . . and endorphins are quite addictive.

Whoever, and, actually, whatever, prompts the physical climax becomes our “drug of choice.” By Divine design, one man and one woman become addicted to one another and will go to great lengths to preserve and enrich their “habit.” With the practice of disconnecting marriage from sex, what becomes addictive is not a single person, rather it is an experience that has us hooked.

Let’s return now to the Genesis passage. With His infinite knowledge of the masterpiece He was creating, God laid out a prescription for a mutually-satisfying healthy relationship through which the next generation could be launched with emotional strength, so as to form mutually-satisfying healthy relationships through which the next generation could be launched . . . it’s like the song that does not end. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

While other models may appear to be “good,” God’s model is the model that is designed to be very good. What does it say about me if I am willing to forfeit the best for something that is merely good? Good sex is only one aspect of a great relationship. At its best, good sex is accompanied by lifelong monogamous commitment. Children are a welcome result and are reared with healthy outcomes in view.

Because the relationship with a physical lover has the complication of emotional bonding due to endorphin release, and because that bonded relationship is best experienced over the course of a lifetime, it is most important to enter into a physical love relationship only after carefully evaluating the lifelong worth of that potential partner. To consider bonding yourself to someone who offers the potential for a few moments of ecstasy but at the price of verbal or physical abuse, financial instability, total disregard for what interests you or what you enjoy, and lack of commitment to the exclusivity of your relationship, is like getting a great piece of chewing gum, but paying for it with the price of a brand-new yacht.

A sexual relationship without the commitment of marriage is equivalent to paying the price of a yacht. Why not select instead a good marriage partner, build a committed and healthy marriage which includes sexual fulfillment and, thereby, have a yacht?



**Consider the power of your relationship as a “lover” . . .**

Contemporary relationships with lovers may be called friendships, hook-ups, friends with benefits, partners, affairs, marriages, or some other term. What words identifies yours (Past or present)? How do you feel about the status of that (those) relationship(s) now? Why?

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Jesus encountered at least two women who were in relationships with lovers: the Samaritan, who had had several husbands and was living with someone who was not her husband (John 4:4-30); and the woman caught in adultery whom the people wanted to stone to death (John 8:1-11). He treated both women with dignity, respect, and love. He implicitly recommended that each cease the lifestyle she was living. How do you feel about that advice? Why?

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If you are engaged in a long-term physical relationship without marriage, what stops you from moving into a relationship based on biblical standards?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with your lover?**

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## Chapter 8

# Spouses

**Genesis 2:18 and 24** *The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” . . . That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

**Ephesians 5:21-33** *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the Church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the Church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

A sound structure is built on a solid foundation. Before a skyscraper is built, a very deep foundation is laid, resulting in floor after floor of basement levels. Relatively few people are even aware of those basements, but without them, that skyscraper would topple to the ground with the first blast of wind.

Society is one structure with a foundation that has been forgotten, ignored and even attacked. Around the world, in every culture and within every “people group” the same foundation is found: the family. This comes as no surprise when we recognize that, before any human institution whether church, government, school, or business, there was family. In the Genesis account, man is created as a solitary being; but God is not satisfied until He creates woman for man. Family begins as Adam and Eve become one flesh. Children were added to the family.

Just as family is the foundation of society, so marriage is the foundation of family. The quality of what goes on between a husband and wife determines the quality of the impact that family will have on and through its members.

As society becomes increasingly complex, family dynamics have also changed, though not always for the better.

Just a few days ago I was reminded of the impact of World War II on families in America. Prior to World War II, the workforce consisted largely of men. When America was thrust into war by the attack on Pearl Harbor, men of all ages, in unimaginable numbers, answered the call to defend our nation. Yet, the workforce had to remain strong so as to be able to produce the arms, equipment, and supplies that would allow us to fight victoriously.

That is when a new army arose, an army of women, represented by images such as that of Rosie the Riveter. Women stepped in to factories and offices, proving what had never been attempted, that women can be every bit as effective as men in the workplace.

When the war ended, the interest of women to remain in the workplace did not. While the contribution of women to the workplace is tremendous, marriages have taken a large blow because we have not proactively addressed the impact of one on the other.

I am not about to suggest that women need to absent themselves from the workforce in favor of becoming stay-at-home wives and mothers. What I am suggesting is that men and women contemplating marriage would do well to explore the implications of Ephesians 5 and how they will address the roles of each partner in their marriage.

If a marriage is going to include children, someone needs to be with those children through their growing up years. Our society is increasingly suggesting that “You can have it all.” This is partially true. You **can** have it all, just not at the same time. Marriage is a marathon, not a sprint. The large tasks of life, parenthood and career building, come as seasons, not as balls to be juggled or scales to be balanced.

Humans are the only life form that denies physiology in our search for fulfillment. If we charted our lives based on our physiology, and planned so that the female would be the one who takes primary care of the children, marriage would take place while young. Children would be raised by a stay-at-home parent who, as the youngest child reached high school, could then pursue professional training. If the mother is interested in a career that requires extensive preparation beyond college, college education may need to begin slowly while the children are younger, but in such a way as to allow the mother to provide the nurture the children need in order to thrive and to manage the household within the income produced by the husband. By the time the young parents have launched their children into adulthood, the mother is somewhere between 35 and 45 and ready to engage full time in a career or business, if that was her goal. Her résumé is full not only of educational qualifications but also of years of experience in personnel management, organizational operations, and fiscal management. Because her strongest earning years come after the children are grown, the couples’ nest egg grows large rather quickly. With current life expectancies, she can still anticipate working 25 to 30 years, reaching retirement at about the same age, 65 to 70, as her husband. The retirement years together are enhanced by grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

This picture is not meant to be the only picture for marriage, as there are many creative ways for



couples to rear children that will allow one parent to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually taking leadership in the process of helping both parents fulfill their roles in rearing their growing children. The decision to marry does however need to include the provision for the rearing of children so that they grow to become responsible adults who can carry on the cycle for the generations to come.

Don't forget the love either. A healthy marriage is one where love between the spouses is growing because it is being intentionally nurtured. Take the time to plan what your marriage will mean for each partner, who will be responsible for what. Do this with the same commitment that you are giving to planning the wedding. Determine which good things you are willing to delay in order to give attention to the important things that cannot be delayed. After the wedding, regularly review the impact of the decisions you are making about the way your marriage is affecting each of you. Make different plans that reflect your priorities while protecting each spouse. Doing these things will help preserve the time and emotional energy the couple will need to cultivate the romance and friendship that will keep the marriage strong.

Before I look at "wives submit," let's look at the verse before: "Submit yourselves one to another out of reverence for Christ." Strong marriages stand on the foundation of mutual submission, which is built when both husband and wife are following the leadership of Christ in each of their lives.

This is a critical place to inject Paul's admonishment from II Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" Paul's words certainly apply to more than marriage, but they definitely apply strongly to marriage. If marriage is the foundation of family, which is the foundation of society, does it not make sense that marriage must be properly formed? When one or the other partner refuses to reverence Christ in marriage, the marriage is on rocky ground. This is not merely a reference to attending church with some measure of irregularity. Marriages are best built by a man and woman who are committed to learning and following the life lessons laid out by Jesus.

Mutual submission means that each partner must surrender some "rights" for the good of the marriage. What rights? Who determines them? Jesus Christ wants to be the One who guides the surrendering process.

These concepts require that spouses be chosen with not just the heart, but with the head. We have the ability, in fact, we have the biblical mandate to limit who it is with whom we allow ourselves to fall in love. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it". Philippians 4:7 tells us how this can be best done: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus". God expects and enables us to exercise responsible control over our emotions by the guarding of our hearts.

Choosing a Christ-following partner to love makes the rest of Ephesians 5 easier to implement. "Wives, submit to your husbands" This is not a command to become a doormat. Submitting to

a husband is more than just saying “Yes, dear” to whatever he proposes. The submission process includes the submission of your thoughts and, yes, feelings into the decision-making process of your relationship. Once that is done, the final decision is up to the husband.

What colors that husband’s decision is, again, Ephesians 5. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her . . . husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.” How hard is it to understand that being the head doesn’t mean getting your own way? In my head, I may believe that I can climb Mt. Everest. When my back and legs contribute how they feel about it, the head may have to reconsider. The man who is head of his marriage understands that he must seek, understand, and respectfully consider the input of his wife in making any decision because that’s what love does.

One classic example of wife-submit/husband-love is what I heard Dr. James Dobson share about his decision to move Focus on the Family, and, therefore, his wife Shirley, from Pomona, California, to Colorado Springs, Colorado. Dr. Dobson explained throughout the decision-making process, in leisurely dialog with Shirley, that he was thinking about moving the ministry, and the reasons why. As Shirley responded, James realized that her heart wasn’t with her head on this decision. While she knew that moving the ministry made sense, her heart wasn’t ready to move from lifelong friends and their two adult children. James, convinced by many facts that God wanted the ministry to move, presented it to Shirley with the qualifier that there will be no move until and unless Shirley was comfortable with this being God’s leading. It took many months of prayer, together and individually, before Shirley was able to know that the move was indeed God’s next step for her husband’s ministry . . . and therefore for Shirley.

Even after the move, Shirley acknowledged that making the adjustment was difficult. Only with the true wisdom that comes from the passage of time could she see that her emotional connections eventually moved away from California also. Her children are more intentional than ever about spending time with their parents. Her life has actually been enriched by opportunities that came to her in Colorado.

In another marriage that I know, a friend sold a successful business while still a young man and made enough in that transaction that he was able to retire. He and his wife, in discussing this development, came up with a plan that led to him becoming the stay-at-home parent while she became involved in an entrepreneurial career. He was still supporting his family; he just no longer had to work to do so. The fact that her career also took off financially gives them even more choices. While some outsiders may not understand the foundation of this lifestyle, my friend and his family find it all good.

A dear friend from Alaska shared an interesting wedding custom that helps to illustrate how, in Christ, two complete individuals come together in the formation of a marriage that is meant to endure for a lifetime. The mothers of the bride and groom enter together, each carrying a glass of sand. The bride’s sand is one color. The groom’s sand is another color. No matter what size each container might be, they contain equal amounts of sand. The glasses are placed next to a larger container which sits at the front of the church. At the designated time in the ceremony, the bride and groom together pour their sands into the large container, mixing the two colors to

form a unique design. That sand design remains on display in their home. The tradition holds that before the couple can get a divorce, they must first separate out the two colors of sand.

Mutually submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. Wives submit. Husbands love. Merge your sand. Marriage properly established and faithfully carried out brings two lives together creating a unique work that brings its own beauty into this world.



**Consider the power of your relationship with your spouse (or intended)**

On what foundation is your relationship to your spouse resting? Is this a sound foundation? If you are aware that it is not based on a sound foundation, what are you willing to do to help place it on a solid foundation? Ask your spouse if he or she is willing to work with you to make it happen?

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Do you and your spouse have a plan for raising your children? What is it? Are your views of raising children compatible with those of your spouse? Where is there room for flexibility?

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The Bible talks about mutual submission in marriage. How difficult has it been for you to submit to your spouse? What can you do to improve in this area? Remember, submission goes both ways.

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What does “guarding your heart” mean to you? How are you practicing this as a single or married person?

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**What is your prayer for your marriage? (Singles, are you anticipating marriage or are you convinced that you will not be marrying? What is your prayer in that regard?)**

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## Chapter 9

# Children

**Proverbs 17:6** *Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.*

**Proverbs 22:6** *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.*

**Isaiah 38:19** *The living, the living—they praise you, as I am doing today; parents tell their children about your faithfulness.*

**II Corinthians 12:14** *Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.*

**I Timothy 5:3-4** *Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, this is pleasing to God.*

I remember it well, June 4, 1986. My plan was to attend field day in support of my third graders while I was on leave. Instead, I wound up in the midst of Houston, TX, rush hour traffic, complete with wrecks and stalled vehicles, with my husband driving the 25 plus miles from home to St. Luke's Hospital. The delays of rush hour had no significance for the course of that day. It was not until 6:51 PM that we finally heard the sound for which that day was spent: the first wails of our son.

Having children, whether biologically or through formal or informal adoption, launches one of life's most defining relationships. Suddenly there is another human being totally dependent on you.

In America, parenting is often a whirlwind of taking children here, there, and wherever; all the more challenging when both parents are employed outside of the home. Daycare, lessons, team sports, birthday parties . . . and all of that before the child reaches school age!

It is no wonder that urgency often takes the place that belongs to important. Did you notice that "church" was not on the list above? If we are honest, we will admit that the things of God don't always make the priority list when we are raising children.

Whether we had it or not, as parents, we suddenly become all consumed with giving to our

children the things and experiences that everyone else says they ought to have. Before the child has cooed its first coo, we have decided what swimming coach to hire, what instrument should be learned . . . We may not verbalize it, but we have plans for this child to enjoy every good thing we have ever had or wanted. We enter into the game of keeping up with the Joneses, never evaluating whether or not we are starting them off right in the spirit of Proverbs 22:6 which says, “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it”. The “way they should go” of this verse, is determined, not by you, the parents, rather by the unique combination of characteristics and preferences of that child.

The first task, then, of being a parent is to learn your child. This does not mean giving the child everything he or she wants, either. If we begin parenting with the end in mind, we realize that we are taking the personality of the child and molding that child to conform to the image of God. After all, if life takes its expected course, one day that child will bear responsibility for taking care of you in your declining years.

Be careful then, regarding these common temptations of parenting:

- Seeking to be your child’s very best friend. While you and your child should enjoy a positive relationship, the priority is that you maintain the role of coach, or guide for the child.
- Living your life vicariously through the child. How many times do we see parents pushing for what they want rather than what the child needs in a given situation?
- Neglecting to introduce your child to God as LORD and Father. It takes time to know how your child is understanding God. Certainly, she will see God first in you and your interactions with her. But you are not God. In age-appropriate ways, your child can learn that God is Creator, Father, and, above all, LORD.

The key role of a parent is to help develop a morally-responsible child into someone who is ready to accept adult responsibility when the time comes.



*Consider the power of your relationship(s) with your child(ren) . . .*

What does your relationship to your child(ren) show about the person you are?

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What has been your greatest pleasure in raising your child(ren)?

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What is your relationship like with each of your children?

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How do you need to work on your relationships with your child(ren)?

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What resources can you put into practice to help you be a better parent? If you don't know, who can help you find the resources you might need?

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**What is your prayer regarding your relationship(s) with your child(ren)?**

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# The Church

**Ephesians 5:23** “. . . *Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior*”

**John 3:28-30** “*You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less.*”

When a person commits to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that person is also committing to a relationship with the Church. Are you wondering how I can say that?

The Bible paints two pictures of Christ and the Church. One is that of marriage. Christ is often referred to as the bridegroom and those who would follow Him as His bride. The Church is the calling out of those who follow Christ into a unit, the Church, His Bride. To reject the Church while claiming to be in relationship with Christ is the equivalent of having a series of dinner parties for friends but never inviting their spouses. They may show up for you once or twice, but if you insist on leaving out their spouses, they will eventually stop showing up for you.

The other picture of Christ and the Church is even more compelling. Christ is the head; the Church is the body. To love Christ without regard for the Church is to dismember Christ, to take away His heart, hands, and feet. This is worshiping the ideas of Christ, His thoughts and teachings, but refusing to be a part of serving Christ, or sharing Christ with those who need Him. This is the work of the Body of Christ: as His heart, to love as Jesus loves; as His feet, to go to the hurting, helpless and hopeless with the healing, help and hope that only Christ brings; as His hands to touch lives with the great news of the gospel.

Apparently, Jesus views as paramount our relationship, not with Him, but with one another for our effectiveness in sharing the news of Who He is. John 13:34-35 quotes Jesus where He says, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” These words remind us that miracles, kind deeds, and all of the goodwill towards others, while important, will not win the world to Jesus Christ. What wins the world is when they see the people of God loving one another. Look at the “one another” teachings directed to the Church in the New Testament.

**Romans 12:10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

**Romans 12:16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

**Romans 13:8** Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

**Romans 14:13** Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

**Romans 15:7** Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

**Romans 15:14** I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

**Romans 16:16** Greet one another with a holy kiss.

**1 Corinthians 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

**2 Corinthians 13:11** Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.

**Galatians 5:13** You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

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

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

**Ephesians 5:18-19** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

**Philippians 2:5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus

**Colossians 3:13** Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you.

**Colossians 3:16** Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

**1 Thessalonians 4:9** Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

**1 Thessalonians 4:18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

**Hebrews 13:1** Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

**James 4:11** Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another.

**James 5:9** Don't grumble against one another.

**1 Peter 1:22** Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

**1 Peter 4:9** Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

**1 Peter 5:5** In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble".

While we are to love everyone, regardless of their relationship to Christ, it is the genuine, unconditional love of Christians towards other Christians that will impress upon others the reality of Who Christ is and how Christ loves.



**Consider the power of your relationship with the Church . . .**

Which is the most compelling view of the Church to you, the Bride of Christ, or the Body of Christ with Christ as the head, and why?

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How are you using your talents, gifts, and skills to be the heart, hands, and feet of Christ through the Church?

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What might God be nudging you to do to help strengthen your church's functioning within the Body of Christ?

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**What is your prayer regarding your relationship with the Church?**

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# Church Members

**1 Corinthians 1:11** *My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.*

**1 Corinthians 3:3** *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?*

**1 Corinthians 5:1** *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife.*

**1 Corinthians 5:13** *God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."*

**1 Corinthians 6:5** *I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?*

**1 Corinthians 11:18-19** *In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.*

After looking at the "one anothers" listed in the New Testament, you may honestly be thinking, "This will never happen in the church I attend. The people there are too . . ."

There are some realities to look at when we talk about the Church, as well as some guidelines to help us function in a church.

You may have noticed that I capitalized the word Church in talking about "the Church" but did not when I wrote "a church". It is important to know that the Church is made up of every Christ-follower who ever has, does, and will live. The Church is the Bride and Body of Christ, across time and place. A church is a local group of unrelated people who meet together regularly for the purpose of worshipping and serving God.

One crucial thing we need to remember is that while all in the Church do go to church, not everyone in church is part of the Church. To put it another way, saved people do go to church, but not everyone in church is saved.

A church can look like many things. It may be a house church, where several families meet together at least once a week. It may be a storefront congregation that meets in a converted

business location. It may be a traditional church building where anywhere from 50 to 5,000 can be seated at one time. It may be a mega church, along the lines of a basketball arena or football stadium, where thousands sit and many watch the stage personalities via monitors in order to be able to see their faces as they talk. It may even be a satellite church, where one church building serves as the main campus and broadcasts parts of their worship to one or more other buildings who synchronize the “live” portions of what is being done in the other buildings so that, at the appointed times, the broadcast segment, which is normally the sermon, can begin simultaneously on all campuses. Sound complex? It is. But satellite churches are active and growing in cities across the United States and perhaps beyond.

No one of these models of a church is right or wrong. What is wrong is for a Christ-follower to sit at home, week after week, months on end, with just those who live there, and call that church. Even in the most extreme situations of isolation, that family, if it would truly be the Church, should be prayerfully inviting others to join them in their worship of the LORD, thus becoming a church.

Within every model for a church, there is the possibility of personality clashes or outright conflict to arise. The way these clashes are addressed will be among the indicators of how healthy that church is. Yes, churches, like people, exist in various states of wellness/health. While the model of church you attend may be irrelevant, the health of the church is very relevant. You want to know that you are in a church that is either healthy or working to become healthy.

Looking at today’s Scriptures we see even in the early church that there were problems. The sense we get from these scriptures, however, is that the healthy church was willing to address these problems from a biblical perspective.

To make it plain, the church that is healthy is:

**First, built on a solid foundation. I Corinthians 3:11** “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” If the Gospel of Jesus Christ, built on the seven facts we will share in discussing our relationship to God (chapter 13), is not taught and accepted as essential doctrine, then the foundation of that church is already shaky.

**Led by appropriate leaders. I Timothy 3** gives an excellent list for the qualifications of church leaders. Some churches will take it literally and assert that all deacons and preachers must be male. Some will, based on Galatians 3:28 (There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.), hold that gender is not a qualifier for church leadership. While I personally lean toward the Galatians 3:28 mindset, I can respect a congregation that takes the literal view that only men can lead. What is a red flag for church health is a mismatched, hodgepodge view of gender and leadership that says, “Women can do this but they cannot do that”. Either “women must be silent in the church”, as I Corinthians 14:34 says, is universally true or else “leaders must be males because they have to be husbands of one wife” is not a universal teaching either.

Consistency is the key. Whether it’s husband of one wife or married to one spouse, the church leadership needs to be living out God’s view of marriage, which also allows for single, celibate

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leaders, or else Paul himself would be disqualified. There are other expectations of church leaders laid out clearly in scripture, so let's not get stuck on gender.

What matters is that church leadership should be for those who demonstrate in their lives a commitment to living according to the teachings of God's Word, without compromise. This should be evidenced before being granted leadership, not coerced after leadership is conferred. When church leaders have no sense of a need to live by the standards of mature believers, that church is on shaky ground. It may be appealing when you first experience it, but the longer you stay the more you will find that the presence and power of Christ are not manifesting in the way they should be.

**Submitted to what the Bible says about how believers conduct themselves as well as how a church should operate.** A healthy church says, "The Bible is true and we will live by it." An unhealthy church says, "The Bible is a book of inspirations and encouragements, but it is outdated in many ways so we don't have to follow it."

To determine the health of a church, look at its belief statement, look at its leadership and its teachings. Look at how it corrects itself and its members. You want to find the healthiest church possible.

Once you find that healthy church, you want to be sure that you contribute to its health, rather than to its weaknesses. Find the people who make it healthy and engage with them. Join with those who are studying the Word of God and be a faithful student. Be loving but honest with those who begin to operate in ways that are not healthy. Challenge them to make the choices that keep the church healthy.

In our relationships with church members, we have the choice to bring health and healing or sickness and death. Which will it be?



**Consider the power of your relationship with church members . . .**

God expects all members of the Church to be active members of a local church. How well have you been faithful to attend and actively participate in your local church?

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Which model of the local church attracts you most, and what are the benefits and limitations to that model? (House church, storefront, traditional, or mega church?)

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What is healthy about the church that you attend?

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What weakness do you see in your church that keeps it from functioning effectively as part of the Body of Christ?

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Everything rises and falls on leadership. How effective are the methods your church uses to choose leaders (pastor, staff, volunteer)? Explain.

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with church members?**

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# Accountability Relationships

**II Samuel 12:7-14** *Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’*

*“This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”*

*Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”*

*Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die.”*

**Galatians 6:1** *Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.*

**I Corinthians 10:12-13** *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

I remember working on a church staff where one of my privileges was to develop and teach the orientation program for new members. One session of that program addressed stewardship. For that class, I wanted to develop a pie chart showing how the monies received were being spent. It would have section titles: Building, Staff/Employees, Missions/Benevolence Giving, Operational Expenses, Outreach . . . The pie would show what percentage of the offerings was going to each of these functions of the church. No dollar amounts were to be included.

New to the staff, I approached the pastor to request a copy of the current year’s budget so that

I could do the math and come up with the percentages for the pie chart. His reply to me was, “That information is not available. We want people to understand that they are giving to God.” My response came almost as a reflex: “They may be giving to God, but people are spending it, and the congregation should know how!”

Many of us long for lives free of human accountability. We want to make our decisions and have no one to answer to but God. We seem to conveniently forget that one of the ways God holds us accountable is through the honest words of people around us.

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba then arranged the death of her husband so that he could marry her and cover up the scandalous pregnancy that resulted from the adultery, David was sure that no one knew. Of course, God knew and, in order to hold David accountable, God sent Nathan, the prophet, to challenge David’s morals (what David claimed to believe) and then to confront David with his lack of character (the level at which David was not living his beliefs). David took Nathan’s bait and expressed high moral standards for the man in Nathan’s story. Then Nathan shifted gears by telling David that he (David) was the man in that story. As the passage from II Samuel shows, David did have enough character left to accept the rebuke, receive the announcement of his coming consequence and, most importantly, accept his guilt. In so doing, Nathan was able to end their conversation with words affirming God’s forgiveness and grace, even while there would be a stiff price to pay for that sin. The baby conceived in adultery would die in infancy.

All that Nathan warned David about did occur. David’s own son, Absalom, would lead a bloody revolution against David; and, yes, that child of adultery did become ill and die. God’s grace was evidenced, because it was Solomon, the son born to Bathsheba as David’s wife, who would succeed David as king over Israel and earn the status as the wealthiest/most powerful king in the history of Israel (and, some still deem to be the wealthiest man ever, comparing his wealth in 21st century terms to the wealth of men like Donald Trump and Bill Gates). Moreover, it is through Solomon that the line of David extends to Jesus Christ. God’s grace and forgiveness abounded in the life of penitent David.

We see here that we are to be accountable to men and women of God who teach and correct us, and we want it to end there. God, however, shows through Paul’s writing to the church at Galatia that He extends accountability to all who claim to know the LORD: “Those who live by the Spirit.” This is not a separated holy group. Rather it is meant to be every believer.

When, by His Spirit, God shows us that a brother or sister in Christ is walking in error, we are commanded to approach that erring brother or sister with the hope of seeing them restored to their proper walk with God. When a brother or sister in Christ approaches us with an area of our lives that is out of sync with a proper walk with God, we need to thank them for bringing it to our attention, then evaluate, based on teachings of Scripture, whether or not they are correct about our behavior. If they are correct, we need to confess to God and change our pattern of behavior.

It is important to make the approach to an erring brother or sister in private, with a tone of humility, rather than of arrogance or superiority. Begin the approach with an affirmation,

followed by the correction and then a word of encouragement.

This scenario actually occurred with a new believer. Joe was saved from life as a serial felon. His conversion was very real. When the preacher taught something, Joe did it. So, when the preacher taught tithing, Joe wanted to do that also. Joe, however, had not yet found a job, so he robbed a store and gave 10% of the take to the church. The pastor, who was personally discipling Joe, asked him where he got the money to make such a large tithe to the church. Joe's honest answer made a firm rebuke necessary.

The encounter went something like this: "Joe, we are so thrilled that you want to be obedient to God's command to tithe, and I appreciate your honest response in telling me how you were able to tithe so generously. However, God does not want you to hold up a store in order to have the money for the tithe. Ephesians 4:28 says 'Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need'. . . Whatever amount of money you earn with honest labor, give God a tithe of that. He is honored by your obedience." Joe was, in a private conversation, affirmed, corrected, and encouraged. The best news of all is that Joe received the correction, found honest work, and faithfully returned to God the tithe of his earnings.

One way to maximize the power of accountability is to have someone in your life who you ask to be your accountability person. This person should be someone with whom you talk on a regular basis and simply share your life with. In the course of the conversations, he or she is expected to inject Godly insight into the decisions you are making, the way you are interacting with others, as well as anything and everything that relates to the area in which you are making accountability to them. The person to whom you are making yourself accountable should at the least be at the same level of understanding as you are in the area of accountability. If you want to improve your money managing skills, you want to be held accountable by someone who is doing a good job of managing his or her money, or at the very least, is actively learning the same process for managing money that you are learning. You may choose to have more than one person helping you remain accountable for the way you are living life.

All that being said, the truth of accountability is this: if God, can give words to a donkey in order to correct Balaam (see Numbers 22:21-33), then He can speak truth to us through any one, at any time, and in any place. Whether we have an accountability partner or not, whether the counsel is asked for or not, whether the one rebuking us is using the "right" words or the "right" tone, or not, we do well to be open to correction from God no matter who brings it or how.

Perhaps we can use the poor encounter as an opportunity to teach the proper encounter, such as, "I thank you for caring enough about me to take the time to share a growth challenge with me. I would have appreciated it even more had you come to me calmly, in private. Matthew 18 instructs us to initiate our concerns to one another one-on-one. I will keep your correction in mind. Please, pray with me as I continue to grow in this area."

As Christians we cannot afford to “tell everybody off” in any way and at any time. If we use kindness, privacy, and the golden rule, correction will be easier to give and receive within our accountability relationships; as well as from children, spouses, parents, pastors, co-workers and friends. The three-step method of giving correction: Affirmation, Correction, Encouragement, will work in almost every situation in which you may have to give correction.

The enemy is not the person who corrects. The enemy is the one who wants us to remain defeated in our weakness. Make the enemy mad: listen and learn from those who care enough to confront.



**Consider the power of accountability in your relationships . . .**

Who are the formal and informal accountability partners or groups holding you accountable?

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Two of the most important factors in being held accountable or giving accountability, besides prayer, are honesty and backbone (tough love), how well do you rate in each?

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All of us can benefit from being held accountable. Do you need to get in an accountable relationship? If you are in an accountable relationship, how is it working for you? What can you do to make it better? Do you need to offer some encouragement and correction? Can you receive some? If you are at fault, are you honest and admit you were wrong like David did?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with your accountability partner(s)?**

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## Chapter 13

# God

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

**Romans 3:23** *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

**Romans 6:23** *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Romans 5:6-8** *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**Acts 16:30-31** *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.*

**John 5:10-13** *Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

**Acts 5:29** *Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!”*

As we look together at the important relationships in our lives and how they shape our lives, I know of no relationship that is more life-impacting than our relationship with God.

As with anyone, we can have different degrees of relationship with God. We can even be unaware that God exists. That leaves everything in this universe to be the product of time and chance. Life is all random and chaotic. Nothing is predictable, because there is no logical mind behind anything. If this is how you relate to God, may I suggest that you look at [www.sunrisesunset.com](http://www.sunrisesunset.com) or [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com). You can go to those websites, and others, and tell the time of the sunrise and sunset for any day of the year in various locations around the globe. This is not because man makes the sun rise and set with such predictability. Rather it is because there is a logical mind behind this universe. There are many more examples of the logic behind our universe. While logic cannot create, a logical creator can. I encourage you to take the first step in relating to God by accepting that, yes, there is a God.

If you are willing to accept the idea that to have a universe of logic and predictability tells us that there is a logical creator behind it, let's look at how we might be relating to that Creator.

I remember a time when I thought that Hottentots were a made-up people . . . sort of like the Munchkins in the Wizard of Oz or the Jedi of Star Wars. Therefore, for a long time, I didn't believe in Hottentots. My not believing in them has no bearing on whether or not they are real.

Over time, I learned that Hottentots are real people. But I didn't know anything about them. That's the next way people relate to God. He is there, but with no factual knowledge of Who He is, we can make Him up as we go along. We decide where God is, what God values, what brings Him joy, pain, or grief . . . and what He can or cannot do. When people are there, but I don't know them, I make them who I want them to be and treat them accordingly.

By the way, did you know that Hottentot is actually a derogatory term for a member of the Khoikhoi people, a formerly nomadic people who have now settled primarily in Namibia? I didn't either until, literally, I was researching this piece. Before now, I thought that Hottentots were a Chinese group . . . I had only heard the name used as a reference "all the Hottentots in China." Because I had limited my knowledge of Hottentots, to what I concluded based on what I heard other people say, I was dead-up wrong about who they are.

With apologies to the Khoikhoi people, and a commitment to now remove that h-term from my vocabulary, let me celebrate this perfectly wonderful example of what happens when we don't take the time to get to know God for ourselves. We can conclude that God is merely, "the man upstairs" or "the big guy in the sky", because we heard someone on television, or even in a church, refer to Him that way. But, is that really who God is? Does God even like being referred to in that way?

Included in this type of relationship with God is what I call the Santa Claus/Easter bunny God. We may be taught as children that there is a God . . . by the same people who tell us that there is a real Santa Claus who delivers Christmas presents by sleigh to every house in the whole world in one night, and that there is a real Easter bunny who . . . what does the Easter bunny do? Oh yes, "Here comes Peter Cottontail . . . bringing every girl and boy a basket full of Easter joy." And then there's God, who makes everybody happy and healthy and safe because, "He's there for us."

What happens when we figure out that Santa Claus isn't real, the Easter bunny isn't real, and people are not always happy, healthy, and safe? We develop a God who fits in the category of Santa and the Easter bunny. He is just one more thing made up as an attempt to bring joy to life in this world.

Just as you and I want people to know and relate to us as we really are, so does God. That is, therefore, a third option for how we can relate to Him. We can relate to Him as He really is.

Since God is Spirit not flesh, knowing who He really is could become quite a challenge except for the fact that He has orchestrated the composing of what some refer to as His love letter to us, the Bible. I realize that that I may be asking you to take another giant leap out of your comfort zone when I declare the Bible to be the signature book, not just about God but literally from



God. Before you reject that idea, I just ask you to read it, all. Begin in the part called the New Testament, reading from Matthew to Revelation. Then go back to the beginning and read from Genesis through Malachi. Use a Bible that is in language that you can easily understand. If English is your language of choice, try the Good News Translation, or try the Holman Christian Standard Version. Do this three times, and see if you don't come away with a different sense of Who God is. By the way, you will be able to understand the Bible best if you ask God to help you understand it. So, before you read, each time you read, ask God to show Himself to you.

Yes, I am suggesting that you ask God, who may be a total stranger to you, to help you understand the Bible, a book you may not consider valuable. If you do that, however, with the open mindedness of a child exploring his world based not simply on what others say but also through the child's own discoveries, then you will find that God is not content to be a stranger to you.

In fact, as a teaser of sorts, I want to share with you seven critical facts that God wants you to know and apply fully to your life. If you are willing to do so, your journey toward Him will be much accelerated. This is similar to meeting anyone new. If, on the first encounter, you are able to grab hold of certain realities about her, including a sense of what she thinks of you, you will find it much easier to build a strong relationship with her.

Take me up on this, please. After all, what do you have to lose by trying? Then, consider what you stand to gain if I am correct.

There are seven critical facts to understand when engaging God in a relationship. As in any truly great relationship, new facets of what these facts mean will manifest every day. That's what keeps the relationship vibrant.

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

God loves you. Contrary to any rumor you once heard. This is the starting place for your relationship with God. He loves you. He loves you because He created you. To Him you are a masterpiece in progress. If you've ever written a really good poem, composed a beautiful piece of music, painted a wonderful picture, snapped that perfect photo, or sculpted a master work in clay, you know what God feels. When God created this universe, He said that each step along the way was “Good.”

When, however, God assessed the creation of man and woman, He said that it was “very good.” God loves you and me because we are created in His image, we are made to be creative, loving, giving, and caring; to be just like He is.

God loves you and me because, as we will see in the next six facts, He has invested greatly in having a relationship with us. It's like meeting that special someone. We go out of our way to be in his or her presence. We change our schedules to have time together. We invest much and we expect that investment will be recognized and returned with a love that matches our own. God loves you and has gone out of His way at great cost to reach out to you. What is His reaching out costing Him?

## 2. Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”.

Each of us is a sinner. God is reaching out to people who don't necessarily reach out to Him. The Greek word translated *sin*, is an archery term, *armatia*. It means to miss the bullseye. When we sin, we miss the bullseye which is the manifestation of the glory of God. In our terms, hitting the bullseye involves reaching out for God in every situation of life with the same intentionality and intensity that He reaches out to us. When little ones disobey parents or teachers, they're missing the bullseye. When children go to school and think socializing with friends is more important than listening to teachers, they're missing the bullseye. When adults make the job, the family, a favorite hobby, or anything else, more important than time with God, we're missing the bullseye. Any time I determine in my heart that what I want matters more than any other reason for the behavior I choose, I am missing the bullseye.

## 3. Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Our sin leaves us dead. This is where the stakes get high. We all know what a wage is, right? You get a job, work your time, and when payday comes, they **owe** you. If they don't pay, you, rightfully, have an issue with that. Have you ever worked a job and then on payday they didn't pay you? No, they pay on payday unless they go out of business before payday. Just as an employee expects to receive a paycheck on payday, we, being people who sin, or miss the mark of the glory of God, should expect death.

Death simply means “separation.” There are actually two deaths in scripture. One is physical death, when the spirit (who you really are) is separated from the body (the shell, if you will, for your spirit). Think about a hermit crab. It lives in a shell, but then it begins to outgrow the shell it is in, so it just leaves that shell behind and moves into another shell. One day, our spirit will so totally outgrow this shell we're in that we will have to move. It will be time to apply the promise of II Corinthians 5:1 “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands”. One day my earthly tent will be destroyed. One day your earthly tent will be destroyed. This is one death that occurs because we miss the mark.

But that is not the worst death. The second death is worse still. The second death is a separation from God. We can be walking around in our shell, but separated from God. We can make all the money we want, and still be separated from God. As long as we are missing the mark by refusing to have a right relationship with God, if we die separated from God, we will spend eternity separated from God. Our final breath in this life is our first breath of eternal life. That eternity can be spent with God or separated from God; the choice is ours. God will not force us to spend eternity with Him if we have no interest in spending this life with Him.

This is the question with which we each must deal. Are we missing GOD's mark regarding the relationship He wants with us now and forever?

- 4. Romans 5:6-8 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Jesus died for you. What does that mean? What is that about? Jesus is the only person who never missed the mark with God. He is the only one Who is not facing the wage of death. That has everything to do with the fact that, before Jesus put on His person shell, He was equal with God . . . He had no shell. When Jesus took on the shell, He still kept Himself in perfect harmony with what God wanted from Him. When God let Jesus die, like a criminal, on that cross, God was creating a way to give you and me a bullseye regarding our relationship with Him. Because Jesus died in my place, God sees a bullseye when He looks at me. Our relationship becomes something that nothing can separate. Look at Romans 8: 35, 38 and 39, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

When Jesus died, God created a superglue that would allow us to become inseparable from His love. Sin cannot stop it . . . but we can. That’s where fact number five comes in.

- 5. Acts 16:30B-31 “‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’”**

We are saved by personal faith in Jesus Christ. We must trust Christ’s death for us. When the Philippian Jailer asked what to do to be saved, Paul didn’t say, “Don’t worry about it, everybody will be saved anyway.” No, Paul said, “Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ and both you and your household will be saved.”

I need to explain two words here. The first is *believe*. This is more than “what you think in your head” . . . although it does begin there. What you are believing is what you “be living.” You believe that water will hold you up so you jump in the pool. Me, I’m not so sure, so I wade in slowly . . . and seldom let my feet leave the floor of that pool. We “be living,” what we are believing. So, Paul said to the jailer and to me and to you . . . be living that Jesus is LORD.

That’s the second word I want to explain to you, *LORD*. Simply put, that means boss. We all understand what that means. What the boss says, goes. No matter how kind and thoughtful your boss is, in the long run, you learn to work with that boss or you find yourself without work. Spiritually, what saves me, what saves you is when the decision is made to live the way Jesus says to live. That’s it. Period! If the Jesus part is just one of many options for an eternity that is right with God, then why did God put Jesus through the agony of the cross? No, trusting Jesus is The

Way. To have a right relationship with God requires that you and I determine to live with Jesus in charge!

- 6. I John 5:10-13 “Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”**

This sixth fact is the confidence fact. You can know that you are saved . . . that you are not separated from God anymore, forevermore. If being saved was something you earned by some great work, the statement, “I am saved.” would be bragging. But remember, God does this. God sent His Son . . . God makes this new covenant . . . God remembers our sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, “declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, “declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”)

So, when I say, I am saved. I'm not bragging about anything I did . . . except that I agree and live with what God did. When you determine to make Jesus boss, God saves you. Eternity with Him is your guarantee.

- 7. Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings!’”**

This is the fact we all-too-often skip. But I'm not sure we can. God saves us to obey Him rather than people, or satan or anything else.

The greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37). In Exodus 20:6, Deuteronomy 5:10, and a few places in John 15, our love for God is to be shown by our keeping of His commands. This means knowing His commands by reading the Bible, then living what the Bible teaches. These are all acts of the will made in response to the facts of God's plan.

It takes only a simple prayer to make these facts your facts. Then it takes a lifetime to live them out. Just tell God something like this . . . and mean it with all of your heart: “Dear God. I am a sinner, separated from You in life and headed for eternal separation from You when I die. You offer me the option . . . Eternal life in Jesus Christ. I surrender myself to You, through the power of His life, death, and resurrection. I will follow Christ in obedience to You so that I can follow Christ to eternity with You. Save me LORD, I pray. In Jesus' Name. Amen.”

Now follow this prayer with commitment to a church that teaches based on these seven facts. (You might choose to revisit chapters 9 and 10 as you consider placing yourself within a church family.) A relationship may begin with sparks and fireworks, but when it is not nurtured over time, the sparks will go out and the fireworks will fade into nothing. Becoming involved with others who are cultivating a God-relationship will offer you the encouragement and resolve to keep your personal relationship with Him vibrant.

If you've never done this, today is the perfect time to begin. Every other relationship in life, including your relationship with yourself, is richer when this first relationship is firmly established and growing to its fullest potential.



**Consider the power of your relationship with God . . .**

What is your relationship like with God? Which view of God is closest to your views?

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What is your view of sin and how has it impacted your life?

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Who is Jesus Christ to you? Is He your Lord and Savior? How do you know this? (Visit [www.whoisjesusreally.org](http://www.whoisjesusreally.org) for another perspective on the seven facts.)

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Are you willing to know God as He wants you to know Him by taking the challenge to read the Bible all the way through? Reading three chapters a day will get you through the Bible in a year. When, where, and how will you do this? Which translation of the Bible will you use?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with God?**

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## Chapter 14

# Holy Spirit

**John 16:7-15** *But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in Me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see Me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

*“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify Me because it is from Me that He will receive what He will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from Me what He will make known to you.”*

**Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

**Acts 2:4-8** *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?”*

**Acts 19:1-3** *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the LORD Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.*

**I Corinthians 12:7-11 and 27-30** *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between*

*spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the Church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?*

**1 Corinthians 14:27-29** *If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.*

**Galatians 5:16-26** *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

**1 Thessalonians 5:19** *Do not quench the Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is the most misunderstood and misrepresented person of the Godhead. People of faith generally agree that God the Father is the Creator and God the Son is the Savior. What troubles us is God the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit as modern translations prefer.

I have heard some interesting “teachings” on the Holy Ghost. Most of which are refuted by simply reading the Scriptures given and resisting the urge to say, “But that’s not what they teach in my church.”

In Chapter 13, we discussed how a false impression of God does not change the reality of Who God is. This is equally true for God the Holy Spirit.

With minimal commenting, let me just summarize what the Scriptures above teach about God the Holy Spirit.

1. He, not it, by the way, came into the world to be with the people of God to convict, or convince, us of sin, righteousness and judgment. Without the Holy Ghost, we become confused about these things. We begin to call good evil, and evil good.
2. He guides us into all truth, prompted by Jesus Himself.



3. He comes upon us to make us effective witnesses of the Gospel, to those near and dear, to those for whom we don't especially care, and even to those we've never met (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the Earth).
4. To distinguish the baptism of Jesus from the baptism of John, many early converts manifested by speaking in tongues. These tongues may or may not have been different from the tongues spoken at Pentecost – where Acts 2 says that when the disciples spoke everyone who heard them heard in their own language.
5. Paul makes it clear that speaking in [unknown] tongues is a spiritual gift. As with all spiritual gifts, not every believer will have it. The gift of tongues, like preaching, prophesying, serving, giving, interpreting tongues, and any other gift, is given at the discretion of God the Father not as a sign of salvation but as a tool for the effective ministry of the Gospel.
6. The use of tongues in public worship is to be guided by the presence of an interpreter so that everyone present can receive the message that is being delivered through tongues.
7. The mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit within is a life that puts off sinfulness and flesh-driven behaviors. Instead we live a life full of the fruit of the Spirit– which every believer is to manifest – love, which shows itself through joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
8. We should never quench the good work of the Holy Spirit through our lives, rather let Him manifest freely through us (even in spite of us) to the Glory of our God.



**Consider the power of your relationship to the Holy Spirit . . .**

Describe your relationship with God the Holy Spirit? How is He active in your life?

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What most satisfies you regarding your relationship as a believer with the Holy Spirit? What do you desire to change?

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How do you know that the Holy Spirit is abiding within you?

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How can you introduce the Holy Spirit to others?

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**What is your prayer for your relationship with the Holy Spirit?**

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# The Ungodly

**Psalm 1:1** *Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.*

This verse addresses a most powerful relationship. It clearly states the blessedness of this relationship. But it comes as a negative expression. Psalm 1:1 looks at our relationship with the ungodly. Do not walk in “the counsel of the ungodly” is how it reads in the King James version.

Where is your counsel coming from? Before you jump in with the quick answer, let me ask you a few clarifying questions here:

- Do you know the words to all the popular songs that you listen to, but you need a book, or words up on the screen, in order to sing along to the music at church?
- Do you make it your business to keep up with current events, but you don’t know the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or the names of the twelve apostles of Christ?
- Do you go to “all” of the “major” movies, but you still haven’t seen “Son of God”, “God is Not Dead,” “Noah,” or “Amazing Grace”? The most powerful counsel of the ungodly is transmitted through the media. What we sing, what we read, and what we watch all shape our lives in most profound ways. You have to know that media is a powerful influencer, or counselor, when you think of the companies who paid an average of \$4,000,000 for thirty seconds of commercial time during the 2014 Super Bowl. All the science, and all the Bible, tells us that what we look at, what we laugh at, what we talk about, what we sing about, even what brings tears to our eyes, these are the things that impact our decision-making; that, therefore, shape the course of our lives.

When we walk (or live) by the media, we walk in the counsel of the ungodly, we walk in the path of death and destruction.

When we share with others what we are watching, listening to, reading and singing that comes from the media, we lead that person to have a favorable view of media without the protection of discernment. WHY? They trust us, we seem to trust media, so they trust media.

Let me use a glaring example, an elephant-in-the-room example that has taken over our society at many levels.

What is the single largest killer of blacks in America today? No, it's not heart disease, diabetes, or cancer. No, it's not gun violence. It's not even AIDS!

The single largest cause of death among American blacks is abortion. Please stay with me here, because this is crucial.

In the book of Exodus, when Pharaoh wanted to subdue the Hebrews, he ordered the Egyptian midwives to practice the first partial birth abortions: "If it is a male child—kill it."

Hitler was more obvious. When he wanted to eliminate the Jews, he staged the holocaust . . . And millions of Jews were murdered in concentration camp gas chambers.

In both instances, in order to eliminate what they considered to be an undesirable element of their society, they had to impose or force something on that element. But when the enemy of blacks in America decided to get rid of blacks, he chose the unbelievable methodology of getting us to pay for our own extermination in the form of abortion. (A note here, the enemy here is not a racial group, a political party, nor an economic class. The enemy of blacks is the enemy of us all: satan. I refer to him here as the enemy of blacks because he knows what would happen on the African continent if blacks ever become truly free to walk in our God-given purpose. Blacks in America are a special threat because America offers such opportunity to reach amazing potential and accomplish that purpose. Those who participate in any part of the plan to subjugate blacks are not the enemy, they are merely tools of the enemy. Sadly some of these tools actually believe they are our friends. Back to the point.

Let's look at some numbers:

Minority women are about 13% of the female population (age 15-44) in the United States, but underwent approximately 36% of the abortions.

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, black women are more than 5 times as likely as white women to have an abortion.

On average, 1,876 black babies are aborted every day in the United States.

Since 1973 Black women have had about 16 million abortions.

Michael Novak had calculated "Since the number of current living Blacks (in the U.S.) is 36 million, the missing 16 million represents an enormous loss, for without abortion, America's Black community would now number 52 million persons. It would be 44 percent larger than it is. Abortion has swept through the Black community like a scythe, cutting down every fourth member."

The death and destruction do not end there, either.

A highly significant 1993 Howard University study showed that African American women over age 50 were 4.7 times more likely to get breast cancer if they had had any abortions compared to women who had not had any abortions. Abortions increase the likelihood of developing breast cancer.

Did you know that the founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, was a fervent racist who created the Negro Project designed to sterilize unknowing black women and others she deemed as undesirables of society? This founder of Planned Parenthood said, “Colored people are like human weeds and are to be exterminated.”

And now, 78% of Planned Parenthood clinics in this nation are located within black communities.

As recently as 2008, I actually heard Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg in defense of the Roe v. Wade decision say that, “We all understand that the legalization of abortion allows us to reduce the undesirable population in our country.”

Did you know that the black population in this nation is on the decline . . . at the current rate, the black American race will be de facto obsolete in voting booths in this nation by 2038?

And what are we doing about it?

- Blacks vote for one political party in this country in overwhelming numbers . . . In spite of the fact that the platform of that party is built on what is dubbed a woman’s right to choose, aka abortion, the single most effective means of our extinction since we arrived on these shores on slave vessels in the 1600’s.
- We are voting for the very people whose objective, intentionally or not, includes eliminating us from the planet via an agenda which leads us to purchase our own annihilation. By the way, these are the same people who promote wholesale birth control usage; did you know that another name for birth control is “abortifacients”, that they are, by definition, drugs that cause miscarriages, and that long-term usage of them leads to complications including cancers?
- By our devoted vote for those who champion our self-destruction, we are simultaneously voting against the people who believe that we can get a solid education, build strong families, and become financially independent in this land which makes millionaires of people five years after they deplane with \$100 to their name and speaking not a word of English.

That is but one ugly example of what happens when you walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

Compare this with the word of God which tells us that:

- Children are like arrows in the hand of a mighty man; blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them (Psalm 127:4-5)
- Before you were born, God knew His plan for you (Jeremiah 1:5).
- God formed you in your mother’s womb. (Isaiah 44:2)
- Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (food, clothing, shelter) will be provided to you. (Matthew 6:33)

I know you may wonder, what about all the children of unwed mothers who are living in poverty, children of rape and incest etc. etc. etc. God's Word addresses that too. Sex is for one man and one woman, only within a committed marriage, who are devoted to rearing the next generation of God-honoring men and women.

By the way, did you know that Jesse Jackson and Eartha Kitt were children conceived of rape? Aren't we glad that their mothers did not opt for ease and convenience over the shame and labor of raising those painful reminders of what was?

God's Word for the children who suffer tells us that it is the job of believers, not the government, to take care of the orphans and widowed, and in our generation single mothers, in our midst.

The teachings of the first century church, not in Scripture but in *the Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, tell us that, when a man who claimed Christ as LORD was abusing his wife, the church was to send two stout men to deal with him . . . And I can just imagine those two stout men did not hold his hand and sing Kum Bah Yah.

We are walking in the counsel of the ungodly, choosing sex for pleasure, marriage for convenience and chasing the wealth of this world as if it is the only thing that matters. God has a word for that too: What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (Matthew 6:26, Mark 6:8, and Luke 9:25)

The counsel we follow . . . the counsel in which we walk . . . determines or undermines the power we will experience as we live in this world on our way to the world that is to come.

We need to sing more about God's love in Christ Jesus. We need to read more about the issues behind the popular controversies of daily life. We need to read the Bible more, and apply its teachings to our daily lives.

We need to listen to some good Christian radio including music, preaching, and talk shows. Read Christian commentaries on life today. Watch Christian movies and glean fantasies of what could be from them, instead of from God-dishonoring, morality-mutilating characters such as we see on too many popular television shows and movies.

Today's church stands silently by while our young people are mating with those who have neither love nor respect for the God of this universe.

We sit helpless as drugs, sex, and monetary gain ruin the lives of our offspring.

We do nothing while men violate the purity of women and then beat them like dogs rather than treat them like queens. In fact, we are raising our young women to believe the lie that this is the insignificant price of a liberated lifestyle in which they are free to enjoy without restraint the pleasures of this world.

One other lie of the world is that those of us who say things like this are judgmental and condemnatory. Nothing could be further from the truth. No matter where you are in relation to what I've written here, I want to make it clear that I do not condemn you. I dare not condemn

you. Even more, God wants you to know that He does not condemn you. But you may be in danger of condemning yourself.

Perhaps you have been through abortion and find yourself now imprisoned by what you expected to be your sexual freedom; maybe even becoming one of those women who frequents abortion clinics because you keep getting pregnant.

Maybe you have simply been the tool for the enemy standing adamantly in favor of a behavior that began, and continues to operate, as the single most effective tool for the destruction of a race of people within the borders of the United States of America.

Maybe you are somewhere between these extremes. Please liberate yourself from the counsel of the ungodly and gain objective information on the truth. Discover the resources that are available to save the lives of the unborn and to empower these mothers to provide a better life for that child, either by becoming a better parent or by surrendering that child to the arms of waiting parents. Contrary to the naysayers there are good homes waiting for newborn babies, especially, but children of all ages, with all kinds of conditions, to adopt them and raise them with love for as long as that child lives.

Not just on this issue, though certainly for me this one is blaring, become a person who examines the rest of the story, before jumping on any bandwagon. Knowledge is power. We are becoming a sound bite generation, but true knowledge needs more than a sound bite in order to be best conveyed. Slow down. Gain knowledge. Become free.

*For more information on the history and practice of abortion in America, visit:*

[www.blackgenocide.org/planned.html](http://www.blackgenocide.org/planned.html)

[www.blackgenocide.org/sanger.html](http://www.blackgenocide.org/sanger.html)

[www.cnsnews.com/blog/judie-brown/abortion-and-racism-america](http://www.cnsnews.com/blog/judie-brown/abortion-and-racism-america)

[www.ewtn.com/library/prolife/ppracism.txt](http://www.ewtn.com/library/prolife/ppracism.txt)

[www.group.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/abortion\\_eugenics/peterson.html](http://www.group.csail.mit.edu/mac/users/rauch/abortion_eugenics/peterson.html)

[www.lifeissues.org/connector/2005/Oct05\\_PPITargetsAA.htm](http://www.lifeissues.org/connector/2005/Oct05_PPITargetsAA.htm)

[www.lifesitenews.com/news/the-racist-underpinnings-of-the-abortion-movement](http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/the-racist-underpinnings-of-the-abortion-movement)

[www.renewamerica.com/columns/creech/050221](http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/creech/050221)

[www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/08/the-quiet-racism-of-abortion-bans/261665](http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/08/the-quiet-racism-of-abortion-bans/261665)



**Consider the power of your relationships with the ungodly . . .**

The most powerful influence of the ungodly is through secular media. Name some of the ungodly influences you see in media today? Include books, TV, movies, internet, etc.

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Christian/religious media are growing in popularity. Can you name some examples? Which religious/Christian media efforts are you reading, watching, listening to, sharing, and purchasing?

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Abortion clinics were originally planted in urban America for the purpose of eliminating the undesirable black population, and to this day, blacks are disproportionately their primary clientele. Does this information impact your opinion of abortion in any way? Why, or why not?

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Do you understand that the only unpardonable sin is the refusal to accept the pardon and new life God offers? Does your previous following of ungodly counsel in any area of life leave you feeling condemned? How does the fact that God does not condemn, only correct, leave you feeling?

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What can you do to counteract the negative influence of secular media on our families, communities, and nation?

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