

# Gift on the Altar

## By Kim Bond

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## Preface

Picture yourself following Jesus on a trail through the woods. At first, you are close but then you fall behind. It is nearly impossible to see Him, hear Him, or even feel His presence. You might begin to feel lost and confused. Following the advice in this book could be likened to a sprint to catch up with Him and become close like you were in the moments after you first decided to follow Jesus.

This book guides you to come close to God based on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5: 23-24, which states "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." From this verse, we can conclude Jesus wants us first to sense those things within us that are unsatisfactory. In doing this, we address our relationship with ourselves

by examining burdens, dealing with anger, and fighting negative thoughts. Next, we should be reconciled to others. We should improve our relationship with others by displaying humility toward all. Finally, we should enrich our relationship with God by offering gifts of faith, prayer and commitment.

If you follow the included recommendations, you will soon realize you are closer to Jesus than you ever thought you could be. You will: 1) fear and love God more and sense the love He is showering down on you, 2) feel more at peace and less scared when bad things happen, 3) know how to pray God's will in more circumstances and have more answered prayers, 4) feel God's presence more and loneliness less, 5) experience more joy and see meaning in life, and 5) come to greater knowledge of God's path for your life. The Holy Spirit will show you the way to go and let Jesus Christ shine through you. Ready?

NOTE TO NON-CHRISTIANS: This book was written especially for Christians who desire to come close to God. If you have never given your life to God and want to become a Christian, pray this prayer of salvation with me right now: Lord, I confess I have sinned against You. I claim Jesus' blood as payment for my sins. I believe Jesus is the Son of God and my Savior. I believe He died and rose again. Send the Holy Spirit to teach me and guide me in the way I should go. Thank You that I am now reconciled to You, Father. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## Burdens

Psalm 51: 10 states, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." As Christians, we want to be free from the burdens we are carrying around and simply to have a "pure heart" as mentioned in Psalm 51:10. The problem is we do not know what steps to take to get a clean heart. Some of us know we have burdens, but we do not know the cause of the burden or how to get freedom from it. Take a minute to examine what might be causing your burdens. Is it a need to give or ask for forgiveness to God or another person? Are you taking up the burdens of others (fixing their problems especially to avoid dealing with your own)? Do you have an overall poor outlook on life?

Since you have been carrying around those burdens for a long time, you are now probably emotionally exhausted and ready to lay them down. Let's do it together. We will forgive

someone, let go of negative feelings, and ask forgiveness from another.

Ephesians 4:32 states, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Since we have a perfect Father in heaven and a Friend that sticks closer than a brother, we can let go of the idealistic expectations we have placed on our parents, friends, and spouse. We can forgive all the ways they have let us down, rejected us, and failed to meet our needs since their mistakes only pointed us to the cross. Sit back in your chair, relax, and ask God, “Lord, who do I need to forgive?”

When you have the person in mind you need to forgive, pray this prayer of forgiveness with us, “Lord, thank You for forgiving our sin debt in full. We know we would never have been able to repay our sin debt without Your Son’s death on the cross. Since Your Son did this for us, we forgive every person that has wronged us. We

give up the right to collect from those who wronged us. In Christ's Name, Amen."

Feeling better yet? Ready to let go of some negative feelings? Hold your hand up to your Father in heaven as if you were giving Him your heart and say, "Lord, I give You my anger, resentment, unforgiveness, bitterness, pain, doubt, spiritual pride... Thank You that You love us and guide us to let go of these emotions so we can live in freedom and joy. In Christ's Name, Amen." (By holding your hand up to heaven, you are doing in the physical what you are doing in the soul. Alternately, you can envision yourself handing your heart to the Lord and think the words.) This practical advice can be used any time a thought or feeling rises up in you that you do not want.

Let's keep at this pace as we turn around and ask for forgiveness from someone we have wronged. Sit back in your chair again, relax and ask God, "Lord, who do I need to ask for

forgiveness from?” It might be your spouse for an argument you had yesterday. It might be someone from high school that you track down on social media. It could be something simple like a text or message stating: I am sorry. Please forgive me.

Doing this simple task could bring healing to their life and open up a door for Christ in their lives as well. After all, you welcomed the light of Christ inside of you the day you first believed. Put your light on a stand for all to see (Matthew 5:15). I am asking the Lord to give you courage to ask forgiveness to the person the Lord brings to your mind. Do not delay in communicating your regret about your past actions.

You may actually feel physically lighter after you have forgiven others, let go of negative feelings, and ask forgiveness from those you have wronged. All of those negative feelings and unforgiveness were coming in between you and the Lord. You have now drawn nearer to the

Lord. As He promises in the Holy Bible, when you draw near to the Lord then He will draw nearer to you (James 4:8).

1John 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Confession of sins is a great way to let go of burdens. Jesus’ blood on the cross makes payment for all sins by mankind. We accept this payment with our belief in Christ. This payment covers our eternal salvation. However, when Christians sin repeatedly they lose a certain closeness with God. In order to draw near to God, we should confess our sins directly to God in prayer.

Take a moment now to relax and ask God to bring your unconfessed sins to remembrance. As He lovingly surfaces them in your mind, just say something like this, “I confess I \_\_\_\_\_ (lied, mistreated my friend, etc.). Please purify me.”

If this is your first time, your sin confession may take awhile. After today, make confession a regular part of your prayer time so you maintain that closeness with the Lord. Confession should not make you feel guilty. It is a humble step of repentance that actively gives God in control of your purification process. You will feel light as a feather and closer to our heavenly Father when you regularly confess sin to Him.

James 5:16 states, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” Confession to God should only be the beginning especially if you still struggle with the same sin over and over again. God’s Word calls us to confess to “one another” and receive prayer to be healed.

Here are some ways you might decide to confess sin to another: on the phone with a Christian friend, during a call for prayer in church, worked into natural conversation in a

Bible study, or online in a Christian community or forum.

Joining a support group may be necessary especially if you are caught in an addictive lifestyle, illegal sin, or sin that is harmful to yourself or others. I pray God will open up opportunities for you to confess your sins to trustworthy Christians who will pray for you and not judge you.

God has certainly called us to confess our sins to God and man, but there is another type of confession we should do, and that is to confess the truth of what the Bible says about us. It is critical to know in your heart and soul that God values you. If you agree that this is important, confess these aloud right now: 1) Christ died for ME while I was still a sinner. (From Romans 5:8), 2) I have been freed from ALL things. (From Acts 13:39), 3) I am a CHILD of GOD. (From Eph. 1:5), 4) God has not given me a spirit of fear. (From 2 Tim. 1:7), 5) I am LOVED by the Father. (From

John 16:27). I pray your heart and soul would hear these truths from your mouth and draw you into a closer relationship with our Lord.

Confession of sin to God and others along with confession of our true identity in Christ to yourself will help you align your viewpoint with God's and help you draw near to Him who loves you unconditionally.

Another way we can draw near to God is let go of worry. Worry is a heavy burden. As if it were not heavy enough, worry causes other burdens like stress. Stress and worry can become overwhelming and even affect your physical body. In Mark 4:15-19, we can see that the worries of this life can even make God's communication with us unfruitful. Is all of this talk causing you to worry that you worry too much? Good news! Today we will unmask and stomp on this culprit.

When we reduce worry to its simplest emotion, it is just fear. In Isaiah 41:10, God tells us not to fear or be dismayed because He will help us. He will uphold us in His righteous hand. When you catch yourself worrying and feel your eyebrows furrowed, remind yourself: I do not need to fear. God is my help.

The reason we continue to worry as Christians is because we are holding onto things we need to relinquish. What do you most frequently worry about? That is the very thing you should relinquish to God!

Sometimes we need to relinquish a situation. Jesus was faced with a situation in the Garden of Gethsemane. He relinquished His will in the situation by praying: Not my will, but Yours (Luke 22:42). If you are worried about a situation, a relationship, or your future then follow Jesus and say this right now: Not my will, but Yours. In that way, you have relinquished

your will for God's will to be done in your life.  
There is no need to worry anymore.

Some of us might need to relinquish control. Do you feel like you need to control other people? You might want to control the actions of your spouse, child, or parent. God tells us in Matthew 6:33 not to worry even about what we will wear or eat, but we should instead focus on His kingdom and righteousness. Then He will add these things to us. Take a moment now to tell the Lord who or what you are relinquishing control of so you can focus more on His kingdom. He knows all about you and your loved ones...your every thought and desire. Let go of your worry by letting go of control.

Sometimes we might need to relinquish schedules and tasks. We strive to keep up with everyone else whose lives seem perfect. All the while, it seems like we are two steps behind on bills, late to important events, and overly tired. Give God your schedule! He has a way of

motivating us to do the right things at the right time. If you still worry, get it out of your head and onto a list and check it off as it gets done. God says His yoke is easy and His burden is light in Matthew 11:30. If your burden does not seem light, you could be taking up the burden of the world instead of the burden of God's kingdom. If that's the case, pray with me: Lord, I relinquish my schedule to you. I surrender all of my tasks that are not demonstrating the love of your kingdom.

It helps if we look fear right in the eye and dare it. Contemplate the worst outcome and the consequences. Much of the time, worriers are overly concerned with outcomes that have minor consequences. Just considering "What's the worst that could happen?" frees us from the burden of fear. Relinquishing situations does not mean failing to try. It means we allow God's will to steer our efforts. Relinquishing control does not mean failing to care. It means putting our focus on love instead. Relinquishing schedules does not mean blowing off important things. It means waiting for God to prioritize

tasks and trusting Him to lead our daily path. As you let go of worry and unnecessary burdens, you will enjoy life more and draw closer to God.

## Dealing With Anger

James 1:19-20 states we should be “slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” Yet, sometimes it just feels like a reflex. It seems like there is nothing we can do about this wild emotion rising up in us. Anger builds in us and we either explode or stuff it down in our heart somewhere. If you think you have successfully stuffed it away, you’re wrong! Your anger takes a toll on your face and in your body. It’s like trying to hold back a tidal wave. You will either explode uncontrollably later or become bitter or resentful.

One way we can deal with anger is to refuse to become angry by forgiving immediately and taking personal responsibility for our part in the situation. Secondly, we can quickly switch our focus from anger to problem resolution. Another great way to manage anger is to express anger through exercise and art regularly. This section explores each of those ways to manage anger.

One of the best ways for a person to control their anger is to take personal responsibility. Personal responsibility means accepting our part of the blame for the situation. When we feel anger, this might require a quick prayer and some soul searching. After thinking a few minutes, we can usually find some way we contributed to the event that is angering us. Once we realize we are also to blame, we can quickly confess and apologize to any other person that is involved. Anger has no time to take root.

Sometimes we simply do not play any part in the blame for a situation that has the potential to anger us. When this happens, it's just best to look for a way to be thankful like saying, "At least it wasn't worse." We can also take heart in remembering God uses our situations for His purpose (although we may not be able to see it). He promises to work them for your good in Romans 8:28. It is always within our power to choose a positive perspective.

Ephesians 4:26 states, “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry... “ One way to avoid letting the sun go down on our anger is to shift our focus away from our angry feelings. We move the focus FROM our feelings TO our mind when we try to solve the conflict instead of arguing about it. Ask yourself, “How can we solve this disagreement?”

Communication is the best way to resolve conflicts with other people. Ask them in a calm way why they did what they did. Try to gain some understanding of their point of view. Ask them how they feel and tell them how you feel. Can you find a solution through compromise? Can you assign times, chores, or routines? Can you avoid the situation altogether? If you humble yourself and put the other person first, will this solve the problem? Brainstorm and work together to try to figure out how you can prevent the situation from happening again. Your relationship and peace of mind is worth

the effort it takes to solve issues. Ask God to help you come up with solutions. He will honor your prayer when He sees you are serious about sheathing the sword of your anger. God cares about you and wants to give you the tools to solve conflicts.

Sometimes relationships become more about winning than actual arguments. If that is the case, maybe you both need more healthy competition in your lives. Stop arguing and join a bowling league! Ideally you two (you and your coworker, spouse, brother, etc.) could join a team together. If not, just join one yourself.

Above all, pray for a solution to recurring conflicts. Is your anger a problem in your life? Ask God to deliver you from your own anger in prayer. Our God delivers us from anger and restores joy. This is how we draw nearer to God.

We know that when one man punches another, he is expressing his anger. But what if the same man punches a volleyball across the net instead? Isn't he still expressing his anger but in a more productive way? The human body was meant for physical activity. The expression of anger is just one more reason to squeeze about 20 minutes into your daily routine. You do not need a gym membership or treadmill. There are many free workout videos online that are designed for men and women to do at home. (Kinda like having your own personal trainer.)

Alternative ways to express anger would be to write in a journal or to dream up some creative fiction. Even drawing and painting can express anger. The quality of your art piece is not as important as the expression of your emotion—the download from your heart and soul.

Prayer: Lord, We confess our sinfulness and unrighteous anger to You. Please help us to become angry less and deal with the anger

inside of us in healthy ways. Thank You that You have the power to deliver us, the desire to deliver us, and great wisdom in all things. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Consider anger you have held onto for a long time. When the sun goes down on your life, will you still be angry at those people? Fast forward to thoughts of you laying on your death bed. Will you regret all the time you wasted being angry? Will you mourn the relationships wounded by your anger? What should you have done with your time?

## Blessed Finances

Jeremiah 29: 11 tells us the Lord has plans to prosper us. Yet, Christians go through periods when we do not feel prosperous at all.

Sometimes all we need to do is stop comparing ourselves with people who have more than we do. Still, some of us truly struggle to provide for our family's basic needs. If you are struggling to provide, consider a few possible reasons that your finances are not blessed. Are you refusing to be generous with your money? Are you using money to perpetuate sin? Are you failing to use your income wisely?

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, we read that God loves a cheerful giver. If we use our income to provide only for our own needs, then why would God give us more than the bare minimum we need to cover our basic needs? Alternately, if we regularly use our income to provide for the needs of others...won't God always bless us with extra money? Yes!

I challenge you to use your money and stuff to make someone else's day better. Consider giving to a local church, buying food to donate to a local food pantry, donating clothes and shoes to The Salvation Army or other organization that helps needy, or sponsoring a child at Compassion (This is a four-star charity according to Charity Navigator.) After you begin giving, you will see how extra money just kinda rolls in to cover your needs and others.

Supposing you are generous with the little you have, but you still struggle to provide. Let's look at another common financial blessing blocker: sin. Sin leads to death, and God wants to give us life. Would a God who loves someone allow that person to have money in abundance if they use it to perpetuate a sin? Probably not. (Especially if that person has asked to be delivered from that sin.)

It really does not matter how much money you use for your sin of choice, it is the simple act of spending your income on sin that blocks the financial blessing. This is NOT to say that poor people are sinners and rich people never sin. The Bible shows us that is not true. However, God may allow money problems in your life if you repetitively use money for sin.

Another major reason Christians struggle to provide basic needs for their family is because they do not have a plan to use money wisely. Whether you make a little or a lot, you can stretch your income with a budget. Put away your credit cards for emergencies only!!!! The envelope budget is taught in many churches, but you do not have to attend a class to understand it. Consider researching budget methods like how the envelope budget system works.

These techniques may sound too simple to be revolutionary, but you will see God's amazing

providence when you trust Him. You will draw near to God when you spend money wisely, give generously, and stop using money to sin. God's face will shine upon you and His providence will flow freely upon you.

Prayer: Dear Father, You are the giver of all good things. We thank You for the many ways in which You provide for us. We pray You would help us to plan and adhere to our budgets. Thank You that You love us even when we are bound by sin. Strengthen us and deliver us that we may have life in abundance. Inspire us to use give money as You would have us do. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## Addiction

If you struggle with addiction, you have probably prayed several times for God to help you resist the urges and deliver you from your addiction. Yet you still find yourself addicted or have fallen back into addiction. You may be thinking...Why won't God help me?....I have failed so many times. Should I give up trying?.....Has God given up on me?

If you are Christian, then you have the Holy Spirit inside of you. God's Spirit continually helps you to live a life that is increasingly marked by holiness and blamelessness. Even when you backslide into sin, God does not give up on you or abandon you.

In Mark 9:43, Jesus says, "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out." If you

are a Christian, there is no need for you to fear hell or cut off your sinning hands. (If you are not a Christian, still don't cut off your hand! Just accept Jesus as Your Savior.) However when we read this verse, we realize how serious Christ was in His attitude against sin. Keep trying to fight against the addiction over and over again and try different ways to stop it. Don't give up!

There is no formula for how God delivers, but sometimes you just need to keep trying to stop your addiction until your heart and soul are broken. In your tears and brokenness, He may deliver you then. God may be allowing your addiction to continue until you finally acknowledge deep hidden emotions that need healing. Together, we'll investigate ways you can draw nearer to God's deliverance from this addictive behavior.

An addiction could be your heart screaming, "Pay attention to me! I am hurt and wounded." Yet you refuse to deal with the memories and

emotions from the past because they seem too painful to handle. Good news! You don't have to handle your emotions....just hand them over to our loving Father.

What memories have you buried? Take a second to ask God to remind you of pain you have hidden away from God and yourself. As He brings them to your mind, ask Him to take them for you. Ask Him to heal you of that pain. If necessary, ask God to forgive you or someone else.

This is a process. It may take several times, or the help of a family member, or even the services of a Christian counselor. The important thing is that you trust God with your pain and stop trying to bear the burden of it in your heart. Your heart cannot handle it and was never meant to carry that weight. That could be the reason your physical body constantly desires the soothing of something other than

God...something that has now become an addiction.

When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water in Matthew 14:28 Peter said, "...tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." And Peter went. Now it's your turn. Make things right with your heart and the rest of your physical body will eventually realize it has been SET FREE.

Even if you no longer feel convicted about your addiction, in your heart you know it is hindering your relationship with God. You know it is ruining your joy. God wants to help you make changes so you will not be stuck in your addiction forever...or start other addictions. So let's try something new!

When you think of resisting your addiction, do negative thoughts keep you from even trying? Your thought life could be a reason your

addiction still has the power to overcome your desire to be free of it. Consciously stop the thought instead of letting it boss you around.

Here's one example of defeatist thinking: My parents were alcoholics so I am an alcoholic. It's in my DNA. I was genetically prone to drinking. No one can change fate.

Once you have stopped the negative thought, think a positive thought. Focus on the deliverance God has already given you. Recite something like this: 1) We are children of God (Galatians 3:26), 2) We are being transformed into the Lord's likeness (2 Cor. 3:18), 3) God's Spirit gives me freedom (2 Cor. 3:17).

Many scientists think our DNA can change. This aligns with what many pastors are preaching...that as adopted children we gain access to Jesus' DNA and certainly His power

over sin and the devil. We have been delivered, and we are tapping into that power right now.

Be sure to meditate on God's Word so you know the truth. If you have turned your pain over to God and forgiven yourself and others with us, then you have no more excuse to feel sorry for yourself. Take up your sword and fight!

We fool ourselves into thinking we only harm ourselves when we give into addiction. I am not sure what your habit is, but evil tends to radiate and multiply. Crooked people are in the business of perpetuating addictions. By consuming porn, we drive the sex trafficking industry. When we pay for cigarettes, tobacco farmers use our dollars to hire pre-teen prostitutes on the other side of the world. Even the most innocent-sounding addictions ruin relationships with the people we love the most.

So now we have given the pain in our hearts to God for healing. We have chosen to chase negative thoughts away with the truth of God's Word. Additionally, we chose healthier ways for us to fulfill our need for comfort, rest, adventure and escape as we draw nearer to God in our daily life. Now it's time to wrestle against the addiction itself.

Every time we don't give into an addiction, we are stronger for the next time we are tempted. In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert. Satan tried over and over again until Jesus had resisted every temptation. Then the devil left Jesus alone. When the devil realizes we are not giving in, he too will leave us.

We are prideful creatures. Some part of us is still sure we can give up on our own even though we have failed so many times. Somehow our soul must try until it is broken. Then it will cry out for God in some mysterious

uttering, and God will rescue all those who need and want His rescuing. He is our Deliverer! So try your very hardest over and over again until God shows up. This may include signing up for porn blockers, joining support groups like Celebrate Recovery, or something else. Just don't give up until you are delivered from your addiction. Earn your victor's crown. God is right beside you.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the person reading this to know You as a God with the power to deliver. We trust in Your Word that You came to proclaim freedom for prisoners in Luke 4:18. We trust that You will do this for us even though we do not deserve Your mercy, we receive it. Thank You, Lord, for Your mercy and power. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## Abuse

One reason some Christians turn to substances is to ease the pain from mistreatment by others. In fact, some mistreatment may actually be considered abuse. Some of us have suffered emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse by the very people in our lives that we trusted to care for us.

As Christians, we are not exempt from the problems of the world. Many of us ask for prayers in tough situations. In fact, some prayer requests I have read even recount signs of emotional abuse. Many times, the victims do not even seem to be aware of their role as a victim so I will define it and include signs in case you think you may be the victim of emotional abuse. Emotional abuse seems to surface often in romantic relationships and parent-child relationships, but it could be in employment settings or friendships, etc.

Signs of emotional abuse include: 1) Blaming when it is inappropriate. Abusers cannot accept their own faults. They rarely apologize and will most often shift their own blame to the victim. 2) Manipulating the victim's emotions by rejecting him/her. It is healthy sometimes for an angry person to walk away and cool off, but an abuser might refuse to communicate for the purpose of controlling their victim's emotions. 3) Humiliating and isolating the victim. Abusers will often call their victim names and keep them from maintaining healthy friendships.

If you think you are the victim of emotional abuse, know that God cares deeply for you. He knows your pain and wants to help. Victims must find the peace that comes only from God when the abuser becomes angry and abusive. They should be aware they are highly treasured no matter how the abuser tries to manipulate them. Even when the storms blow, we can keep calm and recite the truth of God's Word about ourselves as the children of God.

I strongly recommend prayer, supportive friends, scheduling a talk with your pastor, and the help of a Christian counselor. They will be your best resources since they can gain a good understanding of your particular situation.

If you have endured emotional abuse, you may be walking around feeling the weight of your own sin along with the heavy burden of blame heaped on by your abuser. Remember that as a Christian, you no longer need to carry the weight of a sin burden. The blood of Jesus has already paid your sin debt in full.

Victims of emotional abuse may not know they are victims, but the victims of physical abuse have painful bruises to remind them of the hurt and pain they live in. Psalm 11: 5 states, “The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion.”

Some of you may have vowed to love your spouse forever. You probably meant every word

of your marriage vow...even now that your purple bruises are more common than romantic dinners. You begged God to make the abuse stop. You begged God to change him. You begged God to make your marriage work. Why isn't He listening to your requests?

My question for you is this: Are you listening to God? What is He asking you to do? What if He is asking you to leave your spouse to go to a safe place to live until your spouse gets help? Are you willing to listen to His divine guidance?

If you have been physically abused by your spouse, ask God what He wants you to do now with an open heart. Do not be afraid to hear the answer. Just ask: Lord, what do You want me to do? Do you want me to move out?

Listen for that still small voice. If you have children that are being abused by your spouse or are forced to watch abuse to you, it is your

responsibility to move out and take them to a safe place. God hears you. God loves you. God wants the best for you. Please listen for His guidance for your life.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for people in abusive relationships. I pray they would know Your deep love for them and hear Your plan for their life loud and clear. I pray You would give them the courage to follow through with all You have called them to do. In Christ's Name, Amen.

While physical abuse is devastating, there is another evil form of abuse that seems to leave a lifetime of spiritual pain and that is sexual abuse. One of the most difficult types of sexual abuse occurs when the victim is a child. Oftentimes, the abuser takes advantage of a child's trust, their desire to please, and their innocence. If you are the victim of sexual abuse, you know the pain is much deeper than a physical pain. Somehow the wounds made by sexual abuse scar the victims in ways that

overflow into every aspect of their lives. Do not underestimate the damage done by sexual abuse.

Victims may suffer from any of the following: sleeplessness, nightmares, depression, a desire to cut or harm yourself, desires to numb yourself with alcohol and drugs, paralyzing fear, inability to trust or maintain good relationships, guilt, regret, shame, unhealthy sex relationships, avoiding life, overly concerned with control, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, stress, headaches...

Jeremiah 30:17 states, “‘But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,’ declares the Lord...” If you are the victim of sexual abuse, God wants to help you restore your life. He wants to empower you to overcome the pain of your past and begin anew. The key to moving on is forgiveness. As hard as it may seem, you must forgive your abuser. I strongly recommend Christian counseling to sort through the

emotions that are causing problems in your life. If you know someone who has been sexually abused, offer them lots of patience, understanding, and a listening ear. Urge them to get help from a professional so they can embrace all of the wonderful things God has planned for their future.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for you would open the door for the victims of sex abuse to get real help. I pray you would completely and totally heal them of all the emotional pain they experience. I pray for deliverance from all of the harmful ways in which they have learned to cope. Thank You, Lord, for your healing power and ability to restore. Thank You that You have placed so many caring people in the paths of Your people. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## Help for Depression

Hopelessness or self-hatred can turn into a longer-lasting state of mind called depression. Much of the time, it can be avoided by fortifying our trust in God's promises through faith in His Word and embracing our identity in Christ according to the Bible. Victims of depression are often guilty of passivity.

Stand up to negative thoughts. Take control of your brain. Chase negative thoughts away so you can achieve joy and happiness. Focus on pure and noble thoughts as it says in Phil. 4:8. What pure thing makes you smile? In Ephesians 6:12, we are made aware that we are at battle against evil spiritual forces. It is time to fight back. Start by claiming your life.

Analyze your medications. If you have noticed that your depression increased after you began taking a medicine, read the side effects to see if that is listed. Talk to your doctor and be

persistent about changing the medicine. Ignore (and defy) feelings inspired by depression.

Don't let your feelings control you. Here are some feelings and ways to ignore and rebel against them. For instance, if you feel like staying in bed all day, get up and exercise. If you don't want to face anyone today, walk through your neighborhood and wave to people. You understand the idea!

Depression can render you useless if you permit it to do so. Without loving God or people, your life will seem meaningless. Once you light up the love of God in your life, your life will be purposeful. You will learn to love yourself more and contribute to the lives of others. Start by serving in a church, animal shelter, or some other place in your community.

You are a masterpiece that God has made for a purpose. Ecclesiastes 9:10 tells us once we are dead, "...there is neither working nor planning

nor knowledge nor wisdom.” Love knowledge!  
Love wisdom! This is your time on Earth.

You will stop feeling this way one day. I cannot say how it will happen, but one day you are going to feel happy again. It might be as you close the cover of an inspirational self-help book, as you finish talking to a loved one or counselor, or after you wake up tomorrow morning. Don’t listen to the voice that is telling you that you will feel like this forever. It’s a lie. What you are now feeling is temporary.

Trust God with your depression and worries and pain. I am reminded of the story in Matthew 14 about Peter. The disciples sat in a boat and watched Jesus walking on the water. Peter walked out to Jesus, but then he saw the wind and began to sink. He called out, “Lord, save me.” Then Jesus reached out His hand to save him.

You may feel all alone—as if you are sinking into depression and your soul is giving up. Call out to

the Lord today (just like Peter) to save you from depression. Ask Him to give You hope for a better future.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Give us the strength to hold on until You have given us new people to love and be loved by. Rescue us from our enemies, provided new ways for us to prosper, and heal us of our depression. Thank You, Lord, that You faithfully save Your children when they reach out to You. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Depression can evolve into something even more sinister. It could develop into thoughts that you may be better off if you were dead. For some, it will mean considering plans to take their own lives. If that's you, keep reading this passage. (If this does not apply to you, skip to the next section called [Self-Condernation.](#))

If someone broke into your house, pursued you, and made it clear they intended to kill you— what would you do? Call 911, right? If you are contemplating suicide, then someone is in your house, pursuing you with the intent to kill. It is

yourself. Call the emergency phone number in your area.

Supposing you are not contemplating suicide right this second, but the idea is a tempting “solution” to overwhelming problems. That kind of thinking is not healthy. It is your body’s cry for help. You cannot face this alone. Get some help sorting out your problems while finding positive ways to solve them instead.

Here are some ideas to contact someone for help: 1) Schedule a session with a local Christian counselor, 2) Call Focus On The Family’s counseling department, 3) Call a suicide hotline, 4) Talk to a trusted family member or friend, 5) Join a suicide support group in your area. (Look in newspapers for announcements of place and time.) 6) Join a small group at church and confide in them how you are struggling, 7) Schedule an appointment with your pastor.

Commit to doing one or more of the above within 48 hours. God has a plan for your life. Live to let it unfold before your eyes. Greatness will happen and happiness is possible. As our brother or sister in Christ, we love you and want you to live. I pray you will receive godly help in your time of need.

Get rid of the weapons. If you own guns, drop them off at the local police station. Remove everything in your home that could be used as a weapon against yourself.

The truth is everyone would mourn you and miss you if you chose to take your life. Your family would be devastated for the rest of their lives. Old friends would wish for you to be alive another day. Your neighbors would mourn you. Everyone who hears about your death would be sorrowful. Do not listen to the depression that is telling you that no one will miss you or that they'll just get over it. The truth is some people

would be haunted by grief for the rest of their lives by your death.

Your courage is displayed by your continued life. Persevering through depression shows valor. Battling suicidal thoughts and letting go of emotional pain require a lot more bravery than taking your own life. Don't listen to that suicidal spirit daring you to go through with it. It is tricking you. God gave you life because He loves you. Hold on tight to this precious gift.

## Self-Condernnation

1John 2:2 states, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” In this verse we note Christ died not only for us Christians but for everyone. The sins of non-Christians has been paid for, but they perish because they do not accept. What a shame! How different their eternal outcome would be if only they had uttered “I accept.”

We accessed Christ’s power to save with the words “I accept.” But what power is out there that we haven’t claimed by saying “I accept \_\_\_\_\_” (for instance: joy, peace, etc.)? Alternately, what negative influence do we unwittingly accept by not saying “I reject \_\_\_\_\_” (for instance: negative thoughts, depression, etc.)? Start accessing Christ’s power to accept and reject thoughts and attitudes right now. Like Christ’s payment for our sins, it is out there waiting to be claimed BY YOU. Just

give it a try the next time you are in a bad mood.

But what if what you are faced with is actually more than a just a bad mood? All Christians are sometimes confronted with negative thoughts about themselves. However, if you buckle under a constant barrage of condemning thoughts, then you may have fallen into the trap of self-condemnation. Let's look at the Bible to understand God's view of condemnation.

In John 8, the teachers of the law confronted Jesus with an adulterous woman. Once He convinced them to have mercy on her, He asked, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" To which she replied, "No one, sir." Jesus then declared, "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared.

We can see Christ's character with that incident. His desire is not to condemn us. And if the Savior does not condemn us, then why should we condemn ourselves?

I can think of several possible outcomes for this woman. 1) She stopped sinning and lived in gratitude toward Jesus and told lots of people about Him, 2) She continued her life of sin thinking Jesus had prevented her from getting punished in the future, or 3) She stopped sinning yet she was so filled with self-condemnation that she was prevented from living a fruitful life. I hope the adulterous woman's outcome was the first one. Now what path have you chosen since you were saved by Jesus?

Self-condemnation turns our focus inward on ourselves and prevents our circumstance from being fruitful. Thoughts of self-condemnation could be something like: "I am not a good Christian" or "I always fail" or "I am not a good

spouse, parent, etc.” Jesus loves you and has all the tools you need to help you succeed.

Embrace the love He has for you and reject those self-condemning thoughts so you can live a life of gratitude and tell lots of people about Your Savior Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Give us lives of gratitude and happiness. Help us to let go of our past sins, negative thoughts, and bad attitudes. Thank You that You are our Savior. Help us to treasure all You have done for us. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

## Submission

When Christians hear the word submission, their minds may automatically jump to the controversial subject of submission of wives to their husbands. However, all Christians are called into a lifetime of submission. Christians are called to submit first and foremost to God as stated in James 4: 7 “Submit yourselves, then, to God....”. Jesus lived in perfect submission to His Father. He never argued with Him about His rights or rebelled against Him. Instead, He yielded to His Father’s will because He trusted Him. He is our example.

We are called to submit to the government and other authorities. Romans 13: 1 states, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” This means everything from following speed limits to

paying taxes. It means we cannot use our own judgment or take what is entitled to us.

Common sense tells us to submit to our bosses, but Christians are called to do even more than submit but to “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people...” in Ephesians 6:7. Putting forth our best efforts is a testimony to our boss and coworkers that God is good. If you think you are being treated unfairly, do not seek revenge with poor efforts.

Christian children must obey their parents as it says in Ephesians 6:1 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” This basic relationship teaches us to know our place.

Submission is an attitude fortified with humility and obedience. These are characteristics God wants to instill in us because we cannot live in a proper relationship with the Lord unless we are

trained in submission. If we cannot submit to earthly authority, how can we submit to God?

Ephesians 5: 22 states, “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.” As women’s rights gained prominence, the above verse became increasingly controversial. Some non-Christians think it is demeaning to women. Even some Christians think this is a verse that was meant for the time period it was written in and does not apply to us. I do not think it is demeaning or outdated.

Our Creator gave a masterful order to the universe. He instituted the laws of gravity. Our Father in heaven also established an order in families. Jesus should be the head of every household. Husbands are called to submit to Him, wives should submit to their husbands, and children must obey their parents.

Women have been given the gift of beauty, the ability to bear children, and a powerful influence over their children's lives. Yet, women are called to submit to husbands. This does not mean wives should become robotically compliant to their husbands. It means they should yield to their husbands.

Husbands should never misuse their authority to control or abuse women. Rather, they should delegate authority to other people in the household. They should seek the opinions of household members before making decisions. In this way, they become a good Christian husband and father.

Christian wives will become unhappy if they must assume a leadership position because a husband is refusing to lead. When both husband and wife struggle for power, households are too argumentative. Christians who feel their household is out of balance should seek their God-given assigned identity in

Christ by meditating on Scripture and praying for ways to conform to God's design for families.

Christians should have an attitude of submission towards God. Our earthly authority provides a great training ground to learn how to submit. When we submit to authority, we humbly obey God as we should. Whether it is the federal government or our boss or a husband, we respect God's plan for order when we yield to their authority.

But what about when the authority figure or law goes against God's Word? What then? God is the highest authority in the Christian's life. Christians should always obey God even when authorities in your life command you to go against what God or His Word is telling you to do.

In the book of Daniel, we read about Daniel's character. He was faithful to God and submitted to authority. He worked hard and behaved righteously. His qualities earned him a promotion. The jealous officials inspired a decree which forbid Daniel to pray to God. Yet Daniel ignored the decree that lead him away from God and kept on praying! He feared God more than man so God rescued him from the mouth of lions.

Christians must always fear God more than man. Christians should never depend on the law to tell us what is right or wrong, but we should rely on God's Word. Believers should tell corrupt bosses they will not break the law to help their bottom line. Christian women should not quietly submit to abusive husbands but seek God's will in their lives. Those are exceptions in which acting righteously and justly according to God's Word is more important than submitting to authority.

In most circumstances, submission to authority is a useful tool to help us draw near to the Lord. If we love the Lord, we will submit to authority. In doing so, we are a good example and witness to others. Throughout our lives, we must remember our King in heaven is our ultimate authority. Our Father who loves us deserves our undivided loyalty.

Prayer: Lord, Help us to draw near to You by submitting to authority. Give us the courage to stand firm on the Word when authority leads us astray. Thank You, Lord, that You hear our prayers. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## On Being Single

If you are single, keep reading this passage to learn more about “the one,” how to avoid traps that perpetuate singlehood, and sexual myths circulating among singles. (If you are married, go to the next section called [Envision a Happy Marriage](#).)

Single people walk around with a romantic notion in their heads. It is this idea that God has created a perfect match for them, and they should spend their lives looking for that person who will fulfill their every need. In a sense, that impression is true. The perfect match for all people is out there in the man called Jesus Christ. We should spend our lives discovering more about Him. It is only through Him we will find the wholeness we are seeking. You are probably still wondering who you should marry and how to find them though.

God tells us in Matthew 6 that we should not waste time worrying, but we should instead “Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness.” This advice applies to worrying about who your future spouse will be. Genesis 2:18 states God created woman to be a “helper” to Adam. God may bring someone alongside you to be your helper after you have thrown yourself into a focus on Jesus. An example of ways you can do this is to learn more about Christ by reading His Word and other Christian books, fix your attention on serving in a ministry, and learn to gain freedom from sin.

I once met a man and a woman that lived in the same town but did not know each other. Both answered God’s call to be a missionary and flew halfway around the world. In that faraway country, God caused them to meet and fall in love. Together, they worked as servants of God—helping one another bring souls to Christ. When you seek God’s kingdom and righteousness, God may send a helper to you.

If God has sent this helper to you, he/she will be a Christian. You will be attracted to one another. You will be interested in marrying each other. You will pray about marriage and in His own way God will approve of your decision. After you have married this person, you will realize this is the “one” God knew beforehand you would marry. You both can continue to rest in the fact that you have your perfect match in Jesus even if your marriage gets rocky.

“Do not worry” should not be misunderstood to mean “do not pray.” Persevere in prayer that God would send someone in your path if it is His will, and if not that He would remove your desire to be married. Also pray for patience to wait for your future spouse. Look around you! God may have already sent someone perfect for you. Don’t look back and regret though. Unless God has told you something different, assume old relationships did not work out for a reason.

You may know of some Christian that never married and are worried this will become your fate. Single Christians can and do have lots of fun and freedom. Plus they can relax in knowing they found their perfect match in Jesus Christ who fulfills their every need.

Single Christians will often beat themselves up. They will ask, “What’s wrong with me, God? Am I unlovable?” **The truth is that you are very lovable.** There is nothing wrong with you! In fact, you are wonderful. However, you may be falling into a common trap.

Do you spend most of your time with unbelievers? Are your standards way too high? Do you spend most of your time alone in your house? Do you find yourself in long relationships without proposals? These are the traps! If you think you have fallen into a trap, make some practical changes to your life that include prayer and meditation on Scripture verses.

Remember God loves you. He hears your desperate pleas to find someone. He knows your longing to share love and start families. Are you willing to do what He is asking of you to make that happen? God is willing to help you especially when you make yourself available for your future spouse to enter your life. As faithful as he or she is, I doubt they are willing to walk up to your door and knock while you sit there on your computer and ask you on a date...or tell you to break up with that person you've been dating seven years...or well, you get it.

In the meantime, enjoy having the whole bed to yourself. If the loneliness gets to be too much, tell yourself, "I want to remember this loneliness so that when I marry the right person...I will have the good sense to stand by their side even when it gets tough." God is always preparing you for your future and His kingdom.

Hebrews 13:4 states, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” How does this verse compare to the myths circulating among single Christians? Keep reading to learn the truth about three infamous myths so you will not be deceived.

**MYTH #1) MY FUTURE SPOUSE WANTS ME TO BE EXPERIENCED IN SEXUAL INTERCOURSE.**

Christian men and women desire someone who is pure. Choosing to either watch pornography or have premarital sex muddles your heart, mind, and spirit. You are also distancing yourself from God when you engage in these sins. Plus, you run the risk of becoming addicted, contracting a disease, or getting pregnant. Your future spouse would prefer to discover this new activity together with you. If you are dating someone who wishes you were more experienced, I would question whether this person is really the right one for you.

MYTH #2) I NEED TO HAVE PREMARITAL SEX TO KNOW WHETHER OR NOT I AM SEXUALLY COMPATIBLE WITH THE PERSON I AM PLANNING TO MARRY. Not only is this statement a myth, the concept of sexual compatibility is also a myth. Sex was designed to be an expression of your love for your spouse. Your major focus should be on bringing pleasure to the other person. Since people are unique, it requires time to learn the best way to give your spouse the most pleasurable experience. So good sex depends on knowing one another, and it also depends on the health of the relationship. If one person stops working to maintain the relationship, your sex life will could become less pleasurable even if it was fun at the beginning of the relationship.

MYTH#3) IF I HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ACTIVE IN THE PAST, I AM NO LONGER VALUABLE. The right person is going to love you no matter what. God has forgiven all of the sins in your life including any sexual sins you were engaged in. You can be completely honest with both God

and your future spouse about your sexual history.

If you keep studying God's Word and putting it into practice, you will be completely prepared for your future spouse. Don't worry about a thing. I have not written from the high and mighty position of having done everything right. I have written from the humble view of having made mistakes and watching the Lord make everything work together for my good. God has great plans for you. I am praying for you to stumble onto that loving someone while clinging to the Lord.

## Envision a Happy Marriage

(If you are unmarried, you may want to skip to the next section called [Catholics & Protestants](#).)

If you are married, then you know how challenging married life can be. Sometimes it seems like you and your spouse do not share common interests and that you fight all of the time. You may have begun to feel unhappy or dissatisfied with your intimate encounters. You may even be considering divorce. No matter how long you have been married or how happy or unhappy you and your spouse are, you must continue investing in your marriage. This passage includes practical advice for enhancing the marital relationship, eighteen tips for improved intimacy, and a short recommended prayer for you to claim God's favor on your marriage.

The first step to a happy marriage is to envision it. Proverbs 29:18 states, “Where there is no vision, the people perish...” Picture you and your spouse as an old couple doing a specific loving act for one another. Share this vision with your spouse. Make up your mind to let go of the past. Stop replaying old memories and focus on the future. Now that you have envisioned the future of your happy marriage, it’s time to address some of those issues that are deteriorating your relationship.

If you or your spouse complains that you have nothing in common, take these steps to overcome this problem. Start taking an interest in the things your spouse does even if you don’t have a natural interest in those things. Go with him to a baseball game. Sit down on the couch and watch the show she normally watches alone. You probably made lots of compromises when you were dating, and now you are no longer in the habit of compromising desires for the sake of being together. Purposefully start compromising for the sake of love and for the sake of your marriage.

If you and your spouse always fight, then change your focus. When the opportunity to fight arises, focus on the tiny detail you do agree on. Admit you don't agree but you want them to have their way because you love them. You are establishing a new normal that sets an example of love that will be returned to you in time. Don't be a doormat...but be ready yield sometimes. You probably use this technique to avoid confrontations with your boss or coworkers, but your familiarity with your spouse prevents you from utilizing this skill at home.

Some spouses make this common complaint: I'm just not happy anymore. If you are working and praying for a happy marriage, stop looking to your spouse as a source of joy. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and should not find its source in your spouse. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 states, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." We read how Paul was beaten

and jailed in Acts 16. In jail, he sang praises to God! How is that possible? Paul's joy was not dependent on his circumstance but found in his relationship with Christ.

I hope that you will pursue the joy that comes from Christ by remaining in the true vine. Additionally, I hope that confidence and trust in Christ awakens an interest in new experiences that will contribute to your quality of life. Take up a new hobby, pursue your passion, play on a sports league, and work toward your dream with small goals. Be sure to invite your spouse to be a part of your experiences as your life transforms into a healthy expression of the joy that can be found in Christ.

Intimacy is another common complaint. Nothing is happening in the bedroom or you are stuck in a rut or your chemistry just dissolved. There is hope! Read the following eighteen ways to increase intimacy between you and your spouse:

1) New self-control – If you are currently viewing pornography, you are KILLING your sex life. You'll be amazed how intimacy improves when you STOP viewing pornography.

2) New faithfulness – Cut strong ties between people of the opposite sex that you are attracted to. You can improve your intimacy with your spouse by removing emotional attachments to others.

3) New thoughts – Concentrate on something new when you are alone with your spouse. Focus on your love for your spouse, envision blooming flowers, live in the moment.

4) New initiation – The minutes that lead up to intimacy are important. Change your approach.

5) New ways to energize – Intimacy requires energy. Rest up and help your spouse with tasks so he or she feels energetic also.

6) New compliments – Instill confidence in your spouse and he/she will feel like a tiger instead of a mouse.

7) New perfume or aftershave – Scent affects mood. Set the mood for intimacy.

8) New clothes - Attract your spouse by wearing attractive clothes instead of wearing what is comfortable.

9) New underclothes – Replace things with holes. Buy underclothes that are pleasing to the eye.

10) New sheets – Get some soft sheets that announce your intentions to be intimate.

11) New bed – Mentally break your rut by replacing the old squeaky bed.

12) New place - Rent a hotel room for a getaway vacation in your own town.

13) New hairdo or hair color – Make yourself feel new with a change.

14) New makeup or facial hair - Try different things to see what you and your spouse agree enhances your features.

15) New exercise routine – Exercise contributes to a happy mood, builds confidence, and

increases stamina. Consider taking a multivitamin.

16) New music – Set the mood for love with romantic music.

17) New candles – Make your spouse feel special by going the extra mile.

18) New date – Date your spouse with creativity.

You will be shocked at how effective these methods are at revving up your intimacy! A little effort makes a big impact when you pray for a strong relationship with your spouse and embrace love and faithfulness.

Perhaps your marriage has deteriorated to the point in which you are considering divorce. Before you give it further consideration, consider God's will for your marriage. According to Malachi 2:16, God hates divorce. However, He does allow it in certain circumstances.

Theologians debate them, but the discussion surrounds: unfaithfulness, abandonment, and abuse. If your spouse is not guilty of any of the above things, pursue reconciliation instead of divorce.

If you want to follow God's desire for your marriage, stop using the word "divorce" in your conversations and in your mind. Start praying for a change in heart. God understands your hurt. Open your mind and heart to the possibility that God can transform your marriage into the loving relationship you always dreamed of having for "with God all things are possible" (see Matthew 19:26).

The decision to reconcile a marriage should not be a decision to remain stagnant in an unhappy relationship. Take a moment to visualize the marriage you want to have with your spouse. (Yes, right now. Go on. Close your eyes.) Now, what specifically was going on in your daydream that is not going on in real life? Whatever it is, it

constitutes a discussion with your spouse. Make it clear that you are willing to change for the goal of a more loving relationship and announce your hopes that they will be up for the challenge as well.

Your marriage can become a dream come true with your own spouse if you communicate your needs and keep praying. Don't give up on love! Be patient and hold your marriage in honor for God says in His Word that "Marriage should be honored by all..." (Hebrews 13:4). Think back to when you first met your spouse. Were you giddy with love? Think how your spouse has changed you for the better.

I have presented many small practical ways to improve your relationship with your spouse. I implore you to try them no matter how complicated your marriage is. It is God who heals your marriage through your small efforts just like God healed Naaman through his simple efforts in 2 Kings.

Naaman wanted to be cured of his leprosy. Elisha advised him to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman dismissed the idea because of its simplicity, but his servants convinced him to try it anyway. After following Elisha's advice, his leprosy was healed. The Jordan didn't heal Naaman; God healed Naaman through his simple efforts. (See 2 Kings 5: 1-14.)

Remember that a successful marriage is an imperfect marriage with lots of room for God to fill the crevices of our hearts. It is one in which two people are free to give and accept love from one another even in their brokenness.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You promise that "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD." in Proverbs 18:22. I pray You would open our eyes to the favor You have shown us and help us to behold the good thing we have found in our present marriages. Thank You that this promise and all Your promises are

good and true for all time. In Christ's Name,  
Amen.

## Catholics & Protestants

John 13:34 states, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." We may not agree with everything other Christians say or do, but I hope we can agree on this basic definition of a Christian. A Christian is someone who believes all of the following: 1) Jesus is their Savior, 2) Jesus is the Son of God, 3) Jesus died, 4) His blood paid for the sins of mankind, and 5) Jesus rose from the dead.

Once we have isolated who is a Christian, we could further organize them by details of their belief system. If someone calls themselves a Catholic, it is implied that they follow the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. They have usually been baptized, confirmed, and received the Eucharist in a Catholic Church. In contrast, a Protestant is any non-Catholic Christian. This includes all denominations (and non-denominational) like Baptist, Charismatic, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.

The two groups have inspired a great deal of curiosity by both Christians and non-Christians. The comparison between Catholicism and Protestantism could be the contents of a thick book. Yet, even an incredibly long book would still not account for the differences in the beliefs of individuals within each group. In this short passage, we will examine classic opinions toward authority, justification, and salvation. For contrast, we will identify basic principles from the reformation period that are commonly known as the "five solas."

First, let's look at sola Scriptura (Scripture alone). Catholics and Protestants agree the Bible is divinely inspired sacred writing. However, Catholics depend on tradition and the Pope's authority while Protestants trust in the authority of Scripture alone.

Secondly, consider sola fide (faith alone). Both groups will say faith is required for the

justification of man to God. Catholics depend on their faith and good works for justification. On the other hand, Protestants emphasize faith alone.

Thirdly, there is sola gratia (grace alone). Protestants and Catholics both confess we are saved by grace. Yet, Catholics state grace is received through sacraments (such as the Eucharist or communion). Protestants stress grace alone.

Next, let's look at solo Christo (Christ alone). All Christians proclaim Christ as their Savior. Still, Catholics place a higher importance on Mary mother of Jesus and the role of priests while Protestants accentuate Christ alone.

Finally, examine soli Deo gloria (to the glory of God alone). Both Catholics and Protestants believe the faithful ascend to heaven. Catholics have been known to esteem and call on saints

in heaven for help. On the contrary, Protestants exalt the glory of God alone.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:16, “By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?” Catholics and Protestants both have strengths and a history of achievements. By looking at the fruit of each group, we can see how both groups complement each other and how we can benefit from working together for the kingdom of God.

The world is waiting and watching us. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I think it is possible for us to love one another in spite of our individual beliefs.

Prayer: Lord, we invite you into our thoughts and attitudes about our brothers and sisters in Christ. Help us to love one another as You have loved us. In Christ's Name, Amen.



## About Islam

Experts estimate that there are over 20,000 Christian denominations. Each one has their own different beliefs and practices. It would be hard to make a statement of faith that they all agree on. The same is true when it comes to Islam. With that in mind, I will still try to explain a few general differences between Islamic and Christian beliefs (even though it may not apply to every Muslim) in a few short passages.

The Muslims I know are very agreeable in general and will not argue most points of the Bible. Many even believe in Mary's virgin birth (although they do not believe Jesus is the Son of God). However, there is a sharp conflict when it comes to the history of Christ and the cross. Muslims do not believe Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. They believe He was spared death and taken up to heaven. To them, the cross has no saving power since they do not believe a sacrifice was ever made on it. To us,

Christ's death on the cross was the sacrifice that saves us from sin. Christ's resurrection guarantees we too will be raised up from the dead. Therefore, the cross is the cornerstone and symbol of our faith, yet it is insignificant in Islam.

Muslims believe the Bible is an inspired (but corrupted) holy book. The Qur'an (written several hundred years after the death of Christ) is considered a more pure sacred text for Muslims. Christianity teaches God's Word is without error. 2Timothy 3:16 states "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..." If we believe God gave us the Word of God, it stands to reason He has protected it over the years. Scripture has been proven reliable by many transcripts including the Dead Sea Scrolls. Jesus authenticated the accuracy of the Old Testament by quoting it. History and archaeological finds support Biblical accuracy. (Archaeological discoveries have actually disproven the historical accuracy of the Qur'an.) The more you study the Holy Bible, the

more it becomes apparent it is an incredible piece of literature because it is the literal Word of God.

With so much common ground, it seems odd that so much controversy would arise from these two religions. Why do we hear about so much violence towards Christians from Islamic countries? The reason is the Qur'an actually commands holy war against non-Muslims who refuse to convert. "Islamic Extremists" is the name we commonly call Muslims who literally interpret the Quran as a legitimate authorization to kill non-Muslims. However, there are many peaceful Muslims so it is important to differentiate between "peaceful Muslims" and "Islamic Extremists." Peaceful Muslims living among us condemn the killing and persecution just like we do.

The Bible was completed and closed around 400 A.D. Christians believe the Holy Bible is the final authority. No prophecy can supersede the Holy

Bible. God warns us in Revelation 22:18 never to add to His Words. Yet several hundred years later, Muhammad claimed to have received a message from the angel Gabriel. This message was compiled in the Qur'an. Muslims believe the Qur'an supersedes the Bible in authority. Muhammad reminds me of the old prophet in 1 Kings 13. A man of God had been commanded by the Lord not to eat or drink on his journey. He even rejected the king's offer to sup. Yet an old prophet convinced him that he has received a message from an angel that told him to bring this man of God to eat with him. The man of God defied God's command and dines with the old prophet. The man of God's disobedience cost him his very life!

As Christians, we should always have a warm smile and a kind word for peaceful Muslims living among us. As for the extremists, Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you in Matthew 5:44. I hope that, in time, more Muslims can agree on its superiority to the Qur'an. I pray you will be God's instrument for delivering this truth. It is a

spiritual battle and one that can be won through the Holy Spirit's supernatural enabling. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 that he did not come to them with persuasive words or human wisdom but with the testimony of God with fear and trembling. Christ has told us to testify. All we need to do is be obedient.

## About Judaism

Who is Jewish? It seems like a simple question, doesn't it? But it's not! There is more than one basis for being called Jewish.

1. The first basis is ETHNICITY. People who have Jewish parents are referred to as Jewish.

Regardless of their religious beliefs or practices, this group of people are still considered Jewish because they are ethnic Jews.

2. The second basis is RELIGION. Ethnic Jews who practice the religion known as Judaism are called Jewish. However, any person who can convert to Judaism and will then be referred to as a Jew.

In Genesis 12:2, the Lord said to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." Today, it's easy for us to see

that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham!  
Abraham's descendants can be found anywhere  
in the world including the great nation of Israel.  
God always keeps His promises because He is  
faithful.

With over 300 prophecies about the coming  
Messiah pointing to Jesus, it may be hard to  
understand why Jewish people do not accept  
Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Well, some Jewish  
people do accept Jesus as their Messiah and  
Savior. Jewish people practicing Jewish  
traditions that have accepted Jesus are called  
Messianic Jews.

Yet there are many more Jewish people who do  
not accept Jesus as their Messiah. Here are two  
major reasons why:

1. The first reason is CONTEXT. Jewish people  
think Christians take Messianic prophecies out

of context. Christians argue the Bible passages that contain prophecy have a dual meaning.

2. The second reason is the JEWISH BIBLE. The Jewish translation of the Bible renders certain passages differently. For instance, Christian Bible state Immanuel will be born to a virgin in Isaiah 7:14. In the Jewish Bible, it simply says Immanuel will be born to a young woman.

There are whole books written on the subject, and the many words written do not apply to every Jewish person. However, I hope this passage has helped a little to unravel the mystery of why Jewish people are still waiting for their Messiah while the rest of us are waiting for His return!

In the Bible, we read God promised a chosen nation to Jacob's descendants including the Promised Land of Israel. We know one major reason God set this nation apart was to bring

forth the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to bring non-Jews into a reconciled relationship to God. Now that Jesus Christ accomplished His Father's will, does it nullify God's promise to Abraham's descendants? Should Israel belong to the Jewish people in modern day times?

The belief that Israel should belong to the Jewish people is called Zionism. Many Christians support Zionism because they believe the book of Romans confirms the original promise stated in Genesis 12. Many Jewish people support Zionism because they have a continued faith God's promise to them, which is stated in the Jewish Bible. Even people who do not believe in the Bible at all may support Zionism for political or other reasons.

What do you think? I see the existence of Israel as a miracle and a reminder that God has not forsaken us. As Christians, we know for certain God will one day call us to our own spiritual

Promised Land in heaven where we can reside  
forever with Him.

## Closet Atheism

When non-believers think of Christians, we want them to think of an upstanding man or woman who loves God and exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. We do not want them to think of abortion clinic bombers or funeral picketers. When they project those qualities on us, we want to scream, “NO, I AM NOT LIKE THAT! That’s a misunderstanding.”

Now consider how Christians think of atheists. What’s popping into your mind? Is it someone ridiculing your beliefs? Blaspheming God? Suing governmental institutions to exclude every reference to God? If we do not want to be stereotyped, we should stop stereotyping atheists. After all, there are LOTS of atheists that silently and privately disbelieve in God. This is closet atheism.

In fact, you might be surprised to learn some people you assumed were Christians actually do not believe in God at all. They have not told you or anybody else because they are afraid they will be rejected or be forced to endure a long, one-sided conversion speech. If we regard and respect all of God's creation, quiet atheists among us will be more likely to voice their opinions about God. Then, your love for them will have opened the door for an intellectual conversation about God and the Bible.

Once the closet atheists in your life feel comfortable enough to confide their lack of belief in God, you may feel privileged to have this information. Yet at the same time, you may feel too intimidated to speak openly about your faith in God. Try this:

\*Serve this person. In John 13, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. If our Savior washed feet, we should never feel too superior to serve another human being. Be ready. Look and pray

for opportunities to fill needs in this person's life.

\*Share your testimony. Wait for an appropriate time in natural conversation to share the story of how God delivered you, healed you, or saved you. If you cannot think of one that applies to yourself, share the true story of what God has done in someone else's life. Atheists depend on logic to discern whether or not your story adds up so they may explain away the truth in their own mind. That does not matter. The truth of the testimony has an anointing that went forth when you spoke it. Spiritually, Jesus is knocking on their door. It is up to them to answer or not. Just do your part and speak the truth.

\*Discuss God and the Bible. The key word here is "discuss." In a natural conversation, bring up God and the Bible. Ask them what bothers them about Christianity. Be ready to answer according to the Bible. The fact that your answers are Biblical will not mean much to the

atheist since they do not regard it as God's Word, but you know you are speaking the truth if it is Scripturally founded. Admit you do not know all the answers. Humility is a virtue.

Do not take it personally if an atheist rejects your words. They are rejecting Christ—not you! Do not become discouraged no matter how long this atheist rejects Christ. God may be working emotional healing and/or other Christians to witness of God's truth into that person's life. Just keep praying for this person's faith to be ignited. I pray you will boldly and lovingly communicate God's invitation into His kingdom to any unbelieving people in your life.

Supposing a non-believer in your life agrees to say the sinner's prayer with you or answers an alter call while visiting your church or somehow finds faith in God, then what? Go ahead and celebrate! Just don't abandon them after the celebration. Take the time to disciple them. Encourage the new Christian to: 1) confess their

faith publicly and become baptized by showing them what steps are necessary to become baptized, 2) attend church regularly by inviting them, 3) read their Bible by giving them one as a gift, 4) lead a holy life by being a good example.

Consider how much time Jesus spent with His disciples and how He loved them. I pray the Lord gives you the ability to disciple a new Christian in your lifetime with the heart of Jesus. Some of our best opportunities come within our own family. Take the time to disciple new Christians especially if they are your brothers, sisters, cousins, parents, and your very own kids. God bless!

Prayer: Lord, I pray the atheists in our lives would have the courage to confess their lack of belief. I pray You would inspire us to love them the way You love us. Let them see Your glory and be saved by Christ's blood. Thank You, Lord,

that You are good to all and have compassion  
on Your creation. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## Mini History of the Bible

Jesus says in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

The history of Christianity is not taught in many sanctuaries. Instead, churches focus on the principles of Scripture and how they apply to modern-day life. Additionally, they stress the authority of the Bible. They remind us it is God-breathed according to 2Timothy 3:16. Pastors may even mention the author or background of a particular book of the Bible before preaching from it. However, congregations in general typically do not seem that interested in hearing the history of Christianity or origins of the Bible on a Sunday morning.

Some of us are interested though, aren't we? We may not want to buy thick non-fiction books to study every detail. Yet, we sort of want to

know what happened in between the author writing God's words on a scroll and this beautifully bound Bible we bought from our local Christian bookstore.

By learning some of the major events in Christianity that have lead up to the publication of the modern-day Bible, we can be better prepared to answer questions about our faith from non-Christians. More importantly, we understand God's ways so we can know Him more.

The Old Testament originated with our Father in heaven. God breathed His words to Moses and the other prophets so they could write it down for future generations. It is believed that over 20 authors were inspired to write the Old Testament. Scholars believe these authors wrote mostly in ancient Hebrew on scrolls.

Jewish rabbis and scholars decided which books were regarded as Scripture. All of the books of the Old Testament were completed by 500 BC. They were translated into Greek (called the Septuagint or LXX) in 200 BC.

God closely guarded His Word through the process of being written by prophets, replicated by scribes, and translated into other languages. There are a couple of ways we are sure of this. First, Jesus confirmed its authenticity when He quoted from the Old Testament. Second, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 confirms Old Testament accuracy. The ancient Old Testament scrolls found in caves and the modern-day Old Testament we study today are astoundingly similar! Thanks to God's preservation of His Word, we can still say with confidence, Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:105).

Can you imagine what it would be like to live during the time of Jesus? We can only imagine

how filled with awe they were at the life of Jesus and all the miracles he performed. If I were one of those awe-struck disciples, I would probably have begun to write them down. In fact, that is what some of them did.

All 27 books of the New Testament were written within 100 years of Jesus' lifetime. Several authors of the New Testament actually met Jesus in person. By 315 AD, Christians began to recognize the Scripture that makes up the New Testament as sacred writing. The New Testament was believed to have been written originally in Greek on papyrus. It was copied so many times that thousands of ancient manuscripts still exist today.

The first Bible was printed in 1455. The Bible was translated into the English language in 1526. In spite of the many versions available, the New International Version (NIV) is a top-seller. It was developed using over 100

scholars working from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text.

Today we can be as sure as ever that the Bible we read is not from men, but is actually the word of God as is stated in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe." –1 Thessalonians 2:13

## Praying the Bible

According to Ephesians 6:18, we should “...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...” Besides praying dreams, thoughts, and lists, we can also pray our Bibles. Here are a couple of ways:

**Promise Book.** In this way to pray the Bible, you find a promise in the Bible to support your request. For instance, I pray for healing in my back because Isaiah 53:5 says, “...by his wounds we are healed.”

**Conversationally.** In this way, God speaks first. You read along in the book of Matthew and stop at Matthew 5:28 “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Your prayer might sound like, Forgive me, Lord, for looking at people with lust. Help me to see with pure eyes.

This is just the beginning. There are many more ways to pray your Bible. If you have kids, make sure they have their own Bible so they can know the promises of God and engage in their own prayer conversations with Him.

When you pray God's will according to His Word, you put God ahead of your own desires. He will be eager to hear and answer these types of prayers because they have a pure motive. This is a wonderful way for you (and your family) to draw near to God.

## Prayer Lists

1 Timothy 2:1-4 states, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

People who have a good relationship with the Lord spend lots of time in prayer each day. One way to draw closer to God in prayer is to expand the number of people and things you pray for by writing a list. Some suggestions include:

- 1) Family (spouse, children, parents, grandparents, cousins, etc.)
- 2) Leaders (church leadership, political officials, your country’s leaders)

- 3) Authority (parents, teachers, bosses)
- 4) Friends and Neighbors (with particular attention to the unsaved)
- 5) People who are depressed, hospitalized, or ill
- 6) People affected by death, divorce, or other stressful life events
- 7) People with substance abuse problems
- 8) Professionals with dangerous jobs (soldiers, police, firefighters)
- 9) The homeless or needy
- 10) Nations
- 11) Pets, strays, and endangered animals
- 12) Your enemies

God wants all to be saved and live a life of holiness. Beyond that, He wants them to enjoy physical, emotional, and mental health. By praying into the lives of other people, you are

learning the will of God. Your words do not need to be fancy. God will see your heart.

Don't limit your prayer to your own list. Consider how God calls us to pray as we go about our day. Has an old friend come to your mind suddenly? Or maybe there is someone in your family that comes to your remembrance repeatedly. These could be God's invitation to pray for this person. If you have an impression on what you could pray for them such as financial need or health issues, then pray for that. If you are unsure, call them and tell them they have been on your mind lately and you wonder how they have been.

Your prayer could sound something like this:  
Lord, thank You that You are our Provider. I trust You to bring provision to this person. I believe you want this person to be healed. Give them complete healing in their body. Thank You, Lord, for hearing my prayer. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Try this! Close your eyes and relax. Ask the Lord to show you someone who needs your prayer today. God is good and wants the best for you and the ones you love. Step out in faith to pray according to thoughts influenced by the One who knows what we need most. Your relationship with God is going to deepen when you respond to the conversation He invites you to partake in.

Get your whole household involved in prayer. Ask your spouse to pray for certain people according to their needs. If you have kids, teach them to pray and hold them accountable for their prayer time every day by asking, “Did you say your prayers?”

## Dreams & Prayer

“‘We both had dreams,’ they answered, ‘but there is no one to interpret them.’ Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams.’” —Genesis 40:8

We all know we need to spend more time with God in prayer, but sometimes we struggle to know what to pray. The Bible tells us that dreams are significant because God uses them to speak to us sometimes. One reason He speaks to us through dreams is to call us to pray. Here is a step-by-step procedure to begin praying based on your dreams:

1. Before you drift off to sleep, ask God to give you dreams only from Him.
2. After you awaken, write down your dream. Be sure to include every person, every emotion, and symbols.

3. Ask God to help you interpret it.
4. Look for symbols in the dream. Use a Christian dream dictionary if necessary. (There is a free dictionary online at [cddictionary.com](http://cddictionary.com).)
5. Pray into the emotions, people, and symbols shown in the dream.

#### SAMPLE

Dream: I tried to go upstairs, but I could not because this giant shadowy hand of the devil was holding me down.

Symbols: STEPS – Signs of spiritual progress.

Prayer: Lord, I pray Satan would not impede my spiritual progress but You would make my walk easy for You have said “my burden is easy and my yoke is light.” Thank You, Lord. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

It may sound complicated, but it will become easier with practice. Give it a try.

-ALWAYS use discernment. Do not do anything or pray for anything if it does not agree with the Bible.

-ALWAYS use Christian dream dictionaries.

After you have prayed your dreams for awhile, your dreams will increase in frequency and become less focused on you and more steered by the Almighty Father. Who and what will God have you pray for in your unusual dreams? Pursue the interpretation to hear God's message more clearly. In that way, you will draw closer to God. May God lead you closer to Him in your waking and sleeping hours. God bless!

## Spiritual Gifts

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.” -1Corinthians 12:4

Do you believe in spiritual gifts? Some Christians do not believe all of the gifts of the Spirit can be exercised in modern day. Other Christians use them to build up the kingdom of God on a regular basis. I believe God’s power is limitless and He can do all things through us.

What is your spiritual gift? There are some fun question/answer tests a Christian can take to see what spiritual gifts they excel in. These tests can be beneficial for Christians looking for a place to serve in a church. However, it is important to note that as Christians we have offered our bodies as vessels for God to use. Therefore, we may be called into action as a situation dictates. Therefore, we should always be open to the Holy Spirit’s use of any spiritual

gift through us (even if we do not normally excel at that gift).

Do you use your spiritual gifts to build up the kingdom of God? Several spiritual gifts offer us the privilege of acting as God's mouthpiece like prophecy, words of knowledge, and words of wisdom. All Christians receive communication from God in some way or another. Some receive impressions about things they should say or do. Others may hear an audible voice. And yet others believe God uses some combination of the two. We are in obedience to God's Word when we relay God's communication to other people for Matthew 10:27 states, "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."

Are you effective with your spiritual gift? If we are not grounded in God's Word, we are susceptible to false prophecy—which hurts the body of Christ. Studying our Bibles cannot be

shrugged off. It is critical. Even interpreting the Bible with no outside input can be dangerous. You must study what the Holy Spirit is communicating through other Christians. My own writing reflects the influence of Dr. Charles Stanley, Joyce Meyer, and my own beloved pastors Shawn Craig (of Philips, Craig, & Dean), and Josiah Serra in my writing. If I listed all of the amazing godly pastors and authors I have studied, we would be here all day. Stay in the vine that is Christ, His Word, and in fellowship with His people.

Prayer: Lord, I pray You would bestow spiritual gifts on Your children. Help them to know, use, and be effective with spiritual gifts for Your glory. We thank You and praise You that You know how to give good gifts to those who ask for them. In Christ's Name, Amen.

## Physical Healing

Genesis 1:31 states, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good....” God’s original plan for man in the Garden of Eden was a life without sickness or disease. Sin brought these things into the world. The Old Testament records several healings brought about by God. Additionally, Jesus spent a great deal of time healing the sick. It’s pretty clear that God desires for us to walk around in healthy bodies.

All Bible-believing Christians should agree God is capable of healing individuals. If you believe God wants you well, nothing should stand in your way! Consider the following tools:

- 1) Prayer: Begin praying for yourself. James 5:14 also tells us to call on others for pray for physical healing. Prayer chains can be extremely effective.

2) Scripture repetition: Some Christians say they were healed by repeating daily healing Scriptures like: "...by his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

3) Gift of healing: Healing is listed as a spiritual gift in 1Cor. 12:9. Some famous televangelists claim to have this gift, but they are not the only ones. Ask around.

4) Laying on of hands: Having a stranger lay hands on you may feel strange, but Jesus did it and brought about healing (see Mark 6:5). Christians who want healing should invite God to heal through the hands of other Christians.

5) Listening to praise/worship music: Hospitalized people have credited praise and worship music for bringing healing to their bodies.

This list of ways God can bring about healing should not take the place of medical care. Doctors are not gods, but God can choose to heal you through a doctor's care! Remember God loves you and wants to give you a healthy body.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the physical healing of Your people. Thank You that You want us to have life and have it to the fullest. We praise You that You are the Great Physician. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Increase your faith in physical healing by reading amazing testimonies of how God has already healed His people. Read the six healing testimonies in Draw Near's forever free ebook called *Never Forsaken: A Testimony Collection*.

## God Is For You

Christians sometimes go through periods of loss or tragedy. In that time, some of us might ask “Why, God?” or start to think God has turned against us and is causing these terrible things to happen to us. Then, we become angry at God. With anger between us and the Lord, we will begin to feel distant and wonder how we can draw near to Christ. We can get closer to God by remembering the truth of God’s Word.

We all ask this question: “Why, God?” It sounds innocent enough (and sometimes we ask it with a pure heart). But if we really searched our hearts, we would find that most of the time we are really blaming God. By asking, we are insinuating that it is God’s fault for either making this horrible event happen (or letting it happen).

Is God at fault? God's way is perfect (Psalm 18:30) so He does not deserve our blame. God works everything that happens for our good. If you are in the regular habit of asking God why He allowed awful things to happen in your life, try to stop thinking "Why, God?" Instead, remind yourself that God is working everything together for your good.

Notice how God did not cause Job's tragedies. Rather, Satan had launched a full-scale attack against Job! Christians must remember we are at war with evil forces. Satan and his demons still use a variety of tactics in modern day times. The enemy aims to discourage us, distance us from God, and turn some from Him completely.

Christians discuss the importance of faith in God all of the time. In the book of Job, we read about a time when God had faith in a man. In Job 1:8 God said this about Job, "....There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

After Satan attacked, we read in Job 1:22 that “... Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.”

I think God has faith in you. In fact, I believe He has said something wonderful about you. He is probably proud of the way you handled tragedy and held onto your faith. Consider the reward you have in heaven for overcoming this difficult time while still maintaining a strong love for God.

If we have allowed ourselves to blame God, we might also feel some anger toward Him. Whether you acknowledge anger at God or not, the Lord knows it exists. He loves you and does not want it getting in between you and Him. Anger must be dealt with, and it cannot be managed until it is acknowledged. Take a moment now to think of what lingering anger you have aimed at God.

Confess it by praying, “Lord, I confess I am angry at you for \_\_\_\_\_. “ Ask forgiveness for it by saying, “Lord, please forgive me for my unjustified anger. I know You only desire what’s best for me.”

It may take some time for deep anger to be completely released, but you are on your way to healing from that unrighteous anger. Try to remember to deal with anger at God as soon as it rises up within you. Never hide it. God knows how you feel, and He is eager to listen and forgive. Hang in there! God loves you.

Prayer: Lord, Thank You that You love us so much. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for us and sending Your Spirit to us so that we maintain a supernatural strength in times of loss and tragedy. We praise Your awesome Name. In Christ’s Name, Amen.

## Contracts

Hebrews 9:15 states, “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...” God is a god of promises. He makes a lot of them, and He keeps them all. While God does not want us to put rituals before Him, we can read in the Bible that rituals have a place in our relationship with Him. He is a God of covenants and contracts and of written promises.

It seems right that as children of God we would also enter into contracts and written promises with Him. What kind of contract would You enter? I am thinking our contracts (or written promises) might include promises to give up certain sins like misusing alcohol, sex, drugs, food, etc. It might include taking a step to becoming more Christlike like promising to volunteer time, to tithe or be more generous, or to read our Bible more.

Hebrews 13:4 states, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure...” Is God calling you to a life of purity? Maybe you are unmarried and tempted to have premarital sex although you want to wait....or maybe you’re someone who views pornography but wants to make a commitment to stop...or perhaps you have been cheating on your spouse and feel ashamed before God. Whatever your circumstance, God is waiting for you to make a real commitment to Him to stop.

Some families encourage their children to enter into a purity contract to refrain from premarital sex, then give them purity rings to remind them of their promise.

If you have decided to wait until you are married and have never entered into a contract, I encourage you to do so right now. Your written promise might look like this: I promise

to God, my future spouse, and myself to keep my mind and body sexually pure until marriage.

If you want to promise to stop viewing pornography, you may want to make a slightly different promise like this: I promise to God, my (future) spouse, and myself to keep my eyes, mind, and body from sexual immorality and pornography.

If you struggle with faithfulness, consider this promise: I promise to God, my spouse, and myself to stop all adulterous affairs, confess my unfaithfulness to my spouse, and never enter into another affair.

These are short samples of what your sexual purity contract could be. You can personalize your promise and include Scripture and details or keep it simple. Just remember to type, print, and sign your very own purity contract. It could be the beginning of something beautiful. I pray you will have strength and success on your path to purity.

Moderation commitments are for areas of your life that need more discipline. Moderation contracts should not be used for known sinful behavior. Moderation contracts are for normal activities that may require more discipline in your life. Christians feel convicted by simple activities that are out of balance like overconsumption of food, drinking excess amounts of caffeine, and oversleeping.

Your written promise may look like, “I promise God and myself to consume food only for nutrition and not out of boredom or comfort.” It could contain more details like a promise to consume more fruits and vegetables or encouraging verses. (Serious eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia can be life-threatening. Seek professional counseling instead of contracts for eating disorders.)

Another example may be “I promise God and myself to enjoy a suitable amount of rest in my life to renew and refresh my body. I promise not to sleep to avoid problems. I choose to embrace joy and life by rising in a joyful mood

and tackling the day with God.” It might include a goal bedtime and wake-up time or a limit. Your promise may include a promise not to be late to work by pressing snooze.

Over caffeinated? “I promise God and myself to drink only 2 cups of caffeinated coffee/tea/energy drink per day. I trust God to give me energy to do all of the things He wants me to do today.”

Your moderation contract may be something completely different. Listen and pray for what it is God is asking you to be more disciplined about. Just remember to type or write your promise and sign your name to it.

There are easy ways to enrich your life, the lives of others, and your own relationship with God. They could include decisions to become more generous with your time and money. Some examples would be to attend church more often or to give your time by volunteering your service or to contribute money to needy people.

Sometimes all we need to do is change our attitude around. Instead of thinking of some things as chores, we should consider them opportunities. Think of all the opportunities these promises would provide for you to meet people....people who could become your spouse or your best friend. I hope that motivates your attitude to change, but I hope your deepest motivation to enter a contract is love. Let it be love....love for God that you want to become more like His Son and love for His people that you want to help them realize there is a God through your generosity.

Your contract might read, "I promise to God and myself to attend church every Sunday that I am not sick or out of town." If you already attend church, maybe you could promise to invite at least one person per month or season or year.

It might say, "I promise to God and myself to volunteer my service to at least one event per year." It could be something specific like

volunteering to act as a childcare worker at your church or in your community.

Your written promise might say, “I promise to God and myself to give to every person/organization who requests money...even if it is just one dollar.” Your contract may involve finding one organization where you give regularly. It may state something about giving things instead of money.

These are just examples. Feel free to write your own enrichment promise about whatever God has called you to do. Either write or type and print your promises. Just remember to sign your name. Then enjoy your new enriched life.

REMEMBER your salvation does NOT depend on your holiness. Jesus’ blood on the cross has purchased your salvation. These written promises only act as a tool to help you draw near to the Lord with an increasingly holy life. It is an outward display of a renewed heart and mind. It is a helpful reminder to our flesh to

yield to the Holy Spirit as He guides us into a more holy life.

## Christian Media

James 4:8 says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” Maybe you are seeking God’s will for your life and are unsure how to follow His path. If you want to hear God more clearly, I challenge you to sacrifice some of the time you spend on non-Christian media and choose Christian instead. Imagine how much your relationship with God would improve if you began listening to Christian music, watching Christian television, and reading Christian literature.

People claim certain Christian songs helped them to overcome temptation when struggling against addiction. The Bible tells us to “...sing for joy to the Lord...” in Psalm 95: 1. In fact, lots of non-Christians have come to Christ by listening to Christian music. Once you discover what a difference Christian music makes in your life, you will be ready to incorporate Christian television into your schedule. You will see how

it is almost like Jesus is standing in your living room offering the solutions and guidance you have been praying for all these years. Another great way to draw near to God is through Christian literature. That term covers a variety of things including The Holy Bible, non-fiction books that teach us, fiction books written to touch our hearts, devotionals that guide our prayer and thought life, beautiful poetry books, uplifting magazines, and more!

Once you are engaged in Christian media, you will be more prepared to share your own talent. Whether it is creative writing, art, photography, music, or something else, God wants you to use it for His kingdom. Don't let fear or pride stand in the way. Gather up all of your patience, perseverance, and inspiration. I pray you will draw nearer to God when you take a step of faith and create like Him!

## Note to Readers

I have not written from the high and mighty position of having done everything right. I have written from the humble view of having made mistakes and watching the Lord make everything work together for my good. I am a broken person myself and write from experience. My life began a healing process from the moment I was saved. I started at a place of needing healing and then learning God's deliverance in many areas of my life.

I think we all hear from the Lord in various ways. He will often guide us, remind us to pray, and sometimes give us an encouraging word for someone else. I happen to hear the Lord pretty often about a variety of topics. For me, hearing from the Lord is not like having a magic eight-ball. It's more like being His secretary. I pray before I write that it would be anointed for His purposes and say what He wants to tell readers. I am never sure how much is inspired or not. I

do take into consideration comments and suggestions made by readers and will add to or clarify what was written based on their reactions. I would like to thank my friends at [Christianchat.com](http://Christianchat.com) for their willingness to read and interact with me.

You may have noticed influences from some of my favorite television pastors like Charles Stanley, Joyce Meyer, and John Paul Jackson. Additionally, my writing reflects some of the teachings own beloved pastors like Shawn Craig and Josiah Serra. Most of all, I hope this publication is a reflection of knowing God, hearing Him, and studying His Word. Thank you for reading *Gift at the Altar*. Stay blessed in our Lord and Savior's love!

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