

What Is Wrong??

What Is Right??

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Purpose

Why am I writing this book? What purpose do I have for doing this? I have worked with young people for the better part of the last 30 years. I hope that makes me qualified to understand what young people go through. I have watched a lot of young people grow up. Some did well with their lives while others didn't. I can say that most of those who did well had an understanding of two things. They understood about having a relationship with God that was real. They had His help. The second thing was that they understood about right and wrong and how to tell the difference. They were committed to following the right way. Can knowing the difference between right and wrong make that much difference in your life? After all, isn't right and wrong just everyone's opinion? Doesn't everyone have their own ideas of what is right and what is wrong? Seems like it? When you talk to different people about the difference between the two you sure can get a lot of different answers. To answer this question, think for a minute of some of the people you know that are having a hard time in their lives because they have made wrong decisions. Maybe they are trapped in addiction, drugs or drinking. Maybe they are pregnant. Maybe they have situations in their lives that are just down right scary to have to go through. I'm sure that they didn't just wake up one morning and decide to go out and ruin their lives. I'm sure they didn't choose the outcome. So how did their problems come about? Maybe it was because they lost sight of the difference between wrong and right. Maybe it was because they drifted into things that weren't good for them because they lost sight of this. I hope and I pray that when you read this book it can help to guide you away from some of the things that happen that destroy so many young people. I pray that you can learn the difference between wrong and right and this changes your lives.

Too many times it is easy just to drift through life. We tend to follow whoever is in front of us, and we hope that they are going in the right direction. We don't really know.

Your life and your future are too important for you to just drift and follow. You need to have direction in your life. You need to stand for something or you will fall for anything. Sometimes we put too much emphasis in having friends and being accepted in a crowd. Who cares what crowd, just any crowd will do. When young people get in trouble do you know who automatically is blamed? Their friends. I hear parents say every day, “My child wouldn’t have gotten into this or that situation if it hadn’t been for their friends or the crowd that they were hanging around with”. They forget that you can’t blame what happens to you on other people. What you choose to do is what you choose. That can’t be blamed on others. Still there is a little truth in what they say. If you don’t have a sense of what is right and what is wrong, then it is easy to get in with the wrong crowd and become a follower. You will eventually wind up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe this has already happened to you. If it has then you know what I am talking about. If it has, then you’ll know that you can’t blame the crowd or your friends. You are the one who did it. It was your choice.

So it is my hope that this book helps you to stay on the right track with your life. It is so easy to get side tracked. Everybody is out there saying, “Hey try this. It is great. Hey, you need to go this way. It is definitely the way to go. This is the thing that you need to do.” Every day we have choices that we are asked to make. Lots of times we can get on the wrong road because we haven’t made up our minds which roads are the best ones to take. We really don’t sit down and think about which ones are the right ones, so when someone says, hey this is it, we just follow them. We let life happen to us. We don’t think things through. We hear about how a lot of young people made mistakes because they made wrong decisions. I’m not sure that everybody who has problems made a wrong decision. They just failed to make any decision at all. They didn’t decide on a course of action that would help them have a good life. They didn’t decide what was right and what was wrong. They just let whatever happens, happen however.

They just let whatever wind was blowing that particular day blow them along, even if it was a bad wind which was blowing in entirely the wrong direction. I hope that as you read this book you see the importance of taking hold of your life and your future.

I'm not writing this book to scare you to death. There is a lot of pressure on young people. I see more teens today with stress related problems, anxiety attacks, and just plain old fear. It is a scary world out there even for adults. But you don't have to be afraid. If you find a relationship with God, you will realize that you don't have to be afraid. God is your heavenly Father. You won't have to be afraid because you know how much He loves you. You know that He will take care of you. It's OK to get serious about life. You can do that and not have a heart attack. I'll tell you more about how to do this. We'll also talk about how to get to know God and have a relationship with Him that is real. You can get to know Him and you can know that He knows you and loves you. We'll talk about what it means to be saved, and what it is that we are saved from. We'll talk about how to tell wrong from right. A lot of young people are genuinely confused about this. They want to do right, but aren't sure what right is. It is hard to make up your mind to run a race as hard as you can if you have no idea which direction to run in. I won't tell you my opinion about this. I will talk about what God's Word says about the subject. Also, it is one thing to know the difference between right and wrong and another to be strong enough to do what is right. We'll talk about how God can strengthen you to be able to do right. We'll also talk about people in the Bible. Some of them messed up their lives and some had a life that totally rocked their world. Keep reading.

I can remember when I was a teenager how my grandmother taught us about right and wrong. She would hold up two fingers and put her other hand between them. Her one hand would separate her two fingers so that they were distinctly separate. She would say, "There are two sides. I don't care about what everyone else says, there is a right.

There is a wrong, and there is a difference between the two.” That has been a lot of years ago. Since then this world has gotten really confused about this subject. Lots of churches have gotten this confused. I’ve talked to a lot of young people who have lost sight of what is wrong and what is right and they really don’t know which is which. That is because everywhere you go people have a different opinion. But just because everyone has a different opinion, that doesn’t change the truth. There is a black and there is a white. There is a day and there is a night. There is a wrong and there is a right. As the old saying goes, “If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything”. I have watched so many young people make choices that wrecked their lives. They got caught in a crowd that got caught up in doing wrong. They did wrong. All the sudden they found themselves in situations that destroyed their whole world in only just a few moments. I believe that is because they really didn’t see the difference between right and wrong and if they did, they lacked the strength to stand against what is wrong. How can you tell right from wrong? Who sets the rules? Does it really matter? What difference does it make? When you know right from wrong, how can you find the strength to do what is right? Are you alone when you stand up for what is right? I want to try to help you to find the answers to these questions.

A lot of people say that there is no use to write a book like this for today’s young people. I actually had some people tell me this. They said that the young people today don’t care. That they are “too far gone past knowing right from wrong to care”. I don’t believe that this is true. Like I said earlier, I have taught for over 30 years. (Hey, don’t rub it in. I feel old enough already. ☺) Times have changed. People have changed. But I am definitely not convinced that all young people can be put in this category of being hopelessly lost. What do you think? What about you? Are you willing to try to do your best to become the best person that you can be? Are you willing to make a change in your life for the better? Are you willing to make a difference in the lives of people?

Are you willing to make a difference in the lives of those around you, the people you care about? If you are willing, then keep on reading.

I want to challenge you to do something. Just like in anything in life, what you put into something is what you get out of it. Just like in school. If you apply yourself and try, you will learn. If you put yourself into it you'll get something out of it. What would you like to change about yourself and your life? Are you willing to put something into changing it? If you are willing to put something into it then it is guaranteed that you will get something out of it. In this book I will be talking about principles that have worked for thousands of years since the beginning of time. They will certainly work for you. Don't read this book just because it is a school assignment and you have to. Expect something when you read it. It is about God's Word. God promises in His Word that when we read his Word and we put those things to work in our lives, it will make a difference. Try it and see for yourself.

Chapter 1.

What Does It Mean-Doing Right?

When I talk about doing right, some people assume that I am just talking about not doing the “biggies”. They think that I mean not drinking, not doing drugs, not having sex if you aren’t married, not smoking. Some people think that saying no to those things is all there is to the decisions that have to be made about doing right and wrong. I guess a lot of people think that if they don’t do the big things then they are OK in every thing else. Here is a thought. Are you only called on to do right when those kinds of things come up? What about the other things that you face everyday? Let’s talk about some of the things that are not “biggies” but that can shape your life all the same.

The Bible talks about the little foxes spoiling the vine. That means the little things that can mess us up. One example that I can think about is lying. I guess as a teacher that is one that I deal with a lot. That and cheating which is really a form of lying. Did you hear the story about the boy who cried wolf? You may have heard it when you were a kid. It tells about a boy who was a shepherd. He would get bored up there sitting with the sheep and he would think up ways to have a little action. He would yell out, wolf!! Everybody would come running. Sheep would scatter. People would yell and freak out. He thought it was great fun. He did it several times.... Until. Until the day that the wolf really came. He yelled for help, but nobody came. They thought he was doing the same thing that he had before. Because he had lied so much, no one paid any attention to him when he told the truth. If we aren’t careful, that can happen to us when we lie. One day it might be important that people believe us, but nobody does because we have lied. It is that way with anything that we do wrong. If we don’t do what is right, if we only half way try to do our best, then one day it will cost us.

I was talking with someone that worked in the guidance office in the public school on the day I wrote this.

We were talking about how it seemed like the word “morals” was a word that isn’t understood any more. When you have morals, it means that you are concerned with doing what is right. It isn’t just that you don’t do drugs, or don’t drink, or other things like that. It means that on an everyday basis you are concerned with doing the best that you can do and being the best you can be. It means that you know the difference between right and wrong and your decisions show this. One of the places in the Bible that people often go to find out what they should and shouldn’t do is the Ten Commandments. Everybody these days, even people who don’t read their Bibles, knows about the Ten Commandments. They have become even more known because of the government’s decision to take them out of public buildings. I think that it is sad, and more than a little scary, that our government wants to take down the most basic and complete rule for moral standards that there is. What are the Ten Commandments? When Moses led the children of Israel in to the desert to escape from Egypt, he went on a mountain. While he was there God gave him a list of rules that the Israelites were to follow. God did this so that they would have a healthy and happy life if they kept these guides. What do the Ten Commandments say? Let’s read them. They are found in Exodus 20:1. I haven’t written them out word for word like they are in the Bible. I just summarized them.

I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. That means that we aren’t to worship anybody or anything other than God. A lot of people get messed up in religions that aren’t true because they forget this commandment.

II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. This means that we don’t worship statues or idols. There are lots of religions today where people worship a statue or idol. There is a lot of ways of thinking that are tied up with these religions. Be careful of any kind of thinking that is related to Eastern religions. I’m talking about karate, meditation, and other similar things. They may seem harmless, but they aren’t.

These things have in them a way of thinking that comes from Hindu, Buddhists, and other religions. Most of these people worship statues and idols. Avoid that. That is what God is saying here.

III. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. This is something that is done a lot if we aren't careful. It means don't cuss by saying God's name. It means calling on God's name in a disrespectful way when you really aren't calling on Him at all.

IV. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. That means go to church and keep Sunday to think about God. Also it talks about resting on Sunday. That is a good healthy practice, physically and mentally, and spiritually. Doctors today talk about how this is a way to stay healthy and have less stress.

V. Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land... WOW. Did you know that how you treat your Mom and Dad might have a lot to do with how old you will be when you die? Think about it. How many times have you known someone to do something in rebellion to what their parents wanted and they died because of it.

VI. Thou shalt not kill.

VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery. That means don't have sex with someone who is married if you aren't the one that is married to them. The Bible says don't commit fornication either. That means don't have sex with anybody if you aren't married to them.

VIII. Thou shalt not steal.

IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness. This means don't lie. This means don't cheat, either. That is a form of lying. By the way, there is no such thing as a little white lie. If you tell something that isn't true, then you have lied.

X. Thou shalt not covet. That means you shouldn't want what other people have. Be content with what you have. There is a word of wisdom here. Some people spend a lifetime wishing that they were like this or that person, wishing they had something someone else had, or wishing they could be someone else. Bottom line, they aren't happy with themselves.

God made you to be you. Nobody can be you like you can. It is important that you learn to see yourself as special, and that you be proud of being you.

These are just 10 simple rules. God gave them to Moses to give to His people. I have heard doctors, psychiatrists, and many other professionals say that if we live by these 10 simple rules, we will have a healthy, happy, and successful life.

One of the main reasons why it is important to decide to do right in all that you do is so that you can have peace of mind. I know a lot of people who struggle with mental and emotional problems because they have settled for doing wrong. They constantly feel bad for what they have done. They have no peace of mind. When they lay their head on their pillow at night, they have to think about what they have done. When you choose to do right, you can have peace with God, peace with others, and most of all you can find peace with yourself.

One of the best rules to go by in choosing what to do is this. Ask yourself, “What would Jesus do? Would Jesus go here? Would Jesus say this? Would Jesus do this? How would Jesus react to this? What would He do if He was faced with this same situation?” If you ask yourself this before you act it will change your life. Everyday you’ll have to choose what is right and what is wrong. Everywhere you go (work, home, school, personal life) your success will be dependent on whether you do right. If you lie, steal, cheat, have poor attitudes at home, you will have a rocky home life. If you do the same at school, you won’t have peace there for sure. If you do these things on the job, then you will get fired.

I see a lot of young people who haven’t learned how to have good moral character on the job. Because of this they lose a job, go to another, lose that one, go to the next and lose that. All the while they blame the people at their workplaces for their problems. I’ll hear them say, “If my boss hadn’t done this or that, I would still be working there. If everybody at my job had just acted right, I would still be working there.”

All the while it was their own problem that caused them to lose all those jobs. If you don't have good morals, if you don't choose to do what is right, it will affect every part of your life.

There is a booklet that we do for our job training classes. Many of you have done this booklet. It is called "Jobology 101". It is a good booklet about how to prepare for jobs and careers. The booklet talks about how having good ethics, morals, and values are important in getting and keeping jobs. This is so true. I know lots of young people who lose their jobs simply because they don't understand the difference between wrong and right. They don't see how important it is. If you want to be successful in the work place, you have to have good morals. You have to choose to do what is right. Here is a chapter from "Jobology 101" that talks about this. Patty Moore wrote this booklet. She did a really good job in this book explaining what you need to do to be able to get a job and keep it. This is from *Chapter 4. Ethics, Morals, and Values*. This chapter talks about how important it is in the work world to have good morals and values. It discusses how important it is to do right. In this chapter she talks about how we need to have maturity, a good attitude, respect, show teamwork, commitment, loyalty, honesty, discipline, love, truth, obedience. She talked about how it is important not to steal, or to be jealous. Sounds a little like the Ten Commandments. Everywhere in life it is important to do what is right. If you want to have a successful happy life that is full of peace, do what is right. If you want to have a happy home, do what is right. If you want to do well in the work place, do what is right. If you want to be proud of who you are and what you have accomplished, do what is right.

Doing right should be your choice. What I mean by saying this is- if you don't do right, you will suffer the consequences of your decisions. If you steal, you can go to jail. If you lie, no one will believe you. If you have wrong attitudes, no one will like you. If you cheat, no one will trust you. If you don't have good work ethics, then no one can depend on you. You will have consequences for doing wrong.

But you need to decide to do right because it is the best thing you can do. You need to decide to do right because of the benefits that it will bring you in your life. You need to decide to do right to be able please God. You need to make the conscience choice to do right. Don't just drift through life doing whatever then suffering the consequences for the times that you do wrong.

Have you ever thought about who came up with all those rules for doing right? Have you ever wondered who it was that decided what was right and what was wrong? Let's talk about that in the next chapter.

Chapter 2.

Who Decides?

These are some of the questions that a lot of young people ask me when we are talking about what is wrong and what is right. Just who decides what is wrong and what is right? What is the difference between the two and how do we tell? For that matter, who decides what is true as far as religion goes? What is wrong and right there? Everyone knows there are more religions out there than we can even know about. All of these people say that what they believe is right. People like the Moslems die for their God. Their beliefs are certainly different than ours as Christians. Some of them think that the way to serve God is to kill Christians. Who is to say which belief is right and which is wrong? Even in the Christian world, there are so many different churches, all with different beliefs. I have heard some young people tell me that one reason they don't go to church is that they are afraid that they might get into a church that doesn't believe the truth. All this is so confusing that they don't know which way to go, so they don't go anywhere. Some feel like they feel when going into a huge candy store and they don't pick anything, because it is too overwhelming to try to decide on something else. They don't pick out anything because there are too many choices. How are you supposed to tell the difference between wrong and right churches? Between wrong and right religions? What does this have to do with being able to tell the difference between right and wrong? The world will tell you that it is wrong to judge between the two. But if you don't, then you will wind up in something that can destroy you, so you had better be able to tell the difference. How can you tell what is the truth?

A lot of people will tell you that there isn't a real truth. They say that every thing has an element of truth in it, so it doesn't matter what you believe. They will tell you that there isn't really a wrong and right, that it is your choice to decide this. They will tell you that everybody's religion is right.

That everybody's religion is right no matter how strange it is. That whatever you believe is OK. They say that there are no absolute truths, so we just have to believe something and hope for the best. They say that what is right for you might not be right for me, and what is wrong for you might not be wrong for me. That makes everything even more confusing. Are they right? Where can you find the answers to all this?

There is one book that has been around since the beginning of time. It has been on the bestseller list for thousands of years, and if you'll check it out, it is still on the bestseller list today. For real. It has a unique history like no other book that has ever been written. What are some facts that prove the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible was written for over a 1,500 year span for over 40 generations by over 40 authors from every walk of life. It was written in many different places, and at many different times. It was written on three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its subject matter includes hundreds of subjects. Subjects that now can't be agreed on when mentioned or discussed. Yet there is an agreement between the writers that could only exist because God's Spirit inspired them. They agree as if one author had written what they wrote. There is a continuity that runs throughout the book. Another fact, it was written on material that perishes, especially the Dead Sea Scrolls written on papyrus, yet they were preserved miraculously for thousands of years. Also, the scrolls had to be written by hand for thousands of years, but every copy agreed. Those who copied it were especially chosen for that task. They kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word, and paragraph. These men even counted the syllables to make sure that it was copied correctly. Another fact that proves the Bible is the Word of God is this. No other book has been attacked like the Bible, yet through time it has stood every test and still stands as the Word of God today. These are only a few of the reasons why we know that the Bible is God's Word.

Let's read what the Bible has to say about itself:

Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." From the beginning of time to the end of time, God's Word will stand.

I Peter 1:25 tells us, "But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Jesus said this about the Bible in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Jeremiah 15:16 says this about God's Word, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts."

In II Timothy 3:16 we read why the Bible was given to us. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

David in the books of Psalms talks a lot about the Bible, God's Word. In Psalms 19:8 we read, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy word is a lamp unto feet, and a light unto my path."

Psalm 119:47-48 says, "And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved: and I will meditate in thy statutes."

The main reason why the Bible was written is found in John 20:31, "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus

is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

God’s Word will last forever, even though from the beginning of time there has been a battle against it. Even though many have tried through time to destroy it, it still stands as a number one best seller. Why? Because God said in His Word that it would. So it is and so it has been. What other book comes with that kind of guarantee? Why can the Bible make the kind of promises that it does? Can another book say what this book says about itself? What makes the Bible different from other books? The main difference has to do with its author. As we mention before, the Bible was written over a 1,500 year span for over 40 generations by over 40 authors from every walk of life. Yet every part of it from start to finish agrees. All of the separate parts of it that were written by all those authors agree just as if one author had written it. It is written about controversial issues. Churches today can’t even agree on the issues discussed in the Bible. Yet all of those authors from all those thousands of years agreed. The neat thing about this is that most of them didn’t have the rest of the Bible to read before they wrote their part. The Bible as the whole book that it is today didn’t come about until most of the different authors wrote their separate parts. Then it was put together later. So each author wasn’t looking at what others had written and adding to it. How could it be that their part agreed with what was already written?

Even though there were several men who helped write the Bible, God is the author. That is why throughout the Bible it is referred to as being God’s Word. He told them what to write. His Spirit led them to write what they did. The book of Jeremiah is a part of the Old Testament. Jeremiah 36:2 tells how the Bible was written. In this verse God tells Jeremiah to get a scroll and write down the words that God spoke to him. That is how it was written. God told people what to write, and they wrote it. Ezekiel 1:3 tells about how the book of Ezekiel was written. “The Word of God came expressly unto Ezekiel, the priest...and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.”

Here are some more verses that tell how the Bible was written. Acts 1:16 tells us about something that happened in Acts, “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.” The Holy Ghost will speak through and to people. That is how the Bible was written. In II Peter 1:21 we read, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” God’s Spirit told people what to write and they did. That is why the Bible is such a different book.

I’ve had young people ask me this. Anyone can say that God told them to write something, and then just write anything. How do we know that this might be what happened? The hundreds of prophecies that are in the Bible prove that God’s Spirit led people what to write. What are prophecies? Prophecies were written about an event before it happened. They tell sometimes hundreds of years before an event what is going to happen. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Bible. There are hundreds of prophecies that are just about Jesus, His life on earth and how He died. We can even read in the Bible about things that are happening today. How can this be so? God knows everything. Time means nothing to God. He is so big that in the past He could see the future. He knows your future as well as He knows the day you were born. He knows all the details about you. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. Matthew 10:30 says, “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” He is different than us. In Isaiah 55:9, God tells us, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Time, future or past, is all the same to God. He knows everything. So thousands of years ago He was able to tell the Bible’s writers what is going to happen even today.

Let’s talk about some of the prophecies in the Bible that were written about Jesus. These are only just a few, there were over 300 prophecies that were written about Him alone.

Keep in mind that these verses were written sometimes hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. Micah 5:2 said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. We read in the Christmas story that this was so and how that came about. I am sure that the king that declared that they should go to their families' birth city to be taxed didn't read the scriptures and decide to make this decree so that this verse would be true. Psalms 41:9 tells us that Jesus' friend would be the one to betray him and deliver him to the soldiers to kill him. We know this is true because Judas was a friend of Jesus. Isaiah 50:6 says that they would spit on Jesus and pluck his hair. We read in Mark, written hundreds of years before, that is what happened. Isaiah 53:5 tells us that Jesus would have stripes. Hundreds of years after that was written the Roman soldiers whipped Jesus with a whip leaving stripes on His back. Psalms 69:21 says that they would give Jesus vinegar to drink when He was on the cross. We read in the book of John that they did. In Psalms 34:20 it says that not any of Jesus' bones would be broken. At the time when Jesus was crucified, it was customary for the Romans to break the legs of those who were hanging on the cross. The Bible says in John that the soldiers didn't break Jesus' legs. These are only a few of the prophecies about Jesus in the Bible that came to pass. Remember, there were over 300 prophecies in the Bible concerning Jesus.

The prophecies that were written about Jesus aren't the only prophecies in the Bible. There were prophecies about who would be King, which country would be the most powerful, which countries would fall, which countries would try to overthrow other countries, cities that would be destroyed, and much more. There are even prophecies about certain things that are happening overseas and to America today that were written about in the Bible. Through all this we can see that it is easy to know that the Bible was written because God told the people what to write. How else could have all these prophecies have been true?

Let's talk a little about something else concerning this.

A lot of young people ask me how we know that Christianity is true and other religions are not. All religions have a central figure, someone who started that religion and caused it to grow. In Christianity, that central figure is Jesus. In the Moslem religion, that central figure is Mohammed. In Buddhism, the central figure is Buddha. These are just a couple of examples. Christianity is the only religion in the world that has historic proof that the main person in their religion was raised from the dead. How could a religion say this if it wasn't true? There had to be proof that it was true before something so out of the ordinary could be accepted as the truth. To start with, Jesus appeared to over thousands of people after He rose from the dead. He spent 40 days on the earth, teaching people after He came back from the dead. His death was on public record. Hundreds saw Him die. When He came back from the dead you can be sure it caused a stir. It was talked about all over for years. It was written down and recorded as historical fact, not only in the Bible, but also in lots of other historical documents. I am sure that if the Moslems could have gotten by with it, they would have claimed that Mohammed came back from the dead. I'm sure that if the Buddhists could have gotten by with it, they would have claimed that Buddha came back from the dead. The same is true with all religions. They couldn't say it because it wasn't proven to be true. This is one reason why we know that Christianity is a true religion.

Another way that we know that Christianity is true is because of salvation. When you get saved, you ask Jesus into your heart. He really comes in. He makes a change when He comes in. You know that He is real because He is in your heart. What other religion can say that their main figure came back from the dead, still lives, and can come into your heart today? Isn't that kind of far out for someone to say? If you have asked Jesus to come into your heart, if you have been saved, then you know that this is true. It really does happen. I know Jesus is alive because He is inside of me. I know him personally. He is in my heart. I walk with Him every day.

I am not worshipping a memory of some dead guy. I am serving a living, loving Savior who died because He loves me, who came back from the dead, and now lives inside of me. He helps me to do what I am supposed to do because He is in my heart. That is certainly proof enough for me. I know that Jesus rose from the dead. He is my best friend today. I know Him. He is not just a figment of my imagination. I have seen evidence of His presence in my life for over 35 years.

So with all this proof about the Bible being God's Word and Christianity being the truth, are you convinced that the Bible is the place to go to find out the difference between right and wrong? It has many guides for our lives. Psalms 119:138 tells us, "Thy testimonies (meaning God's) that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful." The things that He tells us to do can be trusted. God's Word teaches us right from wrong. When the first schools in America were set up, they started mostly in the churches. The main reader that they used in class was the Bible. Now you can't even take a Bible to a public classroom. Could you imagine someone coming into some of those school that were there when our country was first started and start killing other students and teachers for no reason? I can't. Why do these things happen today? I believe that it was because the Bible was taken out of the schools. Students can no longer learn about God and about what is wrong and what is right. Not only has the Bible been taken out of school, but also people act like there is something wrong with it. People are made to feel like it is a bad thing. You are even taught in the public schools that you need to be tolerant of every religion. You are taught that there isn't one truth, that everybody has a little of the truth. You are taught that there is nothing to go by to help you to know right from wrong. No wonder there is such trouble with young people doing things that are wrong.

We need to remember that we have an anchor, something that holds us steady through the storm. Something that we can depend on. Just like a ship's anchor holds the ship steady in rough, stormy waters, the Bible holds us steady

today when things get scary. When it seems like there is so much wrong, and so much bad stuff around us, it is good to know that there is something that tells us that we can make it. It is good to know that there is something that is true that we can hold on to. (Here is something to think about. If you don't ever read your Bible, can it help you?)

I can tell you about how delicious strawberry banana cream pie is, but if you haven't tried it, you really won't know. I can tell you how much the Bible can help you, but if you never read it, you will never know. A student was telling me that he couldn't understand the Bible at all when he read it. He kept trying. Then one day he came and told me that he had started being able to understand it. It started making sense to him. What had happened to make things change? He had in the meantime gotten saved. He had asked Jesus to come into his heart. The Holy Spirit came into the boy's heart. The One who wrote the book had come into his heart and mind. Who better can explain what a book means than the author? The Bible tells us that the Spirit of God can explain what the Bible is saying. He is your teacher. You just have to listen to Him in your heart. What other book can this happen with? We will talk more in the next chapter about how to get to know the author.

I want to add something to this chapter. Lots of people who come to the school haven't been familiar with the Bible and how it is put together. They don't understand how to look up scriptures. Here is a short lesson. The Bible is split into two main sections: the Old Testament, and the New Testament. The Old Testament was written before the birth of Jesus. The New Testament starts with the birth of Jesus. For just a minute, let's go through a lesson on how to look up scripture. There are books in the Bible that go together to make up the Bible as a whole book. These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and so forth. You can find a list of the books in the Bible and where each is found by looking at the beginning of the Bible for the table of contents. This will list each book and tell the pages each is found on. It helps.

It helps you look them up especially if you aren't sure where each book is found in the Bible. When you see scripture written out it will look like this: Genesis 1:1. This means the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1. Each book is divided into chapters. Each chapter is divided into numbered verses. Genesis 1:1 means chapter 1 and verse 1 in the book of Genesis. That is how you look up scripture references. You see these a lot in your Bible textbooks.

The Bible has some of the wisest teaching. It has some of the most exciting stories. These stories are all true, too. Guaranteed with the TRUTH seal. One thing that I find the most fascinating about the Bible is that thousands of years ago people wrote about what we are going through today in details. It has the history of nations in its pages. No other book has the power to change your life like the Bible can. It comes with its own guarantee that it will change your life. Try it. You'll like it.

Chapter 3.

How Do You Get To Know God

We've already talked about how we can get to know God through the Bible, God's Word. We can also get to know God through being around other people that know Him and through listening to them talk about Him. The most important way to get to know Him is to get to know Him personally. We already talked about God as being the author of the Bible. I'll give you an example. Let's say you read a book by a famous author. The book was an autobiography, a book that the author wrote about his own life. You would know a little about him, whatever you could learn about what kind of person he was by reading that one book. Then let's suppose that you talked to several people who knew this author. Maybe some of them knew him really well. Some of them might claim that they knew him well, but they really didn't know him at all. They just acted like they did. You would start to know this author even more through them, but you wouldn't really know what he was like until you met him yourself.

Then let's say you finally got to meet him for yourself. At first you might just casually meet him. Then maybe as time went on you spent more time with him. As time went on, you got to be close friends. Then you really could say that you knew that author for yourself. Getting to know God and Jesus is a lot like that. At first we read about them in the Bible. Then we hear about them from other people. It might be preachers, or Sunday school teachers. Then God begins to deal with our heart. Then you open up your heart and let Him into your heart, mind, and soul. As time goes on you get to know Him more. You grow closer to Him. A relationship is not made over night. Remember this, a close relationship with someone doesn't happen in an instant. Good friendships, good relationships, take time to build. (You may not know those friends that you have only just met. Before you become close friends with someone, take time to get to know them.

Here is an old saying that is a wise saying. “Choose your friends, don’t let your friends choose you.) Just as in any relationship, it takes time to build a lasting friendship. Building a relationship with God is the same way. The longer you know Him, the better you get to know Him. His is a friendship that you can trust never to let you down.

God says in His word that if we seek Him we will find Him, that is if we seek Him with all of our heart. I Chronicles 28:9 tells us, “And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.” In this verse David is teaching his son, Solomon, how to find a relationship with God. David told his son that if he would seek God with all of his heart, then God would find him. David also wrote in Proverbs 8:17 something that God says, “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.” If you love God, He will love you in return. Isaiah 55:6 says, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.” If God starts dealing with your heart to give your heart and your life to Him, answer Him while He is dealing with you. Jeremiah 29:13 tells us that we are to seek Him with all our heart. We need to seek for Him with a made up mind that we want to serve Him. When we seek Him, the Bible promises that we will find Him.

Getting saved, asking Jesus to forgive you and asking Him to come into your heart is the first step to take in getting to know God.

Chapter 4.

How To Be Saved, What That Means, And What Are We Saved From

One of the most important questions that I ask young people is this one. “Have you been saved?” I try to make it a point to ask every young and old person that comes in my office if they have been saved. I do this because there have been times when young people connected with the school have died. Just in the last few months before I wrote this book we have had a dozen teens to die in our community. Some from accidents, some from sickness, some from violent situations. I remember one particular young man who came to enroll in the school. He was killed in a car wreck just a few weeks after he came to my office to enroll. I never asked him if he knew the Lord, and I always felt bad because I didn’t witness to him. That is why I try to be careful to ask that question. I know without a doubt that there is a real heaven and I know that there is a real hell. We’ll talk more about this in a later chapter, how we know this is so, and how to avoid hell, and how to make it to heaven. I want to help as many people find their way to heaven as I can. When you really love people, you’ll get serious about this subject. I know a lot of young Christians who say, “I love my friends and family.” But at the same time I hear them say, “I am afraid to witness to people because I am afraid of what they may think about me if I do.” Do you really love them? Do you want them to go to hell? Then you have to get serious about directing them toward heaven. I care. That is why I try to ask that question a lot. Have you been saved?

When I ask that question, I get a lot of answers. Some are a little strange. Some look at me and say, saved from what? That is a good question. What are we saved from? We are saved from spending eternity in hell. But there is a lot more. We are saved from a lot of things. One thing that we are saved from is loneliness. Loneliness drives a lot of young people into doing stupid things just to have friends.

Have you ever been there? Loneliness drives us into doing anything just so we can fit into a crowd. Who cares what the crowd is doing, just as long as we fit in. When I first got saved, one of the things that I noticed right away was that my loneliness was gone. God is the best friend you could ever have. He is always there. He knows you better than anyone else can, and loves you like you are. He sees all your weaknesses and still loves you. The Bible says that we are precious to Him. We are loved. Jeremiah 31:3 says, “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” God loves you with an everlasting love. He draws you to Him through His love.

When God starts dealing with your heart to be saved, the first thing that you feel is His love for you. God’s love is the reason why we can be saved in the first place. We can be saved because God sent His son to die for our sins. John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” To be saved we had to be forgiven. Part of what we are saved from is our sin, our wrong, our messes that we make in our lives when we don’t do right. We know what a good feeling it is to be forgiven. Before we give our hearts to the Lord, we do stuff that is bad. (We still do wrong even after we give our heart to the Lord. We might not mean to, but it still hurts God.) The Bible says that He grieves over our wrongdoing. It hurts Him when we do wrong.

Before we get saved, God starts dealing with our heart. What does that mean? He starts showing us that He is real. He begins to show us His love for us. He starts showing us that we are doing wrong. The Bible says that we are all so bad that we really can’t naturally by ourselves do anything good. Just naturally, if God doesn’t show us what is right and what is wrong, then we can’t know it on our own. It isn’t in our nature to know the difference. He convicts us. He starts dealing with us, leading us to give our heart and our life to Him.

He begins to show us how much we need Him. We start thinking more and more about Him. Somebody will say something about Him, and we start to feel lonely for Him. We start to want to have His help in our lives.

Then we might be at church or talking to one of His children, or just lying by ourselves in bed at night and it happens. We start to feel God's presence. We feel His love just like He is there wrapping His arms around us. Nobody has to tell us He is real because we feel Him there with us. We may start to cry. We know that He is asking us to make a decision to give our heart and life to Him. We do. We say yes. We pray, *God I give you my heart and life*. We ask Him to come into our heart. We confess our sin and repent. We tell Him that we are sorry. Our heart breaks because we can feel his love and we are sorry we ever hurt Him with doing wrong. Then we ask Him to forgive us. Maybe we remember John 3:16. We know He will forgive us if we ask. Then we feel a load lift up off us. We know somehow that we have been washed clean from the inside out. We feel His love in a mighty way and we know that we are forgiven. We ask Him to come into our heart, and we know that He does. We feel different. We feel new and changed. And we aren't lonely any more. Our life isn't empty. We don't have that empty feeling inside of us any longer. Jesus has come into our heart and we know this. A change takes place in us and in our lives. We have been saved and we know that. We know that we know that we know that is what happened.

We know that we are loved with a great love, the greatest love we could ever find. We know that we are precious in His eyes. We become God's own children. We are special. We fit into a crowd that is the best crowd that we could ever belong to, God's family. What others say doesn't matter after that. It doesn't change how we feel about ourselves. We are loved. No we aren't perfect. No matter. That doesn't change His love. God's love will love us like we are, but it is a love that will change us. There is a little Sunday School song that says, "He's still working on me.

To make me what I ought to be”. That is how we are. We are a work in progress. We can be proud of who we are, even if we know we aren’t perfect, because we know that God is working on the things that aren’t perfect. That is what it means to be saved.

Another thing that we are saved from is hopelessness. We have hope when Jesus comes into our lives. We all know how hopeless this world is getting. Young people are literally scared to death. We don’t have to be scared. We don’t have to be hopeless. We have hope. God is our Father. He spoke and made the whole world. He made it right. It is a mess because we have messed it up. If He can speak and create the whole world, then we know that He can take care of us. No matter how big your problems seem, or how bad the world seems, you have hope that things will turn out better. Romans 8:28 tells us, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” You might go through bad things, but even those will be turned into good. The Bible says plainly that you don’t have to be afraid. You don’t have to worry. Matter of fact, over 365 times in the Word of God it says to “fear not”. If I look at the world and all the bad situations my heart will fail me with fear. If I concentrate on all the bad things around me, I will feel bad all the time. Some people are sick because all they think of all the time is the bad things around them. If I think on things that cause me to be afraid all the time, I will have panic attacks and health problems. If I think about God and his Word, His love and His promises to me, I will be all right. No fear.

Another thing that we are saved from is having no direction. I have a lot of kids who come into my office that have totally messed up in school. Maybe they are only in the 8th grade and they are 16 because they failed so many times. Many kids have quit caring about school because they don’t think that there is any point in going. They are just drifting through life, not really caring about anything. Maybe they have failed so many times that they are afraid to care.

Maybe they don't see how important it is to care. For whatever reason they don't have a reason to do their best. Because of not having a reason, they don't try. The easiest way to drown is to get caught in an undercurrent in the ocean that pulls you down and you just drift with it. It will eventually pull you down. How do young people get in trouble and mess up their lives? They just drift. They don't get up one morning and purposefully say, "Today I am going to mess up my life". They just drift down into it, just like you drift into that rip tide in the ocean. The young people who have a purpose for their lives are the ones who stay out of trouble. Their life and their future is valuable, so they try not to do stupid things to mess them up.

When you are saved, you get a new direction for your life. God calls us according to a purpose. He creates us with that special purpose in mind. He works on us getting us ready for that purpose. Yes, God calls: preachers, evangelists, missionaries, singers, songwriters, people who work in churches and ministries. But, He also calls teachers, mechanics, dentists, accountants, computer specialists, and more. This world is full of people without God who don't have hope and a purpose in their lives. Because of this it is filled with people who don't know right and wrong. They don't care. When they do their jobs, they do them poorly. Because they don't know right from wrong, you can't trust them to be honest. Where would we be without Christian workers doing their jobs in the world? Find out God's purpose for your life. You have a reason to be alive. To help you to find your purpose in life, read my book titled, *Who Am I and Where Am I Going*.

God also saves us from failure. We talked about how in the last paragraph some young people give up because they fail so many times that they are afraid to try. When God comes into your heart, and helps you, you no longer have to be afraid to try. He gives you the strength to make it. We can't face life on our own. It is impossible to do this alone. We can't overcome all there is to overcome on our own.

We will fail, time and time and time again. But with God, when we fail, He will pick us up. When we keep trying, we will get it right, with His help. We don't have to stay a failure. We'll talk more in another chapter coming up about what to do when we fail.

God also saves us from ourselves. I was a mess when I came to God. I had been saved when I was in the 6th grade. But when I was in college I left behind everything I had learned about God and left to find out what the big, bad world was all about. It didn't take long for me to wreck my life. I was an alcoholic by the time that I was in my 20's. I was a reject from the 60's. I had tried every kind of drugs that there were to try. I had done all the sinning that there was to do until I was a total wreck. Like I said earlier, I had been saved when I was in the 6th grade. I knew right from wrong. My parent's had taught me. I read the Bible when I was young. I went to church. Then one day I decided I was tired of being good. I wanted to know what it was like to be bad. I found out. It only took me a few years to wreck my life to the place that I couldn't fix it. I didn't care because I had failed and messed up so long that I thought there was no hope for me. I quit trying. I am thankful that God kept me safe and kept me alive because I know that without a doubt if I had died in those days, I would have gone to hell. Then God opened my eyes so I could see again. He started dealing with me about coming back home to His love where I belonged.

When He saved me, He saved me from myself. You might be like I was. If you have left God and you have paid a price because of that, then don't give up hope. God still loves you. He will take you back home. One of my favorite stories is the Prodigal son. It was a story Jesus told to teach about God's love. We'll talk more about this story in another chapter. This is just a short version of the story here. A son left home with his inheritance. Partied it all away. Had a big time. Then reality hit. He found that when his money was gone, so were all his friends. He found himself working in a pigpen, feeding the pigs, so hungry that he ate the pig's food.

He decided to go back home. He was afraid his father wouldn't welcome him home. As he went toward home, he saw his father, standing on a hill looking for him, where he had been every day since he left. Your heavenly Father wants you to come home. When you come, you'll find His love for you just like it was before you left. Come home to His love. That is what I did, and I have never regretted it. God helped me to get my life together. He gave me hope, and saved me from myself.

I have written my testimony of what I had done in other books before this one. I have had lots of young people read this and tell me, "Wow. I really like reading the part where you told everybody all the bad things you got into growing up. You can understand what I have gone through because I have done a lot of those things too." They act like it is cool that I went through these things. When students tell me this, I wonder if they really understand what I am saying. When I say that I suffered through years of messing up my life totally doing stupid things, that isn't so that I can be thought of as being cool. No, I was not cool. Just stupid. I haven't written this so you can think it is OK to go through these things because I did them. I have written it so that you can see two things. Number one, how you need God in your life to keep you from doing these things. Number two, if you have already done these things, there is hope for you to get your life together. God will help you like He helped me.

When I started this chapter, I mentioned how I always try to ask people if they have been saved. I do it because I know who I was when He saved me. I don't want them to go through things I went through. When I ask people this, I get all kinds of answers. Some people tell me that they know they are saved because they go to church. The Bible tells us there is only one way to heaven and that is by having a real relationship with God. It is important to go to church. The Bible tells us to do that. It strengthens us. It puts us in the middle of the right crowd, and we need that. But church can't save us. We have to be forgiven, and ask Jesus to come into our heart.

We have to serve Him with our whole heart to be saved. Jesus says in John 14:6, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Then in verse 15 He says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” How many people do you know that go to church on Sunday, and go out during the week and act like the devil, cussing, drinking, smoking, partying, and doing whatever. Then they go back to church on Sunday. Do they really know Jesus? Do they really love Him? Are they keeping His commandments? Are they really saved? Going to church can’t save you. It can help keep you, but it can’t save you.

I hear some people say, I am saved because I have been baptized. We get baptized to show a symbol of the fact that we are saved. Water can’t wash away our sin. Being dunked can’t make a new person of us. Asking Jesus in our hearts and being filled with Him makes us new. Obeying His word keeps us. Baptism is something we do to remind ourselves of what Jesus has done for us.

Some people say, “I’m saved because I don’t drink or party. I’m a good person.” The Bible tells us that accepting Jesus is the only way to be saved. We can’t earn our way to heaven. No matter how hard we try, we can’t be good enough. The Bible tells us that our best is just filthy rags in the sight of a holy and perfect God. We can’t be perfect and holy. We are saved when we repent and ask His forgiveness. When we ask Him in our heart, then we start to take on His holy nature. That is the only way that we can ever be good enough to get to go to heaven.

The saddest thing that I’ve heard people say is “I am saved because I am too young to make that choice. I am too young to decide now, so it isn’t important if I am saved or not. I don’t want to decide that right now. There are other things that I want to do. I will put off being saved so that I can do those things.” Then something happens and they die and go to hell because they put off the most important decision that they could ever make.

Then there are the people who get saved for real.

They do all the right things to get saved, they are convicted, they repent, they ask Jesus into their heart, then they go out and keep doing the same things that they were doing before they were saved. They don't find a relationship with God that is real. They don't love Him. He isn't their best friend. They are too in love with the world and the crowd to love God enough to give them up. They act one way with the crowd and another with God, but God sees them in both worlds. This world is hard to live in. There is an enemy, the devil, who wants to destroy you and keep you from serving God. There will be people around you who don't know God, who will try to pull you down. Being saved is something we have to live every single day of our life if we want to stay strong to overcome all this. It isn't like a new suit of clothes that we can put on when we want to, and take it off when we don't want to wear them. It is a change that takes place in our lives for real. It is a heart's commitment to serve someone Who we love with all our hearts. We have to care enough that we want to do what is right because we know that pleases Him.

You won't be perfect. You will mess up. But the Bible tells us that we have an advocate with God, like a lawyer pleading our case. His name is Jesus. Jesus died to forgive us. You can be sure that He will forgive you. If you repent and you ask His forgiveness, He will forgive you. But some people take this way too far. I had one girl tell me, "I can drink, I can smoke, I can do whatever I want to, because I have been saved. Jesus will forgive me" Something is wrong with this kind of thinking. When I think back to my years when I left God, I did just that. I left Him. It is like I moved away from God's love. I moved out of His grace. I no longer obeyed Him, and I didn't care that I didn't obey Him. I stopped letting Him convict me. I stopped asking Him to forgive me. I was not forgiven. If I had died then, I would have died in my sin. I know without a shadow of doubt that I would have gone to hell.

We have to make up our mind who we want to serve. We can't act like the world and say we are God's children.

It doesn't work that way. Revelations 3:15-16 tells us how Jesus feels about people who are neither cold or hot, but they keep things in the middle of the road, trying to have it both ways. He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

You can be saved. You can know that you are saved. Some young people tell me that they don't know if they are saved or not. Make up your mind. Commit your heart to the Lord. God will meet you more than halfway. If when you read this chapter you feel Him dealing with your heart, don't turn Him away. If you feel Him talking to you, if you feel His conviction, don't shove it away or ignore it. It is precious. He loves you so much and you need that love more than you'll ever know. Run to Him. I know that He will be there.

Chapter 5.

Give Up and Give In

I guess you could say that I am a master on the subject of rebellion. When I was a teenager the 60's were just ending. If you weren't rebelling about something, everybody wondered what was wrong with you. It was right about then that I began "finding myself". Plus at that time I didn't have God in my life. He was there, but I had started shutting Him out. I have an inborn stubborn streak that I have to give God. My mother used to tell me that I would go out and argue with a fence post if there wasn't anybody around to argue with. I had to find a different way to do everything. If someone told me to do a certain thing a certain way, I would find another way to do it. That caused a lot of problems in my life. When you don't listen to good sound advice, you are setting yourself up for trouble. I knew right from wrong but I was making up my own rules as I went along. I was doing it my way. When you are doing it your way, or a new way, then you leave behind the old ways. The old ways have been tried and true, so leaving them behind is not always a smart thing to do. I

It was hard for me to see that experience means something. When people have been there and done that, they know about how it works. I thought that I was smarter than everybody who had been there and done that. I thought that older people were all stupid and I was a new generation with new ideas. So I knew more than then they did with all their old ideas. Since the rules they were playing by didn't always work, I thought it was a good idea to make up my own. I was like that until God came into my life. When I read His book and started to understand it, I realized that it was the wisest book that I'd ever read. And it was really, really old. It had stood the test of time. Then when God saved me, He started setting me free from rebellion. I began to see things in a different way. God sets people as elders over us to teach us so that we can grow by what they know. We can learn by their example then we won't have to make so many mistakes.

I saw that there are certain rules and guidelines to follow that are tested and true. I learned which ones to follow. Because I was willing to follow, I could follow God.

One of the reasons I think that it was hard for me to follow is because I thought I had to prove that I could do it better. I also had to prove that I could do it on my own. When we try to prove ourselves, we are only setting ourselves up for failure. Usually when we do that, we won't listen to anyone else, since we are trying to prove ourselves. Usually when are trying so hard to prove ourselves, we won't listen to anybody. We will try too hard. That doesn't work either. I was too afraid to do it by anyone else's plan. Number one, I was afraid I couldn't do it at all. I was getting ready to face an adult world, and I was scared to death. I was scared until the time that Jesus came into my heart and I found God's love and His peace. I learned that I didn't have to be afraid any more because I had His help.

There is a verse that tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. When we find Jesus' love for us, and we know that we can trust Him to keep us that does away with fear. When we know that He loves us, we don't have to try to prove anything. We are OK because His love makes us OK. Number two, I was afraid to trust anybody or anything. Because of this I couldn't come down off of my high horse and do it someone else's way. I didn't know where to go. I really didn't know which direction to take. I didn't have a clue. To obey you have to be able to submit. I was afraid to submit and go someone else's direction. When I found God's love for me, I wasn't afraid to follow Him and do it His way. I knew that He loved me and wanted the best for me. I knew that His will would work. Then I had to admit to myself that I didn't know what was best for me. Then is when I could obey God and do it His way. I gave up and gave in.

Young people will come to talk to me about problems that they have. I'll tell them to "give up and give in". For God to help you, that is what you have to do. To be able to do it God's way, you have to give up your way. It isn't easy.

Have you ever had a hardheaded argument with someone to the place that you were nearly butting heads? You wanted your way, and they wanted theirs and nobody was giving in. That is what rebellion does. It causes us to be hard headed about doing it our way. It causes us to refuse to give in and give up to anybody, including God. Just like when you had that hardheaded argument, nothing gets done, nothing gets settled until somebody gives in. With God, you always have to give in, because bottom line, your way won't work when it conflicts with His way. There can be no peace when two people argue until somebody gives up and gives in. We can't have peace with God until we give up and give in to His Word and to His way.

Sometimes it's easy to try to do God like you do your parents. Sometimes we start making excuses. Have you ever done that? I heard a young person say, "I don't know right from wrong. Nobody told me. So I can't be responsible for my actions." That is one excuse that some people try to make. What about that? Is that true? Just because we fail to learn something is it all right for us to do what we are not supposed to do? Wrong. If you mess up and do wrong, will you have to pay the consequences? Will you get out of having to pay the consequences of your actions just because you didn't know you were doing wrong? It doesn't work that way.

Another excuse I've heard is, "I don't believe the way that you believe. I think that everyone should determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Everyone is free to make their own standards for themselves. Why should I be forced to live by someone else's standards?" Is this true? Let's talk about one example. I know that there are lots of young people who are convinced that sex outside of marriage is OK. They think that it is old fashioned to say no. Many of those same young people have STD's or aides or they have babies that they are not prepared to raise. There are consequences for doing wrong whether or not you believe that it is wrong. God decides what is wrong and what is right because He knows what it best. He is the smartest of all.

He doesn't set up rules to trample on your rights. He sets up a standard because He loves us. If we fail to keep that standard then we risk being destroyed by the very things that He set up a standard to protect us from.

I've heard young people say, "I know that this is wrong, but just this once won't hurt?" Have you ever heard anyone say this, or have you ever thought this to yourself? Then you wished that you had never done it that one time? Do you know how many times that it takes to get addicted to crack and meth? Just one time. Do you know how many times it takes to get pregnant from having sex? Just one time. Do you know how many times it takes being with someone who has forgotten to tell you that they have aids before you are infected yourself? Just one time. Do you know how many times being stupid behind the wheel of a car can cost you your life? Just one time. How many times do you have to get in trouble to mess up your life for good? Just one time. My question to you is, why do it at all?

Another excuse to do wrong is this one. "What will people think if I don't do it? They will think that I am not cool if I don't go along with what everyone else is doing. My parents say no, but I'd rather have them disappointed in me than have my friends disappointed in me." Who really loves you most? Your parents who want you to keep from messing up your life, or your friends who are trying to get you to go along with something that can destroy you. Think about it. If you really love someone you won't try to get them to do something stupid that can wreck their lives, and their futures.

Another thing that I've heard young people say is, "So what if I do it. I can do it just once and nobody will know." I knew someone who came from a long line of alcoholics. Their dad's grandfather drank. Their dad's dad drank. Their dad drank. Guess what? They drank too. All of them had a bad problem with alcohol. Even some of them died from diseases caused by drinking. Some things are hereditary. That means we pass them down to our kids. That is until someone gets a hold of God and God sets them free from it.

I am sure when the first person in that family started drinking, they probably thought, if I do this just once it won't hurt anybody but me. How will anyone else know? What we do isn't done in a corner. If we do something that hurts us, it eventually will hurt our family and the people we love. When we choose to rebel and do wrong, it hurts everyone around us. Some of the greatest tragedies that I've seen families go through happen because someone said this won't hurt anybody but me. We don't live on an island. We are never really all to ourselves. For the rest of your life, the decisions that you make will affect others.

We've talked about rebellion and how it can hurt us. How do we stop rebelling? How do we come to the place that we do it God's way and not our own? First, we have to admit that we need God. We have to admit that we can't do it on our own and we need His help. Then, if we aren't saved, that is the next step. We have to ask Him to come into our heart and lives. We have to accept His Word as true and we have to admit that it works better than our way. Then we have to submit our will to Him. We have to let Him love us so that we know that we can trust Him. Then we have to yield ourselves to that love. He is your heavenly Father. He only wants what is best for you. Be willing to let Him have His way in your life.

Why should you do these things? Ask someone who is in jail or in prison for their mistakes. Ask someone who is addicted to drugs. Ask someone who has aides. Ask anybody who has messed up their future. Ask every person who caused a tragedy in their family because of rebelling against what was right. Ask them all. If you could do it over again would you do this same thing again? Or would you do what was right? What do you think would be their answer?

We have talked about how important it is for you to do right. The next thing to talk about is how to do right. It isn't easy, is it? How do you do right?

Chapter 6.

How To Do Right

I used to work in a children's home. The kids lived there. It was a Christian home and every day those kids were taught Bible verses. They were even memorizing verses in kindergarten. Learning scripture is a very good thing to do. I don't mean at all to sound like it isn't important to learn verses, because it is. The Bible will help you in life. What you eat becomes a part of you. I can tell who likes lots of junk food, and who tries to eat healthy foods just by looking at them. We are what we eat. It's the same way with what you take into your spirit. What you take into the inside of you becomes a part of who and what you are. This is what I mean. If you take into your mind and heart and spirit things that are Godly and good, they will help to make you stronger in God. If you listen to sermons, read the Bible, pray, listen to Gospel music, hang around Christian friends, go to church, all these things will feed your Spirit and strengthen the Spirit of God in you. If you listen to rock music, hang around with friends who aren't Christians, never pray or read your Bible, then don't be surprised when you get weak and eventually stop serving God. This is especially true if you are trying to change for the better.

I've known lots of young people who start out serving God. Then I run into them one day and they are back out doing the same old things that they were doing before they got saved. Matter of fact, they are worse. How does that happen? They stop feeding the Spirit man good things. They stop strengthening that part of them. They stop putting an importance on the things of God in their lives. Maybe they get a job that won't let them go to church because they have to work at church time. Maybe they start hanging around with their old crowd. Little by little they change in how they act, talk, and look. Instead of hanging out in church around Christians they start hanging out in places they shouldn't be in. They lose sight of what is wrong and what is right.

Matthew 13:3-23 is a story that Jesus told that explains what I am trying to tell you. This is a parable, one of the stories Jesus told to illustrate different points that He was teaching about. Jesus tells us that a man went out sowing seed. Some of the seeds fell on ground that was so hard that it wouldn't even grow. Some of it fell on good ground, but the birds ate it before it could take root and grow anything. Some of the seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns choked out the plant as it grew. Some of it fell on good ground and had lots of fruit. In this story, the seed that Jesus talks about is God's Word. Some people hear God's Word but their heart is so hard it won't sink in. Some people hear it and the devil comes along and lies to them and talks them out of believing that it is true. This is like the seed that was eaten by the birds. Some people hear God's Word, but they let the thorns (the cares of this world) choke it out so that it doesn't grow. Some people let it grow in their heart and they grow and change and their lives have fruit, good things that God grows. God's Word is the same for all of them, just like the seed is the same for all the sowers. But what they do with that seed determines whether or not it grows well in their lives. What you do with God's Word determines whether or not you change for the better, and whether or not that change lasts. We need to fill up on things that strengthen us so that we can do right.

So, like I said at the beginning of this chapter, reading the Bible is very important. But when those kids at that children's home memorized all that scripture it had a bad effect. Wow, that is really something to say, but it was true. What do I mean? They would memorize scripture all day long, but they wouldn't put it to practice in their lives. It was just words that they were memorizing. They didn't have a real relationship with God. Lots of them weren't even Christians. They would memorize the verses that said if you sin you would die. They memorized verses that said disobedience would be punished. They would talk about hell and how they didn't want to go there, but nobody told them how to get to go to heaven. The Bible was used like a paddle to spank them.

It was like punishment when they did bad, but nobody told them how to do good. Have you ever had a teacher at school that stayed on your case about not learning, but never taught you? Have you ever had a teacher that kept hounding you to do better, but never told you how? You probably got defensive and more than just a little rebellious. That is what happened to these kids. They were some of the most rebellious kids I have ever known. It is important to know right from wrong. You also have to learn how to be able to do right.

It is human nature to do badly. Without God, there is no way that we can do right. Like we talked about earlier, we can't even know the difference between good and bad on our own. How do I know? Those of you that baby sit, or have little brothers or sisters, do you have to teach them how to do wrong, or do you have to teach them how to do right? Even the smallest ones already know how to get into trouble. It is in their nature. That is why you have to teach them to obey and listen to what you say. They are born wanting to do what is wrong. We are all that way.

God says it in Job 5:7, "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." As natural as it is for sparks of a fire to fly up, it is as natural for us to get into trouble. A man named Paul wrote most of the New Testament. We'll talk more about him later in another chapter. In the Romans 7:14-15 Paul says, "For we know that the law (of God) is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." He says that the things of God are spiritual. God is a spirit. He isn't a flesh person like we are. He is perfect. We aren't. We are what the Bible calls carnal. We are born with a nature to sin. God is our only hope to be able to be any different. Paul says that the things that he wanted to do he didn't do, and the things that he didn't want to do, he did. Does that sound familiar? Have you ever felt that way? Paul wanted to do right. He said in verse 22, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Part of him wanted to do right, but it

seemed like he couldn't. Well, it sounds like from what he is saying that it is OK to do wrong and to do whatever we want to. If we already know that we can't do it, why try. Is that the attitude to take about things? That is just like those of you who have failed grades in the past. You come to school with the attitude I can't do it so why try. Who cares whether or not I graduate. Then you realize that you can do it after all. Some of you get so excited by knowing this that you start doing more than anyone in the class and you'll graduate early. You figured out that you could do it after you spent all that time feeling like a loser. Look what happened. Life is the same way. If you think that there is no way that you can live life as a Christian, then you won't be able to. You will fail. Some of you may have tried to be a Christian before and every time it just turned out wrong. You went back to your old ways. You still know that it is right, but you don't know how to do it, so you quit trying. It is one thing to know the difference between wrong and right, but it is another to be able to do right. That is what Paul is saying. In verse 24 he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This sounds pretty desperate. Have you ever felt that bad when you were trying to do right and no matter how you tried you only messed up? Is there a way out of all this?

Paul was a pretty smart guy. If you read in chapter 8 you'll find the answer. Now remember, when we talk about the flesh part of us, or the carnal part, that is us minus God trying to do things on our own. When we talk about the spirit part of us, that is the Spirit of God that comes into our lives, our heart and mind, when we are saved. Paul says in verse 5, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." If we ignore the things of God and build our lives around everything else but Him, we are minding the things of the flesh. If we value the things of God and we concentrate on them, we are spiritually minded. One of these ways lead to death and the other one leads to life.

We are talking about eternal death. Verse 9-14 says, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Wow. That is a tongue twister. Sounds hard to understand when you first read it, but it is kind of like those Algebra questions that sound hard at first, but when you break it down it really isn’t hard after all. Paul is saying here that the way to have a good life is to concentrate on good things. The way to have a life filled with being a winner over things that get us down (or what we call a victorious life) is to concentrate on God’s things. We can have a victorious life by letting the Spirit of God in us be stronger than the flesh part of us. If you have been saved, the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Have you ever wondered why God did that, made us so that we are like a vessel, a container that can hold His Spirit? He did that because that is how we can do right. He comes inside of us to live. After that happens he quickens our bodies with life. He strengthens us to be able to do right from the inside out. We no longer let our flesh, our will, our body, and our mind have their way. We know the trouble that can lead to. We let God have His way inside of us. Just like the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead, it can raise us up above the things in us that will cause us to die. We will live when we let the Spirit of God live in us and be strong in us.

We fail when we try to do it on our own. I can’t live a victorious Christian life on my own, without God’s Spirit in me helping me, strengthening me, leading me. I’ve been a Christian for lots of years, but I still can’t. Nobody can.

God knew that. That is why He made us to hold His Spirit, so He could come inside of us and help us. Wouldn't that be great if somebody could do an implant for you and put in you the mind of a genius, the physical reflects of the greatest athlete in the world, and the abilities of the most gifted people? You would really be something. That is true. But you still wouldn't be able to do right. Because Jesus himself comes into our heart through the Holy Spirit, we can do the things that we need to do. We can do right. We don't have to fail.

So does that mean that we are automatically perfect? Does that mean after we get saved that we won't mess up ever again because God is in us helping us to be perfect? We all know that isn't true. Why? Do you know any people who are perfect? We aren't perfect because we still have our flesh side in us. Our flesh is that side of us that is bent toward trouble. But we have help to overcome that side of us. So things are better. But we still have that old nature. How do we overcome that side of us? Like we said earlier in the chapter, we do the things that feed that part of us and make it stronger so that it overcomes the flesh part of us. We let God's Spirit be strong in our lives. We read His Word. We do what He says to do. We hang around with Christian people that strengthen us. We go to church. We listen to Gospel music. We pray. We spend time with God talking to Him. We listen to Him. All of these are ways that we can be stronger.

One of the most important things that we can do is to submit to God. That means that we decide that we want His way in our life. We don't want our way. If we are really hard headed, we won't be able to let God be strong in our lives. We will want to be number one. We will want our way all the time. That is human nature, too. If we are hard headed at home with our parents about getting our way, then it will be easy to be that way with God. We will be in the habit of acting that way, and we will act that way with Him. If you find yourself being that way, ask God to help you to overcome this. Ask Him to help you to give in to those around you who

are over you so that you can give in to Him and let Him change you.

Another thing that helps us to be able to do right is the Bible. We've already talked about how the Word of God can change us. The Bible says that it can purify us, strengthen us to be able to do right, show us what to do, and perfect us to be like Jesus. The Bible is compared to a sword that can cut out of your heart and mind the things that you wish you didn't have there. WOW! What a book. Can you think of any other book that can do that? There are two things though that you have to do so that the Bible can work in your life. Can the Bible help you if you never pick it up and read it? How would that work with your books at school? Let's say that you want to be a mechanic. You have a mechanics book. What if you never picked it up, and you came to school and told me that you knew everything in it, and it was going to help you to be able to be a good mechanic, but you never opened it. Would it do you much good? How could it? You have to read it to learn what it is all about. You have to read the Bible to learn what it is all about. It can't help you unless you do. Then you have to do what the book says. If you just read the mechanics manual and you never work on a car, will you be a good mechanic. Maybe the mechanics manual is written like an instruction manual giving you steps in what to do. Maybe it tells you how to change a carburetor. What if you never pick up a tool and start? Will that car run when you are done? You have to put the instructions to use. You have to do what it says. The Bible is the same way.

In James 1:23-25, we read about a curious acting man. He looks in the mirror and sees what a mess he is, but then he goes on and doesn't brush his hair, wash his face, or do anything to help fix the mess he is in. Sometimes we are like that. "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a

forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” If we read the Bible, but never do what it says, we are like that man that stays a mess even after he looks in the mirror. If we read it, and never do what it says, how can it help us.

It’s the same with letting the Spirit of God live inside of us. We’ll talk more in a chapter coming up about how the Spirit of God can change us. God convicts us when we do wrong. He is inside of us so He knows when we do wrong. He gives us this feeling in our heart that lets us know that we have disobeyed Him. If we go away and do nothing about it, then that can’t help us. When He convicts us we need to repent and be determined not to do that again. With His Spirit to help us, we can go on and be stronger the next time. That will change our lives. We have to do what He tells us to do. He can speak to our hearts. He can show us what to do, and what not to do. But if we don’t do what He tells us, it won’t help us.

Everyday we need God’s help. Every day we have to say no to certain things. Just to be able to get up in the morning and go to school, we need God’s help. We need His help to be able to do well in class. We have to have His help when people get on our case or in our face. We have to have His help when people try to make us feel like we are nothing. We need His help to listen to our parents and do what they tell us to do. We need His help to get along with everyone in our families. We need His help every day, every minute to be and to do the best we can be and do.

So you see, even though it is impossible to do well on your own, you have help. You don’t have to stay helpless. What about those times when you mess up? Those times when you don’t let God have His way? That chapter is coming up next.

Chapter 7.

Repentance and Forgiveness

We've talked about how important it is to do right. We've talked about how God helps us to be able to do that. We've also talked about how there will still be times when we mess up. How can we deal with those times? How does God help us when we mess up? That is what this chapter is about. When we mess up, how do we know that we have messed up? If God never shows us that we are sinning, then we won't be able to get forgiveness. If we never get forgiveness then we can never go to heaven. How does God show us that we have done wrong? One way is by conviction. Conviction is the feeling that we have like a rock in our heart when we have done something wrong. It is a heaviness that we feel when we do wrong. God uses conviction to show us right from wrong. It is like an onboard wrong detector. What if a parent never told his child that he was doing wrong? What if they let their child do anything that they wanted, even if it was damaging to them? Would that child know that their parent really loved them? Probably not. We show our love by teaching and directing our children. God is a good parent. He teaches by His Word. He teaches us by His Spirit in our heart. But He doesn't just stop there.

I have heard a lot of kids talk about some of the worst teachers that they had. Some of them had teachers that would punish them if they missed the answer. They would make fun of them and ridicule them in front of the class if they messed up. They would tell them they were wrong, but they would never show them how to do it right. I am glad that God isn't that way. He convicts us by telling us when we do wrong, and then He makes a way for us to get it right. After conviction comes repentance. Repentance comes when we feel sorry for what we have done. Then after that comes forgiveness. That forgiveness was paid for when Jesus died on the cross. He forgives us. Then He teaches us how to do better. He strengthens us by His Spirit in us to be able to do better. With all that on our side, how can we lose, even when we mess up?

What does repentance have to do with all of this?

Here's an example. Lets say you have a squabble with someone out on the ball field and they punch you in the nose. After you get over being mad, they say I'm sorry. Then things are OK between you. Then they turn around and before they leave they punch you in the nose again. Then they say sorry, but they do it again. Are they really sorry? Did they really repent? The dictionary defines repentance as "feeling such regret over an action, intentions to change one's mind". When we repent there will be a change. We won't be like the fellow on the ball field. We won't turn around and do it again. God loves us. He loves us with a love greater than anyone else can love us. He is perfect and His love for us is perfect. He knows that we can't be perfect, but He wants the best for us. He has done all He can do to help us to be able to do our best. When we fail Him, we need to be sorry. Genuinely sorry for what we have done. Some people aren't really sorry when they sin. They don't want to stop what they are doing. God convicts them, but they do it again and again. Then before long they talk themselves into believing that it doesn't matter if they do this. They begin to make excuses for what they do, and they tune out God's conviction. Then they come to the place where nobody can tell them that they are doing wrong. How can they ever be forgiven if they won't admit their sin? How can they go to heaven if they are never forgiven? To be forgiven we have to ask God for forgiveness. It isn't automatic. You won't forgive someone who doesn't ask for it, because if they don't ask for it then they aren't really sorry. God is no different.

When we repent, when we are really sorry for what we have done, God will forgive us. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (Here's a little Bible lesson here. There are actually four books of the Bible named John. One is in the Gospels in the beginning of the New Testament. Three are found later on in the New Testament. They are First, Second, and Third John. When I write I John like I did in that Bible reference, I mean first John. Jesus' disciple, John wrote all these books.) Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. I can remember when I was young and I would do something that was bad.

I knew that my parents would probably find out. I would spend a lot of time dreading that day. Then it came. They would find out and they would get really mad. Fire works would fly. Punishment would come, and then it would pass. The worst feeling was the feeling that they didn't love me any more because I had messed up. You know what I'm talking about. Then I would realize that I was forgiven. I would start to feel their love again. It hadn't gone anywhere. I had just lost sight of it through all that load of guilt and condemnation. Forgiveness would come and wipe that entire load away. That is how it is with God. Jesus died so that we can be forgiven. Without Jesus' death, we could never come back into God's love after we messed up. We would have had no hope of getting to heaven. Jesus died so we could be forgiven. That is why we shouldn't take forgiveness for granted.

We should never take the attitude that we can do anything we want because God will forgive us. When God deals with your heart, you will know. He will convict you. He will lead you to repentance. When we repent that means that we feel sorry for what we have done wrong. We admit it all. We ask God to forgive us. We do this when we get saved. We have to do this after we get saved too. We do this every time we sin. Jeremiah 31:19 says, "Surely after that I was turned. I repented: and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." We have to be instructed. We have to learn right and wrong so that we know that we have done wrong. Then when we do, we are ashamed for having done wrong. That is repentance. Then God forgives us and starts us over. He makes us new. We will talk more about that later, what it means to be forgiven and what a great thing that is.

When we know God's love, and His mercy and His grace, it gives us peace and strength to try our best. When we mess up and we experience His love and grace, that will give us the strength to keep trying. God loves us. He knows that we will mess up. That is why Jesus died for us. The Bible tells us the story of the prodigal son. It is a story that Jesus told to teach his disciples about what God's love was like. We talked about it earlier in short version form. Here is the whole story.

You can read about it in Luke 15:11-32. It is really a good story. Get your Bible out and read it. It is a story about a teenager that wasn't a lot different than you. It was set in a different place and time, but as a whole people are people. He was tired of living by his dad's rules. He was tired of having to do what his parents wanted him to do. He was ready to get out on his own and see the world. He knew that he was ready for whatever came his way no matter what anybody said. Parents in those days were probably a lot like parents in these days. Knowing parents like I do, I'd say that his dad argued with him trying to convince him to see reason. He refused to listen. So one day his dad just said, "OK. I'll give you your inheritance early. You can have what is coming to you and you are free to go." I'm sure that before that happened there was a lot of noise around that household. Then his dad just gave in.

Let's talk a little now about parents. Most parents will be there for you. There is an old saying, "You can't out run a mother's love, or a dad's love." You are a part of them. You can't understand that now, but one day when you have your own kids, you will be able to. When you hurt they hurt. My Mom used to tell me when she spanked me, "This will hurt me a lot worse than it hurts you." I used to think, yeah right! She was telling me the truth. Your parents don't want to see you hurt. They don't want to see you get in trouble. They don't want to watch you ruin your life by making bad choices. Usually, even though you may hate to admit it, they know a few things more than what you want to give them credit for. You'd be surprised how many times through the years that I've thanked my mom for doing the things that made me the maddest when I was your age. Parents who care are parents who say no.

Sometimes we have a hard time with our parents because we carry a chip on our shoulder the size of Texas. We go around daring them to knock it off. We want to prove to them that we are smart and that we can do things on our own. We want to prove to them that we can make the right decisions on our own without listening to them. We want to do our own thing, and excuse ourselves even when we really know deep inside that we shouldn't be doing what we are doing. We don't want to hear it.

We get the maddest when our parents bring up that we are going on the wrong track. Even if down inside our hearts and heads, we know they are right. Their bringing it up just makes us madder and more determined to do what it is they are telling us not to do. All they are trying to do is love us. Let them love you. Let them care about you. Let them be parents. That is what they are there for. Relax. They aren't out to ruin your life. They want to help you, and they can, if you will just wise up and admit that there are some things you need to quit doing, and there are some things that you need to do that you aren't doing. It helps to listen. Am I saying that they are perfect? No they aren't. We already talked about that one verse in the Bible that tells us that nobody's perfect, except God and Jesus. Yes, they will make mistakes. Yes, they will have problems. I remember the first time it dawned on me that my parents were capable of making mistakes. I don't know why I thought that to be a parent you had to be perfect. That still doesn't change things. The Bible says that you still have to respect them. They still know things that you don't know and they can still help you a lot. Let them be parents.

Now sometimes parents are not perfect. OK hold on. I'll get back to the prodigal in a minute. Just hear me out on this. I know a lot of kids whose parents aren't there for them. Sometimes their parents may have such a mess in their own lives that they can't be there for their kids to help them. It's sad but sometimes parents get caught up in a lot of other things and they have no time for their children. They don't know what they are missing. I hope that they find out before it is too late. If you come from this kind of home, the best thing that you can do is forgive your parents, and keep on loving them. Give the hurt to Jesus. Let Him sort it out. I know more than one Mom or Dad who has come to give their heart to the Lord and got saved because of the testimony of their son or daughter. They saw a change in their child when they got saved, and this led them to the Lord. If you hold on and keep loving them no matter what kind of problems they have, then you can love them to the Lord. Then God can change your family in a way you never thought possible. If you just hold on and keep loving them, and understanding them, God can change them and give you a whole new family.

OK, back to the prodigal. This guy's dad just gave up and gave in and let this boy leave. He gave him his part of his inheritance money early. He let him go and do his thing. Sometimes if you aren't careful, you can outrun a parent's love. You can worry them until they say go ahead and do your own thing and find out the hard way. Like the old saying goes, "If you don't listen, then you can just feel." That is what this dad did.

This young man took off to see the world. He partied big time. He rolled in the dough. He spent a lot. He lived the life he'd dreamed of. He had it made. Everything he wanted, he had. You know, he was the best in town. The crowd came to him. It is easy to buy friends. I've known people who tried to buy a girl or boy friend. They would spend their last dollar on them. Then when the spending stopped, the boyfriend, or girlfriend was gone. You can't buy people's love. You can't buy peoples' friendship. This kind of love or friendship is not real at all. That is what this fellow found out. His money soon ran out. So did his friends. He was left in a strange place away from his family. He was all alone. He had nothing. Nobody cared. There wasn't any welfare. So he found the only job that he could find. He was a pig feeder. One day, he was so hungry that he found himself eating the slop with the pigs. That was when He came to himself. He knew that it was time to go home. Luke 15:17-19 tells us, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger: I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He said to himself that his father's servants had it better off than he did. He would go home, and at least if his father was mad at him for what he had done, he might let him come home as a servant. That was better than what he had now. The Bible tells us that his father saw him coming even when he was a good distance away. How could he see him when he didn't even know he was coming? His father had to have been going and standing there watching the road every day, hoping that he would come home. When his son returned, this father gave a welcome home party, taking him back in like a son. He was home.

I love that story because it reminds me of my own life. When I left God and the things of God, I had my good time. When my life got so bad, I could no longer stand it, I came to myself like this boy in the story. When I came back home, my Father, God, had been there waiting for me all the time. He wrapped me in His love. God is talked about in the Bible as loving us with a Father's love. My heavenly Father welcomed me home. He forgave me for all I had done while I was way from Him. He wiped it away with His love. It was gone. Because He forgave me, I forgave myself. Because He loved me, I learned to love myself. That changed my life. I no longer hated myself.

What about you? Are you living where God wants you to live? Be real with Him. If you are not living where you should be, He already knows. He is waiting for you to come to yourself and turn around to head in the right direction. He knows where you are. You can't fool Him. Isn't it time for you to come back home? He has been there waiting for you the whole time, ready to welcome you back home.

When we do wrong, the worst thing that we can do is try to hide it from God or run away from Him. He already knows. Remember when I was talking in the beginning of this chapter about how it was when I was younger and I did something wrong. Those times when I tried to hide it. I just had to sweat longer. I could have gotten it all over with quicker if I had just come clean. God already knows. Go ahead and confess.

Adam and Eve lived in a perfect place, the Garden of Eden, when God first made the world and man. They listened to the devil and they sinned. They ran and hid. God knew all the time what they had done. He called to them. He knew where they were hiding all along. God knows what you do before you do it. He isn't just there in church on Sunday. He is there 7 days a week. Matter of fact, if you have been saved, He is in your heart and you carry Him with you wherever you go. If you go to places that you know He wouldn't go, you carry Him with you into those places. If you do something that is wrong, then He does it with you, because He is inside of you. The Bible refers to our body as being the temple of God because it is where He lives. He loves you. When you do wrong, don't hide it. Repent. Confess up.

Ask for His forgiveness. What is more important than that? Don't do it in the first place.

You also have to remember that you have an enemy who hates you because he hates God and everything that God loves. The devil wants to destroy you. The devil wants to discourage you and get you to give up on serving God. The Bible says that when you fail, the devil will condemn you. The Bible calls the devil the accuser of the brethren both day and night. What is the difference between conviction and condemnation? Conviction comes when God gives you that feeling that lets you know that you have sinned. God does this so that you can repent and be forgiven. Condemnation comes when the devil beats you over the head with every mistake and sin that you have ever done. He does this so that he can discourage you from trying. God loves you. When God forgives you, He cleans you and makes you new. He removes your sin away from you as far as the east is from the west. God won't remind you of your sin every day. He forgets it. Psalm 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Transgressions are sins. The east and the west will never meet. You can't get any further apart than that. If you keep thinking about your sin after God has forgiven you and you feel a weight on you because you feel so bad about it, that may be the devil condemning you. If you have asked God to forgive you and you have done all He tells you to do to make it right, then you are forgiven. You don't have to feel condemned any longer. Tell the devil to go away and leave you alone. When you tell the devil to flee the Bible tells us that he has to go.

Then you have to forgive yourself. When God forgives you, you are forgiven. You don't have to hold it against yourself. You don't have to beat yourself up over every thing that you do wrong. I have known young people who failed God. God is ready to forgive them, but they won't let it go themselves. They keep feeling guilty. They won't forgive themselves. They eventually quit trying. That is what the devil wants us to do. Don't beat yourself up. Let God love you.

Another reason why we can't be forgiven is because we don't forgive others. The Lord's Prayer teaches us this.

It says “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”. Our debts are our sins. If we hold things against people and we don’t forgive them, then we can’t be forgiven. Sometimes that is hard to do. How can we forgive someone who has hurt us bad? Remember, Jesus is in you. He can help you do the things that you can’t do on your own. You have to be willing to try. He is the one who forgave those that nailed Him to the cross. He can surely help you to forgive. He can help you to forgive those who have hurt you. When you hold grudges against people, it never hurts them. It just hurts you. Bitterness and unforgiveness have been proven to cause cancer and hardening of the arteries, and more. Doctors have proven this. If there is someone who has hurt you, let God help you to forgive them.

That sounds like a lot to remember. Conviction, repentance, forgiveness, condemnation. Conviction is God’s way of letting you know that you have sinned. Repentance is your part. You repent when you are really sorry for what you did to the point that you won’t do that again willingly and knowingly. Forgiveness is God’s part. It happens when He forgives us. Condemnation is the feeling you get when the devil tries to discourage you by making you feel like you aren’t forgiven when he throws everything you do wrong in your face to discourage you.

Did everybody in the Bible always do right? Weren’t they perfect people so that is how they got written about? Let’s talk about some of them in the next chapter. We’ll talk more about what to do when you have done wrong.

Chapter 8.

What to Do When You've Done Wrong

Even if you haven't read the Bible much, you probably have heard about David, the shepherd boy who became king. His story is found in II Samuel and in I Kings. It is a great story. You should read it some time. It is a war story, drama story, and love story, all rolled into one. Matter of fact, there have been several movies made of the life of David. David starts out as a shepherd boy. God chose him to become king of Israel. That is what he became. In one verse the Bible talks about David as being a man after God's own heart. David was very human. He made a lot of mistakes. Wait a minute, how could he be a man after God's own heart if he made a lot of mistakes. He wasn't called that because he was perfect. He wasn't called that because he didn't make mistakes. It is what he did with his mistakes after he made them that was important. He never stopped loving God and serving him with his whole heart. He never stopped obeying God. When he messed up, he repented and asked forgiveness. Throughout his story you'll read mistakes that he made. He always repented and asked God to forgive him. Then he got back up and kept trying. He had to pay for his sin. Sin will cost you. David had to pay dearly for some of his sin. Let's read about his story.

Read II Samuel 11 and 12. It tells the story of how David was looking down from his roof and saw a beautiful woman washing herself. She was married. Her name was Bathsheeba. David gave into what was wrong and sent for her. Just so we don't blame it all on him, she went. She got pregnant. Bathsheeba's husband was Urea. He was a soldier. At the time this happened, Urriah was gone to battle. David knew that if Bathsheeba turned up pregnant while Urriah was gone, everyone could figure out that Urriah wasn't the baby's daddy. So he got a plan to cast the suspicion off of them. At that time the women could even be stoned for committing adultery. That was when people threw rocks at you until you were dead. So David definitely didn't want anyone to find out what had happened. David sent his general to the battlefield to get Urriah. Urriah was cool.

He was so dedicated to his country that when he came home, he told David that he couldn't spend time at home and be with his wife while everyone else in his outfit was in the battlefield. David tried for several nights to get him to go home, but he refused. David knew that everybody, including Urriah, would figure out that there was no way Urriah could be the baby's father. So David got an idea of how he could work it all out. He had his chief general send Urriah into the hottest part of the battle so that he would get killed. It happened just that way. Urriah was killed and David got Bathsheeba.

David thought that everything after that was cool. He thought that he had gotten away with everything. That was until a prophet named Nathan came by with a message from God. Then David knew. He knew that he hadn't hidden what he'd done from God. God spoke to David and told him that because he had done this thing, his country and his children would have to pay the consequences. His son died. His children had lots of turmoil. His country later became divided in a civil war when one of his children tried to take over from David. Did this mean that God turned his back on David? Did that mean that God no longer used him or loved him? The book of Psalms is filled with songs that David wrote about God's love. Here is one that talks about God's forgiveness. Psalms 51:6-14 says, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not they Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."

David served God all the rest of his life. I Chronicles 29:10-30 tells about how David died. Verse 17 is part of a prayer that David prayed just before he died. It says, "I know also, my

God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things...” David was upright in heart because God had forgiven, and had restored him in His love. What would have happened in this story if David had quit from discouragement when he messed up? What would have happened if David had kept on sinning, making excuses? Would things have turned out the same? He kept serving God, loving Him with all his heart.

Let’s look at someone in the New Testament for just a minute. Most of the people we’ve talked about so far have been in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is about the time before Jesus was born. The New Testament is about Jesus what happened after His death. This person that we are going to talk about next was guilty of one of the worst things that the New Testament talks about. This man was a Christian killer. His name was Saul. He was a Jew. The Jews at that time didn’t believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Some of them still don’t today.

When the Christians started saying that Jesus was the Son of God, the Jews thought that this was something that was against God. They started persecuting the church. They even started killing them. They actually thought that this was what God wanted them to do. The first time that the Bible mentions Saul is in Acts 7:58. This story is about a man named Stephen who was stoned to death for being a Christian. In Acts 8 it says, “and Saul was consenting unto his death.” He even held the coats for them while they stoned Stephen. Talk about being in the wrong crowd doing the wrong thing. Things went from there on to get worse for this young man. The next time that we read about him he is going to take men and women who were Christians to be killed. But God had other plans for him.

While he was on this trip to take these people to be killed, or tortured, or both, Jesus spoke to him. What was different about this? Jesus had already died on the cross, had come back to life, and had gone back to heaven. Jesus spoke to Saul from heaven. He spoke to him out loud. He said, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutedst.” Can he talk to you just like he did to Saul? He sure can. God can speak out loud to us. I know some people He did this to.

Mostly though God speaks to us inside of our hearts. When Jesus spoke to Saul it changed his life. When He speaks to us today, it will do the same. Paul became one of the people that spread the church around the world. He wrote most of the books of the New Testament. They were actually letters that he wrote teaching the Christians in the churches that he had helped start. God forgave him and he turned his world upside down.

Paul has written a lot about forgiveness. I guess this was because as he said it, he was the chief among sinners. He wrote a lot about forgiveness in the book of Romans, which he wrote to the church in Rome. Romans chapter 6 is a good chapter to read about sin, how to overcome it, and how God forgives us. It closes with verse 23. It says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sin will earn us death. There is a price to pay. Like David, sometimes that price can be dear. When we mess up our lives, we have to pay the consequences. Because Jesus died for us, we can be forgiven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us, God strengthens us so that we won't do this same thing again. This chapter that Paul wrote also tells us how to overcome when we do wrong. It talks about how the Spirit of God gives us power to overcome sin. We'll talk more about that in a later chapter. We'll talk about how God makes us new when we mess up. We've talked about how God can help us to pick up the pieces when we make a mess of our lives. We've talked about how He forgives us when we repent and how He can start us over.

What about those people who haven't sinned? They haven't drank and partied and done all the things that the rest of the crowd has done. Are they OK? Do they still need God's forgiveness too? The Bible says that everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God. It says that no one is perfect when compared to God and His perfection. So everybody comes up short. We all need forgiveness. We all need God. We need God's help even if we think that we aren't that bad. On our own we can't even keep the 10 commandments. If you think you can, then when is the last time that you lied? Even a little white lie, which is a lie all the same. We can't earn our way to heaven. We can't be good enough to get there. We aren't perfect enough.

Repenting of our sin, getting God's forgiveness, following Jesus is the only way that we can get to heaven. Jesus is the only door. To get to heaven we have to be forgiven by Him. We have to have a relationship with Him.

I am adding this next story in this chapter to talk more about those people who haven't been out doing everything wrong. Here are two people that made a choice to do right from the time that they were young. Let's look at the story of Timothy. Timothy was Paul's helper. In I Corinthians 4:17 Paul said this about Timothy, "...my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord..." Timothy is mentioned in nearly all the books of the New Testament, except of course the Gospels, which were written before Paul and Timothy's day. Paul wrote two of the books of the New Testament just to Timothy.

I have heard a lot of young people and even older ones say this. "I haven't been delivered from drugs and alcohol. I haven't done some of the things that a lot of people have done. So my testimony isn't as good as the testimonies of those people. God didn't deliver me out of a life of sin like that so my testimony isn't as sensational as theirs. I got saved when I was young and never got into all that stuff." The first time that I heard someone make this statement, I agreed with them. I wasn't one of those people. I had been saved when I was in the sixth grade, but laid it all down when I went away to college. I wanted to see what the other side was all about. I saw and regretted what I saw. When God saved me, He set me free from a lot of addictions and heartaches. I praise God for all that He did in my life. When I first heard someone testify in the way that I mentioned, I thought that God hadn't done as much for them as He had for me. I was foolish. What a testimony they had. It was a wonderful testimony. When someone, especially someone today, can say that God saved them when they were young and they didn't get into drugs, alcohol, and everything else that everyone is doing today, that is a wonderful and rare testimony. It is really a miracle. If you can say that today, then you are in a minority. God has done a wonderful thing in your life. Just like he did in Timothy's life. Timothy had known and had kept the Word of God from his youth. Look how God used Timothy. He can use you the same.

Don't hang your head and think that you don't have a testimony that is as important as others. Be proud of what God is doing for you.

So what if you don't go along with the crowd and do the right things? Can you really make a difference? Read the story of Josiah and see what you think. To understand his story you need to know about his grandfather and his father. You can find their story in II Kings 21. Verse 11 sums up his grandfather, "Because Manassah king of Judah hath done these abominations and hath done wickedly.." This tells us that because he was so wicked the rest of his country suffered. Anon was this guy's son. He was bad too. Verse 20 says about him, "and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did." These two kings were wicked and their whole country suffered because of it. Then Josiah was born. In II Kings 22:1 we read that Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king. Can you imagine being king at age 8? Because of hundreds of years of wickedness of his father and grandfather, everybody in his country had stopped serving God. They had stopped going to church so long ago that the churches had all fell apart. The Bible as they had it then had been lost entirely. Someone found it and brought it to Josiah. Back in those days everybody couldn't own a Bible. If you got one, you had to copy the whole thing down. Only certain people were allowed to copy it. There were only just a few copies in existence. Mostly they kept them in the church and the priest read them to the people. In some countries today not everyone can have a Bible. They are too expensive for most people in those countries to own. You need to appreciate your Bible. Sure it is written in a way that is hard to understand. For one thing if you haven't been saved you won't understand it. God's Spirit reveals what it means when we read it. God's Spirit teaches us what the Bible says. If we haven't been saved, then we don't have the Spirit to teach us. God's Spirit can quicken the Word of God and make it alive so that it changes us. Also, the more that you read it, the more you will understand it. It will change your life, guaranteed.

Someone brought the Bible to Josiah. When the king read it he was so sorry, so full of anguish that he ripped his clothes.

He realized when he read it how wrong they had all been living for so many years. You see it may have been hundreds of years since it had been read. He said this in verse 13, “go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.” You see it is God’s Word that shows us when we have done wrong. Then God’s Spirit convicts us and causes us to repent. Then His Spirit gives us the strength to do right.

Fixing his country was no small job. Read in II Kings 2:23 what all Josiah did to get this right. His country had gotten so bad that they were worshipping idols and as part of their worship they were sacrificing their own children to those idols. Josiah broke down all the altars and killed all the priests that took part in those kinds of things. He was serious about getting things right. The Bible says in verse 24, “And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.”

You may think that you are too young to make a difference. You may think that you are too young to have to decide whether or not you need to serve God. You may think all this is for someone older. You may think that if you choose to do right, so what. All you’ll get for making that choice is a hard time from everyone else. I am sure that Josiah got a hard time everywhere he went. But he didn’t stop until he made a difference. Are you tired of watching your friends destroy their lives and their futures? Are you tired of watching your friends and people you know die young because of sin? Are you tired of hurting because you can’t help them and you really want to? You can make difference. I am sure that when Josiah became king at 8 years old he thought that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I am sure that he wondered if he could really make a difference. God used him. He didn’t do it all on his own. God helped him to do what he did. He literally changed his whole country. Maybe you won’t do anything as radical as Josiah did.

But you can make a difference. Starting where you are. Can you do it on your own? No. None of us can. You need God's help. You need God's Word. Josiah found strength to make a stand when he read God's Word. That is what started it all. You have the same things that Josiah had when he was alive. But you also have something that he couldn't have. You have the opportunity to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus died, people couldn't receive that. We'll talk more about that in the next chapter.

Chapter 9.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

When I first got saved, I was a mess. I had been into drugs, and drinking, and everything else. I gave my heart to the Lord knowing He was my only hope. My life was such a mess. I thought that it couldn't be fixed. I had a hard time at first choosing to do right. I had made wrong choices so long it was easier to do wrong than to do right. Have you ever noticed how it is easy to do bad and hard to do well? We talked about this earlier in a chapter. That is because we all have a nature that is prone to get into trouble. The Bible refers to the human part of us as being the flesh. When we get saved, Jesus comes into our hearts through the Holy Ghost. He helps us to do right. He changes us from the inside out. The Bible can change us too. We've talked about that as well. The more we read and study God's Word and apply it to our lives, doing what it says to do, the more we will change. I knew all this, but I still had a hard time making right choices and staying away from the wrong. For one thing, I wouldn't leave my old friends alone. I thought that it was my responsibility to help to change them. It didn't work that way. They would wind up pulling me back down. For another thing, I was addicted to doing wrong. I was addicted to the things that were destroying me.

Addiction is a hard thing to get out from. One of the main reasons is because there are two sides to addiction. There is a physical side, and there is a spiritual side. On the physical side, our bodies become addicted to whatever it is, whether it is drugs, drinking, or smoking. All these come with physical addictions where our bodies become dependent on that substance. The other side is a spiritual side. The devil loves addiction. The devil possesses and owns people through addiction. He can manipulate them to do what he wants, and he can destroy their life, mind, and soul. He steps in when people become addicted which makes it all worse. I could not get free from either the physical or spiritual side of my addictions. Then I learned how God could deliver. He can set you free from both the physical and spiritual side of addiction. People prayed for me. God delivered me, set me free.

I was in a spiritual church where people knew about the power of prayer and God's ability to set us free. The Spirit of God delivered me physically from the symptoms of addiction. I was no longer addicted.

I have seen coke addicts go free. I have seen meth addicts be delivered through prayer. I have seen alcoholics who have drunk for years get up from an altar of prayer to be totally set free. There was such a change in them that they even looked younger. God can set you free. You just have to make up your mind that you really want to be delivered. They found freedom from both the physical and the spiritual addictions that they had. You can go through all kinds of rehab, but if you don't take care of the spiritual addiction as well as the physical you won't be totally set free. Have you ever heard someone refer to "the monkey on your back"? People who have been addicted and go through physical rehab say, "You are not ever set free from an addiction. You are just a rehabilitated alcoholic, or a rehabilitated drug addict. There is no such thing as being totally free. You will always have to fight this addiction". That is not true. When you are free in Jesus, you are free indeed. When I got set free from addiction and alcoholism, I was set free for real. That has been over 30 years ago. I am not a rehabilitated alcoholic. I am not an alcoholic at all. Haven't been since God set me free from both the physical and the spiritual side of my addictions.

To be set free, you have to make up your mind that you really really really want to be set free. You have to know that you are tired of your addictions, and you have to give them up. For God to set you free from anything you have to give it up and give it to Him. If you still hold onto it, He can't take it. Then we have to let God deliver us. Then we have to be filled with the Spirit of God so that we can continue to make a stand against the devil who is trying to destroy us. This life with God is a new life in a whole new world. It isn't a physical world, but a spiritual world. To fight against the enemy, you can't fight physically because it isn't a physical fight. You have to fight back spiritually through prayer and through the Spirit of God that is in you. You have to know God loves you. You have to stand against the enemy, refuse to do it His way. God has to help you fight the battle.

So how did I get free from all that was binding me? I found God's love. I trusted Him. I gave up my way and was willing to do it His way. I gave up my addictions and everything connected with it. I had to stop hanging around with my old friends. I had to stop going to the places I had gone to. But the main thing that helped me was learning about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. I hadn't heard of this when I was growing up. I grew up in a church that didn't teach about it. That is sad because the founders of the Methodist church, which was the church I attended, had the Baptism of the Holy Ghost when they started the denomination. Some churches teach about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and some don't. That isn't important. What is important is that the Bible teaches about it. What is important, too, is that it is real and it works. It is first mentioned in Acts in Chapter 1 verses 5-8. Jesus spoke in verse 5-8, "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence....But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the world."

After Jesus died, the disciples were afraid. They went into hiding. The enemies of Jesus were after them, too. They were afraid for their lives. Then something happened that we read about in the second chapter of Acts on the day of Pentecost. In verse 4 we read, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Holy Ghost came in and baptized, or filled them. Then we read about a change. In verse 41 of that chapter we read that on that very day over 3,000 people were saved and added to the church. What happened in the rest of the world from then on until today depended on what happened that day. If the disciples had stayed hidden away in fear, we wouldn't have the church today. These guys were the ones who started the church. They spread it around through out the known world at that time. They were the ones who told about Jesus, and wrote His life's story down for us to read. They were important. They were scared, sure. But God made a way to fire them up so that they forgot all about being scared. He filled them with His Spirit.

Maybe you are going through something a little like them. Maybe you are afraid to stand up for what is right. Maybe you want to obey God but you are not strong enough to stand up for what is right. You always get pulled back down. This is what you need. That same power that the disciples had then is available for you today. Just like it was (and still is) for me. I was up, then down, then up, then down. I was ready to give up on the whole thing. I thought that it just wasn't going to work for me. Then I received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. It gave me the power and strength to make a stand. It gave me the spiritual strength to stand against the enemy and all his addictions. It can do the same for you.

How do you get the Baptism of the Holy Ghost? The Bible says that you have to be determined to obey God. Then you have to ask God for it believing that He will give it to you. It is a gift like many other things that God has for you. You have to seek God for it and you will find it. Luke 11:9-12 tells us this. Jesus is speaking in these verses. "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." In verse 13 it goes on to say, "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?" God knows how to give us the Spirit when we seek Him for it. Your job is to seek it and believe that He will give it to you.

I grew up in a church that didn't teach about it. How did I find it? I knew that I needed something more than what I had. I wasn't going to make it if I didn't find something else. I prayed and asked God to help me. He sent me help when He led me to go to a certain church. They believed in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. They knew how to pray for people to receive the Baptism. They invited me to come and I went. I went with an open mind and a hungry heart. They prayed for me, and I received it. It truly changed my whole life. It can change your life too.

When you receive the Baptism of the Spirit you have more power to help overcome your flesh. The Spirit of God will be stronger in you. We talked earlier about the two parts of us:

our human nature, and God's nature in us that comes in after we get saved. The Baptism strengthens the God part of us. The Spirit begins to rule instead of our flesh. Also, the Spirit of God knows how to fight against the enemy, the devil who tries to pull us down. The Spirit of God knows how to pray for those around us. When He prays through us, He can pray for exactly the right thing.

It is all up to you and what you choose. God makes a way for us. We just have to do what He tells us to do. John 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." We can choose to be weak, or we can choose to be filled with all the fullness of God and get all He has for us. Dare to be like the disciples. God filled them with His Spirit. They changed their world. You can make a difference. Think of the people around you who are going to hell because they can't see God and how real He is. The only way they can see Him is if you let your light shine before them. Be a light. Help them to be able to make heaven their home. To do this you have to be willing to be different from the crowd. Can God help you to be able to do this? What difference can you make to others if you stand up for what is right? If nobody listens, is it still important to make a stand. These two guys in the story in our next chapter found out that if you stand for God, He will stand for you, even if nobody else does.

Chapter 10.

Joseph

We read about the story of Joseph starting in Genesis 37. Joseph had decided when he was young that no matter what anyone else did, his brothers included, he was going to do right. Some of his brothers weren't that great. They were really jealous. They didn't want to try to do what was right and they got mad when Joseph got attention for doing what was right. That is not so different than what its like today. Seems like the kids at school that really try to do good are the ones that everyone else picks on. I think that people pick on ones who are doing their best because they are jealous. Also, they aren't willing to try so they get mad when someone else tries. Sad to say that makes a lot of young people stop doing what is right. They quit doing what is the best, and they do what everyone else is doing just so they can fit in. One of the sad things about doing that is that if they give up on doing right entirely, one day they will be in hell with the crowd. Joseph didn't make that mistake. He kept doing what was right no matter what happened. And believe me, he had a lot happen to him.

The first thing that happened was that his brothers got so mad at him they tried to kill him. They decided not to, and to make a long story short, they sold him as a slave to a caravan headed to Egypt. When he got there he was sold to Potiphar, who was Pharaoh's chief guard. He did a good job there serving Potiphar, until Potiphar's wife got the hots for him. She tried to put the make on him. Joseph still didn't do what has wrong. He ran away from her. This made her mad, and she told Potiphar that he had done wrong. Potiphar got mad at him and threw him in prison. Twice he had gotten in trouble for things that he didn't do while trying to stand up for what was right. Right now in this story it doesn't look like standing up for what is right was the best thing to do. I wonder if while he was in prison, Joseph thought about that. I wonder if he ever said, "Why do I bother to try. Look where it has gotten me." The Bible doesn't say that he did that. If he did think that, I don't think that he dwelled on it because of how he acted. The Bible says that while he was in

prison he still tried to do what was right. The jailer over the prison put him over the other prisoners.

You see God had a plan. All this happened for a reason. Pharaoh's butler and baker were both thrown into prison. While they were in prison both of them had a dream. They asked Joseph what their dream meant. Joseph told them what the dreams meant. He told them some things that were going to happen, and it happened just like he had said. Joseph explained that it was because God had showed him what was going to happen. The butler was released from prison. Joseph told him to remember that he had helped him. It was a two years before he did. At that time, Pharaoh had a dream. The butler remembered how Joseph had told him what his dream meant. He told Pharaoh and Pharaoh had Joseph released out of prison. Joseph told Pharaoh that his dream meant that there was coming 7 years when there would be such a harvest that there would be extra food for everyone. But after those 7 years, there would be 7 years of famine. Pharaoh recognized that Joseph was someone of integrity, someone who could be trusted. He appointed Joseph to be over his country, in charge of saving up food for the 7 years of famine. You see, there weren't any grocery stores to run to when their fields didn't grow food. When the food didn't grow, they would all starve. Joseph was in charge of seeing that no one in their country starved. He saved Egypt and even kept his father and brothers from going hungry. You'll have to read in your Bible to see how that happened. Remember, his story is found in Genesis starting in chapter 37. Read it. It is a really good story with a really good lesson.

Even though it looked like it didn't matter whether Joseph did right or not, it made a difference. Even when it looked like all he would get for standing up for what was right was heartache, it mattered. If we stand up for what is right, we will get God's attention. He will notice us. He will use us in His plan.

Does God have a plan for you? Yes, he does. God has a plan that will be more than anything you could ever think of. He has a plan for you that will be everything your heart desires. If you don't dare to do what is right and listen and obey, you'll never find out what you could do in God's perfect plan for you.

When everyone else is doing wrong, it is worth it when you stand up and do what is right.

Chapter 11.

Joshua and Caleb

Have you ever thought, what is the use to stand up for what is right because nobody listens. Everybody just does their own thing, so why shouldn't I just go along with the crowd. This chapter talks about two people who refused to go along with what everyone else was doing. Nobody listened. Nobody changed. Still the decision they made was important. You can find the story of Joshua and Caleb in the book of Exodus. Joshua is first mentioned in Exodus 17:8. It tells about how Joshua was a mighty warrior, and how he won a battle against a huge army because of a rod. Read it and see what I'm talking about. Joshua learned about obeying God. He knew that if he did it God's way, it would work. It was a good thing he learned this because one day it would make a difference in his life and the lives of everyone. Read the story of Joshua and Caleb. You will enjoy it. It talks about how it can work out if you stand for what is right even if nobody else does.

We've already talked about how this world is not a picnic. It is full of bad stuff. This world is suffering from a condition called, "the absence of righteousness". Very few people are standing up and doing what is right. Very few people stand up for God. Very few people keep sin out of their lives. Sin brings bad things into your life. That's what sin is. Sin not only brings bad things into your life, but also into the lives of the people that love you. We've already talked about this. People are not keeping sin out of their lives, and standing up for what is right. They just follow the crowd in the wrong direction. Sin wins. The Bible says that eventually the wages of sin is death. Sin earns you bad things. Sin causes pain, sickness, corruption, sadness, fear and much more. All these things and more happen because people give in to sin. When people as a whole are no longer concerned with following God and doing what is right, it messes us all up. How can we change this? Can we make a difference? If we stand up for what is right will it make a difference to people around us? If nobody else listens is it still important to do what is right?

We read that Joshua and Caleb were in the desert with Moses when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt back to the Promised Land. They had been in Egypt for several generations. They were the ancestors of Joseph's family who moved to Egypt. We talked about him in the last chapter. As the years went by, the Pharaoh who had known Joseph died. Other Pharaohs came to power that didn't know Joseph and what he had done for the country. The Egyptians became afraid of the Israelites. There were so many Israelites in Egypt that the Egyptians were afraid that they would try to take over and run their country. So the Egyptians made the Israelites slaves. History shows that they could be the slaves that the Egyptians used to make the pyramids and huge buildings that they made. The Egyptians were cruel to the Israelites. They began to pray that God would set them free. God raised up a man named Moses who led the people out of Egypt across the desert to the Promised Land God had for them. You can find his story in the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible.

A lot of people read the stories of the people in the Bible and they think that these are not true stories. They think that these are just make-believe. They read how the children of Israel walked through the Red Sea on dry land. They think that these are just stories that people told. I am a firm believer that all the stories in the Bible are true. There are a lot of geological and archaeological evidences to prove that the accounts in the Bible are true. There have been people who set about trying to prove that the stories in the Bible are wrong. They actually were convinced through trying to prove the Bible wrong that the Bible is true. One day we will get to heaven. We will meet the people in these stories: Joseph, Moses, Abraham, Paul, and all the others. And we'll get to meet Joshua and Caleb.

Joshua and Caleb were in the desert with Moses. They were there when the children of Israel made it to the Promised Land, which is where the nation of Israel stands today. It was the land that God had promised Abraham and his family hundreds of years before this. God had promised that He would make a mighty nation there. God had led them through the desert to this homeland that He had promised them. When they reached the

Promised Land, Moses sent spies to go in and see what it was like. Two of those spies were Caleb and Joshua. They went into the land. They saw some pretty amazing things. One of the things that they saw was grapes in clusters so big that two men had to carry one cluster. The land was a rich farmland. God had chosen the best land for His people. There were a few problems. Most of the guys that went in with the spies couldn't see anything but the problems. They couldn't see the rich land and the huge harvest. They could only see the people who lived there who looked like giants. They became afraid to go in to the land that God had given them. All the rest of the spies talked everyone else into being afraid and turning around. Only two people stood up for what God wanted them to do, Joshua and Caleb.

They were finally there. They had gone through a lot to get there, but God had been with them. God had done miracles for them while they were in the desert. A huge cloud shaded them and led them by day. A pillar of fire warmed them and guided them by night. Food fell from heaven. Water came from rocks. Seas parted and they walked across them on dry land. All this happened and when things looked a little bad when they got there, they turned and wanted to run. They got mad at Moses and at God because they had a little bit of trouble. Who was it that refused to go along with the crowd? Joshua and Caleb. They stood up for what God said. They stood up for what was right even when the rest of the crowd threatened to stone them. They stood up for obeying God. You might think that it didn't do any good for them to stand up against the crowd. After all, nobody listened. The children of Israel messed up and had to wander. They had to wander in the desert for 40 more years. What good did it do for them to stand up for what was right? God punished the people for their sin by telling them that they could not go into the land He had promised them. They would have to wander more in the desert. They would travel in the desert until the parents of that group of people died, and only their children would be allowed to go in. Do you know that out of hundreds of thousands of people who were there in the desert, everybody in that generation died without getting to go to the Promised Land? Only two of that older generation lived to see the Promised Land.

When they finally made it there, guess who the leaders were? You got it. Joshua and Caleb. When they stood up for what was right, God stood up with them. Even if nobody but God notices when you stand up for what is right, does it really matter? Not if God notices.

So what does this story have to do with you? Sure it worked for Joshua and Caleb, but those people in the Bible were all perfect. That is why they were in the Bible. Right? If you've read much in the Bible you'll realize that just because someone was mentioned in the Bible it doesn't mean that they were perfect. Even some of the people God used in a mighty way really messed up. Look at Moses in the story of Joshua and Caleb. He disobeyed God and never got to go into the Promised Land. He died before they got there. God still called Moses His friend. The people in the Bible were just humans. Just like you and me. The ones who God used were ones that made up their mind to do what was important. They made up their minds that they loved God with all their heart and they obeyed Him with His help. They submitted their selves to God and let God come in to their heart. They let God rule in their lives. They weren't perfect, but when they failed God they repented and asked him to forgive them. They were people just like you. They overcame obstacles with His help. You can too.

The next time you find yourself in a crowd that wants to do wrong, remember Joshua and Caleb. The same God that showed them what to do is your God just the same. The same God that strengthened them will strengthen you. You may even think at the time that it isn't important to do what is right. But just like Caleb and Joshua you could be making a stand that affects your future and the lives and futures of those around you. Even if at the time, they aren't listening.

Chapter 12.

How to Make It To Heaven and How to Avoid Hell

Young people constantly ask me how to get to go to heaven. A lot of people have a lot of different answers to that question. Some religions don't believe that there is a heaven. Some say that all there is of heaven is what is here on earth. Some religions teach that after you die here you get to come back to earth as something, or somebody else. Kind of like a huge recycling service. Some religions teach that you go to hell for a little while then you can work your way back to heaven again. Some religions teach that we are all just little puffs of energy and when we die, we go to be with the big wind of energy that is God. We just blow around as energy in the cosmos. What do you believe? What is true?

Is it really important to know the truth? After all, you are young. Why do you need to make up your mind about heaven now anyway? We've already talked about a lot of young people who found out that they weren't guaranteed tomorrow. Neither are you. I'm not saying this to scare you. I am just saying it because it is true. A lot of young people today have a lot of fear. That is why there are so many young people and old ones that drink and do drugs. They don't want to face reality. They can't handle it. Believe me, I have been there and done that. This world is scary. But with God you don't have to be afraid. Matter of fact, the Bible tells us over 365 times that we are to "fear not". God loves you. He will take care of you. You can put your trust in him. I John 4:18 tells us, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear..." It goes on to say in verse 19, "We love Him, because he first loved us." II Timothy 1:7 tells us, "for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." We don't have to be afraid because God loves us and we can put our trust in Him. You can overcome the scary things of this world, and you can also go on to change the lives of those around you. You have to get real with yourself and real with God to be able to make a difference. If you will, and if you will put yourself in His hands and give your life and your will to

Him, you can not only go to heaven yourself, but you can also lead those that you love to be able to go too. You have to decide what you want. Do you want the truth or do you want to follow a lie? If you want the truth, then God can show you what is true. The Spirit of God can reveal the truth to you. If you really want to go to heaven, you had better be finding out the truth.

Why are there so many different beliefs and so many different churches? People tend to want to make up their own truth. They want a truth that is easy to follow. They want a way of life that will enable them to do whatever they want to and still get by. They don't want a religion that demands that they submit and do right. They want a religion that lets them be comfortable. What happens to all these people who want something else beside the truth when they die? Will they be comfortable then? If you find the truth and live by it, then you can't lose. Then no matter what happens you will be ready. I once was witnessing to an atheist, someone who doesn't believe in God, about what he needed to do to be able to go to heaven. I simply told him, "If when I die I am right about heaven, and what it takes to get there, then I am a winner and you are a loser. If I am wrong and you are right, and I have still done all there is to do to get to go to heaven, plus I have the added bonuses that come when you do right. I am still a winner and you are a loser. So anyway I win. Why shouldn't I do right?"

Now some people will tell you that all it takes to get to go to heaven is to say the sinner's prayer. If you pray the sinner's prayer asking Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sin, then no matter what you do from then on, you are saved and you can go to heaven. Is that true? Did God send His son Jesus to die on the cross so that we could do whatever we wanted to and no matter how we lived, we could still get to go to heaven? Does that sound right to you? Is God's love and the price that Jesus paid for our forgiveness something that we should take advantage of? If it were true that we could take advantage of God's forgiveness and do whatever, then what would God's love really mean to us? When we live like the devil, talking anyway that we want to, doing anything that we want to, living any way that we want to, and then we go to church on Sunday like it

doesn't matter, does God know? Does He care? Are we really getting by? Is that how to go to heaven? You can make excuses for anything that you do, but will those excuses make any difference when you die. The Bible teaches that we have to repent and ask God for forgiveness. If you continue to do what you did, have you really repented? God will take those who are forgiven to heaven. There will be no excuses accepted. The Bible teaches us that what we sow we will reap. Galatians 6:7 says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If you want to go to heaven, then there will be some things that are required of you.

You have to find out the truth about heaven and you have to find out what it takes to be able to go there. How do you do that? Read the Bible for yourself. Ask God to show you the truth. Be determined in your heart that you want to do what is right. Give your will to God and say, "God I want to do what you want me to do and not what I want."

I have taught school a lot of years. More years than you've been in school. One of the places that I often use to illustrate how God wants us to live is the classroom. Both of us can relate to that. When different people come to class they come from different backgrounds, different beliefs, and different walks of life. What should be taught in the classroom is the truth. Sometimes in public school, that isn't always true. But what you go to class to learn is the truth. If you went to class and your teacher taught you that $2 \times 3 = 8$, then you wouldn't want to learn anything else from that teacher. In God's classes, the truth is taught. God uses these to teach: His Word, His Spirit, and his people who are filled with His Spirit. Now there are a lot of other classes out there that are teaching other things, but we are going to concentrate on His classes. Let's tune in on one of those classes.

Let's say that there is one little group in this class called group number 1. You may recognize this group of students. They are too busy being noticed to learn anything. They don't want to give in and go anybody else's direction. They want to have everything their way. Are they learning much? How can they? If you have fit into that group you'll know what I mean.

Then there is group number 2. This group of students thinks that they know more than their teachers. No matter how smart and how much knowledge and experience the teacher has, they want to tell their teacher how it should be. Have you ever had anybody in class that way? Can they learn much by doing that?

Then there is group number 3. What about those kids who run together in clicks, little groups. They huddle together in little crowds for support. They aren't interested in learning anything that is outside of their little world. Can they learn much?

Then there is group number 4. They are the rebels. You know, the ones who would argue with anything anybody else said no matter how stupid they sound. They just want to argue. They don't want to do it anybody else's way. Have you ever had anybody like that in your class?

Then there are the quiet ones in group number 5. They are afraid to learn the truth because they really think that they are too stupid to learn. They think that they are so low that they don't deserve knowing anything. They might be the smartest person in the class, but they are too afraid that they will make a mistake to try.

Then in group number 6 there are the kids who think that they have everything. They think they don't need anything. They drive the sports cars to school. They play ball, or some kind of sports, or cheer lead. Everybody in school knows who they are. Some of the other kids in school will fall apart if these perfect students don't notice them. They really are perfect in their own eyes. They think that nobody else is like them, and nobody is as good as them. They really feel like there is nothing for them to learn. Can they learn?

When you read about these kids, you can probably recognize some of them as students that you've seen in some of the classes you've attended. I have had kids like that in my classes through the years, and even have had a few of them in my classes when I was in high school myself. It really is a small world. Let's look at each of these groups of kids as an illustration of how some people act in God's classes.

What about group number 1? The group of kids who want

everyone's attention. Can we learn from God when we want everything to be centered around us and not on Him? Can we learn his truth that way? God is God. He created it all. He has to be the center. Just like that group of kids who will have to submit to their teacher to learn, we have to submit to God to learn. It's His way that matters. If we want it our way, and not His, then we will never find out the truth. I know people that go their own way for years trying to prove that their way is the best. They want to be the center of their own lives. Then when they get old, they look around at their lives and realize that they are empty and meaningless. Let go of your way and let God has His way. You won't regret it. If you do, you will make heaven.

What about group 2, the ones who think that they know more than the teacher. Most of the world thinks that they are smarter than God. Romans 1:22 talks about how people will be. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." We are foolish. We have proved it by nearly destroying this world and each other. What a mess things are in. We have done this. God knows a lot more than we do. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." God sits in heaven and overlooks all we do, and He has done so since the beginning of time. He knows more than we'll ever be able to know. Still we read the Bible and say, how can that be true. We'll discuss it and turn it around to mean differently than how it was written, and we'll think that we are being smart. When we are like that, how can God teach us? If you think that you are smarter than God, and don't believe His Word, then you won't ever make heaven.

Then in group number 3 we talked about the kids who run in clicks, in groups. You can name the groups better than me. There are the skaters, the dorks, the geeks, the jocks, the Goths, and more. You have all the different gangs too. Have you ever felt like you were a nobody and totally left out, because you didn't fit into one of those groups? Or maybe at one time you fit in, but for some reason somebody got mad at you and the rest of the group turned their back on you. Those crowds can really hurt.

You know what I mean when I say that when you are in a little crowd like that you aren't interested in learning anything that is true. You just want to learn how to fit in. More than one kid has messed up their lives by fitting in. sometimes it easy to do that in the Christian world too. We get into a church that believes a certain way. We may not even know what that church believes in. We just want to feel a part of something. Do you know that there are all kinds of churches that teach things that are wrong? Some of them even teach things so wrong that if we start believing that way and if we start to live that way, we will go to hell because of how we believe. There are churches that teach that no matter what you do, you get to go to heaven. Some churches teach that God forgives everyone even if they aren't sorry for what they do. There are churches that teach that Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, Mary. They teach that He was just a good man, a prophet. That He wasn't the Son of God. There are churches that teach that Jesus didn't really die on the cross for our sins. There are churches that teach that to go to heaven you have to play with live snakes in their church services. There are churches that teach that if you dress a certain way and look a certain way, then you can go to heaven.

It is confusing out there. More than a little scary. I have a lot of young people say to me, "I'm scared to go to church. What if I pick the wrong one?" I tell them this, "If you want to learn the truth, God will help you to find the right church. He will lead you." Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." He will guide you. His Word will light your way. The reason why some people never find the truth is because they settle for a church that feels comfortable. Maybe the people show them a lot of love. They want to be a part of a little group, instead of being a part of God's family. God's family is a lot bigger than one little church. It is a lot bigger than one denomination. One thing that all God's family has in common is their love for God, their desire to follow Him, and their desire to know the truth. I meet God's people all over the world, from all denominations. We have to look past denominations to find God's family. We don't have to fit into one little group. We have a huge group to fit into. And they will love us and

accept us like we are.

What about the next group, group 4? They were the rebels. They are the ones that argue about anything. If you tell them to do something, they will do the opposite just because they want to. They don't want to go by anybody else's rules. Have you had anybody in class like that before? They not only can't learn themselves, but they keep everybody else from learning, too. This world is full of rebellion. Just turn on the TV. Are the people in the spotlight the people who want to do right? Surely not. Are the famous people the ones that say, "Kids, I want to show you the right way to live. This is how you should act. Do right. Be right. And be proud of it." Today, anything goes. Most of the actors, singers, and all that do the opposite of what is right. They may do a little spotlight to teach kids how to act, but the way they live surely undoes that. Their lives more often than not are filled with doing the opposite of what is right. The Bible calls the last day's generation, an untoward generation. A generation that is backwards from what it ought to be. In today's world, it is acceptable to wear a ring in your nose or in your tongue and tattoo yourself up. (Just as a reminder, how did this stuff get started? It started with the barbarians in the jungles. Think about it.) In today's world, you wear your clothes wrong side out. You don't pull up your pants. You wear your pajamas to school and don't even comb your hair. You paint your hair green. The weirder the better it seems. Everybody does the opposite of what you should do. Most kids don't know what is right. Then their lives get wrecked because they are trying to fit in with a crowd who is trying to do the opposite of what is good and right. Most kids fall into that crowd because they are afraid that they can't do right. So they settle for doing wrong. Sometimes when we are afraid that we can't do what we need to do, when we are afraid that if we try we will just mess up, we don't try to do right. Because we aren't trying we just drift into what is wrong.

When God saves you, He sends His Spirit to live in your heart. If you ask Him to, He can fill you up with His Spirit. His Spirit will strengthen you and change you from the inside out. You won't have to rebel because you are afraid that you can't do right. He loves you. He'll be there to help you.

I was a genuine rebel most of my life before God came into my heart. One of the reasons why I rebelled was because I was afraid to love people and to let people love me. So I fought everybody and everything. Rebelling was my way of being sure that everybody was shut away out of my life so that they couldn't hurt me. When I found God's love for me, I wasn't afraid any more. In His love, I had the security that I needed. Because of that I learned to submit to God. I knew that He loved me and He wanted the best for me. I learned from submitting to Him that I could submit to others. Yes, still there are times when people hurt me. But God helped me to overcome the hurt and He healed my broken pieces. I didn't have to be afraid any more. People will hurt you. They aren't perfect. Even the ones that love you the most will mess up and hurt you. But when you have God in your life, you can sort out the good and bad and go on with the good in people. You can be strong in yourself so that no matter what people do, they aren't your God. They can't make or break you. God's love and security takes rebellion away, if you'll let him. There won't be any rebels in heaven. Just those who have realized that God's way works. It really does. We won't want to do the opposite. We know He loves us and wants the best for us. Why would we want to do it any other way?

Then in group 5 we talked about the quiet ones. The ones who hide away and think that they are too stupid and not worth anything. There are so many young people today who feel that they are worthless. They think that they are the ugliest, the fattest, the dumbest, the clumsiest, the most unlikely to succeed, and the most of everything that is bad. They don't care about themselves because they really don't think that anyone else cares. If anyone pays attention to them, they run after that person doing anything just to get more attention. A lot of the times these are not the kids that fit into anybody's click. Even if they are in a little crowd, they don't think that they deserve being there because they don't think that they are special at all. One of my favorite sayings is this one, "I know that I am somebody because God doesn't make no junk."

You are special. You were created in the image of God. The Bible says that God's love for us is a special kind of love.

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever, believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 15:13 says, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” That talks about how great Jesus’ love is for you. John 14:23 says, “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” John 16:27 says, “For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” Ephesians 2:4 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.” I John 3:1 says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...” These are only a few of the verses in the Bible that talk about God’s love.

God loves you so much that He sent His son to die for you. That is a lot of love. He loves you so much that if you would have been the only one, He would have died for you. You are loved. When you ask Jesus to come into your heart, then He is really inside of you. How much more special can you be. You have Jesus in you. You don’t have to hide in the edge of the class anymore. You are precious to Him. Get a relationship with Him that is real. He will teach you right and wrong. He will teach you His truth. He will keep you until that day you see Him. He will take you home.

Then we talked about the last group of kids in the classroom who thought that they were perfect. They were the popular crowd. They were the ones that everybody wanted to be like. They didn’t learn because they thought that they didn’t need anything. They had it all. WOW. Is that ever wrong? I talked not long ago to one of those kids who were popular. They found out that they had cancer. They were scared. They knew that they needed someone. I’ve talked to some of those perfect kids that found out that they were pregnant. The pregnancy was dangerous for them. They found out that they needed someone. One of those perfect football players that everyone looked up to was in a bad car wreck. Just minutes before he died, I wonder if he looked up to God. You see we really are all just the same. We are all

very imperfect. We need God and we need each other. The more that we get in reality the easier it is to admit this. There is no way that we can earn a place in heaven by being perfect. The Bible teaches that only one is perfect, and that is Jesus. It teaches that there is no way that we can be perfect enough to deserve heaven. The Bible compares people to sheep because we all need a shepherd to lead us. At our best we don't know which direction to take with our lives. We need Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to lead us. We need His shelter. We need Him to show us the way so that we aren't left out in the cold. We need a Shepherd. We need to admit that we need Jesus.

How do you make heaven and avoid hell? Don't be like some of these kids that we've talked about. Trust God. Listen to him as He teaches you the truth. Get to know Him and find a relationship with Him. Be willing to do it His way and let your will and your way go. After all, He knows what is best. Stay away from all the wrong things. If God says no, then don't. Be a good student. This classroom I've been talking about is life. Let God be your teacher. He will be the best teacher that you've ever had. Guaranteed.

Chapter 13.

Why Do Right?

Well, we've talked about what is wrong and what is right and how to know the difference. Let's talk a little more about why we should do what is right. When I was growing up my mother was a good disciplinarian. She didn't put up with any junk. She taught us the difference between what was right and what was wrong just like her mother and dad taught her. If we came up with some lame excuse as to why we did wrong, we might earn a good chewing out, if not a good lick or two with a switch. We didn't get by with anything. We didn't get by with not trying. We knew what we were supposed to do and we knew what we weren't supposed to do. We didn't mix the two up because we weren't sure of the difference between them. We knew what was acceptable and expected. There weren't any gray areas that we could argue with her about. She didn't give in just because we begged. We didn't dare try. We knew that there was no use. When I got older, I made some wrong choices. But even when I was making wrong choices, I knew that I was doing wrong. I had learned the difference between wrong and right. When I came back to God, it was because I knew where to find the right way for my life. I knew what I needed. I was lost, but I knew the way home.

Why did we put up with my Mom's discipline when we were growing up? I guess that we didn't have to. We could have refused to do anything that she wanted, and made it so hard on her that she backed down and gave in. I'm sure that there were times that she felt like it. We were four girls about the same age. Most of us hit our rebel years at about the same time. We could have tuned her out and stopped hearing her. A lot of kids do that. They just run to their room and turn up the music, or put the headsets on. We could have spent most of our time away from home running with a crowd. That is what a lot of kids do when they want to tune out their parents. Why didn't we? I guess there were two reasons why we didn't. Number one, we knew we couldn't get by with it. Number 2, we knew that my mother loved us, and that she wanted the best for us. And we knew that

she was right. She didn't just fuss at us. She did a lot of fussing, but we deserved it when she did. The rest of the time she spent teaching us. Taking care of us. Spending time with us. Showing us a hundred ways a day that she loved us. We knew that she loved us. We didn't have to guess that she did. We knew that she did. Besides God and my Dad, we were the center of her life. So when the discipline came and it did often, we knew her motive was love. We knew that she wanted the best for us, whether we wanted to admit it or not.

Why does God set up such a thing as right and wrong, and why does he expect us to do right? Why does He discipline us, even punish us when we fail to do what is right? Why would He even have a place like hell to punish us for forever? (By the way, do you know that God made hell to punish the fallen angels, angels that followed the devil instead of Him? He doesn't send us to hell. We send ourselves there when we refuse to accept His love.) The Bible describes God in one word-*love*. It says, "God is love." Sometimes if we aren't careful we want to do God like we do our parents. Bottom line we tend to want our way. We do everything we can to get our way -no matter how long it takes or what we have to do. What goes on in most homes between parents and teenagers is a power struggle. You have to admit it. You hit that age where you feel like you have to prove that you know what is best for your life, (even if you don't know what is best). You feel that you have to establish your own territory and your own rights. You have to establish that you can do it on your own because you are fast approaching the time when you'll have to do it on your own. You feel like you have to show everybody (and yourself) that you can do it. You start feeling like you have to prove everything to everybody. That is when the power struggle starts. Kids that have had great relationships with their parents turn into monsters that nobody can love.

Come on admit it. Sometimes you do things that you hate. Often you don't even know why. We struggle to find our own identity. If you are not careful you find it in a crowd or in a relationship that goes bad. If you try to find who you are through other people, you can easily lose yourself. Because of the power struggle going on at home, you lose sight of your parent's love.

Sometimes you feel totally and completely alone, but you really are not alone. You start feeling like nobody has ever gone through what you are going through. Hey, if that is so, then how come I can write about it? If there has ever been a time when you need to know about God's love it is now.

People often do God like they do their parents. I know kids that grow up in church, and have a close relationship with God. Then one day they walk away from it. I think it is because when you start the power struggle with your parents trying to prove things to them, you start trying to prove that you don't need God either. After all, God has rules. God expects certain things from you, just like your parents do. We may not even realize what we are doing, but when we start wanting to prove we can do it on our own, we walk away from God. I wish that I could tell you that you don't have to go through this, but most of you will. If you just absolutely choose not to, you won't. You don't have to. How do you avoid all this? It will help if you remember that God loves you like you are. Those times when you look in the mirror and can't see anybody worth anything, remember that God loved you enough that He sent Jesus to die for you. The Holy Ghost loved you enough that He came into your heart and He lives there. Learn to look past what you see into what is inside of you. If you can learn to see yourself the way God sees you, you won't have to prove anything. You won't have to prove that you are somebody. You will just simply *be* somebody.

God's Word tells us what we are really like. Even on those days when we don't feel like it. Even on those bad hair days, when it feels like nothing is going right God sees you as His Child. When you look in the mirror on one of those days when you feel fatter than the whole world, God looks at your heart and sees your love for Him. On those days when you absolutely positively hate yourself because it seems like nobody can see anything good in you, God sees you as His beloved. God looks past your weaknesses and sees your strength. He looks past your body that is freaking out because of the growing maturing process it is going through and He loves who you are from the inside of you. He knows you. After all He is in your heart. Still He loves you. Here is a song that talks about God's love for us:

I AM PRECIOUS IN HIS EYES

Verse 1

I had seen the pictures of the nail prints in His hands.
I had seen the crown of thorns He wore upon His head.
I hadn't seen that look of love He had for me
As He looked through time.
I hadn't seen just how precious I am in His eyes.

Chorus

For I am precious in His eyes, for me He bled for me He died.
I am hidden in the palm of His hands.
He is my shepherd. I am His lamb.
I rest secure in His command.
I am precious, oh so precious in His eyes.

Verse 2

Don't you know how precious you are,
How much Jesus loves you.
Those nail prints on His hands His feet,
His side was pierced just for you.
The crown of thorns that He suffered,
Those stripes He bore for you.
He would have hung there on the cross if it had been only you.

Chorus

For **you** are precious in His eyes, for **you** He bled for **you** He died.
You are hidden in the palm of His hands.
He is **your** shepherd. **You** are His lamb.
You can rest secure in His command.
You are precious, oh so precious in His eyes.

On those days when it feels like the world has turned its back on you, just say a prayer. You will feel God's love. Those days when you don't know what to do or what direction to take, just ask Him to guide you. You don't have to struggle to prove you can do it yourself. He is there to help you. Just relax in His love. Let Him help you. You don't have to do it all alone. Let Him walk with you. He will.

When you really understand God's love for you, you'll understand why He has rules. It is like my mother. She knew what was best for us. God is that way. He doesn't have rules to

restrict you, but to guide you. When His Word says don't, then don't. When His Spirit inside your heart convicts you of doing something, don't do it again. When you get that heart sinking feeling that you shouldn't have done something, don't do it any more. Look at the lives of some of the people around you who are on a fast track to hell. They don't have God's love so they don't love themselves. They don't have God's guidance so they are doing whatever. *If* they live through all this what kind of life will they have? Are rules and regulations so bad? Not when they are guides to keep you safe. You are loved. God wants His best for you. If we refuse to do it His way, how can we find His best?

Another thing to remember is this. When someone loves us with this kind of love, the kind that they will die for us, don't we owe them something in return? Love begets love. When somebody loves us, the only way that love is complete is if we love them in return. The more you love God the more of His love you'll receive back. It is that way with anyone we love.

God is trustworthy of our love. Sure you'll always find someone who is mad at Him. Bottom line, we usually get mad at God because something didn't go the way that we thought that it should go. We have to remember that we live in a very imperfect world. Lot's of things go wrong. This world is full of people and things that aren't full of God. Even some Christians aren't doing it God's way. There will be people who will hurt us. Things will hurt us. God doesn't promise that things will go perfect. But He does promise in His Word that if something bad happens, He will turn it all out for our good. I've seen things that were so bad that you couldn't see how they could ever turn out for someone's good. When God got finished with the situation the person actually praised God for that happening and the good things that He made from the bad. When we realize we can trust Him it is easier to obey Him and accept His way for our lives.

We can trust God's love. You may be 100 years old one day, and you will be able to say, God is trustworthy. My grandmother died at 96 years old. I heard her say many times what a good friend that God had been to her through the years, that in her 90 some years of serving Him that He had never let her down. Love God with all your heart. He won't ever break it.

Chapter 14.

Jesus Says Come Unto Me

I have a picture in my office of Jesus standing with His hands out. You can see Him saying “*Come to me*”. That is one of my favorite pictures. Hundreds of times in the Bible, we read, “*Come unto me*”. We have talked about God’s love and how great it is. We have talked about his promises and how wonderful they are. The next step that we have to take is ours. It is kind of like this. Picture a table spread with a huge feast. Everything that you’ve ever loved to eat is on that table. A huge table with the best food you ever saw. There are chairs there for everyone. Let’s say that you go into this banquet room. You see this feast. You smell the good food. Delicious. I’m hungry just thinking about this. Your mouth waters. You pull up a chair. You take up a fork and get ready. But you never get that delicious food out of your plate and into your mouth. You never taste it. You just sit there with your fork in your hand. Some people will read in this book about God’s love and how much they need Him. Then they will go away and never find it for themselves. They will talk about it, but never experience it. They will never feast on all the good things He has for them.

Let’s say there is a teacher at school who everybody loves. You hear everybody talk about how special they are. You want to find out for yourself. You hear about them for years, maybe. Finally you take one of their classes. You start to get to know them for yourselves. You find out what they said was true. You let that teacher into your world, and you get to know them for yourself. That is how it is with God. You have to go find out for yourself. Some people will never find a relationship with God that is more than just knowing Him from what everybody else says. They will never take the time to let Him into their world, their hearts, and into their lives. They will never know Him for real. They will have knowledge about Him in their heads but not in their heart. They will never get His class. They will never pull up to His table.

God says come to me. Jesus says come to me. You will never find out God’s love for you and how it can change your life

if you never go. To close this book I want to say that I hope that you find out what God's love is all about for yourself. I hope that you find out that the best way is His way. I hope that you've learned that there is a right and there is a wrong and the only way to have a life that is happy and blessed is to find out the right way and walk in it. It is my prayer that when I am old and crotchety, you can come up to me and say, "Mrs. Haga, you were right. God has never let me down." I pray that you can find this out for yourself. God has set a table. Pull up a chair.

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