



NIV  
**Quest**

Top 100 Q & A of the Bible

A ZONDERVAN BIBLE EXTRACT



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# Top 100 Q & A of the Bible

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## *Top 100 Q & A of the Bible: A Zondervan Bible Extract*

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## HOW TO USE THIS ZONDERVAN BIBLE EXTRACT

Thank you for purchasing the Top 100 Q&A of the Bible: A Zondervan Bible Extract. This digital extract from the NIV Quest Study Bible is designed to address the top 100 common, uncommon, and perplexing questions people ask about Scripture. While it does not contain the full Bible it does contain all the verses associated with the top 100 questions & answers Bible reading plan.



Each Top 100 question and its answer are indicated by a  icon.

A complete [Index of the Top 100 Questions](#) is also available.

Included in some reference notes will be additional Scripture references. Use these references with a complete Bible to dive deeper into Bible study.

The NIV Quest Study Bible has clarified the meaning of the Scriptures for countless people. This Zondervan Bible Extract will do the same for you.

A complete Quest Study Bible, containing 7000 questions & answers is also available.

We hope you enjoy reading the Top 100 Q & A of the Bible: A Quest Study Bible Extract.

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### **Are these literal 24-hour days? (Genesis 1:3–31)**

Regardless of whether the “days” of creation were figurative or literal 24-hour periods, this passage is a truthful description of what took place. It indicates that there is intelligence, meaning and purpose behind all existence. In other words, the word of God directed the *method* of creation as well as the *source* of creation (Ps 33:6, 9; Heb 11:3). Yet human beings have been given the privilege of exploring, through scientific investigation, how God may have engineered these events and how long he took to do so.

Many understand the six days of creation as representing long periods of time because the sun, which marks a 24-hour day, wasn’t created until the fourth day. And the word *day* is used in chapters 1–2 in three distinct ways: (1) as approximately 12 hours of daylight (Ge 1:5); (2) as 24 hours (1:14) and (3) as a period of time involving, at the very minimum, the whole creative activity from day one to day seven (see 2:4, where the word that is translated *when* is the same word that is elsewhere translated *day*). The *light* (1:3) could not have come from the earth’s sun if the sun was not created until the fourth day. The light could have come from other sources that God provided in the universe prior to the creation of the sun. We can only speculate about what the atmospheric conditions might have been at that time.

<sup>3</sup>And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.”

<sup>7</sup>So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the

night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” <sup>21</sup>So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” <sup>23</sup>And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, <sup>[1]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup>So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup>And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

<sup>31</sup>God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.



**Is “one man, one woman” the only kind of union God approves of? (Genesis 2:24)**

In a word, yes. Here’s what Jesus said about marriage: *At the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”* (Mt 19:4–5).

Scripture uses metaphorical language to describe marriage, picturing it in terms of a head and body. [Ephesians 5:23](#) says, *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior*. Headship has to do with oneness. The wife is the body of the husband as the church is the body of Christ (Col 1:18). The mystery of marriage is that the head (the husband) plus the body (the wife) equals one flesh.

This head-body picture shows why God approves only of monogamous, heterosexual marriage: two heads (two men) do not equal one flesh, and two bodies (two women) do not equal one flesh. This is affirmed many times in Scripture (e.g., Lev 18:22; 1Co 6:9–11). This picture also shows why polygamy is wrong: a head (one man) and two or more bodies (two or more wives) do not comprise a union of *one flesh*. It is true that many people in Scripture practiced polygamy—including Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon—but those relationships ultimately produced many kinds of strife for each family. And although God chose to bring some good out of those situations (e.g., the 12 tribes of Israel), the goodness of God’s original plan was not changed.

Finally, this picture of one-flesh union does not mean that single people are incomplete or somehow worth less than married people. The metaphorical image of *one flesh* is used in Scripture to identify the boundaries of marriage and highlight the institution as a picture of our relationship with Christ. Indeed, Paul (who was not married) made it clear in 1 Corinthians 7:7–8 that marriage and singleness are both gifts to be used in service to God.

<sup>24</sup>That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.



**What are angels, and how do they interact with the world today? (Genesis 28:12)**

Along with the creation of the physical world, God also fashioned and populated a spiritual realm we call heaven. Little is known about heaven, which is the place where God dwells, because it is beyond human observation. But the Bible identifies some of its inhabitants as cherubim, or “winged beings” (Ex 25:18–22; Eze 10:1–22); others as seraphim, or “burning ones” (Isa 6:2; Rev 4:6–8); and many simply as messengers (Ge 16:7–11; Ex 23:20–24; Mt 1:20–24), from which the term “angel” is derived. Together, the whole company of angelic beings is called *the multitudes of heaven* or the *heavenly host* (1Ki 22:19; Lk 2:13).

In the Bible, angels and humans interacted primarily when these spiritual beings delivered messages from God to his people. But sometimes God sent angels to intervene in human affairs. For example, God sent an angel to guide the Israelites through the desert (Ex 23:20–23), provide food for Elijah (1Ki 19:5–8) and execute his divine judgment against the people of Israel (2Sa 24:16–17). While the ministry of angels occurred most specifically in supervising the redemptive history outlined in the Bible, angels also communicated God’s divine will directly to individuals (Ac 10:3–5) and provided them with protection (Ac 12:11; 27:23).

Throughout subsequent history many people have reported the presence of angelic beings who have communicated specific messages from God or intervened in specific situations. The mysterious and transcendent character of angels has sometimes nurtured cultic obsessions, but such worship is clearly contrary to the Bible’s teaching (Col 2:18–19).

<sup>12</sup>He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.





### **Who is God, what does he value, and how can we approach him? (Exodus 3:13–14)**

The Bible doesn't explain who God is or try to prove his divine existence. It assumes God is eternally present (Ge 1:1) and depicts creation as a result of his divine thought and action (Ge 1:1–2:25). God has, however, offered us a glimpse of who he is through creation (Ps 19:1–6), his Word (Ps 18:30–31), and especially through the incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ, who is *the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being* (Heb 1:3). Jesus demonstrated God's compassion, grace and glory in his life, death and resurrection. From this and from the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ac 2:1–13), our awareness of God as Trinity (one God in three persons) was formed.

While God's being is beyond comprehension or perception (Ex 33:20; Jn 1:18), both the physical world and the human conscience clearly attest to his values and purposes. In addition, God revealed what he values through the Sinai covenant (Ex 20:1–24:18). The Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2–17; Dt 5:6–21) were affirmed by Jesus as a faithful summary of God's moral values (Mt 5:17–47), and they continue to shape social values and legal systems today. God also revealed what he values through the dietary regulations (Lev 11:1–47) and worship regulations (Lev 1:1–9:24; 16:1–34; 21:1–25:55) that were given to the ancient Israelites. Those regulations emphasized God's holiness and his desire for his people to be holy (Lev 11:44). When Jesus came to earth, he taught that while actions are important, God is more concerned with the heart (Mt 5:17–47; 15:18–20). God desires that we love him, trust him, obey him and imitate his character in our interactions with others by being compassionate, loving and forgiving.

So how can we approach such a holy God? Access to God is only through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6; Ro 5:1–2; Eph 2:13–18; 3:12). Christ *suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring [us] to God* (1Pe 3:18). *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need* (Heb 4:16).

<sup>13</sup>Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

<sup>14</sup>God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."<sup>[1]</sup> This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'



### **How do I balance concern for the poor with the needs of my family? (Exodus 23:10–11)**

The poor mentioned in these verses are those who are in need of basic necessities (e.g., food, clothing, shelter). But elsewhere the Bible mentions other types of people who are poor. Whereas Matthew recorded Jesus saying that the poor in spirit are blessed (Mt 5:3), Luke's account states that the poor are blessed by God (Lk 6:20). The poor in spirit referred to in Matthew 5 are those who are spiritually bankrupt and desperate for God. The poor of Luke 6 are those who are desperate because they have no one to care for them. And the apostle Paul admonished Timothy to care for the widows in his congregation, saying, *Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need* (1Ti 5:3).

The fundamental principle here is that God provides for the needs of the poor (Mt 6:25–34). But the question is, How does God do this? The answer is that he does this in a variety of ways. He often meets tangible needs through the generosity of his people, who want to give out of the abundance they have been given. *And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work* (2Co 9:8).

But God also assigns responsibilities to certain individuals who are close to people with material needs. In 1 Timothy 5 Paul said that local needs ought to be met by institutions and individuals who are in closest proximity to those in need. So in the case of widows, Paul said that children or grandchildren bear the first line of responsibility to care for a widow's material needs (1Ti 5:4). But if the widow is all alone and remains upright in her loneliness, then she is to be cared for by the deacons (1Ti 5:5, 16). *Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1Ti 5:7–8).

So how do we balance concern for the poor with the needs of our own family? There is no one-size-fits-all answer. We should begin by examining the stance of our own heart in relation to the apostle's admonition to the Corinthians: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (2Co 9:6–7). God has given his people ample resources to supply every imaginable need.

<sup>10</sup>“For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, <sup>11</sup>but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.



### **Can our prayers cause God to change his mind? (Exodus 32:14)**

Scripture teaches that God sometimes adjusts his plans in response to our actions or requests. The Bible contains several examples of this: the Hebrews on the outskirts of Canaan (Nu 14:11–23); Hezekiah’s repentance on behalf of Israel (Am 7:1–7) and the sparing of Nineveh (Jnh 3:1–10).

Experiencing God’s will is dynamic. As with any interpersonal relationship, God’s relationship with humanity involves complex twists and turns. God modifies his responses based on ours, and we adjust our responses to God’s. So, in a sense, it can be said that God sometimes changes his mind in response to our prayers.

At the same time, God’s will is determined. There are decrees and promises he has made that do not change. He kept his covenant with the forefathers of the Israelites (Dt 7:7–8), and he keeps his new covenant with those who believe in Jesus (Jn 6:37–40, 44). God wants us to live out his will obediently. He has predetermined ways he expects us to respond, but he has made us capable of resisting him (Ps 143:10; 1Th 5:16–18; Heb 10:35–39; 2Pe 3:9).

These aspects of God’s will work together. While it is not possible for us to fully understand how they work together, we know that God is ultimately in control.

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.



### **How are these laws relevant to us today? (Leviticus 19:19–28)**

Though some of the laws in Leviticus seem readily applicable today, others do not. It can be unsettling to see a general principle (*Love your neighbor*, v. 18) alongside what seems to be a culture-specific rule (*Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head*, v. 27). The result can be an apparent inconsistency in how we obey these laws. For example, how can we continue to view homosexual intercourse as sin (20:13) if we no longer care about blended fabrics of cotton and wool (19:19)?

People attempt to resolve this problem in different ways. Some believe the laws fit into different categories of behavior: moral laws are still binding, but ceremonial and civil laws were superseded when Jesus came. The distinction between a moral, civil and ceremonial law is not always clear, however. Others believe that only those laws mentioned or repeated in the New Testament remain binding.

We can gain some insight into the problem by seeing what Jesus said about the law. He told his disciples that not a single letter of the law would disappear until everything is accomplished (Mt 5:17–20). Yet because Jesus followed the true spirit of the law rather than the legalistic views of the religious teachers, he was accused of violating the law (Lk 6:1–2).

Because the Bible is God’s Word, we may assume that each law expresses some aspect or enduring principle of God’s revealed will. Some details, written specifically for Israel’s situation, will not fit ours today. But many of the regulating principles behind them are timeless. Matthew 5 provides several examples where Jesus upheld the deeper, spiritual principles of the law.

The relevance of Old Testament laws may elude our understanding today because the content often addressed Israel’s particular call to be God’s distinct people. However, by seeking the timeless principle behind the letter of the law, we can still apply God’s standards to the details of our lives within the context of our culture.

<sup>19</sup>“ ‘Keep my decrees.

“ ‘Do not mate different kinds of animals.

“ ‘Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.

“ ‘Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.

<sup>20</sup>“ ‘If a man sleeps with a female slave who is promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment.<sup>[1]</sup> Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. <sup>21</sup>The man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the tent of meeting for a guilt offering to the LORD. <sup>22</sup>With the ram of the guilt offering the priest is to make atonement for him before the LORD for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven.

<sup>23</sup>“ ‘When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden. <sup>[2]</sup> For three years you are to consider it forbidden<sup>[3]</sup>; it must not be eaten. <sup>24</sup>In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. <sup>25</sup>But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the LORD your God.

<sup>26</sup>“ ‘Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it.

“ ‘Do not practice divination or seek omens.

<sup>27</sup>“ ‘Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.

<sup>28</sup>“ ‘Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.



### **Is there anything wrong with same-sex relations? (Leviticus 20:13)**

Humankind's fall into sin has pushed us away from God and his good purposes for our lives. As a result, our desires and passions have become distorted and disoriented in numerous ways. The very beginning of the Bible presents God's vision for human sexual relationships, and it describes that relationship as being between a male and a female in the covenant of marriage ([Ge 2:24](#)). Although the Bible contains only a handful of references to same-sex relations, all of them are negative. In other words, engaging in same-sex relations is one way that we can fall away from God's good vision for humanity.

Perhaps the clearest reference to same-sex relations is found in Romans 1:18–32, which begins by describing humankind's universal sinfulness in refusing to acknowledge God as the good creator and rightful ruler of our lives ([Ro 1:18–20](#)). This passage continues by listing numerous symptoms of our sinfulness. Engaging in homosexual relations is held up as one symptom of our fallen nature; but lest we be tempted to judge such behavior, the list also includes sins such as gossiping, coveting and disrespecting parents. All of these sins are signs that we are broken creatures in need of Christ's healing.

Furthermore, the Bible openly acknowledges that some early followers of Jesus had been practicing homosexuals ([1Co 6:9–11](#)). But in Christ they were embraced by God the Father and his people. Like every one else in the church, they were cleansed by Jesus. Then these dear brothers and sisters started a journey toward transformation in Christ—the one who reorients our brokenness and heals our souls.

<sup>13</sup>“ If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.



### **Does obedience bring prosperity? (Leviticus 26:3–39)**

There is no question that righteous living has its own rewards. When the people of Israel served God, they enjoyed good social and economic climates. People who live disciplined lives of moderation generally enjoy the benefits of good health and finances. Even insurance companies formulate their premium rates according to the risks of certain lifestyles. However, these are general principles and cannot be expected to apply in every situation.

The New Testament agrees with the Old Testament that God honors obedience and disdains disobedience, but the New Testament differs in its application of that principle. Where the Old Testament insists that a person's character, speech and actions immediately determine the resulting consequences, the New Testament teaches that by faith, righteous living will eventually be rewarded. The Old Testament says the faithful experience the good life now; the New Testament says they will one day.

At the heart of the New Testament is Jesus, the only perfect human being, a man whose life ended in the suffering and disgrace of the cross. Even though he was sinless, he was abandoned by God—hardly the picture of prosperity and blessing! Yet his obedience provided righteousness for those who believe and resulted in his exaltation as Christ the Lord (Ro 5:19; Php 2:8).

Romans 8:35–39 lists a number of things that cannot separate the believer from Christ: trouble, famine, nakedness, etc. Many items listed match items from the “curse” texts of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Therefore, the New Testament teaches that to obey does not guarantee an absence of material problems. Rather, the guarantee concerns spiritual security despite material troubles.

<sup>3</sup>“ If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, <sup>4</sup>I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. <sup>5</sup>Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.

<sup>6</sup>“ I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. <sup>7</sup>You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. <sup>8</sup>Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.

<sup>9</sup>“ I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. <sup>10</sup>You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. <sup>11</sup>I will put my dwelling place<sup>[4]</sup> among you, and I will not abhor you. <sup>12</sup>I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my

people. <sup>13</sup>I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.





### **Are Christians required to tithe? (Leviticus 27:30–33)**

The short answer is no, Christians aren't required to tithe.

The Law of Moses mandated the tithe to support the Levites in their priestly service and those in need among the foreigners, orphans and widows (Dt 14:28–29). Since Christ's sacrifice of himself removed the need for a Levitical priesthood, the principal purpose for the Old Testament tithe is gone. But the New Testament says quite a lot about giving. Believers are to give in the following manner:

*Generously.* Jesus told his followers to give to everyone who asks (Lk 6:30), to give to those who can't repay (Lk 14:13–14) and to freely give what we have freely received (Mt 10:8). Paul established the principle that what we reap is a reflection of what we sow (2Co 9:6).

*Humbly.* There is danger in thinking that if we follow a specific rule, we have done everything that God requires. Jesus chastised the Pharisees for giving a tenth of their spices while neglecting more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness (Mt 23:23). To suppose that God demands 10 percent—and nothing more—can foster an attitude that says, “This bit is for God, and the rest is mine.”

*With the proper attitude.* Using a strictly legal principle of giving prompts wrangling over questions like: Is it 10 percent of gross income or net income? of take-home pay only? before or after insurance and retirement deductions? Instead, we are to give what we decide in our hearts to give, *not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver* (2Co 9:7). Therefore some better questions might be: How can I better manage my affairs so that I can give more? Where can I give that will best serve God's purposes? Now that I've given what money I can, what else can I give?

<sup>30</sup>“ ‘A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. <sup>31</sup>Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it. <sup>32</sup>Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the LORD. <sup>33</sup>No one may pick out the good from the bad or make any substitution. If anyone does make a substitution, both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed.’ ”



### **Which is better, spiritually speaking—to be rich or poor? (Deuteronomy 8:10–18)**

The relationship between spirituality and wealth in the Bible is complicated. On the one hand, riches can be a sign of God’s blessing (Ge 24:35; Dt 8:18), while poverty can symbolize divine judgment (Jer 8:10, 13). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were God’s friends and were very wealthy—as was Job, one of the most godly figures of the Old Testament. David, a man after God’s own heart (1Sa 13:13–14), was also very rich.

On the other hand, the luxuries and benefits wealth afforded altered Solomon’s early devotion to God (1Ki 11:4). Through the prophet Amos, God blamed wealth for leading Israel into idolatry and moral decay (Am 3:13–4:1). On a number of occasions, Jesus spoke harshly about the rich who ignored God and the poor (e.g., Lk 12:13–21) and compromised their commitment to God (e.g., Mt 19:16–23). Jesus declared that the love of wealth can steal hearts away from God (Mt 6:24). Paul told Timothy to warn people about the temptations of wealth (1Ti 6:6–10, 17–19), and James wrote stern words on the same topic (Jas 2:5–7).

It can’t be said that people who are poor are necessarily in a better spiritual condition than those who are rich. Rather, our spiritual health depends on how we steward our blessings, view our possessions, and serve God and others with them. The Bible commands, *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven* (Mt 6:19–20). We are to work so that we will have resources to share with those who are poor (Eph 4:28). We are also to give quietly, generously, thoughtfully and cheerfully (Mt 6:3; 2Co 9:6–7).

<sup>10</sup>When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. <sup>11</sup>Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. <sup>12</sup>Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup>and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup>then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>15</sup>He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. <sup>16</sup>He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. <sup>17</sup>You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” <sup>18</sup>But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.



### **Does the Bible speak to the issue of immigration? (Deuteronomy 10:19)**

Abraham was an immigrant, so this issue is evident in Jewish and Christian history. God's original commitments to Abraham included promises that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendents (Ge 12:1–9). This proved true when Israel's borders were opened to anyone who wished to become part of the covenant community. Many people, such as Rahab (Jos 2:1–21; 6:23–25), the Gibeonites (Jos 9:1–27) and Ruth (Ru 1:16; 4:11–13), found a home and identity among God's people.

Psalms 87 and similar passages in the prophetic writings indicate that all nations are part of God's large family. Jesus was born into a family that included both Hebrews and immigrants (Mt 1:1–16); Jesus himself was an immigrant from heaven to earth (Jn 1:14). Hospitality was a key theme of Jesus' teachings (Mt 10:40–42) and was echoed by his disciples (Ac 10:1–11:30; Gal 3:26–29) as the international and multicultural character of the family of God became more apparent (Rev 7:9–17).

In current political discussions regarding immigration, a number of factors have to be considered: economic needs, criminal and safety concerns, compassion for the poor and refugees, labor justice, and security. But Jesus' followers would be wise to keep hospitality and justice high on the list of values that inform their opinions in conversations regarding immigration.

<sup>19</sup>And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.



### **Is there a connection between spiritual and physical health? (Deuteronomy 28:58–63)**

Generally, we must acknowledge that our Creator knows what is best for us, so in that regard our physical health and spiritual well-being are closely connected. The Hebrew word used most often to describe humans in the Old Testament is *nephesh*, translated *person*. It described the wholeness of life and was not easily reduced to the “body” and “soul” distinctions that emerged later in the Greek world of the New Testament.

As part of God’s design to make Israel a spiritually vibrant nation, long sections of the social codes in Leviticus were devoted to dietary regulations and hygiene as well as acceptable responses to illnesses, injuries and blood flow. The psalmist David clearly connected the blight of his physical condition to spiritual distress, noting that when he failed to confess his sins and remained at odds with God and others, his *bones wasted* and his *strength was sapped* (Ps 32:3–4). Paul recognized the connection between spiritual laxity and physical sickness (1Co 11:27–30) as well as the need for physical sustenance to maintain spiritual strength (1Ti 5:23).

Still, care must be taken not to completely equate spiritual righteousness and physical health. The psalmist Asaph observed that many wicked people were models of vibrant strength (Ps 73:3–5). And the apostle Paul struggled constantly with at least one, if not several, physical ailments (2Co 12:1–10; Gal 4:13–15) that were by no means a result of spiritual deficiency.

Humans are complex beings, and although we know there are connections between our physical and spiritual health, we can’t always pinpoint what those connections are. Our task is to nurture our souls so that we maximize our spiritual health and take the best possible care of our bodies to maximize our physical health. We are to consider our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit (1Co 3:16; 6:19–20).

<sup>58</sup>If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name—the LORD your God— <sup>59</sup>the LORD will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. <sup>60</sup>He will bring on you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. <sup>61</sup>The LORD will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. <sup>62</sup>You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the LORD your God. <sup>63</sup>Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess.



### **Why does God allow bad things to happen? (Deuteronomy 31:16–21)**

No one knows the mind of God, except for God himself. He is infinite; we are finite. We are not entirely clueless about his character, however, because God speaks to us through his Word. According to the Bible, one reason bad things happen is because *the whole world is under the control of the evil one* (1Jn 5:19). That’s why Jesus taught us to ask God to *deliver us from the evil one* when we pray (Mt 6:13). Even in the Garden of Eden—in paradise, before Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit—Satan was already there, waiting to tempt them to disobey God (Ge 3:1–6).

Another reason bad things happen is because people sin. The reason why God allows people to sin and be tempted to sin is not for us to know—at least for now (Dt 29:29). What we *do* know is that when bad things happen, we should not rage against God. To revolt against God is to fall prey to the devil. The devil is a liar (Jn 8:44) and wants us to believe that God is blameworthy. But the Bible says that *God is light; in him there is no darkness at all* (1Jn 1:5). God is not the enemy; Satan is the enemy. Through his Spirit God empowers us to war against the enemy by following Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior—during good times and bad times.

<sup>16</sup>And the LORD said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. <sup>17</sup>And in that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come on them, and in that day they will ask, ‘Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?’ <sup>18</sup>And I will certainly hide my face in that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods.

<sup>19</sup>“Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. <sup>20</sup>When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their ancestors, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. <sup>21</sup>And when many disasters and calamities come on them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath.”



### **What values does a Christian family hold? (Joshua 24:15)**

A Christian is someone who knows there is nothing he or she can do to deserve God’s love but who gratefully accepts and trusts in what God has done through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. This faith translates into a life lived in love, gratitude and service. A Christian family, then, reflects these same values. While the members of a Christian family are not perfect people and are not without problems, they do believe that God has their best interests at heart. The Bible and the commandments from God found in it serve as their rules for living. They strive to live according to God’s Word and make God the foundation of their beliefs as a family unit.

However, the modern family unit has changed since the days of *Leave It to Beaver*. Whether comprised of a husband and wife with no children, a husband and wife with children, a single parent raising a child or children alone, or any number of other scenarios—the goal of a Christian family is to love God and love people.

With that in mind, the definition of “family” can extend beyond blood relatives and those related by marriage. One Biblical illustration of what a Christian family can look like may be found in Matthew 12:48–50, where Jesus said that his “family” is comprised of those who do the will of his Father in heaven. Jesus’ answer emphasizes the great importance of our spiritual family—those with whom we may not share blood but with whom we share a common and strong faith in God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

It should be noted, however, that being a Christian doesn’t necessarily mean that every member of your family will also be a Christian. It’s possible that only one spouse may believe (1Co 7:12–14; 1Pe 3:1) or that some children won’t believe. After all, even Satan rebelled against the perfect Father.

<sup>15</sup>But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”



### **Can we determine God’s will by “putting out a fleece”? (Judges 6:36–40)**

In Judges 6, Gideon placed a wool fleece on the threshing floor to confirm God’s command to fight the Midianites. His test was a way of gaining confidence in God’s will. However, the fleece really exposed Gideon’s lack of faith. God had already revealed his presence (v. 12), his unmistakable instructions (vv. 14–16) and his power (vv. 21–22). Gideon had everything he needed in order to know and follow God’s will. But because he lacked faith, he searched for more evidence, more assurance and more confidence.

Today, God communicates his will through his Word, the Bible. And where his Word is clear, we should not put out our own “fleece” to decide whether or not we should obey. For example, the Bible’s commands to tell the truth and submit to authority are non-negotiable. To test God regarding whether or not either one is his will for our lives only reveals a lack of faith. Putting out a fleece at these times is usually more about second-guessing God’s direction than about seeking it.

However, the Bible isn’t always specific in its application of God’s commands. We know God calls us to serve, but we may not be sure where or in what capacity. We know God is leading us to develop our talents, but we don’t know which college to attend or which job to apply for. At these times, we may seek the signs that clarify God’s leading (Ge 24:1–21). In this way, we act wisely (Eph 5:17) and avoid presumption (Jas 5:17) in obeying the will of God.

<sup>36</sup>Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—  
<sup>37</sup>look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” <sup>38</sup>And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

<sup>39</sup>Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.” <sup>40</sup>That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.



**Which of the Bible’s instructions regarding male and female roles are specific to first-century culture? (Ruth 4:1–22)**

Biblical teaching on male and female roles and relationships in the church is first and foremost grounded in the foundational principle of equality in Christ (Gal 3:28)—neither gender is intrinsically better than the other. Yet within that equality, God’s Word assigns distinctive roles to each gender.

For example, the apostle Paul gives specific instructions in the New Testament regarding male and female roles—especially in his letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians and Timothy. Paul indicates that the responsibility of leadership in the home falls to husbands (Eph 5:23–33). He told Timothy that women were to be restricted from serving in the office of elder (1Ti 2:12; 3:1–5).

Some scholars have suggested that this limitation was confined to the region of Ephesus, where Timothy was serving; other scholars feel this limitation is unlikely in view of the similar themes found in other passages (e.g., 1Co 11:8–9; 14:34–38; 1Pe 3:4–6). Similarly, some scholars feel that these gender roles were merely an accommodation to New Testament culture that is no longer necessary (Gal 3:28), while others note that Paul rooted these directives in the created order (1Co 11:8–9; 1Ti 2:11–14).

The New Testament texts that exhort women to comply with the cultural custom of female submissiveness do not refer to the spiritual authority of male over female as a timeless creational mandate. Rather, the New Testament submission texts (e.g., 1Ti 2:11) speak of the Biblical principle—emphasized especially in Christ’s teaching and the letters of Paul and Peter—that all believers should be submissive to one another rather than seek to rule others (Eph 5:21–30). And all believers should also submit to the civil laws and cultural standards of the day to the extent that they do not involve disobedience to God’s law. For example, Paul’s command to Timothy that women be silent in the church was not absolute (1Ti 2:12), for women prayed in the assembly and exercised the gift of prophecy (1Co 11:5).

Moreover, women are not the only ones who are told to be “quiet” in Scripture. Similar language is used elsewhere in contexts that would include males (e.g., 1Co 14:28; 1Th 4:11). Thus, women in the New Testament church, who were in many ways culturally and legally subordinate to men, were instructed to comply with their social role in a manner that brought glory to God.

<sup>1</sup>Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer<sup>[1]</sup> he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, “Come over here, my friend, and sit down.” So he went over and sat down.

<sup>2</sup>Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so. <sup>3</sup>Then he



said to the guardian-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. <sup>4</sup>I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you<sup>[2]</sup> will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.”

“I will redeem it,” he said.

<sup>5</sup>Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the<sup>[3]</sup> dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.”

<sup>6</sup>At this, the guardian-redeemer said, “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.”

<sup>7</sup>(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

<sup>8</sup>So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal.

<sup>9</sup>Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup>I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!”

<sup>11</sup>Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.

<sup>12</sup>Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”



### **Does it matter when and where we pray? (1 Kings 8:29–30)**

When Jesus introduced prayer by saying, *Our Father* (Mt 6:9), he reminded us that prayer is more personal than prescriptive. Prayer is a “divine dialogue” between God and those who have a relationship with him. Therefore, we are welcome to come to God anytime and anywhere.

Like Jesus, we may pray early in the morning (Mk 1:35) or in the evening (Mk 14:32). We may pray when we are afraid (Ps 119:145–146), when we are in need (Mt 7:7–12) or when we lack wisdom (Jas 1:5). We may also pray to express the joy (Php 1:4) and the gratitude (1Th 5:16–18) we feel when we see God at work around us. And while many of our prayers include requests for our personal needs, it is right to pray for others (1Th 5:25), including those in authority (1Ti 2:1–2) and even our enemies (Mt 5:44). We should pray *on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests* (Eph 6:18).

Our prayers at any *time* may also be offered in any *place*. Hannah’s prayer in the temple (1Sa 1:9–11) was no more spiritual than Moses’ prayer in the desert (Ex 32:11–14). Jesus prayed in a garden (Mk 14:32–42). Jonah prayed in the belly of a fish (Jnh 2:1–10). Paul prayed in prison (Ac 16:22–25). Nehemiah prayed in the king’s court (Ne 2:4). No matter where we are, we can always be assured of great reception with God when we pray.

<sup>29</sup>May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. <sup>30</sup>Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.



### **Can the Bible exaggerate and still be true? (2 Chronicles 1:9–15)**

In a word, yes. When Solomon said the people were *as numerous as the dust of the earth* (v. 9), he didn't have an exact figure in mind. Solomon was using a figure of speech called hyperbole—an exaggeration not meant to be interpreted literally. He simply meant that he ruled over a lot of people.

The writers of the Bible's 66 books used all the richness and variety of human language to communicate God's message. To understand the Bible accurately, its various literary devices and figures of speech must be seen for what they are. If we interpret them at face value, the intended meaning may be missed completely.

The Chronicler reports in verse 15 that Solomon *made silver and gold as common ... as stones, and cedar [a rare and costly wood] as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees [a commonplace tree]*. His point was not to be exact but to indicate great wealth—numbers that would boggle the mind.

There are many passages—especially in 1 and 2 Chronicles—in which the Bible offers precise information. But when God promised Abraham that his children would be as numerous as the stars (Ge 15:5), when Mark said that *all the people of Jerusalem* went out to see John the Baptist (Mk 1:5), or when Paul claimed to be *the worst* of sinners (1Ti 1:15), the context and language indicate a meaning beneath the surface rather than a literal meaning. Instead of being frustrated by the lack of precision in such statements, we should be thankful that God reveals himself in the richness of human language.

<sup>9</sup>Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. <sup>10</sup>Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

<sup>11</sup>God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, <sup>12</sup>therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, possessions and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."

<sup>13</sup>Then Solomon went to Jerusalem from the high place at Gibeon, from before the tent of meeting. And he reigned over Israel.

<sup>14</sup>Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses,<sup>[1]</sup> which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup>The king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills.



### **How can we handle guilt and regret over our past decisions? (Ezra 9:6)**

As every psychiatrist knows, unresolved guilt and brooding regret are significant blocks to healthy living. The Bible emphasizes self-analysis and awareness (Ps 139:1–24), confession and repentance (Ps 32:1–11; 51:1–19; [Jas 5:16](#)), and forgiveness (Mt 6:14) as elements of a sound spiritual lifestyle.

But the past cannot be altered. Therefore it is also important to accept what has happened and learn how to live with the consequences of our choices and decisions. Once the consequences are acknowledged and dealt with (Ps 51:1–19), and the lessons are learned (Ps 107:1–43), we must be able to forgive ourselves because God forgives us. We need to forgive ourselves so that we can move ahead with hope into the future.

Forgiving ourselves is not always easy, nor is it a matter only of individual concern. The teachings of the Bible indicate that self-forgiveness is a spiritual journey that takes place best in community. It is often within the faith community that we come to understand that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1). It is there that we find the grace, forgiveness and comfort of both God and others (2Co 1:3–7; 2:7). It is there that we can confess our sins to God and others and be healed ([Jas 5:16](#); 1Jn 1:9). And “community” isn’t limited to church congregations. There are many communities of faith working to help people heal from the consequences of their past choices. The “Twelve Steps” of Alcoholics Anonymous were formed on the basis of Biblical teachings and spiritual insights; as such, they often help people respond constructively to the tortures of an imperfect past.

<sup>6</sup>and prayed:

“I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.



### **Should Christians today observe the Sabbath? (Nehemiah 13:15–22)**

The rules of the Sabbath, which in Hebrew means “rest,” are based on two specific principles.

First, in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2–17), a sabbath rest on the seventh day of each week was patterned after the events of the creation story (Ge 2:1–3), which describes God ceasing from creative activity on the seventh day after bringing humankind into being. In that teaching, the Sabbath was a time for reflection on good things done and the enjoyment of important relationships. Second, when Moses repeated the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5:6–21, he noted that the Israelites had recently been rescued from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. In that teaching the Sabbath was a celebration of freedom from an existence solely devoted to work.

For the Israelites, the Sabbath was both a rhythm of life bred into human understanding from the very beginning and a celebration of freedom from oppression. Jesus emphasized the former value of the Sabbath in his own teachings (Mk 2:23–28), while his followers focused on the latter value of the Sabbath—especially once they realized the great deliverance from the bondage of sin brought by Jesus’ death and resurrection (Ac 20:7; Rev 1:9–10). This understanding was amplified by the writer of Hebrews 4:1–11 as a forward-looking anticipation of the renewal of all things.

Even though the Bible makes it clear that Sabbath observance is not mandatory (Col 2:14, 16), the practices of both Jesus and the early Christian community testify to its enduring value in a believer’s spiritual life.

<sup>15</sup>In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. <sup>16</sup>People from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. <sup>17</sup>I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? <sup>18</sup>Didn’t your ancestors do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity on us and on this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.”

<sup>19</sup>When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. <sup>20</sup>Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. <sup>21</sup>But I warned them and said, “Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will

arrest you.” From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. <sup>22</sup>Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.



### **Are people just pawns in God’s chess game? (Job 1:13–19)**

It sometimes seems that people are caught in events beyond their control, events manipulated by God or Satan. They may feel forced into situations they would not choose if they were given a choice. While this seems unfair, there is another way—a higher way—to interpret the circumstances of life. We can see them as God-given opportunities to cooperate with God’s purposes and plans that allow us to participate in something far more significant than our own schemes. We are more than pawns in a chess game. We can honor Almighty God by the way we live and die.

Still, many unanswered questions remain. Only God knows why dozens of bystanders had to die in this unfolding drama between Satan and God. We struggle with the fact that some who are righteous have short, tragic lives, while others who are wicked enjoy wealth and long life. There is one thing we can affirm, however: what seems unfair in this life will be made right in eternity. Our problems will be resolved and many of our questions answered.

God has permitted Satan certain freedoms. Satan is called *the prince of this world* (Jn 14:30) and *the ruler of the kingdom of the air* (Eph 2:2), for he sometimes uses sicknesses, plagues, wicked people and the forces of nature. Though God dealt a fatal blow to Satan through Jesus’ death and resurrection, Satan continues to struggle against God and will do so until the end (Ro 16:20).

There are two sides to the suffering of the righteous: the earthly and the heavenly. The apostle Paul understood the tension of living in a corrupt world. He placed his trust in God and things eternal—God’s justice, mercy and love—not in the temporary things of this world—success, wealth and fame. Paul recognized that *our struggle is not against flesh and blood* (Eph 6:12) and took courage in knowing that *our citizenship is in heaven* (Php 3:20).

<sup>13</sup>One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, <sup>14</sup>a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, <sup>15</sup>and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

<sup>16</sup>While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

<sup>17</sup>While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

<sup>18</sup>While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and

daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup>when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"





### **Is God responsible for Satan's actions or people's sins? (Job 19:8–12)**

We know that evil exists in this world. Its origins are personified in a cruel being identified in the Bible as *Satan* (“adversary”) or *the devil* (“slanderer”), but this creature’s origin is never tied to the Creator who made all things good (Ge 1:31). Satan first appears in the creation story (Ge 3:1), with no explanation of how he got there or where he came from. Some think the poetic imagery of Isaiah 14, which describes the power and demise of the king of Babylon, alludes to Satan’s origins. But this is only theological speculation.

A cryptic scene in the drama of Job shows Satan as part of the company of angels who presented themselves before God (Job 1:6–2:7). While this being had the power to wreak havoc on Job’s life in an attempt to make him sin, Satan’s power was limited by God’s permissions and prohibitions. This limitation of Satan’s power by God is echoed by Jesus (Lk 10:17–21) in the New Testament and is pictured graphically in Revelation (Rev 20:7–10). We also know that the Bible does not absolve humans of their guilt for sinful choices and behaviors (Jas 1:13–18).

- <sup>8</sup>He has blocked my way so I cannot pass;  
he has shrouded my paths in darkness.
- <sup>9</sup>He has stripped me of my honor  
and removed the crown from my head.
- <sup>10</sup>He tears me down on every side till I am gone;  
he uproots my hope like a tree.
- <sup>11</sup>His anger burns against me;  
he counts me among his enemies.
- <sup>12</sup>His troops advance in force;  
they build a siege ramp against me  
and encamp around my tent.



### **How much does the Bible explain about the afterlife? (Job 33:28–30)**

There is actually very little explanation in the Bible about the afterlife. In Old Testament times, people focused on living good lives. A few Old Testament passages acknowledge that people lived on in some form after death (1Sa 28:11–19; Job 19:23–29), but there is no clear mention of resurrected life or a fully renewed creation with eternal existence.

It was with Jesus' resurrection and ascension that his followers and subsequent theologians began to inquire more deliberately into what happens after we die. Jesus' resurrection was a key theme of the early Christian message (Ac 2:1–47; 17:29–31; 23:6). It was also a main cause of confusion in the early Thessalonian congregation. Their question was, If Jesus was raised from the dead, why did others still die, and what would happen to them if they were no longer living when Jesus returned from heaven?

Paul's answer to the Thessalonians' question (1Th 4:13–18) and his later letter to the Corinthian church (1Co 15:12–57) helped shape Christian teaching about the afterlife. His letters emphasize that the living Jesus will return to earth one day to punish sin, destroy evil and its effects, restore the glory of creation and raise back to life those who trusted in him during their lives. Those who are resurrected to eternal life will be cleansed and perfected; they will know an intimacy with God that eludes us now. These ideas are more fully expressed in the final chapters of the Bible (Rev 21:1–7; 22:1–5, 12–14).

<sup>28</sup>God has delivered me from going down to the pit,  
and I shall live to enjoy the light of life.'

<sup>29</sup>“God does all these things to a person—  
twice, even three times—

<sup>30</sup>to turn them back from the pit,  
that the light of life may shine on them.



**If we are treated unfairly, is God still good? (Job 34:19)**

Because of the intrusion of sin and evil into our world, it seems to us that life is often not fair or just (Ps 73:3–12). Events occur that we do not cause or desire, and all our best efforts are not able to produce perfect results. Yet the Bible consistently declares that God is good, fair and just (Ps 9:7–12; 101:1; 145:1–21; 1Th 1:5–7; Rev 19:1–2, 11).

Sometimes we find this truth difficult to grasp because of the complexity of this world and its evils. We have limited ability to clearly interpret it. But once we have spiritual insight about the truth, we can conform our behaviors more fully to reflect God’s fairness, goodness and righteousness (Php 4:8–9). Even when things happen that contradict our expressed efforts and knowledge of God’s ultimate designs, we can have confidence that God’s purposes will prevail (2Co 3:7–5:10); he will restore the fortunes of earth and humankind to his original desires ([2Pe 3:13](#)).

Both Peter (1Pe 1:6–7; 2:19–25) and Paul (Ro 8:18–39) insisted that when we experience unfairness in life, we are gaining insights into what Jesus went through. We are also learning how to hope for the fullness of God’s goodness to renew our world.

<sup>19</sup>who shows no partiality to princes  
and does not favor the rich over the poor,  
for they are all the work of his hands?



### **Why does it sometimes seem like God is far away? (Psalm 10:1)**

God promised his people, *The LORD will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you* (Dt 31:5). Yet sometimes God seems distant. During such times, the ever-present God hasn't gone anywhere. Instead, specific obstacles we create or experience can make God seem far away.

One obstacle is busyness. Our overloaded schedules can crowd out time with God and make it difficult to sense his presence in our lives. When Jesus arrived for dinner at the home of friends, Martha chose to busy herself with kitchen duties while her sister sat at the feet of Jesus and was commended for doing what was better (Lk 10:38–42). Busyness isn't next to godliness. In fact, our crammed calendars can cause us to miss connecting with God daily.

A second obstacle is “stuff,” or possessions. In Matthew 19:16–22, Jesus urged a man to sell all he had and to follow him, but the man *went away sad, because he had great wealth* (Mt 19:22). Unfortunately, possessions and wealth can prevent people from pursuing Jesus. He warned, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Mt 6:21). So, if our hearts wander after more and more stuff, we will have little room for God.

A third obstacle is sin. Christians can be secure in their *relationship* with God because their sins have been forgiven through Jesus' death on the cross. But lingering sin in our lives can still stand in the way of present *fellowship* with God. Fortunately, when we confess our sin, repent and obey God, we will feel the Father's love and personal presence once again (Jn 14:23, 25–27).

<sup>1</sup>Why, LORD, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?



### **Why do our prayers seem ineffective at times? (Psalm 39:12)**

One of the differences between the personal God of the Bible and all other so-called gods is that the Lord is *near us whenever we pray to him* (Dt 4:7). However, anyone who has ever prayed has surely experienced a time when their prayers didn't seem to make it higher than the ceiling.

Sometimes God is silent when we harbor sin in our lives. The psalmist understood that the Lord would not listen to his prayers if he *cherished sin in [his] heart* (Ps 66:18). Indeed, if Jesus experienced separation from the Father when he took our sin on himself at the cross (Mt 27:46), we should not be surprised to experience a sense of distance from God when we have unconfessed sin in our lives. When we rebel against God, he does not listen to our prayers (Isa 1:2, 15; 1Pe 3:7; cf. Heb 5:7)

Similarly, our prayers may go unanswered if we ask with self-centered intentions (see Simon's story in Ac 8:9–25). Jesus' model of prayer, the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9–13), included not only personal requests but also praise, thanksgiving and intercession. Selfish requests made with insincere motives will fall on deaf ears (Jas 4:3).

At other times, our prayers may *seem* ineffective when, in fact, the silence of God is intended to bolster our faith. In Luke 18:1–8, Jesus told a parable about a woman who sought help from a judge who initially refused her request but eventually gave her what she asked for because of her persistence. The lesson of the story is that God—a just judge who cares for us—will see to it that our needs are met, but we must exercise faith in his sovereign goodness (Lk 18:8). And while our praying may not produce immediate results, praying with persistence changes us and moves us toward greater dependence on God.

<sup>12</sup>“Hear my prayer, LORD,  
listen to my cry for help;  
do not be deaf to my weeping.  
I dwell with you as a foreigner,  
a stranger, as all my ancestors were.



### **Does God send troubles? (Psalm 71:20)**

We have trouble in the world and in our lives because of humanity's sinful nature. But the book of Job shows that troubles do not necessarily come in direct proportion to our sin. Troubles may come not because we have committed a particular sin but because of someone else's sin against us.

In this psalm the writer looked back on his life and admitted that God had allowed him to experience some bitter troubles. God is not the blameworthy cause or originator of evil in the world, and he is neither capricious nor a mere passive observer. Sometimes God *permits* trouble in people's lives; other times he seems to deliberately bring people to a place where they will experience difficulties.

The Bible says that God has many reasons for allowing the godly to experience suffering. Suffering may (1) lead someone away from sin and closer to God (Heb 12:4–11), (2) build up a person's character (Jas 1:2–6) or (3) provide a means to glorify God (Jn 9:1–3).

Then again, there is the lesson of Job: explanations cannot always be found. At times we may not understand why God allows us to experience troubles, but even without answers it is good to say with the psalmist, *You will restore my life again ... you will again bring me up.*

<sup>20</sup>Though you have made me see troubles,  
many and bitter,  
you will restore my life again;  
from the depths of the earth  
you will again bring me up.



**If I have a relationship with God, why do I feel so lonely? (Psalm 73:23)**

There are numerous reasons why people feel lonely. Loneliness is a form of isolation. And even when a person is in relationship with God, it is possible to feel isolated. To guard against developing such feelings, God wants people to live in community, following all the *one another* practices found in Scripture: *love one another* (1Pe 1:22), *encourage one another* (1Th 5:11), *honor one another* (Ro 12:10) and so on.

After God created Adam, he said, *It is not good for the man to be alone* (Ge 2:18). Because we are created in God’s image, we are made for deep and meaningful relationships. God himself is a tri-unity of three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. According to 2 Peter 1:4, the plan of salvation culminates with believers participating directly in the life of God. We will actually partake of God’s divine nature, even though we will never be divine. Until Jesus the Messiah comes back, however, Christians will continue to be vulnerable to various forms of loneliness.

Sometimes loneliness results from sin—burying negative feelings, hiding the truth from others—or from being hurt by someone else’s lack of love. Other times loneliness results from the pain of loss, especially the loss of a loved one.

If a follower of Christ feels lonely even in the safety of God’s presence, that person may not yet have learned the spiritual discipline of being in solitude with God. Solitude is different from loneliness. In solitude, a person can hear the voice of God saying, “You are my beloved,” and he or she can receive the love of God by faith.

<sup>23</sup>Yet I am always with you;  
you hold me by my right hand.



### **Why does God choose some people and reject others? (Psalm 78:67–68)**

The Bible doesn't hide the fact that God chooses some people to participate in a special relationship with him. God chose Abram, one man among millions, and told him, *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse* (Ge 12:3). Jesus told his followers, *You did not choose me, but I chose you ...* (Jn 15:16). To us this seems unfair and exclusive because it could promote elitism and the oppression of the “unchosen.”

However, in the Bible whenever God's chosen people started acting with smug arrogance, God immediately stepped in with a blunt reminder: “Yes, I have chosen you, and you are dearly loved,” God said in essence, “but I didn't choose you based on your superior strength or beauty or goodness. I chose you based on my grace” (e.g., Dt 7:7–11).

It's also clear from the Biblical story that being chosen implied a responsibility, not just a privilege. God kept telling his chosen people that they were chosen for a special purpose: to share God's love with the world. They were blessed in order to be a blessing to others. It's as if God's blessing always starts small and particular—like a single seed—before it spreads out like a broad, beautiful fruit-bearing tree (Ge 12:3; Gal 3:8).

So rather than encourage arrogance and elitism, God's choice should promote humility and gratitude. “Who me?” we should say. “You love me? And you want to bless others through me?” The wonder of being chosen by God should propel us to join Jesus in showing costly love for others.

<sup>67</sup>Then he rejected the tents of Joseph,  
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;

<sup>68</sup>but he chose the tribe of Judah,  
Mount Zion, which he loved.





**Does anything prevent God from responding to our prayers? (Psalm 102:1–2)**

No entity has the power to stop God from responding to our prayers. Nor does anyone have the power to force God to reveal what his answer to a prayer might be. In fact, God might choose *not* to answer our prayers—especially if our requests are selfish. James 4:3 says, *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

It is solely God’s prerogative to answer prayer or not. Sometimes God might test us to see if we will trust him even without clear answers to our prayers. God wants us to know and love him personally; he doesn’t want us to merely ask him for things.

Because God is relational, it is possible even for Christians to *quench the Spirit* (1Th 5:19) or *grieve the Holy Spirit* (Eph 4:30), who intercedes on our behalf when we pray (Ro 8:26). We can do so through repeated sin, for example, which means it is possible for us to make our own prayers ineffective (e.g., 1Pe 3:7).

At the same time, God assures us that he is not far away: *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land* (2Ch 7:14).

- <sup>1</sup>Hear my prayer, LORD;  
let my cry for help come to you.
- <sup>2</sup>Do not hide your face from me  
when I am in distress.  
Turn your ear to me;  
when I call, answer me quickly.



### **How does a person *meditate* on God's Word? (Psalm 119:15)**

Meditation is a combination of reviewing, repeating, reflecting, thinking, analyzing, feeling and even enjoying. It is a physical, intellectual and emotional activity; it involves our whole being.

In some ways, meditation doesn't easily fit into Western culture. We value action and busyness more than stopping and considering. The author of this psalm was from another time and culture, one with a tradition that valued meditation. As a result, meditation came more naturally for him and others with his Middle Eastern background. We will have to overcome some cultural obstacles if we want to learn to meditate.

There are many ways to meditate on God's Word. Some possibilities include: (1) Take time to read a verse or passage over and over. (2) Begin to memorize all or part of it. (3) Listen—quiet your heart to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through God's Word. (4) Consider how it fits with the rest of the Bible and life in general. (5) Become emotionally involved. Allow yourself to feel what God feels, his desires expressed through his words. (6) Move from meditation to application. Connect your thoughts to action. Consider how the truth and power of the Word of God should affect your behavior.

<sup>15</sup>I meditate on your precepts  
and consider your ways.



**Is there any “secular” evidence to support the Bible’s claims? (Psalm 119:160)**

Although the Bible is not an ancient history textbook, it does report events that have been confirmed by other historical works. Consider the following examples:

- Archeological digs and ancient Assyrian records confirm the Bible’s portrayal of King Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah (2Ki 18:13–19:37).
- Until recent excavations at Tell Mardikh uncovered tablets mentioning Sodom and Gomorrah (Ge 19:1–29), scholars dismissed the existence of both cities as a Biblical legend.
- The Hittites were also considered a Biblical legend until their capital and records were discovered in modern-day Turkey.
- The palace of King Sargon, an Assyrian ruler mentioned in Isaiah, was uncovered in Iraq. The events recorded in Isaiah 20 were even recorded on the palace walls.
- In 1947, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (which are copies of almost the entire Old Testament) confirmed how accurately the Bible was copied from 200 BC to AD 1200.
- Greek and Jewish writers (e.g., Pliny, Tacitus and Josephus) supported the Bible’s claims that Jesus really lived, that he was executed between AD 26 and AD 36 and that he was worshiped as God.
- Many of the details of the New Testament—including facts about Pontius Pilate, the census recorded in Luke 2, the death of Agrippa I, the execution of Ananias the high priest and the crucifixion of Jesus—are also mentioned in other historical works.

<sup>160</sup>All your words are true;  
all your righteous laws are eternal.



### **Is it wrong for Christians to use contraception? (Psalm 127:3–5)**

This is a difficult question that has been answered in various ways by Christian churches and ethicists. Because modern forms of contraception weren't available in Biblical times, the Bible does not provide a direct answer. Answering this question involves looking at different interpretations of Scripture for general principles that can be applied. It also involves consulting the wisdom of the Christian church over the centuries for guidance.

First, we must raise the question of whether or not God's purpose for human sexual intercourse is primarily for procreation. If it is (Ge 4:1; 38:8–10), then using contraception may be inappropriate. Many believe that contraception directly contradicts God's command in [Genesis 1:22](#) to *be fruitful and increase in number*. Others believe that only God has the right to "open" or "close" a woman's womb (cf. Ge 20:18; 29:31). However, if marriage and sex are primarily about intimate companionship (Ge 2:18–25; 1Co 7:4), using contraception may not be inappropriate (1Co 10:23–33).

The issue of whether or not contraception is appropriate for Christians is unquestionably a complex one with varying opinions. The issue is complicated even further when discussion turns to the many different types of contraception available today. Education is therefore an important consideration when making a choice regarding contraceptive use. There is a critical moral difference between the "morning-after pill" and birth control pills, condoms and natural family planning—depending on when it is believed life begins. Each person must decide for themselves what does and does not bind their conscience.

<sup>3</sup>Children are a heritage from the LORD,  
offspring a reward from him.

<sup>4</sup>Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are children born in one's youth.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed is the man  
whose quiver is full of them.  
They will not be put to shame  
when they contend with their opponents in court.



### **Does the Bible define when human life begins? (Psalm 139:13)**

A simple assumption undergirds the entire Bible: God, the author of life, creates each and every human being. Therefore, every person is sacred to him. Psalm 100:3 says, *Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his.*

The Bible also assumes that life begins in the womb. God declared to the prophet Jeremiah, *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you* (Jer 1:5). And Job 31:15 refers to God forming us in the womb.

So, medically speaking, God knows us and shapes us even minutes after conception, when our most primitive cells begin to separate; even at the fifth week of life, when our cerebral cortex starts to form; even at the sixth week, when our heart chambers converge; even at the seventh week, when our fingers and toes grow distinct; and even at the tenth week, when we become sensitive to touch.

Perhaps Dr. Seuss captured the Bible's view on this issue best in his children's classic *Horton Hears a Who*: "After all, a person's a person no matter how small." In the Biblical story, all human beings, no matter how small or vulnerable—unborn babies and overwhelmed mothers, the weak and the frail, the imprisoned and the traumatized, the disabled and the diseased, the righteous and the sinners—are valuable to God, the author of all life.

<sup>13</sup>For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.



### **Does God approve of war? (Psalm 144:1)**

The Old Testament seems to say yes. The New Testament seems to say the opposite. This apparent contradiction must be understood within its historical context.

Old Testament Israel conquered the sinful Canaanites as part of God’s judgment. Israel was a theocracy—a nation-state in which God was King. But New Testament followers of Jesus Christ knew only the oppressive rule of the Roman state. Jesus introduced a whole new paradigm concerning violence, resistance and peace in his teachings regarding the kingdom of God. In fact, some early Christians did experience tension between loving one’s enemy and serving in the military, while others such as the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5–13 were encouraged by Jesus for their faith and their witness to those around them. At the end of the second century, soldiers began converting to Christianity, and by the time of Augustine (fourth century), Christians in the military were recognized as an essential component to carrying out warfare in a just manner.

In Romans 13:1–7, we read that God gives governments the right to *bear the sword*—the power of retributive justice to punish evildoers. Any nation has a God-given responsibility to exercise just and appropriate force to protect its citizens from evil. The Bible does not detail how this is to be carried out, but the principles of punishing wrongdoers and protecting the innocent are the basis of our system of law enforcement today, on both a national level (police, FBI, etc.) and an international level (the military).

This does not mean that God approves of everything that is done in the name of law enforcement or war (e.g., torture, wars of conquest, use of nuclear weapons). But the basic principles of punishing wrongdoers and protecting the innocent are in keeping with the character of God.

<sup>1</sup>Praise be to the LORD my Rock,  
who trains my hands for war,  
my fingers for battle.



### **How do I show love to people who violate God’s standards without endorsing their sin? (Proverbs 1:15)**

Nobody likes the stereotypical judgmental “religious” person who condemns others for their sinful ways. Fortunately, the Bible provides advice on how to deal constructively with the faults and sins of other people:

- **Be personal.** Jesus had a very realistic view of the damage caused by sin. So if we see someone betraying God, others or their deepest selves, we should deal with it by approaching the person personally (Mt 18:15–20). This means that we should not complain or gossip about the person.
- **Be humble.** The Bible instructs us to consider our own lives before judging others. Jesus used a humorous illustration about the person who sees the speck in someone else’s eye but fails to see the plank protruding from his or her own eye (Mt 7:3–5). The point is this: Don’t project blame and shame on others. We’re all sinners. We must be humble enough to admit our own mistakes first.
- **Be gentle.** The Bible directs us to address people’s sins with a gentle attitude (Gal 6:1–2). There is no reason to deal harshly with people for their faults.
- **Be truthful.** Spiritually speaking, we all have a lot of growing up to do. Honest people can help us grow by gently but firmly pointing out areas in our lives that could use work. The Bible refers to this process as *speaking the truth in love* (Eph 4:15). It takes courage to do this, but most of us know that this kind of tough love helps us grow.
- **Be hopeful.** After we’ve approached someone personally—with humility, gentleness and truth-filled love—we can leave it in God’s hands. We can’t force someone to change and grow, but we can hope and pray that Jesus will continue to work in that person’s life (Php 1:6).

<sup>15</sup>my son, do not go along with them,  
do not set foot on their paths;



### **How should children be disciplined? (Proverbs 19:18)**

Proverbs begins with the assumption that children are born in need of correction. They enter the world with a bent toward doing wrong. Fathers and mothers are expected to lovingly but firmly train children in the ways of wisdom, responsibility and righteousness. The direction children receive at home sets the course for their entire lives: *Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it (22:6)*. This isn't a blanket promise that godly parents won't have wayward children, but it does underscore the general principle that good parenting can have a life-long impact.

Parents who fail in their duty to discipline their children bear a heavy responsibility. The writer sees them as a *willing party to [their child's] death (19:18)*. In ancient Israel the penalty for several crimes was death, so failing to properly control a child could indirectly lead to his death. Parents who ignore their children or fail to give them the discipline they need consign them to a bleak and dismal future.

There is disagreement today over disciplinary methods. Proverbs appears to favor the stronger forms of discipline: *Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them (13:24)*. Taken to an extreme, of course, such punishment is abuse, which the Bible never encourages. The other side of the coin is that children who never learn that their actions carry consequences will eventually face even more grief.

<sup>18</sup>Discipline your children, for in that there is hope;  
do not be a willing party to their death.





### **How can parents prepare their children to impact the world? (Proverbs 22:6)**

There is an old saying that ships were meant for the sea, not for the harbor. While the harbor is safe, the ship never fulfills its purpose until it is tested in deep waters. We face a similar dilemma in overseeing the lives of our children. Our natural instinct and primary duty while they are young is to protect them. But just as important, we must prepare them to face the risky, even dangerous, situations that life inevitably presents.

Parents can find a healthy balance by working to develop three interrelated qualities in their children that will bear much fruit when their children grow to be adults. First, parents should raise their children to desire wisdom. What parent would not desire for his or her child to follow Solomon's example and ask God for wisdom above wealth and honor (1Ki 3:6–9)? The pursuit of wisdom will help children stay out of harm's way and equip them with the skills needed for effective leadership in any calling.

Second, parents need to teach their children how to distinguish between right and wrong. Moral discernment and wisdom complement each other. Solomon, in fact, joined them together in his prayer for wisdom: *So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?* (1Ki 3:9).

Finally, parents should look for opportunities to vest maturing children with significant responsibilities that impact other people. This is one way to put into practice the stewardship principle found in Matthew 25:23: *You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.*

<sup>6</sup>Start children off on the way they should go,  
and even when they are old they will not turn from it.



**Is it wrong for both parents to work outside of the home? (Proverbs 31:13–18)**

The simple answer is no. This question is usually directed at women working, but the “ideal woman” described in Proverbs 31 had a linen business (v. 24). Indeed, the Bible is full of women who worked outside the home: Lydia sold dyed cloth (Ac 16:14); Deborah was a judge and military leader (Jdg 4:1–23); Ruth worked to support herself and Naomi, both widows (Ru 2:1–3); and Priscilla was part of a tentmaking business (Ac 18:1–3).

On a broader scale, this question is not one of right and wrong but one of when and why. Why do both parents work outside the home? Many parents don’t have a choice. Single parents obviously don’t have much of a choice, and in many families both parents have to work in order to financially support their family. However, some people work outside of the home in order to finance a certain material lifestyle.

The Bible clearly tells us that the spiritual education of our children should take a higher priority than comfort or material gain (Dt 6:5–7; Pr 22:6; Eph 6:4; 2Ti 3:15). Children need their mothers and fathers around more than they need their own bedrooms or the newest video-game system. So when deciding whether or not both parents should work outside of the home, a family should consider not where the Joneses are leading them but where God is leading them.

- <sup>13</sup>She selects wool and flax  
and works with eager hands.
- <sup>14</sup>She is like the merchant ships,  
bringing her food from afar.
- <sup>15</sup>She gets up while it is still night;  
she provides food for her family  
and portions for her female servants.
- <sup>16</sup>She considers a field and buys it;  
out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.
- <sup>17</sup>She sets about her work vigorously;  
her arms are strong for her tasks.
- <sup>18</sup>She sees that her trading is profitable,  
and her lamp does not go out at night.



### **How does God want us to save, spend and give our money? (Ecclesiastes 5:10)**

Believe it or not, money and possessions are the most talked about subjects in the Bible—more than prayer, faith or salvation. That’s because God knew what areas we would struggle with. Our interaction with money should begin with acknowledging that everything belongs to God (Ps 24:1). This is why God told us that when we give back to him, we will *learn to revere the LORD [our] God always* (Dt 14:23). When we *honor the LORD with [our] wealth*, we demonstrate that we trust him; in return he promises to take care of us (Pr 3:9–10). Old Testament tithes were to be given to God from the proceeds of land, herd and flock. The Israelites were to give a percentage of their belongings to God, recognizing God as both the source and owner of all material blessings. That percentage, which is commonly assumed to be 10 percent, was probably more than 20 percent annually, in keeping with the Israelites’ financial obligations under the Mosaic Law (Ex 13:1–16; 23:14–19; [Lev 19:23–25](#); Nu 28:1–29:40; Dt 16:9–17; 26:1–15).

Many Christians today think tithing is no longer a mandated ordinance for believers; even so, that is not justification for not giving at all. Just as Jesus’ summary of the Ten Commandments (Mk 12:29–31), while less complicated, is nonetheless infinitely more demanding than the original set of concrete stipulations, so the New Testament standard of giving impacts us no less than the tithe did the ancient Israelites. The apostle Paul summed up the New Testament standard of giving in 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 when he said, *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Limiting ourselves to a rigid 10 percent standard of tithing can cause us to miss the fundamental principle behind Biblical generosity: God’s liberality is the basis for his people’s openhanded, bighearted responses. In fact, we are called to willingly offer 20, 30 or even 100 percent (Lk 18:22) if that is what the Lord should require of us. Many Christians have adopted a system called 10–10–80, which is to give 10 percent of their total income, save 10 percent and live on 80 percent. These percentages aren’t mandated in the Bible, but the principle as a whole is both Biblical and practical.

<sup>10</sup>Whoever loves money never has enough;  
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.  
This too is meaningless.



### **What is the best way to share our faith in the workplace? (Ecclesiastes 9:10)**

First, it's important for Christians in the workplace to have a proper understanding of work itself. God rested from his work on the seventh day—both as an example of how to rest and as an example of how to work. Work should not be treated as a means to an end but as a blessing and as a chance to be an example. In addition, Paul told us to obey our earthly masters *not only when their eye is on [us] ... but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord ... with all [our] heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters* (Col 3:22–23).

When it comes to evangelism, the book of Titus tells us to set an example by doing what is good, showing *integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned* (Titus 2:7–8). That means not looking down our noses in judgment or shoving our faith in someone's face. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit's job, not ours, to bring other people to the place where they are ready for the seed of the gospel to be planted.

But when the Holy Spirit does lead, we need to be ready to share our faith. Peter said, *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect* (1Pe 3:15). Paul said that we should work in such a way as to *make the teaching about God our Savior attractive* (Titus 2:10).

<sup>10</sup>Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.



### **What does the Bible say about sex? (Song of Songs 2:3–7)**

The Bible has a lot to say about sex. In fact, God’s creation of sex is recorded at the very beginning of his written Word, and God’s first instruction to humankind was to have sex: *Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it* (Ge 1:28). No one who studies the Bible can say that it is prudish about sexuality. Song of Songs is such a steamy account of sexual love that Jewish boys were forbidden to read it until they were 14 years old!

However, as our creator, God knew that people needed committed love to protect them. He knew that outside of a God-ordained marriage, sex can cause many emotional, physical and spiritual problems. The Bible says: *Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished* (Pr 6:27–29).

This instruction isn’t just for adultery. In fact, any sexual relationship outside of marriage is outside of God’s good plan for us. Sex was meant to be the intimate bond that holds a marriage together, as Jesus noted in Mark 10: *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh* (vv. 7–8). Paul said that we are to honor God with our bodies (1Co 6:20). That means sex is essential between a husband and wife (1Co 7:3–5) but prohibited under any other circumstance. All people should *flee from sexual immorality* (1Co 6:18).

<sup>3</sup>Like an apple<sup>[1]</sup> tree among the trees of the forest  
is my beloved among the young men.

I delight to sit in his shade,  
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

<sup>4</sup>Let him lead me to the banquet hall,  
and let his banner over me be love.

<sup>5</sup>Strengthen me with raisins,  
refresh me with apples,  
for I am faint with love.

<sup>6</sup>His left arm is under my head,  
and his right arm embraces me.

<sup>7</sup>Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you  
by the gazelles and by the does of the field:  
Do not arouse or awaken love  
until it so desires.



### **How involved should Christians be in caring for the earth? (Isaiah 24:17–23)**

When God created human beings in his image, he gave them a privileged position above all other creatures (Ps 8:5). This position also carried the responsibility of caring for their environment. God's first mandates to his people were to fill the earth and cultivate the land (Ge 1:28–30). Therefore, human beings are stewards (managers) of all the good things God has made. We are accountable to God to care for his world.

Another reason that Christians should be concerned for the environment is because creation is intended to reflect the glory of God (Ps 19:1–2). The beauty of northeastern leaves turning color in the fall, the power of Niagara Falls and the majesty of Mount Rainier all point people to the beauty, power and majesty of their Creator. For this reason, we care for the world as an act of worship—preserving our environment to bring greater praise to God.

Finally, we care for the earth because as we do, we join God in his kingdom agenda. Sin did more than contaminate human hearts; it also threw physical creation into chaos (Ge 3:17–18; Ro 8:22). Since that time, God has been reclaiming, redeeming and renovating the world. One day, Jesus Christ will return and make all things new (Isa 65:17; Rev 21:5). Until then, we cooperate with God's great goal of restoration when we protect, preserve and cultivate the world around us.

<sup>17</sup>Terror and pit and snare await you,  
people of the earth.

<sup>18</sup>Whoever flees at the sound of terror  
will fall into a pit;  
whoever climbs out of the pit  
will be caught in a snare.

The floodgates of the heavens are opened,  
the foundations of the earth shake.

<sup>19</sup>The earth is broken up,  
the earth is split asunder,  
the earth is violently shaken.

<sup>20</sup>The earth reels like a drunkard,  
it sways like a hut in the wind;  
so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion  
that it falls—never to rise again.

<sup>21</sup>In that day the LORD will punish  
the powers in the heavens above  
and the kings on the earth below.

<sup>22</sup>They will be herded together  
like prisoners bound in a dungeon;  
they will be shut up in prison  
and be punished<sup>[1]</sup> after many days.

<sup>23</sup>The moon will be dismayed,  
the sun ashamed;  
for the LORD Almighty will reign  
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,  
and before its elders—with great glory.



### **What does the Bible definitively reveal about creation? (Isaiah 45:12)**

The Bible teaches first and foremost that creation is the work of the triune God (Ge 1:1–2; Jn 1:1–3, 14).

Genesis describes a six-day creation period (Ge 1:3–31). However, Bible scholars are divided over the interpretation of the Hebrew word translated “day.” Some say that each “day” was a literal 24-hour period. Others note that the Hebrew word for “day” is sometimes used in Scripture to describe an indefinite period of time.

The Biblical account also teaches that human beings were the result of a divine creative act (Ge 1:27; 2:7). Some Christians view Adam as literally the first human being created by God. Others view Adam as a selected representative of humanity. Still others view the story of Adam and Eve as a symbol of the gradual development of humanity’s moral and spiritual status, including the sinful nature, over time. Romans 5:12–19 says that sin entered the world *through one man* and that Adam was *a pattern of the one to come*. Does this language require the existence of a literal Adam? Longstanding interpretation says yes, while some more recent interpretation says either no or maybe. Some say Romans 5 uses what appears to be a literal parallel between the first Adam and the second Adam (Christ) to explain not only the presence of sin in the human race (Adam) but also its remedy (Christ). Many people also think that in Romans 5 “Adam” stands for humanity’s condemnation; “Christ” stands for the believer’s justification.

<sup>12</sup>It is I who made the earth  
and created mankind on it.  
My own hands stretched out the heavens;  
I marshaled their starry hosts.





### **Does God change his plans based on what we do? (Jeremiah 26:3)**

Because of our finite capacity for understanding, we struggle to reconcile how God can remain sovereign over all things while giving human beings the freedom to obey him or defy him. In light of this conflict, consider the following statements the Bible makes about God.

1. *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Ro 8:28). The apostle Paul did not say that God *causes* all things; the fact that we have free will means we are able to make our own choices. But whatever we choose, God works in all things to bring about his purpose.

2. *Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails* (Pr 19:21). This proverb reminds us that our plans cannot thwart God's purpose. So even though we have free choice, we can't disrupt what God actively purposes to do.

The Bible never attempts to solve the mysterious tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. The Bible assumes both are at work in the events of history. Yet this much is clear: God never changes so as to mislead or lie. He is never caught by surprise. He knows the decisions each person will make. Yet, in a manner we do not fully understand, his knowledge does not infringe on an individual's freedom before God.

Also see the articles [Can our prayers cause God to change his mind? \(Ex 32:14\)](#) and [Why did God change his mind? \(Isa 38:1-5\)](#).

<sup>3</sup>Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent and not inflict on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.



### **Has God revealed himself differently to different cultures and time periods? (Jeremiah 31:31)**

Yes, God has revealed himself in different ways to different cultures. During the same time period, God revealed himself (1) as *Yahweh (the Lord of the covenant)* to a polytheist by the name of Abram in Ur (Ge 12:1); (2) as God Most High to the mysterious Melchizedek, king of Salem (Ge 14:18–20), who did not worship the gods of Canaan; and (3) as Lord through a dream to a Philistine king named Abimelek (Ge 20:6). Later God revealed himself through dreams to the pharaoh of Egypt (Ge 41:1–40). And still later God revealed himself more directly to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius (Da 4:1–6:27).

The next question is, Why has an unchanging God revealed himself differently to various people groups throughout history? One answer is called the *principle of progressive revelation*, whereby God revealed himself more fully as Old Testament history unfolded. This revelation culminated in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:31–33; Heb 1:1–2). Another answer is called the *principle of divine accommodation*, whereby God adjusts his revelation to the understanding of the people he wants to use. As an example of this, God used the stars and planets to lead the Magi from the east to the Messiah. God graciously accommodated himself to the background and understanding of the Magi (Mt 2:1–12). God has also accommodated himself to unbelieving Gentiles as the giver of life, breath and everything else (Ac 17:22–34).

The ultimate culmination of this shifting revelation, however, is that God has prepared the gospel for the world and the world for the gospel. He has provided a testimony among the nations (Ac 14:16–17), giving sustenance to the world so that people who do not have the light of Scripture might come to know the one true God and the salvation he offers through Jesus Christ.

<sup>31</sup>“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when I will make a new covenant  
with the people of Israel  
and with the people of Judah.



### **What does the Bible say about the dangers of pornography? (Ezekiel 23:14–16)**

Because of the time and culture in which the Bible was written—no Internet, printed page or video—pornography isn't *directly* discussed in the Bible. However, the parable of Israel's unfaithfulness in Ezekiel 23:1–49 provides an interesting commentary on how images can seduce and corrupt. Verse 14 describes a woman—who represents Jerusalem—who saw figures of men drawn on a wall. *As soon as she saw them, she lusted after them* (v. 16). Not only did these depictions stir up lust, they also led her to seek out men with whom to have sex.

That is exactly what pornography does; it arouses within people impure and unhealthy sexual desires and intensifies sexual temptation. Pornographic images—and the idea of instant sexual pleasure—can dominate the way a person thinks about God's gift of sex. Here's the bottom line: pornography takes something beautiful, which is meant to be shared intimately between two married people, and twists it into something selfish and demeaning.

Furthermore, there are two other Biblical principles that can be applied to the issue of pornography: (1) We should fill our minds only with true, noble and pure thoughts (Php 4:8). (2) No matter what sins we've committed in the past, we're never too dirty to be forgiven and cleansed by God (1Co 6:9–11).

<sup>14</sup>“But she carried her prostitution still further. She saw men portrayed on a wall, figures of Chaldeans<sup>[1]</sup> portrayed in red, <sup>15</sup>with belts around their waists and flowing turbans on their heads; all of them looked like Babylonian chariot officers, natives of Chaldea.<sup>[2]</sup> <sup>16</sup>As soon as she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.



### **How can we understand the Trinity? (Matthew 3:16–17)**

The short answer is that we can't. Not fully. Finite human beings can't fully comprehend an infinite God. But we can grapple intelligently with the concept of one God who exists as three distinct and irreducible persons: Father, Son and Spirit.

The Father is referred to as God in Matthew 6:26, 30. Jesus is referred to as God in John 1:1, 14 and Hebrews 1:6. The Spirit is referred to as God in Acts 5:3–4. All three are referred to as God even though Mark 12:32 tells us that *God is one and there is no other but him*. How do we reconcile this?

The apostle Paul says that God placed clues in creation so we can know more about him (Ro 1:20). One of the ways we can come to know more about God's nature is by drawing analogies with things that we can see. And we do see examples of three forms in one essence when we examine God's creation. Take water, for example. Water is always water, even though it can be experienced in three different forms: liquid, solid (when frozen) and vapor. God is still God even though he can be experienced in three forms—Father, Son and Spirit. Light is another example. Any color of light can be formed from the three primary colors: red, blue and yellow. Even light that appears white and colorless to the human eye is actually a manifestation of those colors. So nature shows us that one substance with multiple aspects can exist in unity. Keep in mind that these are examples, not explanations. God cannot be explained or understood, but these examples give us a way to begin thinking about the mystery of the Trinity.

<sup>16</sup>As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



### **What is hell like? (Matthew 5:21–30)**

The Bible offers a variety of disturbing pictures of hell. Hell is described as a place of unquenchable fire (Mk 9:43); condemnation (Mt 23:33); darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:11–13); chains and judgment (2Pe 2:4). While some of these images create an apparent conflict (e.g., fire and darkness), together they are a picture of misery.

The clearest picture we have of hell comes from Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus in [Luke 16:19–31](#). In this parable, Jesus warned that the boundaries between heaven and hell are permanently fixed. While Lazarus entered a place of comfort ([Lk 16:25](#)), the rich man existed in torment, longing for even a drop of cool water ([Lk 16:24](#)).

Jesus' description of hell also leads to several observations. People are recognizable there, and it is a place of agony and torment ([Lk 16:23](#)). The chasm between heaven and hell prevents escape or movement from hell to heaven ([Lk 16:26](#)). And it is not possible for anyone in hell to warn loved ones alive on earth about the reality of hell ([Lk 16:31](#)).

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,<sup>[1]</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister<sup>[2],[3]</sup> will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’<sup>[4]</sup> is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

<sup>23</sup>“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

<sup>25</sup>“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.



### **How can I tell if I have too much “stuff”? (Matthew 6:19–20)**

When we have too many material possessions, we often hold on to them too tightly; we overemphasize their importance and purpose in our lives, and this causes us anxiety. A good way to find out if we have a healthy view of material possessions is to ask ourselves, Am I actively seeking first God’s kingdom and his righteousness or am I worrying about losing or increasing my stuff? Jesus said, *Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear* (Mt 6:25). The remedy to our anxiety and acquisitiveness is to *seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to [us] as well* (Mt 6:33). So what’s needed is the cultivation of a right frame of reference concerning material possessions.

What we have (or do not have) should not define who we are (or are not). Furthermore, we should be looking for creative ways to share what we have with others—especially those who cannot repay us in monetary or material ways. Have you ever stopped to wonder why God entrusts us with all this stuff in the first place? It is certainly not because we deserve it more than anybody else. The answer, in large part, goes back to what God said to Abram in Genesis 12:2–3: you’ve been blessed to be a blessing to others. We should never lose sight of the fact that we’ve been called to use what God has given us to serve others (Mt 20:25–28; 1Pe 4:10). We should acknowledge the reality that sometimes those with the least give the most materially (giving the shirt off their back) and relationally (giving from the heart), and that is the sacrificial giving the apostle Paul praised so highly in 2 Corinthians 8–9. So the issue is not simply how much we have or don’t have; the issue is what we *do* with what we have. And *why* we do what we do. That core issue makes all the difference in the love we develop for stuff.

We know we have too much stuff when anxiety or greed, which is idolatry (Col 3:5), keeps us from sharing with others; when we find our contentment in what we buy and own rather than in whom we love; and when we find our identity in what we possess rather than in our relationships—both with God and others. Seek first his kingdom, and everything else will fall into line.

<sup>19</sup>“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup>But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.



### **How involved should the church be in politics? (Matthew 22:21)**

There is no easy answer to this question. Perhaps the most straightforward reply is that it depends. It depends mostly on what you mean by the church's involvement.

When we speak of the "church," if we are thinking of each individual believer bearing witness to God's truth in public debates on critical political and moral issues, then it seems clear that the level of involvement should be high, as God's people should *give ... to God what is God's* (Mt 22:21). This often takes the form of checking the state's messianic ambition. But if we understand church involvement in politics to be formal representatives of a denomination taking official stances on political issues, then the line becomes quite a bit more obscured for two important reasons.

First, Scripture teaches that we are to maintain a *clear conscience toward God* (1Pe 3:21), which implies that each individual believer is responsible for his or her actions, political affiliations and beliefs. Aside from the obvious issue in this country of a church's tax-exempt status being jeopardized by engaging in party politics, the more important matter relates to the binding of consciences that can take place when church officials take positions on behalf of their members. Second, a great many stances on political issues fall into the category of prudential judgment, and this is an area in which God's people are to free to lovingly disagree while they *give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's* (Mt 22:21). The question is not *how much* political involvement is appropriate, but *which kind* of political involvement is appropriate.

So how involved should Christians become in the politics of our nation and culture? There is no set answer, but we are to observe at least two principles. First, we must show respect for our political leaders (Ro 13:1–7) and work together with them in caring for our society. Second, we must remind the state to not play God and resist any messianic ambitions that politicians announce (Ac 5:29).

<sup>21</sup>"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."



### **What does it mean to love my neighbor? (Matthew 22:37–40)**

Henri Nouwen once said that true community is the place where the individual we least like always lives next door. This is certainly a Biblical principle. Jesus taught that our neighbor might be the person least like us—consider the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37). We are called to be like the Samaritan rather than the religious leaders who passed by their Jewish countryman who had been beaten, robbed and left for dead along the road. They didn't lift a hand to help him.

In contrast, the despised Samaritan did not walk past the Jewish man but cared for him—paying out of his own pocket for the man's needs, not expecting repayment. This Samaritan loved radically, sacrificially and at great risk to himself. He acted decisively; he didn't question what his fellow Samaritans would think or what might happen if the robbers were still nearby.

Loving our neighbor involves caring for those in need who cross our path. This applies certainly to friends, but *especially* to those least like us and to those we like the least.

Those who experience eternal life with Jesus must love like Jesus loves. So, just as Jesus loves his neighbor—like the Samaritan loved the Jewish man who was attacked by robbers—we too must love our neighbor, even though they might not like us or be able to pay us back. Jesus loves unconditionally and we should too.

<sup>37</sup>Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’<sup>[5]</sup> <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>[6]</sup> <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”





### **How should Christians understand prayer? (Mark 1:35)**

When trying to understand what prayer is, a good place to start is identifying what prayer is *not*. Prayer is not a formula (i.e., if I pray a certain prayer in a certain way, then God will be obliged to give me what I ask for). Prayer is not a way for us to convince God to bend to our will. Nor is prayer just one of several religious activities we engage in to earn God's favor.

Rather, prayer is an ongoing conversation during which we get to know God more intimately. Oswald Chambers wrote the following in *My Utmost for His Highest*: "When a person is born again from above, the life of the Son of God is born in him, and he can either starve or nourish that life. Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished ... We look at prayer as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the Bible's idea of prayer is that we may know God himself."

As we get to know God, we begin to see our circumstances from his perspective. We then adjust our will to God's will. Chambers also wrote: "When you begin to pray, *things* remain the same but *you* begin to be different ... It is not so true that 'Prayer changes things' as that prayer changes *me*, and then I change things."

<sup>35</sup>Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.



### **How can we, imperfect people, live the way Jesus wants us to live? (Mark 9:19–24)**

Jesus is never unsettled by our imperfections. Actually, he is most at ease and hopeful with those who are glaringly imperfect. He dined with hated tax collectors and “champion” sinners (Mt 9:10). He offered grace to a woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3–11). His own disciples—the men *he* chose—were sometimes dull, fickle and unbelieving (Mt 15:16; Mk 9:19; 14:66–72). Even in his last hour, as he hung on the cross, Jesus welcomed a criminal into the kingdom (Lk 23:43).

It seems Jesus sees potential in our imperfection. When we are the most acutely aware of our weakness, we reach the end of our rope. Those who have run out of self-reliance are ready to rely on Jesus to give them new life.

But Jesus is frustrated by dishonesty. He reserved his sharpest words for the religious frauds who did not realize they were in desperate trouble. *It is not the healthy who need a doctor* (Mt 9:12), he told them. So an important step toward living the way Jesus intends is being brutally honest about our radical imperfections. Bringing our sins into his light by giving them a specific name—lust, anger, gossip, gluttony, greed and so on—makes it possible for us to experience deep-soul healing from the Great Physician (1Jn 1:8–9).

But the goal is not to merely admit our imperfections and offenses. The goal is to transform our sinful natures by the Spirit of God so that we become the kind of people in whom the life of Jesus is most vividly expressed. Because we are human, imperfections are inevitable. But through Jesus, what’s old can become new (2Co 5:17).

<sup>19</sup>“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

<sup>20</sup>So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

<sup>21</sup>Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. <sup>22</sup>“It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

<sup>23</sup>“‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

<sup>24</sup>Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”



### **Does the Bible approve of remarriage after divorce? (Mark 10:11–12)**

The Bible certainly does not cast a favorable light on divorce (e.g., Mal 2:16). However, there are some passages that seem to permit divorce and remarriage.

The language employed by Moses in regulating divorce (Dt 24:1–4) indicates that divorce predated the Mosaic Law. This is why Jesus said that Moses merely *permitted* divorce due to the hardness of their hearts (Mt 19:8). Jesus taught that it was not lawful to divorce *for any and every reason* (Mt 19:3). But he did allow divorce and remarriage in cases of *sexual immorality* (Mt 19:9).

Some scholars believe that the phrase *except for sexual immorality* in Matthew 19:9 only grants permission to divorce—not to remarry. Others argue that Jesus’ warning that divorce constitutes adultery only makes sense if remarriage is assumed. The apostle Paul reiterated Jesus’ teaching on this subject but also allowed for remarriage in cases in which an unbeliever deserts a believing partner. Under those circumstances, the believer who has been abandoned *is not bound* (1Co 7:15).

In summary, the Bible teaches that marriage is a permanent state that is normally dissolved only by the death of one of the partners (Ge 2:23–24). The only stated exceptions to this are two: (1) if one partner has engaged in sexual immorality, and (2) if an unbeliever has abandoned the believing partner. When one of these situations occurs, the innocent party may remarry. It’s also important to recognize that anyone who has broken God’s pattern for marriage can find forgiveness through Christ (1Jn 1:9). And those who have remarried have entered into a covenant that should be *honored by all* and maintained with purity (Heb 13:4).

<sup>11</sup>He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup>And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”



### **Are natural disasters literally “acts of God”? Does he cause them? (Mark 13:8)**

When a volcano erupts, a hurricane devastates a city or lightning ignites a vast forest fire, it is natural for us to ponder God’s relationship to the events. How should we regard such tragic occurrences? Are they really “acts of God,” as insurance companies still label them?

Jesus asked his disciples a similar question. In Luke 13:4, Jesus asked, *Those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?* Jesus was apparently referring to a well-known disaster of his time that had killed 18 people. His point was simple: events and tragedies beyond our control are part of life. There is not necessarily a direct cause and effect between the people who suffer and the tragedies themselves.

The Bible offers two reasons for natural disasters. First, the world itself is beautiful but broken. All of creation suffers as a consequence of the entry of sin, death and decay into the world (Ro 5:12; 8:19–22). Second, all of human history takes place within the context of the cosmic battle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. Job did not know that the Lord was using his life as an example of faithfulness when Satan afflicted him with sores and sadness.

Thankfully, Jesus left his disciples (and us) with this encouragement: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33).

<sup>8</sup>Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.



### **Can Christians lose their salvation? (Luke 8:13)**

Salvation is the work of God. It came through Jesus Christ by the shedding of his blood on the cross (Jn 3:17; Ro 5:9). Those who experience salvation are given eternal life as a gift of grace that they receive by faith (Eph 2:5, 8)—this gift comes because of God’s mercy, not as a result of human effort (2Ti 1:9; Titus 3:5).

Since salvation is a work of God’s grace from beginning to end (Ro 1:17; Gal 3:1–3), those who belong to Christ can be assured that they will never lose their salvation. They have been appointed to receive salvation, not to suffer wrath (1Th 5:9). There is also a subjective dimension to this assurance. The Holy Spirit *testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children* (Ro 8:16). In other words, when we are children of God, the Holy Spirit helps us know with confidence that we are heirs of eternal life.

But assurance is no excuse for complacency. God’s grace transforms those who are in Christ (2Co 5:21; Jas 2:14–26; 1Jn 3:3). Therefore, those whose lives show no evidence of this transformation should examine themselves to see if they have genuinely trusted in Christ (2Co 13:5; Heb 6:1–8). For such people the question is not whether they might lose their salvation but whether they ever possessed it in the first place.

<sup>13</sup>Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.



### **What are demons, and how do they interact with the world today? (Luke 9:37–43)**

Demons are called *deceiving spirits* (1Ti 4:1). They are also called *impure spirits* (Mt 10:1; see Lk 4:33). The origin of demons is not described in the Scriptures, but Jesus' reference to *the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41) suggests that demons are angels who fell when Satan rebelled (Rev 12:4).

Demons can speak and can possess people and animals (Mk 5:9, 12; Ac 19:15). Deceitful spirits are also capable of appearing as angels of light (2Co 11:14). Yet despite their apparent beauty and power, their influence is ultimately destructive (Mk 5:2–5). Demonic manifestation during the New Testament era often resulted in symptoms similar to those of mental or physical illness (e.g., Mt 9:33; 17:15, 18; Mk 5:15). Demonic influence is also a source of false religion (Dt 32:17; 1Co 10:19–21).

The fact that demons are rarely mentioned in the Old Testament has caused some Bible scholars to conclude that the high frequency of demonic activity in the New Testament era was unique and may have been a response to the presence of Jesus. Others believe that demons are just as active today. In either case, Jesus gave his disciples authority over evil spirits (Mk 6:7). This power is rooted in Jesus the Messiah's kingdom authority (Mt 10:1, 7–8), which remains very much in effect today.

<sup>37</sup>The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. <sup>38</sup>A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. <sup>39</sup>A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. <sup>40</sup>I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not."

<sup>41</sup>"You unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."

<sup>42</sup>Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the impure spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup>And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.



### **Does saving for retirement show a lack of trust in God? (Luke 12:16–21)**

The first thing we have to determine is whether or not we have already made up our mind about the answer to this question. Are we even open to an answer about retirement savings that may fly in the face of what we really want?

The Bible offers stern warnings about money. We are not to store up treasures on earth (Mt 6:19). We are not to put our hope in wealth (1Ti 6:17). We are not to hoard wealth (Jas 5:3). Money will ensnare us without our realizing it. Compounding the concern is the fact that we are so skilled at deceiving ourselves on the topic of money. We have a proclivity for finding loopholes, and we cut ourselves endless slack.

In some cases, saving for retirement is indeed another display of self-reliance. We must remember that this world is not our home. We are to seek first God's kingdom (Mt 6:33). At the same time, trusting God does not abdicate our responsibilities in life, which include planning and preparing for how we will meet our own and our family's needs after retiring. Wise financial planning can create opportunities for us to give and serve long after our working days are over.

So, our first priority must be to radically and generously invest the resources we have accumulated over the years into people, ministries and efforts that bring the message and values of God's kingdom to this desperate world. We earn and save now so we can give and serve later. When we properly prioritize the purpose for our spending and saving philosophies, we will be free to enjoy the gifts of our retirement.

<sup>16</sup>And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

<sup>18</sup>"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'

<sup>20</sup>"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

<sup>21</sup>"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."



### **Does God give people a chance to believe in him after death? (Luke 16:19–31)**

It may be tempting to think people will be given an opportunity to obtain salvation after they die—or that their loved ones will—but the Bible offers no indication that anyone is given a “second chance” after death to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Some have interpreted Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus to mean that people can plead for mercy after death and be heard. But Jesus doesn’t seem to offer that as something to hope for or to bet your life on.

Hebrews 9:27 states that *people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*. At that time, Jesus Christ, who has been appointed to judge everyone (Ac 17:31; Ro 2:16), will determine the eternal destiny of each individual. Those who have trusted Jesus Christ will be ushered into God’s presence (Jn 3:16; 1Th 4:16). Those who have rejected Jesus Christ will be ushered into a place of separation and torment—a place called hell (Mt 10:28; 13:42).

God desires that every person would come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved (1Ti 2:4). And as long as we have life on earth, we have the opportunity to accept the salvation Jesus Christ freely offers to all (Jn 3:16–17; [Ro 10:9–10](#)).

<sup>19</sup>“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. <sup>20</sup>At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores <sup>21</sup>and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

<sup>22</sup>“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. <sup>23</sup>In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. <sup>24</sup>So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

<sup>25</sup>“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. <sup>26</sup>And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

<sup>27</sup>“He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, <sup>28</sup>for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

<sup>29</sup>“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

<sup>30</sup>“ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’



<sup>31</sup>“He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”



### **Does God expect me to forgive someone who keeps hurting me? (Luke 17:1–4)**

The entire Christian understanding of forgiving others is based on God’s forgiveness of us through Jesus Christ. We are to forgive each other *just as in Christ God forgave [us]* (Eph 4:32). Peter once asked Jesus how many times he was supposed to forgive someone who continued to sin against him (Mt 18:21). Jesus responded with a chilling statement and a story that teaches us the limitless nature of forgiveness. We should not set limits on our forgiveness, because God has forgiven us a far greater debt (Mt 18:23–35).

So does God expect you to forgive someone who keeps hurting you? Yes, because we have been shown such abundant forgiveness. Yes, because we have a new nature—a *new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph 4:24). But steps should also be taken in difficult relationships to establish boundaries and to encourage true reconciliation.

One person can bring forgiveness to a relationship, but it takes two people to bring reconciliation. You are responsible to forgive others because Christ has forgiven you. However, you cannot bring reconciliation to a relationship if the other person does not want to make peace with you. Consider Paul’s counsel in Romans 12:18: *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*. Relationships can only be healed through forgiveness and repentance. Where repentance is not present, reconciliation cannot take place.

<sup>1</sup>Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. <sup>2</sup>It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. <sup>3</sup>So watch yourselves.

“If your brother or sister<sup>[1]</sup> sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. <sup>4</sup>Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”



**Is there more to the gospel than being assured of heaven? (John 5:24)**

Yes, there is much more. Through the gospel we learn about eternal life with Jesus the Messiah. And since Jesus has entered our present lives through faith, the gospel is also about life lived to the full here and now on earth in the power of his Spirit.

The first step in finding eternal life is accepting Jesus as our Savior. The Bible teaches us how to do this and how to live lives of faith as Jesus' followers. As those assured of God's love in Jesus through his Spirit, we can live our lives to the full and share God's love with others here on earth. The gospel involves heaven coming down to earth.

The gospel impacts everything: God is going to make all things new, just like he has "made us new through faith in Jesus Christ" (Ro 3:22–26; 2Co 5:17).

<sup>24</sup>“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.



**Is accepting Jesus the only way for people to get to heaven? (John 14:6)**

Yes. The Bible clearly identifies Jesus as the only means of salvation ([Jn 14:6](#); [Ac 4:12](#); [Php 2:9–11](#)). Believing in Jesus and his unique work ([Ac 2:37–39](#); [16:31](#); [Ro 10:9](#)) is the only way to gain access to God’s forgiveness. No number of good deeds can earn a person an eternal reward. No other faith system leads people to the one true God. Some people chafe at such an exclusive stance, but the words of Jesus and the apostles leave no other option ([Ac 4:12](#); [1Ti 2:5](#)). See the article [What about those who have never heard about Jesus?](#) ([Ac 4:12](#)).

<sup>6</sup>Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.



### **How can the Christian church become what Jesus intended? (John 14:12)**

The church is a spiritual organism and, at the same time, a human organization. We become members of the organism by new birth and baptism (1Co 12:13) and members of the organization by covenant. Most of the controversy about the church becoming what Jesus intended is focused on this organizational form. The real issue, however, is not with organization, but with people who occupy it (both leaders and members).

On the one hand, we Christians still live with our own version of the flesh, not realizing that we are angry, envious, competitive and self-righteous, which are all barriers to communication. On the other hand, we tend to see the sin of others so much more clearly than our own. We each have our own set of expectations as to what the church should be. We go from church to church in search of this ideal, which gets in the way of living dynamic, loving lives in the imperfect church we are in. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter.” We all have our own dream of what the church should be like, and when we cannot find it, we grow disillusioned. However, true fellowship is based on faith and not dreams—on truth and not emotions. Bonhoeffer boldly suggests that the sooner disillusionment comes, the better: “Therefore the very hour of disillusionment is instructive because it teaches me that neither I nor my brother can live to ourselves, but only through the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.”

In other words, the church will become what Jesus intended it to be when we receive one another with grace and forgiveness instead of measuring one another by our own faulty expectations.

<sup>12</sup>Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.



### **What is the Holy Spirit's role in evangelism? (Acts 1:8)**

Defining the Holy Spirit's role in evangelism is much like talking about your heart's relationship to your physical body. Without your heart, you would be dead. Without the Holy Spirit, you would be dead in your relationship to God.

The Holy Spirit makes us *alive with Christ* (Eph 2:5). The Holy Spirit resuscitates and regenerates us so that we can see and understand the things of God (Jn 3:3; 1Co 2:12). The Holy Spirit gives us ears to hear and respond to the call of the gospel (Jn 6:44), resulting in salvation and holiness. The Holy Spirit is our very own "caseworker" for adoption into God's family as children and heirs (Ro 8:15–16). Even before we hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit is working to empower the message (Ro 1:16) and the messenger (1Co 2:3–4).

The most vivid image of the Holy Spirit's role in evangelism is found in the book of Ezekiel, where the prophet received a vision of the valley of dry bones (Eze 37:1–14). It is an astounding picture of the new work that God will do in Israel by his Spirit in the last days. Ezekiel was told to preach, and as he did, the Spirit (breath) of God began to animate those old bones, which came together to form a great army (Eze 37:9–10). This is a template of what the Holy Spirit does through evangelism.

<sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."



### **What about those who have never heard about Jesus? (Acts 4:12)**

Jesus was clear about the rules for receiving salvation when he said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (Jn 14:6). And when speaking about Jesus, the apostle Peter said in this passage, *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*

Further, all people have to answer to God whether or not they have “heard” about him (Heb 9:27). The Bible states that God has clearly revealed himself in creation (Ro 1:19–20) and that he has *set eternity in the human heart* (Ecc 3:11). This means that people see all around them the evidence of God and sense within themselves the truth that they are meant for more than this world. God is not the problem; humankind is. Because of sin, people reject this knowledge of God and rebel against his will (Ro 1:21–23). It is only because of God’s grace (Eph 2:8–9) that he saves people from their own sinful desires (Ro 1:24–32).

How God works out his plan is mysterious and complicated. We have our ideas of what it means for Jesus to be “the way,” but he is not bound by our understanding. God works to accomplish his goals in ways that we will never see or comprehend. The wideness of God’s mercy and the tenacity of his love is beyond our intellectual capacity.

Jesus is central in the redemption story. But God rewards those who seek him (Heb 11:6). It is our mission to help those who seek him and make sure that those who have yet to answer God’s call hear and understand the gospel (Mt 28:19–20; Ac 1:8). God always acts justly; he never acts unfairly or wrongly (Dt 32:4). We might be surprised at the final roll call of heaven. Fortunately, it is God—not us—who will sort out the details in each person’s case.

<sup>12</sup>Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”



### **Does it matter which Bible translation Christians use? (Acts 8:26–30)**

By the time of Jesus and the early church, there were several editions of the Old Testament in wide use by both Jewish and Christian communities. The version of the Hebrew Bible used today as the foundation for all English and non-English translations was not finished until near the end of the first century AD.

Paul used both a Hebrew text (possibly several) and the Septuagint (the primary Greek translation of the Law and the Prophets) when quoting the Old Testament in his letters. The writer of Hebrews did the same. This indicates that an absolute, authoritative text has never been required in either Jewish or Christian religious communities.

At the same time, recognition of the high value and authority of the Bible has meant that Jews and Christians seek to precisely copy and carefully preserve the Scriptures. Since every translation of the Bible—which includes Hebrew (most of the Old Testament), Greek (the New Testament) and Aramaic (a few parts of the Old Testament)—requires an attempt to find equivalent meanings in our modern language, no single translation is definitively accurate.

So, to answer the question, it *does* matter whether or not we use an accurate and helpful translation of the Bible. But all translations undertaken by groups of qualified scholars working under the auspices of recognized Christian faith communities are likely to be acceptable for general use. Even some paraphrases, authored by individuals as more interpretive expressions of Scripture, can be helpful study guides; however, they are rarely as accurate to the original texts as are the major, well-known translations.

<sup>26</sup>Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” <sup>27</sup>So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian<sup>[1]</sup> eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, <sup>28</sup>and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. <sup>29</sup>The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

<sup>30</sup>Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.





### **What is the value of baptism? (Acts 19:1–7)**

Jesus' final instructions to his disciples were to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Mt 28:19–20). For centuries, brilliant minds have debated whether baptism is a symbol or a sacrament, whether it is for believers or infants. But clearly, baptism is a crucial step in a Christian's faith journey.

The real question is, When precisely does our faith journey begin? Scripture is clear that baptism points to the fact that a person has already begun a relationship with God. However, it is God who initially draws us to himself (Jn 6:44). We don't create our own spiritual sensitivity, and this aspect of our faith journey is poignantly illustrated in the baptism of helpless, dependent infants.

The disciples Paul met in Ephesus were adults who had a way to go in learning how to imitate and trust in Jesus the Messiah. They were becoming the kind of people who consistently obey Jesus. Baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus was the key for enabling them to living a Spirit-filled and empowered life. In a world where individualism and privacy are cherished values, baptism publicly and boldly proclaims our allegiance to Jesus. Through baptism, we fly our colors—declaring we are unashamedly committed to following Jesus, and proclaiming our union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Life is hard. Sin is enticing. Our identity is often uncertain. Our faith is sometimes weak. Baptism is a reference point during challenging times that helps us rediscover “true north.” We remember our baptism. We remember to whom we belong. We remember that we are part of the body of Jesus Christ. And we also remember that, spiritually speaking, we are like helpless, dependent infants who can't live on their own without the sustaining grace and power of their Father in heaven.

Finally, baptism immerses us into the reality of the Trinity (Mt 28:19). The precise meaning of this may elude us, but complete understanding is not a prerequisite to rejoicing. We are no longer on our own. We have fellowship with the Trinity. What a glorious mystery!

<sup>1</sup>While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples <sup>2</sup>and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when<sup>[2]</sup> you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

<sup>3</sup>So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?”

“John's baptism,” they replied.

<sup>4</sup>Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues<sup>[3]</sup> and prophesied. <sup>7</sup>There were about twelve men in all.



### **How are we *justified*? (Romans 5:1)**

To be *justified* means “to be made right.” Paul’s great question was, How is a sinful human being made right with a holy God? Even if we could follow the law and live perfectly, we would still not be right with God. *Sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin* (v. 12). Stated another way, Adam’s sin *resulted in condemnation for all people* (v. 18). Therefore, we do not start life with even the possibility of living sinless lives; we begin life with a sinful nature (Ge 8:21; Ps 51:5; 58:3; Eph 2:3).

Yet God created us for a relationship with him. So he took the initiative to make the relationship right. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who did for us what we could never do for ourselves: Jesus lived a wholly righteous life—a perfect life in line with the law and in total relationship with God the Father. Even more than that, Jesus took on himself all the punishment our disobedience deserves (Ro 3:24). At the cross he fulfilled all that righteousness demanded. His life was given in exchange for ours; his blood paid the price for our justification.

The results of Jesus’ sacrifice are personally available to us simply by faith. God has done everything required to justify us. All that remains is for us to receive the grace of God shown on the cross. We are *justified through faith* when we stop trying to justify ourselves and depend completely on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we<sup>[1]</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,



### **Does sin ever quit? (Romans 7:14–25)**

Sin will not quit until the final coming of God’s kingdom; at that time the fallen world will no longer exist, for there will be *a new heaven and a new earth* (Rev 21:1), and our mortal bodies will be changed to immortal bodies (1Co 15:53–54). Sin will keep knocking at our door as long as we live in this broken, rebellious, twisted world.

Paul said we have *died to sin* (Ro 6:2), that is, sin’s claim on our lives has been broken. We do not have to give in to it any longer. As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit within us (8:9–11), giving us the power to resist sin’s advances and live a strong, new life (Gal 5:13–25). But we must choose to resist sin. Every day. Every moment of every day.

What level of victory over sin can we expect before the day when Christ returns? Less important than the degree of victory is the direction we’re going. We can expect that as we learn to consistently yield more of our will to the Holy Spirit, we will move progressively in the direction of obedience. When we fail and do not choose to trust the Spirit to empower us, we can confess our sins, receive forgiveness and keep moving forward. And one day, when Christ returns, we will be completely free from sin’s influence.

<sup>14</sup>We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. <sup>15</sup>I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup>And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.<sup>[2]</sup> For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

<sup>21</sup>So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup>For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; <sup>23</sup>but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. <sup>24</sup>What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature<sup>[3]</sup> a slave to the law of sin.



### **What determines a person's eternal destination? (Romans 10:9–10)**

The Bible teaches that every human being will spend eternity somewhere, either in heaven or in hell (Mt 25:46). Heaven is a place where God is present and his people abide with him in joyful worship. Hell is a place of separation from God—a place of agony, where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 13:50).

Ultimately, God is the sovereign judge of the universe, and he determines where a person spends eternity. As a holy and righteous judge, God has every right to send each one of us to hell because we *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Ro 3:23). But because of his great love for us, God sent Jesus Christ into the world to die on the cross as payment for our sins (5:8–9). In doing so, God provided a way for all people to enter into eternal life (Jn 3:16–17).

The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms what determines a person's eternal destiny: believing in and obeying the Son of God. *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them* (Jn 3:36). Heaven (eternal life) or hell (eternal damnation) is not determined by good works or church affiliation but by our relationship with Jesus. Those who trust in him as Savior and sin-bearer will spend eternity with him in heaven.

<sup>9</sup>If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.



### **Does God expect me to keep my mind and body pure in today's culture? (1 Corinthians 6:18)**

In his Word, God calls his people to a life of holiness. Peter wrote, *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy"* (1Pe 1:14–16). When we read a passage like this, we might think, How can God expect me to live a holy life in a culture that bombards me every day with the very antithesis of holiness?

When we're tempted to respond this way, we must keep three things in mind. First, the culture of the Old and New Testament writers was every bit as decadent as ours is today. Sinful human nature hasn't changed, nor has our adversary, the devil. We cannot excuse lowering our standards on the basis of the changing conditions in which we live.

Second, the moral standards in the Word of God are no less applicable and binding today than they were when the Old and New Testament writers recorded in written words what God had previously made known to countless generations before through the witness of conscience and creation. God's moral standards are as unalterable as the holy nature of God himself. His moral standards reflect his holy nature, and Peter calls us to mimic God *as obedient children* (1Pe 1:14).

And third, God hasn't left us alone in our fight against sin. He has given us the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. While no one will achieve sinless perfection on this side of heaven, the Spirit within is a powerful resource to aid us in becoming increasingly conformed in mind and body to the image of the holy God we love and serve.

<sup>18</sup>Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.



### **How do Christians practice evangelism in a culture that frowns on “proselytizing”? (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)**

Ever since Jesus charged his disciples to *go and make disciples of all nations* (Mt 28:19), Christians have understood that it’s our privilege and responsibility to share the gospel. The early Christians obeyed this charge in a culture that frowned on proselytizing even more than our own culture does. When Peter and John were threatened and commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop preaching, they responded by saying, *We must obey God rather than human beings!* (Ac 5:29). Despite the consequences, our commitment today should be no less than theirs was.

The charge to proclaim the gospel in a culture that frowns on doing so requires both courage and sensitivity. Paul modeled both of these qualities when he preached to the Athenians at the Areopagus (Ac 17:16–34). In that sermon, he showed remarkable fluency in Greek literature and religion, communicating the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that the Athenians could understand and appreciate. At the same time, he didn’t shrink from proclaiming the resurrection—a doctrine that flew in the face of their preconceived ideas and philosophical commitments.

When sharing the gospel, we, like Paul, must be mindful of our culture, yet never shrink away from those eternal truths that may rub people the wrong way. And we must always season our words with acts of compassion so that unbelievers may *see [our] good deeds and glorify [our] Father in heaven* (Mt 5:16).

Paul’s wise counsel to the Colossians sums it up best: *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone* (Col 4:5–6).

<sup>19</sup>Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup>To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup>I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.



**What is my purpose in life? And how can I be certain of it? (1 Corinthians 10:31)**

*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Mt 6:10). This is the essence of our purpose. We are to honor God and advance his kingdom through who we are and in everything we do.

Through our cooperation with God’s Spirit who is at work within us, we can grow to the point that what we want aligns with what God wants—our passions and purposes are his passions and purposes; we think, speak, act and relate in a Christlike way. We will never be perfect or without struggle in this life, but we can be inwardly connected to Jesus (Jn 15:1–8). We listen for the Spirit’s guidance. We cultivate our gifts. We live our lives pursuing God’s kingdom interests (1Co 10:31–11:1).

But often this isn’t enough for us. We want to know our specific, individual purpose with certainty. We want the mystery solved. We want to find a unique purpose that focuses our energies and convinces us that our life counts.

Perhaps our feverish search for the specific is misguided. Maybe our need for certainty reflects our addiction to control and what Eugene Peterson calls “insiders’ pride.” God wants us to trust him, and sometimes knowing too much leads to trusting too little. Maybe letting go of the pressure to find our purpose—and instead following hard after God each new day—will center us squarely in the target.

<sup>31</sup>So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.





### **How can we identify our spiritual gifts? (1 Corinthians 12:1–11)**

Every believer has been blessed with at least one spiritual gift (a God-given ability to be used in building up the body of Christ). See the article What are spiritual gifts? (1Co 12:1–31). But how can we discover what our gifts are? Here are several guidelines that will prove helpful in answering this question:

- *Learn*: Scripture mentions dozens of spiritual gifts. In order to recognize the gifts in our lives, we should know what they are (Ro 12:6–8; Eph 4:11–12; 1Pe 4:10–11).
- *Pray*: We should go to God in prayer and ask him what our gifts are. We should remain open. God the Holy Spirit chooses our gifts (1Co 12:11), and he is able and willing to reveal them to us.
- *Serve*: We should not wait for God to tell us what our gifts are before we begin serving in ministry. As we get more involved, patterns will emerge that will give us a clue as to what our gifts are.
- *Ask*: We should go to other believers who know us well and ask them what they think our gifts are. It is hard to imagine God giving us gifts that no one else recognizes but us!
- *Desire*: We should ask ourselves, “What do I desire to do? What do I delight in doing for Christ? What am I passionate about in relation to fellow believers?” God has given us these passions and desires, and they are often another clue as to what our gifts may be.

<sup>1</sup>Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

<sup>2</sup>You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. <sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. <sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

<sup>7</sup>Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,<sup>[1]</sup> and to still another the interpretation of tongues.<sup>[2]</sup> <sup>11</sup>All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.



### **Is there value in other religions like Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism? (Galatians 1:9)**

The simplest answer to this question is yes, there is value, especially ethical value, in other religions. But the more difficult and significant question is, Is there *eternal* value in other religions? The answer to that question is no. Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism all provide very different answers to questions concerning the nature of God, sin, who Jesus Christ is, what the purpose of life is, the afterlife and the eternal significance of being a good person. Simple honesty requires that we acknowledge the diversity of religions and the diversity of their answers to such basic questions.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that God rewards *those who earnestly seek him* (Heb 11:6). God wants to be found, and traces of him can be found throughout the world's religions. But much about God's revelation of himself through nature and the world's religions has also been distorted through sin, ignorance, falsehood and superstition (Ro 1:18–32). This is why we all need a more definitive form of revelation. In the Christian faith, the most rudimentary issues concern who Jesus Christ is and whether he actually has the authority to speak on God's behalf. The Gospels record Jesus' teachings and the rest of the New Testament corroborates, clarifies and applies his teachings.

While world religions help to express the human soul's longing to know its Creator, all religions must wrestle with the question of truth about Jesus Christ. Who was this carpenter from Nazareth? Was he a charismatic leader, a prophet, a martyr or *the way and the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6)? The Bible teaches that believing in Jesus and following his way is the only path to finding a personal relationship with God and receiving eternal life. Jesus said, *No one comes to the Father except through me* (Jn 14:6). And the apostle Peter said, when speaking about Jesus, *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved* (Ac 4:12).

It is logically impossible for the various religions of the world to all be correct. Everyone can't be right. The common practice of picking and choosing from each of the religions creates a self-made spirituality governed by a god made with our own hands and in our own image. All roads do not lead to God. But all roads can be a way to get started on the quest to find him. People of different religions are neighbors we are called to love. The Spirit can use anything to bring others to Jesus!

<sup>9</sup>As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!



### **As a Christian, am I supposed to do *good works*? (Ephesians 2:10)**

The question of whether or not Christians should do good works can be answered with an enthusiastic “Yes!” Jesus said that his disciples are *the light of the world* (Mt 5:14). He then said, *Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven* (Mt 5:16). Jesus calls us to stand out from the rest of the world by the good deeds we perform. Paul also characterized redeemed believers as those who are *eager to do what is good* (Titus 2:14).

Still, there is often confusion about how good works are related to salvation. The Scriptures teach that good works are not the cause of our salvation but the result. We cannot earn our salvation with good works. Paul said, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast* (Eph 2:8–9). After reading Paul’s statement, it’s natural to wonder if good works have any place in our lives. But in the next breath, Paul said, *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Eph 2:10).

Imagine the goodness of a God who not only offers salvation as a gift but also makes us new creatures in Christ who are able to perform good works that he himself has orchestrated beforehand!

<sup>10</sup>For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.



### **What does the Bible mean about wives submitting to their husbands? (Ephesians 5:22–24)**

The Bible *isn't* saying that husbands have license to be domineering, abusive, controlling, tyrannical or dictatorial. It doesn't mean that wives shouldn't be allowed to express themselves, think independently or cooperate in decision making that affects the couple and the family. [Ephesians 5:22–24](#) teaches mutual submission: husbands and wives are to live in an attitude of humility and service to one another, and together, as well as individually, they are to be in submission to Christ.

The word *submission* takes on a positive meaning as we understand the loving God who becomes the source for all authority. When a husband willingly submits to the loving authority of Jesus Christ, he treats his wife with the same sacrificial love that Christ displayed to his bride, the church. When mutual submission is practiced, husbands and wives embody the humble servanthood that epitomized Christ's earthly obedience, even to the point of death (Eph 5:25–33).

We see an example of submission at work in the Trinity. Jesus the Son willingly submitted to the Father, because Jesus knew the Father loved him (Jn 15:10). Similarly, the Holy Spirit willingly submits to Jesus and exalts Jesus in everything he does (Jn 16:13–15).

While Jesus and the Holy Spirit willingly exercise submission in their relationship with the triune God, they also act as co-equal members of the Godhead. Their willing submission doesn't mean one person in the relationship is less important than the other. The same is true in a marriage relationship.

Matthew Henry wrote: "The woman was made out of Adam's side. She was not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved."

<sup>22</sup>Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup>Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.



### **What is spiritual warfare, and how does it affect me? (Ephesians 6:12)**

Spiritual warfare is the unseen battle of believers against Satan and his army of demons, or fallen spirits. It is not a physical battle, says the apostle Paul, but a spiritual struggle against the dark forces of evil in the world and in the heavenly realms.

The battleground for spiritual warfare is in our hearts and minds. The apostle Paul urges us to resist being taken captive by worldly philosophies (Col 2:8). Spiritual battles take place as the enemy attacks our thoughts about the truths of God and our relationship with God (Dt 13:13).

We are encouraged to remember that Satan and his forces have already been defeated and disarmed by Christ (Col 2:15). Paul tells believers that they have access to spiritual authority, knowledge and power in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:18–21). Believers in Christ, therefore, need not fear God’s enemies—spiritual or physical. Satan may still have limited freedom to harass followers of Jesus, but he has no direct authority over them. The armor of God (6:10–17) is a picture of the protection Jesus gives us against spiritual attack.

Believers who fill their minds with God’s truth and remain alert through prayer will guard their hearts and minds against attack, resulting in a peaceful spirit (Php 4:6–7). Two passages which serve as marching orders for those in God’s army are Romans 12:1–21 and James 4:1–12. The best way to avoid being frightened by darkness is to walk in the light (1Jn 1:5–7).

<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.



### **What can Christians do to become more like Jesus? (Philippians 3:7–11)**

Changes in behavior always start with a radically new way of thinking, because what we believe shapes what we do. The same is true of becoming more like Jesus (Ro 12:2). Therefore, in order for us to change our thinking, we must learn about the spiritual treasures that are part of our salvation—things like freedom in Christ, free access to God’s rich spiritual resources, the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the immeasurable love of God. The Bible says that as followers of God, we have *every spiritual blessing in Christ* (Eph 1:3).

As Christians we become more like Jesus by drawing on these Christ-given riches to enable us to behave like the new creations that we are (2Co 5:17). We determine to be humble, loving, pure, grace-giving people. When we make mistakes and bad decisions, we confess our sins and repent, which keeps our relationship with the Lord strong. When we discover our weaknesses, we draw on God’s wisdom and power for help.

No one can become more like Jesus without having close relationships with other believers. As the body of Christ, Christians need one another to grow. We need a church in which fellow believers are *speaking the truth in love* (Eph 4:15) and in which the Bible is being preached so we know how to do *works of service* in Jesus’ name (Eph 4:12). In addition, Christians have always found that practicing spiritual disciplines—such as regular Bible reading, prayer, fasting, solitude and giving, among others—provide deep insights into their own souls and open pathways into Christlikeness.

Finally, we must reckon with God’s discipline (Heb 12:6). As a loving Father, God sometimes invests in our growth by allowing us to experience painful situations that arrest us in our sinfulness, reveal our weaknesses and build into our lives a deeper reliance on Christ and his Word (Heb 12:4–13).

<sup>7</sup>But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in<sup>[1]</sup> Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup>I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.



### **In what ways should the church be serving the world? (Colossians 1:24–29)**

First and foremost, the church is to preach the gospel—to make known to sinners the free offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. This was Jesus’ great commission to the church: *Go and make disciples of all nations* (Mt 28:19). The gospel is preached not only when someone stands in front of an audience but also when Christians live out their faith (especially in times of trouble) and tell others *the reason for the hope that [they] have* (1Pe 3:15).

Christians also serve the world by loving one another and the Lord (Jn 17:23). The church is the body of Christ in this world. When unbelievers witness church members serving one another and the community as a healthy, Spirit-filled body, they see Jesus for themselves and are drawn to him (Mt 5:16; 1Pe 2:12).

Being agents of grace and compassion in the world is another sphere of the church’s service (1Pe 3:8–9). “This is a dog-eat-dog world,” people often say. But Christians are to reverse that by giving generously of their resources, by advocating justice for those who cannot speak for themselves and by befriending those who are friendless.

Finally, Christians can pray. We can ask *the Judge of all the earth [to] do right* (Ge 18:25). We can ask God for wisdom when it comes to helping people. We can ask for God’s resources when it’s unclear how the need will be met. And we can ask for the love of Christ to be vividly expressed to those who have no one to care for them.

<sup>24</sup>Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. <sup>25</sup>I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— <sup>26</sup>the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. <sup>27</sup>To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

<sup>28</sup>He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.



### **How can we gain victory over secret sins? (Colossians 3:8–9)**

It would be wonderful if our relationship with Jesus eradicated the allure of the darkness so prevalent in this world, but that won't happen in this life. And whether it comes through the internet, television, purse, tongue or stomach, most of us are intimately familiar with the relentless persistence of secret sins.

The conquest of these persistent sins can only begin when we decide that we want to change. We are quick to say we want to be free. But we may derive “benefits”—pleasure, power, influence, ego—from these sins. Do we really want to live without these “friends”? Do we really want to be healed? We will never break free until we believe life without our secret sins is better, in every way, than life with them.

The other ingredient to victory is inviting others into the struggle. The sin cycle is fueled by secrecy. We may have confessed these sins to God countless times, but we hide them from others because we are afraid to risk people's esteem. But transparency and humility before others is an opportunity to put teeth to our belief that God has forgiven us. It provides accountability in our spiritual growth. And perhaps we need to care more about offending God with our perpetual disobedience and less about our friends' opinions.

Sin grows in the dark. The psalmist said, *You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence* (Ps 90:8). The light destroys the darkness. The way to strike a fatal blow against secret sins is to finally decide we want to be free and then invite a trusted friend into our battle.

<sup>8</sup>But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup>Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices





### **Are we tempted by Satan or by our own evil desires? (1 Thessalonians 3:5)**

The Bible teaches that we are tempted by both Satan and our own evil desires. From within and without, we are engaged in a fierce battle with sin (Ro 7:7–25).

James wrote that we are tempted when we are *dragged away by [our] own evil desire and enticed* (Jas 1:14). Cain was warned that sin was *crouching at [his] door*, desiring to have him (Ge 4:6–7).

The apostle Peter said that *the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1Pe 5:8). And James said that we are to *resist the devil, and he will flee from [us]* (Jas 4:7). Satan is smart. He knows where we are weak. He knows our “favorite” sins. He is the source of all evil and *the father of lies* (Jn 8:44). He follows us around and dangles sin in front of us, as he did with Jesus in the wilderness (Mt 4:1–11).

We aren’t going to destroy the devil. God will handle Satan in due time. But we thwart Satan’s purposes when we intentionally pursue the transformation of our evil desires. And as we cooperate with God to defeat the power of evil from within, we glimpse the ultimate victory God will secure at the culmination of the ages.

<sup>5</sup>For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.



### **What does it mean to be *sanctified*? (1 Thessalonians 4:3–12)**

Essentially, the word *sanctified* means to be “made holy.” At the moment of faith, when Christ’s sacrificial righteousness is imputed to a new believer, that person goes from being corrupted by sin in God’s eyes to being spotless, pure and holy. This is “positional” or “imparted” holiness; it is ours as a free gift without respect to our actual behavior (1Co 1:2). But that’s not the end of the story; in fact, it’s just the beginning. God saves us so that we might actually become good and godly people—that we might live in a way that is *worthy of the calling* [we] *have received* (Eph 4:1). This is called “progressive” or “moral” sanctification; it is the lifelong process of becoming more and more Christlike.

Such a thing is possible because the Holy Spirit lives within us (1Co 3:16). We are new creations (2Co 5:17), with a new desire to love the Lord and be righteous people. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us through our attention to Scripture, prayer, fellowship with other believers, life’s struggles (including God’s wise discipline), and his voice within our hearts.

The problem every believer senses, however, is the resistance of our old sinful nature to *live ... according to the Spirit* (Ro 8:4). We sense a war within us, and we must choose to be *led by the Spirit* (Ro 8:13–14; Gal 5:16–18). This sanctifying process continues throughout our earthly life. When we die or the Lord returns, we will instantly become like Christ (1Jn 3:2) and our sanctification will be complete.

<sup>3</sup>It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup>that each of you should learn to control your own body<sup>[1]</sup> in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup>not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; <sup>6</sup>and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.<sup>[2]</sup> The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. <sup>7</sup>For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. <sup>8</sup>Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

<sup>9</sup>Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. <sup>10</sup>And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, <sup>11</sup>and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, <sup>12</sup>so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.



### **Should women be prohibited from certain leadership roles within the church? (1 Timothy 2:12)**

No answer to this question is viewed as correct by everyone. In fact, the responses of Christians to this question tend to fall into four major groupings.

First, some Christians see a clear distinction of social roles based on gender; they believe the Bible mandates that only men hold church leadership positions (1Ti 2:12–14). Others believe that part of the consequence of the fall is that women must take a subordinate social position to men (Ge 3:16)—in other words, women must submit to men because of the fall.

In contrast, some Christians believe Jesus brought women and men into a new age that gives equal social responsibilities and opportunities to all (Gal 3:26–28); they believe that both men and women receive and should use and develop their spiritual gifts (1Co 12:1–31). Finally, some maintain that the church is the new creation of God (2Co 5:16–17); they anticipate the social order of Jesus’ eternal kingdom—where every person, female and male, will express their full potential (Rev 21:1–22:21).

While each position has solid Biblical support, there are also clear exceptions that keep debates on the topic ongoing. For instance, Israel’s traditional society was shaped by divine laws that made priesthood a male occupation, yet Deborah served as a primary religious and political leader (Jdg 4:1–5:31), and Athaliah was recognized as queen (2Ki 11:1–20). And while Jesus called only males to be in his close group of 12 disciples (Mt 10:1–4), he honored women in unique ways that upset entrenched social sensibilities. For example, Jesus healed women as well as men (Lk 13:10–17), affirmed women eager to learn (Lk 10:38–42), used women as examples in parables (Lk 18:1–8), was supported by women (Lk 8:1–3), and chose women to be the first witnesses to his resurrection (Mt 28:1–10). And Paul, who in some circumstances gave specific instructions limiting women’s roles in the church, also spoke of women who prophesied (1Co 11:5) and recognized women in the church leadership positions of deacon (Ro 16:1) and apostle (Ro 16:7).

<sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;<sup>[1]</sup> she must be quiet.



**How important is it that we understand all doctrines correctly? (1 Timothy 4:16)**

We will never understand all doctrines correctly. For starters, brilliant minds have debated these issues for centuries without resolving all the dilemmas. Anyone who professes to understand all doctrines correctly does not understand the doctrine of humility. But there are two extremes to avoid when considering doctrine.

Some people dismiss doctrine as the boring stuff found in incomprehensible books written by absentminded professors. Other people mistakenly equate correct doctrine with salvation. They assume that the failure to embrace their set of doctrinal beliefs condemns a person to an eternity apart from God.

Doctrine is vitally important to us as Christians because what we believe always shapes how we live. The hard work of theological study sharpens our thinking about life, humanity and God. Among other benefits, engaging in the study of doctrine opens our hearts to God's magnificent transcendence and exposes us to the wisdom of the past.

There is not a neat and tidy answer to every doctrinal debate. But in a world where endless information breeds intellectual laziness, it is appropriate for us to work to understand the messy and complex doctrines of our faith and to persevere toward maturity and completeness (Jas 1:4).

<sup>16</sup>Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.



### **How should Christians teach their children about God? (2 Timothy 1:5)**

When children are born, they are helpless and incapable of survival without the care and protection of their parents or guardians. In addition, children are sponge-like learners who are talked into talking, walked into walking, loved into loving and socialized into relational skills. It is no wonder God places huge responsibilities on parents for their children's faith development (Dt 4:9–11; Pr 22:6; Eph 6:4).

A significant portion of this development should happen in the home (Dt 6:1–25; 2Ti 1:5), where loving parents model faith and commitment (Pr 1:1–9:18). This often involves the creation of intentional teaching moments based on a society's cultural heritage (Ex 12:26–27; 13:14; 16:32–33; Dt 6:20–25; Jos 4:21–23). Indeed, the church and overall faith community is always responsible for nurturing a broad range of religious education and guidance (Joel 1:3; 2:16; Ac 2:39).

For this reason, the church has always promoted organized methods of training, including larger systems of community and social education. At the very least, faith communities should promote healthy marriages and homes (where children receive their first and most influential spiritual nurturing), provide good training classes and youth groups, and encourage positive investment in local educational systems.

<sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.



### **Does the Bible have answers for all of today's moral dilemmas? (2 Timothy 2:15)**

Yes, but the answers aren't always a simple yes or no. Many moral dilemmas are addressed directly and specifically in Scripture. For example, lying, sexual immorality, greed, cruelty and injustice are always wrong. Faithfulness, generosity to the poor, kindness, truthfulness and forgiveness are always right. However, contrary to popular belief, the Bible is not primarily a book of moral instruction, and Jesus' primary mission on earth was not to be a great moral teacher (though he was that). Instead, the Bible sets forth our need for God, against whom we've rebelled, and God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that the greatest moral dilemma is that humankind can neither think nor act righteously (Ro 3:10–18). Thus, we will view every other moral dilemma with a skewed perspective. Our minds and wills are corrupted by our sinful nature. We are bound to see every decision through glasses blurred by our ignorance of God and his ways. So the Bible's first answer for any moral dilemmas is that *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom* (Pr 9:10). Such reverence for God must begin by giving our hearts over to Jesus Christ. God then renews our minds so that we can think rightly about the problems we face (Ro 12:1–2).

Many moral dilemmas are not directly addressed by the Bible, which was written to people living in cultures and times much different from our own. Therefore, principles of Scripture must be used in conjunction with God-given common sense, careful fact collection and wise counsel to deduce prudent courses of action. We must work together because *as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another* (Pr 27:17). But believers also have the great promise that *if any of [us] lacks wisdom, [we] should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to [us]* (Jas 1:5).

<sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.



### **Does it matter which denomination my church belongs to? (Titus 3:9)**

Denominations are like extended church families. The churches within them are linked by common doctrinal beliefs, history, relationships and culture. A new attendee may not sense these “family ties” at first, but they are often significant in shaping the life of a congregation. Just as it matters what family you come from, it also matters what denomination your church is part of.

At their best, denominations help like-minded churches combine resources for larger ministries (e.g., schools or missionary work) that could not be accomplished by an individual church alone. They help safeguard doctrinal integrity by overseeing the orthodoxy of pastors, missionaries and member congregations. Together, churches within a denomination are able to more effectively champion their common doctrinal and social distinctives.

The most important distinctive of a denomination is what its members believe, which is often expressed in a creed or doctrinal statement. Generally, these cardinal doctrines are what unite all Bible-believing Christians, regardless of denomination. But there are many important doctrinal distinctives dear to believers that often define denominations; these include baptism, communion, church government, sovereignty of God and the freewill of humankind, the end times and certain social issues.

While individual Christians may not agree with every distinctive of their denomination, it would be difficult to be loyal to a church in which there are strong disagreements. Some local churches maintain only a loose connection to their denomination, and many churches are non-denominational or independent. Of course, while churches such as these may avoid some of the drawbacks of denominations, they miss some of the advantages as well.

<sup>9</sup>But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.



### **How do we know the Bible is true? (Hebrews 4:12)**

According to the Bible, *all Scripture is God-breathed* (2Ti 3:16). Peter confirmed this when he said that those who wrote the Bible were not speaking on their own but *spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2Pe 1:21). Many parts of Scripture are directly attributed to God through use of phrases like *This is what the LORD says* (e.g., Ex 4:22). Finally, Jesus often quoted from the Old Testament and affirmed it as being God’s Word.

Prophecies that were later fulfilled are corroboration of the accuracy of the Bible’s claim to be God’s Word. For example, the vision recorded in Daniel 7 correctly predicted the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great, and the Roman Empire.

Archaeological discoveries are also important evidence of the Bible’s accuracy. For example, for many years King David was believed by some to be a fictional character. But recently a composition from a king of Syria referring to the “house of David” was discovered at Tel Dan. This writing provides tangible evidence that ancient rulers indeed recognized the dynasty of David in Judah.

Another reason for confidence in the Bible’s authenticity is its internal consistency. The Bible is actually a compilation of 66 books written over a period of 2,000 years by more than 40 different authors, and yet there is a unified message and a striking theological coherence—something that clearly speaks of God’s guidance throughout the process of writing, transmitting and assembling the Biblical texts.

It is important to remember that the original Biblical documents no longer exist. We are dependent on copies, and copyists can make mistakes. However, scholars have carefully tracked the accuracy of ancient manuscripts from different centuries, and their consistency gives us good reason to be confident in the Bibles we read today. Furthermore, rigorous standards were applied to determine the canon—both by the Jews, who determined the collection of books that make up the Old Testament Scriptures, and by the early church, which decided the books to be included in the New Testament.

<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.





### **Do Christians really need to attend church? (Hebrews 10:24–25)**

Yes! The Bible stresses the need for Christians to be part of a local church and have significant relationships with other believers (Ecc 4:9–12). Christians who are not involved in a local congregation are inevitably stunted in their spiritual growth and their witness for Christ to others.

Most important, Christians must be part of a church to please our Lord. In John 17:20–23 Jesus prayed, [May] *those who will believe in me ... be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* Together we are Christ's body in this world. Our unified presence—as we actively love each other and fulfill our particular functions in the body—honors and delights the Lord. What's more, our life together as his church makes the Lord visible to the lost world. And our unified prayers and decisions have the power of Jesus' own presence (Mt 18:20; Jn 20:22–23).

Jesus also ministers to individuals through other believers in his body. The mutually edifying use of spiritual gifts (Ro 12:3–8; [1Co 12:4–31](#)) builds all Christians up as each one does his or her part. Furthermore, we *carry each other's burdens* (Gal 6:2), encourage one another in worship (Eph 5:19), *admonish one another with all wisdom* (Col 3:16), *submit to one another* (Eph 5:21) and *consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds* ([Heb 10:24](#)). We do all these things because of the deep spiritual unity we have in Christ: *There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all* (Eph 4:4–6).

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



### **What does it mean to have faith? (Hebrews 11:1)**

In the Bible, faith is always tied to an active trust in God and his Word. For the believer, there is no such thing as “blind faith.” Faith is the sensible response to the revealed will of God and the privileges he has promised his people. Biblical faith does not mean that people can believe in any unlikely thing and God, in response, must bring it to pass. In other words, faith that is not directly attached to God’s Word is merely positive thinking.

At its core, faith—trusting God—is how people access the salvation God has provided in Christ Jesus. Abraham, the father of all who have saving faith (Ro 4:16), *believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness* (Jas 2:23). Faith is not righteousness, but it is how we access Jesus’ saving righteousness—something we could never access on our own (Eph 2:8).

Faith, God’s gift to his followers (Eph 2:8), is fortified by paying careful attention to the Bible and practicing the spiritual disciplines. Romans 10:17 says, *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ*. Throughout the Christian life, faith continues to be how believers receive the privileges and necessities for serving Christ. We trust God to give what he has promised—whether it is gifts and abilities to do the work of Jesus in the world and in our own hearts (Jn 14:12–13) or whether it is carrying us through our spiritual journey and into our eternal home in heaven.

<sup>1</sup>Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.



**In what ways can people experience God today? (James 4:8–10)**

In some respects, experiencing God is like experiencing air. We rarely think about air, yet our lives are fully dependent on its unseen presence. It's the same with God: although we may ignore God (Isa 1:2–4; 17:10), deny his existence (Ps 14:1) or even be ignorant of who he is (Ac 17:22–23, 30), we remain as connected to God as a fish is connected to the water in which it thrives.

However, people certainly do experience God on many different occasions and in many different ways: seeing the power of creation (Ps 29:1–11); experiencing the warmth of a caring community (Gal 6:2); being the recipient of specific acts of kindness (Eph 4:32); hearing the testimonies of others (Mt 5:13–16); observing God's work in the lives of others (1Th 1:2–10); having dreams or visions (Da 7:1–8:27); reading the words of Scripture (Ps 119:1–176); observing miracles or mighty wonders (Jn 12:20–33); or having direct interaction with the divine presence of God (Ex 33:1–23). Some of these are fairly common experiences, while others happen only occasionally or under special circumstances.

<sup>8</sup>Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.



### **Should we regularly confess our sins to other Christians? (James 5:16)**

The primary reason for confessing our sins is to find God's forgiveness. Only God can forgive our sins and, in most cases, only God needs to hear our confession. According to 1 John 1:9, *if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Confession involves verbally acknowledging our sin, but we must also repent, meaning we must turn away from our sin in sad awareness that our actions have offended God and often hurt others. God responds to such a confession with forgiveness because Jesus Christ died and rose again, becoming the sacrifice God required to make us clean (Heb 9:28).

However, confessing one's sins to other Christians does have a place in a believer's life. **James 5:16** says, *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.* Evidently, sin is sometimes—but certainly not always (Job 1:8; Jn 9:2–3)—the cause of sickness, and healing will follow confession and prayer. Confessing our sins to others can also break the power of secret sins, enable others to pray for us in our spiritual struggles, and hold us accountable for our choices.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.



### **How much influence does Satan have in the world today? (1 Peter 5:8)**

Enormous influence! Jesus called him *the prince of this world* (Jn 12:31), and Paul called him *the god of this age* (2Co 4:4). Satan controls a vast hierarchical network of fallen angels (Eph 6:12), also called demons. Revelation 12:9 says that *Satan ... leads the whole world astray*. He manipulates nations, rulers, economies and cultures. He remains disguised behind all the idolatries and false religions of the world. In the end, according to Revelation, Satan will orchestrate a vast, worldwide rebellion against Christ and the church, but he will be defeated and suffer eternal punishment (Rev 20:7–10).

At the root of all Satan's efforts on earth is his desire to usurp God's glory. Satan is insanely jealous of God. Created as a mighty and good angel, he fell due to his arrogant desire to take the place of God (Isa 14:12–15; Eze 28:11–19). Satan works in this world primarily through deceit (Jn 8:44). He is skillful beyond our imagination at tempting people to sin. He is also ruthless and willing to spare no one in his pursuit of glory.

However, Satan is no match for Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. Christians will certainly face Satan's attacks as he tempts, tests and accuses them (Job 1:8–12; Rev 12:10). But Christians may always take refuge in Jesus, for by the power of his name (Lk 10:17–20) they are successfully able to resist Satan (1Pe 5:8–10).

<sup>8</sup>Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.



### **What do we know about a new heaven and a new earth? (2 Peter 3:13)**

The new creation God promises in Revelation 21:1–22:5 will be a re-creation of the perfect world God first made (Ge 1:1–2:24). And like that first creation, this *new heaven* and *new earth* will be a real environment—of land, sky, vegetation and creatures—that is populated with God’s people, who will be finally and forever released from every vestige and scar of sin.

Like the Garden of Eden, this new creation will have a life-giving river and the fruit-bearing tree of life (Rev 22:1–2). Particularly astonishing will be the light there, for God’s glory will be the light (Rev 21:23). Night’s shadows and sin will be banished forever. The city’s great walls, gates and streets (made of precious metals and stones) will reflect and refract that holy light in unimaginable beauty. *The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into this city* (Rev 21:26), suggesting a kind of rich, international culture purified through Christ Jesus.

Believers there, united forever, will be as beloved *as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband* (Rev 21:2). *There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain* (Rev 21:4). But best of all, *we will be with the Lord forever* (1Th 4:17; see Jn 14:3). Faith, as we now experience it, will no longer be necessary in our relationship with Jesus, for *God himself will be with [us] and be [our] God* (Rev 21:3). All of life will be lived in praise to God, but that does not imply an endless existence of singing and choral activity. Revelation 22:3 states that *his servants will serve him*, implying a life of service far more varied and engaging than any service we engage in now. We will serve the Lord by cultivating the new creation and governing all he has made.

<sup>13</sup>But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.



### **Why are so many parts of the Bible difficult to understand? (2 Peter 3:16)**

The Bible contains writings from many different literary genres—histories, social and legal codes, ethical pronouncements, worship songs, poetic dramas, educational materials, sermons, prophecies, letters, doctrinal dissertations and apocalyptic visions. All of these were written by a variety of authors from around 1400 BC to the late 90S AD. Furthermore, the Bible is the product of two great religious traditions; what is known today as the Old Testament forms the complete “Hebrew Bible” of Judaism, while the New Testament is distinctly Christian.

So when reading the Bible, we encounter passages that were shaped by cultures and traditions that were very different from our own. In addition, these passages speak in literary genres that we do not regularly use today.

Both Jews and Christians understand the Bible to be divine revelation—that is, the very Word of God. This requires unique techniques for interpreting what the Bible says, since we know that God is the primary author who influenced every passage of Scripture. This should also help us to better understand the text because the entire Bible shares common ideas and purposes, even though some sections may seem quite different from, and otherwise unrelated to, other sections.

Furthermore, some sections of the Bible require additional cultural, linguistic or theological training before they can be properly understood. Fortunately, though, the essential teachings of the Bible—creation, sin, Israel’s unique calling and history, the covenant, worship, Jesus’ life and teachings, Jesus’ death and resurrection, basic moral codes, and so on—are clear.

<sup>16</sup>He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.



### **What happens to a Christian between death and the day of judgment? (1 John 4:17)**

The period between death and judgment, called the *intermediate state*, is not clearly explained in the Bible. However, Christians can find comfort from Jesus' statement to the repentant thief on the cross—*Today you will be with me in paradise* (Lk 23:43)—and from Paul's confident assertion that *to be away from the body [is to be] at home with the Lord* (2Co 5:8). The bodies of God's children may sleep, but their souls do not. What this likely means is that even though our bodies and souls still exist in parallel tracks, our souls are united with God in a conscious state of constant communion and fellowship.

Jesus' promise of *paradise* (Lk 23:43) suggests that the believer who dies is immediately in a place of delight and beauty reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. Paul had a vision in which he was *caught up to paradise*, where he *heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell* (2Co 12:4). Jesus' parable in [Luke 16:19–31](#) portrays a poor man who died and was immediately carried to heaven—to *Abraham's side*—where he was *comforted* ([Lk 16:22, 25](#)).

The Bible does not explain what kind of body or external form believers will have during this intermediate state. We do know, however, that believers will not receive their new and final resurrected bodies until Christ returns (1Co 15:50–54).

<sup>17</sup>This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.





### **What is heaven like? (Revelation 4:1–11)**

Right now, heaven is the literal but unseen realm in which God reigns in unimaginable glory. Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul and John were all offered glimpses of this holy place. And we know that Christians who have died are with the Lord in paradise (Lk 23:43). They are in heaven, awaiting the second coming of Christ.

When Jesus Christ returns for his bride, the church, a new era of “heaven” will begin—what might be called “life *after* life after death” (N. T. Wright). Revelation 21:1–22:5 captures the most complete description of this *new heaven* and *new earth* (Rev 21:1). John saw *the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband* (Rev 21:2). When Jesus promised in John 14:2 that he was going to *prepare a place* for his disciples, this Holy City is the place he was referring to.

This eternal home will truly be “heaven on earth,” for God will re-create his world as a great and beautiful city with streets, protecting walls, a life-giving river and the tree of life—all lit by the glory of God in his inexpressible beauty. The triune God himself will live in that city with his people. All sorrow will be gone. God’s children will worship him forever, accompanied by the angels. Believers will worship God with the great songs of heaven (Rev 7:10; 15:2–4; 19:1–3), by exploring God’s new creation and through the fellowship of the saints. Believers will reign with Christ and be responsible for governing various parts of God’s kingdom. It will be a bliss that never ends!

<sup>1</sup>After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” <sup>2</sup>At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup>And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup>Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits<sup>[1]</sup> of God. <sup>6</sup>Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. <sup>7</sup>The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup>Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“ ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,’<sup>[2]</sup> who was, and is, and is to come.”

<sup>9</sup>Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup>the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

<sup>11</sup>“You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being.”

## GENESIS

[BACK TO Genesis 1:26 (1)] 1:26 Probable reading of the original Hebrew text (see Syriac); Masoretic Text *the earth*

## EXODUS

[BACK TO Exodus 3:14 (1)] 3:14 Or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*

## LEVITICUS

[BACK TO Leviticus 19:20 (1)] 19:20 Or *be an inquiry*

[BACK TO Leviticus 19:23 (2)] 19:23 Hebrew *uncircumcised*

[BACK TO Leviticus 19:23 (3)] 19:23 Hebrew *uncircumcised*

[BACK TO Leviticus 26:11 (4)] 26:11 Or *my tabernacle*

## RUTH

[BACK TO Ruth 4:1 (1)] 4:1 The Hebrew word for *guardian-redeemer* is a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty (see Lev. 25:25–55); also in verses 3, 6, 8 and 14.

[BACK TO Ruth 4:4 (2)] 4:4 Many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; most Hebrew manuscripts *he*

[BACK TO Ruth 4:5 (3)] 4:5 Vulgate and Syriac; Hebrew (see also Septuagint) *Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, you acquire the*

## 2 CHRONICLES

[BACK TO 2 Chronicles 1:14 (1)] 1:14 Or *charioteers*

## SONG OF SONGS

[BACK TO Song of Songs 2:3 (1)] 2:3 Or possibly *apricot*; here and elsewhere in Song of Songs

## ISAIAH

[BACK TO Isaiah 24:22 (1)] 24:22 Or *released*

## EZEKIEL

[BACK TO Ezekiel 23:14 (1)] 23:14 Or *Babylonians*

[BACK TO Ezekiel 23:15 (2)] 23:15 Or *Babylonia*; also in verse 16

## MATTHEW

[BACK TO Matthew 5:21 (1)] 5:21 Exodus 20:13

[BACK TO Matthew 5:22 (2)] 5:22 The Greek word for *brother or sister (adelphos)* refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verse 23.

[BACK TO Matthew 5:22 (3)] 5:22 Some manuscripts *brother or sister without cause*

[BACK TO Matthew 5:22 (4)] 5:22 An Aramaic term of contempt

[BACK TO Matthew 22:37 (5)] 22:37 Deut. 6:5

[BACK TO Matthew 22:39 (6)] 22:39 Lev. 19:18

## LUKE

[BACK TO Luke 17:3 (1)] 17:3 The Greek word for *brother or sister (adelphos)* refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman.

## ACTS

[BACK TO Acts 8:27 (1)] 8:27 That is, from the southern Nile region

[BACK TO Acts 19:2 (2)] 19:2 Or *after*

[BACK TO Acts 19:6 (3)] 19:6 Or *other languages*

## ROMANS

[BACK TO Romans 5:1 (1)] 5:1 Many manuscripts *let us*

[BACK TO Romans 7:18 (2)] 7:18 Or *my flesh*

[BACK TO Romans 7:25 (3)] 7:25 Or *in the flesh*

## 1 CORINTHIANS

[BACK TO 1 Corinthians 12:10 (1)] 12:10 Or *languages*; also in verse 28

[BACK TO 1 Corinthians 12:10 (2)] 12:10 Or *languages*; also in verse 28

## PHILIPPIANS

[BACK TO Philippians 3:9 (1)] 3:9 Or *through the faithfulness of*

## 1 THESSALONIANS

[BACK TO 1 Thessalonians 4:4 (1)] 4:4 Or *learn to live with your own wife; or learn to acquire a wife*

[BACK TO 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (2)] 4:6 The Greek word for *brother or sister (adelphos)* refers here to a believer, whether man or woman, as part of God's family.

## 1 TIMOTHY

[\[BACK TO 1 Timothy 2:12 \(1\)\]](#) 2:12 Or *over her husband*

## **REVELATION**

[\[BACK TO Revelation 4:5 \(1\)\]](#) 4:5 That is, the sevenfold Spirit

[\[BACK TO Revelation 4:8 \(2\)\]](#) 4:8 Isaiah 6:3

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This unique Zondervan Bible Extract is one of three courses taking you quickly into passages every Christian should know. In this bite size edition you'll spend two weeks studying the life and teachings of Paul from passages in Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Each daily reading should take only about 10 minutes and includes 14 chapters of Scripture. You'll also find question-based notes that clarify the meaning of the Bible text.

### **Q&A ON THE OLD TESTAMENT: A QUEST STUDY BIBLE EXTRACT**

This unique Zondervan Bible Extract is one of three courses taking you quickly into passages every Christian should know. In this bite size edition you'll spend two weeks in the Old Testament studying passages from Genesis, Exodus, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, and Amos. Each daily reading should take only about 10 minutes and includes 14 chapters of Scripture. You'll also find question-based notes that clarify the meaning of the Bible text.

### **Q&A GUIDED TOUR OF THE BIBLE: A QUEST STUDY BIBLE EXTRACT**

This unique Zondervan Bible Extract offers daily readings consisting of 180 selected passages, including at least one chapter from each of the Bible's 66 books. You can read both the chapter and its accompanying Quest study notes in 15 minutes per day.

With a few exceptions, the Biblical material appears in chronological order. You will read the psalms attributed to David as you read about David's life. You will read the prophets along with their background history. Portions from the Gospels, too, are interspersed, giving a composite picture of Jesus' life on earth; Paul's letters are scattered throughout the record of Jesus' life.

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