

# WHY DO I EXIST?

A Christian Response to the Question of Purpose and  
Meaning

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### **Important Quick Note:**

Parts of this book were initially written under the title of Christianity 201: The Pursuit of Excellence. However I have broken the original book into 3 smaller books because they covered a wide variety of topics. I also included content from more recent writing from the Changing Paradigms book from December 2016.

I want to encourage you to apply the Truth you learn rather than simply believe it. Truth that is not applied does not lead to Transformation.

I hope this book helps to show how we can get rid of purposelessness in a world full of distractions.

The introduction discusses why this title is relevant. The first chapter discusses how to deal with some of the major challenges of our times especially in the area of technological advancement and an increase in opportunities for distraction. The second chapter discusses the Existence of God and the third chapter discusses the basis of Christianity using the Bible as the Foundation. Please feel free to read the book in any order.

### **Introduction- Where do we begin?**

I will start with a poem I wrote in August of 2015 by the grace of God.

#### **Urgency**

“There is work to be done.

Time is short

People are hurting

The Truth is revealed in the Word which we sometimes neglect

Yet we turn to the things of the

world which will not satisfy,

Are we living for the reason we were

Created?

Or do we live as though everything came together by chance?

We need to be transformed and then call others to be

transformed.

Rise, get up and strive for Perfection like it says in Philippians 3

Enough with mediocrity and low standards

Resist and flee from Apathy

There is work to be done.

What will you do?”

- Brother Amos

Now I will like to discuss why this topic is very important.

Purpose is like gold in this day and age. It is one of the biggest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. One could say purpose has

always been an issue, however part of the reason these times are different occurs in the fact that we are one of the wealthiest generations in history and also one of the generations with large amounts of distractions. Wealth can lead to Apathy. We have too many gadgets to help us stay in our purposelessness. Boredom seems to be a scary thing for many young people so they can play games all day to avoid living life as it should be lived. In his book, *America is too young to die*, Leonard Ravenhill describes the decline of empires as he reminds us of what someone once said “From bondage to faith; From faith to great courage; From courage to liberty; From liberty to abundance; From abundance to selfishness; From selfishness to complacency; From complacency to apathy; From apathy to dependence; From dependence back into bondage.”

This issue of wealth and abundance is discussed in Deuteronomy Chapter 8. I will encourage you to read the whole chapter. Here are a few verses from the Chapter.

“When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart

be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” Deuteronomy 8:10-14 (KJV).

No matter what happens in the world and the amount of wealth we acquire in any form, we have to remember we were created to live for God. A lot of students are being taught that their existence did not come from creation. We were created and God left his fingerprints all around us. I will have more resources on the issue of creation and evolution on the website. Psalm 19:1 reminds us that “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”

I will be discussing the existence of God in the first chapter from a philosophical approach. I tried to focus on a few perspectives from Philosophy and the Philosophy of Science. If you will rather avoid the Philosophical discussion on the existence of God, please feel free to move on to Chapter 2.

It is important to note that it is because God exists that we exist. He is eternal and we are temporary. He created the Heavens and the Earth (Genesis 1:1, which is the very first verse in the Bible). When it is all said and done, we exist for His purposes and for His glory.

“whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 10:31b (KJV).

The Purpose He created us for is not for our comfort. Because of the view we have bought into today, many think God exists to

meet their needs. Our cultural position and many other factors including rebellion has caused us to think God exists for us instead of the other way around. We do not see the fear of God anymore. People are not saddened by sin and immorality. Instead compromise is being allowed into the faith. I remember someone saying that God is more concerned about Holiness instead of Happiness. He wants us to become Like Jesus Christ.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. “

-Romans 8:28

We exist for God's Purposes not ours (Psalm 19:1).

We are the clay and He is the Potter (Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:3-4, 2 Timothy 2:20)

We are the Sheep and He is the Shepherd (John 10:14)

We are students and servants while He is the Teacher and Master (Matthew 10:24).

He is the Great I Am, who has always been and who will always be (Genesis 1:1)

We are here today and gone tomorrow. We are dust. Our days are as grass (Psalm 103:15-16, James 1:11). Even unbelievers know this is a fact. Age comes upon us all.

Somehow we have bought into the idea that we can live however we want and still enjoy God's blessings. This is not true. There

are consequences to the decisions we make. His blessings are on His terms not ours.

Seeing that we exist for Him, why is it that we end up living for lesser things? We know life is short but we do not always live with that reality in mind.

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

-Psalms 90:12

This book aims to show that our reason for existing lies in knowing the one who created us for His purposes. He calls us into a relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ. We will be exploring what it means to live a victorious Christian life. By living a victorious Christian life, we find purpose in being conformed to the image of Christ. Our identity should be in Him and our mission is to be involved in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

God has shown us in His word how we ought to live. We should seek to live that way no matter what our circumstance. We should walk by Faith not by Sight. Just because something works does not mean that it is True and Right. We cannot go with the idea culture gives us, which is based more on pragmatism (which is “an approach that assesses the truth of meaning of theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application.”)

When following God, it will not always make sense to the carnal

man but God knows best. And just because something does not fit the cultural paradigm for what is right does not make it wrong. The culture changes its mind all the time. Our view of God and His ways need to be such that they are not affected by our cultural context. Instead of settling for no faith, we need to ask God to deliver us from unbelief.

## **Chapter 1- Challenges of the Times:**

### **How do we live in the world of Post-Truth & Excessive Technological Advancement?**

How should we live in a world with so much information, too much data, continual distractions, and shallow relationships? We are seeing selfishness and moral decline in many sectors. The moral decay is not a new phenomenon; however the aspect of technological increase is at a new level. I am noticing more and more people who are not motivated to do well in anything. I am seeing more opportunities for the flesh to be fed and the Spirit to be starved leading to more emptiness all around.

**SOLUTION:** 1. *Purpose in Our Hearts to live for the Purpose for which God created us.*

2. *Seek to have a Solid Foundation in the Truth*

A few months ago, I was telling my wife Stephanie that I sense something in the air that is not right. What I was referring to had to do with the fact that I had noticed that many people did not necessarily care about what the Truth on a certain issue was, but instead they trusted in their feelings alone. I noticed people were seeking instant gratification in very high levels. Later on during that season I heard someone mention some things that proved the point I was trying to tell my wife about. Then much later, I heard that Post Truth was chosen as the 2016 International word of the year by Oxford Dictionary.

The dictionary defines “post-truth” as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

That is exactly part of what I was describing to Stephanie without knowing the terminology. I was not observing people make decisions because it was what they knew was right based on God’s word.

I believe there are several reasons for how we have turned out to become what we are as a society. There could be many more reasons and much more details to add but I just want to start a conversation. Abundance, Technology and weak foundations are some of the reasons for what has happened to us.

**Abundance without a solid foundation and solid moral compass will lead to Chaos-**

When you have limited resources, you have to pause and think about how to manage what you have. However we live in a time of unlimited data and storage and unlimited many other things and I am afraid it is going to affect how people function outside the world of data and storage. When a muscle is not used often it gets weak. We will begin to ignore limits because we think everything is unlimited. I am concerned about this for the young people who are living in a day and time when they have unlimited entertainment and instant shipping. They can order things and receive them in a day or two. Back in the 1920s you

had to wait a few days or weeks to receive a letter. Now we can get messages instantly yet we have so much conflict, loneliness and bad relationships. This is because we have an abundance without a moral compass.

These so called luxuries which have come to our world can be helpful but they can also cause us harm if we do not watch out. They give us a false view of reality. For example, when a person thinks they can always get what they want when they want it and how they want it, it will cause them to be very disappointed when they are faced with a situation that contradicts this view. The same can be said of the unlimited data and storage issue. It will cause people to forget that in reality, things are limited. We have limits as people and time is a limited commodity. We have a limited amount of time on earth. **This should cause us to proceed with caution.** Without the right priorities we will end up wasting the time we have been blessed with. Time wastage is likely to happen in large doses since people are blessed with time saving tools and yet don't know what to do with the time they gain. I find it strange that in America, we have dish washers, washing machines, and many other tools and yet we do not have time to develop deep and solid relationships and friendships. Maybe we need to revisit the issue of priorities. A lot of people today don't want to waste gas or buy cars that consume a lot of gas, however some of these people waste time daily. Time

Wastage is an epidemic today. Time is rarer than gas and more expensive than gas so we should seek to avoid wasting it.

When I was in elementary school in Nigeria, I would spend long periods of time talking to specific friends over the phone about different things. Today it seems like most people do not make phone calls. With Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Text Messaging, e-mail technology, Google plus, we do not seem to have any deep friendships. We cannot let technology rule us and how we think. Instead we have to go back to the design God intended for us.

Never in the history of humanity have we ever reached the point we have reached. The world is so connected; it is not funny. You can fly to almost any country when you want. You can skype, facetime, download books instantly and do so many other things. Since this has never happened before, we need to be careful in how we handle all these things because we do not know all the side effects we will face from excessive use of these things. We have to use them in moderation and also remember our design and make sure they do not cause us to function outside the design God has for us. We are created beings and therefore we have guidelines we ought to follow. If we go outside of those guidelines, we will break down.

**What Guidelines are we trespassing? Here are a few:**

- 1. Deep Relationships-** With too much information, shallow relationships can become the order of the day.

Because there is only so much time we can give to each friendship. Now people can have 1500 friends on Facebook and think they are being social. How can a person really develop deep friendships with all these friends? We need to view Facebook more as a tool for other purposes not necessarily a tool that can deepen friendships. It can be used almost as a blog or website but it is not the best tool to deepening friendships. We need to make time to develop healthy and deep friendships. Remember Bad Company Corrupts Good Manners. A Solid Foundation can help dictate who we spend time with.

- 2. Time with the Lord-** Because of all the distractions available, it has become easier to forget about spending time with the Lord. If we are disciples of Jesus Christ then we should seek to spend time with Him. We should seek to rise earlier than the time our studies begin or our jobs so we can have time to read His word and pray. This means we should go to bed the night before in good time if possible. So technology should be put away to allow us sleep well so we can rise up well to seek His face. Seek to get to His word first before the distractions kick in. 5 minutes on Facebook can turn to 500 minutes wasted if you don't put a limit.

**3. Focus-** We need to learn to focus. With all the distractions and gadgets around, we can lose this trait. This can affect families and lives all around. Make sure you practice self-control and focus in dealing with the new advances of our time.

Know how to live so you can know how to use the things this world offers. Live with an understanding of how you ought to function instead of simply going with the flow. Live with simplicity remembering that stuff does not satisfy.

In this book, we will consider the basics and examples of the Christian faith and see how this leads to living a purposeful life. Individuals should make time to come to their conclusions on the important issues of life.

**We were created. Therefore no matter what we create, it should never become our Lord and redirect our purpose for living.**

## **Chapter 2: Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?**

This book refers to the God described in the Bible. Not everyone chooses to believe that the God of the Bible has revealed Himself to us. In this chapter of the book, evidence for the existence of God is presented, and this will help to show why it is important to understand the implications of His existence.

The God of the Bible is a personal being. There are certain attributes of God that can help us understand why His existence is important to our existence. Sometimes people think that the existence of God is irrelevant; others think that His existence does not help to explain anything in reality.

In order to understand the implications of God's existence, let us look at the law of non-contradiction. The law of non-contradiction basically says that two things that are mutually exclusive cannot be both true at the same time and in the same context. If my friend James asked me if I had a blue car *right now* and I said yes and then Peter came and asked me the same question and I told him no, I do not own a blue car *right now*, Jilian, who is listening to this conversation, will wonder what I am trying to say because it is not possible to have a blue car *right now* and not have a blue car *right now*. The two statements "I have a blue car *right now*" and "I do not have a blue car *right now*" are mutually exclusive and cannot be both true at the same time in the same context according to the law of non-contradiction.

This also applies to the existence of God. If “God, the Invisible, Infinite, Eternal, Creator of the Universe” exists, then the statement “God, the Invisible, Infinite, Eternal, Creator of the Universe does not exist” cannot also be true. And if “God, the Invisible, Infinite, Eternal, Creator of the Universe” does not exist, then the statement “God, the Invisible, Infinite, Eternal, Creator of the Universe exists” cannot be true, because the statements are mutually exclusive. Existence here means that God intervenes and is sovereign over everything, that He is in touch with the universe and designed it.

Here is a final illustration to help explain this point. If someone asked if Amos Tarfa exists and you said yes (I would hope you say yes because if Amos does not exist then it will be hard to explain who wrote this particular chapter), and then someone walks along and says no, he is very sure that Amos does not exist, one of you would have to be wrong because Amos Tarfa cannot exist and not exist at the same time in the same context. One of the evidences for Amos’ existence is this book, because you can trace back the existence of a being by the effects of that being. The effects of an entity can ultimately point us back to the entity itself.

There are two key words that can be used when describing concepts and materials: causes and effects. The cause of something produces something else, which is called the effect of that cause. However, there is a huge difference between the

existence of a finite being and the existence of an infinite being. A finite being can begin to exist and cease to exist, but an infinite being such as the Christian God cannot begin to exist or cease to exist. It is very hard to comprehend infinity, but as we look at one of the arguments for the existence of God, it should help to show the importance of an infinite being.

If the infinite God of the Bible exists, then He exists eternally and cannot cease to exist. If He does not exist, then He cannot begin to exist because He is eternal. The Bible says that God has made His evidence plain through what He has created (Romans 1). Before we look at arguments for the existence of God, let us examine the nature of arguments and their importance.

#### **Arguments for the Existence of God and the Faith Factor**

Arguments for or against something or someone do not necessarily prove or disprove the existence of that thing or person. The actual existence of that thing or person has to match up with reality. I could argue for the existence of Voltron, a giant robot that lives on planet Mars, but in actuality, I do not think such a machine exists on Mars. On the other hand, I can create an argument to show why someone in Nigeria does not exist, but then when you go to Nigeria you might find the very person I was referring to in my argument. Even if an argument for the existence of God fails, the reality of God's existence still remains. An argument can be valid while what it asserts is false.

In this section, I hope to show that the arguments that I will present below are valid when the terms are properly understood and the God that I am describing also exists. He has made His existence evident through the works of His hands and the transforming work He does in the lives of those who believe.

The argument for the existence of God is more logical and coherent than the argument against the existence of God, which requires more faith to believe. For the purposes of this discussion, I am defining faith as “believing or disbelieving something without fully understanding the thing in question.” I do agree that belief and non-belief in God require faith; however faith does not negate the use of logic and reason in understanding the reality it proposes. It is important to note that the Christian faith never says that Christians are not supposed to have faith; the Bible makes it clear that without faith, we cannot please God (Hebrews 11). Christians are expected to use their mind in studying God’s Word, and they don’t commit intellectual suicide when they put their faith in Jesus. The Bible actually says it is when people come into a relationship with God that they can truly begin to understand things.

In the field of philosophy, one of the questions that has been around for a long time is the question of the existence of God. One might ask, “Why is the existence of God relevant? Does it help to explain anything?” My response to that is yes. Our universe, as we are told by many scientists, has a beginning,

a time when it came into existence, and this is where the evidence points. There are very few options to describe this beginning. The Christian Bible claims that God made the Heavens and the earth from nothing. This is one option. Here are some available options:

- 1) An Eternal being or Deity brought it to being.
- 2) The universe has always existed.
- 3) The universe came from nothing.
- 4) We don't know how the universe came into existence.

There are two arguments that can help us see why belief in God is built on reasonable faith (faith that is logical and consistent) They are called the cosmological argument and the teleological (design) argument. I will describe them briefly and state why the reality they are pointing to makes sense.

#### **Deductive Argument 1: The Cosmological Argument**

- 1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- 2) The Universe began to exist.
- 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause for its existence.

The key point here is that our universe began to exist, and it needed a cause to bring it into existence. The cause of the universe has to transcend it: if not it cannot really explain how the universe began from itself.

The cosmological argument does not conclude that God exists, but it suggests that this universe needs a cause for its

existence and the God of the Bible is consistent with the cause that is required to bring this universe into existence.

If you looked at a car made of a certain metal and other essential materials and you were trying to figure out the origin of the car, you would look for characteristics in the cause that could produce the effect in question (the car). In this case, the cause needs to be able to produce the required metals and essential parts of the car. The attributes of the cause of this universe are consistent with the attributes of the God of the Bible. It is possible for the nature of the materials in the universe to be different from the cause of the universe.

There are very few options for the origin of the universe. The universe is either self-existent—that is, it does not depend on anything else for its existence—or it has a self-existent entity that has caused its existence. The need for the self-existent attribute in the cause of the universe is important, because only a self-existent entity can cause a non-self-existent universe to begin to exist. Before the twentieth century, many thought that the universe was self-existent and did not have a beginning (and some still do today), so they dismissed the possibility and importance of a self-existent being such as the God of the Bible because the Bible makes it clear that He caused the universe to begin. Before the universe began, neither time nor matter existed. It was when God spoke that everything began. This is a place the law of non-contradiction is important.

The Bible claims that the universe began at a certain time. If the universe had a beginning, then its nature is consistent with the universe the Bible describes. So the Bible is not in conflict with reality on the issue of the origin of the universe. However if the universe was self-existent and eternal, then it would not need a cause for its beginning because it did not have a beginning. However with developments in science and cosmology, we see that the evidence for the universe having a beginning is overwhelming. With the help of science and cosmology, we see that the evidence points to a universe with a beginning. It definitely requires faith to believe that God made the world out of nothing or something else caused the universe to exist, but the cosmological argument seems to me to be more rational and logical if the cause of the universe is the God of the Bible.

Looking at the requirements of the first being that could cause the universe to exist and the attributes of the Christian God, it is clear that God's existence is coherent with our world and it is rational to believe in Him. Here are some attributes that help to explain this point.

Requirements of First Being	The God of the Bible
Transcends the universe	Transcends the universe
Outside of time and unchanging (Eternal)	Is Eternal
Intelligent to create intelligence	Is Intelligent
Creates	Is the Creator
Self-existent to cause the first dependent being	Self-Existent

**Deductive Argument 2: The Teleological Argument or the Design Argument**

There are many versions of this argument, but here is a very simple version:

- 1) There are certain features in nature and the universe that exhibit specificity, complexity, and purpose.
- 2) These features cannot be explained by random natural processes and chance but are better explained as features designed by a mind (inference to the best explanation).
- 3) Therefore these features are better explained with the presence of a designer.
- 4) The universe has a designer behind its design.

From experience, we know that the first premise is clear. Some try to run away from the need for a designer by saying that the universe is not designed. However, in order for one to disqualify

the design of the universe, one would have to define the word “design” and give examples of its use. Using the inference to the best explanation, we see that based on the options available for explaining the complexity and specificity, design is valid.

The presence of design in a certain organism or machine is not found on the basis of the comparison of that organism or machine with another one of its kind, but instead design is found as the specificity and complexity within a certain organism or machine is observed. For example a Honda is said to be designed not because when compared to a Toyota it looks designed but because within the Honda itself we see evidence of complexity, specificity and precision.

This is the case with our universe. There is specified and precise complexity as we look at the order behind it. There are physical constants that have to remain the way they are for the planets to function properly. There are biochemical structures that need to maintain their shape for animals to digest food properly. Within the human body, we see a very high level of design and order. Different molecules are playing different roles at just the right time in the right conditions.

The development in science keeps showing us the complexity and design that can be found in nature. Enzymes will bind to substrates that are specific with a certain shape. There are natural laws in place, mathematical theorems which follow through

logically and match with reality. These things all point to the some form of design.

### **Cosmological + Teleological Arguments**

Since these two arguments are referring to the same universe, when these two arguments come together we see that the self-existent entity also needs to be able to design things properly. If that is not the case, then one might pose that the self-existent entity is different from the designer. However, the Christian faith proposes One Entity and that is God, the Self-Existent, Uncaused Being, and the Designer of the universe. His attributes match with the attributes that this current reality is proposing.

God has more attributes that are clearly seen in nature. He is Love, Just, Kind, Merciful, and it is from Him and through Him that we can truly understand these concepts. In the Christian faith we believe that this Creator of the Heavens and the earth came into the world and lived among the human race (John chapter 1). It is this same Jesus presented in the Bible who is also presented in the history of this world that I am referring to. He lived on this planet and died for the sins of mankind. It is the history documents presented for the existence of Jesus that prompt me and other believers to put our faith in God.

Faith can be delusional if it is not built on reason and truth, but the Christian faith is built on truth which can be checked and verified. The question of the existence of God is the most important question that can ever be asked. If God does not

exist, then it will be difficult to know if there is any objective meaning to this universe and the world as we know it. If God does not exist, then we are left to figure things out. There is no absolute standard by which to measure wrong from right. This is because God is the moral law giver.

Even though the belief or non-belief in the existence of God ultimately requires faith, I find it interesting that faith is one of the requirements of the Christian faith and so faith is compatible with the Christian worldview. On the other hand, people disbelieve in God sometimes because they don't want to have faith in anything, but they end up placing their faith in nothing. This does not help in establishing a coherent worldview. The arguments may fail, but the reality remains, and the evidence still remains even if faith is required.

There are many books that go into detail in explaining the existence of God. Here is a list you can start with:

*The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel

*The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel

*The Case for a Creator*, Lee Strobel

*The End of Reason*, Ravi Zacharias

*God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* John

Lennox

*Can Man Live Without God?* Dr. Ravi Zacharias

*Is there a God?* Richard Swinburne

### **Chapter 3- Christianity 101: Real Authentic Genuine Undeified and Pure Christianity**

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:44-46).

“I believe Christianity is true, just as I believe the sun has risen, not just because I see, but by it I see everything else.” —C.S

Lewis

#### **Who Is a Christian?**

Are there certain characteristics of a person who chooses to call him or herself a Christian? What is the role of Jesus in Christianity? Did He know that some people would call Him their master? Jesus said that there would be false teachers in the last days. Does that mean you can be a false disciple if you follow the wrong teachings? Studying Christianity can raise a lot of questions. In this section of the book, I want you to join me as I look into the Bible to see what it says about Christianity and the kind of life a Christian is supposed to lead.

Let me first address a very serious issue in defining anything. Who has the right to define words or concepts? When you hear about a concept, it helps to go to a source that speaks

directly about that concept. Do we have the right to define concepts the way we want them to be and leave them that way while expecting people to accept our beliefs without giving them a chance to question our assumptions? Socrates said that “an unexamined life is not worth living,” and I believe that an unexamined idea is not worth believing. We need to examine our assumptions of what Christianity is and is not. We need to define concepts based on what the first users intended the words to mean. As you might have learned, there are certain characteristics that come with concepts so that classification can occur.

Here is an example of what I am saying:

Respiration	Oxygen is used	Carbon dioxide is released
Photosynthesis	Oxygen is released	Carbon dioxide is used

For respiration to occur in humans, oxygen has to be used. According to this scientific model, humans cannot photosynthesize, because we will be doing the reverse of what we ought to be doing. Today many people call themselves Christians even though their lives do not reflect what the life of a Christian ought to reflect. Just as with any other title, being a Christian comes with responsibilities. The next example will help to make this point clear.

A bachelor is defined as a person who is not married. Being unmarried is a key requirement of being a bachelor. For a person to say that they met a married bachelor, they would have to redefine what a bachelor is so that the phrase “married bachelor” makes sense. If they do not, they will not be saying a statement that will be considered true. We know that once a man gets married, he cannot be considered a bachelor anymore.

Let us examine Christianity to see some of the characteristics it comes with. Is everyone who says they are Christian indeed Christian, or do they just look up to Jesus as a mythical being who said a lot of good stuff? Can you say He was just a prophet without accepting His divinity and still be a Christian? And, while saying all this, do you have a way to back up your claim for who you think He is? Being a Christian comes with certain responsibilities, and I will touch on some of them. C.S Lewis does a great job in *Mere Christianity* in defining who a Christian is and what Christians believe.<sup>i</sup>

If you want to learn about gravity, you read a physics book, not a sociology book. If you want to learn about people and cultures, you read a sociology or anthropology book, not a calculus book. The reason for this choice is that what you want to learn will be addressed in books that intend to touch on those topics. The book that best describes Christianity is the Bible. This is because it helps you tie the strands together and tells you why the apostles did what they did. Acts 11:26 is the first time

the word Christian is mentioned in the Bible. “When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians)” (Acts 11:26, NLT). They were called Christians for what they were doing: they were becoming more like Jesus.

Christianity has a historical root in an event that happened over 1900 years ago, some days after the resurrection of Jesus (this is the first belief). Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. The story is outlined in the Gospels and the first chapter of the book of Acts. “They were called Christians.” When a person chooses to call us something, it implies a lot. A Christian is “Christ-like.” This basically means a Christian is a person who lives in a way that is consistent with the teachings of Christ and also believes Jesus was who He claimed to be: the Messiah and the Living God. Christianity is *not* what it is because I say it. It is what it is, so I concur and stand on the truth it claims to have. Christianity is about becoming like Jesus Christ.

Let me use one more example to show that our words alone cannot create *truth* but that reality must match our words. People can choose to call themselves citizens of a certain country, but if in reality they are not citizens then they are lying. Anyone can call themselves whatever they want, but remember, the words alone do not prove that what they are calling

themselves is valid. Just because they call themselves citizens does not mean that they are citizens.

Many people call themselves Christians, but have they studied what the Bible has to say about Christianity? I am not writing to condemn anyone. As a Christian I cannot do that. I am writing to reveal the truth of Christianity as described by the Bible, not as many who profess to be Christians are living. I am repeating this because Jesus said something very important about this.

### **True Disciples**

Not everyone who calls out to me, “Lord! Lord!” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, “Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.” But I will reply, “I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.”

—Matthew 7:21-23, NLT

Please join me in this quest to unveil *true* Christianity. Let us consider the words of the person *on whom* the Christian faith is based: Jesus. Let us look at the personality of God as Jesus describes it. We see the trinity coming out here. God: the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.

This is an essential part of Christianity, because the Christian God is One, but He reveals Himself in three different ways with different tasks. We see this clearly in John Chapter 1:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”

—John 1:29-34, NLT

John helps us see that there is unity in the community of the trinity. The theme of the trinity is repeated over and over again in the Bible. The book of John starts by telling us who Jesus is:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He

existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.... He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'" From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came

through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God.  
But the unique One, who is himself God, is near  
to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

—John 1:1-5, 10-18, NLT

I skipped some verses, but you can read the first chapter of John  
to get all the details.

Here is a relationship between God's Word, Jesus and truth:

God's Word=Jesus (John 1:1)

Jesus=The Truth (John 14:6)

God's Word= The Truth (John 17:17 and 2 Timothy  
3:16-17)

In Luke 24, Jesus talked about the third member of the  
trinity, the Holy Spirit: "And now I will send the Holy Spirit,  
just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the  
Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven" (Luke  
24:49, NLT). You see here that the Holy Spirit is God living in  
the life of a Christian. Without Him, there is nothing a Christian  
can do. That is the way God designed it to be. The trinity is a  
hard concept to grasp. We are mere humans so this is hard, but  
with God the trinity is definitely possible. The reason I am  
emphasizing the trinity is that Jesus spent time addressing His  
oneness with God. The Gospel of John has more details on this,  
especially John 17:

After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to  
heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come.

Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”

—John 17:1-5, 20-23, NLT

I am writing to show the truth from God’s Word, the Bible. If you do not believe the words in the Bible, that does not make your claim automatically true. We can choose to disbelieve many things, but the *consequences* of our disbelief is what I believe is more important.

Be careful not to deceive people with what you say or how you live your life. Bertrand Russell pondered committing suicide, but came to the realization that he did not commit suicide because he wanted to learn more mathematics.<sup>ii</sup> He lived

for mathematics. He made it clear what he was living for. How many people are aware of what they are living for? Sometimes we say we are Christians when we are living for money or pleasure. Let us make sure we check what we are living for every day. In Christianity, we ought to live for God: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). What you live for will affect how you spend your time and resources.

There is more that could be said on mercy, love, justice, morality, marriage, sex, forgiveness, pride, hope, faith, God’s plan and God’s will. The bottom line is that the Bible has certain characteristics that describe who a Christian is and is not. Again we can choose to disagree, but that does not justify our beliefs. We need to do some research to fight against what claims to be true. For now, please consider what Jesus said in John chapter 3: “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God’” (John 3:3, NLT). Jesus said *everyone* in the world needs Him. He called Himself the bread of life and the water of life. Everyone needs water and bread, and Jesus makes it clear in His words that we need Him even more than we need these other physical substances. One definition of a Christian is a person who accepts their need for Jesus and asks Jesus to live through him or her. They

acknowledge that they cannot obey all God's law in order to be righteous, so they put on the righteousness of Jesus.

The *ultimate* purpose for man's existence is to bring glory to God, and even Jesus stated it throughout the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and other parts of the Bible remind us about this.

Ignorance is not the way to go. There are some things people do not know about Jesus. Jesus is not just the Lamb of God; He will also return to judge the world. When I say "judge," it means there is a way to live and if we don't live in that way then we are not pleasing God. He is also our advocate, so we can ask Him to set us free: "Jesus said to the people who believed in Him, 'You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32). We are all sinners and are condemned according to the law, but God sent us an advocate and a Savior. It is when we trust in Him that we can overcome sin and avoid the wrath of God. This is a core belief in Christianity: salvation through Christ alone. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus also said he was the light of the world in John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never

walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” He expects people who also call themselves Christians to shine and bring glory to God by the way they live. We see this in Matthew 5:16: “In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father” (NLT).

As Christians, we need to live in a certain way God expects of us, not out of compulsion but out of love. He loves us and knows what is best for us. He describes the way to live in His Word. If you want to live out the life God wants you to live, it will be helpful to read His words from the Bible so you don’t become a hypocrite. If we say we love someone, we have to remember to show it by the way we live in response to what they love or hate. If we love God, then let us watch out for what He loves and what He hates.

Finally, Christians need to see God’s hand in creation. The Bible makes it clear that God made the heavens and the earth, and as Christians we need to understand His plan for creation. The Bible lays it out well, and the more we read the Bible, the clearer things become. There is a plan, and it is found in the Word. These things are necessary in defining Biblical Christianity. The book of Genesis describes the beginning of the world, and as Christians we believe there is a plan for existence and we don’t exist because of random processes and chance.

Jesus said and did many other things and John tells us this at the end of his book: “Jesus also did many other things. If

they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25, NLT).

Christianity is not all about religion or philosophies; it is about a *relationship* with God through Jesus. He will help us live the life God wants us to live. His name is Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.” He came, lived, died and rose; and while living, He did not just show us the way to live but showed us that He was the way. I pray you will live out your life like Jesus and not be ashamed of people calling you a Christian.

There are about 89 chapters in the Gospels, and all of them talk explicitly about Jesus, so Christians do not have an excuse to be ignorant today. The Gospel writers focus on different aspects of who Jesus was and what He did. The Old Testament documents also talk about Jesus, and Jesus occasionally quoted books of the Old Testament. A Christian needs to spend time studying the Bible. This is one way to become more like Jesus which is the goal of Christianity.

Christianity not based on the Bible is not Christianity at all. C.S Lewis put it well when he said, “Every Christian is to become like Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”<sup>iii</sup>

## Chapter 4- Strengthening the Foundation

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’”

(Ecclesiastes 12:1)

“But the question is not what we intended ourselves to be, but what He (God) intended us to be when He made us. He is the inventor, we are only the machine. He is the painter, we are only the picture.... But all the time He knew His plan for us and was determined to carry it out.... To shrink back from that plan is not humility: It is laziness and cowardice. To submit to it is not conceit or megalomania; it is obedience. —C.S. Lewis<sup>iv</sup>

Excellence is hard to achieve. It takes a lot of time and energy to achieve excellence, but this should not deter us from going after it. God is excellent, and as we depend on Him we can start moving towards excellence His way. In the book of Matthew, chapter 25, Jesus told a parable about a man who gave his servants different amounts of money, or talents, before he left for the journey. When the man returned He rewarded his servants according to how they had invested the money, and he told two of his servants, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” However the master was angry with the third servant, because the servant was

lazy and disobedient and hadn't done anything with the money given to him. My prayer is that as you read this book, you will be like the first two servants who used what their master gave them wisely. The master was happy and welcomed them to share his happiness.

True excellence occurs when God is happy with us as we use what He has given us to glorify Him. It does not occur when we depend on ourselves but instead when we start depending on God and living for His glory. It occurs when we live for the purpose for which we were created.

In the book of Colossians, Paul tells the church, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23). This book is for those who want to live for the purpose they were created for the glory of God. Do not let the hard work it will take to achieve excellence discourage you from trying, because with God's grace and strength we can serve Him and live for His glory.

I grew up in Nigeria and learned many lessons about achieving excellence. (You can read more about my personal story in chapter two of this book.) In elementary school and high school, there was a day that was focused on those who had achieved excellence. Those with good grades and those who behaved well were rewarded for their efforts. As we pursue excellence and purpose, let us remember that God will reward us as He promised in His word. God rewards us in ways that He

chooses. One of the rewards we will receive is God telling us, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” when we meet Him face to face. My prayer is that God will be happy with the way we live our lives. He also rewards us by helping us grow and strengthening us in our walk with Him.

In the first book I wrote, *Achieving Excellence as a Young Person (2006)*,<sup>v</sup> I focused on the young people in Nigeria and the challenges they would experience in achieving excellence. Since moving to the United States for my education, I have come to realize that most people want to achieve excellence, but they don’t know how.

I believe young people have the potential to succeed, but they need to tap into what God has given them and use it. In order to do this, they need to make sure their personal principles are built on a solid foundation. In order to excel in life we need a strong foundation. Jesus Christ is the Foundation I hope you will build your life on. The Bible says that all other foundations are like sinking sand. Here are two verses that help to explain the importance of our foundation.

“Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth”

(1 Timothy 3:14-15).

Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

—Luke 6:46-49

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

In philosophy, there is a type of reasoning called deductive reasoning.<sup>vi</sup> It involves a person establishing certain premises and then coming up with conclusions based on these premises. If the premises are valid, then the conclusion is valid. Here is an example:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The Earth began to exist.
3. Therefore the Earth has a cause.

If the first two statements (premises) are true, then the conclusion is true. In this book, my premise is that God exists and that He has revealed Himself to us through His Word, the Bible. I am building on these premises to affirm that excellence can only be achieved by obeying God's Word. If you disagree with my premise or you know someone who disagrees, I want to encourage you to read the Chapter on the Existence of God and think about the issues raised.

Many people say philosophers do not do anything but sit around and waste time confusing people. But after listening to some philosophers, I have found that I enjoy philosophy. It has taught me many lessons. I have found that philosophy helps you think deeply and the ability to think is a good skill to have. The Bible has much to say about thinking, and the book of Proverbs gives more reasons why critical thinking is a good skill to have. I encourage you to spend much time reading and meditating on the words that King Solomon wrote in Proverbs with God's wisdom.

Many people choose not to think critically about what they say, so they conclude that everything is relative and nothing is absolutely true. However, the problem is that if everything is relative and there is no absolute truth, one will have to explain how the phrase "everything is relative" is not also relative and how "there is no absolute truth" could be absolutely true when nothing is absolutely true. In order for the claim "there is no

absolute truth” to be true, absolute truth would have to exist, but this claim is not trying to affirm the presence of absolute truth but instead reject it, and in the process it rejects itself.

There are many things that are absolutely true, and this book is on built on things that are true. It is absolutely true that if you throw an ordinary book up here on planet Earth, it will come back down. Jesus Christ is the Foundation of the Christian faith, and He made it clear that He was the ultimate objective truth. In John 14:6, He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The truth is extremely important, and it can be known. Jesus Himself is the Truth this book talks about.

This book will give you knowledge, but you need much more than just knowledge to achieve excellence. You also need understanding and wisdom. Let me explain. Knowledge is all about information or facts (i.e. knowing). Understanding is knowing the reason for this basic information or realizing why something should be done or how something works. It gives a clearer view of knowledge. Wisdom is all about application. That is, wisdom is the application of the knowledge which you have understood.

Many people do not know or understand why they are in school, and that is why they are not giving their best. Understanding helps you give your best, and you will be wise in giving your best.

What you end up believing will play a big role in your life, because your belief will affect what you believe and how you behave. The books you read will shape the way you think, and the way you think will ultimately affect the way you live.

As you read this book, I want to challenge you to separate opinions from facts. “Blue is the best color in the world” is an opinion, but “whatever you sow you must reap” is a fact, because it cannot be disputed. Anyone who studies the idea of sowing and reaping will come to realize that whether you are talking about plants or humans, actions have consequences. I want to caution you from the start to make sure you examine the opinions you allow into your life, and whether you recognize them as simply opinions or facts.

Thank you for choosing to read this book. I hope you learn principles and ideas that will help you do the best at what God may have assigned you to do. The goal of this book is to encourage someone somewhere to wake up and give the best they can to make their vicinity a better place to live and to glorify God with their entire lives. I pray you will be that person.

Living a purposeful life and a life of excellence involves a lot of work. Excellence always raises its banner high. If you excel, you might be persecuted, but remember: with God on your side, you will be able to stand and encourage others. My prayer is that we will always keep *pursuing* excellence in all we choose to do for God’s glory.

The book calls people to live lives of purpose found in Christ. As we strengthen the foundation, it will affect how we live and how we deal with practical issues in our lives. I am in no way saying that I have achieved excellence, but I want you to join me in the pursuit of excellence in all you do to the glory of God. Remember the Bible is the foundation for Christianity so if anything is unclear in the book, go back to the Bible and see what it says on the particular issue.

Ultimately, we are on the path to excellence when we know God, understand and apply His word. If this book makes you to spend more time reading the Bible and seeking to know God more and learning about His ways, that will be excellent. I pray it encourages you in your faith and helps you grow as you seek to call others to grow as well.

## Chapter 5- Spiritual Growth

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

—Matthew 7:24-29

There is only one person that I give my full trust and faith to and that is Jesus Christ, who is God. God is the foundation of my life and the life of anyone who follows *Biblical Christianity*. The foundation of a building is very important, because if it is weak, the building might collapse when storms come. However, if it is strong, then the building will stand firm when it gets hit by a

storm. God is firm and trustworthy. The Bible teaches that He can never fail.

While teaching on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5 to 7), Jesus teaches us that it is only when we listen to His words and obey them that we can establish a solid foundation. A foundation supports other things on top of it by holding the building down, and Jesus says that His words will do that for us.

**Bible Reading: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)**

In this chapter, we will focus on growth and see ways that we can grow as Christians. With this in mind, here is an acronym to help you remember some essentials for growth, and also for a deeper relationship with God. They are:

**G**od

**R**epentance

**O**bedience

**W**orship

**T**hanksgiving

**H**eaven and Hell

**God**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”

(Genesis 1:1).

“No man is the same after an agony; he is either better or worse, and the agony of a man’s experience is nearly always the first thing that opens his mind to understand the need of redemption

worked out by Jesus Christ. At the back of the wall of the world stands God with His arms outstretched, and every man driven there is driven into the arms of God. The cross of Jesus is the supreme evidence of the love of God.”—Oswald Chambers<sup>vii</sup>

This is one of the longest sections in the book, because God is the reason I am writing this book. In the process of writing this book I kept the thought in my mind—man informs, but only God can transform. It is my prayer that He will transform your heart and give you a new life as you trust in Him.

In order to understand growth and the pursuit of excellence, you need to know the God I am referring to, the One who enables us to pursue excellence and to live purposeful lives. This past year, I was trying to picture what the profile of God would look like. I came to realize that making a profile of God would be difficult, because God is infinite and eternal. Here are some words I was able to come up with. As you read through the Bible, you will see these attributes mentioned over and over again. Take time as you read through this list to ponder and pray over these attributes—let God do a work in your heart as you ponder these truths:

- He is the eternal and infinite Being; the One whose existence is not dependent on any other (Genesis 1:1, John 8:58). He existed before time began.
- He is holy and righteous (Isaiah 45:21).

- He created the world out of nothing (Genesis 1:1, Hebrews 11).
- He is all-knowing (Isaiah 48:12-13).
- He is our Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).
- He uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things (Judges 6:11-12).
- He is merciful (Jonah 4:2).
- He is both transcendent and immanent at the same time (Psalms 8:1).
- He revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ about 2,000 years ago (John 1).
- He saves and transforms (John 3, the book of Romans).
- He is a loving God (John 3:16) and He is a Just God.
- He disciplines His children and knows what is best for them (Hebrews 12:5-6).
- He meets people at their point of need (Philippians 4:19).
- He is sovereign over all (Psalms 19).
- He is the Potter and we are the Clay.

This is the God I am serving, and it is Him I want you to know. We need Him, and it is His purpose we should live for. My prayer is that as you read through this book, God will meet you at the point of your need. I pray you will put your trust in Him

and allow Him to work through you for His glory. Sometimes people are out of balance and only focus on the love of God without remembering that He is a just God and He will not live with sin. Let us fear the Lord as we are called to do in the Bible.

Let us focus in on the eternal nature of God. In Genesis 1:1, the Bible tells us that in the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth. God existed before time, space or matter began to exist. God has no beginning or end. He is everlasting. This is a critical point, because many people cannot seem to grasp the nature of the beginning of the world or how it began.

Dr. Norman Geisler, philosopher and defender of the Christian faith, made a very strong philosophical case for the existence of God, while examining the necessary attributes of the creator of the universe. He uses a ten-step deductive argument, but I picked only one of the points to start off our next point.<sup>viii</sup> Here is the sixth premise of the argument: “Whatever has the possibility not to exist is currently caused to exist by another.”

The world has the possibility of not existing, but the world exists because of an external agent which caused its existence. The world as we know it began to exist at a certain time, so it needs something outside of itself to enable it to begin existing. A table exists because something outside of the table caused it to begin existing. The table cannot find its origin in itself. An external agent is necessary.

No matter what you believe about the origin of the universe and the world, you are going to get to a point where you have to rely on something eternal, that is, something which itself was not created, and which is outside of time, matter and space, bringing the universe into existence. In Christianity, that thing is not a thing, it is a personal being. He is God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the I Am (the absolute ultimate reality because He Is. He remains the same from generation to generation.). The Good News is that you can know Him through a relationship with Jesus Christ, His Son. Christianity is not all about religion; it is about having a relationship with God. He is real. He meets people at the point of their need, so please ask Him to meet you and reveal Himself to you.

If you have a genuine encounter with Jesus, your life *cannot* remain the same. An example of an encounter is seen in Acts 9 when Jesus appeared to Paul. Paul used to persecute the church, but when he had an encounter with Jesus, he started teaching people about Jesus. He was also able to write thirteen books of the New Testament. I pray you will have a genuine encounter with Jesus and start telling people about Him. In John 3:36, Jesus tells us “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” The Bible tells us that without Jesus, we are under the wrath of God and condemned. We need Jesus in order to be acceptable before God (Romans 8:1). If you have never

given God a chance to work through you, pray and ask Him to do so. Commit your talents, ambitions and dreams to Him and ask Him to show you the way to go.

In a land where we have so much, it is very easy to forget about the Great Provider. We need to live life everyday acknowledging our need for God.

Humans consist of several parts; the visible and the invincible, the Spirit, Soul and the Body. The body needs certain things: food, air, shelter and clothing. However humans have a tendency to think that those are the only needs. Since humans are also made up of the spiritual dimension, then humans need certain things that are not physical edible and tangible. Some of the greatest needs include the need for True love, acceptance, healing, and forgiveness. We cannot find the purest form of any of these things anywhere else apart from the True source. God is our true source. We need him every day and no matter how we are doing on the physical needs, we need his provision to meet us at a spiritual level.

Jesus said that man shall not live by Bread alone but by everything word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4, Deut. 8:3)

My desire is that you will come to know God as your father and give Him your all. This is the first step in the pursuit of excellence.

## **Repentance**

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Repentance is a change of mind resulting in a change of behavior.<sup>ix</sup> When you repent of something, it means you leave it behind. With the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can live above any temptation and sin. He gives us the grace that is required to go through life’s struggles. We need to learn to confess our sins to God daily. Being a Christian does not mean we are perfect; it means we learn the habit of admitting our sins and asking God to forgive us. Ultimately we should strive to become more like Jesus every day. In repenting, we show that we acknowledge our sins and are willing to change.

In the summer of 2009, I was preparing to go on a trip, and I noticed that my wallet was too bulky. I realized I had been keeping receipts and papers from different places, and the wallet was completely full. I had not spent time sorting the necessary and the unnecessary things out, and now I was carrying a lot of junk. This can happen in our daily walk with God. When we live our lives without examining the junk we might be putting into our system, we will take up a lot of unnecessary things. At the

end of the day, the things we put into our lives will affect the things that come out.

Repentance is about examining your life to see if it is the way God wants it to be, and then making adjustments.

Repentance is not a one-time event: it is a daily thing. We need to examine our lives every day to make sure we are keeping in touch with Jesus. I looked through the papers and receipts in my wallet, and I had to take some of them out. As I reduced the content of the wallet, it was easier to carry it around. We need to do the same thing with our lives daily. We need to examine the things we have allowed into our lives to make sure that they bring glory to God. Hebrews 12:1 tells us, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Repentance is taking a U-turn (180-degree turn) away from what God hates and towards what God wants.

In the Bible, we learn that King David was a man after God’s heart (Acts 13:22). If you were to spend time looking into David’s life, you would see that he made mistakes and he sinned against God. However he was willing to repent. Again I am not saying you should go out and start making mistakes and saying that you will repent later. With the Holy Spirit in us, we can overcome anything that comes our way. We can also read about people to learn how to avoid the mistakes they made. David not

only repented, but also he was willing to do what God wanted.

Here is David's prayer of repentance from Psalms 51:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

—Psalms 51:1-7, 10-12

If you want to pursue excellence diligently, you need to throw away the things that are holding you back. It might be

friends, certain movies, video games or something else God reveals to you. These things weigh on your life and pull you back. You need to drop them so you can be more effective for Him. The lesser the loads you carry, the easier it is to pursue excellence. Remember your relationship with God is the most important relationship, so let nothing interrupt that.

In the book of Acts, any time the apostle Peter presented the gospel, he always made it clear that repentance was necessary if the people wanted to follow God. Repentance is still necessary if we want to grow, and most especially if we want to pursue excellence God's way.

### **Obedience**

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

—Hebrews 11:8-10

Faith + Obedience = Growth + Rewards

The Bible helps us to learn the things God wants and the things He dislikes. As you read through the Bible, you will see the

blessings of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham chose to obey God before God told him to stop and sacrifice the lamb God provided. God blessed Abraham for his obedience. If God is asking you to do something, please get up and start doing it. God knows what is best for us, so it is in our best interest to obey Him.

If we choose to disobey God thinking that we are right, we will only be showing that God's Word is right and that we are wrong. If the manual of a computer says, "Do not throw in water or else it will damage this system," then if you choose to disobey the instructions and put the computer in water, your computer will probably fall apart. Your disobedience will not stop your computer from disintegrating, because your computer was not designed in such a way that it could stay in water. Your disobedience only serves to prove that the manual is right. God designed the world to be the way it is, so we have to be careful in thinking that we are smarter than He is. If He tells us to do something, He knows why; and if we choose to disobey, we will face the consequences. King Saul disobeyed God, and the prophet Samuel was sent to tell him the implications of his decision. Samuel told Saul that obedience was better than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).

A person can obey God for the wrong reasons—reasons that do not point to God and His glory. If this happens, then such

a person should not expect any reward from God. Jesus talked about this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). He told us this when He talked about giving to the needy. If a person gives for the wrong reason or simply to show off, then they will not receive God's blessing (Matthew 6:2).

We also need to remember that we are not saved by obeying God's law. Selwyn Hughes, writer for *Everyday with Jesus* put it well when he said that good works do not lead to salvation but salvation leads to good works. I do not want you to think that choosing to obey God, without having a personal relationship with Him first, can save you. The Bible tells us we need to know God first before we can obey Him in the right way. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

### **Worship**

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

"Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God.

It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness,

Nourishment of mind by His truth,

Purifying of imagination by His beauty,  
Opening of the heart to His love,  
And submission of will to His purpose.

And all this gathered up in adoration is the greatest of human expressions of which we are capable.” —Archbishop William

Temple

Many people today are asking the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Some answer by saying that life has no objective meaning. I want to tell you that life does have meaning. Consider another question: What is the meaning of a car? The meaning of a car can be found in the function of the car, that is, to move a person from point A to point B. The meaning of a car is found only when the car is doing what it was designed to be doing. The meaning of a plane can only be found when a plane does what it was designed to do. The meaning of life can be found when we start doing what we were designed to do. God designed us to glorify Him and live for Him. Jesus calls us the salt of the earth and the light of the world. God has blessed us with different abilities and talents, and we are supposed to use them and give Him the glory.

My pastor once preached that to worship God is to ascribe worth, or weight, or glory, to Him consistent with who He has revealed Himself to be. Consider again the long list of

God's attributes. He alone is truly worthy of all honor, glory and praise.

In John 4 we are told about the Samaritan woman who thought that worship was about location, but Jesus corrected her and told her that a time would come when people would worship God in Spirit and in Truth. When worshiping God, the location does not matter as much. What matters is that your heart is right with Him. In the book of Isaiah, we see what God says about the condition of our hearts during worship. "The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men'" (Isaiah 29:13).

In Matthew 5, Jesus reminds us of our purpose:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

—Matthew 5:13-16

We were made to worship God. That is our sole purpose in life. There are certain angels that simply worship God day and night. This shows how awesome He is. If we don't worship God, then we will worship something else. There is nothing that can compare to God and who He is, so He is the one who deserves our worship. We have to be careful about what we end up worshipping. This is because we become like what we worship. Dr. Beale, a New Testament professor, reminds us, "You and I will become like what we go after."<sup>x</sup> If we want to be more like our Heavenly Father, then we ought to worship Him and give Him all the glory in all we do. I pray you will choose to worship our Excellent Father. He alone is worthy of our worship. Let us seek Him daily.

### **Thanksgiving**

"Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations" (Psalms 100:4-5).

"Give thanks with a grateful heart  
Give thanks to the Holy One  
Give thanks because He's given  
Jesus Christ His Son." —Don Moen

God gives us gifts every day, and we need to learn ways to say thank you. Life itself is a gift. It is sad that many times we do things and we forget to give the glory to God. Thanking God involves remembering God, and it leads to worship. When we thank God, we acknowledge that He is the one who blesses us.

I pray you will spend time counting your blessings and giving God glory for all He does. I want to use this section to thank God for what He has done for me, and I want you to pause and just thank God for the things He has done for you. We need to spend time reflecting on God's goodness daily. There is one thing we have to thank God for every single day and that is His Salvation plan. Jesus died and rose again. This is an important truth, and it remains true whether the world chooses to believe it or not. This is because if something is true, it can never become false. If it becomes false, then it was never true in the first place. Listen to what Paul tells the Colossian church:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and

authorities, he made a public spectacle of them,  
triumphing over them by the cross.

—Colossians 2:13-15

God also provides us with opportunities to shine every day, and we have to remember to always thank Him and give Him the glory. When we forget to thank God, we are deceiving people and making them think that we are shining because of our own strength. We need to always thank God for what He does so that the world can see Him working in our lives.

Once in a while, I get the opportunity to watch a sporting event on TV, and I was fortunate to watch the 2009 NBA Eastern Conference Finals. The team from Orlando, Florida, won, and one of the players was asked to say something about his team and how they made it. He stepped forward, and these are the words that he started with: “First of all I want to thank God, because without Him none of this would have been possible.” He knew his source, and he was willing to acknowledge that God deserved all the thanks. We need to thank God whether it rains or it doesn’t, whether we are rich or poor. Let us remember He is in control and He deserves all thanks. Michael Chang, the youngest tennis player to win a grand slam (the French Open) in 1989 also stood on the stage and thanked his Savior Jesus Christ. He was seventeen years old when he won.

Pastor Duncan Ross once said a thankful heart can make the difference between judgment and joy because thanksgiving will keep us from a prideful heart. Thanksgiving is not pridefully looking to self, but humbly looking to God. God gives grace to the humble, but He opposes the proud (James 4:6, Proverbs 3:34). We need God's grace as we pursue excellence in all we do. Let us remember to acknowledge Him and give Him thanks for giving us the desire to pursue excellence for His glory.

### **Heaven and Hell**

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

—Philippians 3:17-21

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”

(Colossians 3:1-2).

“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him”

(Hebrews 9:27-28).

The issue of heaven and hell is often overlooked, and people have decided to say that heaven and hell do not exist, for their own reasons. We can choose to disbelieve the validity of a certain concept, but our disbelief does not automatically nullify the existence of the reality or concept in question. For example, I can choose to say that a certain country does not exist on the world map, but if you do your research and find this country I was saying did not exist, you can tell me that I am wrong for that belief. Be careful about what you choose to ignore, because it might be real.

Beyond belief or disbelief in an idea, what really matters is the effects of the ideas we do believe. There are consequences in regards to the existence of heaven and hell, one of which is that there are the only two places we can experience after death for eternity.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Paul goes on to tell us in Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death.” We all deserve to go to hell and be separated from God. Amazingly, however, God in His mercy has made a way for us to connect to Him and be in a relationship with Him.

Therefore in order to go to heaven, we need to look to Jesus, because He can clothe us in His righteousness by His grace. This is a gift. When our hearts are joined to His and we agree with Him, then we are converted. When this happens, we may confess with our mouths and believe in our hearts that Jesus is Lord. Our faith in God is what saves us (Ephesians 2, Acts 16:30b-31).

Charles Stanley uses a very good analogy to show the nature of God and hell. He begins by saying that things are the way they are because God is the way He is. “Fire is hot by nature; fire does not make itself hot; it is hot. If you put your hand in a campfire to retrieve a hot dog that fell off your stick, you would be burned. Fire and your hand are incompatible. You can protect your hand with a hand glove, but that doesn’t make your hand and the fire more compatible; it doesn’t change the nature of fire.”<sup>xi</sup> God is eternally holy, and He cannot dwell with sin, so we need a savior to take the punishment for our sins.

The reality of hell is certain because Jesus affirms the existence of hell many times.

I do not want you to feel hopeless at this time; instead I want you to realize that God has provided a way so that you and I do not have to suffer in hell. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This is the Gospel and the Good News. Going to heaven is not about what we do, it is about whom we trust. Jesus is the way to heaven.

In the third chapter of John, Jesus tells us that “no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). He clearly specified that the way to the kingdom of God, for anyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, is to be born again. This is the core of the Christian message. Being born again is not a physical rebirth, but a spiritual regeneration. It means to be born of the Spirit.

When we are born again, we experience a change in our passions and desires. We start pursuing spiritual growth and righteousness. We start living for Jesus and learning more about Him every day. Everyone needs Jesus in order to get to heaven. Jesus said it, and He showed that He was the way to God. As you learn about Him, share with others with love. God does not want anyone to perish, but He wants them to know Him. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

I pray you will keep the thought of eternity in mind. Jesus made it clear that heaven and hell are real. We need to examine our lives and make sure we are keeping in step with Jesus.

Jesus referred to Himself as the gate for the sheep in John 10:7. Then He went on to say that He was the way, the truth and the life in John 14:6. Everyone will have to answer the question of who Jesus is one day. If Jesus is not the only way to God then He was lying by claiming to be the way to God. But if He is the way to God, then we had better get up and start listening to Him. When you read through the whole Bible, you will come to realize that Jesus is the way to God. He is the only one who can take away our sins because He lived the perfect life and died in our place so we can live a life we could not have been able to live.

Heaven is the place where those who have believed in Jesus and His promises will live with God for eternity. I want to encourage you to invest in heaven by doing the things that Jesus tells us to do. Jesus described the necessity of investing in heaven when He was teaching about money and possessions: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34b). Where have you placed your trust? As you understand the concept of heaven and hell, I pray you will make time to tell people about eternity and how to get to heaven.

I do not know where you are now in your journey, but I want to encourage you to keep growing. Growth is necessary if you want to excel. Growth is the main theme in this book. I hope you will choose to grow even as you pursue excellence. In the next chapter, I hope to show you ways that you can grow after you become born again and start living for Jesus Christ.

### **Practical Applications: Where Do We Go From Here?**

1. Spend time thinking through God's attributes. When we come to terms with who God is, we will never have to worry. For example, He is Jehovah Jireh, Our Provider. He will provide for you. Worship Him for who He is.
2. Remember to do a regular spiritual checkup. You might be allowing things into your life that will destroy you later.
3. Practice obedience by listening and obeying authority and God.
4. Practice the art of gratitude by thanking people for what they give you. Then remember to thank God for all He does for you.
5. Remember this life is brief and there is eternity. There is heaven and hell, so make sure you live your life remembering that you will give account of it one day. What are some things you have to give up in order to keep in step with God?

### **Songs To Consider**

Mercy Me: "He Reigns," "In The Blink of an Eye," "I Can Only Imagine"

Chris Tomlin: "How Great Is Our God," "Indescribable"

Newsboys: "He Reigns" and Paul Baloche: "My Reward"

## **Chapter 6- Spiritual Disciplines**

Bible Reading: Spiritual Maturity (Ephesians 4:11-16)

### **Ways To Grow in the Spirit**

In the last chapter, I discussed the foundation of biblical excellence. After you become born again, there are some things that can help you grow and draw closer to God. These are the things I want to discuss in this chapter. There are more spiritual disciplines that could be discussed, but I want to focus on these three. Please keep reading God's Word to learn more ways you can grow such as through giving tithes and offerings or through intercession.

### **Prayer**

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”

(Philippians 4:6).

When a doctoral student at Princeton Seminary asked, 'What is there left in the world for original dissertation research?' Albert Einstein replied, 'Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer.'<sup>xii</sup>

“The shortest distance between a problem and the solution is the distance between our knees and the floor.” —Dr. Charles Stanley  
While growing up, I heard that there were several ways God answered prayers. Yes, no and wait which could eventually become a yes or no. Jesus said that if we ask for anything in His

name, which is according to His will, then it will be granted unto us.

God knows everything and we do not, so we need to pray and ask Him for what is best for our lives and His glory. Sometimes the things we pray for are not the best for us, so when we pray and God seems silent, let us check our motives and make sure they are right—then let us keep praying. It is His will we should live for.

**I thank God that He does not say yes to all my prayers, because there are times I ask for things that are good, instead of asking for the best. I want to encourage you to spend time in God's Word to learn what His will is, then pray in line with what He wants.**

It is only through prayer we can know what God wants us to do. We can also ask God to help us do what He wants us to do. We need to keep in touch with God at all times. Before He chose His apostles, Jesus spent a lot of time praying about it. The Lord of heaven and earth made it clear that we need to pray, and He taught us how to pray in His word. Prayer is very important as we try to live lives of purpose. I want to encourage you to make time every day to spend with the Lord. This might mean waking up an earlier each day to make sure you have time to read His word and pray. It might be the best decision you make after becoming a Christian because as you spend time in His word, He will reveal himself to you and transform you. There are

many books and teachings on prayer but I have included this section as a reminder.

Here is a Bible verse to consider as you go through life and its uncertainties: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil” (Proverbs 3:5-7).

Before I move on to Bible reading and meditation, I want to say that when you choose to pray and fast, remember that there are right ways to fast and wrong ways to fast. Jesus talked about this in the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew 6. Fasting is a good way to put away things that you thought you could not do without, and simply focus your attention on God. If you don't know how to start praying. Let me give you an acronym I learned growing up to encourage you: ACTS

A: Adoration. Worship God for who He is (Matthew 6).

C: Confess your sins before God (1 John 1:9).

T: Thanksgiving. Thank Him for all He has done for you (Psalms 100:4).

S: Supplication. Tell Him about your needs (1 Peter 5:7). As you pray with this formula, I want you to remember to specifically spend time praying and interceding for your friends, the government, the church, your family and your spiritual

journey. Nothing is difficult for God, so always remember to commit everything to Him in prayer.

### **Bible Reading and Meditation**

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”

(2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and

successful” (Joshua 1:8).

The Bible is a manual. When you look at the characteristics of a manual and the relationship it has to the product it comes with, you will see that the Bible is, in fact, the manual of man. It is from the Bible we can learn what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. I am not saying this to make humans look like robots, but I am saying this because God has blessed us by giving us a book that tells us of His plan for our lives. If you doubt the validity of the Bible, I want to encourage you to look at the evidence and follow it where it leads, not where you want it to lead. Do not allow your presuppositions to hold you back from seeing what God’s Word has to say about reality. Here are some ways that the Bible proves to be our manual.

The manual of a device tells you the purpose of the device. In the book of Genesis, God made it clear why He was creating man. Humans were made in the image of God to have dominion and be stewards of God's creation. We were made to worship God and glorify God, and the Bible makes this clear (Matthew 5:16).

The manual of a device tells you about the many functions the device has. If you want to learn more about yourself and the many functions you have, spend time reading the Bible.

The manual of a device tells you where to go if any problems arise. We know where to go when we are in trouble. Solomon said in Proverbs 18:10 that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." We can always run to God. He is our only true hope.

The manual of a device gives you warnings about what you should not do with the device. In the Bible, we see over and over again how God deals with disobedience and how He blesses those who are obedient. If we obey God, we will live and reap His rewards, but if we disobey Him, we will face the consequences. The Bible tells us that if we do wrong we will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6). Please teach people about this in love.

The manual of a device tells you of potential problems that might arise and what you should do when they arise. In the

Bible, we see the mistakes people made and how they made up for it. David sinned against God by taking another man's wife and killing her husband, and he repented genuinely. Peter denied Jesus and later repented, and he went out and preached the Gospel. Our flesh will deceive us and we might fall into temptation, and when this happens, let us be willing to repent genuinely and turn to God. The Bible can teach us ways to avoid falling.

In the Bible we learn about the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). I want to remind you that they are commandments, not suggestions. If we choose to disobey them, we will face the consequences. God has designed the world to operate in a certain way, and there are implications if we go against His design. The Bible tells us our major problem: sin. However it does not stop there; it also tells us of a solution and an answer to our problem. Jesus is the answer, and we all need Him if we want to live. Ravi Zacharias put it well during a speech when he said that "Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live." It is all because of Jesus that we are alive, and it is only in His Word, which is our manual, that we can find ways to glorify Him. Whatever your situation, you can find the answers in the Bible. Please do not condemn it without looking at what it has to say. As you read The Manual, please spend time meditating on what it says and ask God to open your eyes to see what He wants you to see.

The manual of a device fits the reality of the device. The Bible's description of reality is accurate. The Bible helps to show us what reality truly is. In order to remind you of the gospel of Jesus Christ, here are seven realities the Bible tells us about:

Seven Realities To Remind You of the Gospel The Bible  
Presents

**Reality 1:** A personal uncaused cause of the universe (eternal entity) exists, and He is God (Gen.1:1).

**Reality 2:** God is holy, perfect and excellent (Revelation 4).

**Reality 3:** We are not holy, perfect and excellent (Romans 3:23).

**Reality 4:** God has a high standard, and we cannot attain it (The book of Romans).

**Reality 5:** We have fallen short (Romans 3:23).

**Reality 6:** God sent Jesus to pay the price (John 3:16).

**Reality 7:** Through Jesus, we can connect to God, become acceptable in His sight and live with Him in eternity. (John 3, Book of Hebrews).

Some people dismiss the Bible because of its age, but the question is, who said that age is a determinant of truth? If something is true, then no matter how long it has been true, it cannot cease to be true. The Bible is true, so it can never stop being true.<sup>xiii</sup> If it did, then it was never true in the first place. The age of the words of the Bible actually make the case for its validity much stronger. God cannot change, so His words, which

are found in the Bible, will remain true. The Bible is still relevant in today's world. Please make time for the Bible; it will transform your life and show you how to live to the glory of God.

I was invited to give a speech at the evening service of my church and I wanted to record it, so I decided to buy a voice recorder online. It was after I had purchased the recorder that I came to realize that I had always owned a voice recorder of my own. However, I did not know that it was a voice recorder because I had never read the manual for the device. I knew it had an mp3 player function and an FM radio function, but I never realized that there was a voice recorder function. When you read the manual of a device, you learn more and more about the device, and you treat it much better. If you read the Bible more and more, you will learn more about yourself and how to excel God's way. God has provided everything for us to know in His Word. The Bible is a blessing, and it makes the pursuit of excellence much easier. It teaches us how God used people for His purposes, and how He blessed them to do His work. Spend time in God's Word, and you will be on the right track to excellence.

### **“Going to Church” and Fellowship**

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

In June of 2009, I had the opportunity of going to a retreat with members of my fellowship. We were sitting outside at a bonfire in the evening, and I observed that some people were taking little pieces of the wood from the fire and playing with them. This made the fire start to die down. I came to realize that this is what happens when a person moves away from the church or from the gathering of believers. Their fire begins to die down. We all need each other in the Christian race. It is not the best for you to take yourself away from the church. Even if you don't think you need anything from others, you have to remember that they might need something from you. The Bible tells us we need to serve others with our gifts. I will talk more on this issue in the next chapter.

The church helps to keep us on track. Just as we need physical disciplines to grow daily in life, we also need spiritual disciplines. It is important to note that we cannot allow the church to take the place of our personal relationship with the Lord. We need to be seeking the Lord on an individual basis. I pray you will hold on to these disciplines and you will keep growing, and that you will encourage others to also grow to the

glory of God. These disciplines were focused on your individual growth. In the next chapter, I hope to show you ways that you can encourage others to grow. In the next chapter, I hope to show ways that you can help build the body of Christ by using the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us.

Attending Fellowship (or as some call it “going to church”) is not a guarantee that you will go to heaven. You need to listen to the words of Jesus and believe on Him in order to go to heaven. Attending Fellowship helps you grow in your knowledge of God, and you need to apply what you learn. Jesus said in John 15 that it is when we obey His commandments we can remain in His love. Remember trusting in Jesus is what takes you to heaven, not what you do. You can never do enough to earn salvation. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus tells us that many will come to Him on the last day and say that they did things for Him, but Jesus will reply by saying He never knew them. Please do the will of the father and put your trust in Jesus for salvation. The important thing is not just knowing Jesus, but Jesus knowing you. Does Jesus know you as one of His children? In Romans 8, Paul tells us to walk in the Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit then we will delight in the disciplines I mentioned above. Take these disciplines one day at a time and God will see you through even as you grow to become more like Him and draw closer to excellence. Remember you are the Temple of God (Read the Book of Corinthians to learn more on this.)

When it comes to the issue of the Church, the book of Acts, the Gospels and the Epistles provide a lot of insight into this issue. Again let us examine what we are doing today in light of what was taught and demonstrated in the early church. If we are not following their model, whose model are we following? Fellowship should not be all about spectatorship. There should be participation. We live in a culture where there is a lot to be a spectator for. We have sporting events, music performances, and other hobbies that require nothing of us other than just sitting and watching or occasionally standing as might be the case in certain sporting events. This cannot be the case with the church/fellowship. When we are heading to fellowship, we need to bring something to share even as it is described in 1 Corinthians 14:26. My brothers and sisters, let us search the scriptures like the Bereans. Let us ask ourselves, how can I serve in the body of Christ today? We all need to seek to be more Biblical in our approach to church. Jesus did not die so we could promote a compromised Church. We have to be careful as the world is watching us. The last thing we want to do is convey a false message to the world so they think what they are seeing is the real deal when it is not. Every fellowship should seek to grow more into what God intends for it. Just like individuals seek perfection, churches should seek perfection.

Ephesians chapter 4 talks more about the role of the leaders in the church.

The fundamental questions of the Faith start with the individual followers of the faith not the gathering of the followers.

Fellowship is critical and cannot be taken for granted. However we cannot hide under the cover of fellowship and not be in a Personal Growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Our tendency is to hide and so Fellowship which is a blessing can end up being a hiding spot for people. Especially when they sneak in and out of the gathering of believers, believing that they have done their fair share. We have a **personal** responsibility to the Truth first before we move to the fellowship level. Notice that since Fellowship is so crucial, it must mean that our Personal relationship with Christ is also extremely important.

### **Why Do You Do What You Do?**

There are three primary reasons people choose to do what they do (there may be more, but I will focus on these three). One is the “everybody is doing it” syndrome. Avoid doing things and justifying them by saying that everyone is taking part. Following the crowd is not healthy, because the crowd could be going in the wrong direction. Learn to stand for the truth even if you will be alone. Remember Jesus said we should enter through the narrow gate in Matthew 7. “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction,

and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Everybody taking part in an act does not make the act right if that act is wrong. If the Bible says that a certain act is wrong then it is wrong whether people choose to follow it or not.

The second reason many people do what they do is tradition: the “it has always been like that” factor. “Jesus replied, ‘And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?’” (Matthew 15:3). Traditions are things that are handed down from the past. Following bad traditions could be a hindrance to progress. Don’t ever do wrong things and justify yourself by saying it has always been like that. Throw out wrong traditions. Even if something wrong has been taking place for a long period of time, it remains wrong. If you want to excel, learn to throw out bad traditions that can act as burdens; don’t allow them stop you from becoming who God wants you to be. These traditions could include laziness, procrastination and so on.

A third reason people do things is to glorify God: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). The Bible tells us to glorify God in all we do, so I am hoping that this will be the foundation for all your decisions. God is worthy of all our praise and glory, so let our actions show that we love Him and let us live for His glory.

### **Practical Applications**

1. Make time every day to spend time with God. Most people call this Quiet Time or Time Alone with God (TAG time). This is very important for your spiritual growth. This time could involve prayer and Bible reading with some singing.
2. Make a Bible reading schedule.
3. Take time to journal your thoughts and prayers.
4. Make sure the activities you take part in do not take away your time in Fellowship. Fellowship is very important.

### **Songs To Consider**

Amy Grant: "Thy Word"

Nicole Mullen: "Call On Jesus"

## **Chapter 7- Spiritual Gifts and the Issue of Identity**

Bible Reading: The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”

(1 Peter 2:9).

In the last chapter, I discussed some spiritual disciplines to help you go deeper in your faith. Now I want to focus on a portion of church attendance and fellowship: spiritual gifts. In order for us not to mix up our terms, I am going to define spiritual gifts as gifts that only those with the Holy Spirit have, and talents as things that anyone can have whether they have the Holy Spirit or not. I would consider the ability to play basketball a talent, not a gift. You can definitely use your talent to the glory of God. We should not simply attend church and stop there; we need to use our spiritual gifts to bless those that God puts in our path.

There are different categories of gifts in the Bible. Here are some spiritual gifts Paul talks about in Romans 12:4-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:

Prophecy

Serving Others

Teaching

Encouraging Others

Giving

Leadership

Showing Kindness

Healing

Discernment

Speaking in Tongues

Interpretation of Tongues

The Spirit decides who gets what gift, however we are told we can desire gifts as well and pray to function in them. These gifts are supposed to be used to encourage the church. As children of God, we ought to discover our gifts and start using them to encourage people around us. In the next chapter, I hope to use my gift of teaching to encourage you and show you the limits of science and philosophy. With the increase of knowledge all around us, we need to remember we still need Jesus.

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:28-30).

If we keep using what God has blessed us with, God will bless us with more. But if we do not use what God has given us, we will lose what we currently have. Jesus talked about this in

the parable of the talents. Our gifts and abilities operate differently than the way natural resources operate. When you use gasoline, it decreases in quantity, but when you use the gifts and abilities that God has given you, you gain more.

God blesses us with different gifts and abilities, so we should not compare ourselves with other people. If you want to know how a productive something can be or should be, do not compare it to another copy of its kind. It will be better to compare it with the original plan the creator of the thing had in mind. If you want to know how effective you can be for God, please do not compare yourself with other people, instead ask God to show you what He wants you to do and please start doing it. The answer lies in the Bible. God gives us different gifts, which are to be used to His glory and for the edification of the church.

### **The Issue of Identity**

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalms 139:13-14).

There is no one whom God creates that is useless. God created each of us with gifts and abilities, which we are supposed to use

to encourage the church. Let me show this with deductive reasoning:

1. Every intended creation comes with a plan and purpose for its existence from its creator.
2. The human race is an intended creation.
3. The human race comes with a plan and purpose from God, the Creator.

Some people are told they are useless, and this makes them sad and ineffective, but according to the Bible no one is useless. God will love to use you for His Glory as long as you are willing to trust in Him and hand your will over to Him. You can either live for self or for God's glory.

In a factory, if you have good resources and equipment, you are more likely to be able to build a solid machine than if you have few resources or poor equipment. God has unlimited resources, and He designs and builds people the way He wants. The best way to know how to serve Him is to ask Him to reveal His plan to you. God has blessed all his children with gifts; let us not feel inferior to anyone. Instead, encourage those God brings along your path.

Let me remind you that it is not how much you do that matters, but how and why you do what you do. If you choose to do many things for the Lord, give your best in the many things you do. If you have discovered only a few gifts and you want to

do fewer things for the Lord, remember to give your best in the little. Give your best and excel in all you choose to do to the glory of God.

During my high school days, I struggled with my identity, though not many people noticed this. I felt others were better than me, and this made me seek approval with the people I spent time with. This view of me started changing when I got into tenth grade. I started looking at myself differently. I started appreciating myself for who God made me to be, and I also started appreciating other people for who God had created them to be recognizing that we all had strengths and weaknesses and no one was perfect. I learned that I was not the only person who had weaknesses but we all have weaknesses and this is one of the reasons we need to seek God. In 2006, I wrote a poem addressing this issue of identity. I came to realize that what others thought about me was not important and all that mattered was what God thought about me. As I matured in my faith, I came to realize that my identity could only be found in my Savior, Jesus Christ. Now I am happy to know that my identity is found in the One who cannot fail. Humans can fail you, but the One who will never fail you and me is our Creator. Now I appreciate those around me even more because I realized that He made us for a purpose which is to glorify Him. This poem is a reminder for us to remain humble as we serve others because they were created for a purpose.

The answer to our quest for identity and worth is found when we come to know who we truly are, not as described by ourselves but as described by the One who gave us the ability to understand the meaning of worth and how to appreciate it. It is in Him that we truly come to know who we are.

### **When You Know Who You Are**

When you know who you are

You will not want to be someone else, because God made you to be who you are.

When you know who you are

You will not think of yourself being inferior to anyone else, because you are uniquely designed by God to be you.

When you know who you are

You will not consciously be jealous or envious of other people's achievement, because God has blessed you with your own resources. Instead encourage people to use their gifts.

When you know who you are

You will not be intimidated or oppressed by anyone.

When you know who you are

You will not be shaken or stoppable.

When you know who you are

You will never want to be pitied.

When you know who you are

You will not have any reason to fear.

When you know who you are  
You will not respond to mere insults.

When you know who you are  
You will not want to be worshiped; instead you will give God  
the glory.

When you know who you are  
You will love to serve others with your gifts

When you know who you are  
You will give thanks and praises to God  
(Psalms 139, Psalms 100, Romans 12)

It is only when you know who you are in Christ that you can serve Him with what He has given you to His glory. Find out who you are in Christ and enjoy being God's own child and make Him pleased.

Part of living a purposeful life involves ministering to other people. No matter what phase of life you are in, it is important to remember to think of others.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

-Matthew 28:18-20

We have to seek to the truth so we don't call people into something that is not Christianity. Notice Jesus does not tell us to make good people. He said **Make Disciples**. Notice what Paul says about his goal in dealing with men.

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: **Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus**: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.”

-Colossians 1:25-29

If we do not put our focus on Christ and call men and women to focus on Christ, we can end up doing a lot of good things but not things that Christ has called us to do.

The expectation we have of others can affect how we teach them and what we believe that they are capable of accomplishing.

When we are seeking to minister to others who might be followers of Christ, let us not lower the bar. I notice this especially with young people where we assume they are incapable of being responsible, so we don't expect much from them. But the Holy Spirit can dwell in the life of a young person

and when he dwells in their life, they are capable of doing amazing things as he works in and through them. They can walk in their True identity no matter how old they are. That identity of course is that of a Child of God.

### **Practical Applications**

1. If you do not know your spiritual gifts, please spend time praying and try taking a spiritual gift inventory. There are different versions of the list of gifts, so make sure you find one that is built on the Bible. God wants you to use what He has blessed you with.
2. Always remember that you are defined by what God says and not what the world says. You are special and valuable in the Lord's sight, and that is all that matters.
3. Never get tired of using what God has blessed you with.
4. Encourage those around you to start using what God has given them.

Take a look at the questions from *Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living* to learn more about servitude.<sup>xiv</sup>

### **Questions from the Charles Stanley Handbook**

1. How can you plug in and get your gifts functioning in a way that maximizes your contribution to the body of Christ?

2. Do you tend to be a spiritual lone ranger? If so begin today praying that God will give you a desire to be interdependent with the body of Christ.
3. Have you identified the areas in which the Holy Spirit has especially gifted you?

#### Songs To Consider

Britt Nicole: "Set The World On Fire"

Hymn by Francis Ridley Havergal: "Take My Life and Let It Be"

## **Chapter 8- Apologetics: Serving God in an Age of Science and Philosophy**

Bible Reading: Lessons for Christian Conduct and Speech

(2 Timothy 2:23-26)

“Though these bodies may indeed continue in their orbits by the mere laws of gravity, yet they could by no means have at first derived the regular position of the orbits themselves from those laws. Thus, this most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the council and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.” —Sir Isaac Newton, *Principia*

According to the 1939 Webster dictionary, philosophy is the love of wisdom and also the science which investigates the facts and principles of reality and of human nature and conduct. It is comprised of logic, aesthetics, metaphysics and the theory of knowledge. Philosophy is basically concerned with discovering ultimate reality and truth. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are referred to as the big three in philosophy.

Science is a branch of study concerned with observation and classification of facts, especially with the establishment of verifiable general laws, chiefly by hypothesis and induction. In this chapter, I want to show you how you can serve God in a time where people are beginning to put their faith and trust in science and philosophy. The battle for the minds of people is a spiritual one, because there is no way science or philosophy can

disprove the existence of God. God existed before science and philosophy came into existence, and since He is eternal, nothing can disprove His existence. I hope to show you how science and philosophy point us to God and not away from Him. We should use them to His glory.

Before I proceed, I want to explain a very important concept in logic and philosophy. This law that I will be discussing is important because if it is disobeyed, we cannot understand the importance of anything. Here is one of the laws of logic (and you can find more details in a logic textbook): the law of non-contradiction. This law simply states that two statements that contradict themselves cannot both be true at the same time in the same context. For example, if I ask you whether the Christian God exists now, you have to answer either yes or no, because if you say both, it will not make any sense. The Christian God either exists or He doesn't. Some believe that science and philosophy will one day disprove God's existence, as though God's existence depends on these fields.

### **Examining Science**

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalms 19:1).

“The existence of a limit to science is, however, made clear by its inability to answer child-like elementary questions having to do with first and last things—questions such as ‘how did

everything begin?', 'what are we all here for?', 'what is the point of living?'" —Sir Peter Medawar, *God's Undertaker*<sup>v</sup>

"I am not postulating a 'God of the gaps,' a god merely to explain th things that science has not yet explained. I am postulating a God to explain why science explains; I do not deny that science explains, but I postulate God to explain why science explains." —Richard Swinburne

Science tries to provide explanations and mechanisms to the order that is observed in the universe. It is like a tool. According to the Christian faith, science is a tool given to us by God; a way in which we can study the universe He has given to us. However, it is not wise to say that the tools the creator of a system creates could disprove his existence. That is what people are saying when they forget that God created the world with a certain plan in mind. We see this in different fields. To understand how God relates to science, here is an illustration:

When you put a person in a room and give him a computer system to play with, he will play with the different keys and see what they do when he pushes them. For example:

Ctrl. + A = highlights everything in a document

Ctrl. + B = makes the font in a document bold

Ctrl. + C = copies a document

Ctrl. + S = saves a document

When these combinations are discovered, the person might start wondering why certain combinations of keys do different things.

The only answer to that question is that someone programmed the computer to do what it does. This is the way it is in science.

Science discovers things that conform to reality. In science we learn that the body needs a certain pH to function properly. The question we don't consider is: Why that pH? Is it because of chance, or did someone program it to be that way? Science only helps us find the optimal pH and temperature, but it cannot tell us why those values are what they are. God is the agent that can explain why such values need to be what they are. However, knowing God is behind it does not stop us from learning more about it through science. In his book *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*, Professor Lennox explains this concept by saying that knowing Mr. Ford or the maker of a specific type of car should not stop you from studying the mechanism of the car. Science deals with mechanisms without saying much about the agency.

God is the programmer of the universe we are trying to study. The person playing with the computer will not understand why his computer works as it does without the frame of reference of knowing that someone programmed it, just like we won't ultimately understand any of our discoveries without God as a frame of reference. When the person discovers the different programmed keys, he has found something that conforms to reality for the computer. Science and philosophy help us look at

things that conform to reality. God is the one who created reality to be what it is.

We can keep studying the works of His hand, but it would be unwise to say the works of His hand disprove His existence. It is because of Him that everything we know or don't know makes sense. He gives us the ability to understand, and we see this in philosophy, but all the tools should at the end of the day serve to bring glory to Him. Whatever we do, let us make sure we give Him the glory.

It is interesting that Isaac Newton was willing to acknowledge the limits of science even though he made great discoveries (see his quote above). However, there are many modern-day scientists and philosophers who do not want to acknowledge how limited science and philosophy are.

The very thing that gives scientists credibility could be lost when we come to realize that science itself has limitations. Science deals with things that can be quantified. What can be seen can be quantified, but the invisible feelings and beliefs we hold are unquantifiable. To dwell in the realm of the quantifiable (science) alone is narrow-minded and weak. True faith, hope and love are unquantifiable, but they are the three inevitable things that everyone ends up looking for in life.

The question of evolution and its limits is one of the hottest topics in science and philosophy, and because of the dynamic nature of the debate, I will include a link on the website

of books that address this issue thoroughly, and also include resources that can help explain the importance of the debate. Again with a proper understanding of the law of noncontradiction we see that humans as we know them today are either a result of chance or they are a product of a Creator. There are many views on the origin of the universe, and the website will explain the different views.

### **Examining Philosophy**

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”

(Colossians 2:8).

God has put enough into the world to make faith in Him a most reasonable thing. But He has left enough out to make it impossible to live by sheer reason alone.” —Ravi Zacharias

According to Del Tackett from The Truth Project,<sup>xvi</sup> a worldview is a comprehensive set of truth claims that serves to drive what you think about reality. Everyone has a worldview, and Dr. Ravi Zacharias says that we come to hold to our worldview by answering four basic questions:

- Where did I come from? (Origin)
- What is the meaning of life? (Meaning)
- What is the standard for morality? (Morality)

- What happens after I die? (Destiny)

The answers you provide to these four questions (origin, meaning, morality and destiny) will shape how you live. Dr. Zacharias goes on to say that the answers we provide to these questions must be correspondingly true and, as a whole, coherent. Everyone has a worldview. Just as Christianity is a worldview, so are atheism and postmodernism. The main point here is that the reason why a worldview is true is not because a person believes in it. The reason why a worldview is true is that it matches with reality. Christianity matches with reality in describing the condition of humanity and providing a solution to man's needs. If you spend time studying the Bible, God's Word, you will see that it is consistent, has verifiable facts and is relevant to everyone on the face of the earth.

Here is a very good description of truth by Dr. Paul Copan: "Truth has an objective existence. It has universal application. Truth is true—even if no one knows it. Truth is true—even if no one admits it. Truth is true—even if no one agrees what it is. Truth is true—even if no one follows it. Truth is true—even if no one but God grasps it fully."<sup>xvii</sup>

The Christian worldview is true. It answers the four questions in a coherent manner. The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Origin: Genesis 1:1). The Bible goes on to tell us that we were created to worship God and give him glory in all we do (Meaning:

Revelation 4:11, 1 Corinthians 10:31). Our morals are based on the teachings of the Bible, and Jesus helped to provide a summary for how we ought to live (Morality: Mark 12:29-31). He said we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and also love our neighbors as ourselves. Finally the Bible reminds us that when we die, we will either go to heaven or hell (Destiny: Hebrews 9:27). There is no middle ground.

I plead with you to examine your worldview and make sure it falls in line with what Jesus said, because He made it clear that He was and is the only way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except through Him. A statement that is true cannot be arrogant, so if Jesus' statement is true then we had better start living in line with what He taught. Jesus called Himself the bread of life and the water of life. Just as we need bread and water, we need Jesus. He is the reason for all seasons.

A very important question in philosophy has to do with how one can know anything. This is a fundamental question in epistemology (the field of philosophy that focuses on the nature and scope of knowledge). There are times we think we know things only to realize later that we did not know what we thought we knew. According to the Bible, it is because the all-knowing God reveals things to us that we can know. Since He is all-knowing, what He says is true and cannot be refuted. I will put more on epistemology on the book's website.

One of the most important questions anyone in the world will answer is “Who is Jesus?” According to the Bible, Jesus is our only hope and it is in Him alone we can find joy, peace and eternal life (John 10:10). Do not allow science or philosophy from holding you back as you pursue excellence. I pray you will always remember to give God glory as He gives you the ability to comprehend the beauty of his creation.

When Jesus was leaving, He gave us some homework to do. We ought to tell people about Jesus and remind them that He is coming back again. He gave us the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20). As one preacher once said you cannot evangelize in heaven, so you need to get up now and start telling people the truth in love.

### **Practical Applications**

1. Do your best to analyze the ideas you hear in school. They might sound intelligent on the surface, but make sure you examine them before accepting them.
2. As you learn science and philosophy, check with the Bible to make sure things are in line with it. The Bible is the Truth, and it is God's Word. Any philosophy that tries to stand against it will eventually fail.
3. Invest in books that will help you learn how to defend the faith.
4. Remember to teach people the truth in love. Correct people gently. Apologetics involves learning and it could make a person proud; be careful not to get proud and look down on others because of what you know.

## **Chapter 9- Daniel: An Example of Excellence and Purpose**

Bible Reading: The Story of Daniel (Daniel Chapters 1-6)

“So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Daniel 6:28).

“It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.” —A.W. Tozer

In this chapter, I want to show you how Daniel excelled to the glory of God. I hope you will spend some time reading the book of Daniel, at least the first six chapters.

### **Lessons From The Life of Daniel**

Through reading the book of Daniel, I learned that Daniel was a man who pursued excellence and excelled in all he did. Here are some ways that Daniel excelled:

- Daniel excelled by standing out (Daniel 1:8-14). Daniel and his friends chose not to eat the food in the king’s palace. This was because the food was sacrificed to idols.
- Daniel excelled by giving God glory (Daniel 2:19-23). When God revealed the meaning of the king’s dream to Daniel, Daniel gave God the glory.
- Daniel excelled by using his talents and abilities (Daniel 2:24-25). Daniel was willing to use his gift of interpretations for the glory of God.

- Daniel excelled by acknowledging God in his endeavors (Daniel 2:27-30). Daniel made it clear that it was God who enabled him to do what he did.
- Daniel excelled by doing the right thing without expecting incentives (Daniel 5:17). Daniel told Belshazzar to keep his gifts and then he told him what his dream meant.
- Daniel excelled by depending on God and remaining bold (Daniel 6:10). Even after the king said that no one should pray to any other god, Daniel went home and prayed to the God of heaven. Daniel was ready to get into trouble for the glory of God.
- Daniel excelled by being humble (Daniel 9). Daniel offered prayers to God and admitted that they had sinned against God. His prayer was focused on God, and his prayer showed that he was a man of faith. Daniel placed his confidence in the right place.

If you want to excel, I want to encourage you to be like Daniel by giving your best and giving God the glory. If you do the best in what you choose to do, people will notice and wonder.

#### **Similarities Between Daniel's Time and Ours**

Daniel's generation is similar to ours, because people were persecuted for trusting in God. However, Daniel and his friends

stood for the truth. They were willing to swim against the current.

Daniel had friends who also believed what he believed. They were willing to follow the narrow way. We need to spend time with people who are willing to obey God. It is always helpful to have people who can support us when we do the right thing.

As you read the first six chapters of Daniel, you will see that he excelled in many ways:

- He remembered to pray.
- He remembered to use what God had given him for God's glory.
- He had friends who were willing to obey God.
- He stood for the truth even when it meant death or persecution.

In Daniel 6, we are told that Daniel was trustworthy and it was difficult for people to find something against him. I pray you will live your life in such a way that people will wonder why you live the way you live. This will be an opportunity to tell them of God's grace. The Bible tells us to be ready at all times to present the gospel. Do not be afraid, put your trust in God and ask Him to help you live a life of excellence.

I pray you will give God the glory as you excel in your everyday walk with Him. Daniel served God in his generation. In what way will you serve God and excel to His glory?

### **Practical Applications**

1. Make time to read the book of Daniel to learn what God did in his life and the lives of his friends.
2. Try to spend time studying specific Bible characters to see what God did through them when they chose to serve Him with all their hearts.
3. Spend time praying and asking God to help you become the person He wants you to be.
4. Read about Joseph (Genesis 39) and see other ways you can stand for the truth

### **Song To Consider**

Newsboys: "I'm Not Ashamed"

## **Chapter 9- Conclusion: Finishing Strong**

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 3:7-14

“A strong beginning is a good thing when coupled with a strong finishing.” —Mary Kay

I want to emphasize that I have not achieved excellence. It is an ongoing pursuit, but I am going to continue pursuing it because God has called me to and in obeying someone will be blessed. I am writing to encourage you to pursue excellence, just as I have been encouraged by others to do the same. I pray you will do this in every area of your life, and that you would encourage others throughout your life.

One of my favorite hobbies is debating. I love exchanging ideas with people and hearing what they have to say. While doing this I have come to learn some valuable lessons. One of the lessons is that it is okay to agree to disagree. However, keep in mind what Socrates said: “It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” Are you letting what you hear affect how you live? This is very important, because some of the things you will learn in this world and even in your schools are lies, because they go against the teachings of Jesus. Jesus knows what is best for us, so He is the one we should listen to, not philosophies that are self-destructive and dangerous. Even if the philosophies look good at first, it is important that you do not get carried away. Solomon put it well when he said, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him” (Proverbs

18:17). Learn to examine what people tell you, because people often close their minds to any idea you present to them. Do your best to present your case in a gentle manner and pray for those who might not agree with you.

A statement that is true is not arrogant. A person could present the statement in an arrogant manner, but the statement in and of itself is true. The *truth* about anything remains true regardless of whether everyone chooses to accept it or not. In Mathematics,  $1+1=2$  (in base 10), not because your teacher said it, but because it is true, which leads your teacher to teach it. If you disagree with what I have said, examine it by what is true. If what I am saying is true, then there are implications to not believing it. If you know anyone who might disagree with the facts I have presented in this book, please encourage them gently to look at the evidence for themselves. Remember to pray for them and ask God to open their eyes to understand the truth in His word.

The bottom line in all of this is the effects things can have in our lives. Let me give an example. I have heard people say that if you cannot see something, then that thing does not exist. This is a problematic assumption because we cannot see our *thoughts*, but that does not mean our thoughts don't exist. Most people believe they think because they see the effects of it. The effects are very important. We might not be able to see God, but that does not mean He does not exist. We see the effects of

His existence, especially in a transformed life. We also see the effects of His existence through His creation and blessings upon us. Be careful not to allow your presuppositions to affect how far you go in life.

For those who believe they have or almost have achieved excellence, I want to encourage you to please keep going, keep growing, keep gaining wisdom, and please stay on track in the pursuit of excellence.

Earlier in the book, I referred to the verse that tells us to remember God in the days of our youth, and I want to end by saying: hold on to God throughout your stay in life. He will never let you down. I don't want you to be like me. I want you to be like Jesus. He is the epitome of Excellence and Purpose. It is only by being like Him we can use the abilities He has given us to His glory. It is only when we start knowing Him that we can really pursue excellence the right way. When we start to see and understand the big picture, we begin to see things God's way and start living for God's glory. Here are some words from Solomon's conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes: "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

If you are like me, you have come to realize you might have failed in one way or another; I want to encourage you to get

up and try again. Mistakes can either break us or make us grow stronger. Do not allow mistakes to break you. It is never too late to excel to the glory of God. An acknowledgement of failure is the first step in recovering and excelling after we have accepted our faults.

Make time to listen and learn from people who care about you and are willing to tell you the truth. Take out time daily to go through your activities to see if they are helping you grow or not. The pursuit of excellence requires constant check-ups. Take it one day at a time and give your best every day to the glory of God. I pray God meets you where you are, and that He reveals Himself to you more and more as you continue to pursue excellence in all you do.

I will conclude with the words of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who said that the two most important commandments were to love God and love people. I believe nothing else really matters; we need to show our love for God by the way we worship Him and Fear Him and then our love and care for those around us. Seek to use the all that God has given you to do what He has called you to do for His Glory. May God bless you richly as you seek to be more like Christ and live purposeful lives for His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

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## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> Lewis, Clive Staples. *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001 edition).

<sup>ii</sup> Dunham, William. *Journey Through Genius* (New York: Penguin Groups, 1990).

<sup>iii</sup> Lewis, Clive Staples. *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001 edition).

<sup>iv</sup> Lewis, Clive Staples. *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001 edition), 203-204.

<sup>v</sup> I self-published a short book, *Achieving Excellence As a Young Person*, in 2006 while waiting for my admission to college. There are very few copies available today.

<sup>vi</sup> You can learn more about deductive reasoning from books that talk about logic.

<sup>vii</sup> Chambers, Oswald. *The Love of God* (Michigan: Discovery House Publishers, 1988 edition).

<sup>viii</sup> Zacharias, Dr. Ravi. *Can Man Live Without God* (W Publishing Group, 2004).

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<sup>ix</sup> Stanley, Charles. *Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living* (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

<sup>x</sup> Beale, G.K. *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (InterVarsity Press, 2008).

<sup>xi</sup> Stanley, Charles. *Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living* (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

<sup>xii</sup> Yancey, Phillip. *Prayer* (Discovery House Publishers, 2006).

<sup>xiii</sup> Here are two books that help explain why the Bible is true: *Seven Reasons You Can Trust the Bible*, by Erwin Lutzer, and *Inerrancy*, by Norman Geisler.

<sup>xiv</sup> Stanley, Charles. *Charles Stanley's Handbook for Christian Living* (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996).

<sup>xv</sup> Lennox, John. *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (London, England: Lion Hudson, 2007).

<sup>xvi</sup> Tackett, Del. The Truth Project, <http://www.thetruthproject.org/> (accessed 7/1/09).

<sup>xvii</sup> Copan, Dr. Paul. *True For Me But Not For You* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1998).