

Dwelling In His Presence:

**Spiritual Disciplines To
Deepen Your Walk with God**



by Rhonda Jones

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About the Author

Rhonda Jones, (aka. The Christian Meditator), is the creator of over 25 Christ-centered meditation and affirmation CDs and the author of the 10-week Christian self-development, *Detox Your Life and Awaken Your Inner Spirit*.



In addition to her popular website, <http://www.thechristianmeditator.com>, Rhonda hosts annual Christian meditation retreats where participants learn a variety of Christ-centered meditation techniques and discover the profound benefits of Biblically-based meditation and dwelling in God's presence.

It was meditation integrated with the scriptures that helped Rhonda overcome years of depression. Now her ministry reaches thousands of Christians world-wide who have been touched by her guided meditations and teachings.

Learn more about The Christian Meditator by visiting her websites:

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Introduction

My desire in life is that all Christians really know God. Knowing God is a process. It is a spiritual progression of growth towards the divine. It is inexhaustible and never ending. In fact, while we live on the earth, it is never fully attainable. Yet, in seeking to know God more fully, we become more of who Christ created us to be, we have a greater understand our pilgrimage on the earth, we adopt more of the fruits of God's spirit, and we begin to possess a sense of joy and fulfillment deep in our heart.

The Journey Began

In 1996 after having been a Christian since my college days, my life changed one evening, an evening that began no different than any other. I was sitting at ***Thank God Its Friday Restaurant*** with the man of my dreams. The man I thought I would spend my life with. As we were talking amongst the busyness and buzzing in the room I began to sense a strange feeling. It was like everything came to a standstill and God put the spotlight on me. Then he said in a voice so clearly, "Rhonda, what are you doing here, this is not the life I have called for you." He said it again. Although I behaved as if nothing happened. God spoke to me that night and within one month my relationship ended and my life spiraled down into deep despair. Then God began to build me back up. This Ebook is about my journey to wholeness and eventually ministry.

I've been a Christian for over 20 years now. My salvation began at the age of 20. I didn't grow up in a Christian home and rarely attended church. I was a child of the world, fully indoctrinated in the ways of sin and polluted by the world's concepts and principles. Giving my life to Jesus truly transformed me into a new person and sent me down a new path of discovery.

From the day of my salvation I was an avid church goer. I never missed a Sunday Service, attended mid-week bible study, participated in outreach meetings, taught Sunday School, was a member of the Young Women's Group, and hosted small group meetings. I could go on and on, but to limit space, let's just say I was deeply involved in every facet of the church at one

time or another. I made many friends, enjoyed ongoing fellowship with the saints, and loved being a part of a large extended family.

Yet, about 12 years into my high profile church existence a longing began in my heart. In the deepest crevices of my soul, something was missing. I began to find fault with the church and blame my discontentment on my surroundings. It wasn't anything the pastor was or wasn't doing or the church wasn't offering. The messages become mundane and lost their excitement. So I went on a journey to find the perfect church or environment that would restore that missing piece. Several years past and I never found it. Going to church became routine for me. I went because I had always gone, except the enthusiasm wasn't there any more. Each week to me was like sitting through Algebra class. I couldn't wait until it was over and questioned why I was even there.

But it was also during this time that transformation and change began. As I spent less time in church, I spent more time with God. I spent more time in silence. I spent more time listening. It was also a time characterized by pain and aloneness, sometimes loneliness, a somewhat desert and barren experience. It was during this time that God's voice became clearer to me. Then one day, many years ago, He said as I stood in a crowded room, "Rhonda, what are you doing here, this is not the life I chose for you." And within 2 months of that calling my life changed forever.

I can't say that I've been happy about all that has occurred during that time, but I can tell you that my love and intimacy with God has increased, and interestingly it had nothing to do with attending church. Instead my greatest growth and maturity came from depending on God through what appeared to be unbearable circumstances, times of isolation, hours of devouring the scriptures, and learning to "be still and get to know God" for myself. That is why I wrote this book, which is an chapter of a larger (unpublished) book I wrote in 2001, title, "***Don't Go Back to Egypt.***" Creating Greater Intimacy with God will provide you with tools and knowledge to draw closer to God and give Him the opportunity to draw closer to you. I'm sure that you will identify with many of my experiences as God courts us to a greater love relationship with him.

The book incorporates my personal experience, the Word of God, and biblical principles to enhancing your relationship with God. Subchapters include the following topics:

***Developing Intimacy with God,
Moses on the Mountain top,
The Holy Spirit the Messenger of Truth,***

***Journaling Your Spiritual Progress,
Finding Time for Solitude,
Purified By the Word,
Quieting a Restless Mind,
Prayer-the Catalyst for Change,
Spiritual Breathing,
The Company You Keep,
Forgiving Yourself
Entering God's Presence Through Praise
Ever Increasing Faith.***

(may not be in this order).

Developing Intimacy with God

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) It is only through abiding with Christ that we can do anything of significance in this life. But what exactly does it mean to abide in Christ? Webster's definitions of "abiding" mean to "rest" and "reside." When you reside with someone you occupy the same space. You spend time with that person both formally and informally. You talk to them and enjoy their company. Christ is not to be like a next-door neighbor that we visit from time to time. He wants to live in your house with you. Your house referring to your mind, body, and spirit.

It is only by God's grace and unmerited favor that blood flows through our bodies and air through our lungs. However, God wants to do more in our life than to sustain our physical body. Just as the vine produces the nourishment and growth for the branches, God wants us to rely upon him for all that we need.

You would never consider ignoring a family member or special guest who lived in your home. Yet, how many times are we guilty of neglecting our relationship with God except on Sunday morning or when a crisis arises? I began to make a mental checklist of how much time I devoted each day to

knowing God and growing my spiritual muscles. Even as Christians, we can go days, weeks, even months without spending quality time in this area.

Everything- children, husbands, jobs, hobbies, even church activities choke out spiritual nourishing time. But Christ made an absolute statement. "Apart from me you can do nothing." We may be expending a lot of time and energy on what we consider meaningful pursuits, but if it's not God directed it may not count for much.

Often times we're spinning our wheels devoting our energy on efforts that God may have never intended us to do. We're just doing what we do today because we did it yesterday and the day before, never taking inventory as to what our true purpose might be. If we want to bear fruit, God's joy, peace and blessings, we must learn to abide. "This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8)

We have become a generation of doers. But branches don't do, they abide. Branches can't even bear fruit without the vine. We can't "do" for God until we know God in a personal way. It is only through intimate and close encounters with God that we can even comprehend God's leading and direction. Without it, we're just hitting and missing. Sometimes were on target, but more often than not, were totally missing the mark. As our intimacy with God increases as we learn to abide in him, out of our being will come meaningful doing. God said we will find him when we seek him with all our hearts. (Jeremiah 29:13) The good news is that God is just waiting to reveal himself to us. We don't have to look that far.

Zacchaeus a tax collector climbed up in a tree. It was an obscure place to be found, but He wanted to see Jesus. No doubt there were a multitude of people around who desired the attention of almighty God as well, but there was a need in Zacchaeus that out-weighted the others. (Luke 19)

Out of the entire crowd, Jesus headed for Zacchaeus in that tree. He said to him, "Zacchaeus come down, today I will spend time with you at your house." God wants to come to your house too. Inside your house you shut out the rest of the crowd. You see Jesus face to face. No buffers, no preachers, no music, no sermon. Just you and Jesus. Zacchaeus could have stayed in the tree and just listened, but that wouldn't have been the same as a personal visit at home. When Zacchaeus became acquainted with Jesus he was a changed man. If we haven't changed, then maybe we just know about Him, but we don't really know him.

When we know Jesus we have a compelling desire to live righteously and holy. When Zacchaeus met him, he told Jesus that whomever he cheated he would pay back double and if he had wronged anyone he would make it right again. There is no indication that God told him to do these things. There is no indication that a long sermon preceding Zacchaeus's decision. When we have a true encounter with God we will never be the same.

But why do many people hear a potentially life changing message and walk out the door and keep doing what they've always done. It's because they've never had a real encounter with God. We may go to church, but never know God in a personal and intimate way.

Take the example of a pastor of a large church. Each week he prepares powerful messages to encourage and inspire us. He may use his life as an example and tell us anecdotes about his experiences. You know his name, his family and even where he lives. You may see him occasionally at the shopping mall and recognize him but he may vaguely know you at all. You volunteer at the church, busy trying to make an impression and give of your time and service. You see him, hear him speak, are in his vicinity most of the time, and may exchange a pleasant word now and then.

In reality you are no more of an acquaintance. You know of him, but you don't really know him. Though he may see you from time to time, he doesn't know you either. He probably doesn't even know your name. You could continue to be in this church for 5 years, faithfully attending services and in his immediate presence and never really know this man of God. Even if you pass the acquaintance mark and become friends, unless you spend a considerably amount of time with him, you still only know bits and pieces about the man.

That is how most of us who profess to be Christian live our lives. We're around Christian circles, hear Christian messages, can speak Christian jargon, and know Christian tradition, without the opportunity of ever really getting to know the founder of Christianity in a personal way. Jesus came not only to establish His kingdom on earth, but also to come into our house as well as our heart and give us the opportunity to know him personally!

It's mind-boggling that in the last days many will say, "Lord, Lord did I not do all these wonderful works in your name. Then God will say, depart from me...I never knew you." (Matthew 7:23) Some Christians think because they go to church from time to time, read a few Bible passages now and then, say prayers before eating and going to bed at night that they're really doing something. All we're doing is fooling ourselves.

Contrary to what we might believe, our spiritual growth is not just predicated on church attendance either. It's not easy to get personal with another person in a crowd of people. Intimacy develops from being alone, talking at length, and being genuinely interested in the other person.

In some cases, I believe church attendance can become a hindrance to our spiritual growth if we solely rely upon it for the spiritual nourishment we need in order to grow. For the most part, many churches are nothing more than weekly social clubs. They do not deliberately set out to stifle our intimacy with God, but if we're not careful that is exactly what can happen.

We can get so bogged down doing for God and the church that we neglect the very relationship we say we want to cultivate.

Moses spent forty days on a mountain with the Lord, listening and conversing with Him. In fact, God told Moses that no one could come upon the mountain with him. God wanted Moses all to himself. When he came down from the mountain God's presence was all over him.

My church I attended had awesome praise and worship unto the Lord and dynamic teaching. I always left church filling full and uplifted. But if two hours per week was the only time I devote to spending time with God, then I'm going to be spiritually starving most of the time. In some ways, we've become too dependent on church for our spiritual diet. What would happen should church buildings disappear tomorrow? Would we walk away and back to our old life, or desperately begin to seek God to attain a new level of intimacy on our own?

It's sad to say, but church has limited power because too many of its members are spiritually bankrupt. We've been living on the sensationalism and bright lights of Christianity without any real depth. True spiritual growth is usually the result of hardship, suffering, and time spent alone with God. Life changes usually occurred in solitude and separation. Jesus withdrew alone to the mountains every morning for extended prayer. (Matthew 14:23)

Church creates an atmosphere for us to fellowship with other Christians, receive encouragement, meet the needs of the saints and community, disciple new believers, minister to the lost, and learn more about God through his word. Many times pastors can help us to interpret difficult passages and discover teachings about God's word that were formerly unfamiliar to us. Thank God for churches and all the needs they meet in the lives of saint and unbelievers! Unfortunately, too many Christians rely only on the presentation from the pulpit to help them grow

spiritually in Christ, and by doing so never develop into the men or women of God, Christ intended us to be.

Though we never want to put God in a box, we're less likely to hear all God wants to say to us in a church service. A word in due season may inspire us to seek more knowledge in a particular area, but before that knowledge can become a part of us, we must apply it to our life through practical application. Through these growing pains we see our life deepening in its relationship to our creator. As we go to God in times of needs and distress, His word says that He hears and comforts us

Without experiencing God working directly on our behalf, our walk is all based on theory. It's hearsay. We don't really know what God can do for us because we've only heard what others have testified. If we are to grow spiritually, we must experience the love and power of God for ourselves. Job who had only known God on the peripheral before suffering great loss said at the end of his encounter, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." (Job 42:5)

Knowing about God, instead of actually knowing God characterizes the life of too many believers. I knew what it meant to be a Christian, I knew many scriptures, I even knew how to live a relatively moral life. But knowing God, talking to God when I wasn't asking for something, and fellowshiping with God? How can you know or do that with someone you can't even see? I could sense God's prompting and leading from time to time but still He was a long way off, up in heaven somewhere.

It wasn't until I reached the end of my rope and had no where else to go to find peace and comfort that I turned my attention wholeheartedly to Jesus. It was then that I discovered the possibility to know God as a Father and friend. In the past when I needed advice or comfort I'd turn to earthly friends, but they could no longer take away the pain I was experiencing. So I did what I've heard over and over again in songs and the Bible, take all my

troubles and cares to the Lord. As I did this, I felt comforted. As I did it more, I experienced God speaking to and ministering to my spirit. It finally came to a point that I took everything to the Lord. Some days I'd sit on the couch and say, "Lord, we need to talk. I'm not feeling too good right now and I need to tell you about it." I may sit there for 20 minutes having a heart to heart with Jesus. He had become like my best girlfriend. My love for him grew more than I ever thought possible. Jesus is more real to me now than my circumstances. I sense his presence throughout my day. But for years prior he was a God who lived off in the distance.

When God speaks to me, it's not in an audible voice, though I suppose he could, but more often than not it comes in impressions in my heart and spirit. Sometimes without even a word, I know exactly what he's telling me. I submerge with his consciousness in brief moments and share in his wisdom and understanding. But it took landing in the desert to finally see him, recognize him and get to know him. And I could never live my life with him in the shadows again.

Our spiritual growth is predicated on us spending time alone with ourselves and our God. A branch is in constant connection with the vine for protection, nourishment and in essence, life. The branch can't support itself. Cut the branch off and it will wither up and die. There's more to life than physical death. The majority of the human race is spiritually dead; cut off from the truth. Walking with God is not a ritual; it's not a habit or even a tradition. It hasn't much to do with whether you are a Baptist, Methodist or Pentecostal. It's a way of life. A life that seeks its direction, substance and support from the only qualified source.

Walking with God is a lifestyle. It's not a crash course or even a temporary diet. You don't stop once you think you've reached your plateau. You can't cram in enough spiritual knowledge to carry you through the rest of your

life. It's depleteable. Why? Because almost everything in life is pulling you in the opposite direction. Just look around you. Western civilization values what they can see (which is temporary) over what can't be seen (which is eternal.) You are going against the grain to break away from this predetermined course.

It's easy to lose your way if you are not in constant connection to the source, which is also characterized by the truth. As human spirits in a physical body, we are limited in our knowledge. The Bible says we see through a glass darkly. What looks good and feels good may not be good for us. In fact, it can be disastrous. It's egotistical to rely on our human wisdom for all the answers.

But God didn't intend for us to. Christ didn't leave us on this earth alone, but sent us a comforter to live and abide in us and teach us all truth that he heard from the Father.

God is not some pie in the sky. The Bible tells us not to look for God in heaven or even under the earth, but that the kingdom of God is within us. (Luke 17:21) Within us is the answer to all life dilemmas. It doesn't come from us, but from God, whose spirit is dwelling within us, once we invite Him in.

Moses on the Mountain Top

Moses and God had one of the most unique relationships in the Bible. He had found favor with God and spent a generous amount of time in His presence. Moses said to God in Exodus 33:12- "You have said, ' I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' 'If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.'" In verse 19 the Lord said to Moses, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence." Moses went up to Mount Sinai early in the morning as the Lord commanded.

“Then the Lord came down and proclaimed His name.” (Exodus 34:5) What he found was a God who is full of love and who hates evil.

Moses went many times upon the mountain of Sinai to dwell with the Lord. During that time God gave him the Ten Commandments along with other statutes the Israelites were to follow. Exodus 34:27-28 tells us, “Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant -the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hand, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.”

You can not spend time with the Lord and not be affected by His presence. Scriptures tell us every time Moses came down from speaking with the Lord that his face so shined he covered it with a veil. I often hear people ask how do you spend time with the Lord and develop this type of intimacy? We don't know because we've spent so much time relating to everything on a physical and rational plane, that the idea of truly living as spiritual beings seems foreign to us, and it is.

It feels much more natural to watch television, eat a good meal, listen to music, spend time with friends, work, have fun, work on a project, and even sin. When did we learn in all this programming that we need to develop our spiritual muscles as well? For many of us not until we were adults and it's difficult making that transition from a purely earthy being to one predominately led and dominated by God's Spirit, even if we know how.

I remember one day driving in my car thinking how nice it would be to be famous one day, to be recognized and applauded by people for my work in the Lord or ministry. Then the very next thought was, “Now how does this idea of fame relate to the principles of God and His purpose. We can't measure our success in this life by the world's standards, even in Christendom. The most successful person in God's eyes may not be

someone of high honor or prestige, but a person you'd never even noticed. Someone who is walking in faith, love, and obedience to Christ on what we might consider a smaller scale. There are times I used to visualize myself being this great speaker admired by many people. One day while doing this I realized this didn't measure my success as a Christian nor God's approval. Prestige, pride, power, and fame are indulgences and by-products of our flesh, not our spirit.

God said a humble and contrite heart is more valuable than all the fame in the world. I then understood that it didn't matter if anyone ever saw or noticed my exploits for the Lord as long as He saw and approved of them. We will be surprised when we get to heaven and see those we esteemed on earth getting less glory or rewards than many nameless and faceless individuals. From then on what mattered most was what I did out of my love and commitment to my creator. In that He would be well pleased.

The Holy Spirit, the Messenger of Truth

When the Holy Spirit comes he will guide us into all truth. (John 16:13) Jesus said that we will no longer need a teacher but when the spirit of truth has come, He will tell us all things. Do you hear that! God says we don't need a teacher. That's good news. The problem is we've relied so long on the preacher and others telling us how to live a godly Christian life, we have no confidence in God's spirit living in us and guiding us. We're afraid to follow His promptings and teachings and instead give in to rational thought and what makes sense. Read the Bible and you will find that not much makes sense in there. I don't mean from a spiritual point of view but from a logical one. Water into wine, dip in the Jordan River, and lose your life to save it? Come on!

But how do we hear God in all the hustle and bustle of rational thought and the mental noises that plague us from dawn to dusk? Ephesians 6 tells us that Satan's battlefield is in our mind. "Cast down thoughts and imaginations that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Many of us can't hear God because we're either on a constant diet of sound or distractions or we can't quiet the voices in our head long enough to get another thought in edge-wise. We can't hear God through all the noise and activity we surround ourselves with. Do you think God is going to shout over the music videos, the hip-hop or your favorite television show?

In most every instance in the Bible when God wanted an individual's attention it came during a time of quietness and stillness. The Lord told Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went and stood at the face of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God doesn't create thunder and lightning to get our attention. He speaks to us in a still, quiet voice.

When Samuel was a small boy, God woke him up three times wanting to speak to him. Each time he ran to the prophet thinking he had called him. Finally the prophet told him to listen, God wants to speak to you. God comes in the stillness and quietness, unobtrusive and non-abrasive.

If you are like most people you are probably wondering when do I find the time to be still in the presence of God, and even if I did my mind is still plagued with a host of other thoughts that keep me from fully connecting to

God and entering into His presence. The next section will help you with ways to develop a growing intimacy with the Lord. It's not an over night process. Most of us are still heavily ruled by our basic desires and spending time in stillness and solitude may seem as foreign as living on Mars. But it's a part of our desert experience and often God must lead us there to get all of the stuff we hold onto so dearly out of our grasp. He wants us to realize that the stuff is nothing but a big pile of rubble and give us the desire and inclination to search for more than what we can see and attain.

Often times I look at myself inwardly and I don't like what I see. Who and what I am today is only an accumulation of experiences and choices I've made in the past. I criticize myself for lacking discipline and being lazy, but they are still choices I make. I can redefine myself by making new choices and then practicing them long enough so that they become apart of my basic character. If you don't like the time and attention you have given to the Lord, decide to do something about it. Change is not easy, but it is definitely possible.

Quieting a Restless Mind

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Though many religions of the world have adopted meditation as a form of spiritual enhancement, most Christians shy away from this practice fearing it to be ungodly or occultish and in some cases it may be. However, Christian meditation is not only beneficial but also commanded. In Psalms 46:10 we are told to "be still and know that I am God." We are admonished to meditate on God's word day and night. (Joshua 1:8) Psalms 4:4b persuades us, "When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be

silent." David desired that his "meditations be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the Lord." (Psalms 104:34)

I have found Christian Meditation to be beneficial in internalizing God's truths and releasing negative energy, toxic emotions, and calming and controlling wandering thoughts. In fact, I created my own set of meditation tapes to help me in this endeavor. These tapes are not mystical or ominous, but are biblically-based affirmations and deep breathing techniques that assist me in focusing on God's principles, fine tune my spiritual listening skills, and entering into the presence of God. You can do all these without tapes, but I have found using the tape helps me to be more consistent in my daily devotions and meditations.

We tend to get so busy and neglect time alone with the Lord. Many times we will have short devotions and even prayer but fail to just abide in God's presence. Each time we withdraw to a quiet place to do nothing but wait upon the Lord, a little bit of the world is shed from our heart. In some supernatural way our eyes of understanding are opened. We become more and more detached from the world and its vices. Our life in Christ comes into a clearer perspective and we're not so apt to get caught up in the affairs of this life.

Western Civilization has lost this important element. We have become so accustomed to believing only what we can see and equating materialism with success that the idea of daily meditation seems strange or foreign.

Daily meditation will help you to slow down, find more balance in life, fine-tune your inner spirit, establish priorities, live in the present, and enhance thought control all while expounding on Christian principles and biblical truths needed to live an overcoming Christian life. I am convinced believers can practice meditation in a form that completely honors God, and will improve their relationship with him as well strengthen their Christian walk.

Meditation is just a term used for quieting the mind. If satan's battlefield is our mind, how important is it that we gain control over the intrusion of fiery darts and unwanted thoughts. The Bible says to meditate on God's Word day and night. With all the voices in our head, how will we truly be able to hear God's voice and discern his words without first bringing stillness to our mind and then casting out thoughts and imaginations contrary to God's word. This is a skill we must learn and practice and I've found Christian meditation is one successful way to learn thought control.

Have you ever tried to cast down thoughts and imaginations only to have them come back again and again and again, virtually wearing you out. You tell yourself, "I've given this to situation to God, and I know God is taking care of it." But before long those nagging thoughts have gained entrance in your head again before you even realized it happened.

I learned many years ago that we are not our thoughts. For a long time I thought I was, so when a thought would come, disheartening or otherwise, I believed I had to endure it. I had no idea I could tell that thing to go away, I want no part of you. I remember living in the country about 10 years ago and for no reason at all I'd become depressed. I'd just be doing the dishes and this heaviness would come over me and ruin my day. When I realized through a book I had been reading at the time I could accept or reject any thought I wanted, I quickly put it into practice. The next time I felt that eerie feeling of depression I said to it, "I'm not depressed and have no reason to be, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus, go away." In an instant it was gone.

Many years later, after a failed relationship it seemed like depression and all its cousins, aunts, uncles and extended family came to make residence in my house. I was at a weakened state and Satan used that to his advantage. Since I had been prone to depression in the past, I was an easy mark for this ghost to reappear again. If you could have seen the

activity that was going on in my mind it would drive you crazy. I mean the attack of negative thoughts was non-stop. I'd go to bed at night with them only to wake up with them waiting at my bedside the moment I opened my eyes. Every once in a while my mind would take a detour on something else, but before long, a reminder would trigger my thoughts back to this loss. I was literally thinking myself crazy!

Then, after months and months of this, I decided I would not entertain these thoughts any longer. They had to go if I was ever going to gain control over my emotions again. From then on, when a thought would arise instead of listening to it and dwelling on it, I quickly dislodged it from my mind. Now these thoughts were coming about one every second, so I was constantly rejecting thought after thought for long periods of time. After several days I noticed the interval between thoughts was lessening. Now instead of one per second it was down to one every five minutes. Sometimes I relapsed and descended into a spiral of depression, but over time my mind became more still and quieter and I had a greater sense of well being. Jesus saves from negative thoughts.

You may not have gone through the break-up of relationship, but we are all subject to the debilitating and limited thoughts that keep us bound or even deceived into pursuing a life void of God. I have found the practice of frequent solitude and Christian meditation to be an effective and successful way to dispose of incessant mind pollutants and give me a great sense of peace and serenity. When we are free from mindful clutter we are in a better position to hear and recognize God's voice when He speaks to us. When our minds are quiet we are more apt to live in his presence and enjoy the fruit God has blessed us with. In this state, we stop living in the past or wondering about the future and we learn to live and embrace the here and the now. It's a wonderful experience.

Spend some time alone and in a quiet area each day preferable for 10-20 minutes. Before you begin, pray and ask God to direct your time together with him. Sit or lie down with your hands in your lap or hanging down at your sides. Close your eyes. Breathe slowly and deeply allowing your abdomen to rise with each inhalation. Concentrate on your breathing and the spot in the middle of your forehead. When your mind begins to wander repeat silently to yourself the words Jesus used to calm the storm that terrified his disciples, "Peace Be Still."

As you are sitting with your eyes closed, an array of thoughts some negative and some positive may begin to flood your mind. Each time that happens simply say in your mind, "Peace Be Still," or another short scripture that brings you comfort. If you get caught up in a thought unknowingly, once you realize it, repeat to yourself again, "Peace Be Still" or whatever scripture you choose. You will find that over time if you continue the meditation, you can go for long periods of time without a thought at all and you are living totally in the present.

Always remember that thoughts are separate entities and they don't become a part of us until we invite them in to stay. Our goal in meditating is to first recognize the thoughts that want entrance into our minds and if these thoughts aren't in the truest alignment of who we are in Christ, then here is our opportunity to consciously reject them. I heard someone once say regarding meditation to see yourself sitting quietly and calmly on the bank of a river. As you are observing the waves and ripples in river you'll see various thoughts floating by. Some of the thoughts will be uplifting and joyful so you bend over and pick them up. You want to keep these and adorn your home with them. Other thoughts floating by will be negative and self-defeating and those you just let casually float by. You're not claiming them, and don't want them inhabiting your home, so you just let them float right past you down the river.

I can honestly tell you that meditating on the Lord and abiding in His presence is one of my most wonderful parts of my day. About one week out of every month all three of my children stayed with their dad. (This was many years ago now, they are all grown) Now most people might use this time for recreation or absorb themselves in some long-awaited project, but not me. In fact, for those five-days I may not talk to a soul once I got off work. I made myself a schedule of how I'm going to spend the week. Mondays I cleaned up the house. Tuesdays were pampering days. This is the day I light the bathroom full of candles and take a bubble bath. Wednesday I did business type stuff. Thursdays I ran errands. Once I got each of my daily tasks accomplished I'd pray, mediate, read the word and/or an inspiration book and go to bed. I didn't even turn on the television.

By Friday I am a new person. I am refreshed and rejuvenated. I have gotten more done in that week than I would have if I'd eliminated my meditation and devotional time. When the kids would come home on Friday, I'm full of joy and energy. My love for God has increased and I feel more secure and less dependent on the things of the world. It was time well spent. When you spend time just being alone with God, he will supernatural fill and supply you will all you need. This is what it means to abide.

During the weeks all my teenagers were home, my time with the Lord may be more sporadic and piece meal, but I was determined to get it in. On the mornings I'm rushed because I just couldn't wake myself up, I may listen to the biblical affirmation exercise of my meditation tape while driving to work. Later in the evenings when everyone is settled, I slip away in my room to spend time in fellowship with the Lord and his word. It's the spiritual nourishment I needed to maintain my peace and perspective. In the presence of God, every problem seems minute. It also gave me the confidence he would take care of everything if I brought it to him.

You may have a consuming job, small children, and a husband or wife, and think you can't squeeze out the time to spend with the Lord. As the divorced mother of three teenage girls I know what limited time means. Throughout the week I was off chauffeuring kids to track meets, hair appointments, and football games. Then there's shopping. Oh, they need their make-up, a new blouse, an item for a project, and juice for tomorrow's class party that I just found out about. Sometimes they just want me to take them to Taco Bell. You get my drift?

I was busy too! But busyness is not the issue here, priorities are. You see, the number one, numeral uno priority in our life is our relationship with Jesus. Everything else, I mean everything comes second to that! If you must neglect something, it shouldn't be your time and fellowship with God. Neglect the yard work, neglect the housework, neglect washing the car, neglect the television, neglect your friends and the telephone, create boundaries if necessary, but don't neglect your God!

All this stuff is passing away! We aren't going to spend eternity on this earth! Whether we get \$1000 back on our taxes verses \$1500 isn't going to amount to a hill of beans in light of eternity. The car is going eventually rust, but what kind of relationship will we have built with the one who loves us more than anybody else on earth. The one who left his throne in heaven to die for us so you could live victoriously and have eternal life. If we can't make time for God, then we're too bogged down with the wrong stuff. We must learn to center our life around God and not our circumstances. If we do, we will find everything else falling nicely into place. When we spend time with God, it's like he supernaturally multiplies the time we have left over and we'll find ourselves accomplishing more than we did if we hadn't taken the time.

It takes practice so be diligent to add this time of quietness and stillness to your day. If you still feel funny about saying you meditate, just

practice controlling your thoughts while driving, cooking, or doing anything that doesn't take mental processes. My guided Christian Meditation CDs on a variety of topics help you to be still before the Lord.

Spend Time In Solitude

When my children were all very young, between ages 3 and 6, I moved on a 5 acre ranch in the middle of nowhere. I had been divorced about one year and had this dream of living secluded in the country. The population of the town was a mere 100 and consisted of a school, church, bar, post office, and very small general store. We lived down a 2 ½ mile dirt road and I had to drive my oldest daughter to kindergarten each morning about 7 miles from home. The closest city was 20 minutes way and I took a trip there once a week to fill up my gas tank and buy groceries.

We were the only African-American family in town, but I hardly noticed. Everyone was so friendly and treated me like I belonged there. In the evenings we took long walks down the dirt road where we brought cut apples to feed the horses. Once we experienced our house being swarmed by bees. My daughters collected tarantulas they found roaming across our path. I had planted a large garden that was shared by the gophers as well as us. I spent hours placing traps to catch them.

In the whole time I lived there I didn't have one visitor from outside the local town, and not many of those either. It was just the girls, solitude, and me. My ex-husband and friends thought I had lost my mind. But quite to the contrary; I think it is where I found it. It was the most wonderful time of my life. I felt safe and serene. I had no fears. Every other weekend I spent there alone when my ex-husband picked up our children for his visit, but I felt safer than being in the midst of a big city.

During this time I never experienced loneliness. I felt happy and complete. We didn't even have a television, so I didn't waste countless

hours in front of the tube. I played with my kids, worked on projects, kept my home business going, volunteered for the weekly bible afterschool program, and attended church. I still regret the day I moved from there.

Moving to the city changed all that. Now instead of quiet walks there was traffic and deadlines. I had to get a real job and go to work. I had to deal with people, lots of people. Then I got involved in relationships. I became a slave to my new environment and all the sins it possessed. There had been a time when solitude and I had been the best of friends. But that had all changed. When my relationship had ended, solitude had become my enemy and I wanted to avoid it like the plague. I dreaded the weekends my children would go to their dads because it meant spending time by myself and all the horrors associated with it. For months following the break-up I immersed myself in a bottom-less pit of activity. I signed up for acting lessons, worked out, visited with friends, played golf, and enrolled in a class. One day one of my daughters said, "Mom, can't just stay home and cook dinner!" But I needed to subdue my pain. If I was occupying myself with a host of activities at least for a short time I wasn't thinking about my hurt.

After months of this and finally wearing myself out, let alone letting my household fall apart, I wiped my slate clean. I realized all I was doing was masking my hurt and trying to replace my loss with a mirage of meaningless movement. One evening alone and miserable I desperately tried to think about whom I could call or where I could go. I wanted this feeling to go away. I needed to run from it and put it out of my mind. As I lay there on the couch, I told myself, Rhonda, this is not going to kill you. Embrace this time in your life. Learn from it. It's here for a reason. Stop fearing it, let it have its say and it will find it's no longer needed or wanted. I could reminisce of a time when I felt at peace, free from anxiety and pain.

Forced solitude is the beginning of the weaning and purging process of all the falsehoods that we have come to believe. Initially we may not think

we can make it. We're like addicts needing a fix. If we don't get some outside stimulation we think the walls may come tumbling down. That's exactly what happens in a sense. As we move into silence and solitude, old beliefs, patterns, and habits resurface and as we confront them begin to fall away. Our conditioning loses its grip. We open our minds to new thoughts and clearer realities. We can use this time for self-reflection and open our minds and hearts to hear new music, heavenly rhythms. What we're doing is taking a break from all the distractions and energies which have carried us along in a forcible whirlwind. As we begin to break away we realize things we thought we wanted or needed we really don't want or need anymore. We can do without them.

During this time we discover God is in us, and around us with a message to be heard, not only through His Word but in our hearts as well. Paul told the church not to look for Jesus in heaven or under the earth, for the kingdom of God is within you! Jesus through the Holy Spirit lives in the heart of every believer. For most he's locked up in a chamber of carnal and rational thoughts and never gets the opportunity to transform our lives through a greater understanding of ourselves and God's purpose for us.

If while experiencing solitude we are communing with God through prayer and renewing of our minds with the Word of God, we can completely transform who we are. You may wake up one day and realize that old person with its fears and insecurities no longer exist. The things that motivated you in the past no longer interest you. The fears that held you in bondage have lost their power. Incorporate in your life scheduled times of aloneness, to just be still and know that God is God!

When we consider fasting the first thing that comes to our mind is eliminating food from our diet for a period of time for a variety of reasons. Some people fast for health purposes, others fast to give their full attention to God and prayer. I try to fast for at least 3 days every other month. Most

times when I begin a fast I feel confident and determined to follow-through. The sad fact however is that the majority of the time, by the end of the day, I've broken my fast and put something in my mouth that didn't belong there. For me, fasting is the way I break the sugar addiction that has gotten terribly out of control in my life. I know I shouldn't eat the candy, cakes, and sweets just staring me in the face, but I guess I have the can't help its. Those raging sugar demons just won't let me pass up a good sweet when I see one. The longer I wait to fast the worst my addiction gets. Finally I get to the point that it must be done. I prepare by making sure I have ample bottled water and 100% fruit juices. I stock up on herbal and cleansing teas. I throw away any remnant of a sweet in my household. Sometimes I have placed whole bags of cookies I bought the day before down the drain. There comes a point when nothing is going to stop me and it usually takes several failed attempts before I get to that place of no return. The fast is on.

Once my mind is made up, the first day of the fast isn't so bad. I begin to get a little hungrier before bedtime but it's nothing I can't handle. I usually wake up hungry the second day and will drink hot teas and diluted juices to take the edge off. I continue taking my multiple vitamins and other natural supplements throughout the fast as well.

By about the evening of the second day every food in the world starts to look delicious, even steamed carrots seem appealing. I have gone past the point of no return so there's no way I'm going to give in to my urges, but it's still a battle all the same. I want to eat, but I'm not going to forfeit all my efforts thus far. By the third day I'm in agony. Those sugar demons are working overtime. I'm moaning and groaning. Every television commercial is causing my mouth to salivate. It's a war of monumental proportions. I must make it through.

On the morning of the fourth day, I'm feeling wonderful. The cravings are gone. I'm not hungry anymore. Food doesn't thrill me anymore. In fact, I can take it or leave it. I feel light and free. I'm waking up early with so much energy I don't know what to do with myself. I may get up an hour earlier than normal and cook breakfast for the kids or undertake some major project. From day four on, I feel I could live without food forever. Why encumber myself with such menial rituals that zap your strength and force your allegiance?

I usually force myself to eat on about the fifth day, but what I put in my mouth is much different than the half of carrot cake I downed five days earlier. And sugar, what's sugar, an enemy of the past, whom I dare not invite in for fear of its sinister clutches. Now, my diet now consists of an abundance of fruits and vegetables, lean meats, fish and poultry. I pass by the deserts, sodas, and potato chips laid out in our staff lounge with air and celebration. I have fought the sugar demons and won. I will go months without the slightest temptation of eating poorly again. But after about that time my rationalization kicks in and I tell myself just one cookie isn't going to send me off the deep end. I know all too well, that it's that first cookie that marks the beginning of the end of my victory over sugar, and off begins the cycle again.

I relate this story because we all have physical, mental, and emotional addictions we need broken in our lives. Fasting coupled with the word of God and prayer is our first line of defense to eliminating specific areas of bondage in our lives. You must separate yourself from the demons that grip you long enough for you to gain power over them and eliminate them from your system.

Maybe you're addicted to relationships, or have had several unsuccessful relationships in the past year. You're tired of meeting Mr. or Ms. Wrong, but seem to attract them like flies. Commit to staying single for

the next year or longer. Spend the next year weaning yourself of your false need for a companionship and devote your energies to developing your relationship with the Lord. Get to know yourself better and find out what about you is attracting or creating these faltering unions. If the temptation to be around the opposite sex is too strong, avoid them as much as possible until you can build your resolve. Get to the point of not needing or even wanting a relationship before you enter one again. As long as the desire for a relationship dominates a good portion of your thoughts and actions, you are not ready for one. When you are ready, trust God to bring the right person along in His way and in His timing.

You're friendships with unsaved friends may be creating internal conflicts with your walk with God. Your friends want to continue to party, look for men or women, and drink alcohol all to your dismay. So far you haven't the courage to confront them and stand up for the Lord, so you just go along with their carousing against your better judgement. As I discuss in **The Company You Keep** it may now be time to wean yourself from unproductive friendships and relationships. Allow God to send new friendships into your life that will honor Him and your commitment to living a godly, Christian life.

Use solitude as a way to become the person you want to be. You will find that the more time you spend with yourself, the more time you **must** spend by yourself. Use solitude and stillness to hear the quiet promptings of the Holy Spirit who wants to speak to your heart and spirit. Solitude is the fast of the mind, soul, and spirit. It will wash away the falsehoods, misconceptions, and claws of sin if you use it in conjunction with God's word. It will clear your mind and heart and allow you to see clearly the truth of God and the truth about your situation. Solitude will create balance in your life. If you practice it faithfully you will quickly notice when you are feeling off kilter and need to retreat again. It will give you the peace you need to

live in this world, but not be a part of it. Solitude is the invisible force God uses to rejuvenate and energize our spirits. Use it faithfully.

You may want to begin with an hour of solitude now and then. Turn off the television and the radio. Enjoy looking at nature or staring at a sunset. As you feel more and more comfortable alone with your own thoughts extend this time to days and possibly weekends. Once you begin to live with solitude you won't be able to live without it.

Entering God's Presence Through Praise

"The joy of the Lord is our strength," Nehemiah 8:10. Praise and worship is another avenue we can use to strengthen our relationship with the Lord. When I first joined the church I currently attend I was so taken by the praise and worship that two weeks later I decided to join the choir. The songs, music, worship and praise that takes place in our services seemed to usher in the very presence of God. Many times I wish the praise and worship would extend throughout the whole service. God inhabits the praises of his people. Ephesians 5:18 and 19 tells us to, "be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name our Lord Jesus Christ." "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord," declares Psalms 100. Praising and worshipping God helps us to take the focus off ourselves and unto our awesome God. The Bible says He is worthy to be praised.

My choir days were short-lived. I attended three of the weekly three-hour evening rehearsals before I decided it wasn't practical for me to continue. I was getting home and to bed too late to feel rested enough for my next day's work. I didn't feel quite comfortable leaving my three teenage daughters home alone for that extended period of time either. In

addition, the church is about a 20-minute drive from home that added to the already lengthy time commitment.

I realized however it wasn't so much being in the choir that I wanted but to experience that extending feeling of being in the presence of God. My quick remedy was to replicate these same experiences at home by recording and purchasing the very same music that touched my heart at church. God is everywhere and just not contained within the four walls of the church.

During mornings, days, or evenings when I was alone or could sneak away into my bedroom, I would sit on my bed and play particular worship songs that ministered to both myself and the Lord. Later I made one long recording of my favorite worship songs to play continually for 30 minutes or more. Within minutes of turning upon the recorder and opening my heart and mind to the Lord, a sweet and warm spirit would fill my room as well as my being. Sometimes I'd get so carried away I begin dancing around the room like I was performing for Jesus, or jumping up and down with joy and enthusiasm. Other times I'd be so overcome with God's love that I would sit and cry and praise Him for everything He has done in my life. But one thing was always for certain, when I was in the presence of God, I never wanted to stop what I was doing and leave it. Those feelings of God's love, security, and peace drove me back to God's presence time and time again. It is a part of my life I will never want to live without. "In thy presence in fullness of joy." (Psalms 16:11)

When I was teaching Sunday school, I'd miss out on the praise and worship portion of the service altogether. As much as I enjoy it, I knew I would never miss out on glorifying God in song and adoration because I could always do it at home. One nice thing about praising God alone at home is that you don't have to be self-conscious of the people around you. You can dance, kneel, cry, shout, and sing your lungs out to your hearts content. I also believe God honors us for taking out time from our weekly

schedules to exalt and bless Him in this way. I continually feel renewed and believe my relationship with God has deepened from this ritual I have embraced.

Ask friends or your worship leader to recommend songs or artist that will usher you into God's presence. Between our church services our sound technician plays music. On more than several occasions I have inquired about songs I heard and liked. Also, visit some of the Christian music sites on the Internet. Many let you listen to portions of songs right on-line. This is also available through amazon.com. I particularly enjoy some of the WOW collections, Celtic praise music, among others. Select your favorites off of each album and make your own praise and worship tape, then let the praise begin. You will never have to wait for another church service again to enter into God's presence through the celebration of praise.

Spiritual Breathing

Have you ever been so wrought with emotional pain and anxiety that you could hardly function? I have. After my break-up I was incessantly overcome with an almost debilitating grief and agony. It was like emotional charged toxins were churning in my body with no avenue for escape. It was the kind of emotional pain that causes you to moan and wail. For months I just lived with this constant and gnawing anguish.

Then almost by accident, though there are no coincidences, I discovered a technique that would effectively release these spasmodic feelings from my body, heart, and soul. I was sitting in the parking lot of my daughter's school to pick her up. I was so depressed and absorbed in my hurt that it actually contorted my face. I prayed but still the pain persisted. For no apparent reason I laid my head back on the head cushion and began to breathe deeply. Upon each exhalation, I focused on the pain leaving my body through by lungs and my skin. With each breath I began to feel better

until the pain was eventually gone. Though I'm sure I'm no way original, I termed it spiritual breathing.

Colossians 3:8 says, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips...since you have taken off your old self with its practices..."

Then Colossians 3:10, tells us to "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...and verse 14, "and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect harmony.

Whenever I begin to feel restless inside I first breath out or put off the negative emotions by practicing deep breathing and exhaling any negative energy, and then replacing in or putting on one of God's virtues. For example, if I feel intense emotional stress, I will close my eyes and breathe in deeply through my nose. Next, as I exhale through my nose or mouth, I say mentally, "I release this stress." Then when I inhale again I will chose the opposite of what I am exhaling to take its place. In other words, as I inhale through my nose I will say to myself, "I inhale or put on God's peace.

With each breath I feel the negative energy leaving my body and I continue this exercise until all vestiges of the emotion are gone. I practice this deep spiritual breathing anytime I feel my peace being disturbed. If you'd like to find out more about this spiritual breathing method, I have recorded a complete spiritual breathing exercise on my Christian meditation tape available for order in the appendix.

Fine Tune Your Hearing Through Journaling

Journaling is becoming more used and accepted in the Christian community as a way of getting in touch with our thoughts and emotions.

Journaling is an excellent tool for healing and growth. Until we can see and acknowledge our shortcomings they will continue to have power over us.

I recommend journaling everyday, especially in the morning before you start your day. During that time the house is quiet, your mind is still, and has yet to be cluttered by the requirements of your day. It's a time you are more prone to hear God. Don't limit journaling to just the morning however. Any time something comes into your heart or mind that inspires you or causes anxiety commit to writing it down. This gives you the opportunity to see your thoughts in tangible form. It will help you to work through various emotions that accompany a decision or situation you might encounter. It will also serve as a reference you can refer back to and see the theme underlining many of your entrees. When I have received a special word from the Lord, a revelation or encouragement, I can go back to my journal, find a particular entry, and gain strength.

Once you journal for awhile you will begin to recognize when God has spoken to your heart. He always speaks to us with words of support and faith. As our minds become less cluttered we will hear and recognize His voice more often until you feel like you're living in the constant presence of the Lord. God can become more real to you than any person around you. You can also purchase a variety of excellent books on how to journal or look for journaling workshops in your area.

Prayer-Our Catalyst for Change

Prayer is our life link to God. I pray about everything and all the time. God's word tells us to pray without ceasing. I've learned to go to the throne room of grace in my times of need. (Hebrews 4:16) I believe prayer is one of the most important tools we have for orchestrating change in our own lives and the world.

Prayer is talking to God. I don't try and sound intelligent when I pray. I just tell God what I'm thinking or feeling just like I'd tell a friend. I try not to whine or complain too much like the children of Israel did. God was angered and destroyed them for all their grumbling and complaining. God knows my vulnerabilities and weaknesses so I don't feel guilty praying about the same things over and over. In fact, God told us to be persistent in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God knows the temptations we face. He knows we're partially human and we are going to make lots of mistakes on this journey through life. I don't believe God is as impressed with perfection as he is with the person who realizes his limitations and seeks Him for help. God is honored when we take our sins and struggles to him in prayer. It shows our trust in Him to govern our lives.

If we observe God's servants in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, we see sin abounded in their lives just as ours today. Though they portrayed many human weaknesses some were exalted as mighty men of God. David for example is said to be a man after God's own heart. Now if we closely examine David's life we will find he was an adulterer, murderer, manipulator and neglected serious aspects of his children's lives.

David was loved and vindicated by God because he was always quick to repent and acknowledge his wrong doing, not because he never did anything wrong. Like David, we will suffer for our indiscretions but if we are quick to repent and turn our hearts back to the Lord we will regain God's favor and unfailing grace.

I'm convinced no prayer goes unanswered. We must be careful what we pray for. Just because some of our prayers don't manifest immediately doesn't mean they haven't been answered. You can pray and obsess about something long enough until you make it happen and then believe God did it.

God hears our prayers and sets into motion what's necessary to bring them into reality, if what we are praying for is according to His will for our lives. Sometimes that means preparation work on our part. God may have to prepare us to get ready to receive the prayer or blessing we asked for. When we make request of God and we're not prepared to receive it, God may use the wilderness to plow up the sin in our heart so we will be able to later see and recognize his blessing when it comes.

If we have characteristics in opposition to God's word and character we may have some suffering to do until we can release those traits that give rise to sin. For example, if you have a problem with anger and we pray for deliverance, we will continue to draw situation into our lives that challenge our anger and its destructiveness. At some point we may realize reacting in anger is not God's higher ideal. He can then show us a better route to express our discontent or not react to these types of situations altogether.

I believe whatever area we want to overcome we will receive test after test until we overcome it. We are given many opportunities to change our destructive patterns. For example, if we are obsessed with putting a relationship with a man or a women before God, we may continue to suffer through meaningless relationships until we seek first God's kingdom and put him in control of our love life.

Once we make a commitment to turn an area in our life over to God don't be surprised when the tests come. In the case of relationships, men or women may just seem to pop out of the woodwork. This is our opportunity to build spiritual muscle by refusing to give into those same tempting voices. If we give into temptation, the cycle starts all over again, with a new character and background scenery. It may take numerous unsuccessful relationships before we recognize our unproductive patterns and make a conscious effort not to repeat history.

From the time we are born, God desires to connect with our spirits. As we grow up and get accustomed to the world our flesh is the dominating motivation. Through the course of our life, God wants to break through our flesh exterior and connect with that spirit part of us that lies dormant. God is in tune with our spirits. Our flesh may cry out and make demands but God isn't interested in what our flesh has to say. Our flesh is corruptive, selfish, and sinful.

God listens to our spirit. It might be the quaint, small whisper of our heart but God hears it all the well. It may be a prayer for help or a new life. You're tired of the life you've been living and in quiet desperation you say God help me. No matter how quaint or how small, whether you say it verbally or to yourself in a thought, the moment your spirit cries for help God and all his power comes to your aid and assistance. In what appears to be an instant your life may dramatically change. Your flesh will fight it all the way. Our flesh doesn't like change and it especially doesn't want to be controlled by our spirit. Our flesh goes into battle to keep the status quo. But thank God he doesn't listen to our flesh and halt his work. He knows that the flesh is going to show its ugly head, but his interest is in our spirit only.

Every time you don't give into the temptations of the flesh, your spirit increases in strength and power. God is behind every prayer of faith to build your spirit man and he won't let up until you are free. It may take years, even decades before you completely overcome the bondages and lies of your flesh but God is not concerned about times. He's concerned about your spirit and will go to great lengths to rescue you. This is why some people's lives are characterized by so much struggling. There is a war going on between the flesh and the spirit. Sometimes it takes a while for our spirit to mature and understand its power over the flesh. The flesh is stronger

because it's been in charge for so much longer. Testing in our lives gives us continual opportunity to build our spiritual man or muscles.

When situations present themselves that we used react unconsciously to, we can now step back and choose to respond in the spirit. When we respond by God's spirit we gain a victory and become stronger. If we react in our flesh and the situation goes awry it may keep us from going down that road again. This is the battle of the spirit dominance. When our spirit seeks help and freedom, God and all his armies become our powerful allies and artillery. We must use and access them through prayer. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." (2 Corinthians 10:4) It is only through prayer and faith that we access God's power.

Do you remember the woman at the well who had the issue of blood? She had been bleeding for more than 20years. Though she had visited numerous physicians none could cure her. She had reasoned in her mind if she could only touch his garment she would be made whole. She had heard he was a healer. As Jesus was walking through town, the Bible says that many were bumping up against him. She made her way through the crowd, some say she crawled. If she didn't possess faith she never would have tried.

When the woman touched Jesus, he paused and said, "Who touched me?" The disciples said, Jesus, you are among so many, everyone is bumping against you. Then he replied again, "Who touched me, I perceive that virtue has gone out of me." He then saw the woman who had instantly been healed. He looked at her and said, "Your faith has made you whole."

Amidst the noise, the crowd, and the rebellion of our flesh, God hears the cries of our heart. Zaccheus is another example of God hearing our hearts cry and desire for him.

Sometimes physical healings are instantaneous. They are also easy to be measured. But we have far more emotional wounds and illnesses than

we do physical ailments. These are scars inflicted by the devil, our parents, relationships, and environment. They are not as easy to recognize, but acknowledging them must be the first step in healing. God heals us of emotional sickness most often through pain and suffering. When we receive victory over one area, God will disclose another stronghold we need to release. We will become aware of additional patterns or emotional scars we need healing and freedom from. We don't know we have them but they come in the form of hate, fear, insecurity, lust, arguments, power struggles, phobias, overeating and other indulgences our flesh.

Depression is a form of spiritual warfare that attempts to make us remorseful of our past and helpless toward our future. Depression is also a lack of trusting God and his word because we put these emotions above God's absolute truth. Depression is real and it has been the devils' primary tool in keeping me unhappy and bound. I know that some types of depression are physiology, but many are a result of a repetitive, defeated thinking pattern. This is why thought control is so important. If you are one who faces depression, keep taking it to God in prayer as well as working on your thought life. See section on quieting the mind. You might also consider Christian counseling.

We must keep pressing forth in prayer until we have victory over our situation. Sometimes it will hurt so badly you may want to die, but victory is coming. Don't give up. God wants to increase and develop your dependency upon him so in the midst of all situations you will turn to him first. In order to do that he must allow circumstance that will give us the opportunity to do just that.

After suffering often comes new revelation from God. Revelation we couldn't see before.

Purified by the Word

“ Now that you have purified yourself by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1Peter 1:22-23)

We learn from the scriptures that it is the word of God that purifies our hearts and our minds. Without God’s word and absolute truth we are likened to 2 Timothy 3:6 that tells of the silly woman taken about by every wind of doctrine. Every philosophy, concept and idea must first be funneled through the word of God for its veracity and accuracy. God’s living word is our foundation. God’s message is alive and busy bringing about changes in our life and character as we listen and submit to its wisdom.

As we place God’s word in our heart it purifies us from the weights, sins, filth, and evil that have become commonplace in our lives. Until God’s truth is revealed to us we may not even recognize the sin we possess. In much the same way, God instituted the law to reveal our sin. Paul stated in Romans 3:20, “through the law we become conscious of sin.” Through Christ’s redemption we are no longer subject to the tenements of the law, instead God says he has written his laws upon our heart once we accept and acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior.

That is why non-believers can continue walk in sin without guilt or shame. God’s imperishable seed has not yet been planted in their hearts to awaken them to righteousness in Christ. For the Christian, life is much different because our eyes are no longer darkened to the sin that surrounds us and possesses our hearts. We are no longer slaves to unrighteousness, unless we choose to be. Proverbs 13:15 says, “the way of a transgressor is hard.” “It is better that they never knew the light of the Gospel than to have known it and turned away.” (find scripture ref)

Why is that? Because the born-again believer can no longer remain oblivious to the choices he or she must make in regards to their walk with

Christ. Every choice is a deliberate action that either attest to the authority of Christ in our lives or rejects it. I have heard on some occasions struggling Christians almost denouncing the day they were saved. The awareness of their sinful nature is undeniable. There is a war going on within their mind and members. Those who have tried to forfeit their faith and return to worldly living are the most miserable of all. No longer can they partake in their old sins with the same fervor and ecstasy. They have come to know much too much. They have become like Adam and Eve, who by eating the forbidden fruit became conscious of the presence of both good and evil, especially the evil which dwelled in their own hearts.

As Christians it is important that we consume a rich and steady of God's word. Without it, we haven't much power or weaponry to battle the forces of sin and evil. We must first allow God's word to purify and then fortify us. The battlefield in our hearts, minds, and bodies is won on the arsenal of prayer with a heavy dose of God's word as our artillery.

The struggles that we face day in and day out are not birthed within this physical plane but the spiritual. There is a fight within the heavenly realm, a realm not seen by human eyes, for your soul and destiny. You may think your boss is just an over-powering tyrant. What you don't see is the wicked influences from the spiritual bodies directed at you to steal your peace, joy, and strength in the Lord. Try not to get mad at your boss or your spouse, he or she is only acting the role of a puppet. Take your issues up with a higher authority by becoming strong in prayer and equipped with God's living word. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12)

Spiritual warfare is very real. Though it may be invisible to our natural eyes, enemy forces stand in wait to steal the very purpose God has created for your life. 1 Peter 5:8, tells us to beware, "Be self-controlled and alert.

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” Satan knows your weaknesses and he won’t hesitate to capitalize on them when he has the opportunity.

If you often feel oppressed, depressed, or obsessed with unwholesome thoughts or repetitive sin you are most likely under severe spiritual attack. Let me illustrate. Presently, I can often go for weeks filled with and experiencing God’s joy and peace in my life. During these times, everything in the world appears hopeful, and I’m filled with anticipation. There is not a dark cloud on my horizon. Then one morning, right out of nowhere, I can wake up with such heaviness and discouragement I can hardly get myself out of the bed.

Most likely you’d think something terrible happened the day before to trigger this shift in mood, but it hadn’t. The landscaping is just as beautiful. My circumstances haven’t changed one bit, but by the way I feel it appeared someone had just dropped an atomic bomb on my home, only I survived. Where did the joy and bliss go that I had enjoyed so immensely the day before? What changed? Why did I suddenly get a bad case of the blues?

Spiritual warfare, that’s what! An all out attack on my mind and spirit. Fiery darts and flaming arrows aimed and dispersed directly toward me in an attempt to find a weak spot and steal God’s blessings from my day and ultimately my life. What do you do when that happens? Go in your prayer closet and fight! Come against the enemy with God’s word. Turn on your worship music and praise God like your life depended on it! And don’t come out until the attack is thwarted and your joy has returned.

We must replace the lies and philosophy of this world with the truth of the gospel, no matter how implausible it may sound. If we must choose between what we see and the word of God, we must choose the God’s word.

If we must choose between what we feel to be right and the Word of God, the God's word takes precedents. Even what we hear must be brought under submission to what God tells us in his word.

Some people refrain from getting to know God's word so they don't have to be accountable to what it says. They'd rather live their life with a paper-sack over their head and allow the devil to ransack their life. In God's mercy and our ignorance, we may think we're getting by for a time, but at some point our blinded eyes are going to lead us right into a deep ditch our intellect won't be able to get us out of. Only God's love, word, and faithfulness will hold the key to delivering us from our self-imposed sin.

The Holy Spirit also plays a key role in helping us to discern God's will and direction for our life. In fact, the Holy Spirit and God's word work hand in hand. In sincerity, we may be unaware of God's ordinances concerning different areas in our lives. In those instances, I believe the Holy Spirit will become a guide and teacher to illuminate the way. God's spirit is living on the inside of us and it's just as important to get familiar with his unctious and urgings to keep us from falling prey to the enemy.

Psalms 119:11 tells us to "hide God's word in our heart that we might not sin against thee." To be effective in prayer we must read and memorize God's Word. I look at God's word as the absolute truth. I measure my own thoughts against God's word and if they aren't in agreement, no matter how I feel they are false and I must get rid of them. If we don't know God's word and continually put it in our heart, our emotions will have us making wrong judgments and decisions constantly. "It is easy for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law." (Luke 16:17)

The centurion told Jesus to, "Speak the word only and my servant will be healed." (Luke 7:7) He knew Jesus was a man of authority and his words were filled with power and life. God's word is referred to as a two-edged

sword. His word is alive. It must do what it has been sent out to accomplish. (Hebrews 4:12)

There is power in God's Word, and we must learn His word with the same tenacity as we would learn a foreign language. God's word may not always make sense to us. His word and principles are often contrary to what we've been taught growing up.

God's word and the philosophy of this world are an anti-thesis of one another. The world and all its trappings are temporary, only God's truth shall endure throughout eternity.

We must learn God's word through reading the Bible, attending Bible studies, and listening to biblically-based taped messages that will help us to grow in God truth. When unfavorable circumstances arise in our life, we must speak God's Word over them. God's Word mixed with faith brings awesome results. If you don't know it, or don't use it, it won't do you any good.

The spirit world is more real than what our senses tell us. God says what we can see is temporary but what we cannot see is eternal. Eternal means it always was and always will be. We can't see the spiritual world with our natural eyes but the Bible clearly lets us know we live in a spiritual kingdom.

Within the spiritual kingdom, God's heavenly host and satanic powers respond to the language we use. When we speak the words of God and words of faith and love, we give rise and strength to God's heavenly kingdom around us. We give our angelic and spiritual host ammunition, power, and permission to manifest God's will in our lives. The language our heavenly hosts respond to is God's Word.

On the contrary, when we rely upon the language of this world to solve problems, we're speaking the language of the flesh. Satan is the god of this

world and he has a language as well. Relying on his language will keep us defeated and absent of God's power.

Without knowing the language of another country, you can't effectively communicate with the natives. There is a communication gap. In the spiritual realm, we must learn the language of the spirit, God's Word, and use it to bring change in lives and circumstances.

"The fervent prayers of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16) Schedule time to read your word, listen to Bible on tape, and purchase tapes from godly men and women you esteem. Feed yourself on a constant diet of God's word. Then when a struggle or conflict arises you will know and speak the right language to stop the enemy and while giving power and direction to your allies in heavenly places to work mightily on your behalf.

When God's word is in your heart, the Holy Spirit will bring into remembrance the scriptures you need to combat the enemy. Once you have confessed God's word over your dilemma, then stand in faith. Without faith we can't live or endure the Christian walk. God's word must always be coupled with faith. We must believe that God is a rewarder of those who diligently (trust) and seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

His word is backed by God's power. Faith keeps that power alive until it has a chance to get the job done. Stand in faith on the word.

The Company you Keep

The people we choose to associate with are usually some reflection of ourselves. The saying birds of a feather flock together is a truism. We tend to hang out with those we feel most comfortable and who validate our thoughts and lifestyle. When we decide to deepen our relationship with God, we may find some of our old friendships just don't feel right anymore even among Christians. As your intimacy with Christ grows it will become clearer

to you that many Christians are not living truly Christ-centered lives. Many of them exhibit worldly lifestyles while wearing a Christian bodysuit.

A natural progression in your walk with Christ may be the desire to distance yourself from those who are loosely straddling the fence. This can cause some feelings of anxiety. You need your friends, right? I heard a pastor say once, there are two types of relationships, those who draw you closer to Christ and those who don't. If your friendships are creating a wedge between you and the Lord it's best to give them up. Jesus said if your right hand offends thee, cut it off and throw it away, it is better to enter into eternal life maimed than be cast into hell fire.

If you want to mature in Christ and become great in his kingdom you will need to break the influence of ungodly relationships in your life. 2 Corinthians 6:17, admonishes us to "Therefore come out from them and be separate", says the Lord." You will have to stop going to places you don't feel comfortable with just to appease them. If your walk with Christ is secure and you are not going to let anything or anybody get in your way you can be a strong influence for Christ in your friends' life. But most often, sincere Christians are pressured and pulled in the opposite direction. The fear of rejection and loneliness is just too much to storm. "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

This is the time to build more spiritual muscles. When I decided I was going to give up everything for Christ my closet friends verbally supported my decision. Not all of them were as adamant as I was about the Lord, but I could sense God working through me to influence their lives for him. At times I wanted to pull away because I felt a struggle ensuing regarding the direction of our lives. On many occasions I withdrew from my circle of acquaintances to spend time alone with God to regain my strength and

renew my commitment. As I did this I began to notice the persuasive mindsets and tactics of my friends had less and less influence over my decisions. It became easier and easier to stand up to them, say "no" when I didn't want to do something, and adamantly share my views about Jesus and his principles. There were times when I thought I'd made them so angry they'd never want to speak to me again. But my persistence won out and my friends are just as committed to Christ as I am. They had to play in the world just a little bit longer and get bit by the snake several more times to realize they were headed down the same empty road I had gotten off. These same friends are now influencing their circle of acquaintances for the Lord.

Sometimes God will remove people from your life if He knows they will have an adverse effect on your walk with Him. When or if He does, let them go. Don't try to hold-on things that aren't for you. In His time, God will bring people in your life who will support your efforts to live a godly and committed Christian life. As you get involved at your church, you will draw like-minded Christians to yourself. Those just playing church will quickly seek out more suitable playmates.

In my life, God chose to keep my friends around to strengthen my resolve for Him. He also used my no-holds-bar attitude to persuade them that Jesus is the only way to peace, joy, contentment, love and fulfillment. Standing up to my friends and having them still love me and want to be around me healed some areas of rejection in my heart. I learned that the first real friendship we must honor is our friendship with ourselves. My values, goals, wants and needs are just as valid as anybody else's.

I dishonor both myself and God, when I forfeit God's principles for the wants and desires of others. I taught my friends this lesson as well by not giving in to the whims and aches of their flesh. It's important to maintain healthy boundaries in all of our relationships. That doesn't mean we don't

strive to create a give and take relationship in our friendships. However, we must be careful not to submit to plans and ideas that do not bring glory to God or enhance our Christian lifestyle.

It's also important to steal away quiet time alone with God and away from your friends. We must allow time for God to speak to us and refocus our perspective and vision on kingdom living. It's so easy to get sidetracked and distracted by the things of this world. Creating silence and solitude from the world and even friendships is like washing away the dirt and residue of a soiled garment. It's like taking a long hot shower of the mind and soul. It is also necessary if we are to grow into Christian maturity. God never wants our family members or friendships to have greater influence in our lives than He himself. God doesn't want us to refrain from doing His will because of fear or rejection of what other's think or may say. God will either use your friendships to strength you or remove them until you will follow no other voice but his. John 10:27, Jesus says my sheep know my voice and no other they will follow.

Forgiving Yourself

Just because you've been liberated from the events of your past doesn't mean the enemy won't show up to sabotage you newfound freedom. I can almost guarantee it. He's laying in wait with a trap just ready to steal the progress you've made in the Lord up until this point. 1 Peter 5:8 says our adversary the devil is like a roaming lion seeking someone to devour. He's looking for an entrance, a weak point, to carry out his plan.

There is an incident in the Bible concerning a prophet named Elijah in 1 Kings 18 and 19. In the story, Elijah challenged a bunch of pagans to a duel of the Gods. He instructed these pagans to build an altar to their god and he did the same. Elijah told the prophets of Baal, "Call on the name of

your god, and I will call on the name of my Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God.” (1 Kings 18:24)

“Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. ‘Oh answer us!’ they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they made.” After this had gone on all afternoon Elijah beckoned the prophets of Baal to come to the altar he had prepared. He even instructed them to dig a trench around the altar and fill it up with water. “At the time of the sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: ‘O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer O lord, answer me.”

“Then fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!” Then Elijah commanded them to seize the prophets of Baal and kill them. (1 Kings 19: 36-40)

Elijah must have been elated. In a glorious show of his power, and at Elijah’s request, God shot down fire from heaven and consumed the altar and everything surrounding it. Could Elijah have any more confidence in God’s power and favor with him? Knowing that God was with him, you’d think Elijah would be free from all fear and intimidation. He just beckoned God to spew down fire from heaven, and he did! How’s that for answered prayers? But that wasn’t the case.

When Jezebel, queen of Israel, heard what Elijah had done she made an verbal proclamation, “ ‘May the god deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.’ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.” Elijah took a day’s journey into the desert and when he came to a broom tree he sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, Lord,’ he said. ‘Take my life; I am no

better than my ancestors. Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.”
(1 Kings 19:2-4)

How many times has God performed a great victory in our lives, to find us only in a matter of days, or even hours, as dejected as poor Elijah? The same God who gave him the power to challenge the prophets of Baal and who hurled fire from the sky had not abandoned Elijah. He stood up to the vast enemies of God and won! Yet Elijah became afraid of the threat of one woman!

Satan knows our weak points. He waits to find us in a vulnerable position. In many cases, we've just partaken in a great battle and won. Our guard is down. We've taken off our armor to relax a bit. We feel invincible. Then boom, satan launches an all out attack that we weren't expecting or prepared for. Though were rejoicing in our past victory, we may still be a little weary from the fight. Satan uses this time as an opportunity to hit us where it hurts, and like Elijah, we say Lord, "Please put an end to our misery!"

"What the devil meant for evil, God will always turn it around for our good." God did have compassion for Elijah and ministered him back to health. He did not condemn or even chastise him. God comes to our aid in our time of need. God will also use these very circumstances to help us gain more power over the enemy in specific areas.

1 Corinthians 10: 12-13 tells us, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

"When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is

tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”
(James 1:13-14)

We can only be tempted by the lust, urges and desires already lingering in our hearts. I would never be tempted to smoke a cigarette, but a person who smoked 5-years-ago and then quit, might. The enemy plays on our weaknesses and though God has already delivered us, satan will try to get us to forfeit our victory. This could happen five days, five months or five years after we think it’s all behind us. I’ve often heard of some rehabilitated drug addicts who are actively serving the Lord returning to their previous addictions sometimes after 10 years or more years of sobriety. A pastor friend of mine who God miraculously delivered from drugs 15 years earlier told me that several times the devil tried to tempt him by actually filling the room with the smell of cocaine.

God also uses these attacks to strengthen our walk with him. God wants us to see where our true loyalty lies. Will we seek and trust him to deliver us or will we attempt to meet our needs through our Egyptian past? Moses told the Israelites, “ Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” (Deuteronomy 8:2) “In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.” (Exodus 16:4)

When we don’t submit to the enemy’s deception to detour us, we decrease his power over us and progress closer to what God has in store for us. Deuteronomy 8:16, “He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you.” Each time we pass the test, we eliminate a little bit more of our predisposition to sin in a certain area, until finally we can no longer be tempted with the same old lust. Satan will have

to pull a new rabbit out of the hat because we will no longer take the same old bait.

Many chapters in the book of Daniel declare the events that will take place in the end times. One scripture I've embraced is Daniel 11 verse 35 that says, "Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time." Yes, even the wise will stumble, so that God can get the best out of them. How can we ever know we are walking in error without correction. In comparison, how could the children of Israel have known they were sinning without the law? It's comforting to know that God ordains our mistakes to refine and purify us for even greater service.

So if over-zealousness or any other sin is our downfall, then it be true of God's word, love, grace, and character to give us the opportunity to pursue and fail, so we can learn the fruitlessness of our actions and alter our behavior, in an effort to get us ready for the real blessing? I believe God does give us such opportunities, so when it really counts we can succeed, especially if it is our desire to do his will. I do suppose, as the children of Israel, the light bulb could never come on, and we could ultimately miss what God has for us.

Iyanla Vanzant's stated in her *Acts of Faith* calendar, that's been posted above my computer for the last two years, that if we seek God's guidance we can never miss out on what God has for us.

"Everything happens when it needs to happen; everyone is always where they need to be. You will never miss out on what is meant for you, even if it has to come to you in a roundabout way. When we relax and follow our inner guidance, everything we should have is all that we get. When we rush around trying to make it, disappointment may be all we get."

When Elijah's awoke from his sleep under that bloom tree, "All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked around and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.' " (1 Kings 19: 5-8)

When Elijah's strength returned and confidence intact, God enlisted him once again for service. Not once did God rebuke him, but instead loved and nurtured him back to wholeness and restored health. Thank God his mercy endures through all generations.

Ever Increasing Faith

Throughout the writing of this book God has so often-placed words, ideas, and concepts in my heart that were necessary for my growth and prosperity in him. One such area is faith. I tend to be a feeling person. If something doesn't feel good to me, too often I've let it take precedence over what I know to be the truth. But basing reality on what you can see, feel, or hear is devastating to a life of faith. God needed me to stop making conclusions based on my five senses, and instead let his word and his promises become my guiding force. Therefore, the Lord spoke generous to my heart through the scriptures on exactly how important faith is to the life of a believer.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us in the Living Bible that faith "is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead." Before we can let faith operate in our lives, we must believe God for something we want or he has promised. It could be the fulfillment of a ministry you've been praying about, salvation of a prodigal son or daughter,

financial woes, a mate, or a situation on your job. In any and all cases, a hope, desire, or promise is necessary before our faith can be fully functional.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6) When it comes to believing God, some things are easier for me to stand in faith and agreement with God for desired result. On numerous occasions I have believed God for the positive outcome of various circumstances. In most of these cases when I’d done everything human possible to rectify the situation without any satisfaction, I’d give the matter over to God in prayer. Then I’d forget about it. Every now and then when a negative thought would arise I’d simple say, “Lord, it’s in your hands.” Sometimes it took months before I’d receive an answer. But without a doubt, in almost all situations, God was faithful.

I believe concerning some areas in my life, I have great faith that God and his word will prevail. Even when some situations looks dismal, I’ve learned to find peace in the storm. My children’s salvation is one area that I have completely trusted to the Lord. I have no doubt that though it could take years of suffering and pain, each of my children will know Christ as their savior. 2 Timothy 1:12 says, “God is able to keep that which is committed to him.” I committed my children to God’s care years ago. They may not be angelic little beings (then who is), but I am certain that God has a plan for their life and his plan will succeed. That doesn’t mean they won’t go through hardship, trials, and various difficulties before surrendering their life completely to the Father. I tell them they can learn the hard way, or the easy way, but whichever way they choose, they’re going to learn.

In reading this book, you can probably guess the areas where my faith seems to flounder. It’s not as easy for me to pray about certain areas, give these areas to God and just leave them there--and Forget About Them! You may have specific areas in your life that God is trying to develop your faith

in as well. Most Christians usually have at least one area they struggle with totally surrendering to the Lord. The Bible let's us know that faith is an essential ingredient in living a successful and supernatural life in his kingdom. In fact, faith is so important that without it we can never receive all that God has for us. And like walking through the desert with the Lord to develop our dependency and trust in him, God also wants to build our faith. And to do so he will provide dilemmas in our lives that can only be accomplished by his mighty power.

Faith is at the core of our walk with the Lord. Without it, we cannot stand or persevere in trials, conquer temptations, or endure the hardships of making it to the promise land. Faith entails waiting for God to get us ready for what he has in store. Faith is what keeps us from giving up. We must endure by faith. Many times the only evidence of a thing coming to pass is our faith combined with God's word. This was the children of Israel's downfall. Hebrews 4:2 reminds us, "For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

We can be saturated with God's word, his prophecies, and even have a clear vision of his direction but it's our faith that will determine whether what we seek will become a reality or forever remain a dream. God showed the Israelites a land of blessing and promise just at their fingertips, but they lacked the faith to possess it.

Jesus often said to his followers, "Only believe!" or "Oh, you of little faith, why did you doubt?" He was always amazed when he saw an individual who possessed great faith. The kind of faith that made them steadfast and unwavering in their attempt to receive from him. Great faith was always rewarded and the request always granted. These faithful believers had faith enough to move mountains, see their circumstances changed, endure the doubt, snares and opinions of other, and eventually receive their

breakthroughs. When everything and everyone appeared contrary to what was desired they stood relentless in the presence of God and dared to believe him. Jesus most often reply, "Your faith has made you whole."

Our faith and hope must be in God to provide for all we need. Faith is a principle used frequently in the world. People conjure up a great deal of faith to succeed in their own endeavors. But faith in the process of faith or the principle of faith is not God's objective for the believer. He wants our faith to be solely in him to do for us what it is we ask according to his will for us. Faith alone can get us many things, but not necessarily the things of God.

We must have faith not to manipulate our circumstances. We must have faith to wait when everything in our body, soul, and minds is urging us to move ahead of God's plan. Through faith in Christ, we must learn to endure the dark and bleak times, when it appears Jesus is preoccupied and not coming to our aid, as it appeared when he delayed coming to Lazereth aid. Hebrews 10:23 states, "Let us hold unswerving to the hope we profess, for he is faithful who promised." And Hebrews 10:38, "But the righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."

Faith is the fuel that moves our hopes and request from the spirit realm to the natural world. Faith empowers God and his kingdom to bring forth the miracles of our desires. Without faith we can never progress, receive, or be great in the kingdom of God. Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear is the enemy of God. Fear says it won't happen. Fear is sense-based. It needs evidence it can experience through the senses. But we as Christians should never rely on our senses to determine what God is doing. They are unreliable. They oppose God's supernatural power.

We must ask God to increase our faith so we can have an authentic walk in Christ. Romans 10:17, tells us that "faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God." We must put no limitations on what our God is

capable of doing. God knows every detail, every circumstance, and every possible side effect. And he takes all these things into consideration as he manifests his plan in our lives. His way will always be the best way.

“Fight the good fight of faith,” admonishes Paul. (1 Timothy 6:12) “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day...” (2 Timothy 4:7) These were Paul’s words to Timothy towards the end of his life. Endure long enough for your faith to work. Oh, how sad we give up so easily.

God let me know that the greater the resistance, the greater opportunity for God to be glorified. He reminded me of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, which God used to demonstrate his miraculous power to the Israelites. “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them.” (Exodus 10:1) We can take comfort that sometimes the most horrendous obstacles are positionally placed pawns to display God’s awesome power and glory.

My favorite passage in the inspiring classic and devotional, **God Calling** is dated on October 23, and reads,

“Hill of Sacrifice—You must trust to the end. You must be ready to go on trusting to the last hour. You must know even when you cannot see...You must be ready, like My servant Abraham, to climb the very Hill of Sacrifice, to go to the very last moment, before you see My deliverance. This final test has to come to all who walk by Faith. You must rely on Me alone. Look to no other arm, look for no other help. Trust in the Spirit Forces of the Unseen, not in those you see. Trust and fear not.”

I retyped and taped this passage to my bathroom mirror. Every time I begin to get discouraged or lose heart I read it and God's word until my faith and courage returns. "This is a test. It's only a test. I will pass. I must pass. God will not let me down," I say to myself.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians in chapter 3: 2 saying, "We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials." When difficulties come, we can thank God for another opportunity to increase our faith and demonstrate his power. We read in 2 Thessalonians 1:11, "With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good ***purpose of yours*** and every act prompted by ***your faith.***"

You don't realize how hard it is to walk in faith until you are called to do so. But a life of faith is every believer's destiny. Don't worry about whether your request is out of the will of God. If your desire is to do God's will, he will reveal even that to you or change your desires to conform with the plan he has for your life. "All of us who are mature should take a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained." (Philippians 3:15) Step out in faith; believe God for something miraculous in your life today.

Refuse to doubt God at all cost. Ask him to increase your faith. Ask him for mountain moving faith, ever increasing faith, wall-tumbling faith, unwavering faith, finish-line faith, conquering faith, quiet and confident faith, giant killing faith, unshakable faith, mustard-seed faith, miracle-working faith, and steadfast faith. Perceive and keep abreast of the opportunities God will send your way to build the very faith you seek. How many times did Jesus say in the Bible, "This sickness is not unto death but that the Son

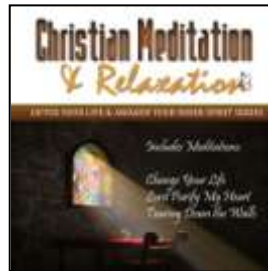
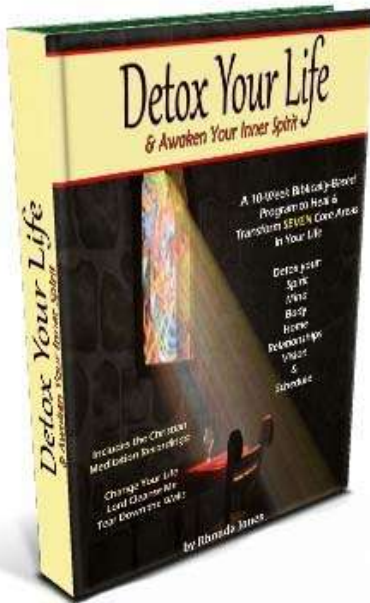
of Man might be glorified? Faith, like patience, is not a presence that overtakes you. It's a virtue that is built, brick upon brick by its constant use and subsequent rewards. Use you faith today to receive all the blessings of God and enter our promise land.

The End

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