

XIV. OUR WORSHIPFUL RESPONSE

COMMUNION BETWEEN GOD AND HIS ADOPTED CHILDREN

✠ WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH ✠

So what are we to do with all of this incredible truth? Here we have been given our family history, our heritage, our past, as well as the roadmap to our future. So, as we have asked throughout this study, “What difference does it make?” “Now what?” is another way of asking ourselves this question. Our humble prayer should be that this would not end in the procurement of information, but rather that this information would be for the procurement of transformation; we should pray that this story of grace would *fuel* our transformation. Look at how A.W. Tozer said it:

There is scarcely anything so dull and meaningless as bible doctrine taught for its own sake. Truth divorced from life is not truth in its biblical sense, but something else and something less. No man is better for knowing that God “in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.” The devil knows that, and so did Judas Iscariot. No man is better for knowing that “God so loved the world of men that he gave His only begotten Son to die for their redemption.” In hell there are millions who know that. Theological truth is useless until it is obeyed.⁹⁴⁶

The goal of theology is worship.

-Philip Ryken

This is incredibly true, and sadly, too often just simply observed. What’s maybe worse is that *because* doctrinal truth is seen as an end in itself (which would be dull and meaningless), many don’t even *attempt* knowing it in the first place! Hence, we have two “Christians” in view here: the one with “Truth” and no Spirit, and the one with “Spirit” and no Truth. Neither of these are acceptable, because God is looking only for *true worshippers*, those who worship in Spirit *and* in Truth!⁹⁴⁷

You can’t worship God in Spirit if you don’t know the Truth. You don’t really know the Truth if you don’t worship Him in Spirit.

Notice that in **John 4.23, 24** it says that God is looking for *true worshippers*. Indeed, Paul met some pretty religious worshippers in his day. He spoke to the Greeks by even telling them, “I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’”⁹⁴⁸ These folks were worshippers, passionate ones, but they knew nothing of the god that they worshipped. How are many people who profess to be Christians any different? Just that they know His Name? Or know that He died on a cross? Or that there is some benefit for them? We must realize that when we walk this line, this very, very thin line of being childish rather than childlike, we may err on the side of *thinking* that we are Christians, when really we are not.⁹⁴⁹

A few years ago my mom and her five sisters, collectively known as “the Six Sisters,” wrote a book where they each tell their own story of God’s grace and sovereign redemption in their life. In the beginning, the book mentions this:⁹⁵⁰

There are three types of people: believers, unbelievers, and make-believers.

Does that sting? Even a little bit? Did your heart just sink a little? If it did, I can tell you almost certainly that the Holy Spirit just brought some grace-filled conviction. Don’t ignore it or let a wall go up; explore it, examine it, and give thanks for that conviction. My hope is that for the many who call themselves Christians or assume they are Christians because they grew up in a Christian home or responded to an altar call, would be woken up by the Holy Spirit and given that grace-filled reality check. There is surely nothing more heart breaking than seeing a make-believer go through life with a false assurance.

⁹⁴⁶ *Of God and Men*, pg. 26

⁹⁴⁷ John 4.23, 24

⁹⁴⁸ Acts 17.22, 23

⁹⁴⁹ Matthew 7.21-23 // 1 John 2.19 // Hebrews 6.1-8. Also, read through the chapter on the Holy Spirit for a more in depth look at this.

⁹⁵⁰ pg. 9

The reality of all of this is that this is all just too true and too common. We think of those who say “Lord, Lord, we did this and that in Your Name,” and what does Christ say to them? “I never knew you; depart from Me you workers of lawlessness.”⁹⁵¹ It makes one also think of the sobering words of Christ when He speaks of the hot, cold, and lukewarm believer.⁹⁵² What happens to the lukewarm? They are spit out of His mouth.⁹⁵³ Some would say this is “proof” that we can lose our salvation, but does simple “belief” in God qualify as the same as being born again and having saving faith in Christ? Apparently, no, as the Word clearly tells us that even demons “believe,” but in the end it is of no benefit to them.⁹⁵⁴

In context of James speaking about demons who believe, he boldly makes his famous challenge: you say you have faith? Prove it; show me your works.⁹⁵⁵ Paul equates our spiritual maturity with our action of generous giving.⁹⁵⁶ Jesus said that if we love Him that this will be made obvious because we obey Him.⁹⁵⁷

What are these marks of a real Christian? We have explored this quite a bit in the chapter on the Holy Spirit as we looked at the fruit of the Spirit.⁹⁵⁸ Let’s see some of the things that play out as a result of the fruit of the Spirit and how we can make the most of our faith, giving the Spirit of God over to His job description as our Helper.

KNOWING THE TRUTH OF THE WORD

We have said much of studying and knowing the Word and the great truth that it contains, so we won’t belabor it much here. We will also mention it more in light of prayer and meditation. But as we close this very study out, a few things should be said about the actual act of studying, as opposed to reading and meditating on, the Word of God.

If the Word is our daily bread, we need something to help us digest that bread. In our physical diets, a good amount of protein is what breaks down carbs and other elements, helping us digest and stay healthy and balanced. Study does this for us. Where simply reading the Word may serve as the actual eating, and meditation on the Word, as we will see, distributes the nourishment to our soul and our heart, there is something in the middle that must happen: the ingested food must be first broken down *so that it can* be distributed properly in our life.

Here, the author of Hebrews actually might equate real studying and understanding of the Word as that of role that our teeth play in our physical health.

Hebrews 5.12-14

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Only the mature, those with teeth and not just gums, are able to be “skilled in the Word of righteousness.” He says that those who know and understand the Word are the ones who have the power of discernment, which was trained through the instruction of the Word.

Paul told young Timothy to do his best to “present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of truth.”⁹⁵⁹ So we see, of course, that study is of utmost importance, let’s now look briefly at a few ways we can be intentional to pursue this discipline.

⁹⁵¹ Matthew 7.21-23

⁹⁵² From Revelation 3.15. Some people ask why God would “want” us to be either “hot or cold.” Some theologians say that God would prefer us to clearly choose our “side” and know where we stand and would rather have us be confident in either our faith or our defiance rather than be hypocrites. Others say that both hot and cold water would be considered “good” and positive to the reader; both bring useful blessing, but lukewarm water alone is the “useless” water.

⁹⁵³ Revelation 3.16

⁹⁵⁴ James 2.19

⁹⁵⁵ James 2.14-26

⁹⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

⁹⁵⁷ John 8.42, 14.15, 28

⁹⁵⁸ pg. 248-251

⁹⁵⁹ 1 Timothy 2.15

- **Devise a plan.**

This could be as simple as following more intently with what the church and your **Community Group** is studying. Spend more time in the **Community Group Homework**, writing answers in a journal rather than on one small line. Spend time in prayer over what you are reading.

- **Accountability.**

You will have a high risk of failing and giving up on this if you don't have someone holding you accountable. Find someone that can hold you to it and remind you of it, and *be specific* with them. Tell them exactly what you are aiming to accomplish. Don't just say "I need to study more, can you hold me accountable?" Tell them "I want to study for 10 minutes per day, and I'm going to study what my **Community Group** is studying. Can you email or text me every day to ask me what I studied?"

Your **Community Group**, of course, is the *perfect* place to make this happen. Email each other, text each other, and have **Fight Clubs** with each other. Stop being a social support group and start becoming a school and army. Challenge each other in love, as iron sharpens iron.⁹⁶⁰ Sometimes it seems in our close friendships, even in our **Community Groups** which are *built* to be challenging, we tend to try to sharpen each other with dull blades. We have to hold each other accountable in our growth if we really and truly love each other.

- **Invest in your study.**

I can tell you what you value by looking at your bank statement. Do you value having a roof over your head? You will pay your rent or mortgage. Do you value living in a country with many freedoms? You will pay your taxes. Do you value your coffee fix? You will buy Starbucks. Do you value the Gospel going out in your community? You will give an offering at church.

The same goes, however, with our study. Now, you will know that I am an absolute true believer that all we *need* to study is our bible, our brain, and the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶¹ That said, God has given each of us to each other as a body and as a people, indeed again, to sharpen each other. There are thousands and thousands of great writings, sermons, songs, and insights gathered throughout the collective body of church history that can serve as an incredible source of wisdom and teaching for us.

The thing is, God has wired us all very differently. Some of us are more gentle, others more gung-ho. Some are pastoral, some more missional. Some are pragmatic, others more emotional. The point is that we're all unique, and we all learn and hear uniquely. So I may say or teach things that strike someone to the heart, and others are confused (most probably when I make a movie reference). It's for this reason that I want to make the names of these Pastors, authors, theologians, books, and websites available. My hope is that you find some other authors and teachers that "speak your language," not in the sense of catering to your "itching ears," but in the sense of *how* they deliver the *truth* of the Word.

Some of you like no-nonsense, you will like Jonathon Edwards, Martin Luther, John Piper, and Matt Chandler. Others of you like pastoral and gentle. You will like Jerry Bridges, and Wayne Grudem. Some of you enjoy creativity, so you may like C.S. Lewis, Randy Alcorn, and others. And yet all of these guys share some of these traits, as you *will be challenged* deeply by Piper and Spurgeon when they are no-nonsense; you *will find* creativity in Luther and Chandler's humor; you *will feel loved* pastorally by Alcorn and Edwards.

The point is, know and love the body of Christ and what the various members offer. Find websites and resources that help you; find authors and teachers that speak unadulterated, un-watered down and objective truth to you, whether you like it or not. With this in mind, plan a budget that you can spend per month on buying books or resources. Maybe it's ten or thirty dollars, or even more. If you value your relationship with Christ, *invest in it!*

However, man cannot live off of study alone. It's been said that the longest distance on the planet is the 18 inches between the brain and the heart. The Word tells us that Word must dwell in us richly, that it should be used for teaching and admonishing, but also should cause singing and thankfulness in our hearts.⁹⁶² Let's explore how to make this happen.

⁹⁶⁰ Proverbs 27.17

⁹⁶¹ See the intro of this study.

⁹⁶² Colossians 3.16

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

J.I. Packer describes meditation like this:

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.

Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let His truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself; it is, indeed, often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief into a clear apprehension of God's power and grace.⁹⁶³

Prayer is meant not as a genie in a bottle or a Magic 8 Ball. Nor is it meant to be a spiritual ATM machine that we go to and just swipe a card to get stuff. John Piper said that "prayer is a walkie-talkie for warfare, not a domestic intercom for increasing our conveniences."⁹⁶⁴ Prayer is meant to humble us and for us to contemplate God's greatness and glory and our own littleness and sinfulness. It is for us to align ourselves with God as we seek to glorify Him and know Him.

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.⁹⁶⁵

And as with breathing, prayer must have its purpose. It cannot just simply be rambling on and vain repetition. Jesus warned of this.⁹⁶⁶ Likewise, God tells us that if our prayers don't come from a place of real faith that even though we pray a lot, He will not listen.⁹⁶⁷ So we know that prayer is a necessity for a healthy spiritual life, but how do we know if our prayers are indeed godly and seeking after God's glory? How can we know that God is listening? How do we truly pray "in Jesus' Name"?⁹⁶⁸

When you pray it is better that your heart be without words than your words without heart.

-John Bunyan

So how, then, do we pray with heart?

Whenever I buy a book, I always read the endorsements; I like to see who this person has influenced. But even more than that, I like to read the dedication, because I like to see who has influenced *them*. When I first purchased Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, I was looking at his list of people he dedicated his thorough work of 10 years.⁹⁶⁹ As I got to the bottom, I was ecstatically and pleasantly surprised to see this entry:

...and Harald Bredesen and John Wimber, pastors and friends, who, more than anyone else, taught me about the power and work of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷⁰



Harald Bredesen was also a friend of mine. Now, if you knew Harald, or know of him, you'll understand that my initial "surprise" wore off quickly, because it only took a minute for me to think "why does this

⁹⁶³ *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer, page 23.

⁹⁶⁴ *Desiring God*, pg. 147

⁹⁶⁵ Some attribute this to Martin Luther, some to Martin Luther King, Jr. It's possible that Martin Luther said it first and that Martin Luther King, Jr. later on quoted him.

⁹⁶⁶ Matthew 6:7

⁹⁶⁷ Isaiah 1:15

⁹⁶⁸ John 14:13, 14

⁹⁶⁹ He was asked in an interview with his wife of 41 years (they met when they were 12 and 13), Margaret, at the home of Mark Driscoll (in his very impressive home library) how long it took him to write *Systematic Theology*. He said it was "off and on" in between other ministry projects and writings, and it was compiled and completed over 10 years' time. To watch this great little interview, which has some awesome and rather cute banter with his wife (seriously, you should watch it, it's so cute), go to www.theresurgence.com and type "Grudem interview" in the search field.

⁹⁷⁰ Wimber as well was Jeremy's and my pastor's mentor, so it was kind of a little one-two punch reading this.

surprise me? It's Harald. He found a way to get into *anything and everything*, even if it was Grudem's *Systematic Theology!*"

Nonetheless, though the surprise may have waned quickly, my smile and emotion didn't, I was so excited and even more deeply humbled to have known him than before. Harald indeed was a man who is, I'll be honest, simply indescribable, and he meant a tremendous deal to me, and I bring him up for a reason.

There's a face I can't wait to see again.

In the short time that we had the same home church when we were at the Movement (2003 until his death at 88 years old in December 2006), he was a wildfire for my brother, Jeremy, and me, as well as for anyone else who came in contact with him. The man, as Grudem so truly wrote, taught about the power and work of the Holy Spirit because he *lived by* the power and work of the Holy Spirit! This was a man who lived *only* for God and His glory; he really was a work of Holy Spirit sanctified art. As a matter of fact, he is known as the "Father of the Modern Charismatic Movement." He was the real article.

Though Harry and I would disagree on a few minor points of theology (he believed that everyone who had the Holy Spirit also had the gift of tongues because, as he would say, "when you buy a pair of shoes the tongues come with it!"⁹⁷¹ Again, as I said, a sanctified work of art this guy was!); but regardless of these minor differences, the guy just knew how to do it. He knew how to walk in step with the Spirit of God. He knew how to fully depend and trust in the Holy Spirit's work in his life. The awesome thing about him, however, was that he wasn't as "random" or "untamed" as I think some may think he was. He knew that the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of "self control,"⁹⁷² not chaos.⁹⁷³ He was just simply bold in his deep convictions, and his convictions were based in Spirit *and* in Truth.

When speaking of "private" prophetic insights, answers to prayer, and prophetic utterances given to us from other people, Harald said this:

**Prophecy can never be by itself directive.
It may be for preparation or confirmation, but never by itself directional.**

-Harald Bredesen

He goes on to say that it "may prepare us for something God is going to speak directly to my heart." Sometimes, unfortunately, our hearts are hardened toward the plain truth of the Word. At times, He may soften our hearts through prayer or someone else's encouragement, only because He wants us to find and be changed by a deeper, more challenging truth in His Word. Harry also says that "it may confirm something that He has already spoken to me."

If you were blessed to know Harald, you know that he loved the Word of God. Sometimes the opposite thing will happen, where we'll read the Word, and be stubborn about acting on it. When this happens, sometimes the Holy Spirit will move in us through prayer, conviction, discipline, or even at times through other people's encouragement or correction to get us to step out in faith on the Word of God. Basically, in the end, Harald declares that we "must never let it by itself direct me."⁹⁷⁴

This takes us back to **Chapter 2** when we looked at the Word of God. The Word *alone* is our place of testing these spoken words, answers to prayer, dreams, visions, or "feelings" and discernments that we may have. Without wanting to be redundant, we should *always* remember that God has lovingly and graciously given us His validated, sure, infallible, uncompromised written Word to be the lamp to our feet, the discerning double-edged sword, our source of correction, rebuking, and training, our life source, and our hope of eternal life. To echo the words of Harald:

Praise God!!!⁹⁷⁵

God has chosen to reveal Himself most clearly and perfectly through two means: Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and the Scriptures, the written Word. As we extensively noted in **Chapter 2**, you simply and absolutely *cannot* know Jesus if you don't know His Word; they are one in the same, inseparable, and eternally intertwined. This, once again, is why it is *so crucially* important to have the most objective, properly interpreted view of Scripture, because to twist Scripture is to twist the very Man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

⁹⁷¹ From his sermon, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*

⁹⁷² 2 Timothy 1.7. cf. Proverbs 25.28 // 1 Corinthians 7.5, 9.25 // Galatians 5.23 // 1 Timothy 2.9, 3.2, 11 // Titus 2.2-5, 16 // 1 Peter 1.13, 4.7 // 2 Peter 1.5-7

⁹⁷³ 1 Corinthians 14.33

⁹⁷⁴ Yes, Lord!, pg. 111

⁹⁷⁵ 15 times, minimum, at the top of his lungs, every time you would hang out with him, even if just for a five minute phone call.

This is why St. Jerome said, “Search the Scriptures, and [in] seeking you will find....[for] ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,”⁹⁷⁶ and why J.I. Packer said, “There can be no spiritual health without doctrinal knowledge.”⁹⁷⁷ The Word *must* be our lamp, and it *must* be our guide. Everything else is nothing else. Remember the words of John Stott:

**God has clothed His thoughts in words,
and there is no way to know Him except by knowing the Scriptures.**

-John Stott

Such a bold claim, one would contend “but can’t God speak through dreams and visions and signs and wonders?” Yes, indeed he can, but as Harald rightly noted, these should *never* be our sole direction; even more, they *cannot* be our sole direction! Why? Because how could you *possibly know*, without some hard evidenced proof, that what you are hearing or seeing *is in fact the Lord*? We *must* have a “test,” a backdrop that we can put our trust in, for knowing 100% beyond the shadow of a doubt that God is speaking. This is why Stott is so bold to make this claim, because, quite simply, it is true.

If you have anything more than the Word of God, then you have nothing at all.

When we have the Word of God, but also say things like “well, yeah of course I have the Word, but I also have this, that, or the other thing,” then we have made a grave mistake in our life. Until the Word becomes *everything* we need, until it becomes our life source, our daily bread, our hope, our sustenance, and until we cannot go a *single day* without, then we have nothing.

Paul said that if our righteousness, our good deeds, our way of life, our accomplishments at work, in our family, in our church, were gained through anything more than person and work of the Word made flesh, then Christ has become pointless;⁹⁷⁸ and if Word is useless to you, then you have nothing.

Too often I hear people declare that they don’t “need” to be in the bible every day or don’t “have time” to be in it every day. In that same person I see someone who is not living off of God’s daily bread, but is living off of yesterday’s manna, and is living of self-strength and independence, rather than dependence. I see a person who is not submitted to the Lord and humbled before Him, because they have yet to realize their real need for Him.

Look what Moses said to the Hebrews, who had not entered into the Promises Land yet:

Deuteronomy 32.46, 47

“Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life.”

This doesn’t say that God’s Word *should be* our life, as if we have an option; it says that God’s Word *is our life*. So what if you don’t have and live by His Word? You won’t have life. Some may have had enough of His Word to receive grace unto salvation, but they won’t have the life that the promises of the Word afford them. They will miss out on real joy, peace, and the glory of God in their life, but instead will have a life of misery, frustration, emptiness, and restlessness.

Is the Word your life? Or is the bible just empty words to you? Or maybe it’s half empty words, words you only go to when you *feel like* you need it or feel like you *should* read it out of obligation or guilt. If the Word is not your life source, your daily bread, your very life, I can only tell you to desperately pray, pray, pray, and ask God by the power of His will and gift of His Holy Spirit that He gives to you what is *surely* His will: a desire and love for His Word. You can ask boldly and confidently *in Jesus’ Name* that this be done, because you can be *absolutely sure* that God would *never* reject this request! So what is stopping you? Ask and you shall receive!⁹⁷⁹

John 14.13, 14

[Jesus said] “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

⁹⁷⁶ *Commentary on Isaiah*, Nn. 1.2: CCL 73, 1-3

⁹⁷⁷ *Knowing God*, pg. 22

⁹⁷⁸ Galatians 2.20, 21 // Philippians 3.8

⁹⁷⁹ Mark 11.24 // John 11.22, 15.7, 16, 16.23

I don't say this to point fingers and cast judgment, because there are days where I don't give the Word the first place in my life, and there days where I don't go to prayer as my first line of offense and defense in my day. And I want to be the first one to stand *with you*, arm in arm as we *humbly declare to our God*, "Lord! We are sorry, show us Your mercy and grace! Break our hearts and teach us to depend on You! To love You! To honor You! To trust in You! To worship You!" I hope that God will grant me the grace to see my sin of arrogant independence for what it is, to see my pride for what it is, to see my self-worship for what it is, and to see my idolatry for what it is. So please, please, please I hope you don't think for a second that I am standing back as the Pharisee looking down on the tax collector.⁹⁸⁰ Oh Lord, examine my heart and keep me humbled before You, eyes opened to see my sin! I *know* that I don't depend on God as I should, my hope is that you would join me in that recognition as we "discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness."⁹⁸¹

☪ KNOWING GOD'S WILL ☪

The big question we ask all the time is "how do we know God's will?" We wonder how to discern decisions, how we know whether an answer to prayer is from the Lord or was just some funky, not-so-fresh sushi we had the night before. Oftentimes, we believe that we would have the faith to step out if God would just "give us a sign" or "make it known to me for sure."

However, Jesus teaches us that seeking signs is not for us, because He has already given us the only sign we need: that He, Jesus Christ, died and rose again and has conquered sin and death on our behalf.⁹⁸² If this isn't enough of a sign for us to believe His promises, no sign will be enough for us.

Furthermore, in **Exodus 3.12** we see that the ultimate "sign" that God is indeed sending us comes *after* we step out in faith: "And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.'" When did the Hebrews get the sign from God so they would know that what God said was really God? *After* they did it!

Paul reaffirms this when He says this:

Romans 12.1, 2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

How do we know what God's will is? By being transformed by the renewing of our mind. It is only *after* our mind is renewed that we know God's will.

So if knowing God's will takes the transformation of our mind, how do we know how to do that? Do we just pray for it? My hope is that by now, almost 400 pages into our study, you will know that the only way to have our minds transformed so that we can know the mind and will of God is through His very Word. Jesus prayed to His Father and asked that He would "sanctify them [His people] by His truth." He followed that request up by stating "Your Word is truth."⁹⁸³ Again, as we saw earlier, Paul told Timothy this important truth:

2 Timothy 3.15, 16

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Do you believe that? That the Word is all you need? Or do you think there is something more that you need?

As we have seen, His *logos* (Greek for "word") is His thoughts, heart, desires, plan, mind, and will being put forth into words. We believe not only that the Scriptures are the infallible and inerrant Word of God, but also that they are self-sufficient, meaning that they are *all* that we need for life and godliness.

⁹⁸⁰ Luke 18.9-14

⁹⁸¹ 1 Timothy 4.7

⁹⁸² Matthew 12.39, 40

⁹⁸³ John 17.17

God has told us that His Word is a lamp to our feet, which means that it is our guide;⁹⁸⁴ He tells us that it is our daily bread that we are to live off of as much as we live off of real bread;⁹⁸⁵ it is our final authority, so we can base our whole life on it;⁹⁸⁶ Jesus is the Word made flesh, so it should be loved and looked to every day, as much as we can.⁹⁸⁷

If you are immersed in the mind of God, will you not then *pray* the will of God?

When you know the mind, will, ways, thoughts, desires, and heart of God, you will do nothing *but* pray the will of God. You will become so aligned with the will of God that His will *will* become *your will*.

Here's the thing, we so often treat prayer as a shortcut for answers. We would rather pray and get an answer or a feeling rather than do our due diligence and seek God out in His Word. Rather than discipline, we prefer laziness. Rather than getting to know Him, we want the cliff notes. Rather than long term wisdom, we want short term answers. We would much rather have a sign, a dream, a vision, a "coincidence," an answer to prayer, a prophetic word from someone else, or a feeling rather than actually get to know God through what He has *promised* is His thoughts, will, desires, mind, and wisdom.

Prayer is not a shortcut to knowing God.

Rather, what prayer does is takes what God has told us and revealed to us about Himself and helps us align with that. But if you don't know Him through His Word, what are you aligning yourself with? Chances are, it's your own feelings or thoughts, a make-believe theological system based on ignorance of who God really is and what His will really is. Think about it, what is your prayer life aligning you to?

Jesus told us that if *His words abide in us*, we will ask what we will and it will be done for us.⁹⁸⁸ I've heard this so poorly misapplied, most notably as a "name it and claim it" type theology. That's not what this is. I've also seen many Christians get their faith pummeled because they have asked for a great number of things, but to no avail. That is devastating. But a point is missed, which is why I italicized it. The condition for receiving these things of prayer is that His words must abide in us. Because guess what, if His Word is in us, then we will pray and ask for His promises, and His promises *will be given to us!* *This is the secret of "effective prayer" that "avails much."*⁹⁸⁹

R.A. Torrey was an incredible American theologian, evangelist, and Pastor in the last half of the 1800's. He partnered with D.L Moody in his evangelistic efforts in Chicago and also served as the Dean at Biola University (which at the time was formally known as the Bible Institute of Los Angeles) starting in 1912. His clear and timeless teachings still impact teachers and students alike, as his favorite topics were the Word of God, prayer, the Holy Spirit, and evangelism. Here is what Torrey wrote in his book he wrote in 1900 called *How to Pray*:



How does real faith come?

Romans 10.17 answers the question: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." If we are to have real faith, we must study the Word of God and find out what is promised, then simply believe the promises of God. Faith must have a warrant. Trying to believe something that you want to believe is not faith. Believing what God says in His Word is faith. If I am to have faith when I pray, I must find some promise in the Word of God on which to rest my faith. Faith furthermore comes through the Spirit. The Spirit knows the will of God, and if I pray in the Spirit, and look to the Spirit to teach me God's will, he will lead me out in prayer along the line of that will, and give me faith that the prayer is to be answered. But in no case does real faith come by simply determining that you are going to get the thing that you want to get.⁹⁹⁰

If prayer is a walkie-talkie, the Word tells us what channel that God is on.

When Jesus compared Himself to a vine and us to branches, He spoke of something very profound. The branches whole life and health was dependent on the sap that was given to them through the vine. They were nothing without it; they had zero independence. He gives us great insight into what this "sap" is when he tells us that His *words* must

⁹⁸⁴ Psalm 119.105

⁹⁸⁵ Matthew 6.11 // Luke 4.4

⁹⁸⁶ Psalm 138.2 // 1 Thessalonians 5.19-22

⁹⁸⁷ John 1.1-5, 14 // Revelation 19.13

⁹⁸⁸ John 15.7

⁹⁸⁹ James 5.16

⁹⁹⁰ pg. 37, from the Hendrickson Christian Classics edition called *How to Pray/How to Study the Bible*

abide in us! Torrey again says that “it is vain to expect power in prayer unless we meditate much upon the words of Christ.”⁹⁹¹ As well, he said this:

Prevailing prayer is almost an impossibility where there is neglect of the study of the Word of God...the prayer that is born of meditation upon the Word of God is the prayer that soars upward most easily God’s listening ear.

So again, I ask, what is your prayers aligning yourself with? Your own desires? Your will? Your emotions? What is the “sap” that gives your prayer life its motive, directive, and depth? If His Word is not the sap, the daily bread that keeps you connected to the vine, you very much run a great risk in having a very ineffective prayer life. The only prayer that will be answered with a “yes” answer are those that are in accordance with His will. If your sap is your own will, you can guarantee that the answer will be “no.” The solution is to know His will by knowing His Word.

The only way to pray in the Spirit is to pray by the sword of the Spirit.

Let me explore this just a little bit more. Jesus said that what comes out of your mouth is from the abundant contents of your heart.⁹⁹² If your heart is filled with garbage and selfish desires, then you will speak and act on selfish desires. If your heart is full of the Word of God, then you will speak and act out the Word of God. In other words, you will be doing God’s will, and it will have now become your will. This is how we walk in the Spirit.⁹⁹³

Walking in the Spirit is not about getting special revelations, supernatural occurrences, and divine interventions and direction. Walking in the Spirit is being filled with the Spirit of God, equipped with His sword, and then being led by the Spirit according to His sword, the Word. This is the only way we can live obedient lives, lives that worship in Spirit and in truth. Without the sword of the Spirit, we cannot live obediently to God, even as we read earlier, that we can only please God through faith,⁹⁹⁴ and faith comes through the Word of Christ.⁹⁹⁵

As Harald said that we can never be led simply and only by sources outside the bible, such as prophetic words, dreams, and answers to prayer, John Piper would agree with him. Here is how Piper describes it:

What is necessary is that we have a renewed mind, that is so shaped and so governed by the revealed will of God in the Bible, that we see and assess all relevant factors with the mind of Christ, and discern what God is calling us to do. This is very different from constantly trying to hear God’s voice saying do this and do that. People who try to lead their lives by hearing voices are not in sync with Romans 12:2 [which I have quoted above].

There is a world of difference between praying and laboring for a renewed mind that discerns how to apply God’s Word, on the one hand, and the habit of asking God to give you new revelation of what to do, on the other hand. Divination does not require transformation. God’s aim is a new mind, a new way of thinking and judging, not just new information. His aim is that we be transformed, sanctified, freed by the truth of his revealed Word (John 8:32; 17:17). So the second stage of God’s will of command is the discerning application of the Scriptures to new situations in life by means of a renewed mind.⁹⁹⁶

So again, the only way to know the will of God is to know the Word of God. As the Word of God transforms our minds and hearts, we begin to see, hear, act, speak, and think like God. This is why the Word calls it being “conformed into the image of Christ.”⁹⁹⁷

So if we now know how we can learn and know the will of God, how are we then to *pray in faith* for the will of God?

☪ Two “WILLS” of God? ☪

⁹⁹¹ Ibid., pg. 45

⁹⁹² Luke 6.45

⁹⁹³ Galatians 5.16, 25 // Romans 8.4

⁹⁹⁴ Hebrews 11.6

⁹⁹⁵ Romans 10.17

⁹⁹⁶ From an article titled “What is the Will of God and How Can We Know It?” on www.desiringgod.org

⁹⁹⁷ Romans 8.29

I've heard many Christians pray a prayer like this: "Lord, I ask that you heal me (or give me that job or whatever it may be), if it is in Your will." I'll then hear another Christian rebuke that Christian by saying, "Don't say 'if it's in Your will.' That just shows a lack of faith, and if you lack faith then it won't be given to you. You *know* it's God's will to heal and prosper you, so just ask!"

But is that "just asking"? Or is that "telling God" what to do?

If it really is a lack of faith, and lack of faith is sin, then Jesus sinned. Look at what He said the night before He died:

Luke 22.42

"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

So what's the difference in us saying, as the leper humbly asked of Jesus "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." What was Jesus response? "Sorry, you just said 'if You will,' which means that you lack faith. Go and be leprous." Not hardly! He said, "I will; be clean." It says then that his leprosy was immediately gone!

So is it okay to say, "However, Lord, let Your will be done, and not mine?" Yes...but not all the time.

Before you slip into confusion, I want to offer something exciting to you. When we know His Word, we will know His promises and His will. When we know His will, we will pray His will. When we pray His will, it *will* be given to us, so we *don't have to say* "if it's Your will" because we *know it is His will* and we can *know that we will receive it!* Now, at *that point*, if we are praying for something that we know is God's will, praying tentatively "if it's Your will" could indeed then be a lack of faith based out of a lack of knowledge of who God is and what He has promised.

Now then, we should wonder then what exactly those guaranteed promises are. Indeed, some believe that it is God's will *always* to heal, and if we aren't healed, it's not because it wasn't His will, it's because we lacked faith. But this goes against Scripture. We covered this a lot in the section on sin and death, so we won't cover it again here, but you recall, God has plan and purpose even in evil and suffering. So what do we make of this?

Firstly, we know that there are God's perfect desires. These are His commands. It is His will, in the sense that it is His desire and heart, to see us obey all of His commands and live in harmony with Him and each other. In this sense, He doesn't desire to see the wicked perish⁹⁹⁸ or His people to suffer,⁹⁹⁹ but yet these things still happen. This is what many theologians call His perfect will or His *will of command*.♣

And then there is what *actually* happens in the world. Though it doesn't match up with God's will of command, we do know that everything happens according to His will.¹⁰⁰⁰ We know that somehow, in His eternal mind, everything that He has caused to happen, even the bad things, work together for good and give praise to His glory and grace. This is what we may call His permissive or sovereign will, or as many theologians call His *will of decree*,♣ which is that which He actual causes to happen by His sovereign will.¹⁰⁰¹

Consider the story of Joseph. Joseph was wrongly sold into slavery by his brothers. Talk about a treacherous thing to do! Joseph, however, eventually was a tool of God's righteous and merciful plan. Look at what happens after his brothers are confronted with the reality of what they had done:

Genesis 50.18-21

His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

What does Joseph say to them? He doesn't say, "well it all worked out," or "God cleaned up your mess." No, he says "you meant evil against me, *but God meant it for good, to bring it about!*" God actually caused it, planned it, and brought it about! It was not a mistake that God worked around; it was not a Plan B; it was meant and caused by God

⁹⁹⁸ Ezekiel 33.11

⁹⁹⁹ Exodus 3.7, 8

¹⁰⁰⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5.9 // Titus 1.1-3 // Jeremiah 1.5 // 1 Corinthians 2.7-9 // Isaiah 37.26 // Jeremiah 29.11 // Isaiah 14.25-27 // Job 42.2, 3 // Romans 8.28-30

¹⁰⁰¹ Make sure to check the Resources at the end of this section for some great articles on this topic.

Himself! This is so reassuring! We can know that everything that comes our way is no mistake that God is trying to fix, but that it was *meant* and *caused* for a *good purpose*!

Now, we have to ask ourselves, was it God's pleasure and desire to see Joseph be sold into slavery? Absolutely not, according to His will of command. His brothers broke a *number* of God's commands! But was it His pleasure and desire to create this event to bring glory to Himself for a greater good? Absolutely!

There are many other examples, but let me give you the most important one. Do you think that it was God's desire to see His one and only begotten Son murdered and humiliated? No way. What loving Father would want that? After all, it is His command to not murder, especially if it is the Messiah! But was God pleased in the willing sacrifice of His Son and what it accomplished? Of course He was, He is the One that decreed it. He desired to plan something He didn't desire. We could possibly chalk this up as another antinomy, but I actually think that this is easier for us to understand than a true antinomy.

Have you ever watched one of your children doing something they shouldn't be doing? They have disregarded your instruction, and sometimes there comes a point where you watch them do it anyway so that they learn a lesson (provided that the lesson isn't actually harmful to them). Do you want your child to sin? No. Do you want them to learn? Yes. You have a will of command, which your child doesn't always obey, and you have a will of decree, that which you sovereignly decide will happen for the purpose of good.

So, what does this have to do with prayer? Everything!

Many game shows we see on television have some sort of intense, take a risk sort of an ending. The contestant can either choose a guaranteed prize, let's say \$10,000, or they can risk it all and choose "what's behind door number 1," which could have either \$1,000,000 or nothing at all. One of my favorite instances of this is from the Weird Al Yankovic movie, *UHF*, which many of you have probably not seen, and those that did probably didn't like it.

In the movie, a contestant on a local cable TV show called "Wheel of Fish" (remember, it's Weird Al) can either choose a tasty red snapper off the wheel or choose a hidden item from under a box. She chooses the box, risking the loss of the tasty snapper, and to her dismay, as Kuni, the Japanese Karate sensei/host of the show, unveils the contents of the box, he exclaims, "Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Yo' so stupid!!!"



Okay, so there's a point, I promise. When we know the Word, we see that there are an incredible amount of gifts and inheritance that are *guaranteed* for us to receive from our Father. When we pray, we can *know for sure* that God will absolutely give us these things.

You can think of it in light of our natural parenting. There are some things that you will always give your kids, because it is their inheritance as your kids. You will never deny them love (even if it's in the form of discipline), you will never deny them reconciliation, guidance, care, or nurturing. You will never deny them advice, provision (such as food and clothing), or opportunity to have peace and joy in their relationship with you.

On the other hand, our kids can ask if they can have ice cream, and it may be, or it may not be, your will to give it to them based on what you think is right. They may ask for a new pair of shoes or a raise in their allowance, but this is not guaranteed, it is up to your wisdom as parents knowing what is best for them in that time. So what do our kids do? They can and should humbly ask if they can have these things, but ultimately trust our will and discernment.

So let's look first at what is guaranteed, and then at the hidden things of God.

- Wisdom. **James 1.5** says "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"

- A way out of temptation.¹⁰⁰² God will never tempt you beyond the point where you are forced to sin. It may seem that way, like you have no choice, but if you pray and ask God to show you the way out, He will provide the way out. This doesn't mean you will *take* the way out, but He promises to provide it.
- Forgiveness and restoration. David said that a "broken and contrite spirit You have yet to deny."¹⁰⁰³ If you are broken over sin, you are guaranteed to be accepted by God unconditionally.
- Pray for the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He is in you, and if your prayer is for Him to lead and guide you, prayers for the manifestation of His fruit is a slam dunk prayer. Look at this list of His fruit:
 - Love. If you lack love for others, God will give this liberally.
 - Joy. Regardless of your situation, God will answer this prayer to find joy in Him.
 - Peace. God will give us the peace that surpasses understanding.
 - Patience. This is a scary one to pray for, but
 - Kindness. Having a hard time being kind to others? Here's a free gift waiting for you.
 - Goodness. Still have some garbage in your heart? Dishonesty? Pray for goodness.
 - Faithfulness. Having trouble staying steady? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you, it's His job.
 - Gentleness. Rough around the edges? Careless with people's feelings? Ask for change.
 - Self-control. Addictive personality? Compulsive? You have been given the Spirit of self-control, so ask Him to help you!¹⁰⁰⁴

Now, as I said, you can't just simply pray for these things and expect them to fall in your lap. There are no cheap fixes, no microwave instant meals here. God will bring the means for which to give you these things about, but we have to be ready, watchful, and waiting. Here's a few for instances

- You pray for wisdom. God will give it to you, right? But don't expect to become Solomon overnight. Expect God to give you a deeper desire for His Word. Expect to start seeing situations differently, and when you do, you find yourself being humbled, asking others for advice, looking into the Word, etc. God will give you wisdom, but He will provide it in the right way; the way that provides long term character and heart change, long term habits.
- You pray to be able to forgive others. Will your feelings of anger and bitterness suddenly vanish? No. But if you persistently pray for this, you can know that He will provide the way to receive it. Maybe you pray that God could help you forgive, and then all of a sudden you run into that person in the store, or your son ends up on the same baseball team as their son. Coincidence? Nope, we call that an answer to prayer.
- Praying for patience? This is a classic one. Everyone knows that the prayer for patience is a scary prayer. *Everyone*, even non-Christians, joke around and say "be careful what your pray/ask for, you just might get it!" What do they mean by this? Who wouldn't want patience? Because everyone knows you don't just get patience, but you get to be put in situations that test and build your patience.
- Let's say you are miserable in life. You hate your job, your marriage is falling apart, you have a tough sickness, or something like that. You pray for joy. Once again, you probably not expect an instant dose of joy (though often times, when people are in very desperate situations, it seems that by God's grace and mercy He does give a supernatural gift of joy for that time, praise God); but you can expect that He will give you a desire for His Word and that His Word will bring you comfort and joy in your situation.

Those are just a few examples, but as you can see, when we make claim to our inheritance that we have in Christ through the Holy Spirit, God will liberally and freely give it to us; but we tell us to be persistent in our prayer and has designed the long lasting procurement of these gifts not simply through a download, but through (and for the purpose of) the transformation of our hearts and minds.¹⁰⁰⁵

On the other hand, there are other things, things that may or may not be underneath the box, so to speak, that are hidden from our knowledge. As a matter of fact, they are hidden in the deep counsel of God's sovereign mind and will. Here's where my silly *UHF* analogy falls drastically apart. In prayer, we don't have to choose one or the other to pray

¹⁰⁰² 1 Corinthians 10.13

¹⁰⁰³ Psalm 51.1-17

¹⁰⁰⁴ 2 Timothy 1.7

¹⁰⁰⁵ Matthew 7.7, 8 // Luke 18.1, 9, 10 // 1 Thessalonians 5.17

for; we can pray for both! We can absolutely pray in absolute faith for the things that are guaranteed, and we can *also* ask for the things that may or not be God's will that He has in store for us. On top of that, I promise you that if you *ever* pray for something that was not according to God's will, He will *never, ever* exclaim, "Yo' so stupid!!!"

So, rest assured! We have a merciful God and Father who does indeed love to give good gifts to His children, and we should be bold, while still humble, in entering into His presence and making our requests known to Him!

Now, when it comes to the things that are hidden, this is where we, as God's children, ask humbly, in the same manner that Jesus did, where we can ask God for things by saying something like "Father, I don't know what you have planned for me, but I am asking for healing from this sickness. But if You have a greater purpose in it, I know that You want to be glorified in it and so I am asking that You help me learn what You want me to learn so that You can be glorified in me through it. So let Your will be done, not my will."

This is a good prayer. This is a great prayer. This was Jesus' prayer! But guess what? In this prayer, we must pray in faith, because we really don't know what's on the other side, so to speak, of our prayers.

- Pray for our enemies to be saved. Though we don't know for sure who God may save, we are still praying according to His command for us to pray for them and His desire to show mercy.
- Pray for missionaries to be protected and be effective. Though we don't know how fruitful their ministry may be, or if God has planned that they be martyred or oppressed, we pray according to His desire for His Word to go forth and for the nations to hear the gospel.
- Pray for pastors and teachers. We pray for their wisdom, humility, families, health, rest, and protection.
- Pray for government. We pray for humility, salvation, deep godly convictions, and honesty.
- Pray for healing. God supernaturally heals. We should pray in faith knowing that He does this and knowing that He can be glorified in it. Though we don't know what His deeper plan may be for some people's suffering, we can obey the command to pray for the sick and simultaneously submit to God and know that He works all things for good for those that love Him.¹⁰⁰⁶
- Pray for other aids to life, such as friends during a time of loneliness or a job during a time of unemployment. We can and should pray for these things, but we also, in the end, must submit to God and His sovereign plan, because it may be His desire for us to be in a season of human loneliness so that we can learn to have God be our Best Friend; He may have us be in a season of unemployment for any number of reasons, such as humility, building trust, prioritizing our life, or even forcing our hand out of a certain industry, line of work, or even location.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Romans 8.28

We've also looked a lot at the theology of the church, but here we should consider some of the practical implications of it. In the chapter on the church, I quoted theologian Dr. Ray Ortlund, and it deserves to be repeated. He said this:

The Christian who is not committed to a group of other believers for praying, sharing, and serving, so that he is known, as he knows others, is not an obedient Christian. He is not in the will of God. However vocal he may be in his theology, he is not obeying the Lord.

The design of God is communal. It is overtly-communal. I say that because we see that He Himself is communal, a Triune God. We see that that life itself is only possible when we are communal through marriage and procreation. The animal kingdom is communal. We saw in the last chapter that the New Earth will be communal. And so we can see that our life here on Earth must also be communal.

**To gather with God's people in united adoration of the Father
is as necessary to the Christian life as prayer.**

-Martin Luther

In the same way that physical life is only born through the means of community between a man and a woman, so also the spiritual life is born through the means of community. Obviously and firstly, of course is that the spiritual life is born out of the communal Covenant of Redemption made between the Trinity. But not only that, we have seen extensively that the vehicle by which the Holy Spirit (who is the Agent of regeneration per the Father's request and sovereign election) is used to reach us is redeemed sinners! He chooses to indwell in us, empower us, teach us, and then use us to "baptize others and teach them to obey."¹⁰⁰⁷ We are His mouthpiece; even as His Word says that there can be no salvation without a preacher.¹⁰⁰⁸ And so we see, community is not only the heart of fellowship, but it is the heart of evangelism and mission.

The most evangelistic thing you can do is to be committed to your church.

This may seem like an over-promising statement, but as we examine the Scriptures and see God's plan, heart, and design for us and our salvation, we see this to be very true. Simply looking even at the statement Jesus made in His prayer from the previous verses we looked at, **John 17.21-23**, we see that there is something mysteriously supernatural about what happens when we are unified with each other. We also see that God has chosen to make the manifold wisdom of His plan of salvation known through the church in **Ephesians 3.7-13**. It is through the church that He has entrusted the message of the Gospel, and it is by our love for each other and our actions toward each other that cause the world to take notice of our claims of God.

So how is this great salvation made known simply by being committed to the church? Let's look at some Scriptures in addition to the important ones we have already mentioned.

John 13.35

[Jesus said,] "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus said that if we love one another, and really love and are committed to each other, people will know that we are authentic, the real deal.¹⁰⁰⁹

John 13.34, 35

[Jesus said,] "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Matthew 5.16

[Jesus said,] "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

¹⁰⁰⁷ Matthew 28.19, 20

¹⁰⁰⁸ Romans 10.14

¹⁰⁰⁹ 1 Peter 1.22 // 1 John 3.11, 4.7

Actions speak loudly. Additionally, we also can recall that we saw that it was the disciples' love for each other that caused them to have "the favor of *all* the people" in **Acts 2.42-47**.

So what does this mean for us? Obviously, we must pursue this love, but how can we do this? Well now that we have seen a bit on why God has chosen this to be His plan, let's look a little on how He has designed for us to fulfill this effectively.

Matthew 23.10-12

The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Philippians 2.4

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

God is asking for sacrifice. He desires our humility as we aim not to seek self and please self, but to seek and esteem others as *greater than* ourselves. He tells us that if we die to ourselves, we will find life;¹⁰¹⁰ if we become the least, we will become the greatest;¹⁰¹¹ if we become selfless we will become Spirit-filled.¹⁰¹² God has required a radical commitment to His covenant people.

A COVENANT PEOPLE

So what does this commitment look like? What does it mean to be a covenant people? Well once again, we remember that a covenant is, in its simplest definition, a promise or commitment. Being in a covenant, one would say to the other, "I'm going to do everything it takes to uphold my end, regardless of what you do on your end." It was a very intense commitment. We, as a people, are called to each other, as a covenant people, in many ways, including the following:

- We are to be kind to one another. Ephesians 4.32
- We are to be tenderhearted to one another. 1 Peter 3.8 // Ephesians 4.32
- We are to forgive one another. Colossians 3.13
- We are to confess to one another. James 5.16
- We are to pray for one another. 2 Thessalonians 3.11
- We are to bear one another's burdens. Galatians 6.2
- We are to practice hospitality toward one another. 1 Peter 4.8
- We are to stir up one another to love and good works. Hebrews 10.24, 25
- We are to encourage one another. Romans 1.12 // 1 Corinthians 14.3 // 1 Thessalonians 5.11
- We are to be submitted to one another. Ephesians 5.21
- We are to teach one another. Colossians 3.16

So how do we fully commit to each other in the way that Scripture describes? It takes a lot of humility, dying to self, selflessness, submission, prayer, and dedication. These things don't come easy for us. Let's look at what our necessary steps as believers should be as we move forward with the Gospel as church. Also, it would be beneficial to review the chapter on the church.

Hebrews 10.24, 25

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

¹⁰¹⁰ Matthew 10.39

¹⁰¹¹ Matthew 19.30, 20.16

¹⁰¹² Ephesians 5.18 // Romans 5.5

1. Prayer

First of all, recognize that you simply cannot, on your own, really do these things. Our flesh wars against all of this. We love our independence, we love our rights, we love our privacy, and we love not being accountable. If the Spirit is at work in you and is giving you a desire to obey His Word in the area of commitment to the church, pray, pray, pray and ask Him to help you do this!

2. Commit to Your Church

God has called us to commit to each other, submit one to another, and be committed to a local gathering of Christians who are led by God-appointed Elders and teachers. Step out in faith, do what it takes to not just get involved, but really and truly commit and dedicate yourself to the church.

3. Be Baptized

Baptism in the Word is not just to show a commitment to Jesus, but it is to show a real and true entry into the family of God. It's an outward showing of what is going on inside of our hearts, as it identifies us as being crucified with Christ, going into the grave, and dying to self, and then being raised in Christ.

4. Be Generous

Go to the next level. If you are in a **Community Group**, be generous and consider starting your own. If you are shy, be generous despite your fears, and start sharing your faith. If you don't give financially, pray for a generous heart and step out in faith (remembering that sometimes you don't get the "sign" that God is working in you until *after* you do it!). If you already do give financially, pray and ask God if there is a way you can give more generously. All in all, ask God to give you a generous heart in all that you do. Chances are, He will offer situations and opportunities for you to step out in that.

5. Be Humbly Submitted

Know what your church believes and what the vision is, and get on board. Being submitted doesn't mean following blindly, but it means to understand what your church believes, where it's going, and how it plans on getting there; if you agree, jump in and do your part! If you disagree, but it is on minor points (such as method or structure, not big doctrinal issues), then submit yourself to the church's leadership, praying for and trusting that God is guiding them.

He that is not a son of peace is not a son of God. All other sins destroy the Church consequentially; but division and separation demolish it directly.

-Richard Baxter¹⁰¹³

6. Commit to Being Equipped

If you aren't disciplined in the Word, reach out and seek accountability, ideas, and a plan; be open to trying new things and new ministries; be open to constructive criticism; be open to going the extra mile (such as you are now by taking this class and an extra couple hours out of your weekend to be equipped in the Word).

7. Teach Others

We are *all* to take part in the Great Commandment. It's not just for the "professionals." If you are a student, share your faith with your friends. If you are a husband, wash your wife in the Word of God. If you have kids, teach your kids about the Gospel. Not just "Jesus loves you," but the whole Gospel. And teach them all the time.¹⁰¹⁴

As you consider these things, remember that in "God's economy" things tend to work backwards. Whoever is first will be last, and whoever is last will be first.¹⁰¹⁵ As disciples, dying to self is exactly that, it means that we give up many of our rights and desires. But guess what? Here is a true statement:

**God replaces our 'rights' with rewards,
and He replaces our desires with His desires!**

¹⁰¹³ *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, pg. 4

¹⁰¹⁴ For a great book written for parents to teach them how to teach their kids good theology and gospel truth, check out *Big Truths for Young Hearts* by Bruce Ware. It covers all the topics in this study, but equips the parent to be able to communicate it and teach it to their little ones. Very cool.

¹⁰¹⁵ Matthew 19.32

☪ Purpose of Each BELIEVER ☪

Spurgeon spoke of the unique hardships of being a Pastor. He spoke of the exhaustion, the warfare, the criticism, and all the not-so-savory things that come with the calling. In one of his lectures to his students, he said something about Pastors that I believe relates to every Christian:

It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus.

We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living sacrifices, whose lot is to be consumed: we are to spend and to be spent, not to lay ourselves up in lavender, and nurse our flesh.

He is absolutely correct. When we get saved, it is not our purpose to be put in a display box for the world to see what a great job God has done making us pretty. We are called to spend our life and be spent as God would enjoy. We are to be living sacrifices unto God,¹⁰¹⁶ taking up our cross daily,¹⁰¹⁷ and living as recklessly abandoned people for the sake of the Gospel advancing in this world. Our glorious purpose in this life is to bring as much glory to God as we possibly can among all the nations. Remember one of our first quotations from the beginning of this study:

The chief end of man is glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

-Westminster Confession of Faith

This is what I have been designed to do, and I am to do it with all I have and with all that I am. You were created to do the same thing. Your life mission, that mystical, ever evading enigma of “the purpose of life” is exactly what the Westminster Confession of Faith says. It is not found in fame, wealth, or a fortune cookie, it is only found in being a living sacrifice, a lifestyle of devotion, unceasing worship, and the enjoyment of God.

This is why C.S. Lewis said “die before you die; after that there is no hope.” Stop living for things that don’t satisfy; put them away, take up what is eternal, and make God’s glory your highest aim. This, I promise, and more importantly the Word makes the promise, that this will not disappoint.

God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary.

Don’t forget, God uses the foolish things to confound the wise.¹⁰¹⁸ Here’s the truth, and don’t take this wrong, but I don’t care who you are or what you’ve done. All I care about is *whose* you are and *what He’s* done! God has given you a future and a hope, He’s given you a plan and a purpose, He’s *even* preordained the good works that He wants you to walk in!¹⁰¹⁹ He’s put Pastors and teachers and mentors and friends and family in your life to help guide you! And more than that, He’s give you His eternal Word and His Holy Spirit to teach you who He is and how He wants to work in you!

Each of us have been given a unique story, unique qualities, and unique desires. We all have unique personalities and traits, and we all have unique passions. Moses was a shepherd, and though he had a speech impediment and was hiding out in the desert, God used his shepherd’s staff as an instrument of miracles. Each of us have unique instruments that, to us, looking from the outside, are foolish, but to God, they are His instruments of righteousness.

**I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all;
but whatever I have placed in *God's hands*, those I still possess.**

-Martin Luther, 16th Century Reformer

¹⁰¹⁶ Romans 12.1, 2

¹⁰¹⁷ Matthew 16.24

¹⁰¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 1.27

¹⁰¹⁹ Ephesians 2.10

Our Worshipful Next Step

So, here we are, just the two of us. What do we do now?

We worship.

I want to share with you one of the main reasons I decided to write this class back in 2009 and 2010.

I set out originally to develop this class, a foundational starting point for us so that we can truly be and deeply understand of God's plan for redemption in Christ. I hoped that it would lead to a deeper sense of who Christ is so that it would transform the way we see our God and Savior. To be totally clear, I set out in this task as a worship leader. Not a musician, but a worship leader. We both know that singing songs isn't the point. Worship is the point. When we come together as a people, our aim, our focus in worship, should be Christ and the promises that He has made. But how could we be worshipping in Spirit if we weren't worshipping in truth?

And so it was with that heart, the heart of a worship leader, that I hope to have brought this to you. Not just as information, but information that leads to transformation. The goal of this theology, as we have seen, is worship.

Now, I'm not foolish, or at least I don't like to think I am. I know that going to a class doesn't make us worshipers any more than going to a church makes you a Christian or going to In-N-Out makes you a hamburger. But my prayer is that we would take this foundation of systematic theology, that we would study it, know it, love it, live it, and apply it. My prayer is that as we hear the message of the bible, whether it's in the Old Testament building a case for our need for a Savior, or in the New Testament which has revealed to us this Savior, or whether it's at church on Sunday or at your **Community Group** on Wednesday, that those truths would stack firmly in place on the foundation of what we have studied, which is the Gospel. It's like with building Legos, this theology is the bottom plate. When that is sturdy, everything else gets stacked on that and fits in its. We then have a foundation built on the solid foundation of the Rock, rather than on sinking sand.



This takes time, it takes discipline, it takes commitment, it takes humility, it takes accountability, it takes being a part of the family, and it takes the Holy Spirit to empower all of these things. But through His guidance, the Word of God will change your life, because it promises to. Without the Word, you have nothing to stand on in your faith. You risk being a make-believe Christian with make-believe theology, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, led away by itching ears, and missing out on the abundant life that God promises.

Press in. Commit. Sacrifice. Devote.

I would like to close this study with my prayer for you, which happens to be Paul's prayer for the **Colossian** and **Philippian** churches.

Colossians 3.1-17

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Philippians 1.3-11

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

For the praise and glory of God's holy and perfect Name;

By the exaltation of His Son, who has the Name above all names, is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords;

Through the power and gift of the Holy Spirit and His ministry among us;

My prayer for myself and my covenant to you, my family, is to always and only lift God's Word, alongside His Name, above all things as a lamp to our church's feet, as a light to our path, as our source of truth, hope, strength, wisdom, freedom, reconciliation, healing, guidance, life, and power.

To Him be all praise, honor, glory, power and might.

I love you all, and I am deeply humbled, thrilled, grateful, amazed, shocked, and filled with worshipful awe and praise that God has brought us together to know Him and enjoy Him. I look forward to the coming days, weeks, months, and years that we enjoy with each other as we are being built up together as the holy dwelling place for God by His Spirit.¹⁰²⁰

Your servant and Pastor,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. B. E. Y." with a long vertical stroke extending downwards from the end.

¹⁰²⁰ Ephesians 2.22 // 1 Peter 2.4, 5

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Why Works Must Accompany Faith

Result #1: It proves that we are sealed and saved.

James tells us that if we are really saved, we will produce works. We aren't saved by our works, but our works prove that we are saved. A person who claims to be Christian who is not reading and studying the Word, praying and having fellowship with regularly, and is deeply committed to the body of Christ is either a Christian in rebellion and disobedience to God, or, dare I say, making this claim based on what James has said, not a Christian at all. He is either an unbeliever or a make-believer, both of which are unbelievers.

We looked previously at the fact that we can be assured of our salvation. But the assurance of our salvation doesn't come just because we repeated a prayer after someone. The only way we can know for sure that this prayer was a genuine product of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work in our life is if the fruit of the Spirit follows. We already looked extensively at what some of that fruit looks like, but these three elements (the Word, prayer, and fellowship), are important indicators of our salvation.

After speaking specifically about people who claim to be believers but aren't really (those that say to Him, "Lord, Lord, we did this and that" and He replies, "I never knew you"), He says this to them:

Matthew 7.24-27

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Without study and knowing the Word, prayer, and fellowship, we are building our faith on sand, and we will have no real evidence that we are actually believers. Consider this deeply in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your heart to you.

Result #2: It stabilizes your life.

All too often I see Christians have incredibly unnecessary roller coaster lives. Now, I'm not saying we don't have ups and downs; believe me, we will have ups and downs. I'm also not talking about new believers trying to get their footing. Like a newborn colt, our knees are quite wobbly in the beginning. But the author of **Hebrews** says that we should eventually move on and grow up, moving from simple milk to real food. It's this real food that gives us strength, wisdom, and stability in our life, so that *when* the ups and downs come, they are less drastic, shorter, and not permanently debilitating.

Ephesians 4.11-16

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Result #3: It advances the Kingdom of God more effectively and extensively.

We are designed to have strength in numbers. The Great Commandment is not multiple choice. You can't have God and not have His people. We are a body, a building, a bride. Your walk and your life is made more complete when you are truly and fully dedicated to the church.

**If you want to be like Jesus, you have to give your life to the church,
because that's what He did.**

The Word tells husbands to lay their lives down for their wives. Why? Because Jesus laid His life down for His bride. Likewise, we should not only lay our lives down for our own wives, but also for the bride of Christ. It's only in losing your life that you find real life, and losing your life for the sake of others is where you find the heart of Christ.

Result #4: Knowing how to know God's will completely changes your life.

When you know how to rightfully know and find out God's will, it totally changes the way you pray, ingest the Word, and walk out your life. When you *know* what God's will is, you act more confidently, more boldly, and you become far more God-glorifying than you ever were before, because you are *walking by faith* and *walking by the power of the Spirit!*

When we are unsure, confused, tentative, or unclear on what God's will is, we never get to experience that abundant life that God has promised. We walk through life thinking that life is just a crap shoot and that we hope to get it right every once in a while. But this is not how God designed our life to be. He has revealed His will in His Word, and it is for us to discipline ourselves by submitting ourselves to the Spirit of God to be students of the Word, asking Him to reveal His will through His Word, so that we can live out His will by the power of His Word. It's a glorious and beautiful thing that we have the Word of God as our lamp, our light, and our foundation.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

♣ Definition of Terms ♣

Will of Command: This is God's will as it pertains to His eternal and holy desire. It is based on what He has said *should* be, such as His Ten Commandments. This will, of course, can be offended and disregarded by mankind.

Will of Decree: This is God's will as it pertains to what He decrees, or causes to be. Though He has a holy standard (His commands), He appoints everything by His sovereignty to work out for His most ultimate glory and grace to be known.

Recommended Resources

Theology Books

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem. Chapters 48, 49, and 51 deal with the means of grace, baptism, and worship.

Doctrine by Mark Driscoll. Chapter 11 and 12 deals with worship and stewardship.

Salvation Belongs to the Lord by John Frame. Chapters 20 and 24 cover the means of grace (prayer, the Word, and fellowship) and the question of “How Then Shall We Live?”

Books

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald S. Whitney. This book covers prayer, worship, the Word, fasting, worship, evangelism, and many other practical items.

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster. This is a classic book that covers the same topics as the book above.

How to Pray/How to Study the Bible by R.A. Torrey. Torrey was a turn of the century preacher who wrote this great little book about how these two go hand in hand.

A Short Method of Prayer by Madame Guyon. This is a small little book of two or three page writings about prayer. Guyon was a 16th century theologian during the Reformation. She remained Catholic during the Reformation, but her theology was so “un-Catholic,” the Catholic Church excommunicated her.

Prayer by E.M. Bounds. One of the most classic books written on the subject.

Vintage Church by Mark Driscoll. This is a great, easy to read on looking at what a biblical church looks like.

The Essential Works of Charles Spurgeon edited by Daniel Partner. This is a phenomenal book to have in your collection. Spurgeon may well be my favorite theologian. The richness of his wording and the passion for Christ that jumps out off of the page is just incredible. This volume covers 60 of his sermons and numerous other works on many of the topics that we covered in this study.

Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper. This is a great little book for looking at what it means to be a disciple.

Just Do Something by Kevin DeYoung. An easy to read book on God's will.

Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist by John Piper

The Cross Centered Life by C.J. Mahaney

Unceasing Worship by Harold Best

Sermons

www.marshillchurch.org Type in “heaven.” Choose from a few sermons:

- “Prayer and Planning” from their **Nehemiah** series
- “Stewardship: God Gives” from their Doctrine series.
- “Worship: God Transforms” from their Doctrine series.

www.christianessentialsbc.com/messages This is Wayne Grudem's sermons going through his book, *Systematic Theology*. Go to the sermons on Chapters 48, 49, and 51.

www.desiringgod.org This is John Piper's ministry. Along with audio or video sermons, he has the transcripts as well. Type into the search field on desiringgod.org to find these audio sermons that have attached articles. Simply type in "God's will," "prayer," etc.

- "Why the Gift of Prophecy is not the Usual Way of Knowing God's Will"
- "What is the Will of God and How Do We Know It?"
- "Are There Two Wills in God?"
- "What is Baptism, and How Important is It?"
- "How Important is Church Membership?"
- "The Meaning of Membership and Church Accountability"
- "Teaching and Admonishing One Another in All Wisdom"

Web Articles

fm.thevillagechurch.net This is the church where Matt Chandler, a gifted teacher, is the Teaching Pastor at. Go here, click on "Resource Library," select "Articles and Position Papers," and scroll down at articles on prayer, church life, and worship.

www.monergism.com This is a great site in general, but this particular link has a lot of information on prayer and spiritual disciplines.

www.gotquestions.org If you tend to have lots of questions in general, this is a great website to get to know. Go here and search "prayer," "God's will," you name it.