

Nine Questions

We all face nine questions every day.
Our answers determine the life we have.

by
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Other Books by J. Neil Evans

Life Questions God Asks Us (pub. 2020)

Christian Soldier (pub. 2020)

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Welcome

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It is common to believe that the outcome of our lives is largely determined by our race, gender, economic status, educational opportunities, geography, etc. It is true that these things influence our lives, but the life we have is really determined by our answers to nine religious questions we all face every day. Most of the time we answer without even thinking about them.

It does not matter whether you are young or old, rich or poor, male or female, Christian, atheist, agnostic, or other, we all answer these nine questions every day. The way we answered yesterday determined the character of our today. The way we answer today determines the character of our tomorrow. Faced with thousands of choices every day, our behaviors reveal how we answer.

In answering these questions, we all tend to use our own unique set of standards. Why do some people think living in the city is best and others the country? Why do people consider themselves liberal, conservative, or independent? Why do some people embrace religion and others deny it? Why do we choose the life we are living? Most of us are probably looking for some sort of “healthy, wealthy and wise.” But the reality of life is that each of us have a unique and limited set of options from which to choose the

life we will live each day. But, we all do choose, and the life we have is the result of those choices.

There are nine questions that we all answer in the process of making our choices about the life we have. Answering these questions without serious thought is where I believe most of us make a very big mistake. We tend to not think about the criteria we use in making our moment by moment choices throughout our days. To seriously think about how we answer these fundamental questions is essential if we want to have the best life possible. This book explores those nine questions.

You will notice as you read this book that there are sometimes unusual capitalizations of various words. I try to capitalize things to prompt us to think about the real perfections in the issue at hand. So if you see something capitalized where you don't think it should be, just stop and think about why the word might be emphasized.

# Prologue

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Around Halloween each Fall, in many places, there are mazes carved out of corn fields for people to have fun exploring. Perhaps one of the intriguing things about a maze is that it rather closely mimics life as we experience it. Life is full of twists and turns, stops and starts, questions and uncertainties, lost and found, indeed all the elements of a maze.

In the maze of life a person may be surrounded by all sorts of seemingly normal things. But in the process of living, doors are noticed and the puzzling discovery is made that some are locked. Other doors open to inviting hallways that turn out much different than expected. Maybe while walking with a crowd we get pushed somewhere we didn't think we would go. No matter where we are, there are more hallways, more walls, more doors, more rooms, more places to explore for good or for ill.

Picture in your minds eye that your life's maze is filled with signs. The signs offer all sorts of counsel about how to navigate the maze. But you soon realize that the signs contradict each other. Some point left and lead into a dead end wall. Some point right and after two or three turns you find yourself back at the same sign. And of course there are people throughout the maze who claim to have

mastered the confusion and offer their wise advice about which directions will get you where you want to go.

We sometimes find peaceful, pleasant and prosperous places to stop for a while and enjoy the maze. But simply by the press of life, we move on to continue the maze with all the different challenges it presents. Life is a challenge, no matter the perspective. Could it be that there are familiar questions and corresponding answers written on signs that are designed to guide our thinking and choosing as we look for the right directions? What if our help is right before us, in the maze.

We've All Been To The Grove

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The young couple stood holding hands on the hill just above the grove of lush green trees around the showroom. We don't know just how young they were, but in relation to the many years they had before them they were very young. They were full of youthful curiosity, and ready for adventure. Their life was what most people would call wonderful. They lived in a place of spectacular beauty; they ate the finest food; they were perfectly healthy; they could go anywhere they wanted; everything they did seemed to prosper. Their dad had given them a life we all would envy. They didn't earn it themselves, but they didn't take it for granted either. They enjoyed hard work and made their dad proud of the way they managed their inheritance.

The young lovers had walked by the grove before but not really stopped to look. Dad had warned them to stay away, and they had, until today. It didn't really look any different from all the things with which they were becoming so happily familiar. So they decided to go down and investigate. It was sort of like walking past other showrooms. "We'll just go take a look", they said. Dad's instruction to "don't go, and certainly don't buy one" faded in the intrigue of the moment. Dad was the one who had always given them whatever they needed or wanted so they were a little

surprised when they were greeted by a handsome welcoming salesman. “Good day folks, are you out enjoying this beautiful day? Interested in a new car are you?” Something indistinct but real tugged at their subconscious as the friendly voice pointed out the delightful features of the new model. The memories of dad’s instruction and warning surfaced, they looked at each other, then told the salesman what dad had said about new cars at the grove. With a slight tilt of his head and a hint of scorn in his voice the salesman said: “But your old dad hasn’t seen this new model and all the fun you can have in it.” They answered: “Dad says it will only get us in trouble and we will likely wreck it and ourselves.” “Oh no, in fact it is the safest model yet, and it will take you to places you haven’t even dreamed of”, the voice answered. “In fact I bet ole dad is just trying to hide some real adventures from you.” “You know how overprotective old folks can be.”

“Would you like to take it for a little test drive? It won’t cost you anything. Just open the door and look at all the buttons, the lights and the plush leather seats.” The salesman slid past them into the drivers seat and started the motor that purred like a lion. The couple had to admit that it was tempting. The new car looked, sounded and even smelled so inviting. The beautiful wife turned to her husband and whispered “let’s just take a short drive.” And so they did.

They drove around the park, over the hill, even out on the freeway. They put the top down and let the sun warm their faces and the wind blow their hair. But in the excitement of the test drive it dawned on them that this was just a car, not really better than any other. At the same time they remembered dad's instructions and turned around to return the car to the grove where it belonged. In their haste to get back, only two blocks from the showroom they took a corner too fast and landed hard against a tree. In that moment they realized that their real disappointment was not in the empty allure of the new car, not even in the wreck they had made of it. Their heartache was the fact that they had disobeyed their dad. They had never done that before and the pain was real to the point of despair.

They stood looking at the crumpled car, they examined the scrapes and bruises all over their once unmarred bodies. Then they did something else they had never done before. Realizing that when they didn't come home for dinner, dad would come looking for them. They knew they couldn't face him in their guilt and shame so they did the only thing that seemed reasonable, they ran to hide. They covered themselves, as best they could, to hide their body bruises, but even more to hide the deadness they felt in their hearts.

They were right, it didn't take long for dad to come looking for them. Like most dads, he knew just where to look. Somehow he knew it would be near the forbidden grove, the new car, and the silver tongued salesman. Soon they heard dad's voice. "Where are you?" his deep voice called. The young couple knew that hiding wouldn't work; they knew dad knew exactly where they were. What they didn't know, was what he would do. Would he punish them severely, or maybe let them off with a warning. As quickly as they merely thought the questions they knew the answer. Dad would always be the same, but they had changed. They cowered in fear before him because they knew they must. Dad's question "where are you" lingered in their mind. It was neither asked nor heard as a geographical question. It was a life question. Some people would rephrase it as "how is this working out for you?" Or, "where are you on your search for life?"

We are all familiar with this story. Just like our parents we have all been to the grove, listened to the lying salesman, and driven away in a disappointing car. We are all somewhere on the path of life looking for what we lost in the grove. This story was first experienced by Adam and Eve in the Bible's Garden of Eden. All of us experience the story with our own life. The dad has never changed. He still comes looking for us and asking the question "where are you?" We all answer every day, by our attitudes and

behaviors. In this story we see the nine questions we all answer every day as we live our lives. Could it be that by the answers we give, we are settling for a “life” infinitely less than the “LIFE” God offers us?

## **<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>**

Decisions have consequences. We tend to think of the word “consequences” as negative, but they can be bad or good, mild or severe, temporary or permanent.

As we see, hear or read anything, we decide what we are going to do with the information. These nine questions are the foundation of our lives and so it is very important to think and talk them over with friends. At the end of each chapter are some questions that might help you think and talk about each chapter.

Remember, too, that God is present with you as you think about and discuss these questions. As you discuss, include God in your discussions. Audibly ask Him to guide and enlighten your conversation. Ask God questions, praise Him for answers. Ask God to lead you to specific scriptures and how to understand them accurately. You don't need to close your eyes, or bow your head. Prayer is simply, yet profoundly, talking and listening with God!!!

1. How do I describe each of the individuals in the story?
2. Is there anything in this story that is not the result of a choice or decision by someone?
3. How is my life a result of the decisions I make?

4. What different kinds of consequences do I see in the story?
5. What are some ways I see myself in the story?



# The Questions In The Grove

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Consider with me again the story of the dad, the young couple, the new car and the salesman. There are some fundamental things we have inherited from them that physical science has no good way of explaining. They lived in a perfect place, in perfect harmony with each other, with their environment, and with their dad. They got up each morning, worked with a totally cooperative world for their food and shelter. The quality of their lives provided a fullness of satisfaction and joy as far into the future as they could imagine. From a world full of options they chose each day the things that would make them happy and fulfilled. We are not told the conscious steps they took each day as they chose how to live in their world. We are simply told that it was a perfect place; dad instructed them how to effectively live; and their life was “very good.”

We are not told their process of choosing in their perfect world, but we are told that one day, their choosing changed. Their story describes how they answered at least nine questions every person has answered every day throughout all of human history. Follow as we watch the young couple make choices that set the course of their own lives and the lives of all who follow in their footsteps.

Every day, upon their waking, the **Question #1- “what is the best life for me today?”** awaited their answer. Should they tend their garden, go explore a new valley, watch some amazing animals, or just relax by the river? Each day they chose whatever they thought was best. Dad had told them that there was only one prohibited thing in their life, and it was that grove with the new car lot. One day they made the conscious decision to walk over and take a look. There were numerous options they had that day and in some sort of conscious or even semi-conscious evaluation they decided that to go look at the car was the best thing for them to do that day.

As with every decision they made, they compared the relative values of each option. What they determined as the best choice always answered **Question #2- “what hopes and dreams do I have for my life?”** They never hoped that this day would be worse than yesterday. If they had days that were wonderfully amazing they hoped that the next would be at least as good and even better. So as they wandered over to that grove they hoped that at a minimum it would be a good learning experience to see why they had been instructed not to experience that new car.

We know from the whole story that near the forbidden grove they met the silver-tongued salesman who told them that dad had not told the

truth about the beneficial aspects of a new car and that it would not be death to them, but life. They chose to get in and drive the car, and as they say, “the rest is history.”

So, as they approached the grove they answered the question about what they hoped for. They not only hoped that they might learn something about it, but upon carefully looking at it they actually began to hope that dad’s prohibition might have been exaggerated and that a new car might look nice but also in some ways be good for them.

The daily value questions we all answer are intertwined with each other as our answers influence and impact each other. In seeking the best life for their day and what they hoped it would bring, they answered a third question. Their answer to **Question #3- “What rules guide your day?”** was answered by their behavior as they made their way toward the forbidden grove. Dad’s instructions to the young couple had been seemingly quite simple. They were told:

- be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth;
- subdue and have dominion over all living things;
- work and keep the beautiful garden in which they lived;

- enjoy anything in the garden except the new car in the grove which would bring them death if they drove it.

We are not told how long they followed those rules. But on this day they answered the question about whose rules do you follow, by putting dad's rules aside to follow their own rules such as:

- "do what I myself believe is best,"
- "don't deny myself,"
- "my heart won't deceive me,"
- "if it looks good it can't be bad."

The story continues as they are standing looking at the shiny new car. It doesn't look so bad, in fact it looks as good as any other thing dad had given them. As they are contemplating the car, the salesman appears. He looked as normal and unthreatening as every other thing they had ever seen. He begins to talk to them. Thus far in the story all the questions the pair answered were silent and internal. But now, asking the first question recorded in the Bible, the salesman asked: "Did your dad actually say, 'you shall not have any new car?'" The woman corrected the salesman saying: "We may have cars, but dad said, 'You shall not have the new car in the forbidden grove, don't touch it, lest you die.'"

People may infrequently choose to act on what they know is a lie, but most often we behave according to what we believe is true. The couple had a choice to make, it was either dad or the salesman who was telling the truth about the grove and the car that looked so inviting. They answered the question we all answer over and over every day: **#4- “what are my sources of truth?”** That day they chose, the salesman. Their source of truth in that moment was a lying salesman. Looking and hoping for their best life, they used the rules that would get them what they wanted, and trusted the truth source that would do the same. And all human beings have followed their example.

The woman thought a test drive sounded good, she turned to her husband and asked him to join her. They sought confirmation together in their adventure. And then it happened, “the eyes of both were opened,” the thrill was not what they had expected. They experienced the consequences of their answers to these fundamental questions. Their lives were not better, their hopes were not realized, their rules turned out to be misleading, and they believed the wrong truth source. And so they answered another question, **#5- “who are my friends?”** Having looked to each other for agreement, they now turned to each other for solace, comfort and guidance for what to do next. Using the rules and truths of their new found life (death) they did what seemed best at

the moment and went off to hide from the dad whom they were now afraid to face.

In the confusion of their new independence they heard dad asking: “where are you?” Certainly it was not a geographical question, but a personal one. It was a question not of location, but of condition. It provoked not an answer to dad, but to themselves: “these new choices are not working out very well for us, in fact this knowledge of evil feels awful.” They were now presented with a new question which they have passed on to all of us, **#6- “What are my answers for evil?”** Not just what is the solution for evil, but also what is it like and where does it come from. They had answers, and their answers are very familiar to all of us. Evil is bad things that bring us misery; it is solved by covering ourselves, and we point our finger at others as the source from which it comes ... All very short-sighted answers.

If you are familiar with the Bible story, you recognize that the man and woman of our grove story are Adam and Eve, and their dad is the God who created them. The analogy can only be carried so far, however, and thus the remaining three questions are most accurately explored through the actual experience of Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve answered the seventh question correctly. **#7- “what is man?”** They understood that they were neither God nor animal. They knew they

had been given dominion over all the animals. They knew that they were less than God. They knew they were accountable to the God whom they feared to face in their disobedience. While they, for a brief moment, were beguiled by the serpents suggestion that they could “become like God,” their immediate fear revealed that they had not become like Him, but had become His enemy.

Perhaps the most important question that faced Adam and Eve was what did they believe about God? What was their God really like? The eighth question is not “what is GOD like?”, but **#8- “what is MY God like?”** The Bible makes many specific statements about the nature of God, but in the story of Adam and Eve they don’t actually “say” what they believe about God. They didn’t need to say because their behavior tells us more accurately than anything they could have said.

Living in the garden they saw and experienced the works and the presence of God. They communicated with God as He visited with them often. Being given instructions by God they believed He was personal, communicative, powerful and in some ways similar to themselves but at the same time radically different. As they walked toward the forbidden tree, the God they served was the God they had always honored and loved.

We don't know exactly what it was, but something happened at the tree. What they most highly valued, honored and served, changed. Who or what they looked to for food, delight and wisdom, changed. Who they trusted to tell them the truth, changed. Whose promises they believed, changed. With their behaviors they answered the question "Who is your God and what is he like?" Their God, or gods, at least for the moment, was a tree, a serpent, and their own desires.

God's response to our ancestors is fascinating for both what He did and did not do. To be sure there were, and are, awful consequences for the way they answered life's questions on that fateful day. God didn't ignore them; He didn't complain about them to the angels; He didn't send a bolt of lightening to obliterate them; He didn't kill them. Yes, they died in the moments of their disobedience, but they killed themselves. It was a death of their own doing. It was a relational death. It was a preview of the physical death they would experience and leave to every one of their children for all of history.

Was God angry? Of course He was angry. The very beings who were the crown of His creation had turned their hearts to serve other gods who were no gods. But God's anger has a close companion. God went after Adam and Eve with an anger toward sin and sinners that was manifest in the moment not by

wrath but by a very simple question: “where are you?” We cannot know what would have happened if Adam and Eve would have repented and turned to God rather than themselves for rescue and love.

Adam and Eve were hiding because they were afraid of the God whose kindness, goodness, and present love they had so carelessly turned against. And now they knew what death felt like, they now knew first-hand the contrast between good and evil. The questions they were now answering were: “what do we do now?,” “how can we get back to where we were?,” “how can we fix ourselves?” It was the question we all ask whenever we have troubles great or small: **#9- “who or what is my savior?”** One thing that sin does is make us afraid to honestly turn to God for help. So they did what they thought was the best, most hopeful, truthful, solution to the awful predicament in which they found themselves. Seeking to camouflage themselves they sewed leaves together for clothes for themselves and hid. They answered: “we are own saviors.” Then they heard the familiar voice: “where are you?”

As they listened to God’s call and question they knew it was not God who needed the answer, but themselves. The God with whom they had been so comfortable was not blind or ignorant of their location, or anything else about them for that matter. God came to save, to rescue, to love. God came to

clothe them in a way that was both an awful and wonderful surprise to them and to all mankind. God killed an animal (it might have been a lamb) and made comfortable and warm garments to cover their newfound guilt.

God's question was for them, and us, to ponder. "How is this disobedience working out for you?" "Where are you compared to where you were, or where you would like to be?"

Questions swirled in their heads and hearts. "What is best for us?" "What are we hoping will happen next?" "What rules do we live by now?" "What truth source shall we trust?" "How can we help each other get through this?" "What is this terrible thing we have become and unleashed upon the world?" "Are we now mere animals, no longer special to the God who made us?" "Are there things that can take the place of the God who now seems so distant?" "Who or what can rescue us from this life that now seems so often lifeless?"

We have never stopped hearing the questions. We have never stopped answering. In fact we answer over and over every day. Our lives are determined and defined by the way we answer. The challenge we really face is not simply to voice an answer, for our behavior answers louder than our voices ever do. The challenge we have before us is to truly think about how we are answering and to intentionally,

humbly, repentantly, dependently, answer in ways that lead us to know the way, the truth, and the life that is abundant beyond all that we could accomplish on our own.

All of us are attracted to forbidden fruit; all of us listen to the questions of the one who masquerades as an angel of light; all of us have tasted of the knowledge of evil; all of us have tried to make ourselves presentable to God and one another; all of us have longed for someone to rescue us from this life that isn't working out very well. And God comes calling every day with the same question, "WHERE ARE YOU?" We don't have to say a word because our behavior answers the question.

God has built nine questions into our lives, which, if answered accurately, He uses to guide and bless us with His Abundant LIFE.

<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>

Remember to be praying!!!

1. To think out loud as I "talk it over with friends" is a decision. What are some possible consequences if I decide to not do so?
2. What do I think of the idea that "every moment is a fork in the road?"

3. What are some things in life over which I have no control?
4. What are some things I can control no matter the circumstance?
5. Which of these nine questions have I consciously thought about in the last week?

1. What Is My Best Life?

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*Jesus said to them, "Take care,  
and be on your guard  
against all covetousness,  
for one's life does not consist in  
the abundance of his possessions."*

*Luke 12:15*

If you search "what is life" on the internet you will find things like: general philosophical definitions, related things like life insurance, and song titles. There are specific definitions like: "existence that processes, acts, reacts, evaluates, and evolves through growth," or NASA's: "life is a self-sustaining system capable of Darwinian evolution." The answers seem endless. Ask any number of people to define "life" and there will be as many opinions as there are people. Most people think of a "good life" as having good health, a comfortable level of prosperity, good friends, good family and accomplishing some of our life dreams. Some people would add to the list having the stuff we want and being popular and powerful.

While it is clear that there are lots of different answers, several things seem obvious:

- Life involves every dimension of our existence.
- We can divide life into all sorts of levels of awful ... bad ... okay ... good ... great.

-Something about life makes it very difficult to fully define.

-Even people who may say “I have no life” have some ideas about the life which they feel they are missing.

-We all have a desire to have life.

How would you define “life”? Can you see that there is a difference between “life” (going through the motions of day-after-day, same-old-same-old, marking time, etc.) and “LIFE” (an abundant life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control)? Are you content to go through the rest of your days with the life you are living today? In the process of living, every day we all answer questions about our life. We answer primarily by the choices and decisions we make at the thousands of crossroads we face as we move through our day. The point is not simply that we answer some questions, but that our answers to these questions determine the character and quality of our days, indeed of our Life. And for this reason we ought to answer accurately.

I am writing this little book to challenge myself (and you) to think more carefully about the life that I have, the life that I want and the life that is available to me. The title “Have LIFE?!” intentionally has both a question mark and an exclamation point at the end. Do I have LIFE? And, yes, I can have it! The focus of

this chapter is that we all look for the best life we can have for each moment of each day. And if we correctly answer the daily questions we face we can actually have LIFE!

The motto of the community I live in is: "Life is Better Here." The implication, and hope, is that this place has better schools, parks, roads, business opportunities, and anything else that would make someone want to move here. People tend to move here looking for some things "better" than where they are moving from. I know people who have moved here for a better life in the country; others came to get away from unpleasant or unsafe cultural environments; some people come for what they consider better weather. People have all sorts of reasons why they choose to move, but the reasons, to varying degrees, are all rooted in the hope of a better life.

Even friends who grew up in the same town and had so very much in common, usually turn out very differently. They each experience a unique path for their life. At every intersection, obstacle, and opportunity they each apply their developing heart, mind, and soul to choose the way that they go. They became the person they are today as a result of the choices they made each of their preceding days.

It is built into us to always seek to better our lives. No one ever plans to get married and divorced, twice.

Each time they really believed the decision made was the best option they had. No one ever plans to be an alcoholic. But with each drink they really believed it was the best choice for the moment. While someone may have known the friends they were choosing were not ideal, in each moment they thought that to be with them would be the most exciting and rewarding. Even someone who stays in the same place doing the same thing for their whole life believes, for any number of reasons, it was better than moving away; it was better than more money in a new place with new people and new experiences. We all continually choose what we believe is best from the options we see before us.

I read recently that there is a growing trend among millennials to look at their financially successful lives and wonder if the long hours and the feeling of being owned is really the life they want. More and more of them are opting for lower pay in order to get lower stress and more freedom. Just as they chose the job in the first place because they believed it would give them the best life, they are choosing a different course for a better life.

As I think about “looking for better,” I believe that has been my primary motive throughout my whole life. When playing with toys as a youngster, I always chose the one I thought was better than the last one.

Of course I often went back and forth in my choices but it was always “better” that motivated my decisions. If someone else had the toy I wanted I picked the best of the remaining options. Whatever the circumstance I always looked for the better option. I can’t think of any area of life where better isn’t a major part of our decision making. It seems built into us. Think about the decisions you have made in your life. Can you think of even one that you made with the intention of making your life worse?

Why then have some of my choices turned out for the worse? It certainly is not that I deliberately chose what I hoped would be a downgrade in my circumstances. Of course it is true that I have, more times than I care to recall, made bad choices. Not because I wanted my life to be worse, but because for some ignorant or foolish reason I actually believed that the choice I was making was the best one. My point is that I believe everyone is constantly looking for a better life. And this applies in all areas of our lives right down to the smallest detail. We even greet each other with words that imply our search for a better life. We ask: “Hello, how are you today?” expecting an answer about the relative quality of the day. The other person answers: “Good, thank you,” implying that they are as good as yesterday, but possibly not as “great” as it could be.

Years ago (too many years for younger folks who are used to our better ways of shopping, to remember) Sears catalogs used to list their merchandise as “good,” “better,” and “best.” Even today advertising for virtually everything is described in comparison to other products. One insurance company calls themselves the “good hands” company, encouraging us to see that they are better than other companies that don’t have good hands. We are prompted to evaluate everything in terms of an awful...bad...good...better...best sort of scale. We are presented with the best loan interest rate, the best political candidate, the best college, the best football team, the best route to work, the best vacation spot, the best neighborhood, the best church, the best hospital, the best medicine, and the best restaurant. And, each of us, using our own unique set of measures, choose what we believe to be the best for our resources and interests. Faced with thousands of choices every day we all answer the question “which choice will make my life better?” We answer the question both consciously and subconsciously; and our behaviors reveal our conclusions.

Answering this question without conscious and serious thought is where I believe most of us make a very big mistake. We tend to not think about the criteria we use in making our moment by moment choices in the daily process of looking for a better life. I believe there are fundamental questions we all

answer, most often unconsciously, that underlie the choices we make on our search for better and better lives. To seriously think about how we answer these fundamental questions seems essential if we want to have the best lives possible.

When asked what the best life would be for ourselves, we all tend to use our own unique set of standards. Why do some people think living in the city is best and others the country? Why, taking into consideration our present circumstances and real options, do we choose the life we are living? We would all likely think that the best life would be some sort of “healthy, wealthy and wise.” But the reality of life is that each of us have a unique set of options from which to choose the life we will live each day. All of us are living the life we choose; and we are choosing the best life we see available to us each moment. By the way we choose to live each day we are answering the question “what is the best life for me.”

It is common to hear that in America anyone can be whatever they want to be. It is a nice sounding slogan. While it is true that there is great opportunity here, it is also true that we cannot be “whatever” we want to be. Very few people can be NBA basketball players; not many can be astronauts and even fewer can be President of the United States. This reality is not unfair, it is simply human life. There are many

things that we cannot choose simply because they are genuinely not available to us. Thirty year old people cannot play on high school athletic teams; most of us cannot withdraw a million dollars from our bank account; none of us can make our own star on the Hollywood walk of fame. We may choose to work toward things, but we cannot simply choose to have or be anything we want. However, the most important choices are equally available to all of us.

When we think about choosing the best life possible for ourselves we usually think of circumstantial things like health, wealth, pleasure, vocation, location etc. What challenges me, is to think about the fundamental things that we all can, and do, choose every day. These have even greater influence on the quality of our lives than the circumstantial things on which we tend to focus most of our attention.

We all face traffic laws, workplace rules, neighborhood policies and family norms. In every kind of situation in which we find ourselves we choose the rules we follow as we live out our days. Even if we choose to disobey some rule, we do so following some other rule, like "if I'm in a hurry, I can go over the speed limit." The quality of our life is dynamically influenced by the rules we choose to follow, and we all choose those rules every day. Do I have the right rules to live by?

We are surrounded by voices claiming to offer the best life choices. Each of the voices claim to be true and wise. We choose what to eat, what to watch, what to buy, who to trust, on the basis of which truth source we believe. We choose our sources of truth over and over again as we navigate our day. Are my truth sources the right ones?

While in the midst of a crowded world we may feel alone much of the time, but we all choose other people with whom we like to identify and spend our time. The associations we have in every area of our lives have enormous impact on the nature and quality of our lives. We choose our associations every day. Do I associate with the right people?

It could be said that bad news is half the news. As much as we might like to focus only on good things and good people, we all see evil all around us every day. In seeing evil we all choose how to think about evil and how to respond to it. The way we choose to think about evil is foundational to not only the way we view life but the way we live it. And like the other fundamental choices, the character and quality of our days is determined by whether or not I think rightly about evil.

Another choice we make over and over every day is what we will think about the people around us. We don't just observe the behaviors of others, we also make assumptions about not just who they are but

about what they are and what kind of attentions they want, deserve or need. We also choose what we believe about who and what we are ourselves. And those chosen beliefs have a great impact on the quality of our lives. Do I think rightly about who and what human beings are?

Even though many people do not call them “gods,” we all choose the things, or beings, we idolize, esteem and sacrificially serve every day. The things we elevate to such heights have a much greater influence on the character and quality of our lives than we tend to realize. Do I have the right supreme things in my life?

In the process of going through our day making so many truly important decisions about the kind of life we want, we all make many choices that don't turn out as we hoped. In fact, most of us tend to wish someone wiser and more influential than ourselves could help us make better choices in all of these intersections of life. The reality is that we do rely on others more often than we realize. The more a particular situation seems like a “predicament,” (and that happens more often than we like to admit) the more we look for a savior to guide and get us out of the jams, guilts, failures and other life challenges in which we frequently find ourselves. Am I choosing the right helpers and rescuers for my life?

We all make these fundamental choices every day and it is these choices that underlie, interact with, and shape all the other decisions of our lives. And thus, if we truly desire to have the best life possible, we must ask ourselves lots of questions about these choices we are making over and over every day. Anyone truly interested in a better or more abundant life is wise to very seriously ponder these questions and their answers. To ignore serious thoughts about these questions resigns a person to the status quo of their daily circumstances.

We are all living the best life we have chosen from among the real options facing us. Most of us know, and hope, that our lives could be better than they are today. The solution is not to simply work harder at what we are doing but to recognize that our behaviors demonstrate the lives we are choosing to live, and then to intentionally ponder and accurately answer the fundamental questions that determine the character and quality of our lives.

To think seriously about our lives requires that we carefully evaluate the nature of our hopes and dreams, the source of the rules we live by and the real validity of what we believe is true. We must think more seriously about who we associate with, the source and solutions for the evil in and around us, and what human beings really are. But at the root of it all we must honestly admit to ourselves that we are

worshippers. We truly esteem and serve our hopes, our rules, our truth sources, our close friends, and, yes, most of all ourselves. And all of these things reveal what or Who our Gods and Saviors are. So it is of fundamental importance for us to determine if the Gods and Saviors to which we bow and depend on can actually give us the hopes, the rules, the truth, the friends, the understanding of ourselves, indeed the LIFE that we are looking for.

## **Please Ponder and Read The Following Bible Verses**

What do these verses prompt you to think about the life you are choosing to live.

The Bible verses are the most important part of this book.

- Ask God to help you understand what He wants to tell you ...
- Read each verse several times ... (include context if possible)
- Write or tell God what you are hearing Him say in the verse.

Do you question the truthfulness or value of the Bible? If so, what truth sources do you use to question the Bible? How do you know they are more truthful than the Bible? Are you willing to at least read

these Bible verses and consider their validity? You should at least give the Bible the opportunity to pass the same tests for truth that you give your other truth sources.

It is worthwhile to get out your own Bible and read the context of the verses.

### **Genesis 3:9**

“Where are you?”

Adam and Eve had chosen what they believed would be their best life. Wanting to prompt them to think about the consequences of their choice God asked them this question. God asks us the same question. Perhaps He would phrase it differently to us: “How are your life choices working out for you?”

### **Psalms 16:11**

You make known to me the path of LIFE; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

### **Matthew 6:25**

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your LIFE, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not LIFE more than food, and the body more than clothing?

### **Matthew 16:26**

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?

**Luke 12:15**

And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s LIFE does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

**John 10:10**

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have LIFE and have it abundantly.

**John 17:3**

And this is eternal LIFE, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

**John 20:31**

but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have LIFE in his name.

**Romans 8:1**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Romans 8:6**

For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is LIFE and peace.

**Galatians 6:8**

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal LIFE.

## **1 Timothy 6:19**

... thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly LIFE.

### **<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>**

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. If someone says their present life is the best possible life for them, what questions might be helpful to ask them?
3. What are some choices I have recently made that were not actually the best for me?
4. What might my life be like if I lived like I believe that God really does know what is best for me?
5. Make a list of things in my life right now over which I have absolutely no control. What thoughts and feelings does making this list prompt?
6. Which of the above Bible verses give me a perspective of my life that I haven't thought about recently?



## 2. What Are My Hopes And Dreams?

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*"For what will it profit a man
if he gains the whole world
and forfeits his life?"
Matthew 16:26*

We can tell a lot about a person just by watching them. Sit on a bench in a busy place, just watching people. Without a word you can tell who are the risk takers, the obedient ones, the ones who believe the law doesn't apply to them, the bullies and many other traits. Someone may say they believe people should obey the law, but when they walk against the walk signal we know that they really believe it is okay to break the law at least in some situations. Being around someone, watching and listening to the way they live tells us a lot about them.

Notice the magazines people read, the advertisements that catch their eye, the comments they preface with "I wish." It won't take long to discern the hopes and dreams of their life. But it is not just other people who reveal their values by their behavior. My behavior displays my values for all to see, and so do yours.

In thinking about what we want our lives to be, we can, and do, choose every day what hopes and

dreams will motivate our day. We can hope that we win the lottery, or hope that we get the job we have been preparing for. We can hope that we don't get the flu that is going around or hope that our diet and exercise keeps us healthy. The list goes on and on through the thousands of choices that we face every day. The quality of our lives is based not just on the fact that we have hopes and dreams, but on the character, nature and quality of the hopes and dreams we choose. Do I have the right ones?

We all have hopes and dreams and they come in all forms, shapes and sizes. Some hopes are simple, some are profound. Some are happy and some are sad. Some of our hopes are easily fulfilled and some remain unfulfilled. Some are very public and some are very private. One person may hope for a million dollars while another hopes for a bite of bread. One person may dream of being an Olympic champion while another person dreams of walking again. Of course our dreams are not all so life altering. We all, according to our preferences and plans, hope the weather tomorrow is just what we want. Some people hope for warmer weather and some for cooler. In any sport, there are winners and there are losers. Some dreams are realized and others dashed.

Our hopes and dreams involve every area of our lives. We have hopes about our finances, our health, our relationships and all the various events of our

lives. We dream about the opportunities we hope to have and about our potential accomplishments. We have hopes and dreams that our children will have better lives in a better world. In all of these things sometimes we hope that things do happen and sometimes we hope that things don't happen. And often we simply hope that some things stay the same.

Each of us hope and dream of different things. As you read this you can fill in the specifics of the hopes and dreams in your life. Some of our dreams are fulfilled; but often not in just the way we hoped. Many of our dreams are broken or abandoned and we have to learn to cope with the disappointment. I read recently about an electronic device that if used a few minutes a day it can effectively treat depression. It suggests that there is no need to examine our life values and behaviors, just aim some sort of current at our brain and all will be well. Some hopes are not well founded.

Whether our hopes and dreams are fulfilled or not, they involve all our human emotions from the deepest to the highest and everywhere in-between. Some people may think our hopes and dreams are simply biological and can ultimately be explained and understood with statistical analysis of sociological data. But hopes and dreams are a crucial part of our

human nature that is fundamentally mystical, indeed volitional and spiritual in nature.

I talked to my three year old grandson a couple weeks before his fourth birthday. He was actually giddy with excitement about turning four. He was planning what fun things he would do on that day. That really shouldn't surprise us because we are born hoping and planning. One of the earliest things a child does is talk and play about what they want to be and do as they grow up. I remember dreaming, when I was a teenager, about being a race car driver. I bought an old 1950 Ford and started working at getting it ready to race at our local race track. Then my mom said "no!" My hopes were dashed, but the dream never died. I'm sure most everyone has some sort of similar story.

Most of our hopes and plans are much more daily. We look at the weather report to plan our tomorrow, and hope it is a pleasant day. We hope we get a good nights rest. We hope the morning traffic is lighter than usual. We plan to stop for gas and hope the price hasn't gone up too much. Our lives are full of hopes, dreams and plans.

Perhaps most of our hopes are rather ordinary and somewhat subconscious, but others are more heartfelt and important. We hope we get a certain job; we hope we have the money to pay our bills; we hope a relationship improves; we hope the doctor's

report is positive. The way we most often use the word hope involves a measure of uncertainty about the fulfillment of our hope. Our hopes are often described as wishes. We say: "I wish we could afford a nice vacation, I really hope we get to go."

We tend to live as if tomorrow will be pretty much the same as today. We have hopes and dreams, but too often we settle in and let our hopes and dreams be simply wishful thinking. Perhaps our dreams have been broken so many times that all we have left is wishful thinking, and even that can be so dim as to be subconscious. But even then we hope that things don't get worse than they already are.

The more serious we get about the real issues of life the more significant our hopes and dreams become. All of us have been deeply hurt by another person, and all of us have hurt others. How can these relationships be healed? How can I forgive and be forgiven? As good as this life can sometimes be, this world is a cruel place; is this all there is to life? Is this brief life all there is? We hope and dream for so much more. Is there a real Heaven? Is Hell a real place?

Some people will think that to hope and dream for Heaven is being religious. I want to suggest that hoping and dreaming is one of the fundamentally religious things about us. Some people hope in Heaven, some people hope in earth. Some people

hope they can be forgiven, some people hope offenses fade away. It is not the specific objects of our hopes and dreams that are religious or not. The profound fact that we have hopes and dreams is religious. So the question is not “am I religious?” but “what is the nature of my religion?” The hopes and dreams we live with and pursue every moment of every day are revealed by our behaviors. Our demonstrated answers to the question “what are my hopes and dreams,” reveal to anyone interested to see, a fundamental part of our true religious values and the life we are actually choosing to live in our search for an abundant LIFE.

So, what are your hopes and dreams? What do you long for your life to be like in both the near and distant future? Your answer to the question is pretty obvious to anyone who spends any time around you. Your hopes are likely a large part of your daily conversation. You talk about the places you want to go and the things you want to do. You describe the things in your life you hope will change. You react when things happen to others that you don't want to happen to yourself. Our hopes and dreams strongly influence the way we spend our money, what we do in our spare time, the places we visit on the internet, the things we read, and the people we like to be with.

Our answers to the question “what are my hopes and dreams?” are a very significant part of the character

and quality of our life. Thus, it is truly important that we intentionally evaluate the real hopes that move our lives in the direction they are going. Do I have the hopes and dreams that I really want and need? Are they of such a nature that they will move me into the next years and even the eternity that I really want? Many of our broken and forgotten dreams are the result of simply not pursuing them seriously enough. We are all familiar with the feelings of “woulda, coulda, shoulda.” How do I need to modify or change my hopes and dreams so that they will lead me to the best possible life now and forever? As you read through these nine questions, seriously think about how they each and all influence the real values of your hopes and dreams.

Have my hopes and dreams been prompted by what the world has to offer? Does the fulfillment of my hopes and dreams depend on my own abilities to grasp them? Are my hopes and dreams small, short term and relatively easy to achieve, or long-term, huge, and beyond my own abilities? Are my hopes and dreams earth-bound, or heaven-bound; are they focused on temporary earthly things or things that can be realized both now and forever? Are my hopes and dreams big enough that even gaining the whole world would not compare? Am I really aware of the hopes and dreams that God promises in the Bible?

Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses

Psalm 23

:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

:3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

:6 Surely goodness and mercy

shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 119:50

This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me LIFE.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Matthew 28:20

teaching them to observe all that I have commanded

you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

John 14:1–3

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. :2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? :3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Romans 5:2

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Colossians 1:27

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Titus 2:13

... waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,...

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

1 Peter 1:3–12

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, :4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, :5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. :6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, :7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. :8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that

is inexpressible and filled with glory, :9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Revelation 21:1–7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. :2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. :3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. :4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” :5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” :6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. :7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>

Remember to include God in your conversation, He loves to participate!!!

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. How would I describe the difference between frivolous and meaningful hopes and dreams?
3. What kind of hopes are the most rewarding? Why?
4. Which of my hopes and dreams draw me toward God? Which of my hopes and dreams might tend to draw me away from Him?
5. What are some hopes and dreams that God describes for me in the above verses?

3. What Rules Do I Live By?

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*"Every man did that which was  
right in his own eye."*

*Judges 21:25*

From traffic laws, workplace rules, neighborhood policies, family norms and every other situation in which we find ourselves we choose the rules we follow as we live out our days. The quality of our life is dynamically influenced by the rules we choose to follow, and we all choose those rules every day. Do I have the right rules to live by?

You have probably heard the phrase that "only two things in life are certain: death and taxes." Actually there are many things that are quite certain. It is true that there are many uncertainties in life, and some people claim to believe that everything is relative, but there are many things that we all can really count on. There are natural forces that are consistent like time, gravity, seasons, etc. And, as we have described regarding the first two questions, everyone chooses what they believe is their best life, and everyone has hopes and dreams. Another certainly of life is that everyone has rules they live by. So this third question we all answer every day is: "what rules do I live by?"

This question can be almost humorous at times. Our hypocrisy is revealed by the phrase: "do as I say, not

as I do.” It is quite obvious that we all expect others to follow society’s rules more carefully than we do ourselves. This is why we can be driving five miles over the speed limit in the left hand lane and be upset when someone comes up close behind us expecting us to move over so they can hurry on up the road. Most of us are quite skilled at spotting when other people break the rules.

Human relationships are built on rules. The rules vary from culture to culture, even from community to community, but we all have rules. Commonly held rules help make all our relationships run smoothly. Our travel, commerce, language, sports, marriage, education, science, entertainment, politics, in fact every human relationship works together most smoothly in spite of our differences because of the common rules we share. While it is our independent attitudes that are fundamentally at odds, disputes about the rules we follow are what often divide us.

Some people describe themselves as libertarian because they believe individuals should be free to decide for themselves how best to order their lives. It is certainly true that in our American culture we have rules piled upon rules. In most circumstances it is probably true that fairly applying the laws we have would be more effective than adding new ones. But even libertarians do not generally advocate removing all laws. There is a comment in the Bible, the last

verse in the Old Testament book of Judges, that says: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” It was a comment describing the reason for the chaos in the culture.

I read recently that in the state of California is having a critical shortage of sports referees because of an epidemic of fans abusing those whose task it is to apply the rules. It is interesting that the same thing is happening in politics except that it seems to be attracting participants rather than repelling them. And, of course, isn't it disputes about rules that multiplies attorneys, fills our streets with protests, and ultimately leads to bloodshed and war.

We have not yet reached the total chaos point of “every man doing that which is right in their own eye,” or have we? It seems the natural trend of human cultures to go through cycles of civic relationships. A group of people find themselves under a despot or overruling majority. They band together to overthrow their oppressors. They establish their own rules of cooperative governance and enjoy their peaceful lives. It doesn't take long for them to multiply their rules to cover more and more of their differing values. Eventually a group of them becomes most powerful and makes rules that oppress the minorities. In organized moral frustration or in anarchy the oppressors are overthrown and the cycle

starts all over again. Such is the story of human history. The basic cause of this repetition is discussed in question number seven but the most obvious cause is our answer to this present question “what are the rules I choose to live by?”

I have only met a few people who claim to enjoy following rules. But in reality, we all actually love to follow rules, as long as we agree with them. It is only rules with which we disagree that we don't like to follow. Everyone lives by rules and most often their own rules. This question of “what rules do I live by” is probably the easiest to answer because most of us live by the rule: “I decide which rules I follow, when to follow them and when to make up my own rules.”

We are all thankful for most rules because they enable safety and order as we move through our days. Perhaps you have experienced the confusion at an intersection where the stop light is not working. But even then there are unspoken rules of courtesy that some people follow that helps make the situation bearable. When I was in high school the soft drink dispenser malfunctioned and all the sodas were “free.” At least that is how many of us made the new rules in the scramble before the machine was quickly empty. The looting, destruction and violence we have all seen on TV is the clear picture of a crowd with each person making up their own rules. Everyone has rules, what rules do I live by?

Are you thinking about how the rules you choose to live by each day influence the quality of your life in the nature of your hopes and dreams, the places you look for truth, how you evaluate the people around you, even the way you look at yourself? And most importantly, your rules point you to the gods and saviors you worship.

The real value of any rule is dependent on the knowledge, wisdom and character of who made the rule. What if the rules for my attitudes, behaviors and interpersonal relationships have the same origin as the rules of physics, chemistry and biology? What if there are laws of living that are as sure as the laws of nature. What if to violate the rules of living have similar consequences to violating the laws of gravity? Most of us wisely choose to follow the laws of gravity. But even though we know they are just as sure, we are not so careful to follow the laws of chemistry and biology when we put harmful substances in our bodies or refuse to exercise the way we should. The rules we each choose to live by have real consequences that eventually help or harm us. We all choose the rules we live by daily. What is the origin and what are the real affects of the rules I choose to live by every moment of every day?

We choose which rules we follow by the ways we answer the other daily questions. What rules do I need to follow in order to fulfill my hopes and get the

best life for myself? What sources do I trust to tell me the right rules to follow? What groups or individuals can I associate with to challenge and encourage each other in the rules we follow? In what ways does evil influence the rules I choose to follow or avoid? If the rules I follow are man-made how trustworthy are they? What kind of rules do the gods I serve have for me? When I break the rules I claim to live by (we all do), who or what do I expect to rescue me from the consequences of my failures? In choosing what rules to follow throughout each day our decisions involve our answers to each of the other questions that define our lives from day to day. Do I have the right rules to live by?

## **Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses**

### **Exodus 20:1-17**

And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

- #1. "You shall have no other gods before me.
- #2. "You shall not make for yourself 'idols'
- #3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,
- #4. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- #5. "Honor your father and your mother,
- #6. "You shall not murder.

#7. "You shall not commit adultery.

#8. "You shall not steal.

#9. "You shall not bear false witness.

#10. "You shall not covet.

### **Psalm 1:1-3**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; :2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. :3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

### **Matthew 5:2-12**

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

:3 "Blessed are:

the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

:4 ... those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

:5 ... the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

:6 ... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

:7 ... the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

:8 ... the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

:9 ... the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

:10 ... those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

:11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you

falsely on my account.

:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

**Luke 10:27**

And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”

**Philippians 4:8-9**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. :9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

## **<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>**

Remember, God is not only listening, He wants to participate in our discussion!!!

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially challenging to me?
2. What are the usual results for people who follow their own rules?
3. What are some of the differences between God-made rules and man-made rules? “How does “character” contribute to these differences?
4. What do I think of the statement: Rules that don't require God's Grace to follow are probably not very important.?
5. Why does it seem God's rules often seem more difficult to follow than man's rules?

... more ...

6. Pick two of the above verses and compare them to the rules I followed during the last week.



## 4. What Are My Truth Sources?

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*"How long will you go limping
between two different opinions?"
(God or Baal) 1Kings 18:21*

We are surrounded by voices claiming to offer the best life choices. Each of the voices claim to be the truest and wisest. We choose what to eat, what to watch, what to buy, who to trust, on the basis of which truth source we believe. We choose our sources of truth over and over again as we navigate our day. What sources of truth and guidance for life am I choosing? The decisions I make throughout my days reveal what my sources of truth really are. Are my truth sources the right ones?

In this "information age" we are surrounded by sources claiming to be truth for us. Some people are foolishly convinced that truth is whatever a person believes. It is natural for us to be convinced that our beliefs are true. So a really important question for us to answer is what is my source of truth, and is that source really reliable? While opposing groups of "fact checkers" and accusations of "fake news" abound, what source do I go to for truth about the world and the life I live in it? Truth based upon popular opinion, personal feelings or private insight is often very unreliable. If I care about what is really true, I should

be willing to ask lots of questions about my sources of truth. Truth should be able to reasonably answer any questions. I don't think anyone really goes through their days saying: "I know it's not true, but I believe it anyway." So, to carefully question and reevaluate my truth sources is a very wise thing to do.

We all make thousands of decisions every day. They include the subconscious (which foot to put forward); the semi-conscious (hit the snooze button); the habitual (brush my teeth); the varied (which clothes to wear); the considered (best route to work); the relational (how to talk to coworkers); the passionate (conversations about politics); the fun (bragging about sports); the impulsive (how to respond to bad drivers); the tedious (what to fix for dinner); the relaxing (what TV show to watch); and thousands more in between. In this information age we are surrounded by sources offering to help us make just the right decisions in virtually every area of our lives. We are told the right tooth-paste to use, the best foods to eat, the appropriate clothes to wear, which politicians we can trust, which news is fake, the best use of our money, what to believe about climate, health, religion, entertainment, and on and on and on. How are we to know what is true, right and real in this chaos of information?

The reality is that, in the midst of all the chaos, we all choose in every moment what we believe is the right and best decision. No one ever intentionally chooses what they believe to be the wrong choice. We may know it is not best to eat an extra piece of pie but we choose to eat it anyway. In that moment we sincerely believe that the pleasure of that extra piece is the best choice. Even addicts and criminals make their very unwise choices because they truly believe that their choice will somehow be more fulfilling than any of the alternatives. We sometimes vote by choosing the lesser of two evils, but in doing so we use some sort of criteria that we believe is true. We always choose what we believe is the right choice between the alternatives we see. It is human nature to make choices we believe are right, true and real.

To simply know that a certain choice is not wise is not enough to keep us from making that choice anyway. For some reason we make all sorts of decisions that, if we are pressed, we acknowledge that they were foolish or wrong, but we made them anyway. Why would we do that? We actually believed that it was the best decision for the moment. To buy that car, to say that, to drink that, to go there, seemed right.

Our choices are all rooted in our source of truth. We all have a source, or sources, of truth. We have some thing, some place, some one that we use to evaluate the rightness, accuracy, reality and

truthfulness of everything. The problem is that we often do not think seriously about the reliability of our sources. We all tend to be quite comfortable with the truth sources to which we've become accustomed. And, if we are honest with ourselves we don't care as much about what is actually true as we care about what we want. This shows that much of the time our truth source is our own self. Our own preferences tend to be the standard by which we judge most things. Of course we make reference to other truth sources to authenticate our conclusions, but those sources invariably conform to our desired conclusions. It is a seemingly logical step to conclude that whatever contradicts, or does not support my beliefs, is not true.

The list of possible truth sources is very large but here are some of them: - internet - newspapers - advertisers - magazines - social media - blogs - teachers - scientists - surveys - parents - family - TV - celebrities - reviews - physicians - attorneys - authors - religious texts - preachers - neighbors - and on and on.

Our most widely and commonly used source of truth is ourselves. We say things like: "It just seems right to me;" "I hope it is true, so it must be true;" "This works for me, it satisfies me." We are all persuaded of truth by these attitudes all the time.

We could take almost any behavior during our day and link it to one of these areas as the primary source of truth we used to make our decisions about that behavior. Many times the choices would be barely conscious, but if we thought about it we could link our behavior to one or more of these types of truth sources. The fact that I brush my teeth, and the toothpaste I use is linked to my belief and trust in my dentist, advertisers, and my family. The route I take to work is linked to the traffic report I hear before I leave home. The bank I use was recommended by friends or advertisers. The food I eat is determined not just by my preferences but by my doctor, my family and the advertisements I see. The list is endless.

Many of our choices and behaviors are relatively inconsequential, like the toothpaste I use. But there are choices and behaviors every day that are of very significant importance. Do I go to work on time, or late? Do I make my purchases with credit or cash? Do I tell the truth or not? Do I obey laws or not? Do I think about God or not? My answer to all these questions involves some degree of reference to a source of truth regarding the question.

It is popular to suggest that truth is in the eye of the beholder, or truth is whatever anyone wants it to be. While this may be a popular idea, no one actually lives this way, at least not with any success. No one

drives on the wrong side of the road because for them it is the correct side; none of us really believe that everyone can reasonably make up their own traffic laws. No one goes into a bank and expects to withdraw \$1,000,000 from their \$100 account because they personally believe one hundred means one million. The idea that everyone can choose their own truth is getting more and more popular, but as it does our society gets more and more bizarre. Chaos is the only possible result if everyone lives by their own standards of truth. What then is our best source of truth about life? What are your sources of truth, and are they truly the ones you need and want?

The phrase “let your conscience be your guide” is an old one. We sort of lump many of our decisions in that category. We gather our accumulated experiences over the years and make decisions on the basis of what feels right at the moment. Some folks give credit to a “still small voice” that affirms the correct paths we take. Some take this a step further and claim that “the Spirit of God” led them to the truth. Of course our hunches, intuitions and revelations are not always wrong. They can be sources of good counsel. But the fact that our feelings, even our most heart-felt ones, are often mistaken, should lead us to carefully question them. It is a fact that people with equally strong feelings (even when both claim the authority of a divine spirit) often come to contradicting and opposing

conclusions. This should prompt us to look for truth sources more reliable than our feelings.

I suppose that most everything is influenced by our feelings at some point and should not be ignored simply because our feelings are so fickle. But the real problem comes when we allow our feelings to be our primary and final source of truth. But sadly too many of us don't seriously think about and evaluate all our truth sources because it takes real work and most of us are too comfortable with what we already believe.

We go about our day revealing our truth sources by our behaviors (the decisions we make). We take certain vitamins, or don't take vitamins, because some book, TV show or health authority recommended it. We dress for the day according to the weather report. We discuss politics according to the news we watched the night before. Obviously our decisions and the truth sources upon which our choices are made are very nuanced and complicated. But the question "what is my truth source" is answered by looking at our behaviors throughout the day.

The truth source for many of our decisions is not particularly important. Whether we get what we believe about toothpaste from our dentist, a magazine ad, or from research on the internet is not particularly crucial. But as we move up the scale of importance the source of what we believe becomes

increasingly important. The choices of where to go to school, what career to enter, who to marry, are the sort of decisions that have very significant impacts on our life and thus the sources of truth we use to evaluate and make those decisions are very important.

I believe that these religious decisions we make are of utmost importance. Do I believe there is a personal God? If so, what is God like? Is there a supreme source of truth, if not why not; if there is supreme truth, what is it like? Who was Jesus Christ and what was He like or not like? What rules do I live by? What is the purpose of my life? What kind of people do I want to closely associate with? What do I believe about evil? The way I answer these questions not only reveals the source of what I believe to be true about them, but also determines the character and quality of the present and future days of my life.

Many people believe the Bible is the best source of truth the world has. Individuals that don't believe the Bible have the responsibility to point to a source of truth that is more reliable than the Bible. There are various ways to actually determine the truthfulness of the Bible or any source that claims to be true regarding human life.

Taken as a whole, is it logically consistent? Do its parts fit together? Do the parts reasonably explain

each other? Does the ending answer questions raised in the beginning? Does the middle actually describe the progress being made from the beginning to the end? While the Bible may seem to the casual reader like a loose collection of unrelated stories, it actually is one amazing story. It begins by answering the question “where did everything come from”? As it progresses the Bible describes how God relates with human beings, both those who turn their hearts and lives away from Him, and with those who seek Him. It describes how Jesus Christ is God’s answer for the gulf between God and man. It describes the LIFE God gives to those who seek Him. The Bible ends with the descriptions of the destiny of those who love God and those who do not. It may take sincere rereading, but the Bible is remarkably consistent as one story, with many historical examples of the tensions and triumphs between God and man.

A second test concerns the accuracy of the contents. In its individual parts, does my truth source accurately describe the real world? Are its depictions of human history consistent with other reliable sources of historical data? Are the persons, places, and events it describes consistent with the descriptions of other sources? The Bible is well known as a source for archaeological research in the ancient world. Secular sources authenticate the existence and activities of Biblical people. Real

Biblical places are easily and often located in geographical research. Real people can walk in the real places where Bible stories took place. Many people have set out to disprove the Bible's authenticity and accuracy only to arrive at the conclusion that it is remarkably true and accurate in its descriptions of the world in which it was written.

A third test is, how comprehensively, accurately and effectively does the truth source address real life issues? Does the truth source talk about what life is, why it is bad or good and how to make it better? Does it demonstrate the hopes and dreams of people and how those hopes are gained or lost? Does it give rules for living that really work? Does it present itself as true regarding all that it presents? Does it describe how groups of people relate to each other using, or not using, the truths presented? Does the truth source address the bad things of life like evil, lies, hatred etc. Does it give descriptions of what those evils are, what their sources are, and how they are corrected? Does the truth source consistently and accurately describe what human beings are in their nature and potentials? Does the source acknowledge and describe the fact that humans naturally exalt, honor and yes, worship various kinds of gods. What about solutions to the challenges of living? Does the truth source present answers, rescues, and saviors for the spiritual and physical ills that plague all human beings?

These tests are met by the Bible in uniquely remarkable ways. Do you question the truthfulness or value of the Bible? If so, what truth sources do you use to question the Bible? How do you know they are more truthful than the Bible? Are you willing to at least read the Bible verses in this book and consider their validity? You should at least give the Bible the opportunity to pass the same tests for truth that you give your other truth sources.

Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. :7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Joshua 1:8

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Psalm 12:6

The words of the Lord are pure words,
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
purified seven times.

Psalm 19:7,8

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the
testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the
simple; :8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing
the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;...

Psalm 119:89

Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the
heavens.

Proverbs 30:5,6

Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to
those who take refuge in him. :6 Do not add to his
words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

John 17:17

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in former days was written
for our instruction, that through endurance and
through the encouragement of the Scriptures we
might have hope.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when

you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

2 Timothy 3:16,17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, :17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

2 Peter 1:19-21

And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, :20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. :21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>

Remember to invite the Person Who is not only the Author of Truth, but He claims to be Truth. Be sure to ask Him to guide your discussion about Truth.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. What are some truth sources I accept as truthful simply because I want to?
3. What does it reveal about my confidence if I am reluctant to investigate views different from my own?
4. What are the dangers of believing that I myself am the best judge of what is true?
5. What are some consequences for believing things that are not true? (Especially things about God and our relationship with Him?)
6. How sincerely would I want to know if something I believe is actually false?
7. Pick two of the above Bible verses and compare them to some of my other truth sources.

5. Who Is My Church?

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*"...consider how to stir up one another  
to love and good works,  
not neglecting to meet together,  
... encouraging one another..."  
Hebrews 10:24,25*

While in the midst of a crowded world we may feel alone much of the time, but we all choose other people with whom we like to identify. The associations we have in every area of our lives have enormous impact on the nature and quality of our lives. We choose our associations every day. Do I associate with the right people?

Modern social scientists survey, measure, analyze, and interpret almost everything in our culture. Along with their analysis they make predictions about what our future days and years will be like. The condition of the Christian church is a very popular subject to analyze. While conclusions can be found for almost any particular view a person wants to find, it is quite obvious that the Christian church in America is not viewed as positively as it used to be. It is easy to find negative opinions about churches. It seems that more and more people want nothing to do with church or what many call "organized religion."

The growing trend to be “non-religious” represents people who, for a broad variety of reasons, are either “not interested” or “anti-church.” Church people or Christians are often described as hypocritical, judgmental, self-righteous, and the cause of much hurt in our culture. Some non-religious people who have left church see themselves as escaping legalistic, blinding attitudes in order to enjoy a freedom they felt Christianity was restraining. But is “church” or “Christianity” really the issue?

Numerous surveys report that there has been a very significant decline in religion in the last several decades. There is decline in both regular church attendance and in the number of people who believe in God. Agnosticism and atheism are becoming more and more popular. Religion is commonly blamed as the seed bed of intolerance and violence in our world. In some circles religion is declared to be ignorantly at war with science.

I believe that the term “religion” is being used too narrowly. People are usually considered religious if they attend organized church services, believe in a deity, participate in regular spiritual practices, regard religious texts like the Bible to be supremely authoritative for life, anticipate some sort of heaven after death, and believe evil is a spiritual problem that requires spiritual answers. Though some people say they are spiritual but not religious, more and more

people claim to be not religious at all. In spite of what some people claim, I believe that all people are religious. I believe, like the phrase says, religion is “in our DNA.”

I think that people deny they are religious because they strongly object to one or more specific beliefs and behaviors they understand as religious. People claim they are not religious because they don't believe in God; don't believe the Bible; don't believe Jesus is all that people claim him to be; they don't believe in strict religious rules; they are doubtful about heaven and hell; they don't attend church services; and they don't believe that evil is a spiritual problem. However, if religion is defined more generally, I believe everyone is religious.

Wikipedia says this about religion: “Religion may be defined as a cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, world views, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements. **However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion.**” (emphasis added)

Miriam Webster's number 3 definition of “religious” is: “having or expressing great depth of feeling.” Webster lists the following words as antonyms of religion: “detached, dry, impersonal, objective, reserved, undemonstrative, cold, cool, dispassionate,

emotionless, impassive, unemotional.” I can’t imagine someone one saying: “I’m not religious, I’m cold, dispassionate, emotionless and impassive.” The reality is, we are all religious, we just view and live our religions differently.

Everyone has hopes and dreams to which they look forward. We all have rules by which we live. Everyone has some sources of truth with which they evaluate life. Everyone has associates with whom they share encouragement, common perspective, and life adventures. All of us have convictions about the nature, source of and solution for evil. We all have strong feelings about what human beings really are. Everyone has something or someone they highly esteem, honor, and exalt with their attention, time, and resources. All people have something or someone on whom they rely to rescue them from life’s troubles.

These are values that are foundational to our lives yet beyond the scope of biology, physiology, chemistry and physics. Some “non-religious” people claim that math and science can best answer all the questions of life, yet they, like all the rest of us, by their behaviors, answer these religious questions about their life every day. They live their lives according to their views, values and principles. They may claim to be more reasoned and scientific in their thought processes but they, like all of us, cling

fervently to their thoughts as the views, values and principles by which they live.

Our lives are inherently religious and the way we all live reveals the fact that we are religious beings. The way we live our daily lives declares, even without words, our answers to these nine basic questions. To think about or discuss these issues usually prompts a passionate demonstration of our values.

During any given week there are gatherings of people who get together at their appointed times to celebrate and enjoy each other's company. In crowds from very small to very large, people talk and listen, sing and shout, sit and stand as they unite together around common beliefs and behaviors. They give their money, their time, and their talents to not only encourage each other but to proselytize others to join them and expand their influence. They gather around people who promote and protect their particular beliefs. The crowds are prone to emotional excitement. The people often participate in unique traditional ceremonies and have particular requirements for participation. Sometimes they seem intimidating or unwelcoming to outsiders. But to each person in the group their beliefs and behaviors seem not only normal and appropriate but important and even essential for a good and right life.

A person could easily read the previous paragraph and picture in their mind churches they have visited

or seen pictured and described in various media. But, does not the description fit virtually any group of people? Can't you see the stadium full of football fans; the plaza full of political supporters; the seminar of professional associates; the union meeting hall; the editorial news room; the high-school basketball team and their fans; a wild rock concert; a local flower club; and all the other groups that meet together to help, encourage, and support each other in whatever common endeavor they choose to believe and work for their common interests?

The point is that everyone naturally seeks to associate with others of like mind for fellowship, support, encouragement and life focus. In this sense everyone has a church, or churches to which they belong. The common objection to "church" cannot be that there are people who meet together for their common interests, because we all do that. It is a fundamental part of our human nature to seek to partner with other people in the things we are interested in and passionate about. The levels of passion, commitment, and involvement seem to be pretty much the same no matter the focus. So it is safe to say that everyone has a church, we just focus on and celebrate different things. This fact is another illustration that we are all religious, we just express our religious values in different ways.

So rather than claiming that “church” is a problem in our culture, we should each very intentionally and carefully think about and evaluate the associations (churches) we personally have.

The people we associate with have a very significant impact on the quality, character and values of our lives. Our beliefs and behaviors are dynamically shaped by these associations. The fundamental question everyone answers is not “do I have a church?” because everyone has church-like associations in which they participate. We should be asking about the nature, character and value structure of the church (associations) of which we are a part? Not only do our associations have a great influence on us, but, it is groups of people that have the greatest impact on our human culture. It is true that an individual may start and lead a group, but without the group that gathers around, the individual’s influence will soon die out.

We tend to choose which associations we participate with simply on the basis of whether or not we agree with them. It is quite obvious that just because a group of people meet and work together on their common values does not mean it is a right and good group. We can all think of groups that are generally considered either good or bad. Parent Teacher Associations are usually considered good while neighborhood gangs are considered bad. There is a

more important question we should ask: “is the group true and right?” The answer to this question involves seriously evaluating the rules, truth sources and other religious values of the group.

By the way, I hope you can see that all groups, like PTA’s and Gangs, answer the nine religious questions we all as individuals answer every day. Of course most groups don’t see their views and values as “religious” because they don’t consider themselves “churches” even though they have rules, truth sources, views about evil; they have gods, and saviors. Unfortunately most of us simply assume our personal views are correct and best, and look for others who agree with ourselves. We don’t really think very seriously about the truthfulness and the values of the groups with which we are involved. We tend to not give much serious thought to our values, we just assume that ours are right and best then look for others of like mind with whom to associate.

How long has it been since you asked serious questions about the beliefs and values of the groups (churches) to which you belong. How long since you thought about whether your beliefs and values are really true, or do you just feel like they are right? It is probably natural to be a little fearful about questioning our beliefs. But if they are really true can’t they stand up to any questions? Hopefully, if

our own beliefs or the beliefs and values of a group we belong to is wrong we would want to know.

One of the main reasons there are so many different groups, associations and churches is because they all disagree with each other to varying degrees. If our beliefs and values actually matter, then more seriously evaluating them is really important. If I am unwilling to carefully think about my beliefs and values it profoundly reveals that they don't really matter to me and I am content to blindly and foolishly go through life just living what comes naturally. And it is just that attitude that results in the destructive ways in which we relate to one another. We tend to criticize each others beliefs and values simply because they are different from our own. We need to do the challenging work of not just recognizing the differences but evaluating the truth sources, rules and other religious basis of our beliefs and values.

Everyone is religious, and as religious beings we all have churches or associations. The question we must be asking ourselves is "do I have the right ones"? The people I associate with will naturally influence my own values, just as I influence others in the group. We influence each other's hopes, rules, truth sources, views of evil, beliefs about mankind, Gods and Saviors. We all demonstrate our answers to these questions every day as we involve ourselves with other people. Do I care enough to really think

about and reevaluate my associations and other religious values?

## **Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses**

### **Matthew 16:18**

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

### **Acts 2:47**

... praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

### **Acts 9:31**

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

### **1 Corinthians 5:12**

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

### **1 Corinthians 7:17**

Only let each person lead the LIFE that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

### **Ephesians 1:22**

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church ...

### **Ephesians 2:20–22**

... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, :21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. :22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

### **Ephesians 3:10**

... so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

### **Ephesians 4:12-16**

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.

### **Colossians 1:28**

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

### **2 Timothy 3:12**

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly LIFE in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

### **Hebrews 10:21-25**

... and since we have a great priest over the house of God, :22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. :23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. :24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, :25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### **Hebrews 13:7**

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of LIFE, and imitate their faith.

### **1 Peter 2:5-10**

... you yourselves like living stones are being built up

as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. :6 For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” :7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” :8 and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. :9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. :10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## **<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>**

How about letting the Head of the Christian Church in on your discussion.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. How clearly do I understand the hopes, the rules, the truth sources, the beliefs about evil, the convictions about mankind, the gods and saviors of

the groups with which I am aligned? (Every group has these values, even if not specifically addressed, they are demonstrated in their actions)

3. What are three specific benefits I receive from the church or group with which I am most involved?

4. What are three specific ways this church or group benefits from my involvement with them?

5. Are there some things in my life that I tend to consider not religious? What are the consequences of this thinking?

6. What do I think about the idea that being religious (living out these nine questions) may be the image of God in us? (Remember that the Image of God in us is marred and fallen so we don't naturally live out the questions like God does)

7. Are there any of the above Bible verses that make me want to reevaluate what I think about "church"?





## 6. What Are My Answers For Evil?

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*"Why do you see the speck
that is in your brother's eye,
but do not notice
the log that is in your own eye?"
Matthew 7:3-4*

It could be said that bad news is half the news. As much as we might like to focus only on good things and good people, we see evil all around us every day. It is unavoidable. We all choose how to think about evil and how to respond to it. What we choose to think about evil is foundational to not only the way we view life but the way we live it. And like the other fundamental choices, the character and quality of our days is determined by whether or not we think rightly about evil.

What am I choosing to believe about evil? What is evil, why does evil exist and what is the solution for it? Bad events and bad people are all around us. It is impossible to live in our world and not have beliefs about the what, why and which ways of evil. Our answers regarding evil influence every area of our lives. What I think about evil effects the way I vote, how I lock my doors, how I think about my neighborhood, my entertainment, and on and on.

Turn on any media source and a significant part of the content is about various kinds of bad things going on in our world. Some things, like floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes and such, are what we call “natural” disasters. But, even these things are claimed by some people to be the result of the behaviors of bad people. We are living in a time when it seems that, whatever the issue, people on one side call the people on the other side “evil.” I suppose that we can all agree that to call something evil means that we view it as bad, corrupt and harmful, usually in rather exaggerated ways.

It could reasonably be said that the basic history of mankind is a history of war. We mark time by the years of wars. Currently, around the world, there are 10 official wars and 8 active military conflicts recognized by the United States government. These numbers likely will not decrease as time goes on. I assume that some of those wars, like many before, are seeking to defeat evil. Actually, in most of them at least one side probably claims they are fighting evil. These numbers do not include terrorist type attacks on everything from military bases to schools and even hospitals. They do not include turf wars between drug gangs that affect many innocent bystanders. People are justifiably angry at violent conflicts that impact so many lives.

There have always been people who take cruel advantage of the aged, the infirm, and the young. It seems that every day there is another warning about some phone or internet scam taking advantage of vulnerable people. Sex trafficking is said to be rampant even in the United States. "Buyer Beware" used to be a warning slogan, but we rarely hear it anymore, perhaps because advertising and sales dishonesty is so commonplace. A popular research firm reported that 21 percent of Americans think it is morally okay to cheat on their taxes. It is estimated that \$270,000,000,000 is not received by the US Treasury due to unreported income. Serious injuries, even deaths, caused by road rage incidents are becoming common news. Bandits, who steal packages off of people's porches have spawned various new home surveillance and monitoring products. The cruel and toxic environment of internet social media is heartbreaking. Nearly every public gathering is attended by protest groups, often on both sides, no longer just carrying signs and marching but shouting vile insults that often escalate into physical violence. It would be easy to go on and on describing the evils in our world. But, most people would recognize that these are illustrations of evil. I'm sure I haven't even mentioned some evils that personally impact you.

Every day, as we are surrounded by evil, our behaviors answer the question "what do I think about

evil.” Our behavior describes what we think evil is, where we believe it comes from, and what we think should be done about it.

Evil causes hurt, chaos, trouble, care-less mayhem that intrudes, interrupts and alters the pleasant focus of our days. Perhaps some people would suggest that real evil is exemplified by people like Hitler. They might think that there are varying degrees of evil so that a road rage accident is not really evil but just awfully bad behavior. However, they are both rooted in the same callous, selfish disregard for others which is fundamental to all the different ways people inflict misery on each other. There, obviously, are things that feel more horrendous than others. But, I wonder if we are reluctant to call road rage or tax cheating evil because it gets nearer to our own behaviors.

Our solution for evil is to oppose it in many different ways. The worse the evil, the more focused and involved we become. We honk at the stupid driver that evilly pulled out in front of us. We sign petitions to pass laws against evil behaviors. We call the police to report drug dealing. And we go to war to stop evil dictators. But mostly we just complain about all the bad things going on around us.

When, during our day we respond to the evil in our world by thinking “those are bad people doing bad things,” we reveal some of what we believe about the

source of evil. It seems reasonable because people doing evil things are indeed evil. Many years ago there was a public service advertising campaign against juvenile crime that used the slogan: "Don't help a good boy go bad ... lock your car." The obvious implication was that temptation was the real culprit. Blaming someone other than the perpetrator of evil is as old as Adam and Eve. You remember that when God asked Adam about his disobedience, Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the Serpent. All of us have mastered the art.

Do we recognize that as much as we claim to abhor evil, one of the major categories of our entertainment is evil in movies and TV. There is something about crime, corruption and conflict that attracts our attention; and it's not just that we like to see the good guys win or the bad guys get what they deserve. We actually like the conflict. Competition in sports could be seen as a mild form of combat with the opposing team or individual seen as an enemy. We name our teams the Warriors, the Vikings and all sorts of other battle-hardened champions.

Of course it must be recognized that competition in itself can be very good and healthy as it builds and brings out in us very good qualities like perseverance, hard work, dedication, respect, teamwork, and many other things. It could be said that these and other good character traits could not

be grown without the tensions of opposition and hardship. But there is a tipping point where the response to life circumstances becomes “not good,” and if not evil, the roots of it. Perhaps that point is where “I” become the dominant focus, above “you,” and “us.” When I disregard the wants and needs of others, thinking that my wants are more important than anyone else’s, it is the root of evil in me. I hope that, like me, you recognize that we walk that fine line every day of our lives.

I think that the most important thing to consider about evil is not what I think of it “out there,” but what I think about it “inside me.” It doesn’t matter who you are, or what your life is like there is someone else who thinks something in your attitudes or behaviors is evil. And while they may just be pointing at something with which they very strongly disagree, it is blindness to not recognize that selfishness and greed (the basic elements of all evil) lurk inside each of us. “I want what I want when I want it, no matter what it costs you,” is our basic attitude and too often our basic behavior.

We all know that the solution to evil is far beyond “lock them up,” “just say no,” or “counseling sessions.” What does it take to actually conquer our selfishness and greed? Is it possible to conquer evil in my life without having the right life rules, truth sources, friends, and most essentially the right God

and the right Savior? How long since I really thought about evil and my relationship to it?

I've always vaguely known I am often hypocritical. But I've only recently realized how infected I am with hypocrisy. In many areas of my life I claim to believe one way and yet in my daily behaviors I reveal different beliefs. Of course most of the time I willingly ignore recognizing my hypocrisy; and I certainly avoid admitting it to others.

I don't remember a particular moment in time when this painful honesty came upon me, but I assume that it was connected to some period of critically observing the hypocrisy of others. My personal radar chirps whenever I see in other people some act of intolerance, prejudice, ignorance, selfishness, greed and all sorts of other things I claim to believe are wrong.

The problem is not that I recognize the things that other people need to change in order to have a more meaningful, effective and satisfying life. The problem is that I ignore and excuse things that need changing in my own life. The Bible asks the question: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" (James 4:1) It then answers: "Is it not this, that your passions (or pleasures) are at war within you?" Could it be that the solutions to all our interpersonal conflicts are not in expecting other people to change

their behaviors, but in each of us having our own behaviors changed.

I realize that it is an impossible dream that everyone will participate in admitting their part in life's problems, but I sincerely want to make my life more of a blessing to others, to myself and to God. Many others have struggled with this monumental challenge. The Apostle Paul put it this way: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Romans 7:15)

I suppose the first step is recognizing that I am just like Paul. I say I believe one thing and yet behave in opposite ways. Paul asks a question everyone who is honest with themselves should ask: "...Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) I suspect that until I admit that my hypocrisies are indeed "death" for me, I cannot begin the journey of being delivered from them.

I very naturally resist when others simply point out my hypocrisies. I am convinced that the most effective way of truly recognizing the depth of my hypocrisy is when I am in some way prompted to seriously question the relationship between my beliefs and my behaviors. Perhaps out of self-defense, but also from blind pride, we are all prone to ignore what we perceive as judgmental criticism from others. How much more acceptable, and I believe effective, are sincere, caring questions from

someone we sense truly has our best in mind. These kind of people earn the right, over time, to be more blunt in their observations of our lives. Unfortunately those sort of people are few in most of our lives.

So, I am seeking to look for questions to ask myself that will help me match what I truly believe with what is demonstrated by my actual behaviors. I believe that in answering probing questions about my foundational beliefs and behaviors I will experience more of the life I need, the life I want, and the life I believe God offers. I trust this will result in me being a genuine blessing to others, to myself and a real honor to the God I claim to serve.

The answer for evil in my life is directly linked to how I answer the other eight questions I answer over and over every day. Are there not people who believe evil is the best for their life? Is it possible that some of my hopes and dreams are evil? Are not the rules some people live by evil? How about some of my rules, are they evil? Where do I get the truth about what is good or evil in others and in myself? Doesn't a lying source of ideas about evil produce a false understanding about the nature, source and cure of evil? Do the people I admire and associate with give me a true understanding of evil? In what ways and to what degree is our humanity responsible for evil in the world? What do my gods think about evil and what do they do about solving evil? Is there someone

who has the knowledge and power to rescue me from the external and internal evil in my life? These questions are all linked together in a multitude of ways which makes our answers vitally important to the quality of our lives today and all our tomorrows.

Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses

Genesis 3:1-4

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” :2 And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, :3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” :4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.”

Jeremiah 8:12 & 6:15

Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Ezekiel 33:10

”Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. How then can we live?”

Matthew 7:17

So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

John 8:44

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Romans 1:21-25

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. :22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, :23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. :24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, :25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Romans 3:10-18

... as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; :11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. :12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. :13 Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. :14 Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. :15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; :16 in their paths are ruin and misery, :17 and the way of peace they have not known. :18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Romans 3:23

... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Galatians 5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, :20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, :21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 2:1-3

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins :2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — :3 among whom we all once lived in the passions

of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Titus 1:15-16

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. :16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

1 John 1:8-10

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. :9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. :10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 5:19

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

1 John 3:4

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>

This is a discussion where it is especially good to have The One Who has defeated evil in on the conversation.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. If human beings are basically good, as many people think, what is in me that yields to temptations to do bad?
3. What makes me reluctant to admit that evil lurks in the roots of my being?
4. What are some illustrations that evil must be defeated, rather than simply ignored or forgotten?
5. How do I describe what the Bible says about how God has uniquely responded to evil?
6. Pick two or three of the previous Bible verses that prompt me to modify my thoughts about evil.
7. How does choosing to not think about decisions I make contribute to the contradictions others may see in my beliefs and behaviors?
8. What are some specific hypocrisies I easily spot in other people? Does this suggest anything about the hypocrisies in my own life?

7. What Am I?

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*"So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them."  
Genesis 1:27*

Another choice we make over and over every day is what we will think about the people around us. We don't just observe the behaviors of others, we also make assumptions about not just who they are, but about what they are and what kind of attentions they want, deserve or need. We also choose what we believe about who and what we are ourselves. And those chosen beliefs have a great impact on the quality of our lives. Do I think rightly about who and what people, human beings, are?

I assume most people are familiar with the phrase "midlife crisis." It seems like almost everyone wrestles, to some degree, with the question "who am I." Sometimes it is simply a casual wonder about where we fit in life. We compare ourselves to the people around us. We can easily see people who appear more talented, more attractive, more successful, more popular, more happy and we question ourselves. We tend to conclude that we are less important and less valuable than others, which is usually labeled as having low self-esteem and various other mental health issues. Of course there

are some who compare themselves with others and feel on top of life. Those people still answer the questions, they just appear to not be bothered by them. I imagine that there are billions of dollars spent on counselors, self-help books, life coaches and other related cures for the anxieties related to not having an accurate view of ourselves.

The internet site “wikiHow to do anything” has an article entitled “How To Answer the Question “Who Are You.” It introduces the topic with this statement: “Defining yourself is a difficult process, whether you are writing a journal entry, answering an interview question, or trying to be happier and more fulfilled in your life. However, you must define who you are for yourself first before you can do it for another person. What exactly makes up a a person differs according to what philosophy you follow, but you can look at some basic parts of yourself to define who you are. For instance, you can define your skill set, your passions, your personality, and your values as a way of determining who you are.” The article continues to discuss things like: “Decoding Your Personality and Core Values;” “Discovering Your Passions” and “Discovering Your Skills;”

The interesting thing to me is the fact that our daily behavior reveals the person we are to everyone around us. Granted, it is true that there are some things veiled and misunderstood, but for anyone who

looks closely, our real self is pretty readily seen. We all have our blind spots, but others are quite good at spotting them. If we really want to know what we are like, all we need to do is ask a variety of people who live around us.

One problem is that when we do begin to see ourselves accurately we often don't like what we see. We are not as talented, attractive, successful or popular as we would like to be and so we are not as happy as we think we should be. So, we search for ways to improve our talents, attractiveness and popularity, hoping that we will be more successful and happy in our life. The fundamental answer of most life-helpers is that we are all good people and just need to figure out what has been, and is, hindering us from living out our own unique goodness. From the suggested solutions, the question of "who am I," is answered by an evaluation of things like our skills, passions, personality and values. What does it mean when someone has, what looks to everyone around, good answers for these questions and still is trying to find themselves? Why would so many people go looking for themselves when they seem to have a perfectly adequate life?

With all the introspection and advice that goes on with all of us seeking to discover who we really are, in order to live our lives to the full, there is a fundamental question even more important than

“who am I?” It may not seem significant, but change one word and ask ourselves: “WHAT am I?” At first thought the answer seems obvious that we are all human beings. We are persons with a great variety of differences. We tend to see the differences as the answer to the question “who am I.” Some people answer “I am a man, I am a woman, I am old, I am young, I am a teacher, I am a policeman, I am retired.” These are obvious and different kinds of answers. But what if we considered even more fundamental answers to the question “what am I?”

There are many different views about what human beings really are. Some people believe we are some sort of spirit beings, coming from somewhere, moving through time in various forms, seeking oneness with the universe. Some people believe we are animals at the top of an evolutionary food chain, here today and gone tomorrow, leaving only our DNA to move forward to new generations of evolving natures. Some people see humans going through repeated lives seeking to improve their lot in life during each reincarnated existence. Some believe humans are divine offspring working toward their own divine destiny. The Bible teaches that humans are special creations of God, with their purpose and value determined by the God who created them. Differing views are seemingly endless.

Looking from the perspective that our behavior, more than our words, reveals what we truly believe, how does our daily behavior answer the following two questions. First, am I God made or man made? And second, am I basically good or basically bad? If you are like me you will briefly read the questions, give a quick answer, then realize that the questions can be answered with a lot of variations. But remember, the questions are not what do I “think” but what do I “demonstrate?” So let’s rephrase the questions.

First, as I go through my day observing my own life and the lives around me, do I see God or man at work? Who gets the credit for where I am in life? Did I come from eons of chance mutations, or from the wise design of God? Am I what I am because of the millions of mostly subconscious choices my ancestors have made in our evolutionary process of becoming human? Am I what I am as the result of human efforts or of God’s designs and actions? It is a cop-out to answer “both.” Of course it is valid to recognize that our efforts are involved, but do I believe (demonstrably) that God is the One who gives us our abilities? What do I think my life would be like if there were no God to guide and empower me? It is interesting that much of the time we give man (ourselves) the praise for the pleasant things that happen, and give God the blame for the bad (unpleasant) things that happen. The common phrase for a natural disaster, like a flood or an

earthquake, is “an act of God.” But the words we most often use to describe the good accomplishments of our lives focus on ourselves not God. So, do my words and behaviors demonstrate that I believe I am God made, or man made?

The significance of the question is not simply theoretical, it is practical to our daily life. If we believe that we are fundamentally man made, the quality of our lives is limited to the abilities of ourselves and those around us. It certainly is often argued that mankind (without a supreme deity) has made many remarkable technological improvements to our lives. But our man-made technologies have accomplished little in giving us the more truly life-related things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And, isn't it when these things are missing that our lives feel most unfulfilled? Without God, it seems that our humanity frustrates more than facilitates the qualities of life we most truly need.

This brings us to the second question, “Am I basically good, or basically bad”? This specific question can only really be answered accurately by someone, other than myself; someone with complete and perfect knowledge of all my outward behaviors and my inward attitudes and motivations. While a few people may declare they are basically evil and either warn others or boast of it, most of us would probably

think of ourselves as basically good, with periodic times of bad. But can we be considered GOOD if we actually have some BAD in us. Is it right to define GOOD as just Mostly Good? Doesn't even a little bit of Bad spoil GOoD enough to make it not really GOOD? We see the contrast even more if we use the terms PERFECT and IMPERFECT or RIGHTEOUS and UNRIGHTEOUS. A simple test can be made with the Ten Commandments. Can a person accurately say they have kept the Ten Commandments if they have obeyed all of them except three, or two, or one? Can a person accurately say they are truly GOOD if they have proud selfishness running through their veins? And, don't we all?

While I as a human being move through this amazing world, who gets the credit for the praiseworthy circumstances or events I see? In times of challenge or uncertainty do I turn to man (myself) or to God? As I write this, America and the world is in the middle of a viral pandemic. Am I, are you, are we, looking to God or the government to rescue us? Are we sitting isolated in our homes trusting in God's guidance or the government's actions to lead us through? Remember, we are looking at the answers we demonstrate, not just what we briefly think or say. Are we thanking God for doctors, medicines, and leaders; asking God to make them wise? Are we thanking

God for the opportunity to lovingly care for our neighbors, in His Name?

When we look at a beautiful sunset do we say “that’s awesome,” or “God is an awesome artist?” When we see a beautiful painting, an attractive house and yard, an amazing athletic or musical performance, do we say “what an amazing talent?” or “what an amazing gift God gave?” Do I look for people to praise me for my talents and accomplishments? Or do I hope they give God the credit for any good they might see in me? Many people may say “I know God is behind all things, I just don’t always say it.” Well then, how often do you “say it”? Now you say “you are being picky.” And I say to you, and to myself, “you are making excuses” for not really seeing God in as much as you think you do.

Perhaps thinking too much of ourselves is one of the reasons for so much uncertainty about who we really are. Some claim that our special uniqueness is that we are the most advanced of all the animals. Through evolution we are the monkeys that made it. It is justifiable that we are proud of how far we have come. Who knows how far we can potentially go? How true is the source that tells you these things? Can random time plus chance really account for the majestic complexity we see in and around us? Seemingly intelligent people confidently tell us that all we see just happened; we stand where we are

because of the lucky combinations of various forms of energy and matter. They may reject the Bible but they cannot deny the accuracy of the Bible's statement that man "worships and serves the creature rather than the creator..." (Romans 1:25) But the answer to the problem of thinking too much of ourselves is not to think less of ourselves.

I have heard that in some places in the world Americans are viewed as arrogant snobs. They see Americans as expecting to be treated special. They get the impression that Americans believe they are more important than people from other places. Can you see the difference between being proud Americans and being proud of America? There is a similar difference between being proud of ourselves and being proud of the God Who has made us who and what we are. The answer to thinking too much of ourselves is thinking about the amazing God Who has made us and how amazingly wonderful His creations are.

After talking to a serial killer on the phone a news anchor said: "I've just talked to a man who has no soul." A common answer would suggest that somehow society let him down; if only someone would have helped him follow the good nature of his youth to overcome the pressures that forced him down the wrong paths. Others might propose that he is just living out his animal instincts, saying that

unfortunately some people are just that way. Have you ever thought about the fact that every murderer was once some mother's beautiful new baby. But, from the first cry everything that baby did screamed "me first." Unlike the common idea that basically good children learn to do bad things, the reality is that basically selfish and proud children can learn to do good things.

Have you, like others, thought about taking some time off to "find yourself"? It is very important to know what you are, but do we actually find out by some sort of extraordinary quest focused on ourselves? Looking for what pleases ourselves may lead to being more pleased with ourself, but will it actually lead to the best LIFE we can live? Even if we look for meaning and purpose in what others want and need from us it is usually very unfulfilling as we are pulled in various conflicting directions.

If we really want to know what we are, isn't it wise to see what the One who made us thinks of us? I don't remember who said it, but it is true that "God don't make no junk." It is true that we have made junk of ourselves, but the best answer is to learn how valuable God considers us. The Bible is the story of an Amazing God Who created an Amazing world with something in it on which He focused, and focuses, His greatest and most Amazing attention. Some people think so much of themselves that they ignore

God. Some people think so poorly of themselves that they do not hear what God says about them.

The following verses demonstrate both the sinful beings we have made of ourselves and the supreme value God considers us to be. The whole Bible is a demonstration that even though we gave up on God, He never gave up on us. He wrote the Bible so that we might know how very much He loves us. It is the story of our riches to rags to riches. It is the story of how very far we have fallen and how God came down to where we are to bring us up to be with Himself forever. The Bible says that God names the stars and uses animals to do His bidding. But God LOVES people. The whole object of the Bible is to tell us how much God loves us, even though we refuse to believe Him over and over and over. Jesus didn't die for hurricanes, or earthquakes that cause so much devastation, He died for us, for you, for me, who have caused even more devastation to God's world.

It is important that we realize and acknowledge our offensiveness toward God. "if we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us." (1John 1:10) But, once we admit our awfulness, God frees us to run into the outstretched arms of the ONE Who loves us so much. He, Himself paid the death penalty of our sin for the express purpose that we might spend all of endless eternity in His

Presence learning more and more of the Majesty of Who He IS and what He does.

The only way to really “find yourself” is to find what your Creator made you for. The Bible says God made us to enjoy Him. How tragic that so many people remain caught up in seeking to enjoy themselves, refusing to believe what God says and does for them. In the Bible, a man who used to kill Christians before He met Jesus and was captivated by His forgiving love, says: “... We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:20)

## **Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses**

### **Genesis 1:26,27**

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

**Job 7:17**

What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment?

**Psalms 8:3-6**

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet ...

**Isaiah 43:7**

... everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

**John 3:16**

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

**John 17:24-26**

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to

them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

### **Romans 1:28-32**

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

### **1 Timothy 1:15**

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

### **Hebrews 2:6**

It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?"

## **<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>**

There is Someone Who knows everything about you and loves you very much. He wants to be part of the discussion about ourselves.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?

2. What value differences do I see between a person who is an evolved animal, and a person who is created by God?

... more ...

3. What do the above Bible verses say about the bad and good things God sees in human beings?

4. What questions would I ask a friend who thinks they are basically good and God should recognize their good deeds and reward them accordingly?

5. What would I say to a friend who thinks that God couldn't love them because of all the bad things they have done?

6. Reading what God has done for people, for me, how does it make me want to respond?



## 8. What Are My Gods?

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*"Where are your gods
that you made for yourself?
Let them arise, if they can save you,
in your time of trouble;
for as many as your cities
are your gods, O Judah."
Jeremiah 2:28,29*

Even though most people do not call them "Gods," we all choose the things, or beings, we idolize, esteem and sacrificially serve every day. The things we elevate to such heights have a much greater influence on the character and quality of our lives than we tend to realize. Do I have the right supreme things in my life?

Who or what am I choosing to most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve each moment? Some people may say they do not believe in God. But everyone treats someone or something (often it is ourselves) like a God. The real question is not whether I believe in a God, but, what is the being or the object I treat as a God, really like? Is the God I believe in a genuine God or something much less? There are many things people treat as God which fall far short of really being God. My daily behaviors reveal a lot about what I believe God is like.

I assume that people who consider themselves not religious would reject the idea that they daily answer questions about their God. I understand their objection if by “God” they mean a specific deity of the Bible, the Koran or other common religions. But I am suggesting a general definition of a God rather than the identification of the deity of some specific religious group. You can see what I mean if I define “God” as “who or what I choose to most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve with my time and resources.” Simply because a person may reject the God of the Bible does not mean that they have nothing or no one they treat like a god.

If we turn on a television any weekend we can see fans truly idolizing specific sports, teams, and individual athletes. The NFL advertises with the slogan “We Live for This.” I read an article recently that says: “The NFL split a massive \$7.24 billion in revenue with all 32 teams in a recent season. Each team received \$226.4 million as part of the split, most of which comes from various television deals. That amount does not include the money spent by fans on food, drink and travel. The Golden State Warriors last year paid player salaries of \$148,181,760. This money was generated by tickets, TV and team merchandise; all from the pockets of devoted fans. Sports at every level display fan frenzy that cannot be described with anything less than religious devotion.

As best I can discern Hollywood studios took in more than \$6,000,000,000 last year. The whole business of music entertainment is colossal. The media that feeds the latest news about all these celebrities to adoring fans absolutely surrounds us. It is not just the fans that “most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve” these things. On the occasion of getting his star on the Hollywood walk of fame one famous man said: “Fame is the best thing in the world.” We have celebrities as our Gods, and our celebrities have our praise as their God.

Representing many who worship science, the late Carl Sagan made a video about his rejection of religion in favor of science as the source of meaning and purpose in human life. In the video Sagan said: “But knowledge is preferable to ignorance. Better by far to embrace the hard truth than a reassuring fable. If we crave some cosmic purpose, then let us find ‘ourselves’ a worthy goal.” In response someone commented: “Those words are far greater than anything written in the Bible, Quran, or any other religious book. Sagan > God.” (Sagan is greater than God) Thus Carl Sagan’s God is science and Carl Sagan becomes the God of his followers.

Like Mars hill of the ancient Greeks, our Gods surround us. Money, power, pleasure, fame, leisure, beauty, possessions, associations, are all things we “most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve

with our time and resources.” Most people would not classify these things as Gods, yet simply because we do not label them as Gods does mean we do not treat them as such. They motivate, empower, focus, and dominate the moments of our days.

I must admit, not just to be transparent with others, but most of all to be honest with myself that while I claim to worship the God of the Bible, I join with all mankind in the exaltation of so many other things to the status of a God in my life. This exaltation of someone or something seems a natural part of our lives. We constantly consider things most important, most influential and proceed to actively pursue them. It is easily argued that we readily submit our time, our resources, our very selves in allegiance to these Gods.

I believe the main reason we would deny calling these things our Gods is because we are so accustomed to considering Gods as specific deities rather than “someone or something we most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve with our time and resources.” It is true that when we begin to consider the nature, character and value of God there is a significant difference between football, money, pleasure and The God of all. My point here is simply that human beings seem to naturally exalt things and treat them as supremely important. People who claim to be non-religious can certainly

argue with how others define and describe “God,” but they cannot reasonably deny that we all elevate things to supreme levels in our lives. Unless we restrict the word “worship” to deities, Carl Sagan certainly worshipped science and the cosmos; millions certainly worship the Super Bowl; and the list of things we worship goes on and on.

As surely as people treat many things as Gods there is one thing that is not a deity that is more “highly honored, idolized, esteemed, valued and served with our time and resources” than anything else. We all worship ourselves more than anything else. Most people don’t think of themselves as a deity but most of us, without even thinking, treat ourselves as “Number One.”

I don’t think it can be reasonably argued that as human beings we don’t all have a God or Gods to which we daily give our devout attention and resources.

The real question that divides us is not whether or not we all have a God, but what is the true nature and character of the Gods we each serve. Thus, one of the key questions we all answer every day is not “do I have a God?” but, “what is my God like?”

If my God is whatever I “most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve with my time and resources,” I answer with my behaviors over and

over every day. Why do I dress the way I do? Why do I go to work; what do I watch on TV and the internet? How do I spend my money? All these things demonstrate the things I “most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve with my time and resources.”

What are our Gods like? Are these things we elevate truly God-like, or are they simply things?

- How powerful are they?
- How wise are they?
- How caring are they?
- How consistent are they?
- How personable are they?
- How fulfilling are they?
- How reliable are they?
- How forgiving are they?
- How generous are they?
- How other than us are they?
- How perfect are they?
- Are they the kind of Gods we really want and need?

Even as I stop writing and you stop reading, we will all very soon return to serving the gods of our daily

routines. It really is worth seriously thinking about what my gods are truly like and whether or not they are the ones (or the ONE) I really want and need.

- Who or what am I choosing to most highly honor, idolize, esteem, value and serve each moment?

- What are the first things I think about when I get up in the morning?

- What are the last things I think about when I go to bed in the evening?

- What do I find myself daydreaming about during the day?

- What are the things that make me pause and say a silent "WOW?"

- What are the things to which I say or even shout "AWESOME?"

- What are the things that prompt me to bow or kneel in deep respect?

- What do I find myself willing to work for long and hard?

- What is it that I talk most about with my friends?

- What is it that I wonder what other people are thinking about?

- What is it that I think other people are missing in life?

- What is it that I wish other people wanted and enjoyed more of?
- What is it that I find myself being most thankful for?
- On what do I really enjoy spending my money?
- On what do I spend my extra money?
- If I had a million dollars, how would I spend it?
- What would other people say I am best known for?
- What do I talk about with the most enthusiasm?
- What do others talk about that disappoints me the most?
- What are the bumper stickers I have on my car?
- What topics do I talk about most on social media?
- What makes me cry tears of joy?
- What do I jump up and down and shout about with good excitement?
- What or who do I gladly serve without pay?
- What does my calendar say is my most important non-employment activity?

Here are some important questions worth answering:

For people who claim to be a Christian:

- If I claim to be a follower of Jesus and believe in the GOD of the Bible, does my daily behavior suggest that I may actually have other gods in my life?
- What are the other gods I serve? What are they really like?
- What do I need to do to narrow the gap between the God I say I love and serve and the gods my behaviors reveal I serve?
- Do I tend to think God should conform to my beliefs, or should my beliefs conform to what God reveals about Himself?

For people who claim to be non-religious:

- Of what real significance or benefit to me are the things or ideas I treat like gods? To what degree do these things satisfy my deep longings for meaning and purpose?
- What are some reasons I reject a supernatural deity while at the same time elevating other things to the place of gods in my life?
- What are some possible reasons that humans seem to have gods and other living things do not? (dogs do not seem awestruck by beautiful sunsets)
- Think about it:

Was the house you live in designed and made by someone very intelligent and creative? What would it

take for all the parts to randomly gather and assemble themselves?

Think about anything in nature, like a maple tree or a bumblebee. How much more complex are they than the houses we live in? How could we think our house required an intelligent and creative builder but all of nature did not?

Have you seriously read and thought about what the Bible says about God? How long since you opened a Bible and read about what God declares and demonstrates Himself to be? Here are some verses to get you started. Take the time to read the context surrounding the verses.

Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses

Numbers 23:19

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it?

Deuteronomy 6:4,5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. :5
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

1 Kings 8:27

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold,

heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you;
how much less this house that I have built!

2 Chronicles 19:7

Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality or taking bribes.

Psalms 86:5

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

Psalms 103:19

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.

Psalms 139:7-12

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
:8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
:9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
:10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
:11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
:12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

Psalm 145:3

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:25

To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

Isaiah 40:28

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

Isaiah 44:6-8

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:

“I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.”

:7 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and set it before me,
since I appointed an ancient people.

Let them declare what is to come,
and what will happen.

:8 Fear not, nor be afraid;

have I not told you from of old and declared it?

And you are my witnesses!

Is there a God besides me?

There is no Rock; I know not any.”

Jeremiah 2:28

But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.

Habakuk 2:18

What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!

Malachi 3:6

For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 4:24

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 5:26

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Acts 17:31

Mankind will say, “Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.”

Romans 1:19,20

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. :20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Romans 3:3,4

What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? :4 By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written ...

Romans 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! :34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? :35 Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? :36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 8:5,6

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven

or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— :6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Ephesians 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

Colossians 1:15-17

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. :16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. :17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

1 Timothy 1:17

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 4:13

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,

coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

1 John 3:20

for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

1 John 5:20, 21

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. :21
Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>

In a discussion about God, it is GREAT to have the real One present in the room with us.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. How do I see some of the previous Bible verses describing GOD as different from man.
3. How do I describe the difference between a god and GOD?
4. What do I think are some of the reasons people prefer gods rather than GOD?
5. What consequences do I see for a person having the wrong God?

... more ...

6. What are some of the gods my behaviors reveal that I tend to serve?
7. What will it take to put and keep GOD in His rightful place in my life?

9. Who Are My Saviors?

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*"Peace I leave with you;  
my peace I give to you."*

*"Not as the world gives do I give to you.*

*Let not your hearts be troubled,  
neither let them be afraid."*

*Jesus in John 14:27*

In the process of going through our day, making so many truly important decisions about the kind of life we want, we all make many choices that don't turn out as we hoped. In fact, most of us tend to wish someone wiser and more influential than ourselves could help us make better choices in all of these intersections of life. The reality is that we do rely on others more often than we realize. The more a particular situation seems like a "predicament," (and that happens more often than we like to admit) the more we look for a savior to guide and get us out of the jams, guilts, failures and other life challenges in which we frequently find ourselves. Am I choosing the right helpers and rescuers for my life?

Perhaps you have heard the phrase: "No man is an island." Even the television show titled "The Last Man On Earth" had to find other survivors to make it interesting and remind us that we all really do need others to live. Actually it is more than simply needing someone to build our cars, run our businesses,

manage our cities and all the other daily things that get done all around us. In this process of living we all have crisis of various kinds. We are all familiar with troubles both small and large. We experience varying degrees of physical illness, financial challenges, relational issues. We are hurt by others, and we have injured others. What about the private, inward experiences of disappointment, discouragement, failure and guilt that we all experience and are so reluctant to talk about? When those times come we turn to special people to help us get through. We usually turn to specialists like doctors, bankers, insurance agents, policemen, coaches, mechanics, judges, therapists, and most often family and friends.

The point is that we all have certain people we call on in times of trouble. We look for them to come in and “save the day,” to “rescue” us. I used to have a life insurance policy with the slogan “Life Insurance Guarantees The Future.” It was a misleading slogan at best. As a volunteer I drove an ambulance in small towns for thirty years. We were able to help many people, but only for a few moments of their life. Most of those people were very thankful that qualified people came to their rescue in their time of need. There were times when help arrived too late. There were times when the helpers were unable to truly help. It is indeed sad when people in crisis don’t get the help they need. Some people may claim to be non-religious and don’t believe they need a “Savior,”

and thus say they do not have one. But, for the life needs they do recognize, they have special helpers, specialists, experts they call on to save them. This is what we do as human beings. As children we cried out to Mom and Dad for help. As we grow older we become more and more independent, but we never outgrow need for personal saviors.

In the daily processes of living we all reveal who and what our Saviors are. Other people can see and hear the saviors we call on as we move through our day. It can begin with the very simple “where’s my other sock?” Often it is a regular part of our day, as in looking at a map on a cell phone. Perhaps it is a small emergency like forgetting a wallet and needing to borrow lunch money. Maybe it is a bigger emergency like cutting your hand and needing stitches by a doctor. Eventually we have a real crisis and need an attorney, a surgeon, or a grief counselor. Life is full of times we need someone to help us.

What about the things in life that are more internal, more personal? We can’t go through life without being offended. Sometimes we are deeply hurt by others, even by people we love and we thought loved us. What or who do we turn to for comfort, encouragement and direction? We turn to someone even if it is ourselves. It is the way human beings respond.

Our need for help extends in other directions as well. Not only are we offended by others and need help dealing with the results of their offense; but we offend others and need help doing the things necessary to make amends for the hurts we have caused. These things do not come naturally to us and usually require some sort of mediator to help us see things from a perspective other than our own. If we are serious about healing hurting or broken relationships we seek help from others who can see things better than we see them and can help us with our efforts at reconciliation. Perhaps from sometime in your past, you remember a rift between you and a close friend. The relationship festered as each of you talked to others about the hurt you felt. After a time a third party was involved to get the two of you back together again. The deeper the offense gets the better our helpers need to be. It needs to be someone who knows and understands both of us. Until we find that special person to help us salvage, repair, rescue and save our relationship the hurt remains and deepens. Sadly, sometimes we never find or even look for that helper, that savior.

There is another area in which we need a helper. And this area is probably even deeper and needs a helper with even greater insight and skill. As painful as it is to be hurt by someone, the pain of guilt we experience when we deeply hurt someone else is often even worse. Most of us have thought and even

voiced the words: “how can they forgive me for what I’ve done.” The more important the person we have offended the greater our guilt. We look for some way, for someone to help us get rid of the guilt.

They say that a person who has three or four really close friends is very fortunate. But I suspect that all of us know the feeling of being in the midst of some bad experience and wishing we had someone who could really help us, someone we could depend on to not only understand but to know exactly how to help us. In answer to the question “who do I really depend on?” most of us probably answer “myself.” Some people are fortunate to have a spouse or a family member or good friend who can help them. But, all of them will fail us sometime. Who do I really depend on? Is there anyone who is really worthy of my dependence?

All of us experience things in life that seem very difficult, if not impossible, to solve on our own. In my life I have found that even more than help with things outside myself, I need help with my own attitudes and behaviors. I am often my own worst enemy and need someone to help me make the necessary changes in myself to become the person I need and want to be. To live like I don’t need help with life is both blind and foolish. On a daily basis I need help dealing with my attitudes, thoughts and feelings. I need help with the guilt I have concerning my

failures. The question is not “do I need help?” but, “from whom am I seeking help?” We tend to look for life-help from people more qualified than ourselves. We need someone extremely knowledgeable, wise, understanding, powerful, honest, patient and truly loving. There are some people who claim to be like this but soon are revealed to care more for themselves than about others. What I want is someone I can depend on not just for advice or a good example, but someone who will give themselves to me and be with me in all the times of my life. I am thankful for my wife and many friends, but none of them can really save me.

It is indeed sad when people in crisis don't get the help they need, or rely only on themselves. Who we call on, wait for, depend on in our times of need reveals who we believe to be our Savior. We all have one or more. We should not only identify what saviors we turn to every day. It is even more important to think seriously about how capable and effective they really are. Do my saviors really rescue me from my life pains and guilt?

Have you seriously read and thought about what the Bible says about Jesus Christ? How long since you opened a Bible and read what it declares and demonstrates Jesus to be and what He has done and offers to do for you? Everyone has a savior, who is mine? And can my savior really rescue me from

the real crisis of my present and eternal life? The Church has a message, the Bible describes it as the “the gospel” or the “good news”. The good news describes God’s response to our sin. There is something in each of us that requires us to need a savior. No person in human history is more loved, more hated, more misunderstood, more maligned, yet more influential and capable than Jesus Christ. Our human nature requires a certain kind of Savior, and only Jesus meets the criteria.

## **Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses**

### **Exodus 20:1–3**

And God spoke all these words, saying, :2 “I Am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. :3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

### **Isaiah 53:5**

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

### **Mark 16:6**

And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.

### **John 1:1**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

### **John 1:14**

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

### **John 8:58**

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

**John 14:2–3**

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? :3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

**John 14:6,7**

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

**Philippians 2:6–8**

... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, :7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. :8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

**Titus 2:13**

... waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ ...

**Hebrews 1:3**

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for

sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

### **Hebrews 4:15**

For we do not have a high priest (Jesus) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

### **1 John 1:1–3**

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— :2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— :3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

### **1 John 3:5**

You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

## **<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>**

Let's imagine that Jesus Christ is seated next to us as we discuss our saviors.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. Thinking of some recent troubles in my life, who or what have I turned to for rescue?
3. What makes me prone to turn to others, most often myself, when I face challenges in life?
4. What are some of the short term and long term differences between different kinds of saviors?
5. How do some of the above Bible verses describe Jesus Christ as a man like no other?
6. How is Jesus Christ uniquely qualified to be my Savior; to give me LIFE?
7. What do the people around me think I believe about Jesus Christ?



# We Can Have LIFE Today!

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*"I came that they may have life
and have it abundantly."*

Jesus Christ in John 10:10

Mankind has always been curious about the beginning of things. I just read a news article about the discovery of a 500,000,000 year old fossil of a worm that "could be the ancestor of all life on earth." The Bible has been around longer than any modern theories about the beginning of life or the beginning of the universe. It is safe to say that many people have preferred man's word to God's word on the subject. While believers in the validity of our ancient "could be" ancestor, the fossil worm, appeal to "scientific facts," the real disagreement is more fundamental. The reason most people reject God's Story is because they prefer a man-centered story to the God-centered one.

With your naked eye, look all around you. Depending on where you live, you see a combination of nature-made and man-made things. There is no doubt that man makes many wonderful things. The accomplishments of mankind are astonishing. But what man can take credit for the majesty of snow-capped mountains, the beauty of a meadow stream, the stunning colors of an evening sunset, the vastness of the ocean, or the wind carried seeds of a

dandelion? Then turn a telescope to the heavens and see as many stars as the sand on the seashore; learn of their gravitational dances. Lean over a microscope and see an intricate world of complex order, interdependent diversity, and wondrous creativity. Then close your eyes and think of your own body. What mindless chance could design your eye, the senses of your smell and touch, the way your body repairs itself or the unmatched computer that is your brain? Where did your sense of self come from? What arranges your appreciation of music, or the warmth of being loved? The real evidence of something, Someone infinitely more than man is everywhere for any willing eye to see and heart to sense.

We have been made well aware of man's theories of beginnings, means and ways. We are surrounded by appeals to eons of time plus chance for explanations of our world. These appeals include assumptions that see God's story (the Bible) as foolish at best. Well, if you haven't read it yourself, or have neglected it, come with me for a few moments and reconsider God's story of the beginnings of LIFE.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) The context clearly shows that this is talking about the man Jesus Christ. He was God in the beginning. What beginning? "In the beginning when God

created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) Before any heavens, before any earth, before anything else, there was God. In some sort of plurality, God, refers to Himself as “Spirit” in Genesis 1:2 and as “us” in Genesis 1:26. Then, looking over the formless dark earth, God “spoke.” “Words” came from Him that in their mere utterance, all that is, other than God Himself, came forth. Day after day, God spoke into existence light, sky, seas and vegetation covered continents, the sun, moon and stars, then sea creatures. On the sixth day came all the land creatures, and then man and woman, the crown of His creation. After each day God pronounced his creation “good.”

Of course it is an amazing story. The world is amazing, man is amazing. It took an amazing God to create us and the wonderfully complex world we live in. Have you ever read the story for yourself? Have you ever investigated the perspective of the many scientists who believe the story accurately represents the world we see all around us? Have you ever really thought about the fact that if there is a God like the Bible describes, of course He could create the world with His powerful creative words? Is this any less believable than the assumption that nothing, just happened to become something, that became everything?

Everything God did was “good.” His good plan used rules grounded in truth. He worked in the fellowship of His Divinity. He exercised His Sovereignty as God and planned for the full care of His people.

The Bible does not tell us when God created angels, but it was sometime before the Devil tempted Adam and Eve to disobey God. The Devil had been an angel, but at some point he “worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” Saying “to me be glory forever,” He loved himself more than God and aspired to become like God in order to receive the worship God received. In doing so he, like all of us, did what he thought was best; he hoped he would accomplish his dream of being a God; he followed his own rules, made up his own truth, gathered his associates around himself, idolized himself and set out to lead his followers. The Devil was the first to call Good, Evil, and Evil, Good.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed God’s Good Life, believed it would last forever, lived by God’s rules and God’s truth, enjoyed each other and the Presence of God. Then one day they met the Devil, the Serpent, by the prohibited tree. That day was the the beginning of the broken relationship between God and men; the beginning of evil in men.

And on that same day God promised that He Himself would bring the Messiah/Savior to give LIFE to the now spiritually dead world.

It is reasonable to ask why God would allow evil to exist in His creation. The Bible does not specifically answer that question, but it is obvious that there are wonderful things about God that could not have been displayed or known without the presence of evil, sin and guilt. No one would know God's grace, mercy, patience. We would not experience His ability to defeat any foe. All God's positive attributes would be half-seen apart from their demonstration in the midst of opposition, despair, and enemy challenge. The matchless, magnificent character of God unfolds daily before the eyes, mind and heart of all who are willing to see.

After Adam and Eve believed the Devil rather than God, they began immediately to seek to hide their guilt. Their children, our forbearers, sought all sorts of remedies. They looked, even as we look today, for the LIFE they sensed was missing. Somehow they knew that something was wrong, something was missing and sought to fill the voids, hide the imperfections, or pay for the obvious guilt that plagued them. In response, God repeatedly brought instructions, rules for things they should do or should not do in order to live better lives. It seems that most people took the rules as ways to earn their way into favor with God. But if there was ever anything that could earn God's favor it was simply believing what He said. In the Garden of Eden God never said it was obedience that earned His blessing. It was in

fact unbelief that led to their disobedience and fall from favor. It was the disobedience of unbelief that left a legacy of death, both physical and spiritual, to all of planet earth.

In the fallen world, God looked for us to believe Him, for He knew LIFE would follow. But in the fallen world our belief was changed. Now men believed lies, false hopes, false gods, and looked to save themselves by keeping rules and ceremonies they thought would appease the God or gods from whom they sought relief. For centuries, even millennia, people followed rules, offered sacrifices, performed ordinances, over and over again because the gnawing guilt of failure brought them back in religious repetition seeking lasting peace with God. Their fallen hearts told them that God required penitent work to earn back His favor. But it never worked. From the beginning, God required something different.

Then arrived the apex of earthly time. As promised to Adam and Eve, and over and over down through time, the Solution to our death arrived. As promised, but so misunderstood, Jesus Christ came as the Messiah to save the world. They (and we) could have easily understood a human, warrior-King Messiah. In fact, they expected a Man among men, to lead, conquer and restore the Glory of their days of old. But Jesus turned all their expectations upside down. Jesus did not come as a man to become a God, but

as GOD to become a man. He came as a suffering servant, not a fierce warrior. All He asked was that they believe Him, but they would not. Their unbelief was not for lack of evidence of His Devine claims and demonstrations. Their unbelief (and ours) was because their hearts still wanted their way, their truth, their life, rather than God's Way, God's Truth, God's LIFE. The LAMB pictured in all the ancient sacrifices for their sin, was not brought by men, but willingly came to offer HIMSELF as the LAMB of GOD that takes away the sin of the world. As promised, GOD Himself paid for our sin.

Though many still try, no amount of effort on our part can earn or pay for what our GOD and SAVIOR Jesus Christ has done for us. The penalty of our unbelief and disobedience was, and is, present and eternal death. Knowing we could not pay, God paid the price for us, and all He requires is what He required in the beginning ... believe HIM. There were many demonstrations that Jesus could be believed. But the Cap Stone, the Final Proof was, His Resurrection. Jesus had told them He would rise again, defeating death. It was the promise He gave to Adam and Eve when He said HE would crush the head of the father of lies and death, the enemy of GOD and men, the Devil.

Every word Jesus Christ uttered was extraordinary. After all, He is THE WORD. But one thing He said

stands out. In John 10:10, contrasting Himself to the Devil, Jesus said: "I came that they may have LIFE and have it abundantly." Do you think Jesus would offer us something He didn't have Himself? "No"! Neither do I. In fact, I believe that Jesus Christ lived the most abundant LIFE ever lived. That claim may seem ludicrous to those who simply see the opponents, the ridicule and suffering He daily endured. Obviously Jesus' life was not what most of us would call abundant. He had no home, no bank account, no vacations, none of the things we tend to seek. But the one thing Jesus had, the one thing He cherished about His LIFE, was that He spent every moment of every day in perfect fellowship and harmony with God the Father and God The Spirit. That is what not only empowered His day, but prompted His Love for those who hated Him. This fellowship gave Jesus Joy in the midst of sorrow, Peace in the presence of turmoil, Patience around busyness, Kindness to disrespect, Goodness to meanness, Faithfulness in temptation, Gentleness with the weak, Self-Control in conflict, and a million other blessings we only dimly know.

It is not just "Life" Jesus offers us, it is "HIS LIFE," actually it is "HIMSELF" He came to GIVE us. He doesn't ask us to pay for it, or to earn it. He has already paid for the gift Himself! If we attempt to work for it, or earn it, the grace is no longer GRACE but a wage, and an unbelieving slap in the face to the

GOD Who Has from eternity past planned to GIVE, to all who believe, more than we could ever ask or think, and certainly not deserve.

So, what began with our Amazing Creation, with our rescue by Amazing Grace, is now Amazing LIFE. The part of the story we experience on earth is really so very brief. For most people it is no more than seventy or eighty years. In this short lifetime, we all deserve only death for our sin. But in Jesus, God has pardoned our sin and broken the power of sin over our lives. This is just the beginning to the very best part. Passing from death to LIFE, God will remove us from the presence of sin. Believers longingly await, the SON-Lit endless days of LIFE in the presence of the ONE of Whom it is said:

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”
(Romans 11:33-36)

What an unspeakable tragedy for those who listen to the lying enemy of God, and believe that life is found in singing “to me be glory forever.”

Jesus said, and proved, that He came to give us LIFE. He didn't offer it for sale or as a wage; He bought and paid for it Himself. What are you choosing to believe? To wait to choose is a choice and it may be your last.

Quiz shows on TV often call for the contestants "final answer." The consequences can be anywhere from bragging rights to a million dollars. But in life, our "final answer" is much more serious. We all answer life's questions over and over every day. What if your answers today were your "final answers"? Are you willing to face eternity with the answers you give today? Someday you will.

God says to us:

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Do you Have LIFE?

You can Have LIFE! Today and forever.

Do not focus on the words I have written. They are merely meant to point us to the WORD and WORDS that really matter. Get your Bible and read the WORDS there.

*"Simon Peter answered him,
'Lord, to whom shall we go?"*

You have the words of eternal LIFE”

John 6:68

Please Read and Ponder The Following Bible Verses

Genesis 3:9

But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

Joshua 1:8, 9

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. :9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Psalms 1

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; :2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. :3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. :4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives

away. :5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; :6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Isaiah 53:2-12

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. :3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. :4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. :5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. :6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. :7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. :8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? :9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his

death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. :10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. :11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. :12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

John 1:11,12

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. :12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

John 3:3

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:15-18

... that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. :16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not

perish but have eternal life. :17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. :18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 6:28,29

Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” :29 Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

John 10:7-11

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. :8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. :9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. :10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. :11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:27-30

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. :28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. :29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them

out of the Father's hand. :30 I and the Father are one."

John 12:46

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John 20:30

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; :31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Romans 1:18-25

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. :19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. :20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. :21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in

their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. :22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, :23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. :24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, :25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Romans 3:10-12

... as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; :11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. :12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Romans 3:23

... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...

Romans 5:8-10

... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. :9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. :10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Romans 7:24,25

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? :25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Romans 8:1-4

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. :2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. :3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, :4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 10:9

... because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-10

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every

spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, :4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love :5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, :6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. :7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, :8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight :9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ :10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 2:4

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, :5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, :9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. :10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, :5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, :6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, :7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, :4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, :5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 John 1:5-2:1

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. :6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. :7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. :8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. :9 If we confess

our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. :10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

Revelation 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 21:1-7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. :2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. :3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. :4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." :5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." :6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha

and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. :7 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

1John 5:4,5

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. :5 Who is it that overcomes (conquers) the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

<<< Talk It Over With Friends >>>

As we sit here together, we have the Designer and Giver of LIFE with us now. There is no greater privilege.

1. Can I pick two of the verses that are especially encouraging to me?
2. What do I understand Jesus to mean when He said He came to give me “LIFE”?
3. Take turns describing the Bible’s story of the relationship between God and ourselves in three minutes or less. Please try it. Don’t let the speaker know the time, and don’t stop them at three minutes.
4. Describe the BLESSED LIFE I have, and the ways I would like to have it “more abundantly.”
5. Pray together. Praise God, Ask God, Thank God. Be together often to challenge and encourage each other.

Epilogue

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In the labyrinth of our lives, it does not work to simply “want” a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Neither is it effective to just work harder in these areas. And, it doesn’t work to just answer these questions, for people give all sorts of different answers and have all sorts of different results.

Neither is the answer found in reading any of the many books about finding life, including this one. The answer is found in listening to the One Who knows, perfectly, the maze that is our life. The answer is in following His guidance through the maze because *“His Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* (Psalm 119:105) And He is the One Who in every twist and turn of life promises *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5)

God alone knows the best life for each of us. He alone offers solid and eternal hopes and dreams. God’s rules are the only ones that lead to LIFE. God is the only one who really knows and shares the Truth. God is the only one who truly knows, has conquered and cured evil. Only God knows each of us with perfect accuracy. Only God is GOD. Jesus Christ is the one who accurately, fully and effectively reveals God to us and who amazingly says: *“I Am the*

*Way, The Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)*

There is a cute story about a little boy in Sunday School who was asked by the teacher: “What is grey and furry and has a big bushy tail?” The little boy paused, while realizing that he was in church, then answered: “It sounds like a squirrel, but it must be Jesus.” The little boy was wrong in his assumption. But change the question and the story turns out differently. Teacher: “What is a blessed and abundant life?” Little Boy: “It sounds like nice cars, a big house, lots of money, and a long healthy life; but it must be Jesus.” He understood how the world sees life, and his answer was correct. Many answers are alluring and may seem right, but the only real answer to LIFE is “Jesus.”

One final note is important. It is very easy for us to try to “go it alone” on our search for life. But God, knowing the consequences of our proud independence, designed His Church to be a fellowship of believers who help and encourage each other as they move through the maze of life together. He said: *“let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”*

(Hebrews 10:24,25)

We need each other as we seek to answer accurately the questions we all face every day. Find a local church where the people are following Jesus, through His Word, and get involved. Help each other accurately answer the fundamental questions we all face every day. Talk about His Abundant LIFE with friends.



# Explanation of The Cover Picture

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I have a good friend who owns land in the Owyhee mountains of southwest Idaho. Another friend and I were exploring it one day and came across this old cabin. Only these two sides of the cabin remain. The cabin sits by a cool spring on a mountain hillside. There are several aspen trees around the old cabin. The trees are covered with carved initials and numbers. Thousands of prospectors have explored the area in the last one and one-half centuries. The cabin and the carvings remind me of the hopes and dreams, both realized and dashed, we all have during our lives. In various ways we all leave our mark on the world around us. I won't be remembered for long. But I hope that in some small way I contribute to others learning and remembering the GOD Who is our only Real Hope for now and eternity.