

The background of the entire image is a photograph of a beach. In the upper portion, gentle waves with white foam are washing onto the shore. The sand is a warm, golden-brown color. Several footprints are visible in the sand, leading from the water towards the bottom of the frame. The overall lighting is soft and warm, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

JESUS IS YOUR LORD Now What?

*Your First 10 Steps
to a Fruitful Christian Life*

INSPIRATION
MINISTRIES

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Published by
INSPIRATION MINISTRIES
PO Box 7750
Charlotte, NC 28241

inspiration.org

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Your Most Important Decision Ever

Congratulations on making the most important decision a person can ever make – a decision to make Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior!

Every decision you make carries consequences, whether for your good or your harm. But your decision to follow Jesus is more important than any other, because the consequences are *eternal*.

Yes, God will change your life in the here and now, but He's also preparing a place for you to live with Him for all eternity. Before Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, He promised His disciples:

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I

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go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also (John 14:2-3).

Jesus also said the key ingredient in receiving eternal life is to have a personal relationship with Him and your Heavenly Father:

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

Day by day, God wants you to grow in this relationship (1 Peter 2:2). This happens primarily as you spend time praying, studying the Bible, worshiping, and having fellowship with other believers.

Amazing Benefits

Accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior is not just about going to Heaven when you die. As you grow in your relationship with your Heavenly Father, you can expect all sorts of changes in your life. Your health. Your financial outlook. Your peace of mind. Your relationships. Your victory over sin and Satan.

And every other area of your life will be affected as well!

Because of Jesus' death on the cross on your behalf, you now have an opportunity for a Great Exchange:

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You can trade your sins for His righteousness
(2 Corinthians 5:21).

You can trade your sickness for His health
(1 Peter 2:24).

You can trade your poverty for His wealth
(2 Corinthians 8:9).

You can trade your weakness for His strength
(Joel 3:10).

You can trade your sadness for His joy
(Isaiah 61:3).

You can trade your weariness for His rest
(Matthew 11:28-30).

At the cross of Jesus, He took upon Himself all of your sins, fears, diseases, and liabilities. In exchange, He gave you a whole new life. In Him you're a "*new creation*," and that means "*old things have passed away...ALL things have become new*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Instead of having to rely upon your own human strength and ingenuity, you're empowered by the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11).

Regardless of how nurturing or dysfunctional your previous family situation may have been, you're now an adopted part of the family of God (Romans 8:14-17, Ephesians 2:19, John 1:12). Welcome!

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Laying the Right Foundation

Whenever the Gospel was preached in the New Testament, people were first called to “repent,” which means to change their mind and turn from living life on their own terms (Matthew 4:17, Acts 2:38).

Jesus also made it clear that anyone following Him would have to die to themselves and their old life: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me”* (Luke 9:23).

This is what it means to truly have Jesus as your Lord. You are giving Him permission to sit on the throne of your life and give you direction. In addition to the necessity of a relationship with Him, it’s also vitally important to *submit your life* to Him. That’s why Jesus asked this important question for anyone claiming to follow Him:

Why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

So, right from the beginning, it’s crucial to settle this once and for all: Is Jesus truly the Lord of your life? Are you willing to commit yourself to following His will, no matter how hard it may be at times?

Once you establish the lordship of Jesus as the foundation of your life, you will be ready to take the next steps toward experiencing a vibrant and fulfilling Christian life.

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Prayer:

Jesus, thank You for dying for me and rising from the dead so I can have eternal life. I want You to be the Lord over every part of my life. I commit myself to doing everything I can to grow in my relationship with You. I desire to follow Your will, no matter what the cost may be. In Your name. Amen.

Going Public with Your Decision

As a new follower of Jesus, you have an exciting opportunity to let others know about your faith. People will notice the changes in your life, and you will have a chance to share with them the difference Christ has made (1 Peter 3:15).

In addition to believing in the Gospel in your heart, it's important to testify with your mouth and declare that Jesus is now your Lord and Savior. The apostle Paul writes:

*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. For with the **heart** one believes and is justified, and with the **mouth** one confesses and is saved (Romans 10:9-10 ESV).*

In addition to opportunities to personally share with

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your friends and relatives that you've decided to follow Christ, the Bible prescribes water baptism as an important first step in publicly declaring your new relationship with Him. During water baptism, you are testifying that Jesus Christ is now your Savior and Lord, and it also provides a beautiful picture of the new life you've been given in Him. Romans 6:4 says:

We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Take a moment right now to thank God for giving you a new beginning...a fresh start...a whole new life. Praise Him that the old things have passed away, and new things have come, as the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

As an example for us, even Jesus declared His total allegiance to God by submitting to water baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. In response to John's anxiety over baptizing the Son of God, Jesus said His baptism was being done to "*fulfill all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15).

Then shortly before ascending into Heaven, Jesus told His disciples (in Matthew 28:19-20) that they should go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them to do. Baptism was given as one of the initial steps in a person's obedience as a Christ-follower.

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However, be clear on this: No one is saved just because they decide to get baptized. The Bible says we are saved through God's grace, on the basis of faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5). Grace is God's unmerited favor, freely given to people who don't deserve it.

Baptism is simply an *outward* expression of our inward experience of receiving God's grace and forgiveness through faith in what Jesus did on the cross to pay for our sins. When you're baptized with water, you're declaring to all those around you that you've been spiritually reborn and are a new person. As you go under the water, it's as though you are laying down your old life, burying the person you used to be. Then you rise up, washed and cleansed, resurrected to a new life.

Do you see what a great picture this is? Through the power of the Gospel, you can be set free from your sins, bad habits, and addictions. When your old life is buried, you can say goodbye to feelings of guilt and shame, depression or loneliness.

The act of water baptism is a symbol of your repentant heart, the fact that you're turning from sin and Satan to begin a new lifelong journey as a follower of Christ.

No Turning Back

Perhaps you've heard the old Christian song that says:

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I have decided to follow Jesus.

I have decided to follow Jesus.

I have decided to follow Jesus.

No turning back, no turning back.

Other verses say, “The cross before me, the world behind me” and “Though none go with me, still I will follow.” And each time, the refrain is “No turning back, no turning back.”

This song reflects the sobering words of Jesus, “*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62). You see, following Jesus isn’t for the faint of heart. It’s a lifelong commitment!

Water baptism depicts that kind of solemn, yet joyous, commitment. You are dead to your own life, never to return again. Instead of vacillating, second-guessing yourself, or looking back, now’s the time to set your heart to follow the words of Hebrews 12:1-2:

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

Get ready for a great adventure!

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Prayer:

Lord, thank You that my old life is dead and buried. I'm grateful that You've raised me to a new life of knowing and serving You. Give me boldness to tell others about Your work on the cross and also how You've impacted my life. In Your name. Amen.

Empowered by God's Spirit

Often when people were baptized in water in New Testament times, they were also empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We see this in Acts 2:38, after the apostle Peter has been preaching to a large crowd on the Day of Pentecost. Many people were moved by his words, and they asked how they should respond. Peter replied, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38).

Notice that these new converts weren't just going through some kind of empty religious ceremony when they were baptized in water. They were being empowered by the Holy Spirit so they could experience lives of purpose and impact as followers of Christ.

Jesus had already promised that His followers would

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receive “power from on high” through the Spirit (Luke 24:49). Because of this supernatural power, they could be His witnesses throughout the whole world:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8 NASB).

We’re called to fulfill the Great Commission, taking the Good News of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection throughout the earth. But the power to fulfill that incredible task is supplied by the power of the Spirit.

A Supernatural Life

Do you see why this empowerment by the Holy Spirit is so crucial to your new life in Christ? It’s because the Christian life is meant to be a supernatural life. In fact, the whole Christian life can be summed up as Christ living His life through you by the power of the Spirit:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

To them God willed to make known what

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are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:16-21 NIV).

Many other Bible passages could be cited about the

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incredible power available to you as a believer because the Holy Spirit lives in you. This is not just a nice option or something only available to a few “super-Christians.” It’s a central ingredient for experiencing a joyful, impactful life as a follower of Jesus.

The Missing Ingredient

Perhaps you’ve met professing Christians who seem to have something missing. They claim to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, but where’s the joy in their life... the power...the boldness?

On several occasions, the church in the book of Acts took special action to make sure that new converts received the power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8:12, Philip preached in Samaria, and many people believed the Gospel and were baptized. This was a great start for these new believers, but something was missing:

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

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A similar situation occurred when the apostle Paul preached in Ephesus:

Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-6).

Paul's question to these believers in Ephesus could be paraphrased for YOU today: Do you have the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? If you haven't yet asked God to fill you with the power of the Spirit, don't delay!

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This is an indispensable part of your foundation as a believer.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You that You've not left me powerless, having to live the Christian life in my own strength. I ask You to fill me now to overflowing with the power of Your Holy Spirit, so I can be a witness for Jesus and live a victorious Christian life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Committed to the Basics

The story is told about Vince Lombardi, one of the greatest NFL football coaches of all time. He brought the Green Bay Packers to several championships, and his teams were always known for their careful execution of the fundamentals of the game.

Although Lombardi was coaching some of the best athletes in the world, he always took time to reinforce the importance of the fundamentals. He would begin every season by picking up a ball and saying to his players, “Gentlemen, this is a football.”

Some of the new players probably thought their coach was crazy. “What’s wrong with this guy?” they may have asked each other. “Doesn’t he realize that we already know everything there is to know about football? After all, we’ve been playing the game since we were kids!”

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But Coach Lombardi had a very important message for his team – a message we all would do well to heed. In essence, he was saying, “Men, no matter how skilled or talented you think you are, it’s time to get back to the basics. We’ll win games not by being clever or complicated, but by concentrating on the fundamentals.”

Essentials for Growth

So what are the fundamentals to your growth as a Christian? They are actually very simple, and I like to compare them to the three legs of a footstool. This three-legged stool rests upon God’s Word, prayer, and worship – essential keys to a victorious spiritual life.

Take away just one of those three legs, and you will fall over if you attempt to sit on the stool. Take away two of the legs, and the best you can hope for is to somehow balance yourself against the remaining leg so you don’t fall. And with all three legs gone, you soon will be flat on the floor, wondering what happened!

In the same way, many Christians today are missing one or more “legs” in their spiritual “footstool,” yet they wonder why they struggle to remain upright. They may even try to decorate or paint their footstool to improve its appearance, but the result will still be dismal unless all three legs are intact.

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So make sure to take time, right from the beginning, to establish God's Word, prayer, and worship as the daily foundation of your growth in the Lord. If all three of these are in proper operation in your life, you will be spiritually strong and balanced, able to deal with the fiery darts Satan throws at you in the circumstances of life. But take away even ONE of these essential spiritual "legs," and you soon will find yourself faltering.

While this three-legged stool illustration may seem simplistic to some folks, these three components are like essential ingredients in a cake. Things won't turn out well if you omit one of the ingredients!

Daily Nourishment

So let's take a closer look at each of the three legs of the stool. First of all, when I say you need God's Word in your life, I mean going deeper than just being able to quote a few Bible verses. The Word of God is your essential spiritual nourishment. Your Heavenly Father wants to strengthen you each day as you read, study, and meditate upon the Scriptures.

God's Word is compared to bread for our soul (Matthew 4:4) and as spiritual milk given for our nourishment as newborn babies in Christ (1 Peter 2:2). And the Bible is also described as "*the sword of the Spirit*," enabling us to thwart the devil's lies (Ephesians 6:17).

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In addition to developing a daily habit of studying God's Word, you also need to find a time and place every day to pray and share your needs with the Lord. We read in Philippians 4:6-7:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The more you make prayer a top priority in your life, the more you will be able to hear the Savior's voice speaking to your spiritual ears. Jesus said His relationship with us is like a shepherd with his sheep, and He wants each of us to learn to hear and obey what He's saying to us (John 10:27).

Finally, the third leg of the footstool is worship. The Bible teaches that we enter into God's presence through thanksgiving and praise (Psalm 100:4). And we see many examples of men and women of faith using worship as a powerful tool to gain spiritual victory over the enemy (2 Chronicles 20:1-30).

As you are committed to the basics and the three legs of your spiritual footstool – God's Word, prayer, and worship – you will grow stronger each day in your life of faith.

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Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You that You've laid out the pathway for a strong, vibrant Christian life. I commit myself today to spending regular time in Your Word, in prayer, and in worship. May I grow every day in my intimacy with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In Love with the Lover of Your Soul

There's a great old hymn that says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." I'm convinced this is God's objective for you today: to impact the world by being "happy in Jesus."

But it's crucial to understand that the Christian life is not meant to be lived simply by studying what Jesus did and trying to duplicate His example in your own strength. Rather than just being a script to be read and acted out, the Christian life is *Jesus living His life through you by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The Bible promises in Colossians 3:4, "*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*" Notice that Jesus doesn't just give you life, He **IS** your life! That's why the apostle Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "*It is no longer I who live, but **Christ** lives in me.*"

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Jesus is sometimes referred to as “the lover of our soul,” and He wants us to respond to that love by cultivating an intimate relationship with Him. And we’re promised in James 4:8 that He will draw near to us when we make a commitment to draw near to Him.

Pursuing Greater Intimacy

Although there’s no formula for having an intimate personal relationship with Jesus, the Bible gives us patterns and examples to follow:

1. ***Regularly enter God’s presence.*** Just as with any earthly relationship, you must spend time together with the Lord. The more you draw close to Him and hear His heartbeat, the deeper your love for Him will become. The Bible explains how to do this in Psalm 100:4 (NIV): “*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name.*” Make this a daily habit!
2. ***Develop a heart of devotion.*** God-honoring, Christ-centered, Spirit-led worship always involves expressions of gratitude, awe, and devotion. Like the angels in Heaven, true worshipers will have lives that declare, “*You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power*” (Revelation 4:11). Worship from your lips is

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merely the outward evidence of your inward devotion and passionate love for Christ.

3. ***Honor the Lord 24/7.*** For many people, worship is confined to singing praise songs or hymns during a church service. But it's meant to be SO much more than that. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "***Whatever*** you do, ***do ALL to the glory of God.***" This means your love for Jesus should be expressed through your entire life: home, work, church, friends, and community.
4. ***Hang out with others who are passionate for Jesus.*** It's important to fellowship with people who share your love for the Lord. Jesus promised in Matthew 18:20, "*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*" And Hebrews 10:24 (NIV) instructs us, "*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*" Do you have fellow believers in your life to spur you on to greater affection for the "lover of your soul"? That's a vital ingredient for your spiritual growth and effectiveness.

My friend, I pray you already have a close personal relationship with Jesus and are committed to growing in your intimacy with Him every day. Remember that

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He passionately loves you – shown by His death on the cross. Take time each day to cultivate a passionate love for Him as well.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I thank You and praise You for Your great love for me. I choose to draw near to You today. Help me to cultivate my relationship with You more and more each day. In Your name. Amen.

Free from Sin and Satan

It's important to understand that having a relationship with Jesus doesn't mean you'll be free of problems or struggles. Life can be tough, and even as a Christian you'll face many challenges.

Before you were saved, you were no threat to the devil. But when you accepted Jesus into your heart as your Lord and Savior, something changed. You took up a new residence in the *spiritual battlefield* and immediately became an enemy of Satan.

Yet don't despair! God is a good God, and He would never leave you defenseless or send you into battle unequipped. He has given you spiritual armor to protect you and the most powerful weapon in the world: His Word. That means you don't need to wrestle in your own strength with strongholds like depression, addiction, sickness, poverty, loneliness, or relationship conflicts. You can utilize the awesome spiritual resources you've been given in Christ.

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But remember: When you find yourself faced with battles or temptations, there's much more going on than what you can see with your natural eyes. Many of your battles, struggles, and trials are rooted in the spiritual realm. As a result, war must be waged on the spiritual battlefield and fought with spiritual weapons.

If you're a child of God, the devil no longer has any rights in your life. But perhaps there's some specific area of your life where you're still struggling. Even though Jesus is your Lord, maybe you've allowed Satan to occupy some stronghold that prevents you from wholeheartedly serving God.

Six Steps for Victory

If you're struggling to find freedom in Christ, these six steps will help you experience victory:

- 1. Recognize your need.*** Be honest with God about the foothold Satan still has in your life. Ask Him to reveal the root causes so you can confront the devil's lies with the truth of God's Word.
- 2. Quit relying on your own strength.*** Realize that the only way to freedom is through the power of the Holy Spirit and what Jesus and His blood have accomplished for you.

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3. ***Repent and cry out to God.*** Ask Him to forgive you and deliver you. Turn away from your chains, your sin, and your bondage and run into the arms of your loving Father, Savior, and Deliverer. Then don't look back!
4. ***Be accountable.*** Make sure to surround yourself with solid believers you can lean on for prayer and support during any times of struggle.
5. ***Passionately pursue God.*** The Lord must be your only addiction. Make an all-out effort to spend time with Jesus and get to know Him intimately. Press into His Word and His presence until He's your everything.
6. ***Fight the good fight.*** The devil is a thief and a liar, and Ephesians 6:10-18 says there's a fierce spiritual battle for your soul. You must stand on the truth of God's Word and walk in the victory Jesus has already won for you.

My friend, don't stop pressing in until you know you've been set free from Satan's schemes. As a Christian, you have power over the devil, but he's not going to give in without a fight. You must realize the authority and the spiritual weapons God has given you!

And once you've been set free by the truth of God's

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Word, make sure to guard your heart from further attacks. Galatians 5:1 tells us to “*stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*”

May God awaken the mighty warrior inside of you!
Victory can be yours today in the mighty name of Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying for my sins and purchasing my freedom from the devil's schemes. With all my heart, I want to know You and live for You. Let me stand today in the victory You've won for me. In Your powerful name. Amen.

Winning the Battle for Your Mind

All of us face different kinds of battles in our lives. Sometimes it's a health issue. At other times, we may be facing a struggle in our finances or relationships. And sometimes we deal with issues in our emotions, such as depression, fear, or loneliness.

The Bible says many of these troubles spring from the spiritual battle raging in the unseen world. We have an unseen enemy who is intent on killing, destroying, and stealing our spiritual life, our family, our physical health, our finances, and our peace of mind.

John 8:44 (NASB) calls Satan "*the father of lies*." And since lies are his principle weapon against us, it is crucial for us to know and stand upon the TRUTH of God's Word.

Jesus said in John 8:32 that the truth would set us free, but this is typically a PROCESS, as the devil's lies are

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replaced by God's truth. And let's be honest: From childhood we've been exposed to lies from Satan about God, the world, other people, and our own selves. Once we give our lives to Christ and are born again, God begins to uncover those lies through His Word and His Spirit.

Renewing Your Mind

The moment you were saved, God began to transform your life. Hopefully you've already begun to see many wonderful changes as your Heavenly Father increasingly makes you more like Jesus.

But Romans 12:1-2 gives us an important prescription for how to maximize our transformation. Verse one reminds us that we must fully present our lives to God – not just 10 percent, 20 percent, or even 90 percent, but 100 percent!

Then Romans 12:2 says, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

This verse is describing how our entire *life* is transformed when our mind is renewed. Since our mind is the primary battlefield between Satan's lies and God's truth, it is where our most important victories must be won.

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Take Up Your Sword!

God's Word is referred to as "*the sword of the Spirit*" in Ephesians 6:17 for good reason. Jesus said, "*Your word is truth*" (John 17:17), and the Bible is the ultimate authority in exposing and counteracting the lies of the enemy as many verses tell us:

*The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.*

*Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

*Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.*

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*Keep back your servant also from
presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.*

*Let the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer
(Psalm 19:7-14 ESV).*

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the
counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the
path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the
scornful; but his delight is in the law of the
Lord, and in His law he meditates day and
night. He shall be like a tree planted by the
rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in
its season, whose leaf also shall not wither;
and whatever he does shall prosper
(Psalm 1:1-3).*

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from
your mouth, but you shall meditate in it
day and night, that you may observe 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 (Joshua 1:8).*

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Defeating the Enemy

Something powerful happens when we put the Scriptures in our heart and mouth and begin to point them at the enemy. This is what Jesus did at the beginning of His ministry, when tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Repeatedly, He responded to the devil's taunts by saying, "*It is written...*" (Matthew 4:1-11).

Remember: Although Satan is a fierce, committed adversary, you don't need to be afraid of him. Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, you can have confidence for winning the unfinished battles you face against the devil today. That's why the apostle Paul could write in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "*Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.*"

Friend, this can be your experience today. The battle may be severe at times. But no matter what you may be going through, God wants to show you how to gain victory through the power of His Spirit and the promises of His Word!

Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, I submit my life fully to You.
Thank You for giving me authority over Satan
through the mighty name of Your Son Jesus.
Teach me to wear the spiritual armor You've
given me and wage war with the powerful
weapons I have in Christ. In His name. Amen.*

The Right Circle of Friends

While the most crucial element of the Christian life is your relationship with *GOD*, the relationships you have with *PEOPLE* are also important. When more than 3,000 people were saved after Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, one of the first things these new converts did was find regular fellowship with other believers.

Acts chapter 2 says:

*They were continually **devoting themselves** to the apostles' teaching and to **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...*

*Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart
(vs. 42, 46 NASB).*

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The word “*fellowship*” is the Greek word *koinonia*, which means to have something in common, to share, or to have communion with each other. Those who are walking in fellowship with Christ are meant to share that relationship with other Christians.

More than 30 times in the New Testament, we are told to do something together *with “one another.”* We are to love one another, serve one another, honor one another, bear one another’s burdens, pray for one another...and the list goes on.

Many other verses confirm this principle that God wants us to have other Christians to walk with on our journey of faith. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB) tells us to “*consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*”

God tells us in this passage that we need other Christians in our life to “*stimulate*” us “*to love and good deeds.*” Just as hot coals on a barbecue grill will soon grow cold if they are separated from the other coals, the enemy wants to sow offenses among believers so they will lose this vital connection with each other.

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Needing Each Other

No matter how strong we feel in our relationship with God, there will be times when we need the encouragement and support of other Christians. In fact, the Bible says (in Hebrews 3:12-13 NASB) to encourage each other on a daily basis: *“so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

Throughout the Bible, the message is clear: Your relationships with people will have an impact, either positively or negatively, on your relationship with God. That’s why you need to find a good Bible-believing church and take time to develop strong relationships with other Christians who can help you grow in your walk with the Lord.

This means being more than just a “Sunday Christian” who sits on the back row without going any deeper. Look for opportunities to join a Bible study or small group. Consider finding a more mature Christian to mentor you and help you discover your spiritual gifts.

Evaluating Your Inner Circle

The Bible has a lot to say about choosing the right friends. While the word “friend” has been watered down by Facebook and other forms of social media today, Jesus was clear that true friends are willing to lay down their lives for each other: *“Greater love has no*

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one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Likewise, true friends are loyal to each other, even in times of adversity: *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Proverbs 17:17).

Real friends are honest and genuine with each other. They don't engage in flattery and are willing to confront each other when necessary: *"Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses"* (Proverbs 27:6 NIV; also see Ephesians 4:15).

Friends may clash at times, but they will be used by God to sharpen and improve the lives of each other: *"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend"* (Proverbs 27:17 NLT).

Now is also a great time to examine your circle of friends and your close relationships. Proverbs 13:20 (ESV) includes both a promise and a warning: *"Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."* Can your primary companions be described as "wise," or do they frequently act like "fools"? Are they honest and kind, reflecting what Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23 as *"the fruit of the Spirit"*?

So pause and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the impact your closest friends are having on your life. Are some

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of your relationships toxic and detrimental to your growth in Christ? Have you maintained unhealthy relationships that are undercutting your faith and causing you to compromise your convictions?

Remember: People can either be one of your greatest resources to grow in your faith, or they can become your greatest stumbling blocks. I encourage you to study what the Bible says about the kinds of friendships you need to maximize the vitality and impact of your Christian life. Then ask God to help you make wise choices in your circle of close relationships.

Prayer:

Father, I want to grow deeper in my relationships with my family and friends. However, give me wisdom and discernment on the right people to allow into my life. May my friendships strengthen my faith and draw me closer to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

When Trials Come

Faith will always be tested. And don't think you are any exception!

Even Jesus was tested. During His baptism, He heard the Father's majestic words of affirmation, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matthew 3:17). There could be no greater endorsement than this audible voice from Heaven.

But what happened next? Immediately after this beautiful moment of affirmation, we read that "*Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*" (Matthew 4:1).

It turned out that He would be tested in the very area in which He had just been affirmed. The Father had testified that Jesus was His "*beloved Son*," so the first two tests from Satan were prefaced by the words, "*IF You are the Son of God...*" (vs. 3, 6).

Jesus' very identity was being tested by the devil's

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taunts! And if our Lord had to be tested, we shouldn't be surprised when we are as well. That's why Peter writes:

Don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad – for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world (1 Peter 4:12-13 NLT).

James picks up this same theme:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4 NASB).

Notice that James says, “WHEN you encounter various trials,” not “IF.” Trials are a part of life, whether you're a follower of Jesus or not. But James is pointing out that adversity has a positive effect in our lives, producing greater maturity and endurance. This echoes the encouraging words of Paul:

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who

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are the called according to His purpose
(Romans 8:28).

Trusting His Presence

If believers and unbelievers all experience hardships at times, is there really any benefit in following Jesus? Yes, indeed! One huge difference is that He has promised to be with us during the storms and trials of life. Numerous verses testify of that fact, but here are just a few:

Yea, 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 (Psalm 23:4).

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10).

He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Because of His abiding presence with us, we don't need to fear life's trials and tribulations. In fact, Jesus promised that HIS peace would be available even during the most difficult times:

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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 heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

How is this kind of peace possible during turbulent times? The secret is to fix our attention on the Lord instead of on the problems:

*You will keep him in perfect peace,
whose mind is stayed on You, because he
trusts in You (Isaiah 26:3).*

Perhaps you're objecting at this point, "But it's just not *normal* to have peace like that in times of trouble!" Well, it may not be normal in the eyes of the world, but it's a supernatural experience available to you as a believer. Don't expect to fully comprehend it, because the Bible says this peace "*surpasses all understanding*" (Philippians 4:6-7).

What If You Blow It?

Just as trials are an inevitable part of the Christian life, so are failures from time to time. While our goal

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should be to please God in everything we think, say, and do, the Bible acknowledges that we will sometimes stumble:

My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins – and not only our sins but the sins of all the world (1 John 2:1-2 NLT).

This is saying that Jesus died for your sins – ALL of your sins, whether past, present, or future. If you stumble, His forgiveness is just a prayer away:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Like we see in the Prodigal Son story (Luke 15:11-32), the Father's arms are always open wide when you return home to Him!

Nothing Will Separate You

Whenever you allow some area of sin or disobedience to creep into your life, you'll inevitably feel some distance between you and the Lord. At such times, don't

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be surprised if the devil tells you you've committed some unpardonable sin and aren't even saved. THAT IS A LIE!

Instead of listening to your vacillating feelings or the taunts of the enemy, you need to be confident of God's love and grounded in the promises of His Word. He's promised to be with you always (Matthew 28:20), and He wants you to be confident that nothing will ever separate you from His love:

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:33-39).

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You see, your salvation is a precious thing, but not a fragile thing. It was purchased by the blood of Jesus, and now it's sustained by HIS power, not yours. You've been given an inheritance that is *"incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Peter 1:4-5).

You didn't save yourself. Your salvation was a gift of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). And now it's still His grace that is guarding your relationship with Him. The Bible declares that He *"is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy"* (Jude 1:24). Isn't that good news?

Safe in God's Hands

If you are ever tempted to question the security of your relationship with the Lord, it will be helpful to remember the reassuring words of Jesus, your Good Shepherd:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to

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snatch them out of My Father's hand
(John 10:27-29).

Pause for a moment to picture what Jesus is describing here. When you gave your life to Him as your Lord and Savior, He assumed responsibility for your eternal home with Him. Try as the devil would like to do, he has no power to snatch you out of God's loving hands.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for loving me! I'm grateful that the same grace that brought me salvation is the grace that I can depend on to keep me in right relationship with You. I confess any sins and gratefully receive Your forgiveness and restoration. Thank You for Your promise to be with me through every storm and trial of life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

One of the great benefits of being born again is that God is preparing a wonderful home for you in Heaven with Him when you die. But even though your eternal destiny is critically important, that isn't the *only* reason He saved you. He also wants you to have an abundant and impactful life during your time on earth.

An important part of God's purpose for your life is to learn how to share your story and present the Gospel to others. He also wants you to be a powerful conduit for bringing His love and miracle-working power to the world.

You see, from cover to cover, the Bible teaches two twin truths: (1) God wants to bless His people, and (2) He wants His people to be a blessing to others. This is shown in the Lord's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3: *"I will bless you...and you shall be a blessing...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

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Just as for Abraham, these are your Heavenly Father's desires for YOU as His child today. So are you ready to be blessed – more abundantly than ever before? And are you willing to use God's blessings in your life to reach out to other people with His love?

Fulfilling God's Purposes

One of the Lord's reasons for blessing you is to give you the needed resources for fulfilling His purposes on the earth. Acts 13:36 (NASB) says King David “*served the purpose of God in his own generation.*” That should be our objective as well!

This explains why the psalmist boldly declared his need for God's blessing – not just for his own sake but so that the world would be blessed through his life:

*God be merciful to us and **ble**ss us,
And cause His face to shine upon us, Selah*

***That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations...***

*God shall **ble**ss us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear
Him (Psalm 67:1-2, 7).*

Notice that you don't have to be afraid to ask God to bless you! In fact, He wants to bless you so abundantly that

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people all over the world are touched by your generosity.

Remember: You don't have to twist God's arm to receive His blessings. He's *eager* to bless you – not just financially, but also in your health, relationships, peace of mind, and every other area of your life. He knows that the more you prosper, the more people will observe His blessings and recognize what a great Heavenly Father He is.

Like any father, God wants to be proud of His kids. If your son was the championship quarterback in the Super Bowl, you would proudly tell your friends, "That's my boy!" In the same way, God wants us to live such victorious lives that the world will take notice.

Some Ways to Bless Others

People all around you are in need of God's love and His blessings. Here are just a few examples of the ways you can be a blessing to others:

- ***Sow financial seeds to win souls.*** When you share your financial resources to fund ministries that advance the Great Commission, you will one day share their reward in Heaven. People you've never met will greet you and say, "Thank you! I'm here because you cared enough to send me the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

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- ***Win your lost friends and loved ones to Christ.***

As people observe your life, they should want to know more about how they can follow Jesus. First Peter 3:15 says you should “*always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*” Take time to study the basic Gospel message so you can share it clearly and accurately with the people around you.

- ***Reach out with kindness to the poor and needy.***

Hundreds of passages throughout the Bible speak of God’s compassion for the poor and His desire for His people to reach out to help them. As the Lord blesses you financially and gives you His heart of love, you will be well-positioned to serve as a conduit to bless those in need. When Jesus returns and you stand before Him, He will tell you:

*I was hungry and you gave Me food;
I was thirsty and you gave Me drink;
I was a stranger and you took Me
in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I
was sick and you visited Me; I was in
prison and you came to Me...Assuredly,
I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to
one of the least of these My brethren,
you did it to Me (Matthew 25:35-40).*

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So go ahead and jump into the river of God's blessings and His compassion for others. Walk in a continual, loving, obedient covenant relationship with the Lord, and look for opportunities to impact the people around you.

One day, when you stand before your Lord in Heaven, you will hear His awesome greeting, *"Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your lord"* (Matthew 25:21).

What a day of rejoicing that will be!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, what a wonderful life You've set before me! Thank You for revealing Your great plan to bless me and make me a blessing to others. I surrender my life fully to You, asking You to make this a reality as I seek to glorify You and share Your love each day. In Your name. Amen.

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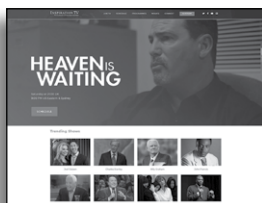
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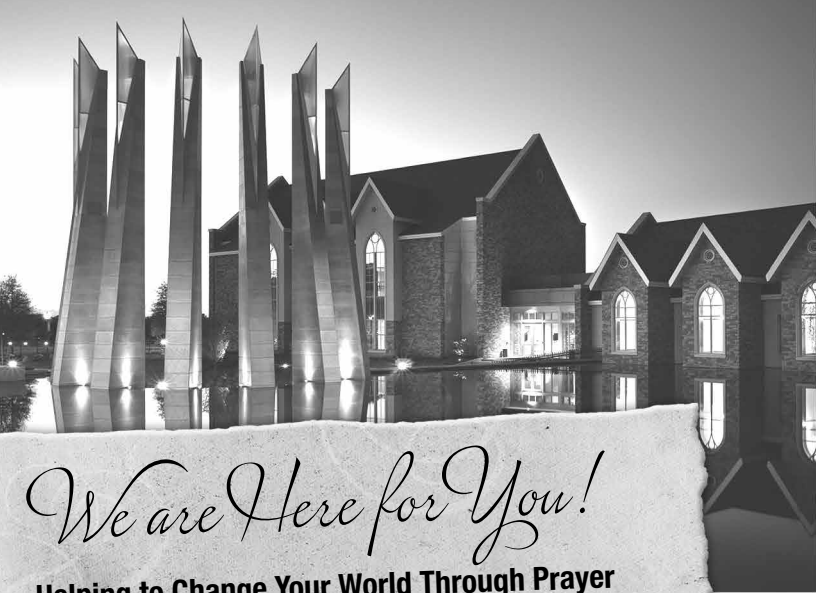
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– 1 Peter 2:2-3 NLT

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