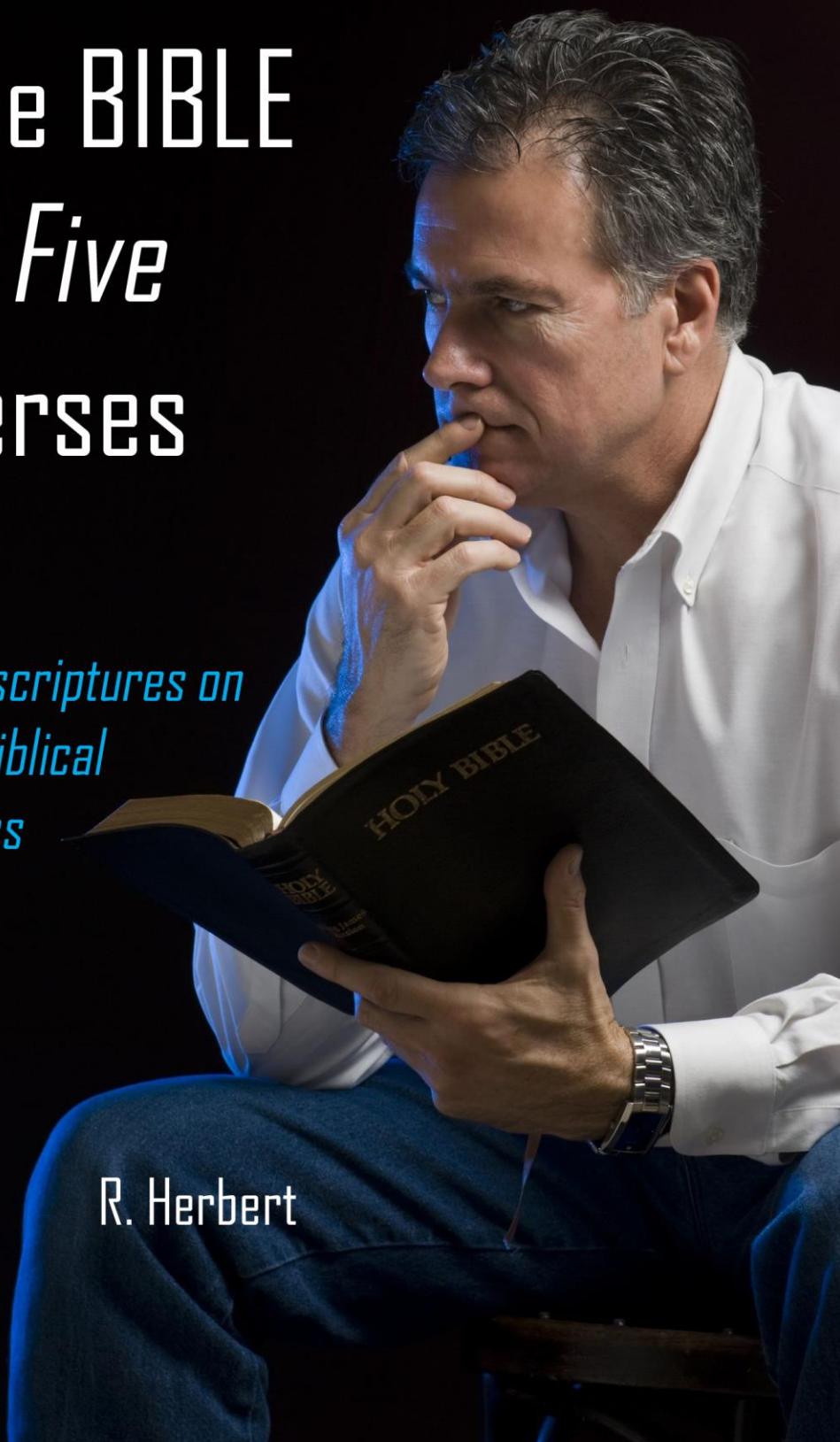


The BIBLE in *Five* Verses

*Key scriptures on
36 biblical
topics*

R. Herbert



The BIBLE

In *Five Verses*

**Key scriptures on
36 biblical topics**

By R. Herbert

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INTRODUCTION

This easy-to-read and understand eBook is not a guide to the stories or characters of the Bible – it explains thirty-six “key” Christian beliefs and principles of living. Each topic has a short introduction and five carefully selected biblical verses or passages, followed by a question for further reflection and additional scripture references. In this way, the selected concepts are first explained with scriptures to which the reader can refer, and then the Bible is allowed to speak for itself regarding what it has to say on each subject.

This is not a theological treatise, however, and its size precludes any attempt to be complete in covering all aspects of the Bible. *The Bible in Five Verses* primarily aims to provide a basic introduction to biblical concepts helpful for those new to the Christian faith. The book has been prepared with this goal in mind and is intended especially for our newer brothers and sisters in parts of Africa, Asia, and other areas of the world where printed materials are often difficult to obtain. Readers in many of these areas are using English as a second or even third language and so technical theological terms have generally been avoided in favor of more widely understood words.

The Bible in Five Verses is designed to provide a simple logical survey of what the Bible teaches that may be used in missionary work and teaching, as well as for independent individual study. But this book may also be profitable for established believers as a review resource and even as an inspirational tool. Its thirty-six short chapters, each with key scriptures and a question to ponder, lend themselves to reading one chapter a day in just over one month.

Of course, everyone has his or her own view of what is a “key” or important biblical concept or verse. As a result, many readers may ask “Where is Grace?” “Where is Redemption” or whatever topic each individual feels should have been separately included. The author can only stress that many such concepts are included within the various chapters, or they are explained under different, sometimes simpler, non-theological headings. Some topics, such as *Love, also include a number of related concepts such as kindness, brotherly affection, etc. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), which are not treated separately.

However, because of the compact size of the book, many areas of belief and practice simply could not be added. Yet we have tried to include what a majority of Christians would regard as perhaps the most important areas of our faith. Because this book was purposely designed to have a relatively small digital footprint to allow easy downloading and transfer, even on the slow internet connections found in many areas of the world, passages are sometimes abridged (indicated by ...), but are not otherwise modified.

The subjects included in this book are organized into twelve things we need to “know,” twelve actions we need to “do,” and twelve qualities that we need to “have.” By grouping concepts in this way, we were able to present aspects of Christian belief so that their relevance can be easily grasped.

So, whether you are new to the Christian faith or an established believer who would like to review some key scriptures on your beliefs, we hope you will find this small book helpful in summarizing the main points of the message of the Bible “in five verses.” May you be blessed with understanding as you read it.

**An asterisk before a word in the text indicates that there is a separate entry on that subject elsewhere in the book.*

PART ONE:
WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW

1. THE BIBLE

The idea that God would send a number of letters to us, that we could read and be instructed by, is an amazing one – but that, of course, is what the Bible is. The combined sixty-six books of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures – called by Christians the Old and New Testament – claim to be the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), and Christians believe that God directly guided the writing and editing of these biblical books through *The Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

Believers know that there are many indications of the inspired nature of these sacred writings, ranging from fulfilled prophecies to commands which, when kept, result in clear blessings. Thus, Christians follow the Bible as the ultimate authority in their lives (Matthew 4:4) and regard it as the only inspired book in which the good news of God's purpose for humanity is explained along with everything we need to know to fulfill that purpose (John 5:39, 2 Timothy 3:17).

The individual books that make up the Bible (39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament) were written over a period of some 1,500 years by many different authors and are of many different types: books of law, history, prophecy, poetry, wisdom, and letters. But all the books in this sacred library share in common the inspired ability to guide, correct, instruct, and encourage those who read them (2 Timothy 3:16-17) so the analogy of "letters from God" still holds, whichever type of literature a given biblical book may be.

Dedicated Christians find that they can never outgrow the Bible – no matter how many times we may read it, we continue to find new understandings, insights and guidance within its pages.

The Bible in Five Verses:

- Psalm 119:105 ESV

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

- Matthew 4:4 ESV

...It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV

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

- Hebrews 4:12 ESV

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.

- Romans 15:4 NIV

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Something to think about: Do I have a clear understanding of the indications we have that the Bible is truly inspired – what would I say if a friend asked me how I knew the Bible was really the word of God?

Some other scriptures on this topic: John 17:17, Romans 10:17, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:21.

Related topics in this book: *Bible Study, *The Gospel.

2. GOD THE FATHER

God who is eternal, invisible, and immortal (1 Timothy 1:17), as well as all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present (Psalm 147:5, Jeremiah 23:24), not only personifies the epitome of goodness, greatness, wisdom, love, justice, truth, compassion, beauty, and an almost infinite number of other qualities, but also his perfection in every one of those areas is far greater than we can imagine with human comprehension. Yet, through his Son, *Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself to us in an understandable way as a loving heavenly Father.

God is spoken of as a Father in several places in the Old Testament (Isaiah 63:16, 64:8, Malachi 2:10, etc.), just as some Old Testament verses also speak of a divine Son. But it is in the New Testament that we find clear revelation of the Father, for the first time, in the teaching and work of Jesus Christ (Luke 10:22, John 14:9-11).

The New Testament writers tell us that the Father is the source of all things (1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6) and that Jesus Christ came from him (1 John 4:14) and returned to him (John 16:28), and that at the conclusion of his plan for humankind the Father will fully reveal himself and will rule over his children forever (Revelation 21:3). A number of the biblical writers also stress (often using the expression “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”) that the Father is the source of all good gifts and help to those who seek him (Matthew 7:11, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Ephesians 1:3, James 1:17, 1 Peter 1:3).

Jesus encouraged us to pray directly to the Father (Matthew 6:9). He also gave us the example of calling on the Father in prayer using the Aramaic word *Abba* (Mark 14:36), which conveyed a familial attitude of intimate respect similar to the English words “Dear Father.”

God the Father in Five Verses:

- 1 Corinthians 8:6 ESV

... there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist...

- 1 John 4:14 ESV

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

- Luke 10:22 ESV

All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

- John 14:9-10 ESV

...Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

- Revelation 21:3 ESV

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 ...”

Something to think about: What ways can I think of in which the concept of “Father” applies to God?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Isaiah 64:8, Matthew 23:9, James 1:17.

Related topics in this book: *Jesus Christ, *The Holy Spirit.

3. JESUS CHRIST

Christianity teaches that the One who became Jesus the Christ (the promised Messiah) existed eternally with God and as God (John 1:1-3). It was apparently Jesus, in his pre-incarnate state as the Word of God, who interacted directly with humanity in Old Testament times (John 1:18, 5:37, 6:46, 1 Corinthians 10:4). The Old Testament Scriptures often speak of the coming of a godly figure, but they speak of both a suffering servant (Isaiah 53, etc.) and a conquering king (Daniel 7:13, etc). Christians believe that Jesus fulfilled the first role at his first coming and will fulfill the second role at his return.

The New Testament tells us that at his first coming Jesus was conceived by the *Holy Spirit and thus combined humanity with his godly nature. It tells us that Jesus lived a sinless life and was thus able to give himself as a sacrifice, dying by crucifixion in order to pay for all of humanity's sins. Jesus was then resurrected and ascended to Heaven from where he will return. At his second coming, the New Testament shows Christ will return with great power to rule the nations, to judge mankind, and to prepare the earth for the eventual dwelling of God with a redeemed humanity. In reading scriptures speaking of Jesus we must look carefully to see if they speak of his first coming (as servant) or second coming (as king), or both, as is sometimes the case (for example, Luke 1:31-33).

Christians enter into a close relationship with Jesus Christ as he is our Lord (Romans 10:9), Savior (Luke 2:11, Acts 4:12), High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), and elder Brother in the family of God (Romans 8:14-17, 29, Hebrews 2:11). In the rite of *Baptism we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and every Christian also becomes part of the "body" of Christ – the *Church (1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:12, 15-16).

Jesus Christ in Five Verses:

- John 1:1-3, 14 ESV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made... 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.

- Luke 1:31-33 ESV

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

- Hebrews 1:3 ESV

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 9:28 ESV

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

- Revelation 11:15 NKJV

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! ..."

Something to think about: Many Christians know the concept of Jesus as the suffering Servant better than they know the concept of Christ as King. Do I know the scriptures that show both aspects of God the Son?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 24:30, John 11:25, 1 John 4:14.

Related topics in this book: *God the Father, *The Holy Spirit, *Salvation, *The Gospel, *The Church.

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT

God is Spirit (John 4:24), but the Bible also speaks of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:11, etc.). It also speaks of the Spirit of Jesus (Galatians 4:6), but we understand there is only one Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:4) – part of the nature of the One God (Acts 5:3-4, 16:6-7). It is through the Holy Spirit that God is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7), that he creates (Genesis 1:2, Job 33:4), and empowers those with whom he chooses to work (Hebrews 2:4).

Throughout the Old Testament we find many scriptures explaining how God accomplished his purposes, including working through and influencing people by means of his Spirit (1 Samuel 11:6). It is through the Holy Spirit that God revealed things to his servants (Ezekiel 11:24) and delivered messages by them (1 Samuel 10:10, 2 Peter 1:21). When individuals were especially empowered by God, they are said to have been “clothed” by his Spirit (Judges 6:34, etc.), but the Spirit of God is usually said to have been “among” most individuals (Isaiah 63:11, etc.) in Old Testament times, and only in some few cases do we find clear indication that the Spirit operated within individuals. This closer relationship with the Spirit of God was prophesied for God’s people, however, and we see the fulfilment of this after the resurrection of Jesus, who promised the Holy Spirit would be given to his followers (John 14:26, Acts 1:5, 8).

In our relationship with God, we experience *Rebirth by means of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:3, 23) when we turn to him in *Repentance (see also *Indwelling of the Spirit). God communicates with us and enables us to communicate with him through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14, Romans 8:27, Philippians 3:3), and he provides us with many spiritual gifts which the apostle Paul calls the “fruits” of the Spirit (*Fruits of the Spirit). It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that gives us fellowship with God and with one another (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Holy Spirit in Five Verses:

- Genesis 1:2 ESV

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

- 2 Peter 1:21 ESV

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.

- Hebrews 2:3-4 NIV

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

- John 14:26 ESV

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

- Romans 8:9, 11, 27 NIV

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ... And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you... And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Something to think about: The Bible promises God's servants a great many gifts through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Do I regularly claim those gifts as they are needed in my life?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Zechariah 4:6, Matthew 12:32, Ephesians 4:30.

Related topics in this book: *God the Father, *Jesus Christ, *Indwelling of the Spirit, *Fruits of the Spirit.

5. HUMANITY

The Bible teaches a number of important concepts regarding humanity. First and foremost it reveals that mankind was created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:26). Many scriptures show that although made from the “dust of the earth,” humankind is one of the high points of all God’s creation and has the great potential to become one with God (1 Corinthians 15:44-49) as part of his family (John 1:12-13, 1 John 3:1-2).

According to Genesis, humanity originally had the opportunity to live forever, as symbolized by the tree of life in the Garden of Eden story. Because of *Sin, humans lost this opportunity and humanity continues to live under the penalty and horrible results of sin. But through the life and death of *Jesus Christ who was also the “Son of Man” (Matthew 18:11, etc.), we are given the opportunity to fulfill that original potential.

In creating mankind as male and female God not only provided for human reproduction, but also intended the sexes to be interdependent and complementary to the development of each other (1 Corinthians 11:11) as full heirs together of God’s purpose for humanity (1 Peter 3:1, 7). While this is an aspect of Christianity many take for granted, it is a distinctive part of the faith and contrasts with the teachings of many other religions of the world.

Humanity in Five Verses:

- Genesis 1:26-27 ESV

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.

- Genesis 5:2 NIV

He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" when they were created.

- 1 Corinthians 11:11 ESV

... in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman.

- Psalm 8:4-5 NIV

what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

- Acts 17:24-26 NIV

The God who made the world and everything in it ... gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Something to think about: Think about why God created mankind – what were his reasons for making humanity?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Genesis 2:7, 1 Corinthians 15:44-49.

Related topics in this book: *Sin, *Salvation, *Eternal Life.

6. SIN

The story of the creation of mankind tells us that although the first humans were created sinless (Genesis 1:26, 31), they had the capacity to choose evil and in choosing the forbidden “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” they sinned. This sin affected all of subsequent humanity, but the Bible is also clear that individually “all have sinned” (Romans 3:10, 23) and brought upon themselves the penalty of sin, which is being cut off from God (Isaiah 59:2) and eventual death (Romans 5:12-23, 6:23).

God’s word teaches that the penalty of our sin can only be removed by a perfect sinless individual – his Son – paying the penalty on our behalf, and it is through this sacrifice alone that we can receive forgiveness and *Salvation.

In grasping the universal sinfulness of humanity, we must understand that sin can be the result of not only doing something we should not do (1 John 3:4) or not doing something we should do (James 4:17), but also of what we are by nature – as is seen in the words of Christ himself (Mark 7:20-23). Christ also showed that we can sin in attitude and thought just as much as in word or deed (Matthew 5:28), and that we are slaves to our sinful nature unless we are freed from it (John 8:34) through God’s forgiveness and through spiritual *Rebirth. This process of salvation is accomplished through faith with *Repentance and *Baptism leading to the imparting of a new nature within us through the *Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Even with a renewed nature, our old self and its proclivity to sin remains; but the Christian chooses a life of increasing transformation away from sin, which will lead to an eventual eternal existence where sin is not present at all (1 John 3:9, Revelation 22:14-15).

Sin in Five Verses:

- Romans 3:23 HCSB

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

- Mark 7:20-23 ESV

... “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

- Isaiah 64:6 NIV

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

- 1 John 1:8-10 ESV

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

- 1 John 3:6-9 ESV

No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

Something to think about: Do I understand that true conversion does not keep us sinless (1 John 1:8), but that it involves ongoing confession and growth away from sin so that we no longer “make a practice” (1 John 3:9) of ongoing sin?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 5:12-23, 6:23, James 4:17, 1 John 3:4.

Related topics in this book: *Jesus Christ, *The Gospel, *Salvation, *Forgiveness.

7. SALVATION

Through *Sin all humans have come under the penalty of eternal death (Romans 6:23), but through God's offer of salvation we have the opportunity to be rescued from that fate. At times, the Bible uses the word "salvation" to refer to being rescued from physical danger or problems (Philippians 1:19, etc.), but usually the word refers to spiritual, eternal salvation from the penalty of sin (Romans 5:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

In the teaching of Jesus (whose name means "salvation" or "God saves"), being saved also is equated with entry into the *Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24-25), as we must, of course, be saved in order to fulfill our purpose by becoming part of God's kingdom and family (Romans 8:14-17).

The Bible is clear that there is nothing we can do as humans to "earn" salvation. God forgives sin not as a result of our works (Ephesians 2:8, 2 Timothy 1:9a, Titus 3:5a), but as an act of undeserved love and mercy (often called "Grace") by substituting the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 1:7). That "paying of the penalty" for our sin is only applied to us if we accept the salvation God offers us (Ephesians 2:5, 8).

Our receiving salvation occurs as a process, not an instantaneous event, however. We receive God's gift of forgiveness and salvation through first hearing and coming to understand the *Gospel (Ephesians 1:13). We then must undergo sincere *Repentance of our sins (Acts 3:19), *Baptism (Acts 2:38), accepting in faith Jesus Christ's sacrifice on our behalf (Acts 4:12) and his resurrection again to life (Romans 10:9-10), and accepting him as Lord and ruler in our lives (Romans 10:9, 13).

Once we have done these things God requires of us, we have assurance that God forgives our sins and will grant us his free gift of salvation (Romans 5:10, 21) if we continue with him (1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Hebrews 3:14, 10:26).

Salvation in Five Verses:

- John 3:16-17 ESV

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

- 2 Timothy 1:9 NIV

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time

- Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Acts 4:10-12 ESV

... by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ... there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

- Romans 10:9 HCSB

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

Something to think about: Have I completed all the steps God’s word shows are required for salvation?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Mark 16:15-16, Acts 16:30-33, Romans 10:13, Titus 3:5.

Related topics in this book: *Sin, *The Gospel, *Repentance, *Baptism.

8. THE GOSPEL

The term “gospel” is used over 75 times in the New Testament and its fundamental meaning is “good news.” In the teaching of Jesus, the gospel often referred to the good news of the institution of the Kingdom of God – the ultimate goal of *Salvation (Matthew 4:23). But the gospel also included the message that we must repent if we are to be part of that kingdom (Mark 1:15). After the resurrection of Jesus the gospel always included teaching about the person, identity and role of Jesus Christ in God’s plan (Acts 9:20, Romans 1:2-3, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

When we consider all the scriptures on this topic, we see that the gospel may be explained in five points:

- 1) We were created in the potential image of God to become like him (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10), but we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s perfect and glorious nature (Romans 3:23).*
- 2) As a result of sin we have all incurred the penalty of death (Romans 6:23).*
- 3) So God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to pay the penalty of sin on our behalf (Romans 5:8).*
- 4) If we repent and accept, by faith, Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf, we can be forgiven and renewed through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, Romans 3:24-25).*
- 5) Just as we become one with Christ in his death, so we become united with him in his resurrection to eternal life (Romans 6:5, 23; Ephesians 1:13).*

The Gospel in Five Verses:

- 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 ESV

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, ... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

- Romans 1:16 ESV

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- Colossians 1:21-23 NIV

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.....

- Ephesians 1:13 HCSB

When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed in Him, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

- Matthew 24:14 NIV

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Something to think about: Paul warns us not to accept any gospel other than that which he and the other apostles taught (Galatians 1:8-9). Have I accepted any other aspects into my understanding of the gospel that are not truly part of it?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 1:16, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 1:8-9, 1 John 4:10.

Related topics in this book: *God the Father, *Jesus Christ, *Humanity, *Sin, *Repentance, *Salvation, *Eternal Life.

9. THE CHURCH

Although there are countless denominations within the Christian faith, the Bible reveals that there is only one Church (Ephesians 4:4-5). The most important biblical fact we find regarding the Church is that it represents the “body” of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18) in this world. This is true because the members of the Church are united by the Spirit of Christ in us (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 6:17), and also because the extended body of Christ continues to do the work he did in his physical life.

Jesus carefully trained his disciples to continue his work, commissioning them to preach the gospel in all the world (Mark 16:15), to guide and strengthen believers (John 21:16-17), and to serve the world (Matthew 25:39-40). In the same way, our responsibility as members of the Church today is to *Fellowship with and build up other believers in the body of Christ, and to participate in the mission the Church has been given to preach the gospel and to help those who need help.

Membership in the Church also carries two further responsibilities: to not be *of* the world – meaning to not live as those in the world do (the Greek word translated “church” in our Bibles means “called out ones”), and also to be committed to preaching to and helping those *in* the world. The Church is not identical with the *Kingdom of God, but the two are interconnected and grow together.

The Bible uses various metaphors to speak of the New Testament Church to show our relationship with other believers and with Christ himself. The Church is likened to a body (Romans 12:15), a building or temple (1 Corinthians 3:13-17), and a bride (Ephesians 5:22-32). That is why the leaders of the Church are called to the spiritual responsibility of caring for the body, building up the temple, and protecting the bride of Christ (Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, etc.).

The Church in Five Verses:

- Matthew 16:18 ESV

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

- Ephesians 2:19-22 ESV

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

- Ephesians 5:29-32 ESV

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.... This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

- Romans 12:5 ESV

So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

- 1 Corinthians 12:28 ESV

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Something to think about: Do I only see the Church as something to belong to? Or do I see it as the “body of Christ” that both connects us with other believers and continues his work?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 12:15, 1 Corinthians 3:13-17, Ephesians 1:22-23, 5:22-27.

Related topics in this book: *Jesus Christ, *The Holy Spirit, *Kingdom of God, *Fellowship.

10. REBIRTH

The words of Jesus make it clear that the entrance requirement for God's kingdom is a new birth (John 3:5), which does not refer to physical rebirth, of course, but to a spiritual birth (John 3:6-8, John 1:13). The new birth begins with baptism (Romans 6:4) and receipt of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8), but it is only completely accomplished in the future life (1 Corinthians 15:53) when we are fully born into the family of God (John 1:12, Romans 8:29). This dual development in present and future time is exactly analogous to the development of the Kingdom of God which the Bible shows we can be part of at this time (Mark 1:15, Colossians 1:13), yet which is not fully instituted until later (Revelation 11:15).

A word related to rebirth in the New Testament is “regeneration” which means essentially the same thing as “rebirth,” but can also apply to the renewal of things. The Greek word translated “regeneration” in English Bibles occurs twice, with the same dual time usage of regeneration that happens now and regeneration that happens in its fullest sense in the future. In Titus 3:5 the apostle Paul says that we are saved now through the “washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (meaning, through baptism – compare John 3:5), and in Matthew 19:28 Christ himself spoke of the future “... regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory.”

Rebirth in Five Verses:

- John 3:5-8 ESV

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

- John 1:12-13 ESV

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- 1 John 3:9 ESV

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

- 1 John 3:2 NIV

... now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Something to think about: Does my life show that I have been changed, that although still imperfect I no longer make a practice of sin and am actively moving toward the nature of God?

Some other scriptures on this topic: 1 Peter 1:3, 23, 1 Peter 2:2, James 1:18.

Related topics in this book: *Salvation, *Baptism, *The Holy Spirit.

11. KINGDOM OF GOD

God rules as king over the whole universe, of course (Psalm 103:19), but the concept of the Kingdom of God (called the “Kingdom of Heaven” in the Book of Matthew as that Gospel was written for a primarily Jewish audience which preferred to use a term without using the name of God) lies at the very heart of the Gospel preached by Jesus Christ and the early Church (Mark 1:15, Acts 28:31, 33, etc.) and is a central part of Christian belief. However, the New Testament distinguishes two aspects of the Kingdom of God – two stages of its institution, as both a present and a future reality.

The Kingdom of God was established on earth during the physical life of the Son of God because wherever Christ is, his Kingdom is there (Luke 17:20-21). Those who are spiritually “in Christ” have already entered into his Kingdom (Colossians 1:13), and in this way the Kingdom can also be partially equated with the Church. The Kingdom has thus been growing steadily since its inception (Matthew 13:31-33).

In its fullest sense, however, the Kingdom of God will be instituted in the future (Matthew 6:10), at the return of Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:34, Revelation 11:15). Care must be taken in reading the Bible to differentiate between scriptures that are speaking of the present development of the Kingdom of God and its future fulfillment – between its initial limited presence and its eventual full and complete reality. The verses below all speak of the Kingdom of Heaven’s future fulfillment.

The Kingdom of God in Five Verses:

- Revelation 11:15 ESV

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

- Matthew 25:34 ESV

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’

- Daniel 7:27 ESV

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

- 1 Corinthians 15:24 ESV

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

- Revelation 21:1-3 ESV

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. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ... 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 ...”

Something to think about: What am I doing in my life to specifically help the growth of the Kingdom of God at this time?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Daniel 2:44, Matthew 7:21, Luke 13:28-29, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

Related topics in this book: *God the Father, *Jesus Christ, *The Gospel, *Eternal Life.

12. ETERNAL LIFE

The New Testament teaches that although all humanity lies under the penalty of death, due to sin, because of the sacrifice of Christ anyone who turns to God in believing faith can find forgiveness and eternal life. Eternal life is given as a free gift from God (Romans 6:23), but the Scriptures show that we receive that gift through faith (John 3:16, 5:24), and the resultant obedience that comes from faith (Romans 2:6-8, Galatians 6:7-8).

Eternal life is thus not something that is automatically waiting for all – it is the result of our believing acceptance of God's gift, and it is something that we must actively take hold of rather than passively accept. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called ..." (1Timothy 6:12 ESV), and Paul said that he himself struggled so that "by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:11-12 ESV).

Eternal Life in Five Verses:

- John 3:16 ESV

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

- Romans 6:23 ESV

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- John 5:24 ESV

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

- Galatians 6:7-8 ESV

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 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.

- Revelation 22:12-14, 17 NIV

Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life ... Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

Something to think about: Have I always presumed that at death we are automatically given eternal life? If so, do I need to carefully read the scriptures on this subject?

Some other scriptures on this topic: John 6:50-51, 17:3, Romans 2:6-8, Revelation 22:1-5.

Related topics in this book: *Sin,* Jesus Christ, *Forgiveness, *Kingdom of God.

PART TWO:
WHAT WE NEED TO DO

13. REPENTANCE

True repentance goes much further than just feeling regret about a mistake or sin. It involves much more than just saying “sorry” to God. The word repentance as it is used in the Bible means “to change one’s mind” – it involves changing our whole attitude and wanting to change our future behavior, to seek God in true sorrow in order to be forgiven and to start anew. Repentance is necessary for salvation as it is part of the process of turning to God and accepting the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

Those who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ repent at the beginning of their Christian lives of what they realize they *are* as well as the wrong they have *done*. Christians continue to express an attitude of repentance whenever they realize they have thought, spoken, or acted contrary to God’s Law of Love.

True repentance is aided by God who helps us to see ourselves as he sees us (John 6:44, Acts 5:31, 11:18). Repentance is, then, a change of mind and attitude that leads to a change of what we are as well as what we think, say, and do.

Repentance in Five Verses:

- Acts 17:30 ESV

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

- Acts 2:38 ESV

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...”

- 1 John 1:9 ESV

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

- Acts 3:19 ESV

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

- 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 ESV

... I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief ... For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

Something to think about: Do I see repentance as a single event I experienced, or is it part of my ongoing life?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, James 4:8-10, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 3:19.

Related topics in this book: *Sin, *Salvation, *Baptism, *Forgiveness.

14. BAPTISM

The Christian rite of baptism is commanded in the Bible as a symbol of the death and burial of the old self (symbolized by going down into the water of baptism) following repentance, and also of the resurrection (symbolized by rising out of the water of baptism) to a new life. It is not usually depicted in the New Testament as a religious “washing” from sin (though it is figuratively called that in Acts 22:16). Usually baptism is viewed in the New Testament as the identification of the believer with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:27, etc.).

Baptism is also shown to be necessary for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, just as the Spirit was shown to descend upon Christ himself at his baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). Although Acts 10:47-48 shows that on occasion God grants his Spirit to individuals before baptism, this seems to be only in special cases, and the New Testament is clear that baptism is usually a prerequisite for the receipt of the Spirit of God.

The “laying on of hands,” symbolizing the transfer of the Spirit through one person to another, is an integral part of Christian baptism, and the Spirit is not normally given without it (Acts 8:14-17). Just as Christ went down into the water and came back up out of it (Mark 1:10), New Testament baptism was evidently by immersion which fulfills the symbolism of burial.

Baptism in Five Verses:

- John 3:5 ESV

... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

- 1 Peter 3:21 ESV

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- Acts 2:38 ESV

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...”

- Acts 8:14-17 NIV

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- Romans 6:3-4 ESV

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Something to think about: Do I understand that baptism is not just a ritual washing, but a symbolic identification of each believer with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – an important part of repentance and the receiving of the Holy Spirit?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, Acts 22:16, Colossians 2:12-13, 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Related topics in this book: *Repentance, *Faith, *Salvation, *The Holy Spirit.

15. FELLOWSHIP

In the Old Testament, fellowship is seen in the coming together of individuals who were all members of the congregation of Israel (Psalm 111:1). In the New Testament, Christian fellowship is based on our adoption into the family of God – on being an adopted brother or sister of all other believers with the shared gift of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:14-15). Christian fellowship then occurs when two or more Christians are in one another's company, through participation in discussion or activity that is mutually spiritually (rather than just socially) uplifting.

The Book of Acts tells us that fellowship was one of the four things which the early Christians made a priority: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42 NIV). This clearly shows that fellowship was of great importance for the early believers – as it is for us today.

On the other hand, in some situations, Christians may be isolated and have little or no access to fellowship with other believers, in which case we must remember that our fellowship is primarily with God and through him with all our spiritual brothers and sisters (1 John 1:3). Whenever possible, however, we need direct Christian fellowship with other believers in order to learn to fully develop the faith and love God wants us to have.

Fellowship in Five Verses:

- Matthew 18:20 ESV

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

- 1 John 1:3 NIV

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 14:26 NIV

...When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

- Colossians 3:16 ESV

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV

And 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.

Something to think about: Am I profiting from true Christian fellowship as much as I could, or is my fellowship with other believers not particularly spiritual?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Proverbs 27:17, Acts 2:42, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 John 1:7.

Related topics in this book: *The Church, *The Holy Spirit, *Love.

16. ENCOURAGEMENT

The Bible shows even the greatest warriors and strongest men of God needing encouragement at times (1 Samuel 23:16, 1 Kings 19:4, etc.), and a great many scriptures in the New Testament show that encouragement is not only something God gives to us, but also something he commands we freely give to others. Encouragement is thus an important part of our calling and one of the purposes of fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:25).

We tend to think of encouragement as something we do to help people who are sad, disappointed, or otherwise “discouraged,” and while that is certainly an important part of the role of spiritual encouragement, a number of scriptures make it clear that encouragement is something we should look for and share at all times – not just in the “bad times.”

To be truly encouraging to others, we need to remember to be careful, as the apostle Paul reminds us, not to “pull each other down” by negative things we say or do, but rather to “build each other up” through positive words and actions (Ephesians 4:29). To be truly encouraging to others we must be encouraged ourselves, and we need to continually look for and be aware of the blessings and help we receive in our lives, as well as the encouraging words of God and of others through whom he works. Encouragement is a gift we receive as well as give (Romans 1:12).

Encouragement in Five Verses:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 ESV

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

- Ephesians 4:29 NIV

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

- Hebrews 3:13 NIV

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

- Romans 1:12 ESV

that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 NIV

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Something to think about: How often do I feel I could use encouragement – and do I try to encourage others at least that often?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Acts 4:36, Romans 12:8, 15:5, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Colossians 2:2.

Related topics in this book: *Faith, *Hope, *Fellowship.

17. GOOD WORKS

The New Testament makes it clear that we are not saved by works – no matter how many or how good those works might be – we are saved through *Faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But the Bible is equally clear that saving faith, if it is present, produces good works (Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 1:10, etc.). The two aspects of this truth are perfectly summarized by the apostle Paul: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy... I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good...” (Titus 3:4-8 NIV).

As is often said by theologians, “we are not saved *by* doing good works, but saved *to* do good works.” The Bible thus shows that religion and faith without good works is unacceptable to God (Titus 1:16, James 2:14-26).

The words of Jesus and the apostles also clearly show that although eternal life is the freely given gift of God, the level of our eventual reward will be according to what we have done in life: our good works (Matthew 16:24-27, 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, Revelation 22:12).

Good Works in Five Verses:

- Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- James 2:14, 17 ESV

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? ... So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

- Colossians 1:10 ESV

... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

- Romans 2:6-8 ESV

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

- Revelation 22:12 NIV

Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

Something to think about: What opportunities do I have to increase the good I can do in my own family, my neighbourhood and even in distant places around the world?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Matthew 5:14-16, 16:24-27, Romans 7:4.

Related topics in this book: *Fruits of the Spirit, *Encouragement, *Fellowship.

18. SHARING OUR FAITH

Sharing our faith with others is an important part of Christian life, but one that carries a great responsibility that we do not turn others away from the truth through the way we witness. A key principle is that it is usually far more effective to share with someone who has expressed a desire to understand life or to deal with problems rather than just confronting someone with our beliefs out of context. That is why it is often said that effective witnessing involves listening as much as talking.

Sharing our faith is also usually more effective when we avoid religious terminology and complicated theological concepts. Usually the truth in simple terms is what convicts people. We should also only share as long as the other person continues to show interest – going beyond that point is not witnessing, but unwanted harassment (Matthew 7:6). We should remember that effective witness is often just giving people something to think about rather than trying to force them to quickly make a life-changing decision regarding what they have heard. Giving a little truth and providing an opportunity for follow up – a recommended book or website, or a business card with contact information – can be more effective in the long run than trying to force acceptance of the gospel.

We must always remember that it is God who opens people's minds to see the truth, not us. We should also remember that what we do is always a more effective witness than what we say (Matthew 5:16). If our light truly is shining, people will often ask us about our beliefs and view of life.

Sharing our Faith in Five Verses:

- Mark 16:15 ESV

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

- Acts 1:8 ESV

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- Matthew 5:16 ESV

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- 1 Peter 3:15 ESV

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

- Romans 1:16 ESV

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ...

Something to think about: Do I understand that in many cases sharing our faith is far more effective when we have already established a relationship of friendship or service with someone?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Psalm 40:9-10, Jeremiah 1:7-8, Matthew 28:18-20, Colossians 4:2-6.

Related topics in this book: *Salvation, *The Gospel, *Good Works.

19. FORGIVING OTHERS

Perhaps no concept, other than love, is more associated with Christianity than that of forgiveness. Not only is the forgiveness of our sins an essential doctrine of Christian belief, but Jesus also made it clear that we cannot expect God to forgive us if we do not forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 6:12, etc). Christ also lived out a life of forgiveness, of course, praying that God would forgive those who killed him (Luke 23:34).

The Bible also gives further instruction regarding forgiving others. First and foremost, although it is human to want to only forgive up to a point, Christianity tells us that there must be no limit to the number of times we grant this forgiveness of others (Luke 17:3-4). We should use wisdom, however, and whenever possible get help or remove ourselves from any situation in which we are being victimized (Matthew 18:15-20).

The common saying “forgive and forget” is good advice, but some things cannot be easily forgotten and some things are particularly hard for us, humanly, to forgive. In those cases we must ask God’s help to forgive and, while we may not be able to forget some of the sins of others against us, we can ask for God’s help not to ever hold those things against those who have hurt or offended us.

Forgiving Others in Five Verses:

- Luke 6:37 ESV

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.

- Matthew 18:21-22 NIV

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

- Matthew 6:14-15 ESV

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

- Mark 11:25 ESV

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

- Colossians 3:13 ESV

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Something to think about: Is there anything that someone has done against me that I am still angry or upset about? If there is, ask God for help to forgive as he does.

Some other scriptures on this topic: Matthew 5:43-45, 6:12, 18:15-17, Luke 6:27-35, 17:3-4, Ephesians 4:32.

Related topics in this book: *Jesus Christ, *Salvation, *The Gospel.

20. RESISTING TEMPTATION

We are all tempted by things that are contrary to God's way of life (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Bible shows us that temptations come primarily through our own nature (James 1:13-15), but also through spiritual forces of which we may be less aware (1 Peter 5:8-11). The Bible is also clear that the only way to overcome the temptations that assail us is to stay active in our relationship with God (Galatians 5:16), keeping close to him in prayer and study. We should pray daily for help to overcome temptation – both before it happens and when it does occur (Matthew 6:13, Luke 22:40). Our study of God's word is also effective in helping us avoid and turn from temptation (Psalm 119:11). With this preparation we must then resist temptation when it occurs and are promised that if we do resist, we can overcome with God's help (James 4:7).

Although we may experience many types of temptation in life, they are all the same in terms of overcoming: our resistance must be *immediate* because it is only as we dwell on temptations that they can take hold (James 1:14-15). The only temptations that are overcome are overcome at their beginning.

Resisting Temptation in Five Verses:

- James 1:13-15 ESV

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

- 1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

- Hebrews 2:18, 4:15 ESV

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted ... For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

- Galatians 5:16 ESV

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

- James 4:7 ESV

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Something to think about: Have I learned the principle that the only temptation we can overcome is the one which we resist immediately?

Some other scriptures on this topic: 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Galatians 5:16-21.

Related topics in this book: *Jesus Christ, *The Holy Spirit, *Humanity, *Sin.

21. GIVING THANKS

Thankfulness is a vitally important part of our relationship with God. It is sometimes said that the “password” to get into God’s presence is “thank you,” and although that is not quoted from a biblical scripture, the principle is certainly true that we should approach God with an attitude of thankfulness (Psalm 100:4) knowing that everything we have comes from him (James 1:17).

Yet thankfulness is not a natural human trait (Luke 17:12-16), and it is one we need to learn. It is human to be more aware of what we do not have than the blessings we do enjoy, so developing a spirit of thankfulness helps us get a better perspective on our own lives, to be more conscious of the things other people do not have, and to help us desire to share what we have (Hebrews 13:16).

Once we come to see God’s many gifts in our lives, we need to learn to continually give thanks for them. We see this constant expression of thanks in many of the psalms of David where the words “Give thanks to the Lord” are often repeated (Psalm 105:1, 106:1, 107:1, 118:1, etc.). In the New Testament we see the same stress on thankfulness in the writings of the apostle Paul who urges us to give thanks “always and for everything” (Ephesians 5:20) and even in “all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When we come to see that God works in every area of our lives, once they are dedicated to him, we see why we can indeed always give thanks.

Giving Thanks in Five Verses:

- Psalm 30:12 ESV
... O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV
give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- Ephesians 5:20 ESV

giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- Colossians 3:15-17 ESV

... And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- Philippians 4:6 ESV

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Something to think about: What area or aspect of my life am I not thankful for? How does what Paul says about being thankful for all things apply to that?

Some other scriptures on this topic: 2 Corinthians 9:15, Colossians 4:2.

Related topics in this book: *God the Father, *Prayer, *Worship.

22. BIBLE STUDY

The study of God's word is, of course, one of the greatest Christian duties and opportunities: through prayer we communicate with God, through our study of his word he communicates with us. But Bible study is much more than just reading. To be truly engaged in our study of the word of God, we need to approach the Bible prayerfully, asking God to help us see what we need to see.

Our focus must always be on the Bible itself, but we can enhance our Bible study by learning to use guides and develop skills that help us to see the meaning of the Scriptures more clearly. Even simple things such as trying a new translation, studying part of the Old Testament and part of the New Testament each day, or taking notes and reviewing them later can enrich our study and our spiritual lives.

Bible study must also be regular to be profitable. For maximum benefit we should aim to study daily (Acts 17:11), at a time with minimum distractions before we become too busy or overtired. How long we study each day is not as important as what we learn. Whenever possible, we should study until we see something that applies to us personally – guiding, correcting, or encouraging us.

After we study a section of God's word we should meditate on its meaning and application in our lives – something we can also do at other times of day, apart from when we study (Psalm 1:2).

Bible Study in Five Verses:

- Joshua 1:8 ESV

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 119:18, 105 ESV

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. ... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

- Acts 17:11 HCSB

The [people of Berea] were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, since they welcomed the message with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

- 2 Timothy 3:14-17 ESV

... the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 2:15 ESV

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

Something to think about: What one thing can I do, starting today, to enhance my Bible study and help increase my understanding of God's word?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Deuteronomy 11:18, Psalm 119:11, Proverbs 3:1-2, Hebrews 4:12.

Related topics in this book: *The Bible, *Prayer, *Faith.

23. PRAYER

Prayer is an opportunity to address the Creator of the universe in a personal way – as our Father (Matthew 6:9, John 15:16), and the Bible also gives examples of praying to his Son, Jesus, on occasion (John 14:13-14, Acts 7:59-60). The English word “prayer” comes from a Latin word meaning “to ask,” or “to beg,” but prayer is much more than just requesting something we personally want (James 4:3) or asking only when we are in dire need (Jeremiah 11:11). God desires regular and real communication with us (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), and prayer may include thanksgiving, confession, praise, asking for our needs, prayer for others, etc. We see this in the “Lord’s Prayer” – the outline prayer Jesus gave his followers – that we can use as a basis for our own prayers (Matthew 6:9-13).

Prayer is often visualized in fixed ways in various religions and cultures, but the Bible shows people praying on their knees (1 Kings 8:54), standing (1 Kings 8:22), bowing (Exodus 4:31), and even lying on their faces before God (2 Chronicles 20:18, Matthew 26:39). We may pray with our eyes opened or closed, in our thoughts or out loud. We can pray in almost any manner, but we can certainly follow the example of Jesus who offered many of his private prayers kneeling humbly before God. God is everywhere, so we can pray anywhere, though a clean and quiet place will usually provide fewer distractions to us as we pray (Matthew 6:6).

Our attitude is always important. Prayer should never be done to elevate ourselves (Matthew 6:5) but to elevate God in our lives. Prayer should always be offered in faith (Mark 9:24, 11:24), in an obedient spirit (John 9:31), and with an attitude of forgiveness of others (Mark 11:25). Prayer offered in this way will always be heard, even if it is sometimes answered in ways we do not expect. Finally, just as the apostle Paul urged his readers to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), we can live prayerfully as we go about our daily lives – staying in a prayerful attitude by offering thoughts of praise and thanks to God and seeking his guidance and help at any time (Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer in Five Verses:

- Matthew 6:9-13 ESV

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...”

- Philippians 4:6 ESV

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

- Romans 8:26 NIV

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with wordless groans.

- John 14:13-14 NIV

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

- 1 John 5:14-15 NIV

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Something to think about: Do I think of prayer as mainly asking for things or as an opportunity to develop my relationship with God?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Psalm 34:17, Jeremiah 33:3, Matthew 6:5-8, 1 Timothy 2:1-4, James 5:13-18.

Related topics in this book: *Bible Study, *Giving Thanks, *Worship.

24. WORSHIP

Worship is one of the most important aspects of our relationship with God. If we truly worship him, we are more likely to obey him, follow his guidance, and love him in our lives. The Bible shows that as Creator of everything, God alone is worthy of worship (Luke 4:8); worship of anyone or anything else is worship of the creation rather than the creator (Revelation 19:10).

Many think of worship as being something done in a formal setting in church services, but worship can be done in private (Genesis 22:5) and in public (1 Kings 8:22-61), and – like *Prayer – in different ways. As a result, various words are found in the Bible which are translated “worship” in English. The most common words used in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament mean “to bow down,” “to kneel,” or “to prostrate oneself [lay on the ground],” before someone as a gesture of ultimate respect (Psalm 95:6, Romans 14:11). But other words indicate worshipping by giving praise silently, by speaking, in song, or giving honor in other ways, because a worshipful approach to God will be expressed in different ways in different circumstances. Worship is ultimately more an attitude than any particular action. The Bible shows that only worship from the heart is acceptable to God (John 4:23), and simply repeating rituals or words of praise means nothing to him (Matthew 6:7).

The Book of Psalms is the Bible’s preeminent book of worship, as a great deal of what is found there describes worship of God or consists of words of worship. There is no better book than Psalms to help us to see true worship in action and expressed in many ways (Psalm 150:1-6, etc). When we read about the life of King David, the author of most of the psalms, we see examples of him praising and worshipping God in prayer, in music and even in dancing (2 Samuel 6:14), as worship can often involve an expression of our joy in the relationship we have with God, although its focus is always on God himself.

Worship in Five Verses:

- Psalm 29:2 ESV

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.

- Psalm 95:6 ESV

... let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

- John 4:23-24 ESV

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

- Romans 12:1 ESV

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

- Hebrews 12:28 ESV

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.

Something to think about: Have I thought about reading the Book of Psalms from the perspective of better understanding worship?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Psalm 95:1-6, 99:9, 100:4, 150:1-6, Isaiah 12:5, Ephesians 5:19, Hebrews 13:15.

Related topics in this book: *Prayer, *Giving Thanks.

PART THREE:
WHAT WE NEED TO HAVE

25. INDWELLING OF THE SPIRIT

The activity of the Spirit of God is often described in the Old Testament – we see, for example, many verses talking about the Spirit working through God’s prophets (Nehemiah 9:30, etc.). The Holy Spirit clearly was given to individuals with whom God was working closely, such as David (Psalm 51:11); but there are many indications that before New Testament times it was more common for God to choose to let his Spirit work *with* individuals rather than *in* them (Isaiah 63:11, Haggai 2:5, 2 Chronicles 24:20). A more general outpouring of the Holy Spirit was prophesied for God’s people (Ezekiel 36:26-27) and spoken of specifically by Christ to his followers (John 14:16-17). That promise began to be fulfilled after Jesus’ resurrection when the Spirit of God was given to many individuals (Acts 2).

It is through his Spirit that God dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16), and we become a “temple” (1 Corinthians 6:19). It is also through the Holy Spirit that we experience God’s presence and his power working in our lives. But the Spirit is only given if we are obedient (Acts 5:32), and usually only after *Repentance and *Baptism. It is then, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that we receive the many *Fruits of the Spirit.

Indwelling of the Spirit in Five Verses:

- Ezekiel 36:26-27 ESV

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you... And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

- John 14:15-17 ESV

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

- Luke 11:13 ESV

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

- Romans 8:9-11 ESV

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him... If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

- Acts 5:32 ESV

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Something to think about: Do I understand that although God promises to give his Spirit to those who ask and obey, we can “grieve” (Ephesians 4:30) or “quench” (1 Thessalonians 5:19) the Spirit and must safeguard it in our lives?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Matthew 3:16, John 7:38-39.

Related topics in this book: *The Holy Spirit, *Repentance, *Baptism, *Fruits of the Spirit.

26. FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

When God gives us his Spirit, we receive not only a “down payment” or “deposit” on eventual membership in his eternal family, as the apostle Paul explains (2 Corinthians 5:5), but also we begin to receive the “fruits of the Spirit” which are aspects of the nature of God himself (Galatians 5:22-23). God may give special spiritual gifts or fruits to specific individuals for specific purposes (1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Hebrews 2:4), but he gives many aspects of his nature to all who are committed to growing in him.

Although the best-known fruits of the Spirit are probably those listed in Galatians 5:22-23, the Holy Spirit also provides many other gifts. It is through the indwelling of the Spirit that we come to more deeply understand God and his way (John 14:26), that we are able to communicate with him (Romans 8:26), and that we receive power to change our lives and to do his work (Acts 1:8). But God does not impart the fruits of the Spirit to us completely formed or all at one time – he usually gives us a small amount of these qualities and desires that we constantly grow in them (John 15:1-8). The Christian life does not ever stop in the quest to produce more fruit through ongoing spiritual growth.

Fruits of the Spirit in Five Verses:

- Ephesians 5:8-11 ESV

... Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

- John 15:1-4, 8 NIV

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear

fruit unless you remain in me....This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

- Luke 6:43-45 ESV

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit... The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil.

- Galatians 5:22-23 ESV

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 HCSB

to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another, faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of languages, to another, interpretation of languages.

Something to think about: What fruits of the Spirit are growing in my life, and are there fruits which I do not display that I need to diligently ask for?

Some other scriptures on this topic: John 15:1-17, Hebrews 2:4.

Related topics in this book: *The Holy Spirit, *Indwelling of the Spirit.

27. FAITH

As is often said, faith involves two things: belief and trust. When we talk about “The Christian Faith,” we mean the beliefs of Christianity, but when we talk about “a Christian’s faith,” we mean something more than just belief, we mean trust. To use a simple analogy, given the laws of physics, we may believe that a boat should float, but we only get into one if we trust that it will. In the same way, we can know what the Bible says, but we only have believing faith if we come not only to know but also to trust what it says enough to act on the knowledge (James 2:19).

Faith is applied in all areas of our spiritual lives. We need faith that God exists and that he created the universe (Hebrews 11:3), that his way of life is right and good, that although we have sinned we can be forgiven, and that the sacrifice of Christ enables that forgiveness (Acts 16:31). We also need faith for any kind of answered prayer (James 5:15, etc.).

Although we may have some limited human level of faith, deep faith is a gift of God (1 Corinthians 12:9) and can be developed through ongoing spiritual growth and transformation (Romans 4:20, 12:6, Jude 1:20). Faith and works are sometimes said to be antithetical, but they are not. Although the Bible says clearly that we are saved by faith, not works, it also shows clearly that living, saving faith will produce *Good Works.

Faith in Five Verses:

- Hebrews 11:1, 6 ESV

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ... And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- 2 Corinthians 5:7 HCSB

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

- Ephesians 2:8 ESV

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

- Romans 3:28, 31 NIV

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ... Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

- James 2:17 ESV

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Something to think about: Does my faith extend beyond basic belief to active trust? Our faith is only complete to the degree we believe *and* trust God.

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 10:17, Hebrews 11:1-40, James 2:17-26.

Related topics in this book: *Repentance, *Baptism,
*Salvation, *Good Works.

28. HOPE

Along with *Love and *Faith, Hope is the third of the great triad of qualities listed by the apostle Paul as central to the Christian life (1 Corinthians 13:13). But we must understand that Christian hope is not the same as that of the world. In common usage, when we say we “hope” something good happens, we mean we don’t know if it will occur or not – but we hope it will. Christian hope is far different – it is the certainty that God will perform what he has promised. So biblical hope is akin to faith – we might say that hope is the future tense of faith.

Hope, like faith, is rooted in trust of God. In the larger sense of what is often called the “Christian Hope,” our hope is in God’s *Salvation and resurrection to the promised afterlife (Acts 23:6, Galatians 5:5, Colossians 1:5). In the narrower sense we need true hope to survive specific problems and difficulties we may experience in life (Romans 5:2-5). So, true confident hope is also closely related to patience. As the apostle Paul wrote: “For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we await for it with patience” (Romans 8:24-25). Finally, true hope is also the basis of much of the joy we experience in the Christian life (Proverbs 10:28; Romans 12:12, 15:13).

Biblical hope, then, like faith, is based on our trust in God; it is a source of joy in our lives; and it powers the quality of patience we need to complete the calling we have been given.

Hope in Five Verses:

- Jeremiah 29:11 ESV

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.

- Proverbs 23:18 NIV

There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

- Ephesians 1:15-18 NIV

... ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people ... I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

- Romans 15:13 ESV

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

- Romans 5:2-5 ESV

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. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame...

Something to think about: Do I have the kind of hope that fills Christians with joy and peace? If not, how does Romans 15:13 show I may receive it?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Psalms 39:7, 71:14, Proverbs 10:28, Romans 12:12, Colossians 1:4-5.

Related topics in this book: *Faith, *Love, *Fruits of the Spirit.

29. LOVE

Not only is God himself described as being the personification of love (1 John 4:16), but Christ summarized the whole law of God in terms of love – as love of God and love of neighbor. The apostles Peter, Paul, James, and John all stressed that love is the fulfilling of God's way of life (1 Peter 4:8, Romans 13:10, James 2:8, 1 John 4:7-21). In his great "love" chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul identifies true spiritual love as the greatest virtue, shows us how that love is expressed, and reminds us that no matter what good works we may do, if we do not have love our efforts are in vain.

Second only to 1 Corinthians 13, the Book of Romans also provides a great deal of insight into the nature of true spiritual love. Although the book covers many topics, Romans 1–11 focuses on God's love for us, and Romans 12–16 looks at the effect of God's love as we, in turn, love others. In Romans 8:39 we find one of the most encouraging verses in the Bible – that nothing can separate us "...from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The epistles of the apostle John provide the third great area of scripture in which love is expounded – with the timeless message that if we are to be like God (1 John 4:16), we must love one another (1 John 4:11).

Love in Five Verses:

- 1 John 4:16 NIV

...God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

- Matthew 22:37-40 ESV

... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

- 1 John 3:10-11 NIV

...Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another.

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a ESV

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

- Romans 12:9-13 NIV

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Something to think about: How does the concept of love in popular culture differ from the love that is described in these five verses, and to which God calls us?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 1-16, John 3:16.

Related topics in this book: *God the Father, *Salvation, *Fellowship.

30. TRUTH

In the age of relativism in which we live, the idea of truth is often rejected and even ridiculed, but the Bible is clear that truth is a reality and that it must permeate our lives. The Bible shows that God is truth (John 14:6 – perhaps why so many want to reject the concept of truth), that his word is truth (Psalm 119:160, John 17:17), and that we must live in truth if we are to be like him (Psalm 43:3, John 8:31-32).

How do we apply truth in our everyday lives? The Bible gives no excuse for even “small” or “white” lies, but it does show that we should use wisdom and that we do not normally need to give details of the truth that might hurt others in a given circumstance. We see this when God commands Samuel to say he will go to Bethlehem to sacrifice, rather than endangering himself by mentioning that the primary reason for his journey was to anoint David (1 Samuel 16:1-2). Nevertheless, although we can use wisdom in *what* truth we say, we are given a great many examples that whatever we *do* say should be true (Proverbs 12:19, Zechariah 8:16, etc.).

Truth involves much more than what we say, however. We can speak the truth yet still live lives that are a lie (Proverbs 11:3, 1 John 2:4). The Bible says Satan is not only the originator of lies (John 8:44), but also that he acts as what he is not (2 Corinthians 11:14). Ultimately, those who lie and whose lives have become a lie will not be part of the Kingdom of God (Revelation 21:8). Conversely, Christians are spoken of as those “who belong to the truth” (1 John 3:19), and truth will be a vital part of their eternal life (2 John 1:2).

Truth in Five Verses:

- Zechariah 8:16 NIV

These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;

- Proverbs 11:3 ESV

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

- John 8:31-32 ESV

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

- Ephesians 4:15, 25 ESV

... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ... Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

- Titus 1:2 ESV

In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began

Something to think about: Do I seek for truth to permeate every aspect of my life – my thoughts, words and deeds?

Other scriptures on this topic: Psalm 43:3, 119:160, Proverbs 11:3, 19:9, Romans 1:25, 2:20.

Related topics in this book: *The Bible, *God the Father, *Jesus Christ.

31. OBEDIENCE

Although we are saved by *Faith rather than works, God's word is clear that saving faith does not negate obedience (James 1:22), and that faith and obedience are closely linked (Romans 1:5, Hebrews 11:8.). We must first have faith, and then obedience, like *Good Works, grows out of that faith.

God certainly deals with us according to our obedience or lack of it. In the Old Testament and New Testament alike, we find curses given for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68, Ephesians 5:6) and blessings for obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14, James 1:25); but obedience must be sincere. The Bible records numerous cases of insincere obedience that were not blessed at all. For example, it is said of Amaziah, one of the kings of ancient Israel, that: "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly" (2 Chronicles 25:2 NIV). Obedience performed because we feel we have to obey, rather than because we want to obey (Isaiah 1:19), is not obedience at all.

True obedience from the heart is based on love, and obedience to God's commands is the clearest indicator of our love for God (Deuteronomy 11:1, 1 John 5:3, 2 John 1:6, etc.). Thus Jesus instructed his disciples to keep his commandments if they loved him (John 14:15), just as he kept his Father's commandments because he loved the Father (John 14:31, Hebrews 5:8).

Obedience in Five Verses:

- John 14:15, 21, 31 ESV

If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him ... I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father...

- 1 John 5:3 ESV

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

- Luke 6:46 ESV

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?

- 1 John 2:3-5 ESV

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected....

- 1 John 3:24 NIV

The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Something to think about: We can only know if we are being obedient by knowing God's word. Do I know what God desires and expects of me?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Psalm 119:30, 44, 60, Romans 6:16, 1 Peter 1:14.

Related topics in this book: *Sin, *Faith, *Good Works.

32. PURITY

The importance of purity is seen in that the apostle Paul lists *impurity* as one of the chief “fruits of the flesh” which can keep us from inheriting the *Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 18). Purity is often thought of as relating only to sexual behavior – which it certainly does – but purity has to do with behavior in every part of our lives. We are called to lives that are pure in thought, word, and deed. Purity operates in two spheres – regarding ourselves and others.

Personal purity has to do with the way we control ourselves and how our own behavior is affected. But the purity we need to have before God is more than just stopping before we do something immoral or wrong – it often involves a conscious decision to avoid situations that might provide temptation or compromise rather than trying to turn from them when they occur. An attitude of personal purity actively avoids impurity.

Relational purity works in the other direction – our conduct can influence others for good (1 Timothy 4:12) or evil (1 Corinthians 15:33). Maintaining or not maintaining purity in our speech and in such things as our reading and viewing habits can have a much greater influence on other people than we sometimes realize. A case in point is the use of pornography which, apart from the negative and often addictive effects it has on the individual using it, can seriously damage relationships with mates, family members and others, as well, of course, as our relationship with God.

Purity in Five Verses:

- Matthew 5:8 ESV

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

- Psalm 119:9 ESV

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 ESV

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God ...For God has not called us for impurity...

- Ephesians 5:5 ESV

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

- Colossians 3:5 ESV

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Something to think about: How does my “social input” – the influence I receive from my friends and the entertainment I choose – affect my thinking? Does it lead to acceptance of immorality or impurity? Would I recommend the books I read and the movies I watch to my Christian friends, or to God?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Romans 13:14, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 18, Galatians 5:19-21, Titus 1:15, 2:12.

Related topics in this book: *Sin, *Resisting Temptation, *Obedience.

33. COURAGE

Courage is just as important for our spiritual wellbeing – if not more so – than for any other area of our lives. Courage or confidence is inextricably linked with faith (Hebrews 11:1, Ephesians 3:12): we use the expression “the courage of his convictions” and every man and woman of God must have such courage in order to follow a life of faith.

The apostle Paul tells us that strong confidence as opposed to fear is one of the *Fruits of the Spirit God has given us (2 Timothy 1:7) – if *The Holy Spirit is working within us, we will have courage. But like any other spiritual “fruit,” courage is something we can develop and increase: we can confidently ask God for help to develop greater courage if we need it.

Practically, spiritual courage often means that we do not act according to what we sense others want or expect us to do when it comes to moral and spiritual issues. It also means that fear no longer controls any area of our lives.

Courage in Five Verses:

- Joshua 1:7-9 NIV

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

- 1 Corinthians 16:13 NIV

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.

- Philippians 1:20 NIV

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

- Hebrews 13:6 NIV

So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

- Hebrews 10:35 NIV

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

Something to think about: In what area of my life could I help others more if I had more courage?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Jeremiah 17:7, Philippians 1:20, 2 Timothy 1:7, Hebrews 4:16.

Related topics in this book: *Faith, *Fruits of the Spirit.

34. HUMILITY

Humility has been called “one of the most essential things that characterizes true Christianity,” and the teachings of Christ are certainly full of instructions that show us we must have this trait. Jesus not only taught, but also personified humility (Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:3-8) and was exalted after his resurrection as a result of the humility he perfected (Philippians 2:9-11). The Scriptures are clear that we, too, will be exalted in the future life only to the extent that we have learned humility in this one (Matthew 23:12, James 4:6, 10, 1 Peter 5:6).

We exhibit humility in our lives to the extent that we both come to see ourselves as nothing compared to God (Micah 6:8, 1 Peter 5:6) and also come to see ourselves as the servants of others (Philippians 2:3-4). Humility is vitally important not only because it is the opposite of a proud and rebellious attitude that exalts itself before God, but also because humility is the basis of much of the gentleness, patience, and love we need to exhibit in our relationships with others (Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:12).

Many scriptures in the writings of the apostle Paul show us that true humility is not ever a crushing lack of self-confidence, but a clear picture of our own importance relative to God and a desire, in love, to place others before ourselves. With this mindset, Paul shows us, we can have great confidence in the life and calling that God gives us (1 Corinthians 15:9-10, Ephesians 3:8).

Humility in Five Verses:

- Micah 6:8 ESV

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

- Matthew 23:12 ESV

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

- Philippians 2:3-8 HCSB

Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, who ... humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

- Colossians 3:12 ESV

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

- 1 Peter 5:5-6 NIV

... All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Something to think about: In what ways can I apply Paul’s admonition that we “submit ourselves one to another” (Ephesians 5:21) to learn and properly express right humility?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Psalm 147:6, Proverbs 16:33, 22:4, Matthew 20:28, Romans 12:3, Ephesians 4:2, James 4:6, 10.

Related topics in this book: *Jesus Christ, *Fruits of the Spirit.

35. WISDOM

Wisdom is one of the attributes of God (Job 12:12-13) and Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:24, Colossians 2:3), and one that we should also display in our own lives. In the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs has much to say regarding wisdom and frequently links it with knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 17:27-28, 24:3-6, etc.), and Proverbs also makes the point that wisdom is our primary need (Proverbs 4:7). In the New Testament, wisdom is also highly praised and grouped with other important qualities that we should have such as praise and thanksgiving (Colossians 3:16, etc.).

The Bible counsels us to get wisdom through experience and advice (Proverbs 19:20), through study of God's word (Psalm 19:7), and through the help of the Spirit of God (James 1:5, Ephesians 1:16-17). However, we do not get wisdom in the way we can just learn facts and knowledge – to get true wisdom we must have the correct attitude. We see this in scriptures that tell us “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10), and “...with the humble is wisdom...” (Proverbs 11:2).

Because wisdom involves the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, wisdom ultimately brings us happiness (Proverbs 3:13), helps us to better love and serve others, and helps us to fulfill our spiritual potential (Proverbs 24:13–14).

Wisdom in Five Verses:

- Job 12:13 ESV

“With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding.

- Proverbs 3:13-17 ESV

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

- Ephesians 5:15-17 ESV

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise ... understand what the will of the Lord is.

- James 1:5 ESV

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

- James 3:17 ESV

... the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

Something to think about: We are not always equally wise in all areas of our lives. Are there areas in my life where I need more wisdom?

Some other scriptures on this topic: Proverbs 1:20–33, 8:1–9:12, 10:23, 24:3–6, Ecclesiastes 8:1, Luke 21:15.

Related topics in this book: *Prayer, *Bible Study, *Humility.

36. ENDURANCE

Endurance is a fitting topic with which to end this book. In the long run, none of the qualities we have looked at in this final section – the traits we must have in our lives – means anything if we do not have endurance. Love that stops loving, faith that stops believing, hope that stops hoping are all pointless. Just as Ezekiel 3:20 tells us that the deeds of those who stop doing good are no longer remembered by God, we are told that we must persist in our fight against wrong and our dedication to doing good.

Christ gave specific parables to show the importance of persistence in prayer (Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8, etc.), and the principle applies, of course, in all aspects of the Christian life as many other scriptures make clear.

We must be willing to endure problems and hardships for our beliefs (1 Peter 3:14), knowing that it is only those who do persist to the end who will be saved (Matthew 24:13) and who will fully accomplish God's will in their lives (Revelation 2:10). But we are not left alone in this – we have firm assurance that if we do our part in enduring, God will complete his work in us (Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 3:14).

We must always remember, however, that Christian endurance is not just about our own lives. The Bible shows that in addition to being called to persist, we are also called to help others to endure and to continue – to help them fulfill the purpose God has given them.

Persistence in Five Verses:

- Matthew 24:13 ESV
... the one who endures to the end will be saved.

- Romans 5:3-4 ESV

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

- Galatians 6:9 ESV

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

- Revelation 2:10 ESV

... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Something to think about: It is easy to become wrapped up in our own struggle to endure and to survive, but do I dedicate time to thinking how I may help others to persevere?

Other scriptures on this topic: Proverbs 24:16, Colossians 1:11, Hebrews 3:14, 10:36, James 1:2-4, 12, Revelation 2:10.

Related topics in this book: *Faith, *Hope, *Courage, *Encouragement.

AFTERWORD

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