

Chapter 1

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

God calls each of us into fellowship with Him through His Son, Jesus, giving us the opportunity to live “life at its best.” God desires this fellowship with us even when we rebel against Him. *“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). There is nothing that can break this fellowship with us that God initiates and nurtures. *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).

God brings all kinds of experiences, pleasant and painful, into our lives, in order to draw us closer to Him and shape us into the people He wants us to be. The closer our relationship with God, the more Christ-like we will become. We will find satisfaction, joy, and purpose in life. God’s unconditional love, even while He is “pruning” us (John 15:2), will show us how to live “life at its best.”

There is no greater joy than experiencing a close fellowship with Christ. That oneness is not only our joy, but our strength as well. Sometimes, we foolishly think we can handle the stresses of life by ourselves. To teach us to rely on His strength, God may even allow us to fail. Then we rejoice, for “[Christ’s] power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).



GOD IS ALWAYS REACHING OUT TO US

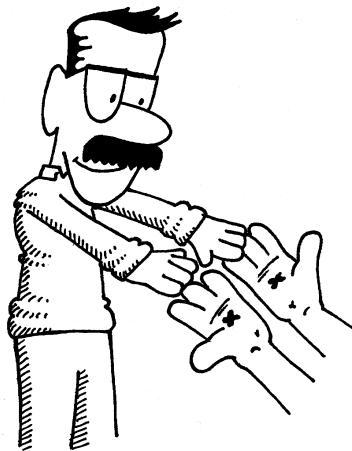
H.A. Ironside wrote about the type of man God wants:

God is not looking for brilliant men, is not depending upon eloquent men, and is not shut up to the use of talented men in sending His Gospel out in the world. God is looking for broken men, for men who have judged themselves in the light of the Cross of Christ. When He wants anything done, He takes men who have come to an end of themselves, and whose trust and confidence is not in themselves but in God.¹

God seeks fellowship with us in spite of our sinfulness. He sees our attempts at independence. He sees our desire for worldly things. In spite of what

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he sees, He is willing to accept us as we are because of Christ's act of reconciliation. We are acceptable to God because Christ has made us acceptable. Because of His love, God desires intimacy with us. God does not wait for us to come to Him; He comes to us in His Holy Word and Sacraments. Christ has broken down the walls of alienation and has put an end to our loneliness. On our behalf, God sent Jesus, Who is "*the way and the truth and the life*" and the only way to the Father (John 14:6).



We can make the choice of being alone, without God. We can make the choice of keeping Him in the margins of our lives, or, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live with Christ at the center. Only God will satisfy us; everything else will fail us. Many of us need to discover how empty and how unhappy we are without Him. Tragically, many of us do not realize how desolate and unfulfilled we are. Keeping ourselves busy—albeit productively—we do not allow ourselves opportunity to explore the emptiness within. When, finally, we come to the end of ourselves and choose to stop rejecting

God, we discover that He is there waiting for us. "*The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

Almost as tragically, many of us believers live as "Sunday Christians," going about our daily lives with Christ on the periphery. We trade God's "*abundant goodness*" (Psalm 145:7), choosing instead the privilege of running our own lives. There is an old saying: "If God seems far away, guess who has moved." He is always close to us—even though we do not know it. When our lives start to unravel through various circumstances, God is present to restore that frayed relationship He has with us. His Spirit leads us to long for Him, as Isaiah the Prophet did: "*My soul yearns for You in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for You . . .*" (Isaiah 26:9a). Jesus promised that He Himself would satisfy us: "...*whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst*" (John 4:14a).

With Christ at the center of our lives, our thirst is quenched by His "living water." "*Indeed, the water [He gives us] will become in [us] a spring of water welling up to eternal life*" (John 4:14b). Our perspective changes from an earthly, temporal one to a heavenly eternal one. "...*those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires . . . the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace*" (Romans 8:5-6). As God's people, we must always realize that what happens within us is more important than what happens to us. John 1:12-13 promises, "*Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent,*

nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." If we want to know what God is like, we can look at Jesus. If someone wants to know what Jesus is like, he should be able to look at His followers. Can people see Christ in you?

The inner joy and peace that come from an intimate fellowship with Christ will survive any circumstance. The relationship will endure, no matter what comes our way. God has the answers for us in His Word. Through His Son, Jesus, we receive all of God's riches. "*He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will*"(Ephesians 1:5). What a beautiful thought this is. God chose us before time began to be His children! In the eternal councils of the Holy Trinity, He adopted us. Because of Jesus:

- We belong!
- We matter!
- We are no longer outcasts!
- We are no longer second-class citizens!
- We are members of His family!

UNDERSTANDING OUR NEED FOR GOD

For generations, we have been obsessed with searching for meaning and purpose in our lives. Wherever we live, whatever we do for a living, we are looking for significance in life. Unfortunately, in our efforts to "find ourselves," we often go the wrong direction. Some of us will never come to understand and acknowledge that we have been created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. As Christians, we believe that God has given us life, and that life in Him gives us meaning and purpose throughout eternity.

We live in a society that tells us that power, fame, and fortune are the keys to satisfying our needs and achieving success. We are told that to achieve happiness and success, we need to focus on "self." Many who have succeeded according to the world's standards have stated their lack of satisfaction with what the world offers. Lee Iacocca said, "Fame and fortune are for the birds."

Mohammed Ali complained: "I had the world, and it was nothing." A Texas millionaire once said, "I thought money could buy happiness." He found that he was wrong. A famous film star broke down and said: "I have money, beauty, glamour, and popularity. I should be the happiest woman in the world, but I am miserable. Why?"²



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One of life's greatest illusions is that life is great when "self" is at the center and that satisfaction is gained from acquiring things of the world. Ted Turner said,



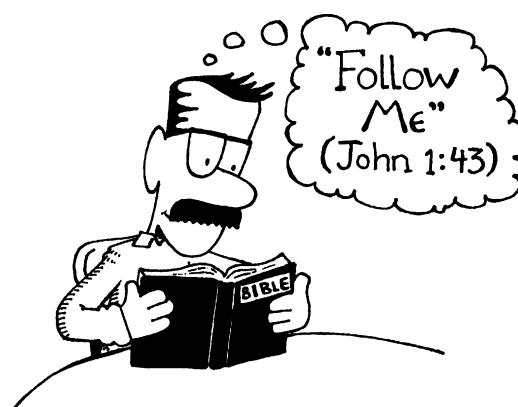
"When money is your god, you are never going to be fulfilled, you are never going to be happy, because no matter how much you have, it is never enough."³ By nature we look for peace, joy, and happiness in the wrong places (Jeremiah 2:13). Those who spend their lifetimes chasing power and success will find themselves all alone at some point. Why? Because...

- True success is not found in material things of the world.
- True success is not found in having status or power in the eyes of the world.
- True success is found when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God is at the center of our lives.

Rev. Billy Graham said the following:

Our materialistic world rushes on with its eternal quest for the fountain of happiness! The more knowledge we acquire, the less wisdom we seem to have. The more economic security we gain, the more bored and insecure we become. The more worldly pleasure we enjoy, the less satisfied and contented we are with life. We are like a restless sea, finding a little peace here and a little pleasure there, but nothing permanent and satisfying. So the search continues! Men will kill, lie, cheat, steal, and go to war to satisfy their quest for power, pleasure, and wealth, thinking thereby to gain for themselves and their particular group peace, security, contentment, and happiness, and yet in vain.

Still, inside us a little voice keeps saying, "We were not meant to be this way—we were meant for better things." We have a mysterious feeling that there is a fountain somewhere that contains the happiness which makes life worthwhile. We keep saying to ourselves that somewhere, sometime we will stumble onto the secret. Sometimes



we feel that we have obtained it—only to find it illusive, leaving us disillusioned, bewildered, unhappy, and still searching.⁴

“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). God promises that He will satisfy the longing of our hearts when we put Him first. Only a relationship with the Lord will provide lasting peace and enjoyment. When we, by the Spirit’s power, make the Lord the object of our affection and delight, He will give us the desires of our hearts.

Jesus said to Phillip, “*Follow Me*” (John 1:43). Matthew heard the same request in Matthew 9:9. Jesus is calling us as well: “Follow Me.” He empowers us to follow Him. Will we follow the fullness of Christ, or will we follow the emptiness of the world?

SEEKING AND DEPENDING ON GOD

God promised, “*You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart*” (Jeremiah 29:13). Our journey in life is a continual quest for God. He is the only answer to the confusion, the lack of morality, the spiritual void in the



world in which we live. A.W. Tozer wrote, “We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit.”⁵ We live in uncertain times, and only God is enduring and unchanging. “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8). Christ wants to be our source of strength. He continues to welcome us: “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Matthew 11:28-29).

Our major pursuit in life needs to be our relationship with the Lord. The depth of our fellowship with God determines the direction our lives will take. The response that God is looking for is our longing for Him. We need to get rid of our pride and dependence on ourselves so that we might possess the peace that only He can provide.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus told His disciples, “*Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” With the “horse before the cart,” so to speak, we do not hinder God in the work He does in and through us. Our problems are caused by ignoring God. Our problems are caused by chasing after the pleasures of the world. When we don’t seek God first in our lives, we are spiritually empty and without purpose. We will not find

fulfilling answers to “what” and “who” we are and “where” we are going. Pursuits other than a close relationship with God will lead us into frenzied activities which will not satisfy our souls’ deepest desires. “*Seek the Lord while He may be found*” (Isaiah 55:6a), God invites, and “*You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace*” (Isaiah 55:12a).

INTIMACY WITH GOD

Christ, Who gave His life for us on Calvary’s Cross, will fill the void in our souls. Nothing else on earth will satisfy us. Philippians 4:7 tells us, “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” If God is our obsession, He will satisfy our longings and bring us peace of mind.

King David expressed his deep longing for God in Psalm 63:1-5:

O God, You are my God, earnestly I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power and Your glory. Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in Your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You.

David was seeking intimacy with God, and he found it. The connectedness that David had sustained and satisfied him.

We all possess a spiritual hunger, although we may not feel the hunger pangs. We may think we have filled it, but, apart from God, there is no quenching of our spiritual hunger and thirst. David said in Psalm 42:1-2, “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*” We all yearn to know that we are not alone. King David not only knew of God’s presence, he longed for His presence **in his life**.

As God’s people, we, like David, find our happiness and sustenance in an intimate relationship with Him. After all, we are His children. “*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26). The whole world cannot fill the emptiness that exists in us without God. A relationship with God begins with acknowledging that God has made us and all creation. “*In the beginning God created . . .*” He was in the beginning and still is today, and He created us in His

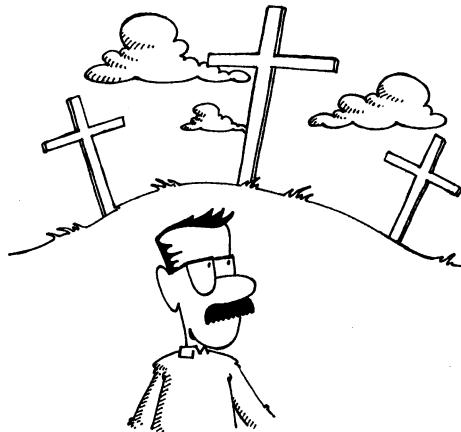




image. He redeems us through the blood of His Son, and sanctifies us through the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. Our relationship with the Lord sustains and keeps us.

For our lives to be complete, we need to remain in fellowship with Him. If we become disconnected from Him, life will be empty and incomplete. We will never be truly satisfied unless we are in communion with God. Our souls, in a state of hunger, are drawn to Him. St. Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”⁶ God

created us for Himself. We long for Him all our lives long. Our only true satisfaction and sustenance come from Him. “ . . .

.Who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's”(Psalm 103:5).

Life is at its best when we abide in Christ. In John 15:5 Jesus said, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.*” Charles Spurgeon said, “Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind, or chariots without steeds; like branches without sap, we are withered; like coals without fire, we are useless.”⁷



By the Spirit’s power, we live in intimate fellowship with God. No longer intent on serving ourselves, we realize that God pours out His blessings on us in order that we might pass His blessings on to others. Jesus said, “*Whoever believes in Me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him*” (John 7:38). When we stay in close fellowship with Jesus through His Word and Sacrament, He will use us as His channels through whom His blessings flow. We become conduits for God’s grace.⁸

KNOWING GOD

In a press conference, a Russian cosmonaut followed that atheist country’s party line by saying that when he was in space he didn’t see any evidence of God. One of our American astronauts, in a press conference about a year later, was reminded of what the Russian had said and was asked, “Did you see any evidence of God?” The American astronaut replied, “I didn’t see anything else.”

Life at its Best

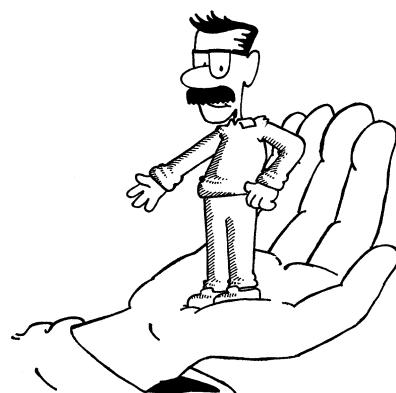
To live “life at its best” is to know God. We may know of or about God as even Satan and evil spirits do (Luke 4:33-34). We may see Him in His creation and experience His goodness. The most important thing, however, is for us to know Him personally. To know God intimately is more than an intellectual understanding or a philosophical awareness. To know Christ is to know God. “*If you really knew Me,*” Christ told the disciples, “*you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him*” (John 14:7).

To know God intimately is to know He has a plan for our lives. His plan gives purpose and true meaning to life. Christ came to restore God’s purpose in our lives. He came to bring us back into the living fellowship with our heavenly Father which had been destroyed by sin (Isaiah 59:2). It is only in Christ and through Christ that we can approach God and have a relationship with Him. Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14:6).

Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are redeemed people with infinite value. We know God through Christ Who became flesh. Our inherent value does not come from who we are, but from Whose we are. “*See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands*” (Isaiah 49:16a). God pours out His love upon us as a father pours out love upon his children. God’s love is consistent and unwavering, yet each person responds differently to the love that God gives. Christians are people who believe that our lives are good gifts from God. We live our lives in response to God’s marvelous love shown on the cross.

Our fellowship with God deepens as we begin to know God through the love, power, grace, and mercy He shows us. We find that in getting closer to God:

- We are more interested in others.
- We discover greater energy, stamina, and perseverance.
- We desire to be obedient to His calling.
- We set higher standards as we respond more faithfully to God’s holy law.
- We receive God’s strength to overcome temptations.
- God’s strength helps us overcome difficult odds.
- We are better equipped to live a balanced lifestyle.
- We have a clearer understanding of the purpose and future our Lord established for us.



- We become better stewards of God's earth (creation).
- We seek to know Him better through His revealed Word.
- We are strengthened, encouraged, and comforted during times of pain and hardship.
- We are blessed by sharing our time, abilities, and money with Him and others.
- We have greater discernment of things that are temporal and eternal.
- We find contentment.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What are ways that Christ may use to draw you closer to Him?
2. How can material things affect your relationship with Jesus?
3. What fills your emptiness?
4. How can you stay connected to Jesus?
5. What does the Lord desire from you?

FOCUSING ON GOD

Our focus must be on God, Who is always there waiting for us. St. Matthew in his Gospel records that when Jesus' disciple Peter first started walking on the water towards Jesus, he was successful.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's You," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

Come," He said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"(Matthew 14:27-30).

While Peter focused on Jesus, he was fine. When he started to think about the wind and waves, he fell into the water. Only when Peter started to doubt Jesus and began to think about his own circumstances did he have problems. Peter's faith faltered when he no longer gave Jesus his full attention.

There are times when we need to redirect our focus. When our lives become disjointed, when we seem to be falling apart, or when we are out of control, we have lost our focus on Christ. We can expect to go down like Peter when we focus on self or on things around us rather than on the Lord.

Life at its Best

What God desires from us is complete devotion to and reliance on Him. Jesus, during His life on earth, called His followers to righteousness, loving service, obedience, and sacrifice. Even if we were able to fulfill that calling, we know through God's Word that we cannot earn or win anything from God through our own efforts. In Isaiah 64:6 we read, “*. . . all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*”

When our hearts are humble and our spirits contrite, when we come with nothing to offer, the Holy Spirit draws us into closer fellowship with God as He pours out His unconditional love on us.



Jesus Christ came to earth as a man for our redemption. He came to show us what God wanted us to be. He lived the perfect life for us. Through His atoning sacrifice on the cross, Jesus reconciled us with His heavenly Father. Through faith, His righteousness is imputed to us. Jesus said, “*. . . I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*” (John 10:10). We live “life at its best” when we bear witness

to His life, so that others might know Him as Lord and Savior.

GOD'S LORDSHIP

As followers of Christ we acknowledge His ownership, rejoice that He has made us His own, and live our lives under His lordship. We owe everything to God. “*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being*” (Revelation 4:11). When we are filled with His presence, God’s love, which comes through us, is seen in what we do and say. We are but jars of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7) in which God can dwell and manifest His grace and goodness. Filled with the love of Christ, we seek to put Him first and demonstrate that He is in control.

When we acknowledge that the Lord is the Master of our universe and the Lord of our lives, we will be fulfilled people. How do we know when Jesus Christ is truly Lord of our lives? Charles Stanley, in a sermon titled “Jesus Christ is Lord” gives six suggestions:

1. He is Lord when we willingly follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
2. We know that Jesus is Lord of our lives



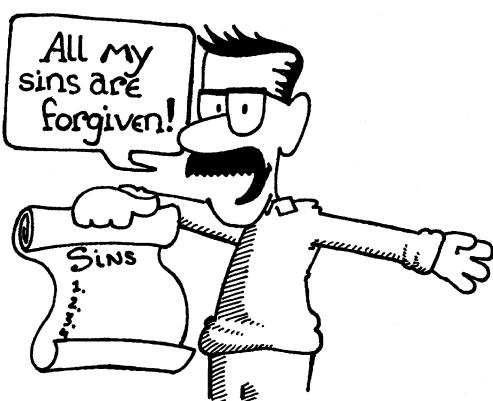
when we are available to serve Him, no matter what He requires of us.

3. Jesus is Lord of our lives when pleasing Him is more important than pleasing others.
4. Jesus is Lord of our lives when we recognize that He is the source of everything.
5. Jesus is Lord of our lives when we allow Him to turn difficulties and failures into opportunities and growth.
6. We know that Jesus is Lord of our lives when knowing Him becomes the obsession of our lives.⁹

OBSTRUCTIONS TO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

1. Continuing in sin

With the fall of Adam and Eve, we became sinners, but, through God's love and grace, we are redeemed people. *"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous"* (Romans 5:19). God would not have sent His Son into the world if we had not needed a Savior. Christ came into the world to rescue us from our lost condition. He came to prove God's mercy. If we truly repent of our sins, our lives will change. Our communion with Christ will prompt us to pray with David, *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). As sinners, when we continue to live in intentional, deliberate sin, we put our eternal salvation at risk. We will never discover the satisfaction and contentment that Jesus won for us on Calvary's Cross. By faith in His redeeming love, He brings us into fellowship with God. *"Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me"* (John 14:21a).



2. Preoccupation with self

When we are filled with ourselves, we will have no room for God in our lives. Our society promotes getting ahead by looking out for "number one." Self-sufficiency or independence, qualities generally seen as positive traits, will ruin our appetite for the things of God. Self-centeredness and self-confidence will result in self-reliance rather than reliance on God.

Isaiah 53:6 laments, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way..."* Our human nature seeks independence from God. Until

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we face God's truths, we will be enslaved to self-promotion and doomed to self-destruction.

The Christian life is lived by having "Christ in us." "*I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Galatians 2:20). If we are not committed and devoted to Christ, it is impossible to live a joyful Christian life.

3. The focus on material things.

The stuff of this world competes with God for our attention. Like the seed that fell among thorns, we can become "*choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures . . .*" (Luke 8:14). We can become preoccupied with enjoying what we have or coveting what we don't have. We can love the gifts God has given us more than God Himself.

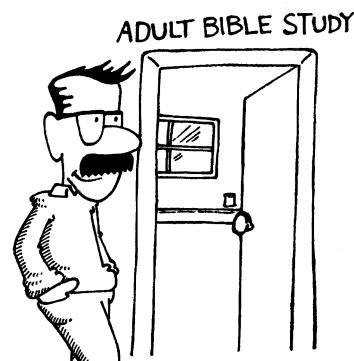


When the Lord your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

God was warning His people not to become self-sufficient and forget Him. If we are forced to choose—

- between God and money . . .
- between God and personal ambition . . .
- between God and self—

will God occupy first place in our lives or fall to second?



REINFORCEMENTS OF OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

God, desiring fellowship with His wayward creation, continues to "*seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10). How do the lost come into fellowship? The Holy Spirit working through the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments creates

saving faith. He also uses you and me to share our faith in Christ with new millions sitting in darkness!

As we draw away from the busyness of our lives and spend time in His Word and in prayer, God will speak to us. The Bible is much more than an historical record. Through the Bible, we receive the assurance of God's love, redemption, and grace. Our finite minds will never fully understand the mystery of God's grace. The Good News of Salvation through Christ gives us the wisdom and direction to live "life at its best." We receive sustenance from God through His Word and Sacraments, prayer, and fellowship with believers.



Prayer needs to be an everyday activity in our lives. God tells us He will hear our prayers. "*Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know,*" God promised through His prophet (Jeremiah 33:3). Wherever God places us and whatever our circumstances, we should be on our knees in prayer. A man stands tallest when He kneels at the cross. God is pleased when we approach Him with empty hands, openly confessing our great need for Him. John 15:7 reads, "*If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*"

Unfortunately, we often believe we are too busy to pray, but, when we need something from God, we find the time. We lose the full benefit of prayer when we use it only to get our needs met instead of realizing it is a way to stay in relationship with our heavenly Father.

God is waiting and listening; our problem is that we often choose to limit our conversations with Him. Jesus said, "*And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father*" (John 14:13). Prayer releases boundless spiritual wealth and power of the Almighty God. Our spiritual walk with the Lord needs to include prayer. Our prayers bring us into closer harmony with God's plan for our lives. When we get to know God through His Word and spend time in His presence through prayer, we draw closer to Him and become more like Him.

It is also vital that we gather for worship. Our attitude should be like that of David, who said, "*I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'*" (Psalm 122:1). The writer to the Hebrews exhorted his readers not to ". . .give up meeting together" (Hebrews 10:25). Being in communion with God through His Word, through prayer, and through the fellowship of believers is essential to a rich and meaningful life. It is in worship that our Lord pours out His

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immeasurable gifts through Word and Sacrament. We worship, first, to be served with our Lord's gifts, and, second, to thank Him for those gifts.

When we spend time in studying God's Word and in prayer, we saturate our minds with the Spirit of God, rather than the teachings of the world. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament:



- we are assured of God's presence . . .
- we will be dependent on His power . . .
- we will be sensitized to the application of His Word.

The time we spend with the Lord in studying His Word and in prayer is so important because we do not know the timetable God has for our lives. We may be called to our heavenly home at any time. We must care for our bodies as though we may live for a long time, but we

must treat our souls as if we are going to die tomorrow.

The Christian is in a delightful dilemma. Paul states our situation in Philippians 1:21-23: "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*" Thankfully, that decision is the Lord's, and He will keep us faithful to that end. "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He Who promised is faithful*" (Hebrews 10:23).

ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

LIFE-ENRICHING	LIFE-DESTROYING
Intimacy with God	Aloneness
Dependence on God	Independence
Stewardship	Ownership
Wisdom	Information
Knowledge	Facts
Viewing life as a trust	Going for the gusto
Living for eternity	Living for the moment
God and I	I, me, mine

Repentance	Remorselessness
Bible reading and prayer	Busyness
Humility	Pride

WRAPPING UP

God has given life to each of us and demands that we acknowledge Him as the Supreme Being (Exodus 20:3). He has given us a free will, and we can choose to ignore Him as the Lord of our lives. Those who choose to go their separate ways will never be complete. They will be lost eternally! Without God, we may experience periods of worldly happiness, but we will not find lasting peace and harmony. God created us for His purposes. When we are in fellowship with Him, those purposes will be fulfilled!

Scripture is very clear about our need to have an intimate relationship with Christ. In spite of all the admonitions and guidance we receive in God's Word and from friends and pastors, many of us still fail to live faithful, God-pleasing lives. When we fully depend upon and trust in Him, we will enjoy "life at its best."

Our dependence on the Lord gives us His power to accomplish the tasks He places before us. God's presence in our lives enables us to handle life's most difficult obstacles. *"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint"* (Isaiah 40:30-31). The Lord gives us strength to face our daily tasks and the courage to go forward.

Through Jesus, we are given full rights as sons and daughters. God has adopted us into His family in Holy Baptism.

But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir (Galatians 4:4-7).

Our heavenly Father extends His right hand of fellowship to us, His Children, and His Spirit fills our hearts with peace and joy enabling us to live "life at its best."

The definition of "life at its best" can be stated in different ways:

- The response of faith
- The human thankfulness for divine goodness and mercy
- Our attitude toward life

Life at its Best

- The joyful expression of our life lived in fellowship with our Lord

As we live our lives in honor and reverence unto the Lord we lay “. . . *a firm foundation for the coming age, so that [we] may take hold of the life that is truly life*” (1 Timothy 6:19).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. How do you know when you have an intimate relationship with Christ?
2. Where do you look and whom do you trust for your sustenance? In a crisis, where do you turn? Do you follow your agenda or God’s agenda?
3. What are some symptoms of aloneness?
4. What are some things your society says that you need to be successful?
5. How does God’s greatest commandment (Mark 22:36-39) relate to “life at its best”?
6. What happened to Adam and Eve when they became disconnected from God (Genesis 3)?
7. What obstructs your fellowship with God? Can seemingly good things become obstacles to your fellowship with Him?
8. Why do you suppose that, in the midst of technological and material growth, we are suffering from a poverty of the spirit and declining morality?
9. Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac?
10. How does Revelation 3:16 relate to our discussion of an intimate relationship with God?
11. Can others see God through you?
12. What does wealth mean to you?
13. What caused Peter to sink in the water (Matthew 14:27-30)?
14. How does your emphasis on “self” block your ability to enjoy “life at its best”?
15. Why did God create mankind?
16. What is your purpose in life?
17. How can Christ love you, a sinner?
18. Is there a difference between religion and Christianity? What is it?
19. By faith, all who are baptized possess the life of Christ Himself. Review Colossians 3:1-17 to see what is given to those who are baptized into Christ. What are we, therefore, to put to death, to put away (vv. 5-9)? What will God’s

people have put on (v. 10)? What flows from our life which “*is now hidden with Christ in God*” (vv. 12-17)?

Notes:

¹ H. A. Ironside, “Men God Wants,” (Newton, Kansas, Herald of His Coming, May 97) 6.

² Joseph M. Stowell, III, Moody Presents Series, “Intimacy with God,” (Chicago, Illinois, Moody Cassette Ministry, February 97).

³ Ibid. tape.

⁴ Billy Graham, *The Secret of Happiness*, (Waco, Texas, Word Books Publisher, 1985) 16.

⁵ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, (Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1948) 11.

⁶ Ibid. 33.

⁷ Warren Wiersbe, *God Isn't in a Hurry*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1994) 14.

⁸ Joseph M. Stowell, tape.

⁹ Charles Stanley, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” (Atlanta, Georgia, In Touch Ministries, Audiotape, 1989).