

NO POWER OVER ME

DEMOLISHING
SATAN'S LIES

4-part study

Matt Massingale

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Foreword

The Apostle Peter's second epistle has stern warnings about false prophets and evil workers within the church and then he makes specific application to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Knowing that the end is coming Peter asks, "What sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11)? How we become that kind of person is outlined in the first chapter.

God has already supplied all we need to become the person He created us to be. He has made us a new creation in Christ and we have become a partaker of His divine nature. We are children of God and we entered into that relationship by faith. With the foundation of faith in God and His word we are to diligently supply moral excellence, and knowledge that leads to self-control, perseverance and godliness, kindness, and ultimately love. "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8).

Matt Massingale has taken on the challenge of explaining how we progress through those levels of maturity. Matt probably thinks of me as his mentor, but I have learned as much from him as he has from me in our weekly meetings. I have never known anybody who is better at engaging in conversation with friends and strangers about spiritual matters and explaining to them through diagrams and word pictures in such a way that they get it. I hope you take the time to read his text and watch his videos. Thousands of people have been set free and enlightened by my gifted friend and follower of Jesus.

Dr. Neil T. Anderson
Founder and President Emeritus of Freedom in Christ Ministries

No Power Over Me - Demolishing Satan's Lies

4-Part Series

What is your story? Do you feel like your life is significant? Important? Necessary? Is life about more than making a living and raising a family? Are you bored? Have you found that “thing” you do that gives you life and makes you want to get out of bed every morning? Is life an adventure or drudgery?

My experience has shown most of us are confused, disoriented, and not aware of the big picture unveiled before us. We sense evil is on the rise but we do not know how to fight against it. We see the prolific spread of child pornography and trafficking; deranged people breaking into schools and gunning down our innocent children; authoritarian governments subjecting their populations to starvation and oppression; greed and lust for power in our government and corporations; and society is given over to brazen, sexual indulgence with no hint of shame.

I remember reading John Eldredge's book *Epic* about 20 years ago. It gave me perspective I have never forgotten. The next four paragraphs are a summary of what I learned from John.

On a Friday night, most of us want to read a good book or watch a movie. We want to hear others' stories in the hope they will help us understand our own. All the

stories we love have the same storyline. There is love, adventure, danger, heroes, villains, romance, sacrifice, a battle between good and evil, and insurmountable odds in favor of evil, but good prevails in the end. The storylines are all the same. Once upon a time, things were good, but something awful happened and now a great journey must be taken or a great battle fought to make things right again. At just the right moment, a hero arrives on the scene to save the day and make everything right. Life, as it was meant to be, is found again.

This is true of most stories and movies you can think of. Think of *Braveheart*, *Gladiator*, *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *The Big Bad Wolf*. Have you wondered why we love these stories? Have you wondered why they captivate our imaginations and our hearts? Have you wondered why they inspire us to love more deeply and defend those we love? **BECAUSE IT IS BORROWED FROM THE STORY — OUR STORY!**

It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All the ingredients in the movies we love are borrowed from our story. Once upon a time, life was perfect in the Garden of Eden. Satan entered the picture, and we exchanged our glory for a lie. We believed Satan's lie that God could not be trusted,

that he was not good, and that we needed to take control of things. He was holding out on us, and we needed to rewrite the script.

You see, the story has been going on since the beginning of time. You have a role to play and an adventure to live, but you must understand your story in light of the bigger story already underway. Your story is much more exciting and adventurous than you believe. It is more dangerous than you imagined. It is more exhilarating than we understand.

Somehow along the road, we lost our hearts and our perspective.

We were meant to live in a relationship with God and others. Life doesn't work when it is all about you. We must recover our hearts and fight for the hearts of others. Our greatest joys and memories are around our family and friends. Our greatest wounds are also connected to people. **We all desperately want to belong and to be part of something bigger than ourselves.**

We live our lives as if we do not have an enemy. A life lived in that reality becomes very confusing. Evil is carried out through people, but people are not the enemy. Hitler, Stalin, and Khan were all influenced by Satan. He is the enemy of our souls. He hates God, but he knows he cannot defeat him. So, he turns his anger upon God's children. You are opposed, and you have an enemy that wants to deceive you, defeat you, and kill you and your family. He does not play by any rules and does not

respect any person or government.

Imagine a world where followers of Christ are free from fear, shame, and guilt. A person that is gripped by fear is not free to live. Fear keeps us from the peace of God and paralyzes us from advancing the kingdom.

God is inviting you into the adventure of a lifetime. It is a life of faith, bravery, courage, and a desire to rescue those that are wounded. For some, the necessary change is subtle. It takes a little "tweaking" to get back on the right path. For others, it requires a radical shift.

Old vs. New

To gain the proper perspective, let's quickly review the Old and New Covenants (Testaments). The Garden of Eden was an environment where relationship and intimacy with God were "normal". It is the way life was intended to be.

God made a covenant with Abraham that promised all nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham and that was fulfilled through Jesus. But Abraham's family did not continue in the life of faith Abraham possessed. After Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph, the family simply chose not to believe. Galatians 3: 17-25 tells us because the people would not respond to God in faith and trust, he gave them the Law through Moses. The effect of the law was to eventually lead them to Christ.

The law was burdensome and immediately

and drastically changed everything with God. The blessings of God that were granted based on relationship and trust were now dependent on obedience and works. He would still dwell among them but now his presence was dangerous. There were penalties, curses, and even death for disobedience.

The inability of the people to perfectly keep the Law resulted in a constant state of condemnation, shame, and guilt. The law could not bring a new identity. The law demanded a moral perfection but did not provide the power to achieve it. It was never meant as a permanent solution to sin. The Law was a set of rules and standards that were impossible to keep. It was a covenant between God and man. God would do his part if man did his.

The New Covenant (Testament) changed everything. Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He perfectly did what none of us could do. Jesus represented all people as he perfectly kept man's side of the covenant vow. Our membership in the covenant is in being sealed by the Holy Spirit, who writes the law on the heart and in the desires of men and women. He is the power of the covenant enabling those within it to live its promises.

Yet, somehow, we view the Christian life as still based on the law. We strive to do "our part." We promise to offer our best and forget God has already offered Jesus, his best. This new life is not to be lived out with gritted teeth, summoning determination and willpower to obey God

to show Him our love. We make promises in our strength we can never keep and sooner or later many burn out and walk away in despair and shame.

So much of our modern discipleship studies are built on keeping the law. We base it on our effort. It is a never-ending list of dos and don'ts and box-checking. It is exhausting and it does not give life. We feverishly try to accomplish what has already been done.

Jesus summarized it in Matthew 11:28-30 when he said, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." My yoke is easy means, not the troublesome laws imposed by Mosaic Law. My burden is light means an invoice, something owed, a task, load, or faults of the conscience that oppress the soul.

I always ask any group I am teaching how many feel under condemnation and how many feel shame and guilt. How is it we feel under condemnation when we know there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus? We have been deceived and we are living under a burden that has been removed.

Use this summary to help guide your thoughts as you go through this study. Be aware of your exhaustion, frustration, and endless attempts to please God. Jesus did all the work for us. It is our job to believe

it, trust it, and obey it. Our work is not to achieve what has already been done, but simply live it out because it is true.

I invite you to spend some time in this **4-Part Series called “No Power Over Me: Demolishing Satan’s Lies.”**

Each study builds upon the other and is intended to help you understand your story in light of the bigger picture. The studies come from my interactions with people over the last 3 decades and are a summary of my experiences. We all struggle to see our lives clearly. What do we think? Why do we do things we do not want to do? It all seems confusing and disorienting at times. My goal is to help you see the big picture and how the enemy has deceived you into believing you are not enough and you do not measure up. Each study will help you organize your thinking and give light to your journey.

Study 1: The Sin Circle Study

will help you understand how Satan has deceived you. You will understand how fear and the desire to control drive the majority of your thinking and actions. Bullies use fear and threats to create fear in order to control you. Employers and governments use the same tactics. Your reaction to these threats and intimidations is dependent on what you believe to be true. Your thoughts gain power as you decide what is true and what is not. Your personality then determines how you live out those perceptions. You were born with a distinct personality given by God. The use of that personality in the flesh can be an unattractive thing. When you learn

to submit your God-given personality to advancing His kingdom, it is a beautiful thing.

Study 2: The 15 Pitfalls Study will help you identify areas of your thinking that are not consistent with God’s truth. The sin circle helps you identify the patterns in your life; this study helps you discover areas of your thinking that may be incorrect. These 15 areas cover 99% of the wrong thinking I have observed as I have met with people over the last 25 years. You must identify wrong thinking to correct bad behavior and out-of-control emotions.

Study 3: The Romans 1/Ephesians 4 and 2 Peter 1 Contrast Study

will show you how following the flesh and its evil desires can lead you down a trail of futility, a hardened heart, a loss of sensitivity, and eventually to a point where God gives you over to your sin if you continue pursuing sin. That is the most horrifying thing I can imagine. I have personally witnessed people so bent on pursuing sin that God gave them over.

Study 4: The 2 Peter 1 Study will show you what a maturing Christian should look like. You will learn why faith is so important and why faith requires action to be authentic. You will understand why it is important to identify and live out what God has called you to be in this life. Faith and goodness lead to knowledge. We tend to strive to understand so we can have faith. But we must remember we have faith so that we can understand. God gets excited when we live with a child-like faith.



He is eager and willing to reveal Himself to those who hunger and thirst for Him. A deep dive into self-control, perseverance, and godliness will lead you to the ultimate expression of maturity which is brotherly kindness and love. Love is the ultimate expression of knowing God.

We are experiencing evil rising around us like never before. It is time for us to recapture our first love and be sober and vigilant. The days are evil but God is pouring out His Spirit. It is time to rid our souls of the darkness and free ourselves from the sins that so easily entangle us. It is for freedom that He set us free. Let's run the race with endurance and train ourselves for godliness. Get ready for the adventure of a lifetime! Following God is never boring.

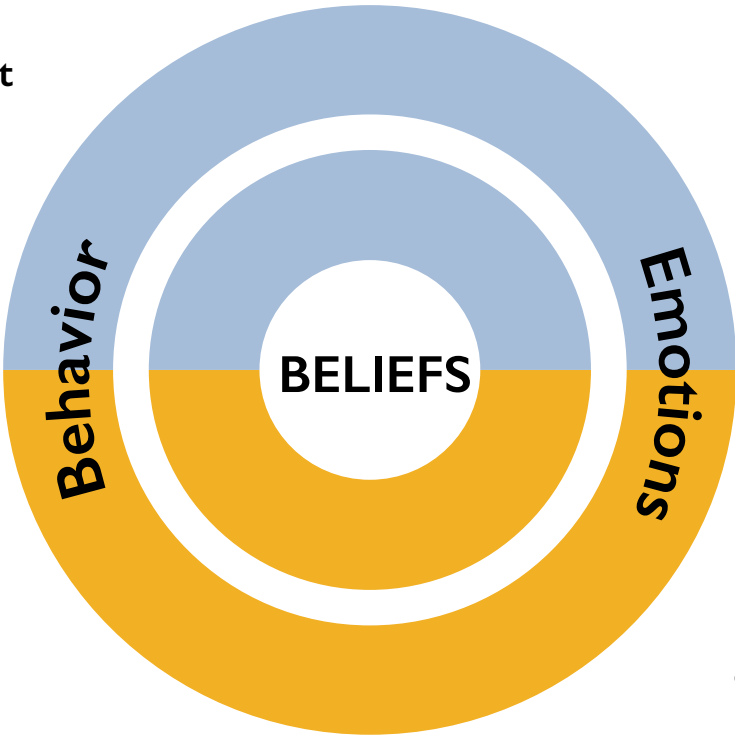
Study 1

Sin Circle



Faith Circle

Based on Faith & Spirit



Sin Circle

Based on Senses & Flesh

Sin Circle - Uncovering How Satan Deceives You

Feeling in Control

(Try Harder & Keep Pressing)



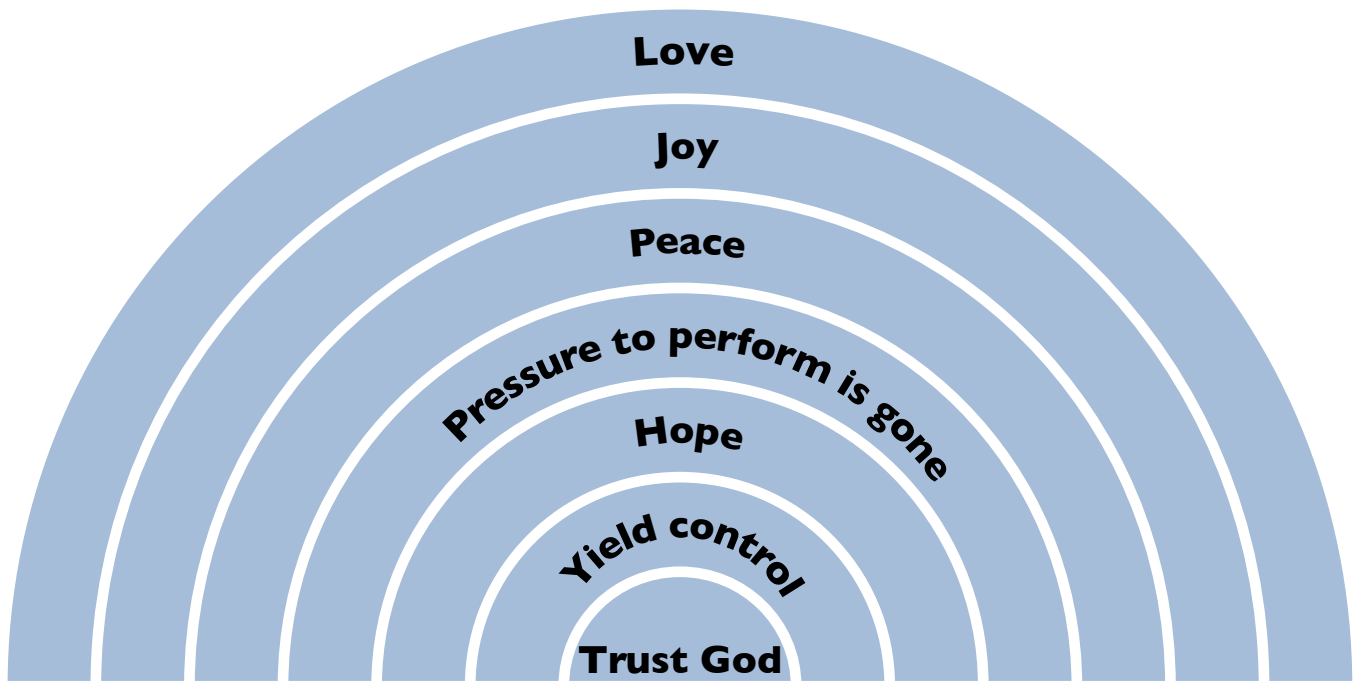
Sin Circle - Uncovering How Satan Deceives You

Feeling Out-of-Control
(Withdraw & Fade Away)



Faith Circle

Based on Faith & Spirit



5 Indicators or Trigger Points

Inability to Control Behaviors

Inability to Control Thoughts

Excessive Behavior

Over-reactions

Negative Emotions

Sin Circle - Uncovering How Satan Deceives You



Sin / Faith Circle

People seek help from others when they are experiencing bad behavior or negative emotions. They seek an answer to overcome their perceived problem. Typically, the first question is “what do I need to do?” It is a good question, but not the correct one. If you want to change how you behave or how you feel, change what you believe. A person will always act out of what they believe.

At Freedom in Christ Ministries, we recommend that people learn the Biblical truths of their identity and freedom in Christ by either reading *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* by our founder, Dr. Neil T. Anderson; going through *The Freedom in Christ Course* on their own or with others; or reading our free, downloadable book *Restored*. After this, we encourage them to go through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* on their own or with a trained encourager. *The Steps* is a guide that encourages you to be still before God and trust the Holy Spirit to guide you as you reflect on the areas of your life where your thoughts and actions are not in alignment with God. I am always amazed when people sit for hours before God and clearly hear him speaking to them and bringing to their mind areas that require confession and repentance. At the end of the process, numerous sins have been confessed and wrong thinking has been addressed.

Most people feel a great sense of relief and freedom after going through *The Steps*. But my experience shows few are able to put the pieces in order. They don't know the sequence of what comes first and what that

leads to. We are told to not be ignorant of Satan's **schemes** (2 Cor. 2:11) and take every **thought** captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). **The word for schemes and thoughts is the same word, noema, which means mind.** Satan lies to us, and we believe it without realizing where the thoughts come from. We assume if we thought it, the thought came from us. We have thoughts that come from God, Satan and ourselves. To successfully walk in freedom, we must understand where our thoughts come from and that our thinking leads to our actions. I use a simple diagram called the Sin Circle to illustrate this and help people understand how the enemy and their own thinking is causing their struggles.

My Story

To help you understand how this works, I'll tell you some of my own story. At the age of 5, I started the first grade. Up until this point, my parents had allowed me to communicate with “baby” talk. Baby talk was my words I made up, and they knew what I meant. It was cute to them, and they lovingly let me continue in it. However, on the first day of school, my fellow students did not find my “baby” talk as cute as my parents did. They laughed at me when I talked. To make the first day even more memorable, the teacher asked the class to write their name on a piece of paper, and I was unable to do so. The first night of school my assignment was to write my name 100 times. Another area I felt inadequate was in art. Every day after lunch, my teacher gave the class a large piece of brown paper for art

class. Well, art was not my thing and still isn't. I drew the same stupid little drawing every day. After a few days, my teacher asked if I was able to draw anything else. I was not able to and still cannot today (you do not want me on your Pictionary team!). One week into school brought failures and a sense I did not measure up. My inner thought was I am not very smart and I need to try really hard. It amazes me that decades later, I can find myself looking at life through the eyes of a six-year-old boy who didn't measure up.

At age 14, three intoxicated men tried to kidnap me and a friend when we were playing basketball in my front yard. We lived on a lake in a fairly remote part of our town. My parents were not home, and there were no close neighbors. We ran from the three men and were uninjured physically. But the mental scars from that close call dug deep into my soul. I was also bullied by the same friend's older brother and two of his friends. They were 18 years old and outweighed me 60-100 pounds. I came home one day with a bloody nose and a busted lip. I vowed to never be bullied or overpowered again. I began a rigorous process of weight lifting, boxing and karate and developed an attitude of self-defense. My fear drove me deeper and deeper into creating a person others would not think they could take advantage of.

I became a follower of Christ at the age of 15. I had a strong faith and wanted to share Christ with all my friends. But I was never told that I had to go back and change the way I had learned to live in the world. For fifteen years, I had learned how to live life on my terms. Every thought and action was based on what I thought was right. When I accepted Christ, all

of that experience of living independent from God still existed.

I kept dragging that sense of not measuring up and not wanting to be over-powered through the next twenty-five years of my life. At 40, an incident happened, and I lost my mind with anger. When I got home, I stayed up late and asked God to show me what was wrong. I knew that kind of anger could cause me to easily kill someone, end up in prison and wonder what happened. I sat in my living room praying and asking God to show me the problem. Almost immediately, I could see the truck with the three intoxicated men driving down my driveway. My pulse jumped to 190 beats a minute. Twenty-five years later, I was still responding like a scared 14-year-old boy.

I thought I had fixed my problem and all would be well. I did not realize, however, that I needed to go back and let God bring to my mind every occurrence where traumatic events were stuck in my mind, causing bad behavior and negative emotions. That is the time I was introduced to Freedom in Christ and Neil Anderson. I read most of Neil's books and went through *The Steps to Freedom* on my own. I found tremendous freedom and decided at that point, I wanted to help others find the same freedom.

Through the years, I had a few instances where my temper was out of control. I was not an angry person and did not lose my temper quickly. But when I felt threatened or felt as if I was being overpowered or bullied, I overreacted. In those instances, I went straight from the feeling of no control to anger. I realized that my reaction was much greater than the event that happened. I was reacting

to something at a level 10 when the triggering event was a 4 or 5. That meant I was living life stuck at a 5 or 6 on a 1-10 scale. **I call this living with a “feeler” that is stuck. Instead of living each day beginning at 0 on your “feeler scale,” you begin stuck at some higher number.**

As I began helping others find their freedom, I saw that they did not understand this cause and effect in their lives. It was much easier to see it in someone else’s life than my own. The Sin Circle helped me understand my thinking and how the vow I made to never be overpowered had created strongholds in my life. **Understanding the progression or pattern in my thinking was a great help in understanding my trigger points. My behavior and emotions were following what I believed. The understanding that fear and control were at the center of my struggles was a huge breakthrough.** I began to surrender the outcomes of life to my loving Heavenly Father. My job was to exercise self-control and only control those things that pertained to my thoughts and actions. The rest was under His control and I learned to trust Him, in all things. I felt like the pressure was off for the first time in my life. Living a performance-based acceptance life eventually becomes exhausting.

How to Use the Sin Circle- Cycle of Feeling in Control (Successes)

It is recommended you go through *The Steps* before using the Sin Circle, but it is not necessary. In my story, periodic outburst of anger was the obvious and most disturbing part of my story. It seemingly came out of nowhere and felt uncontrollable. **Anger was**

the outer ring of my sin circle. Begin with the outside ring of the circle. Fill in that circle with the dominant negative emotion or bad behavior that is recurring in your life. It is the area you know you struggle with.

I asked myself what comes before the outburst of anger. I realized it was often preceded by a critical spirit, perfectionism and a strong sense of competition. That mindset came with my thoughts to try harder and increase my effort.

Try harder is shown as the second ring from the outside and a critical spirit as the third ring from the outside.

The drive to try harder came as my **successes were challenged by others and beginning to fail (fourth circle in).** The world is full of controllers and sparks fly when they bump into each other. It can be a spouse, a child, a boss, a friend, a driver on the road or any other encounter. I recently read about a road rage incident in Nashville. A man in his 50s got out of his car at a redlight and started beating on the car of an 80 year-old couple. The elderly man in the car got out and the aggressive driver attacked him. Then, the elderly wife got out of the car to try and stop the fight when the aggressor picked her up and threw her into the lane of oncoming traffic! She was taken to the emergency room for severe head trauma. Two thoughts come to mind as I think about that story. One, what is wrong with the aggressive driver? His behavior was totally out of control and directed at a defenseless elderly couple. **Do you think his “feeler” was stuck?** The second thought is scarier to me. Had I been there, I’m pretty sure I would have intervened. My pulse increases and my anger rises thinking of that

poor couple. **I hope you see that traumas from the past can haunt you the rest of your life. To walk in freedom in an area of your life does not mean you never struggle there again.**

The fifth circle from the outside is promotion of self in the areas of self-indulgence, self-promotion, and self-defense. When you feel you are in control, everything depends on your effort. It truly is the spirit of an orphan versus the spirit of adoption as a son or daughter by the heavenly father. An orphan is totally dependent on his own effort for survival.

Worldly successes are the sixth circle from the outside. For me, those desires were born from an intense desire to be successful and significant. I tried harder than most people around me.

Finally, we get to the core of the problem with control and fear. We all have this innate fear of failing, not measuring up, or not having enough. God provided everything man needed in the garden. When sin entered the world, man must work by the sweat of his brow to produce food from the ground that was now cursed because of him. Relationship with God and the knowledge of Him, which is spiritual life, was lost. **Fear was the first emotion in the Bible.** After they sinned, Adam and Even hid from God because they were afraid. Fear comes in many shapes and colors. Fear of failure, fear of death, fear of being over powered, fear of not measuring up and a host of other fears are at the heart of our insecurity. This fear leads us to strongly desire to be in control.

The desire or need to be in control is a powerful force in our lives. Controlling people are acting out of fear. Controllers are some of the most unhappy people in the world. Think of someone in your life that has to be in control of everything. Do you like being around them? Probably not. The sad fact is we all struggle with this evil desire at some level. **Control is comprised of pride, rebellion and unbelief.** These three things create a very ugly reality in our lives. For a deeper understanding of control, see item 12 (fight the need to be in control) in the 15 Common Pitfalls study.

I have never met with any person that did not eventually realize that fear and the need or desire to be in control was at the center of their sin.

At this point, people usually take either an **aggressive** or **passive** approach to life. Some of the time it is a blending of the two. **I have shown a Sin Circle of Successes and a Sin Circle of Failures to help illustrate what that may look like in your life.** It is impossible to create a graph that captures everyone's sequence of thinking and actions, but the graphs are a good representation of many people I have talked to throughout the years. I encourage you to graph out your own sin circle.

The Faith Circle is in contrast to the Sin Circle. The center of the Faith Circle is obviously faith instead of fear. But that faith must include knowing, trusting and acting upon your beliefs. I explain the Faith Circle more in depth in the 2 Peter study. Somehow, we have believed that knowing about God is sufficient. It definitely isn't. The demons know about God but do not

trust or submit to him. You will not yield your life and the outcomes of your life to anyone or anything you do not trust.

The progression of faith shown in this graph is so beautiful. Trust leads to giving up control and living dependent on God; hope is increased; the pressure to perform is eliminated or reduced; peace and sense of abiding increases; the joy of the Lord becomes our strength and we have the ability to love others and freely give ourselves away as we have freely received. It is a world free from competition, performance, strife, envy and comparison. It is a life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

I have written another study showing the common pitfalls and trigger points I've seen in the people I've helped over the years. Their stories were always different, but their wrong thinking, bad behavior and negative emotions were very similar. I hope you find that and the Sin Circle helpful as a template to look at the patterns in your life. Use the blank circle provided and systematically walk through your own sin circle. Ask God to direct you. Talk to your spouse and your closest friends and ask them what they see in you. When I completed my sin circle, my wife and friends said the progression was accurate. To walk in freedom, we must be aware of how our thinking and past traumatic events shape our world and how we live in it.

5 Indicators or Trigger Points

The five indicators — or trigger points — come from my observations working with people and hearing their stories and struggles. The list is not scientific, but it has been a good guide in determining when someone may be losing control over their thoughts or behaviors.

Inability to Control Behaviors - Outbursts of aggressive behavior is usually what is seen in this area. Road rage is an excellent example. Someone cuts you off in traffic, and we are ready to explode. A question to always ask yourself: does my reaction match what happened to me? Am I overreacting? Do I have the ability to not respond aggressively in thought or action? If your answer is no, you need to work through your sin circle and determine the cause of your aggression.

Inability to Control Thoughts - This can be an extremely complex area to understand. For our purposes, let's keep it simple. Do you have constant thoughts that you do not want to think? Are they thoughts from God or Satan? Are they convicting or condemning? Determining the source of our thoughts is a great place to start. Any thought you are hearing that is a lie must be replaced with the truth.

Excessive Behavior - It is difficult to define excessive behavior, but it is easy to spot. Excessive behavior always pushes beyond normal limits; it's often hard for someone to explain why they do it. A person spending four hours a day working out would be excessive. But what about a girl who is extremely underweight, weighing only 100 pounds, and works out an hour a day? Is that excessive? I always ask people why are they doing what they are doing. If the 100-pound girl says she must exercise to not get fat, I know that is excessive behavior and would be curious to know her thoughts. Another indicator is to ask someone if they can stop the behavior. I have talked to numerous alcoholics that claim they are not addicted and could stop any time they wanted. My suggestion was always, well quit. Most could not because they did not realize they were out of control. Excessive behavior is more about the mental aspect of the behavior than the actual behavior.

Overreactions - The simple question here is does your reaction equal the triggering event? Let's go back to our road rage example. Suppose someone goes around you in the other lane while you are waiting in line. Then they cut in front of you as you reach your exit. Is that irritating? It is to me. Do I let them in or do I speed up as to not allow them in and risk an altercation? Do I yell at them? You know when you overreact to something. Suppose you leave the toilet seat up or squeeze the toothpaste from the top, and your wife screams at you. I have seen and heard this scene so many times I have lost count. Would you say that is a little bit of an overreaction? At that point, the answer is to go back and determine why the person reacted like that. What else is bothering them that culminated in this explosive reaction?

Negative Emotions - Anger, fear, anxiety, and other emotions have the potential to control our lives. Our emphasis is often on what needs to be done to eliminate the emotions. But the correct approach is to determine what is the cause of the emotion and begin to deal with that. As I show in the sin circle study, fear and the desire to be in control are at the heart and center of our negative emotions and behavior. Take the time to identify the source and how it affects you. Our thoughts and behaviors always begin with what we allow ourselves to think.

Study 2

15 Pitfalls



15 COMMON PITFALLS

NATURE OF GOD

1. Why Jesus came
2. God's intentions
3. Righteousness and Justice - Foundation of His throne
4. Adopted

SPIRITUAL WARFARE (OPPOSED)

5. Forgiveness
6. Unaware of our deception
7. People not the enemy

SIN CREATES INNER CONFLICT AND SEPARATES US FROM GOD

8. Repentance
9. Temptations
10. Emotions / Truth
11. No longer a slave to sin (sin is a choice)

PROPER EXPECTATIONS

12. Fight the desire to be in control
13. Expectations / Goals & Desires
14. Suffering and persecution
15. Legalism



THE BIG PICTURE

EDEN: GENESIS 1 & 2



THE IN BETWEEN: A TIME OF RESCUE, REDEMPTION & RESTORATION



NEW JERUSALEM: NEW HEAVEN & A NEW EARTH REVELATION 21 & 22

Sinless
Harmony
Abundance
Presence of God
Fill the Earth, subdue it,
rule over it
Expand the Kingdom of God

Sin enters humanity
Fractured, broken, competition
Constant dread - our labor
will not be enough
Banished from the Garden
Earth is cursed and becomes
a place of loss, anxiety,
violence and death
Kingdom Lost - Shattered
and broken world

The fulfillment of all Eden -
to become completely secure
Heaven has come to earth
No Sun or Moon - Glory of God
gives it Light
Gates never shut
No night
Everything made new;
Old order has passed away;
No death, mourning, crying or pain

15 Common Pitfalls Study

What Is This Study About?

This study builds off the Sin and Faith Circle study. When you realize how fear and control dominate your behavior, it is necessary to identify *why* you think the way you do. The 15 Pitfalls is organized into 4 main areas where our thinking may be wrong.

- 1) The Nature of God
- 2) Spiritual Warfare
- 3) Sin Creates Inner Conflict
- 4) Proper Expectations

How Will This Help Me?

You may not struggle in each of these four areas, but I am confident you struggle in at least one. What should we expect when we walk as aliens in a foreign land? The world is under the influence of the evil one, and we live with the effects of that influence every day. Satan is the father of lies, and it is our job to rightly discern God's truth from Satan's lies. That sounds simpler than it is. We are told to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Yet, if our worldview is based on what we hear in the media, from our governmental leaders, and even our friends and family, our perceptions may be based on things that are not true. I have realized that some people's thinking is so distorted, they truly believe that what they are thinking and doing is right when it is very wrong. They are not intending to be rebellious, but they are walking in darkness and not light.

The most obvious place to begin is to compare what you believe to God's Word. This study is a brief overview of areas where your thinking may be leading to bad actions.

How to Use

My suggestion is to begin with prayer. Earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to lead you into all truth and reveal where your thinking may be incorrect. Start with the Nature of God. Write down things you believe to be true about God. What is your perception of God? Is He the lover of your soul or do you see Him as harsh and ready to punish you for any bad behavior? Does He see me? Does He care about me? Why did He not answer my prayers for the healing of a loved one?

Take your time and work through all four areas systematically. Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying and what other verses He may be leading you to consider. He will be your guide.

After you have finished this process, go back to your sin circle and see if you have more clarity as to how your thinking leads to your behavior and emotions. Do you feel more peaceful? Do you feel more joy?

15 Common Pitfalls

How to Use

I have helped hundreds of people find their freedom throughout the last several decades. I have also talked to others that have done the same and shown them this list of 15 common pitfalls. I cannot think of a person whose main struggles were not on this list. By using the title “pitfalls”, I am not implying these 15 items are all the pitfalls. Not properly understanding these topics can and does lead to confusion.

Most people are overwhelmed when they look at the vast resources available to Christians. Where do they start and what do they read are hard questions to ask. At Freedom in Christ, the number of resources available can make it tough to know where to start. This study intends to give you a grid or template to assist you in that process. It is a very simple outline to help guide your thinking.

You will not struggle with every item on the list. I encourage you to begin with the nature of God. Take some time to consider who God is and what He is like. Is He loving? Is He good? Is He angry with me? What you think about God will determine how you live your life. The four topics under the nature of God are very brief explanations of His character. I also reference other Freedom in Christ books that will give you a deeper dive into the topic. The summaries are not exhaustive and are intended to be a springboard into deeper study.

As I am writing this, I cannot think of a single person that did not have some level of misunderstanding about God. Under item 1, most do not understand Jesus came to give us life, life to the full, and that life begins now and not in eternity. We are not existing and trudging through life as we wait on eternity. Most do not realize Jesus came to destroy the works of the enemy. That is a huge concept because Satan is the reason the goal of Eden was not realized. Most do not fully understand item 2: God’s intentions. We forget God never intended man to live in a fallen world and struggle with the sin nature inherited

from Adam. We live in this condition because Adam forfeited his God-given authority to Satan, the rebel holder of that authority. Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why does God not heal everyone? These are common questions. If you do not have a proper understanding of how things were meant to be, you begin to question God and His goodness. This is the case for many unbelievers today.

Item 3 is Righteousness and Justice. Righteousness is the state of a person in right relationship with God; Justice is a divinely righteous act by God to promote equality among humanity. These two concepts are the foundation of God’s throne and at the heart of who He is and what He does. To misunderstand that is to miss the big point.

Item 4 is Adoption. I hear testimonies from people who testify they feel heard and seen. That is the desire of every person on earth. We want to be significant and loved. We want to matter to someone. The entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of adoption. As a believer, you are a son or daughter, and every other believer is a brother or sister. We do not have to earn the love of God. We have that as part of being in the family. It is a beautiful thing. We can approach God boldly and call Him Abba (daddy). He invites us into His presence and loves to see us happy. Think with me for a minute about how intensely you love your children and grandchildren (if you have them). Is there anything you would not do for them? Don’t you feel their happiness and their sadness? Of course you do. If we who are sinful and selfish can love that much, how much more pure and powerful is the love from the Creator of the Universe?

Do you see how misunderstanding any part of this brief description of the nature and character of God can skew your thinking? I read *Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer at least 10 times. Tozer had an intense love and understanding of the splendor and beauty of the nature of God. I would read a page of the book

and spend the rest of the day thinking about what it meant. I would ask God to show me more of who He is. I want to know God deeply. I want to reflect His great love to a world that desperately needs it. I want kindness, mercy, and grace to ooze from my body. I want the sweet aroma of Christ to be present when I leave the room. I don't want to stink the place up because of my presence.

I pray that is your desire! Take your time and work through this list. You do not have to be in a rush. You can read the summaries of any of these topics in less than 5 minutes. That is intentional. The emphasis is not on more knowledge and facts. The emphasis is on a summary of often overlooked areas that you need to re-visit. Sit down with a cup of coffee and an open Bible. Read something on the list and ask God to speak to you. Open your heart to him and let Him talk with you. He loves you with the most intense love you can ever imagine. He is most glorified when we find pleasure in Him. He is our daddy and He has a plan for our lives. He is inviting us into a deeper relationship.

You cannot help but sense the surge of evil in the world today. It seems like so many people lost their minds overnight. God is searching the whole world looking for men and women to show Himself strong to. Allow the struggles and sufferings of living in a fallen world to grow your faith and prove your belief in Him is worth it. Allow the power of God to move in you. Imagine the largest nuclear blast you can imagine exploding on the earth. That doesn't begin to compare to the power God wants to make available to and through us. It is the power of love that overcomes every objection and obstacle. If evil is increasing, you can rest assured God is pouring out more of His Spirit upon us who believe.

This is the time I waited for all my life. All the reading, studying, meditating, praying, and thoughts about God are for this time and season. For decades I have said a time is coming when unity in the body would be a necessity, not an option or luxury. Well, friend, I believe that time is now. I urge you to cleanse the temple (your body) first. Go through the *Steps to Freedom* and confess (agree with God) and repent of any sin present in your life. Do not let sin block the flow of the Spirit and the saving blood that cleanses us.

It's game time. What a wonderful time to be alive. I believe with all my heart Satan will misplay his hand in a big way very soon. He knows his time is short and he is desperate to deceive as many as possible. But his tactics and his influence on the elites of our world and their thirst for control and power will backfire. Their use of fear to change the world order will cause great suffering for us. That suffering will produce a confidence in Christ many do not currently possess. 1 Peter 4:1 says "he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." Extreme suffering to the point of loss of life or imprisonment for our beliefs will accelerate our maturity exponentially.

Can you imagine believers who have suffered and persevered determining they are done with petty sins? Every breath they take from here on out is to advance the Kingdom of God at all costs. There is no fear of death or what any person or government can do to them. They are fearless and unafraid. It will be the army that ushers in the return of Christ. I pray I see that in my time on this earth. I am seeing a rise in courage and conviction amount other believers. The outpouring of the Spirit at Asbury college happened right before this was written. That outpouring spread to other places, and I believe it is merely the outer bands of a tremendous storm of righteousness coming upon the earth.

I pray that this simple summary of things to consider and reconsider will help you get ready for this exciting time to be alive. I pray that He will give you understanding and the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the amazing love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph 3:18-19)!!

Study 2

Section 1

The Nature of God



Why Jesus Came

Ask most Christians why Jesus came, and they say to die for their sins. If they receive Christ, their sins will be forgiven, and they will go to heaven when they die. The answer is true, but it is incomplete.

Why does that matter?

To understand why this is important, let's look at what happened in the garden. Man and woman are tempted by the evil one, are separated from the presence of God because of their sin, and die spiritually.

Jesus came to restore what was lost. He came to first, destroy the works of the enemy (1 John 3:8); second, die for our sins so we are forgiven and our relationship with God is restored (Romans 6:23, 1 Timothy 1:15); and third give us life and life to the full (Romans 6:23, John 3:16, John 10:10).

We were deceived, separated from God, and lost spiritual life. The death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished two-thirds of the gospel. **We have access to God, and we have a new spiritual life that begins now, not in eternity.** And the reason we fell is that we were deceived by an enemy, but his power over us has been destroyed.

Many Christians struggle today because they understand only a part of the gospel. They know their sins are forgiven, they believe eternal life begins when they die, and they are unaware they have an enemy. But this third of the gospel — that we have an enemy but

his power is destroyed — is what most of the world's population is waiting to hear. Spiritism is the dominant religious orientation in the world. More people practice spiritism than any other religion. They consult witch doctors, shamans, medicine men, avatars, and spirit guides. Psychic hotlines are on TV commercials at all hours of the day.



Colossians 2:13-15 shows the three things accomplished by Jesus in one verse. When you were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, **God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,** having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having **disarmed the powers and authorities**, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

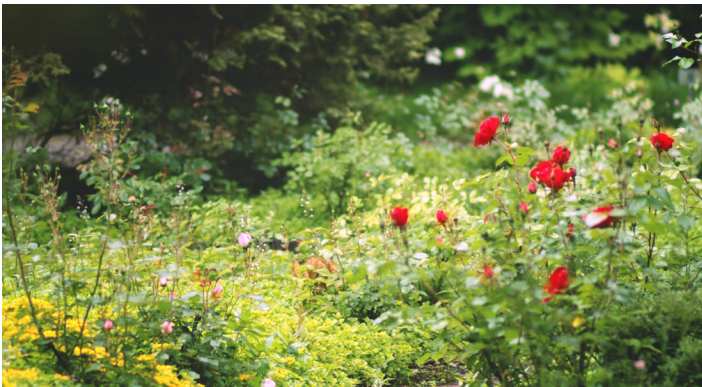
See Chapter 2 of *Victory Over the Darkness* (revised and updated edition), and Chapter 1 of *Restored* for more teaching on this topic.

God's Original Intent

Eden: Genesis 1 & 2

In Genesis, God created the perfect world for Adam and Eve. It was a place of life, joy, beauty, and communion with God. There was prosperity for all, no oppression, no sickness, no poor, no war, and no famine. Man was in harmony with God and the earth. God blessed them and said be fruitful and populate the earth, subdue it, and rule over the fish, birds, and every living creature that moves on the ground. We must understand this was God's original intention, the way He intended for us to live.

Then, Adam and Eve are deceived by Satan, and Satan usurps their authority and right to control. Now we know that the whole earth is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19). Adam and Eve are banished from the garden, and the peace and tranquility they enjoyed is relinquished.



The In-Between Time of Rescue, Redemption, and Restoration

After the fall, the world became a place of loss, anxiety, violence, and death. The earth is

cursed and does not readily produce food. Eve was to be the mother of all life and now suffers in childbirth. Adam was to rule the earth and now he will return to the dust he was created through death. The world becomes a place of competition with others, and there is a constant dread that their labor will not be enough.

Paradise had been shattered, and man becomes self-centered. Death, disease, sin, pain, suffering, and oppression are the new normal. *This was never God's will for man.*

When Jesus came, he came to usher in the new kingdom. This is a complicated topic to understand. The kingdom came, the kingdom is coming and the kingdom will come fully in the future. In Matthew 28, Jesus begins the Great Commission with these words, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." We live in the tension of the kingdom coming, and the prayer that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

My understanding of this tension is we have the authority of Christ, and the fear of death and the works of the enemy have been defeated. We still die, but there is no fear because we are in right relationship with God and will live with Him forever. Satan has no power over our lives unless we yield it to him. He cannot control a believer. When we sin as believers, we are simply choosing to sin. We are no longer under the power or compulsion of sin.

We are called to suffer as Christ suffered. We will suffer persecution because the world hated Jesus and will hate us. We have been adopted as sons and daughters of the King and we should live in the spirit of adoption and not the spirit of competition. Life is not perfect, but perfect peace is possible through our trust in Him. People still get sick and die. Sometimes God heals and sometimes he does not. That is a mystery that does not have a clear answer on this side of heaven. It makes me sad when I hear people tell the sick they are not healed because they do not have enough faith. I have personally watched dozens of very close, very devout, faith-filled believers die while believing in God for their healing or for someone they love. The thought that God could heal and chooses not to can cause them to be bitter and question the goodness of God. But please remember, He did not create the world like it is. Man sinned and we all are living with the consequences of that original sin. Why does God wait so long to come back and make things right? He is patient and loving. He does not wish any to die separated from Him. A time will come when God says that is enough and Jesus will come back.

New Jerusalem — New Heaven and New Earth: Revelation 21 & 22

In Revelation 21 and 22, we see God fulfill all Eden was meant to become. Mankind is redeemed and restored. All things are as they were originally planned to be. Heaven has come to earth. The new order has come, and the old order has passed away. There is no death, sickness, mourning, crying, or pain. We do not need the sun or the moon because the glory of God gives it light. The gates will never shut because there is no night there.

God's original intention is fulfilled in the end and we will live with him for eternity if our names are found in the Lamb's book of life. No circumstance on earth can steal our joy because we know we have Jesus now and forever. He is our blessed hope!

For more on this topic, see chapter 1 of *Victory Over the Darkness* (Revised and Updated Edition), chapter 7 of *The Bondage Breaker* and chapter 1 of *Restored*.

Righteousness & Justice

Psalm 89:14 says “Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. Isaiah 28:17 says, “I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line.”

This concept is one of the more misunderstood issues I have seen in believers. They do not understand God’s intentions or his will, and it causes them to live out their lives incorrectly.

This concept is so important to our understanding of scripture. I encourage you to write R or J every time in your Bible you see the word righteousness or justice. You will look at the scriptures differently when you see R and J on so many pages of the scriptures. To gain a better understanding, let’s define the terms. **Righteousness is the state of a person in right relationship with God (as he ought to be). It is being in right relationship with God and man. Justice is a divinely righteous act by God or man to promote equality among humanity. It is actions taken to restore righteousness and prevent injustice. So, righteousness is being right and justice is doing right.** That is a bit over-simplified, but it helps you grasp the intent of the terms.

When we think of justice, we think of someone getting what they deserve. We want the perpetrators of a crime to face justice. Our word for that is **retribution** which is punishment inflicted on someone for a wrong or criminal act. We also want those wronged to have **restitution** which means the

restoration of something lost or stolen to its proper owner.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, our call to do justice is clear. “How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy, deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:2-3). “Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, and encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:16-17).

It was never God’s intention for anyone to suffer oppression at the hands of another person. So, God calls us to risk our safety and security to stand up for those that cannot stand up for themselves. Oppose the wicked that oppress the needy. Oppose the courts that will not rule for justice. And expect nothing in return because the needy have no way to repay you.

Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness. He came into the right relationship with God through his belief in God. Righteousness also refers to the saving actions of God. It is so much a part of God’s character that He told us in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” The things to be added when we seek His kingdom and righteousness are what we wear, what we eat, and the basic necessities of life.



If we understand that God never intended for sin to enter the world and separate man from God, we can better understand the importance that righteousness and justice play. God is slow to anger. He is compassionate and gracious and abounding in love. His desire is for all men to believe in him and trust him. He wants life for us as it was originally intended in the garden.

When we seek justice, let us not be quick to desire retribution and for someone to “get what they deserve.” Too often we want mercy for ourselves and justice for others. If we want mercy for ourselves, we must be quick to extend mercy and grace to others that have wronged us and pray that God brings them into the right relationship with himself.

I appreciate the intentions of the social justice warriors of our day. Communism and socialism attempted to eliminate injustice. Man simply cannot fix the woes of the world without God. Without God, stronger men will always rule over the weaker. The rich and powerful will rule over the poor and control things to their advantage. Only when we confess our sins and turn in repentance to God can we carry out justice and righteousness on the earth. Without that, we simply project our hurt, hate, and sin tendencies upon the world we are trying to help.

Adoption

Adoption as sons and daughters is a concept that swept me off my feet. The understanding that the creator of the universe, knowing my every thought and action, loves me and accepts me as a father blows my mind. It is a thought so lofty I have to often remind myself it is true.

To summarize this concept, I am paraphrasing from the wonderful book by J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, Chapter 19. You can sum up the whole New Testament teaching by saying it is the revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. If you want to know how well a person understands Christianity, find out what he thinks about being God's child and having God as his Father.

Our understanding of Christianity cannot be greater than our grasp of adoption. God sent his Son to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full (adoptive) rights of sons (Gal 4:4-5).

The New Testament brings a new relationship. His covenant name has now become Father. The fear of approaching God and His throne is replaced by our faith in Christ which allows us to approach God with freedom and confidence (Eph 3:12). We have been adopted by God. We are His sons and daughters. Adoption is a family idea born out of love by our Father. Closeness, affection, and generosity are at the heart of the relationship.

To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). We can not fully feel the wonder of the passage from death to life which takes place in the new birth until we see it as a transition, not simply out of condemnation into acceptance, but out of bondage and destitution into the safety, certainty and enjoyment of the family of God.



The entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of adoption. Sonship must be the controlling thought. Take a moment to consider your new identity in Christ. I am a child of God, God is my Father, heaven is my home, every day is one day nearer, my Savior is my brother and every Christian is my brother.

That is your identity. Your Father's happiness is voluntarily bound to your happiness. We know as humans that we are happiest when those we truly love are happy. I pray that this awesome knowledge changes the way you view God. He doesn't give you rules to follow to restrict your happiness. He created you and loves you as His son or daughter and wants you to be fully alive in Christ.

Study 2

Section 2

Spiritual Warfare (Opposed)

Forgiveness

I believe forgiveness is one of the most important and overlooked keys to living free in Christ. Many people have asked me what spiritual warfare looks like. They expect an answer that is creepy and looks like the movie *The Exorcist*. In reality, it looks as simple and innocent as unforgiveness. I cannot remember talking with a single person that did not have areas of unforgiveness in their life.



Unforgiveness by Christians affords Satan his greatest access to the Church, and many believers are bound to the past because they have failed to forgive others as Christ has forgiven them.

Satan uses unforgiveness in the lives of believers to stifle their growth and intimacy with the Father. Our desire to be strong and self-protect makes it easy for us to miss the importance of forgiveness to God. I want to point out a few common areas where misunderstanding or deception has held those I've tried to help in bondage:

1. Don't forget to forgive yourself. We tend to be harder on ourselves than anyone else in our life. Many hold themselves to an

unachievable standard of perfection and have disgust over their failures.

2. Don't forget to forgive God. He has done nothing wrong, but we still blame him for things that went wrong and we believe he could have prevented them.

3. Forgiveness is not forgetting. You may never forget what someone did to you, but you can forgive them.

4. Forgiveness is a choice of the will. God gives you the ability to extend His grace and forgiveness as you have received it. We are never more like Jesus than when we choose to forgive.

5. Forgiveness is not reconciliation. It is possible to have forgiven and continue to be estranged from a relationship. Reconciliation is dependent on two people agreeing to be in a relationship; forgiveness is up to you.

6. Forgiveness is not letting someone off the hook for their bad behavior. You are letting yourself off the hook. We cling to the memory and pain of past hurt, and it occupies our thinking. The offender may not acknowledge they did anything wrong and probably seldom thinks of you.

7. God requires us to forgive. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus told us how to pray. We need to remember verses 14 and 15 that say, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” We do not have the luxury of asking for God’s forgiveness, mercy and grace for ourselves while we choose not to extend that to others.

8. Forgiveness is not a weakness. It takes a courageous person to not hang on to anger and seek revenge. Trust God with the outcome for those that hurt you. Pray that they repent and turn back to God. One of the ways you know you have truly forgiven someone is when you feel the desire to pray for them again.

Freedom in Christ has a lot of material on forgiveness. Please refer to chapter 4 in the free resource book, *Restored*, chapter 11 in *Victory Over the Darkness* (revised and updated edition), and Step 4 of the *Steps to Freedom in Christ*.

Satan's Schemes

One of the duties of a football coach is to study the opposing team and come up with a game plan to defeat them. What defensive scheme does a team run to shut down a potent offense like the Kansas City Chiefs? The scheme is a result of studying the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team and calculating where they might have an advantage. The coaches and players watch hours of film to spot a potential weakness they can exploit.

That is exactly how Satan plans his attack against us as believers. Satan knows that Jesus died to restore and redeem mankind into a right relationship with God. He knows believers have the mind of Christ and the Holy Spirit residing in them. With that knowledge, what would be your plan if you were Satan? They cannot be defeated if they believe the truth. So, his only plan is to make us doubt the truth.

We are told to not be ignorant of Satan's **schemes (2 Cor. 2:11)** and take every **thought** captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). **The word for schemes and thought is the same word, noema, that means mind.** The playing field (or battlefield) is between your ears. **The battlefield is your mind. If Satan can control your thoughts, he can control your life.**

If you want to change your behavior or emotions, change what you think.

Identifying wrong thinking is not as simple as it sounds. Satan deceives us into believing lies. I have seen people so deceived in certain areas

that their thinking is clouded and confused. They do not process information correctly and end up with bizarre behavior that is abnormal for them. They do not understand they have been deceived. The potency of deception is the deceived person does not know they are deceived. Bad actions lead to bad habits and repeating bad habits leads to strongholds. A stronghold is like a deep rut in the woods. You see a mudhole and steer your truck to the higher ground, but the truck ends up sliding into the slippery rut and you get stuck. Strongholds are mental ruts in our thinking, and they are the reason why many of us stay stuck.



I routinely tell people we are not to be ignorant of Satan's schemes and ask them what is his scheme against them. I have not had one person answer that definitively. I get a blank stare and the question, "what do you mean by that statement?" This entire series—the Sin and Faith Circles, the 2 Peter Study, and the 15 Common Pit Falls—is an attempt to help you determine where your thinking and behavior is not aligned with the Word of God.

As you go through these studies, ask God to reveal to you where and why you struggle. Most people can identify the top one or two areas where they struggle but cannot tell you why. The intention is to help you get past the common areas of struggle and move on to maturity in Christ.

Have you ever run a three legged race? You tie your left ankle to another person's right ankle and then run the race. It is a comical site to see two people take a few strides and fall to the ground. It is impossible to run a race tied to something else. If you want to run the race effectively, it is necessary to untie your feet first and remove your blindfold of deception.

For additional resources on understanding Satan's schemes and strongholds, see Chapter 9 of *Victory Over the Darkness*, revised and updated edition, Chapters 4, 10 and 11 of *The Bondage Breaker*, completely revised and expanded, and the Stronghold Buster Seminar on the free resources section of our website, www.ficm.org. It is also recommended you read *Victory Over the Darkness* in its entirety.

People Are Not the Enemy

When we think about the armor of God in our western mindset, it is easy to translate it into an offensive mindset that is going to battle. Paul is careful to tell us we are not fighting against flesh and blood. People are not our enemies. We put this armor on to enable us to stand against the enemy's schemes. These schemes come through the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm. Paul is directing our attention to the cosmic, unseen world he has been talking about in the entire book of Ephesians.

What exactly does this unseen world look like? Ephesians 1:17-23 gives us a little more insight. Paul prays that the glorious Father would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know Him better. Wisdom and revelation are a gift from God. Our ability to know the unknown and to see the unseen is not natural...it is from the realm of the Spirit. He goes on to pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened. This inner awareness brings clarity and lets us see something invisible to the natural man. We become aware in our inner being that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is working in us. This is the power that not only raised Jesus from the dead but seated him at the right hand of God, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion. God placed all things under his feet and appointed him head over everything. This list of evil forces includes any evil that exists today or may exist in the future age. He is Lord over all things and all spiritual beings are subject to Him and His authority.

We see in Ephesians 2 that God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. What a beautiful picture of triumph and conquest! Jesus has defeated Satan and his demons and they get to watch Jesus sit down at the right hand of God. Game, set, match. The game is over, and they are defeated. And to add insult to injury, he escorts the believers in and sits them down with Christ. Don't miss the rub-in-your-face aspect of verse 7 to the enemy. We are in God's trophy case in plain view of all the evil forces as a testimony to the riches of the grace of God expressed by his kindness to us in Jesus. We are trophies of His grace.

Now, in this context, we are told in Ephesians 6 to put on this armor so that we can take our stand. We are not standing against a force like a strong wind that can blow us over at any moment. We are standing in the presence of a foe that knows he is defeated and knows our place of authority. This is why the armor is not meant to arm us to gear up and go attack. The battle has already been fought. We simply are told to stand firm in the knowledge of what has already happened and who we are in our new identity with Jesus. Psalm 23 describes how I view the posture we are to take. Imagine being in a place where your enemies have surrounded you. You look around and start to fear their attack. God calmly tells you to not fear any evil because He is with us. He prepares a table for you in the presence of your enemies. Can you imagine the insult the enemy feels when you see them around you and you ignore them and simply sit down for a meal? You turn your back on them, relax and

enjoy your time with your Creator. They are no threat to you while you are in the presence of your shepherd.

In light of this knowledge, how do the rulers of evil try to defeat us? They have to lie. Their job is to convince you that what Jesus has done for you is not enough. Through craftiness, deceit, schemes, and constant false accusations, they lay the groundwork that eats away at our peace and slowly drains the joy from our lives if we believe their lies. After all, we are not fighting humans, and we can't wage this war with logic and human understanding. This battle is fought on two fronts. The first front is ourselves. We fight against all the condemning thoughts that run through our minds about our lack of consistency in following Christ. We all struggle with this and the condemnation sounds reasonable to us. It sounds like this... If you loved God, then why did you think or do that?



The second front is the assault from others. We have constant conflict and struggles with family, friends, coworkers, and people we don't even know. If Satan can make you think someone with skin is your enemy, he has the focus on them and not on him. We are fighting an unseen force that wishes to remain unseen. We are told to resist the enemy and he will flee. Too many believers today are unaware

of the methods and schemes the enemy uses against us daily. The evil spiritual forces have observed your behavior, your personality, your tendencies, how you promote yourself, how you defend yourself, how you indulge yourself, what makes you happy, and what makes you sad since you were born. They are crafty, and they study your life like a pro football team studies the other team before a game.

Again, the battle we fight is not physical, and people are not our enemy. We must know the truth of God's word and see the assaults against our minds as lies from the enemy. These lies are like the arrows that were lit on fire and shot at the opposing army. We hold up our shield of truth that extinguishes the flaming lies of the enemy. We remind ourselves of God's truth and we stand firm in that truth. Eventually, our emotions will follow what we believe.

The only advancing assault we are to carry out is to approach our enemies with the love of Christ. We love them and forgive them rather than retaliate against them. This task is the hardest thing we will ever do and is impossible to carry out in the flesh. Only the Spirit of the living God can enable us to love those that hate us and hurl insults at us. Turning the other cheek is not an easy thing to do. When our enemies see the love and mercy we are extending, it is the true reflection of Christ in us. It is the power of love lived out in our lives.

For more teaching on this topic, see chapter 12 of *Victory Over the Darkness* (revised and updated edition).

Study 2
Section 3
**Sin Creates Inner Conflict
& Separates Us From God**

The Truth About Repentance

Repentance is one of those words we have heard 1000 times. Most of us can define the word but somehow have a wrong impression of what it means. We know it means to change your mind and to go in the opposite direction.

I was in Wales several years ago and got to visit a local church with a friend that attended there. Wales was already in a post-Christian state. The locals were not interested in attending and thought the church was irrelevant. When asked if they wanted to attend a special Easter service, their answers were filled with vulgarity and anger. To survive and not lose their buildings, the church rented out space to the townspeople. They had weddings, funerals, art classes, dance lessons, and a host of other activities. One of the offerings was a get-to-know Jesus class. I attended that class with 10 locals that had a small desire to learn about Jesus.

I listened carefully and observed the class as they listened to the teacher. How do you explain terminology to unbelievers, most of whom had never heard of God? The teacher struggled, and the class was disconnected. I asked myself, “what would I say if I had a chance to talk?” At about that time, my friend asked me if I wanted to say anything. I jumped at the opportunity to engage the class as I asked God to lead my thoughts and words. I asked them why they were so angry at the church. How do you feel when people from the church say you are lost? What does it mean to repent? The class was suddenly awake and energetic. They were getting a chance to talk and not listen. They vented their anger at God and the church.

Then I explained repentance to them. Imagine you are suddenly aware for whatever reason that God is real. You find yourself standing face to face with Him in the fullness of his glory. The light of His presence is so bright you cannot see anything but light. You are suddenly aware that He is holy and you are not. You fall on your face before Him in fear and shame. He approaches you and gently reaches down and lifts your head until your eyes meet His. The kindness and love flowing from His eyes overwhelm you and you look down again. He says it is OK to look up because He loves you and desires a relationship with you. You ask Him to forgive you for your unbelief. Your many sins flood through your mind, and you drop your eyes yet again. He softly tells you He has covered those sins and shame if you will only trust Him and let Him be your God. You burst into tears, and He embraces you as only a father can do. This is where you always belonged and all of a sudden you realize that.



As you are basking in this new relationship, you remember some past sin that was pleasurable. You turn your gaze from God and toward your sin. The longer you think about your sin, the easier it is to forget His presence. Finally, you turn and walk away from the light into

the darkness and pursue your sin. The further you walk, the darker it becomes. You hear His voice inside of your soul calling you to return. The last place you want to be when you are in the dark and in sin is to be in His presence. In His great kindness, He tells you it is OK to turn and come back to Him. He reminds you He is so much greater than your sin and will give you His peace and comfort if you return. As you walk back into the light, you see Him approaching you with the same love you saw before. He loves his child and welcomes you back with amazing forgiveness and warmth.

And that, my friends, is repentance. Some in the room were in tears and all were quiet. I asked them what they thought, and the common response was “is that true? Does he love us like that?” They thought of repentance as someone yelling at them from a pulpit to REPENT or burn in hell, which turned them away from Christianity. Allowing them to vent and feel understood gave me the opportunity to tell the story. They resisted the image of angry church leaders and an angry God but were changed by the image of a loving father.

The Steps to Freedom in Christ is a practical, in-depth process of repentance. I urge you to walk through the steps with the image of a loving father gently inviting you back into a proper relationship. He is not an angry God, and He longs for you to walk in the light as He is in the light.

Trials & Temptations

James 1 concentrates on trials and temptations. It is important to understand what each means. **God sends trials to bring out the best in us** (see Abraham in Gen 2:21), **but Satan sends temptations to bring out the worst in us. Trials come from things and events outside of us. Temptations come from the evil desires within us** (James 1:14).

One of the best tests of Christian maturity is enduring difficulty. When we go through personal trials and hardships, we discover what kind of faith we possess. We quickly discover whether our faith is on solid or unstable ground.

We are told to consider it pure joy whenever we face these trials. Doesn't that sound a little strange? It may at first, but not after you have endured many trials. The trials are meant to show you your weakness as well as the compassion and willingness of God to sustain you through the trial. Endurance (patience) through trials produces perseverance which works in us to form our character.

As new believers, the sudden onslaught of problems or circumstances usually brings terror and confusion. But as we are tested and tried by God, we gain experiential knowledge that God will see us through everything that happens to us in this life. He controls the events of the world, and He has a purpose behind every event.

Have you noticed there are things that tempt some people but don't tempt others? Why is that? **Temptation gains its power when it**

connects to a corresponding desire within you. If sexual desire is strongly present in your mind, any temptation in that area has power. Likewise, if you have never used alcohol or drugs, those temptations have no power over you. We tend to think we can continue to think about sin in our minds as long as we do not act upon those impulses. That is exactly what Satan wants you to think. If we give mental space to sinful thoughts and desires, they eventually show up in our life and are a magnet for sin.

Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Yet, Jesus had no inner cravings or desires that were sinful. Jesus said, "The ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in me" (John 14:30).

An interesting thought on trials and temptations is they can show the possibilities in a person, both good and bad. Our greatest strengths exercised in the spirit may be our greatest weaknesses exercised in the flesh. As an example, a pastor's greatest gift may be his compassion and willingness to help those in his congregation. Suppose a woman with a struggling marriage seeks out his help. Over time, she notices the pastor listens intently and is concerned about her well-being. She feels heard and understood. She does not have that in her husband and always desired that in a man. The pastor's greatest strength of compassion and genuine concern exercised in the spirit can easily turn into misguided affection in the flesh. That temptation will have power if he entertains evil desires in his mind.

We must be aware of our inner cravings and desires and practice regular repentance. We have the ability to control what we allow in our minds.

It's natural to blame others for our sins and bad decisions. We blame our spouse, our parents, our boss, even God. But James offers a sharp rebuke to those who blame God for their sinning. "When tempted, no one should say God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone, but each one is tempted when by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:13-14).



The source of the temptation is from within each of us. It is our own evil desires, lust, or inner cravings that come from our flesh. It's important to note that not all desire in itself is sinful. What I am talking about here is evil desires arising in our flesh that cause us to act out in sinful ways. Lust means to add to, meaning something is being added to a normal drive. When we are tempted, we are dragged away and enticed to sin. The words dragged away and enticed are hunting terms that form an image of a hunter or fisherman using bait to lure the prey.

So, a person both builds his own trap and then gets enticed by it. It's like designing a fishing

lure with a sharp hook and casting it into the water. You then jump out of the boat and grab the lure you built and suffer the effect of the hook. **Temptation always uses a bait that appeals to our specific desires. The bait attracts and disguises the fact that yielding to that sinful desire brings sorrow and punishment.** David would have never sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband killed if he had thought through the consequences of his passion. Temptation can override your senses and cause you to make terrible decisions.

The man that is tempted and gives in to the temptation five minutes later does not know the power of temptation. He cannot imagine what life could be like 24 hours later had he asked God to give him the strength to overcome. The more you say no to temptation and allow your mind to be conformed to Christ, the more temptations begin to lose their power.

Temptation always begins with conscious thought. The moment the thought hits our brain, we have the choice to entertain the thought or reject it. **Practice threshold thinking** that immediately dismisses any and every thought that is not consistent with God and His word. **Through God's help and the power of the Holy Spirit, it is possible to resist temptation and not act on these sinful desires.** It can be helpful to remember the consequences of sinful behavior in your life or the lives of people around you. Sin is pleasurable for a season, but it always leads to death.

Jesus modeled this for us when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He

resisted Satan with the Word of God. Hide His word within you that you may not sin against God. When you know the word and are walking intimately with Jesus, you can see the bait and deal with it decisively. We were meant to walk by faith and not by sight.

For more information on trials and temptations, see chapter 1 and 9 of *The Bondage Breaker*, completely revised and expanded, and chapter 9 of *Victory Over the Darkness*, revised and updated edition.

Sin Is a Choice

Do you feel like you have no control over sin? Does it seem more powerful than you and overwhelms you? The simple answer is sin has no power over us and God has given us everything we need in Christ to overcome sin. **As a believer in Christ, sin is always a choice.**

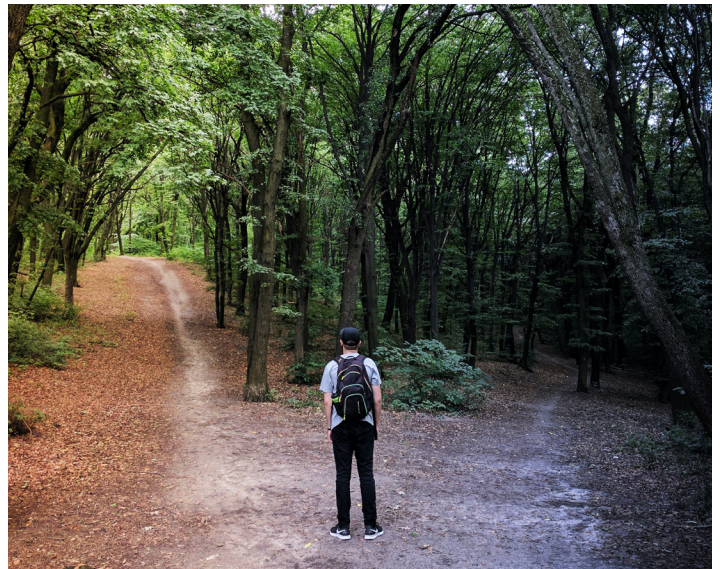
That brings up an uncomfortable reality. If sin has no power over me, then I am willfully and rebelliously choosing not to follow God and choosing to follow sin. That is a bit of a gut punch, but it is true. As humans, we have no choice but to live under a spiritual power—either the Creator of the universe or the god of this world.

When we choose to follow Jesus, we have a new relationship of sonship and a Father we now serve. Our former way of life was walking according to the influence of Satan. We lived according to the lusts of our flesh and indulged the desires of the flesh and the mind. We were by nature objects of God's wrath. But in Christ, we have the authority and power to do God's will, because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus (see Matthew 28:18).

With this change, our actual natures change. God has given us His Spirit and His mind to cause us to do the things we could not do before. Your new nature replaces your old sinful nature. Your heart becomes His heart and is directed to God rather than toward sin and your old behaviors. The evidence of this change is the conviction you feel when you choose to sin. What you are choosing to do

(sin) is no longer consistent with who you are in Christ.

Nature determines what you do. Fish swim, birds fly, and monkeys climb trees. The new nature in you is like a new spiritual DNA. Romans 6 talks about being dead to sin and alive to Christ. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?...For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin" (Romans 6:1-2, 6-7).



So, you are instructed to count yourself dead to sin and offer your body to God as an instrument of righteousness. **SIN IS NOT YOUR MASTER!** It goes on to say that when you offer yourself to someone to obey them, you are a slave to them. Therefore, you are either a slave to sin which leads to death or a slave to God which leads to righteousness.

WHATEVER YOU YIELD YOURSELF TO, CONTROLS YOU.

For guys, this should be a chapter of the bible you memorize. I have never met a man that did not struggle at some level with his sexuality. You cannot participate in sexual immorality without offering your body to sin. Sin in the body carries much guilt and shame. The man that has control over his body but not over his mind, struggles almost as much. You are not truly free until you are free physically and mentally.

Old ways of thinking and acting are like ruts in our thinking. It is easy to slide off the road and end up stuck in a muddy rut. Remember, God is merciful and forgiving. Keep reminding yourself who you are. **Romans 5 encourages us to become in practice what we already are in Spirit. In other words, start acting like the person you already are. I tell people we spend our entire lives trying to get into a room we are already in. We are accepted and loved by God and seated in the heavenlies with him. Think about that the next time you struggle with sin.**

Does sin have power over you? Not unless you choose to offer yourself to sin and let it rule over you!

For more on this topic, see Chapter 4 of *Victory Over the Darkness*, revised and updated edition, and chapter 3 of *The Bondage Breaker*, completely revised and expanded edition.

Study 2

Section 4

Proper Expectations

Control

The most common meaning of sin is to miss the mark, deviate from the goal, or take the wrong road. Man was created to live in utter dependence upon the grace and provision of his creator. The fact that God is sovereign essentially means He has the power, wisdom, and authority to do anything He chooses within His creation. He knows all things and controls all things. We sin when we miss this concept. We miss the mark and take the wrong path when we assume control and the outcomes of our lives.

Control is comprised of three components: pride, unbelief, and rebellion.

Pride refuses to depend upon God and be subject to him. It depends on self and does not trust in God. Pride in my life was like an odorless, deadly gas. I did not detect it. It was present and caused a myriad of problems without my notice.



Unbelief refuses to accept the concept of God. The Holy Spirit was sent to convict the world of sin because they did not believe in Jesus. The unbeliever refuses to hear the words of God and obey because he does not

believe. The believer hears the words of God and can be deceived by the enemy to believe they do not apply. I routinely see believers that are prone to performance-based acceptance struggle with the basic understanding that God sees them as perfect in Christ. They often feel inadequate and are burdened by the nagging thought they are not doing enough.

Rebellion means to oppose, resist, or defy one in control. In 1 Samuel 5:23, “For rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft).” Rebellion is subtle. As believers, we can refuse to obey what the Holy Spirit reveals to us because we do not fully understand it. Faith and obedience come before understanding. If you wait to understand before obeying, you will engage your mind in an exercise that exhausts most people and rarely results in obedience.

It is easy to see that the combination of pride, unbelief, and rebellion is a perfect representation of Satan. The word Satan means adversary. He represents everything that is evil and intends to deceive, tempt, torment, and destroy. Before Satan rebelled, he was called Lucifer, meaning light bearer. He was the morning star, the son of the dawn. He was an anointed angelic being that was beautiful. He was blameless in his ways from the day he was created till wickedness was found in him. **His heart became proud because of his beauty.** His wisdom was corrupted because of his splendor. Isaiah 14 contains five “I will” statements that Satan was condemned for. The last one was “I will make a name for myself.” He wanted to be God.

It is important to understand what made Satan fall because he is the one that deceives us. He is the first sinner and the first one to tempt us. Look at his first interaction with mankind in the garden of Eden. The scene shows Satan basically telling Eve she can't trust God. He says to her "God is not good, and He is holding out on you...You will be in control of all things because you will know all things."

The struggle to be in control is nothing less than wanting to be our own god.

The illusion of control is such a silly concept if you take the time to examine it. **To really be in control, you must have perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future.** Recognizing that we do not have perfect knowledge should be proof enough that we need someone who does possess perfect knowledge and perfectly controls all things. But many people don't see it that way. Pride and self-sufficiency keep them from believing in Jesus.

Control stems from the fact we don't fully understand and trust God. To the extent we misunderstand him, we will live our lives incorrectly.

Control can be confusing though. We are told to have self-control as a fruit of the spirit. Self-control is controlling how you think and act which is admirable. The control I am talking about is the desire to control outcomes. It is a funny thing to think we gain self-control as a fruit of the Spirit when we submit our will to God. We lose control to gain self-control. But, most would rather control outcomes and people than exercise the gift of self-control.

Look back at your life. What happens when you suddenly feel out of control? You receive the news you are losing your job, you or a loved one has a terminal disease or a child is rebelling and spinning out of control. Often, the immediate response is fear. You may also feel a sense of anger over the apparent loss of control. Negative emotions flood our minds and seep into our behavior.

To have peace in our lives, it is mandatory we surrender control to a loving, caring God that has numbered our days and perfectly knows everything about us. He can be trusted to be in control. He is good and wants you to find your contentment in Him. He allows us to participate in the advancement of His Kingdom on earth. Philippians 4:7 says, "The peace of God that surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." This peace is freedom and deliverance from all the strife and distress that come from sin. It is trusting a heavenly Father to guide our lives. It takes the pressure off.

When you realize you are not in control and have never been in control, you have two options. Submit yourself to your heavenly Father or to the father of lies who has deceived you into believing you can be in control. Submit yourselves to God, and you have peace. Submit yourself to Satan, and he will destroy you. Remember, whatever you submit yourself to will control you. Satan is clever enough not to ask you to submit to him. Instead, he encourages you to submit to yourself which is the original sin.

See chapter 5 of the free book *Restored* for more teaching on this topic.

Expectations and Goals

For years, I often found myself disappointed as a follower of Christ. I kept journals and noticed this was a repeated pattern. So, I made it a matter of prayer because I did not want God to think I was disappointed in Him. I remember hearing in my spirit to write down what disappointed me. I was somewhat surprised that my list was things that I had hoped to accomplish for God but had not happened.

Again, I heard God ask me a very pointed question that penetrated my heart. “Did I promise you that?” My answer was no, but my heart was set on doing great things for God. He gently showed me that my zeal for Him and advancing His Kingdom was actually my pride and ambition. They were noble things to accomplish but came from my flesh. God gently reminded me That He would complete everything in me that He had purposed for me.

My disappointments were born from my misguided expectations. In Luke 24, we see two people walking on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection of Christ. They were discussing what had just happened when Jesus appears and walks with them. But they do not recognize him and Jesus then asks them what they are talking about. With downcast faces, they begin to tell Jesus about what happened to Him and how He was crucified. Verse 21 says, “**But we had hoped** that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

“But we had hoped” is an expression of a disappointed heart and mind. We all have walked this road. But we had hoped the diagnosis would not be cancer, the marriage

would get better, the job would not be lost, and the daughter would live. It is a blatant reminder of our desire to control outcomes.

God gives us self-control as a gift of the Spirit, but we would rather control outcomes and other people rather than ourselves.

In the New Testament, the word for hope as a verb and as a noun means to have trust and confidence. It is an expectation of what is sure to come. It is active and living. It is faith-filled waiting on God to fulfill what He promised. My desire to do great things for God and my subsequent disappointment when they didn't happen reveals that my hope was not in God, but in myself. I was trying to make something happen instead of waiting on God to fulfill what He promised.



My expectations are now bound to the hope I have in Christ. The Spirit guides and comforts me, and I surrender outcomes and expectations to Him. He is my provider, my portion, my sustainer, and my rock. One day I will see him face to face, and I will know in full what I now only know in part.

I encourage you to take time to write down what disappoints you in life. What are your expectations? God's goals and expectations for our lives are often different than our own goals and expectations for our lives. There is much peace of mind and joy that comes when our expectations are managed properly.

Goals and Desires

In Chapter 7 of *Victory Over the Darkness*, there is a brief section on goals and desires. This one simple concept has helped me and many I have helped find freedom. This section follows the section on expectations for a reason. What we expect and try to control determines our mental state of mind.

A good beginning point is to establish the definition of a goal and a desire.

A godly goal is anything that reflects God's purpose for your life and is not dependent on other people or circumstances beyond your right or ability to control.

A godly desire is any result that depends on the cooperation of other people, successes or events, or favorable circumstances that you have no right or ability to control.

This is simple yet so often misunderstood and the cause of much grief. A godly goal can only pertain to yourself. You are the only person you have the right or ability to control. If success is dependent on any other person or thing, it falls under a desire, not a goal. We have the right and ability to control what we eat, what we think, how much sleep we get, etc. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit but attempting to control things outside of yourself becomes sinful and hurtful.

Once, I was invited by a pastor of a large church to participate in leadership meetings and conversations with his senior staff. I was given time to share my observations with them

after several months of meetings. I decided to focus on goals and desires. I wrote the definitions for each on the whiteboard and listed several things on the board. I asked the staff about 20 people to get up and write beside my list whether each item was a goal or desire. The list included Sunday School attendance, church attendance, baptisms, and community outreach goals. Every staff person listed these items as godly goals along with the other items on my list.



I asked them to go back and read the descriptions of godly goals and desires. I told them everything listed on the board was a godly desire, not a godly goal, because each item was dependent on the people in the church and community. After some discussion, they realized they were wrong to call these goals. What should our church goals be then? they asked. I told them that was their job to answer those questions in respect to what they had the right and ability to control. They prayed, collaborated, and came up with a great plan for the church. It involved asking people to be responsible for their own godly goals and allowing everything else to be simply a desire.

Why does that matter? When we elevate a desire to a goal in our minds and it gets blocked, we struggle with anger, anxiety and depression. This is because we think we can control the outcome. By comparison, when a desire isn't met, we will only face disappointment.

God's desire is that all would repent and live, but not all will. It is God's desire because he knows not all will repent and live. God has no blocked goals.

God's goals are never blocked. Jesus will return, we will live with him forever, Satan will be cast into the abyss for eternity and we will receive rewards for our faithfulness. God will do what he has determined to do.

Throughout my years of helping others walk in freedom, I have observed three main areas where people struggle the most: forgiving others, dealing with sexual sin, and understanding the difference between a godly goal and desire. I have personally observed innumerable marriages, relationships, business partnerships, and church staffs united after properly understanding the difference between a godly goal and desire and implementing appropriate boundaries and expectations for each. I am eternally grateful to Dr. Anderson for his insight into this. I know it has helped millions of people around the world!

For more on this topic, see chapter 7 of *Victory Over the Darkness*, revised and updated edition.

Suffering and Persecution

Do you want to know what your calling is? What God has planned for your life? Of course, you do. We all want to know God's will and plans for us. God's plan is to conform us to His image to bring light, life, and hope to those around us. Part of that conformity to His image is going through suffering.

1 Peter 2:20-21 says, **"But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this, you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."** I think most of us missed this point when we became a follower of Christ. God is gracious to us in that He reveals His will to us in a progression we can tolerate. He gradually exposes us to new truths and deeper understanding. As God reveals deeper knowledge, we must choose to walk out what we believe.

1 Peter 1:6-7 says, "In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. **These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus is revealed.**"

As a younger believer, I understood suffering and persecution to be something I had to tolerate. It was something I hoped to avoid if possible. I knew the world would hate me because they hate God and I represent and belong to him. I also knew God would use this to shape in me something that did not

yet exist. I viewed it the same way I would view joining the army and being required to endure boot camp. It was necessary but not anticipated and surely not to be desired.



Recently, God has shown me that suffering and persecution are actually the gateways into His presence and His power. It is an invitation into intimacy with Him. When I read about Paul, I longed to be used like that for God. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul boasts about his sufferings. He tells of his frequent prison terms, floggings, being beaten with rods, stoning, shipwrecks, and being in danger everywhere he went. And in chapter 12, he tells about the thorn in his side, a messenger of Satan, to torment him. And the Lord refused to remove the thorn because God tells Paul that His power is made perfect in weakness.

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in the body is done with sin" (1 Peter 4:1). The person who has faced death and survived realizes the petty sinful desires and practices they once indulged in do not matter any longer. They've had a spiritual awakening, a new perspective on what is important in life. A person that has suffered

near the point of death possesses a maturity that is advanced compared to most.

It is only when we realize we are weak and incapable that the power of God is real to us. Our faith takes a giant leap. It goes from something we believe to be true to something we have complete trust in and the confidence to walk in. In 1 Peter 4, it says you have spent enough time in sin. The end of all things is near. It is time to be clear-minded and self-controlled. We are instructed to not be surprised at the painful trial we are suffering as though something strange was happening to us. **It goes on to say rejoice that you participate in the suffering of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.** If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Do you see the invitation to intimacy? If you participate in His sufferings, you also participate in His glory.

In another section of this study, I covered expectations. We are to expect and anticipate suffering and persecution. I've seen football players that were unaware they were about to be hit. Because they were unaware, the hit has more impact and pain. The player that sees and anticipates the hit is braced for the blow and able to reduce its impact. The same is true with our faith. Suffering is not some strange thing that comes upon us, it is part of our calling.

When the apostles were persecuted in Acts 5, they rejoiced because they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. It is a privilege to be identified with Christ. We

are part of His family. In some profound way, we are image bearers and breath carriers of the Almighty. 1 Peter 3 instructs us not to fear what they fear or be frightened. No matter the outcome of our suffering on this earth, we have the blessed hope we will be with Christ for eternity. **Do not be afraid!**

J.I. Packer says, "In this world, royal children have to undergo extra training and discipline which other children escape, to fit them for their high destiny." It is the same with the children of the King of Kings. The clue to understanding all God's dealings with us is to remember that throughout our lives, he is training us for what awaits us, chiseling them into the image of Christ. "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes **everyone he accepts as a son.** Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:6-6, 11).

See chapter 18 of *The Common Made Holy* for more teaching on this topic.

Emotions vs. Trust

People usually seek out a professional counselor or therapist because they have uncontrolled emotions or behavior. They desperately want to find out what they need “to do” to fix the problem. I had a dad call me and tell me his daughter was acting strangely bizarre. She was climbing out of her window at night and rebelling against any form of order in the home. I surprised him when I said I’m not as concerned about what she is doing as I am with what she is thinking. I asked if he had any idea what his daughter was thinking. He had no clue. He was attempting to modify her behavior without understanding what was causing it. Another time a mom told me her daughter was suffering from terrible panic attacks and depression. I told her virtually the same thing—I was more concerned about what her daughter was thinking than how she was feeling. She also had no clue as to what her daughter was thinking.



When our thinking is faulty, our bodies and emotions get out of sync. **In Lamentations 3, Jeremiah was depressed and hopeless because he wrongly believed God was against him and the cause of his problems.** Later in the chapter, he reminds himself of the

truth about God, his hope is restored and his depression fades away. He did not focus on the depression; he fixed his wrong thinking, and his emotions changed. I call this Stinking Thinking. Wrong thinking always leads to stinky outcomes.

Hope is the emotion I pay the most attention to. Psalm 147:11 says, “The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.” When properly focused, the heart is overflowing with hope. Romans 5 talks about faith, hope, and love. Through our faith, we have been justified and have peace with God. We rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint because God has poured out his love into our hearts. **When someone has lost or is losing hope, it is an indicator that their thinking is distorted.**

Hope is not unfounded optimism or positive thinking. It is founded on God’s love. Hope comes before faith because nobody steps out in faith if there is no hope. Faith is being sure of what we hope for (see Hebrews 11:1). Life with God is endless hope, and life without God has no hope and is a hopeless end.

I have met people that stuff their emotions and see others’ emotions as weaknesses. I have also seen others that live by what they feel. Both extremes are not healthy. Our emotions are to our souls what physical feelings are to our bodies. Just as we respond to physical pain, so we should respond to our emotions. Emotions are like indicator lights on the dashboard of

our car. When an indicator light is flashing, you do not ignore it. You read the car manual if you are unfamiliar with the light and open the hood to fix the problem.

The emotional reactions of anger, anxiety, depression, and fear are all related to how we think and what we believe. If you want to change how you feel, you need to change what you believe.

I talked with a person struggling with a complex diagnosis of depression. Normal life had become burdensome, and their hope was mostly gone. We spent hours talking about the situation and what they believed to be true about God. Eventually, we went through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, and they found great relief. We spent over 5 hours in *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* and never mentioned the word depression. In this case, depression was not the real problem, but a result of faulty thinking about God and the person's inability to trust God with outcomes. Outcomes in the past had turned out poorly, and their trust was gone. When trust was gone, hope was gone, and when hope was gone, depression set in.

However, sometimes depression is more complicated than just fixing wrong thinking. A variety of physical, genetic, and biological factors can contribute to depression. In these cases, treating depression may require additional or ongoing help.

I will say it again because it is so important. Do not ignore your emotions. They let you know what your soul is experiencing. But you cannot control your emotions without changing what you think.

For more information on this topic, see Chapter 1 and 10 of *Victory Over the Darkness*, revised and updated edition, and chapter 1 of *Letting Go of Fear* and our website ficm.org for specific resources on treating depression.

Legalism

I heard a pastor once say we are all recovering legalists. Legalism is attractive to followers of Christ because it gives us a feeling that we are doing our part; it makes perfect sense in our minds. The religious leaders of Jesus' day struggled with legalism. The early church struggled with legalism. And the church today struggles with legalism. The book of Galatians is a wonderful study of legalism.

How do you define legalism? How do you recognize legalistic tendencies in yourself? It is somewhat easy to explain but almost undetectable to the practicing legalist. I remember having a conversation about legalism with a very legalistic person. They agreed with all of the points we discussed but were greatly offended when asked to consider if they had these tendencies. "Of course, I am not a legalist," they said.



The majority of believers struggle with a constant feeling of guilt that they are not doing enough or shame for continuing to struggle with sin. The fact we struggle with these feelings is evidence that we believe our performance makes a difference in

our acceptance by God. There is a huge difference between conviction through the Holy Spirit and condemnation from Satan.

Legalism is rooted in our desire for acceptance before God, the desire to be pleasing to God in all we do. In Galatians 2:1-10, you see a picture of legalism as doing the right things with the wrong belief. In verses 11-14, you see a picture of hypocrisy as right belief with wrong behavior. And in verses 15-21, you see a picture of faith as the right belief with the right behavior.

So, what does it look like to do the right things with the wrong beliefs? **The legalistic person begins living life according to religion and not relationship. The Christian life becomes an intense focus on duty and rules.** This person begins working in their own power, according to their own rules, to earn God's favor. They are self-driven and insensitive to others and often to the Holy Spirit. They are often seen as angry, bitter, tired, judgmental, and lacking peace and joy. They always seem in a hurry and are easily frustrated when things aren't going according to their plan.

They have a sour effect on those they are around and can be rejected as unloving, harsh, and demanding. Their main fear is not pleasing God and losing their positions of influence. Sadly, these people are usually in positions of leadership in our churches. They hinder the Spirit and the work of God.

What are some antidotes to legalism? We must remind ourselves of the foundations of our faith.

We cannot work in our own power.

We must have the power of the Holy Spirit working through us.

We cannot work according to our own rules. A controlling spirit is deeply rooted in legalism. We must realize the spread of the gospel is not about us—it is about Jesus. Jesus never did things the same way. His methods of healing varied depending on the person and situation. I believe that was meant for those of us who look for a pattern in life. We want a template to follow, to do things the same way every time, and expect others to do the same. But that is simply not the way it works in the Spirit. We must stop and ask the Spirit to lead us in every situation.

We must realize we are not “working” for God. Galatians 5:1 says “it is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” To go back to following all the rules puts us under the burden of the law, and we miss the grace of God.

We must recognize that legalism blocks the glory of God, undermines our salvation, and destroys our confidence. The mind set on doing everything right in its own strength will eventually stumble under its own weight. Legalism always brings condemnation and discouragement because legalism motivates through fear and guilt. Legalists see themselves as defenders of the faith. In reality, they can look more like a Pharisee than Jesus.

When I hear other believers telling me what I should be doing, I quickly get away from them. The rules and structure of legalism are easy to fall back into. If you are struggling with exhaustion, disappointment, and frustration, I encourage you to be quiet before God. Give Him the freedom to show you whatever He wants to show you. Take the burden of legalism off your back and take His yoke. It is easy and light.

Legalism never focuses on relationships but on the law. God allowed the law to show us we could not keep it in our own power. **The law is perfect because it always pointed to Jesus.** He kept the law perfectly and because He did, you do not have to. We are saved by grace alone and through Christ alone. I pray you can unburden yourself from legalism and rest in His joy. If you are a believer, God sees the perfect work of Christ when He looks at you. You are pleasing in His sight and loved as a son or daughter. Praise be to God!

For more teaching on this topic, see chapter 2 of *The Core of Christianity* and the entire book of *Grace That Breaks the Chains* by Neil Anderson and Rich Miller. Another great resource is the article “Salvation from the Pleasure of Sin” by A.W. Pink. It details the struggle between flesh and spirit.

Study 3

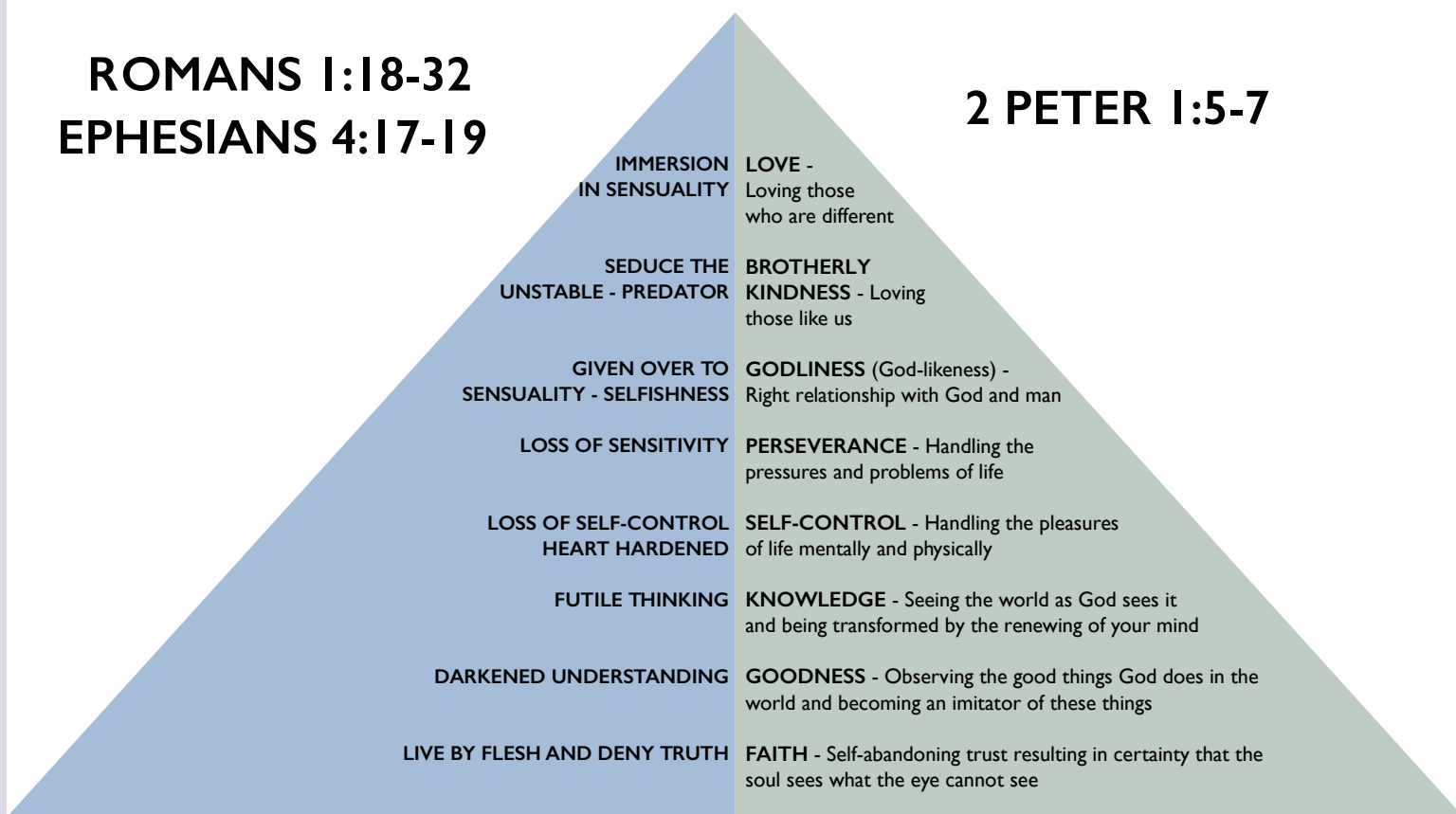
Romans 1, Ephesians 4 & 2 Peter 1

Contrast



ROMANS 1:18-32
EPHESIANS 4:17-19

2 PETER 1:5-7



Spiritual Maturity vs. Sinful Maturity

Romans 1, 2 Peter 1:5-7 & Ephesians 4:17-19 Contrast

What Is This Study About?

We learn best by contrasting one thing to another. This study is a brief summary of how spiritual and sinful living matures. I contrasted 2 Peter to Ephesians 4, but you can also look at Romans 1 for another example of how sinful thinking leads to sinful behavior. Verse 21 tells us these people knew God, but they did not glorify him as God nor did they give thanks to him. Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. They rejected God, and God gave them over to their sinful desires. To me, that is the most frightening thing I can think of. I have personally encountered several people that were at this point in their lives. They consciously rejected God and chose to follow their passions.

Sexual misconduct is usually the first passion people seek to indulge themselves in. But eventually, every kind of wickedness is expressed in their lives. When God gives us over and chooses to remove the restraint of the Holy Spirit, we are left to nothing but our sins.

How Will This Help Me?

Sometimes it is easier to identify with our sin than our faith. I trust the Holy Spirit will show you where you are in your faith or your sin. This study has served as a wake-up call for many. I have seen men and women turn pale and look sick as they realized how far they had fallen into sin.

How To Use

The application of this study is very easy to understand. It is meant to be a reflection of your life and to encourage you to draw back to God if you have strayed. Reflect upon your sin circle and any pitfalls you may have uncovered in your thinking.

Spiritual Maturity vs. Sinful Maturity

2 Peter 1:5-7 and Ephesians 4:17-19 Contrast

The progression of maturity in our faith as shown in 2 Peter is a model for us to follow. In contrast, the progression of sin and self-absorption in Ephesians 4 is a vivid reminder of what sin looks like as it matures.

I was teaching a diverse group of men ranging in age from twenty-five to seventy-five years old about 2 Peter. We had a good interaction, and they were identifying with the passage. I introduced the contrast of that passage with the progression of sin in Ephesians 4 and suddenly, the room was quiet. They read the list and sat there for several minutes. Finally, one man spoke up and said he identified more with the sin side than the faith side. His sin had been hidden from others but present in his life for years. He was pale as he compared his life to the chart. He said, "I am dangerously close to being given over to my sins."

The passage I am referring to is Ephesians 4:17-19 which says, "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual

lust for more." Verses 22-24 say, "You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Before we go deeper, let's begin by establishing the context of this passage. Paul emphatically insists that the Gentile converts to Christianity no longer live as the Gentiles do. Premarital sex, homosexual intercourse, and idolatry were typically Gentile sins. The Jews were taught to abstain from these sins. The Gentiles, or pagans, were raised to live in this sinful behavior with the belief it was normal. Many Greek boys were ushered into "manhood" by an older man's molestation.

In this passage, we are told to **"put off" the old self** which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires and to **"put on" the new self**. It is a picture of taking off filthy clothes and putting on new, clean clothes. The unsaved man lives in this pattern of sin. The saved man can also live in this destructive pattern. He may be saved but still choose to keep on some of his dirty clothes and live part of his life in that filth.

Living by the Flesh vs. Living by Faith

Learning is enhanced when we contrast opposite ideas. In this study, I will not go into depth on the 2 Peter side but will focus on the negative or sin side of the chart. **It is important to note this this sin progression doesn't only apply to an unbeliever but also to a rebellious believer.** As we have discussed, living by faith is to believe something is true, trust in it and be obedient to do it. To walk by the flesh is very similar. You believe you understand what is true. You trust in yourself enough to live out what you believe. You assume control of your life at a foundational level. Everything you do in your life from that point on is dependent upon your ability to understand and control the events and circumstances of your life.

As stated in Study 2, to be in control requires you to have perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future. You do not possess perfect knowledge, but nevertheless, you are determined to be the captain of your fate. You determine to do things "My Way." It is a replay of Adam and Eve in the garden. **A mind that has chosen to not know God -or chosen to limit Him- cannot fully understand the world around him, nor can he understand himself. One obvious reality of this absence is the epidemic rise of fear, anxiety, and depression. It is prevalent in the world and the church (again, we acknowledge that the**

causes of anxiety and depression are sometimes more complex than this).

Darkened Understanding vs. Goodness

The next level of the faith progression is observing all the good things God does and becoming an imitator of those things. When that is rejected, the mind becomes a place of confusion, and understanding is darkened. The unsaved man thinks he is enlightened, and Christians are uninformed. He rejects the Bible and believes in the newest teachings. He is progressive. He may possess great knowledge and have numerous advanced degrees, but he is in the dark. Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so they cannot see God. Without knowledge of their creator, they are often prideful, arrogant, and quick to tell you how much they know. **"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). The person with a darkened mind often defies logic and common sense.** Look at the actions of David with Bathsheba. David clearly was not thinking with the mind of Christ. His lust and passion cast a deep shadow over his godly beliefs, and he did things that were contrary to his beliefs. **Pride and rebellion almost always lead to some form of sexual misconduct.**

Futile Thinking vs. Knowledge

The next faith progression is understanding the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God

is always relational. Without knowledge of God, the defiant or unbelieving man does not have spiritual life. Truth and life go together. The mind of the unsaved person cannot understand the things of God or the world around him. **His thinking is futile (or vain) because it is darkened.** The futile mind is meaningless and lacks purpose because it was created to be in a relationship with God. The mind of the rebellious believer is similar. Unbelief and rebellion limit the knowledge of God in areas of our life we choose to maintain control. **A mind that is darkened and without purpose looks for a means to find purpose. Often that purpose is misguided and shows in controlling people and material possessions and as sexual indulgence.**

Loss of Self-Control vs. Self-Control

Interestingly, the first three levels of the progression of faith are all gifts from God. Faith is a gift. Goodness is a gift. Without Christ, all our works are like filthy rags. There is no true knowledge without a relationship with the Creator of all things. Self-control is the first step after we have believed, trusted, and been obedient to live out our faith in pursuit of His goodness and knowledge. Without this foundation of truth from God, we can't live a life of self-control. Believers are often compared to sheep. Sheep overgraze and do not know how to stop eating without the assistance of a shepherd. We are the same as sheep

in this regard. **We cannot control our appetites for pleasure without the gentle hand of a loving shepherd. The person pursuing sin faces a loss of self-control. The heart becomes hardened or petrified. To be petrified means what was once alive has over time become hard as a rock.**

Loss of Sensitivity vs. Perseverance

To persevere is to hold up under pressure. It is handling the pressures and problems of life with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It does not give up hope. The opposite of this is loss of sensitivity. At this level, sin begins to control life. Because the heart is hard, the ability to feel natural emotions fades. The voice of God fades, the restraint grows faint and indulgence becomes easy. The mind is choosing to yield control to sin.

Let me give you an illustration. The heart in your body pumps the blood to your extremities. The blood is life and without it, everything dies. In the same way, hardened heart to sin is unable to produce life. A person deprived of blood dies physically, and a person deprived of the blood of Christ suffers spiritual death. I want to stress again: this can and does happen to believers who choose to hold onto an area of sin in their life. They are denying the blood of Christ in that area, and death is the result. If you restrict blood flow to your hand by placing a tourniquet on your

arm, you will lose your fingers. The same is true in the spirit.

Given over to Sensuality vs. Godliness

Godliness means God-likeness. It means to be in a right relationship with God and man. For more on this topic, refer to Righteousness and Justice in the 15 Common Pitfalls Study. The contrast to goodness is being **“given over”** to sensuality. Romans 1:28-32 says, “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthy to retain the knowledge of God, **“he gave them”** over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, deceit, and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

To be given over to sin is the most horrifying thing I can think of. God politely says “I will remove my restraint from your life at your request and allow you to experience the fullness of the sin you have chosen.” He gave them over to a depraved mind which means to fail the test, to be rejected or unapproved. Remember that God has no pleasure in anyone choosing death. He doesn’t want

this for anyone; He wants all to repent and live. But sadly, many choose to reject Him and His ways.

In the Romans passage, did you notice it says when a person believes it is not worth it to hold on to the knowledge of God, they become filled with EVERY KIND OF WICKEDNESS? Is that not a picture of our world today? If they are God-haters, they will hate us as Christ’s followers. Expect it and prepare for it. Verse 24 says He gave them over to their sinful, sexual desires. Sexual indulgence is always a sign of self on the throne and resistance to the ways of God. Also, notice the emphasis on the fact they not only continued in the sinful acts but also approved of those practicing the sin. It is appalling to God when we condone and cheer on the sinful acts of others. If you find yourself in this camp, I strongly encourage you to stop! We must not celebrate, promote and protect sin. If you find yourself disagreeing with God on a topic, you must assume you are wrong. It’s not complicated. He created the world and set things in order and he is always right.

Seduce the Unstable (Predator) vs. Brotherly Kindness

What a contrast of thoughts. Am I showing brotherly kindness to those around me or have I become a predator and a threat to society? **What began as a seemingly simple choice to walk in your flesh ends up as a disaster.** I disciplined young men at a university, and sexual control was

always a big part of the teaching. At the beginning of each semester, our ministry hosted talks on how to survive college life. My topic was how to survive sexually. The class was always full, and the students could not believe we were going to discuss this topic. I would tell them “I am going to begin by answering the question you all are asking: How far is too far?” They wanted to know what was permissible and acceptable behavior for a dating believer. Then I would tell them I actually have a scripture that answers that question. They were always shocked and would try to tell me that’s not in the Bible. I told them it is in there and it is very simple. Treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:2). You are free to treat your girlfriend any way you treat your sister or mother. Yuck! was always the response. It was the truth but not quite what they were looking for.

I also told my guys you are either a protector or a predator. Do you protect women like you would your sister or mother or are you a predator? Are you someone they should fear? If a young woman is distressed over something, do you offer advice and friendship only to gain the right to take advantage of her? **2 Peter 2 talks about false teachers that were experts in greed. It describes them as brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts, they too will perish.** Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they

seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed, an accursed brood! **Experts in greed mean they practiced that skill like an athlete exercises to get better. Eyes full of adultery mean they looked at every girl as a sex object. They were shameless men that were a danger to their society. Are you a protector or a predator? You can’t be both.** If you have daughters, be the man you want other men to be around your daughter.

Immersion in Sensuality vs. Love

Pride and rebellion always lead to greed and lust for power and control over people and material things, as well as to sexual indulgence (I’ll go more in depth about this in Study 4). The desire to be in control always ends in the pursuit of pleasure and sensual self-indulgence. Instead of loving others and desiring they find a relationship with God, the progression of sin ends in self-love. Their pleasure and fulfillment come from the satisfaction of sinful desires. Their highest good and proper aim in life is indulgence. A greedy person is an idolater. An idolater has rejected God and God rejects them.

If you are a follower of Christ and you continue to struggle with the desire for power and sexual indulgence, I encourage you to stop dabbling with sin. Your dabbling will eventually turn into obsession, and you will find it hard to stop. You may think you are choosing to enjoy the pleasure of sin in this part of your life, and all is under control. But I assure you that is a lie.

Satan is playing the music, and you are dancing his dance. You think you are in control, but you are not. He will destroy you, your marriage, and your kids and even try to take your very life if you continue down the road of depravity. The end of sin is always death!

Study 4

2 Peter 1



A CALL TO GROWTH AND MATURITY

2 PETER 1:5-7

LOVE

Loving those
that are different

BROTHERLY KINDNESS

Loving those like us

GODLINESS (God-likeness)

Right relationship with God and man

PERSEVERANCE

Handling the pressures and problems of life

SELF-CONTROL

Handling the pleasures of life mentally and physically

KNOWLEDGE

Seeing the world as God sees it and being transformed by the renewing of your mind

GOODNESS

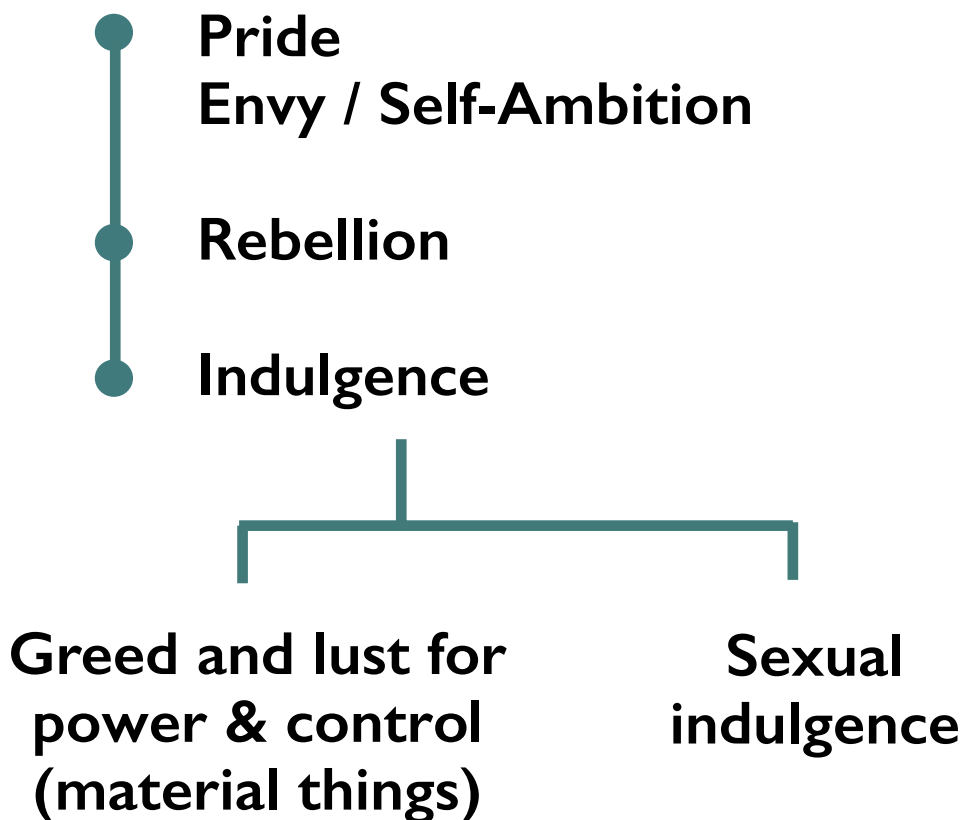
Observing the good things God does in the world and becoming an imitator of these things

FAITH

Self-abandoning trust resulting in certainty that the soul sees what the eye cannot see

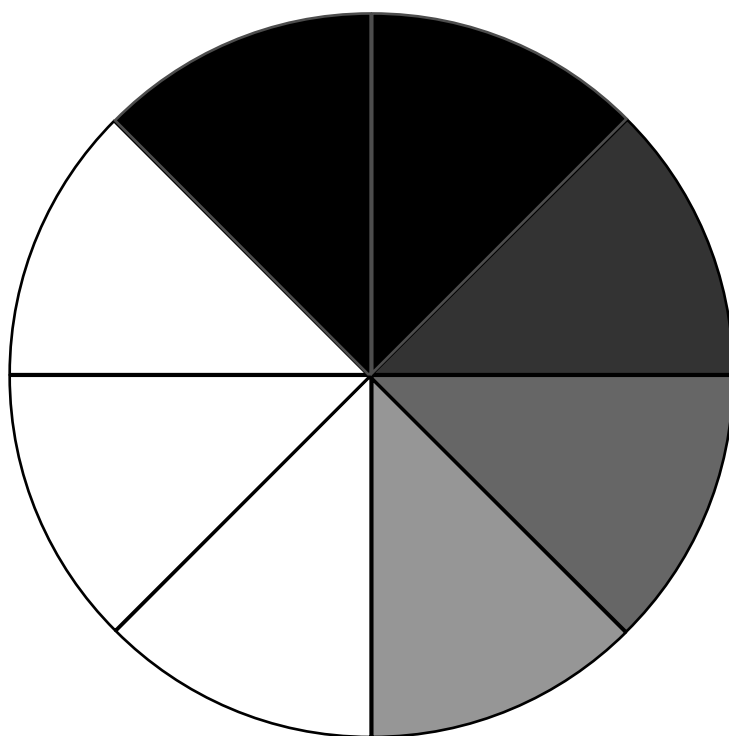


PRIDE LEADS TO A FALL



A REFLECTION OF OUR CHOICES

Circle of Life



A Call to Growth and Maturity Summary

A Study on 2 Peter 1:1-9

What Is The Study About?

This final study puts all the pieces together. The Sin and Faith Circles Story helped you identify the progression of your sin and faith. It also pointed out how fear and control are the centers of sin. The 15 Pitfalls Study helped you identify WHERE and WHY your thinking may be off. The 2 Peter and Ephesians 4 Contrast Study helped you see how sin matures and eventually chokes out your emotions and leads you into darkness.

This study begins with faith and ends with love. A life lived by faith always results in self-denial and an overflow of love. Think of this study as a study of the life of Jesus. We are called to be imitators of Christ. He modeled for us what holiness and righteous living should look like, and we are being transformed into His image. But remember, Jesus is patient; He does not expect instant perfection. You will be working on this process when you die. Be patient with yourself and continue your pursuit of Him.

How Will This Help Me?

This study is like looking in the mirror. The mirror does not tell you what you want to see; it tells you the truth. As you go through this study, you will see clearly

where you are struggling and where you are conforming to the will of God. Are love and brotherly kindness reflected in your life? If not, you can easily look at the pyramid chart and see what is causing love to be choked off. It may be your lack of faith. It may be you have not realized your goodness and have not found that thing you do that makes you feel alive. I view love and brotherly kindness as the blood pumped through the heart that gives life and health to the body. Any blockages in the other areas restrict the blood flow and can cause spiritual death.

How To Use

I would encourage you to take notes on the first 3 studies. Write down areas where your thinking, behavior, and emotions are not what you desire. Then write these things down in the categories of the pyramid chart. If you realize you believe in God but do not trust him, write that down under faith. If you realize you have never found your “calling” in life, write that down under goodness. If you struggle with gossiping, a critical spirit, or sexual lust, write that down under self-control. Do this for every section of the triangle chart and you will have a visual graph of your life.

Do not be overwhelmed as you look at

your areas of struggle. The chart helps you organize and prioritize your approach. Do not begin by trying to correct a self-control issue or wonder why you may be struggling to persevere under hardships. **Always begin at the base level.** Begin with the things that cause you to not have faith. Fear and anxiety will always be present at the base level. Fear paralyzes people and causes them to not obey. We believe fear protects us when in reality it is a prison. The walls we build to protect us only serve to enslave us.

Again, I encourage you to be patient. You did not get to where you are in a day or a week but over a lifetime. You cannot snap your fingers and expect your thinking and behavior to change overnight. **This is a slow process. Allow the Holy Spirit to be your guide.** We are more dependent on Him than we ever imagined. He is the one that leads us into all truth. He is the one that points us to Jesus. Do not be afraid of Him, and do not grieve or quench his presence. When He prompts you to do something, be quick to obey. Go back and look at the first few verses of 2 Peter 1. Verse 3 says “He has given us everything we need for life and godliness through his divine power”. The Holy Spirit is the conduit for that power! You are not being transformed by your strength and by your effort. This can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit present in us.

A Call to Growth and Maturity

A Study on 2 Peter 1:1-9

2 Peter 1:1-9

“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the **knowledge** of God and of Jesus our Lord.

His **divine power** has given us everything we need for a godly life through our **knowledge** of him who called us by his own **glory and goodness**. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may **participate in the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. “**For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.** For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.”

Peter was encouraging people to be strong and mature in their faith. Maturity is necessary to combat the false teachers that had entered the church. The false teachers claimed special knowledge (apart from God) and were full of greed. They were highly motivated to make money and commercialize the faith. They also despised authority and were sexually deviant. They invited and encouraged their listeners into these indulgences without restraint. Some believed those with special knowledge did not need moral restraint.

The encouragement for us today is the same. **Beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing who are teaching in the church. Their words are smooth, and they promise what the sinful heart desires: prosperity and sexual indulgence.** To recognize the wolves, we must be familiar with our Shepherd.

Why is it so easy to be deceived? How do seemingly smart people listen to and follow deceivers without recognizing they are dangerous? We have allowed ourselves to be lulled to sleep. Most are bored with Christianity or see it as old-fashioned and out-of-date.

If you are like most people in our hurry-up

culture, you speed past the first four verses of this passage and concentrate on verses 5-7. Here is yet another list of what “we must do” to be good Christians and not be ineffective and unproductive in our life. I don’t know about you, but I am exhausted by the “do these 5 things to be a winner list.”

This passage has a significant and powerful message for a world that is bored with life. The core question we all ask is what were we made for? Why am I here? You were created to know God and make him known to others. It’s that simple. When I say to know God, I do not mean a structured, academic approach to learning about someone. **In God’s original design, knowledge was relational.** In the Old Testament, wisdom and knowledge are personified. In Proverbs, it says acquire understanding, acquire wisdom. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you. Love her and she will watch over you (Proverbs 4:5-6). Knowing God is deeply personal. It is something to be lived, not understood.

The longing of mankind is to be significant. We want to be part of something larger than ourselves. We want something exhilarating, dangerous, and adventurous. We want something that captures our hearts and imaginations and changes the world. This is what Jesus offers us. He doesn’t offer us religion; he offers us Himself. He was against religion. Religion had reduced relationship to rules, programs, structure, and duty. Does that sound like

what Jesus meant when He said “I have come to give you life, and life to the full”? (John 10:10).

We put a heavy emphasis on studying the Word of God. That is important, but it is not all that is required. Remember, the Word (Jesus) became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14).

In Jesus, we have the undoing of all that we call religion. In the life of Jesus, the kingdom of God breaks out among those whom the religious system had marginalized—the poor, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the prostitutes—and the religious leaders find themselves under the judgment of God (Matthew 23:13-39). It should be apparent to us that we who call ourselves followers of Jesus can expect to be misunderstood and insulted.

As the battle between good and evil intensifies, tribulations and persecutions will increase and become the norm. The good news in all of this is profound. As we are persecuted, we lose our sense of self and are humbled. We realize our weakness and cry out to God for mercy and protection. **God is strongly drawn to weakness and will come to our defense. The hardship we dread will actually be the catalyst that ushers in the move of God we have anticipated and hoped for.**

If you are bored with your brand of Christianity, I suggest you consider the fact that knowing the Creator of the universe is not a boring thing. Have you watched the

power of a storm, listened to the rumble of thunder, and marveled at the splendor of lightning streaking across the sky? Is a sunrise or sunset boring? Do you feel small as you look out upon the ocean and watch the continual crashing of the waves knowing millions of living creatures exist under the surface? The Creator of everything beautiful that we behold on this earth is issuing you a personal invitation to enter into His life. You are not inviting Jesus into your life. You are spiritually dead without Christ. How does a dead person invite anyone into his life? He is rescuing you from death, setting you free from the torment of sin, and giving you His life, the life of the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

Taste and See

With that context, let's go back and look at this passage again. **The key word in 2 Peter is knowledge. This knowledge is the means by which God's grace and mercy may be received and experienced. It is an invitation to "taste and see" that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).** To taste is to try a mouthful of something to appreciate its flavor. Do you want to look at a picture of a chocolate ice cream cone or taste it? To "taste and see" in a relationship is to identify yourself with another person and become emotionally involved in each other's concerns. To "taste and see" God is to feel what He feels and know He feels what you feel. It is to think of him as He thinks about you. It is to rejoice when God is honored and to feel distressed when He is attacked

and misrepresented. **This concept of knowledge is to become emotionally involved with God with a constant desire to know Him better. This is so much more than knowing about God. It is personal and intimate.**

Knowledge (Relationship) is the Key to God's Power

Verse 3 says "His divine power (dynameos or dynamite) has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him, who called us by his own glory and goodness." Think of glory and goodness like this. His glory is His essence (his character or attributes) and His goodness is His excellence expressed in what He does. It is who He is and what He does. He shows His glory through all the miracles he performs. God's goodness extends from His nature to everything that He does. He is good and everything He does is good. The great and precious promises given in His word allow us to participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. This new nature is none other than Christ in you. A new nature should change your appetites. You are a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. You should begin to live your life in the reality of the new nature within. **Everything you need in life and the power to live above the sin in the world is provided. You are lacking nothing.**

Be Christ Imitators

The list of virtues in verses 5-7 is now possible and expected as you live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit with the mind of Christ you have received. You are to imitate Jesus. I illustrated the 8 virtues in these verses as a pyramid. The foundation is faith and the pinnacle is love. Matthew 22:37-40 tells us to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

As you go through this study, remember to look at the life of Jesus in each of these areas before you look at your life. He was our model to follow.

I look at this pyramid in 3 sections:

1) Faith, Goodness, and Knowledge

Faith, goodness, and knowledge are all gifts of God. He is the author and finisher of our faith. Without Christ, all of our works are filthy rags. We have already mentioned knowledge is relational. Without a relationship with Jesus, we will never have supernatural knowledge that is only available through Him. The way these three virtues interact with one another is staggering when you examine your life. As your faith increases, you begin to tell others about Jesus. We all find a particular calling or particular thing we do that is specific to us. As we continue to do “our thing,” God begins to show more of who He is. I cannot tell you how many times I have read

the Bible intending to help someone else, and God took me on a journey through the scriptures. I may start out reading in Hebrews and end up in Leviticus and Judges. I was asking one question and God not only answered that question but showed me things I had never known or knew to ask. That increases my faith exponentially as I encounter God on a personal level. The whole process continues again and again and again until my faith is grounded and secure.

Notice, faith comes before knowledge. The Jews believed in order to understand. The Greeks sought understanding so they could have faith. Faith is always the springboard to knowledge.

Think of it this way- Faith, goodness, and knowledge are about God.

2) Self-control, Perseverance, and Godliness

After the base of faith, goodness, and knowledge is established, we move into the personal application section. **Self-control, perseverance, and godliness are about us.** Isn't it interesting the first thing we are asked to do on a personal level is have self-control? Many in the church never get past this level, and we wonder why the church is not involved in outreach (brotherly kindness and love).

Self-control is about handling the pleasures of life mentally and physically. The two main areas of control people struggle with are sexual control and controlling the tongue.

Perseverance is handling the pressures of life. It means to bear under the load and come out on the other side. Godliness is produced from perseverance. It reflects the right relationship between God and man.

3) Brotherly Kindness and Love

Brotherly kindness and love are about others. Brotherly kindness is loving people like yourself. This is much easier to do than the command to love others who are different than us. Loving others and considering other people more important than yourself is the ultimate imitation of Christ.

I look at the 2 Peter chart like I do the Isaiah 6 passage. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw 1) the Lord high and lifted up 2) he saw himself as a man of unclean lips, and 3) he saw the people he lived among as people with unclean lips.

2 Peter is looking at 1) God and how the gifts of faith, goodness, and knowledge change how we think, 2) looking at ourselves and changing our behavior, and 3) looking at the people around us with love and compassion.

Verse 8 says, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are expected to always be increasing these virtues in our life so we are not swept away by idleness or false teachers. By contrast to a growing Christian, the person who does not have

these virtues is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten he has been cleansed from his past sins. They are choosing to ignore the new divine nature that is within them and live like they did before they were saved.

Now, we will look at each of these qualities from 2 Peter 1 in more detail.

Faith

How do you define faith? In its simplest form, faith is proving to the mind the reality of things that cannot be seen by the eye. You have faith every time you sit in a chair. You believe what you cannot see. You believe the chair will not collapse as you lower your body into it. You have faith every time you board an airplane. You have faith the pilots are trained, the mechanics are competent and have checked the plane, and all the checks and balances required by the airline for a safe flight have been followed. Faith always requires you to believe something you cannot see. That belief must be followed up by action. You believe and trust the chair and the airplane, so you sit in the chair and you board the airplane.

Biblical faith is the same thing. For simplicity, let's define faith in 3 parts: Faith is 1) Believing 2) Trusting and 3) Obeying. If you believe something, but do not trust it or act upon it, you do not believe it. People always act upon what they believe to be true. The demons believe but do not trust or obey.

Hebrews 11 states that faith is being sure of what we hope for and **certain of what we do not see.** This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith, we understand that the universe was formed at God's command **so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible** (Hebrews

11:1-2). The next several verses tell the stories of faith-filled believers in the Old Testament. **By faith, Enoch** was taken from this life so that he did not experience death; **by faith, Noah**, when warned about things not yet seen, built an ark to save his family; **by faith, Abraham**, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, **obeyed and went; by faith, Abraham**, even though he was past age and Sarah herself was barren, was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

Faith is not blind optimism. It is not an intellectual acceptance of some doctrine. It is not believing despite the evidence. **Faith is quite simple. God speaks, and we hear His word. We trust His word and act upon it no matter what the circumstances are or what the consequences may be.** Why? Because God is faithful and never fails to be true to Himself.

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Anything that does come from faith is sin (Romans 14:23). The righteous will live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4 and Hebrews 10:38).

It's easy to see faith is a huge deal to God. Faith excites God, and He is attracted to it. **The faith of the centurion soldier in Matthew 8 astonished Jesus. Jesus said**

he had not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. What did the centurion say that excited Jesus to this extreme? He humbled himself by saying “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.” He fully believed Jesus could heal his dying servant just by saying the word and he will be healed. The centurion expressed faith in Jesus’ authority by communicating that Jesus’ power was not bound by space. Remember, he was a Roman military leader with full authority over Jesus and all the Jews in that place.

Don’t you want your faith to excite Jesus like that? I get choked up just thinking about it. How I long for my faith to be something that astonishes and excites Jesus. For this to happen, we must remind ourselves of His character and His intentions. He has given us authority to do the things He did. Having faith in a silly chair or airplane is much harder than having faith in God who is responsible for everything good in the world. **His glory and goodness are on display every day all around us. Open your eyes and behold His beauty. Every time I hear the thunder during a storm, I remind myself that is His voice, and the lightning is directed by His hand. Job 38:24 says “what is the way to the place the lightning is stored?” It goes on to say that He gives orders to the morning and shows the dawn its place. He shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, and told it how far it could come.**

I could go on and on about the greatness and majesty of our God. **It is not hard to have faith in a God like that.** It is not hard to trust in a God that loves us like that. And it is not hard to obey a God like that. As we trust and obey, faith becomes easier and easier. The object of our faith (God) grows as we experience Him. He invites us to “know Him”. Taste and see that He is good. Step out of your comfort zone and experience intimacy with Him that cannot be understood by study alone.

Goodness

After faith, we are told to add goodness. The word used here in verse 5 is the same word used in verse 3 to describe Jesus. The word means virtue, excellence, or goodness. To the Greek philosophers, it meant the fulfillment of a thing. When anything fulfills the purpose it was created for, it is virtue or goodness. The land that grows a crop is excellent because it is fulfilling its purpose. The saw that cuts wood is excellent because that is what it was created for. **Since we who believe have been given the divine nature of God within us, when we glorify God, we show excellence because we are fulfilling our purpose in life. We are called to advertise the virtues of God by how we live our lives.**

For many years, the goal of my life was to make disciples. I desired to be that person that believed in others and encouraged them to live the life they were called to. The goal was to see lives transformed through their knowledge of Jesus. If I had it to do all over again, I would focus more on walking out the teaching than the teaching itself. Knowledge does not transform a life like walking in that knowledge does.

The transformation in my life came through helping others understand God properly and walk in the freedom that was produced. **As I watched others set free from sin and addictive behavior, my faith soared. The one being helped was receiving the**

grace of God and so was I. When we view other people as our family, God gives us His perspective of that person. We see someone dearly loved by God, created in His image, but struggling under the weight of deception and sin. When we offer a loving hand and their lives are changed, it is the greatest feeling in the world. I love giving presents and watching the face of the person who receives the gift much more than I like receiving a present.

My encouragement to you would be to think of yourself as a beggar that found a supply of bread. When a starving person finds food, the excellent thing to do is to tell all the other beggars where the food is. Jesus is the bread of life. He is our peace, our hope, our rock, our salvation, the one that captivates our thoughts, and the one that gives us life to the full now.

Being a partaker of the divine nature is not the end-all; it is the beginning. Share this precious prize you found with the world. They are desperate and in need of a Shepherd. God has uniquely gifted each person according to how they were made. What is it you do that makes you feel fully alive? What is that thing you would do every day even if you did not get paid to do it? Slow down and think back on the moments you felt you were giving of yourself and the feeling you had. Sadly, many have not figured out what their purpose is. Satan knows once we figure out who we

are and what we do, we are an unstoppable army for righteousness.

Do not listen to the lies of the enemy or the others telling you that you are not qualified or capable. Listen to the Spirit of God within you that nudges you to step out of your comfort zone and be who you are. You are not doing this in your strength but in the divine power of God.

Knowledge

The word knowledge means full knowledge or knowledge that is growing. It is practical knowledge or discernment. Jesus said and did only what He heard His Father in heaven saying. This knowledge suggests an abiding closeness to God. **We all have an insatiable longing for something. We pursue what we believe will satisfy us.** Add to this the constant comparison on social media and you have a society seeking pleasure and significance. We gorge ourselves on R-rated TV series, lush and expensive vacations, lust, material possessions, alcohol or drugs, and it all leaves us more dissatisfied. God is encouraging us to pursue Him with that same intensity because He knows He is the only thing that will satisfy our souls.

I remember praying and telling God I wanted more of Him. Immediately, I heard in my spirit a response that stunned me. God said, “You have all of me you want because I reveal myself to those who choose to pursue me.” Our church fasts and prays the first 21 days of each new year. During that time, my notebook is full of thoughts and promptings I receive from the Holy Spirit. After the 21 days are over, life goes back to the normal busyness and routine and my pursuit of God throttles back as well. This year, in 2023, I decided to not stop the pursuit after 21 days. What would it look like if I devoted a year to pursuing God vigorously? I realized I had pursued many things in my life with some

level of vigor, but I have never pursued anything with all of myself. I do not want to get to the end of my life and have regrets.

I have a very active mind, many different interests, and a lot of energy. I remember many years ago hearing the Spirit prompt me by saying that I would exhaust myself daily pursuing something, but let that something be Jesus. The only thing that captures my mind fully is the pursuit of God. I can spend hours on my back porch reading, studying, and praying. It is like being transported to another place and time. The depths of God’s character and His goodness are unsearchable and beyond our ability to fully comprehend. But I have seen his willingness and felt His pleasure as I have pursued Him with reckless abandon.

It is difficult to express to someone what it means to pursue having full knowledge of God. The following is a description of what it has looked like for me patterned after Paul’s admonition in Philippians 3: 4-14 to put no confidence in the flesh:

1) Life is not about me. God’s kingdom has been advancing long before I was born and will continue long after I am gone. **I am part of a much bigger picture, and I will be most fulfilled when I discover my part to play.**

2) Paul was a Pharisee. They believed they had attained righteousness (right standing

with God) due to their self-efforts of keeping the law. Paul also was a persecutor of the church. He was zealous and “doing” all the right things required by his form of religion. But he counted it all as loss or dung compared to knowing Christ. Nothing else mattered to him any longer. Having Christ was all he wanted. All that was gained by religion and effort he counted as nothing. **Paul had gained Christ, meaning he was in Christ and Christ was in him. That knowledge had become Paul’s identity.** I encourage you to take time and consider how you have put value in your self-effort. Humble yourself before God and agree with Him that all your effort is worthless. His sacrifice alone makes you right before God.

3) Paul knew Christ as his savior, but he is telling the Philippians he wants to know Him more intimately as his Savior. The word **knowing** in verse 8 means not only a knowledge of facts but knowledge gained through experience that transforms the entirety of the person. In verse 10, the word **know** goes even deeper. He says, “I want to know Christ, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10). **Paul doesn’t want to know about Jesus; he wants every area of his life to look like Jesus, even to the point of suffering and death. He is expressing his total surrender to the One that can raise him to life again even if he dies. That is living a life of total surrender and that is where we see the power and presence**

of God. This power helps us overcome any resistance we face. Are you willing to suffer and die to advance the kingdom? Do you “know” Christ well enough to trust him with your future and your life?

True knowledge of God transforms us into His image. We gain the mind and heart of Jesus. To have his mind means we can perceive and understand things we cannot even see. It is the ability to discern things. Discernment is “knowing” God’s mind for the situations we face each day. Discernment means to separate or set apart. We develop sound judgment, we understand the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and truth and lies.

As we see the world around us spinning out of control and evil rising, true knowledge of God is the only hope we have. We cannot discern the times and know what needs to be done, but He does. “For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chron.16:9). Bold and audacious faith excites the heart of God. Commit to know Him fully!

Self-Control

Faith, goodness, and knowledge represent gifts from God; our focus is upward toward God. Self-control, perseverance, and godliness focus inwardly, helping us become what we know to be true.

The first thing we are asked to pursue in this section is self-control. Self-control begins by realizing we must be careful how we handle the good things in life that bring us pleasure. We must have our passions and desires under control. I have never talked with a person that did not have struggles in this area. Sadly, many never add the other virtues to their life because they never gain self-control.

Self-control is a vast topic and there are many ways we can look at this. For our purposes, I want to focus on 3 main areas where self-control is vital: 1) controlling our thoughts 2) controlling our tongue and 3) controlling our sexual appetites.

Controlling Our Thoughts

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 says, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” What an incredible verse. **This is a verse you must understand and use daily in your**

life if you want freedom in this area of your life. In 2 Corinthians, a group of men had come to Corinth who presented themselves as apostles. They were false teachers who were challenging Paul’s integrity and his authority as an apostle. Chapters 10-13 intensify from the first 9 chapters as Paul addresses the ones causing trouble.

Notice the use of the words wage war, weapons we fight with, and strongholds. These are military terms and suggest conflict. **But in verse 1 of Chapter 10, he says, “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” The first thing we must understand as we attempt to control our thinking is people are not our enemies.** The spirit of the antichrist that is influencing or controlling them is the enemy. The weapons of the world are learning, intimidation, personal influence, credentials, and experience. The weapons Paul used were the Word of God and prayer (see Ephesians 6:17-18).

It was initially a little disappointing for me to understand that the way we fight our fight as believers seems a little wimpy. We appear meek and weak. Ephesians 6 tells us to put on the armor of God so that we can take our stand against the devil’s schemes because our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, and the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the



heavenly realms. **No power of evil can oppose the power of God. No thought, including those of our opponents, is beyond the reach of the One who “catches the wise in their craftiness” (1 Cor. 3:19). Nothing is hidden from Him!**

This passage excites me as I read it. I have seen the power of God’s Word and prayer utterly demolish strongholds in people’s lives and set them free. I received a podcast recording recently from a couple I had the pleasure to work with, whose marriage was restored, and they talk about the victory and freedom they experience today. The husband was engulfed in pornography, lying, deceit, and prostitution. As we talked about his story, God revealed the areas of his thinking that needed to change and the right behavior that needed to follow. To look at the marriage from a worldly vantage point, you would have given it a zero percent chance of survival. My friend chose to agree with God and ask God to forgive him and restore his relationship with God and his wife. His marriage is now a living testimony to the power of God’s love. **The problem was not the behavior but the incorrect thinking he had adopted and chosen to live by.** God is always there to rescue and redeem us when we humble ourselves, turn from our sins, and ask him to restore us. I get emotional recalling the undeniable power of God that was available to demolish these arguments and ideas that were from the devil and opposing God. That doesn’t sound wimpy or weak at all to me now.

Controlling Our Tongue

James 3 speaks about the importance of taming the tongue. “Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse men who have been made in God’s likeness” (James 3:5-6, 9).

The tongue is difficult to control. Those who do control it gain control of themselves in the other areas of their life as well. What is the source of the evil of the tongue? Verse 6 says it is set on fire by hell. The source is Satan. Verses 11-12, fresh water and salt water should not come from the same mouth. A fig tree cannot bear olives, and a heart not fully redeemed and renewed cannot control what it speaks. Refer back to the section on knowledge as you contemplate this thought. Growing knowledge of God will transform the mind, and a transformed mind will produce speech that is edifying to the body of Christ. If you want to control what you say, control what you allow into your mind and what you dwell on..

Controlling Sexual Appetites

I have never talked with a man that did not struggle with his sexuality at some point in his life. It seems like husbands and wives have a major disconnect in this area of their marriage. Most husbands are expecting a greater frequency of sexual intimacy than

their wives. I have listened to this discussion so many times I have lost count. So, what is the problem?

We live in an over-sexed society. Everything is about sex and sexual expression. Sex is used to sell everything from cars to cereal. A society consumed with sex and sexual perversion is a society that is in decline and will eventually collapse under the weight of its sin. The very thought of letting an 8-year-old child decide if they think they are a boy or a girl is ridiculous. Parents trying to intervene on their child's behalf are seen as the problem. It seems like this happened overnight, but it did not. Sexual perversion is rampant in the scriptures. Entire cities and governments were destroyed because of sexual perversion.

Please refer to the chart entitled "Pride Leads to a Fall." Pride includes envy and self-ambition which leads to rebellion and then to indulgence. Indulgence includes greed and lust for power and control and sexual indulgence. Most prideful and arrogant people always want to control people and indulge themselves sexually. Just look at the Jeffrey Epstein scandal. The elites and elected officials were indulging themselves at Epstein's "island of sinzo" The World Economic Forum hosts a conference each year in Davos, Switzerland where the elites meet to discuss how to control the world. Does it surprise you that prostitutes from all over Europe are flown in to be at the conference? Or does it surprise you that child trafficking is out of control? Or does it surprise you that trafficking minors

and prostitution is a staple at the Super Bowl each year?

Refer to the shaded chart entitled "A Reflection of Our Choices." This is a simple circle that has white, gray, and dark pieces of the circle. The white represents areas we have submitted to God, the gray represents an area where compromise exists, and the dark represents areas that have been selfishly withheld from submission to God and continue as areas of indulgence in our life. Sexual thinking and behavior will normally show up as gray or dark. For some reason, we think we can hold on to sin in some areas of our life, and it will not affect other areas of our life.

I recommend referring back to study Study 3, A Contrast of 2 Peter 1 and Ephesians 4, and the chart that goes with it. This chart contrasts the progression of faith and sin in life. This study goes into greater depth as it looks at what an un-surrendered life or area in life looks like when sin is allowed to grow unchecked.

Notice the title of the self-control section is handling the pleasures of life mentally and physically. I have talked to men who thought if they were controlling their sexual behavior, they were good. I always ask how are they doing in their thinking. Most admit they struggle in their thoughts. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 that if anyone has looked at a woman lustfully, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. That is the standard we must hold our thinking to.

Take the 21-day challenge.

I will conclude this section with a thought on why men often desire sex in the marriage more than their wife. Men have told me they struggle mightily with this area in their marriages. They wonder why they have so much sexual interest and their wives have so little interest. **I ask them if they would be willing to do an experiment. I ask them to be very aware of what they allow themselves to see and what they allow themselves to think for 21 days. Guard your hearts and make a covenant with your eyes to be pure during this time.** Each time you are tempted to look at someone or some image on your computer inappropriately, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to say no. If they struggle with pornography, I ask them to agree with God that it is not good to look on the nakedness of another woman that is not your wife. At the end of the 21 days, every man comes back and says they are astonished at how much more normal their sex drive is. They were feeding the beast within all this time and had no clue they were creating a monster.

Perseverance

To persevere is to hold up under pressure. It is steadfastness, constancy, endurance, and patience. It is the ability to hold on to one's faith and not be discouraged by the greatest trials and sufferings. The original word in Hebrew means to remain under, not simply with resignation, but with a vibrant hope. Isn't that a beautiful picture of what is possible in Christ? We do not have to just suck it up and endure the pressures of life; we can do it in a manner that glorifies God.

Perseverance follows self-control. **Those that give in to pleasures usually are not disciplined enough to handle pressures either, so they give up.**

Patience is not developed automatically; we must work at it. Romans 5:3-5 says, "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know sufferings produce perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Patience does not come easy for me. I remember praying for patience as a young man. You must be careful what you pray for. My answer to the prayer for patience was God giving us twin daughters. Who said God doesn't have a sense of humor? My girls both weighed almost 8 pounds when they were born. My wife had major

reconstructive abdominal surgery a few weeks later after it was determined she had a hernia from the pregnancy. She could not hold a baby for six weeks. Both of the girls had colic during this period and were not sleeping well. One would wake up, and I would feed her and get her back to sleep. One hour later, the other one would wake up, and I would do the same thing. I was getting very little sleep, and I had just started a new job. I remember reminding myself at some gosh awful early hour in the morning, that this was my answer to prayer and perseverance would eventually come if I did not die first. As I said earlier, patience is not developed automatically.

Many of us do not give up during the pressures of life, but we do lose hope. We wonder when will it end. Our expectations of what it should look like to follow Christ can be off. If we expect to not go through trials, disappointment will overwhelm us. Disappointments can be devastating in our life. **Hope is the cure for disappointment.** Remind yourself God is in control. He is refining us like pure gold and as our flesh is consumed, we are a better reflection of Him. As James says in Chapter 1, "consider it pure joy, my brothers when you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything" (James 1:2-4).



Godliness

We are to add to our perseverance, godliness. Godliness simply means “God-likeness.” That is a simple concept but not easy to understand. When we look at our lives, we do not see God-likeness. We see struggle, effort, work, exhaustion, and frustration. **It seems like the harder we try to be like Christ, the more intense the opposition and the more we fail the test.**

Before I go on, I want to put this in perspective. I have mentioned the rise of evil and brazenly sinful behavior on display in our world today. We look at our political leaders and wonder how they could make such poor decisions that do not reflect what we hold to be true. **We are on the brink of experiencing persecution, prosecution, and financial hardship on a level we can not conceive.** Satan knows his time is short, and he is frantically swinging for the fences. **The global effort to control and manipulate the population is coordinated at a level of precision that is impossible for man to pull off. It is evil and comes from the spirit of the antichrist at work in the world.**

When all hell breaks loose (literally), people will be in despair. They will be disillusioned and confused. Anyone who has self-control, control over their emotions, and is persevering through the trials will show godliness. People will be looking for anyone

that can offer hope and an answer. I urge you to be desperate for God and seek him before the storm is in full force.

In summary, people will be attracted to people that are reflecting the character of God. When Jesus sent people out, he said if there is a man of peace in the house, let your peace rest on Him (Luke 10:5-6 paraphrased). Don't forget we carry the power of God within us. Desperate people sense that when they are around us.

The Mystery of Godliness

In 1st and 2nd Timothy, Paul mentions the word godliness 10 times. In 1 Timothy 3:16, he says “Beyond all question, **the mystery of godliness is great:** He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.” It is clear from this passage that the mystery of godliness was Jesus. A mystery is something revealed that once was concealed. I refer you to a sermon by Dr. Tony Evans titled “The Mystery of Godliness.” Tony has a great way of explaining things in a way all can understand. I will paraphrase from his sermon to help you understand this mystery.

This great mystery is tied to Jesus. We have virtually nothing recorded in the scriptures of the first 30 years of Jesus' life except the

story of him teaching at the temple when he was 12. It took him 30 years to perfectly fulfill the 1600 requirements of the law. The law was not given to free you up; it made you aware of your sin and your need for a Savior. When Jesus fulfilled the law, it was counted as righteousness. This means that when we are saved, we exchange all of our sins for all of his righteousness.

God's grace was revealed in Jesus. You can't buy grace and you can't earn grace. It is always free and is given freely by God. If grace isn't increasing in your life, the mystery (Jesus) is being concealed. We receive Jesus in seed form. You choose to allow the seed to grow in you or to be stifled in you. The Bible gives us instructions, but it does not give us the power to live them. Jesus is the grace of God living inside you. Grace is a person and that person (Jesus) is the master key that unlocks everything in life.

As Jesus is released in your life, grace is increased which leads to godliness. **You possess perfect righteousness and godliness in your soul through Jesus Christ.** Is your life reflecting that reality? If not, ask Him where and how you are restricting the flow of His power and grace in your life.

Brotherly Kindness and Love

Brotherly kindness and love are the expressions of the other virtues that produce a well-founded, fruitful, and maturing life.

Faith, Goodness, and Knowledge

Faith (believing, trusting, and obeying) in God provides the spiritual life we lost in the Garden of Eden. When we begin to imitate the goodness of God in our lives, we find our calling and purpose. As we begin to walk out our faith by our goodness, God graciously allows us to gain His knowledge and see the world as He does. Our minds are transformed by that knowledge. God wants us to have full knowledge of who He is.

Self-control, Perseverance, and Godliness

As our minds are being transformed, we are to live out in our bodies what we are in our Spirit. The perfection of God's grace and righteousness is within us. We choose to grow in that or to stifle the gift of God's grace (Jesus) living within us.

Brotherly Kindness and Love

The mind of Christ in us should be reflected in how we love and respond to people around us. If we love Jesus, we must

love people. 1 Peter 1:23 says, "Now that you have **purified yourselves** by **obeying the truth** so that you have **sincere love** for your brothers, **love one another deeply from the heart.**" Notice how a purified heart is a result of obeying the truth. In John 14, Jesus says if you love Me, keep my commandments. A purified heart produces a sincere love that loves deeply. **It is not merely tolerating other people.**

John 13:34-35 says, "A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

An old saying is "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care". My wife can be in line at Walmart or Taco Bell and end up having a deep conversation with a total stranger. I have seen it happen countless times. I ask her if she knows that person and she says no; I just told her I liked her boots. People automatically sense if someone is loving and genuinely cares about them. These strangers open up to my wife and tell her their life story in a line at a store because she said she liked their boots. It must be a rare thing to find people that care because people respond to it with enthusiasm.

Here's an illustration that will help

make this point. My neighbor walks her black Labrador retriever around the neighborhood. When the dog sees me, his tail wags and he is so excited to come and greet me. I automatically reach down to pat him and talk to him. We all react to an animal like that unless we dislike animals. Why is that so? Because they are showing us love, and we respond to it. Is it any wonder a dog is man's best friend and the pet business is booming?

God is telling us in the Word if we really "get" Him, then the world will see Him in us by how we love them. Our love freely given to others will attract them to God in us.

Brotherly kindness comes from the word Philadelphia. Brotherly kindness can be translated as "mutual affection" or simply "concern for others." Romans 12:10 tells us to "honor one another above yourselves." To put someone else and their interests above your own can only come from a heart that has truly been changed. Our brothers and sisters in the Lord are our families. We are all children of God that share the same Father. If we love those around us, we are to care for their needs.

Love is the ultimate expression of our love for God. The word for love used here is agape. Agape love is always shown by what it does. God displayed His love for us by sending Jesus to restore our relationship with God and give us spiritual life. Agape love raises the bar considerably

from brotherly kindness. **We are to love others with agape love, whether they are believers (John 13:34) or enemies (Matthew 5:44).**

It is hard enough to love those that are like us and impossible in the flesh to love our enemies. When someone vehemently opposes us and what we believe, we feel threatened and in danger. Yet God calls us to love that person with sacrificial love. That type of love can only be produced by God in us.

1 Corinthians 13 is a description of what agape love looks like. 1 Cor. 13:4-8 says, **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."** It goes on to say in that chapter that prophecies will cease, tongues will be stifled, and knowledge will pass away when Jesus comes back and we see him face to face. **Verse 13 says, "And now, these three remain; faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."**



Summary

2 Peter 1:8 says, “For if you **possess these qualities** in **increasing measure**, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To possess these qualities means our hearts have been made new by the Spirit’s presence in our hearts. To possess these qualities in increasing measure implies growth. Growth requires our decision to relinquish our illusion of control and trust God to be in control.

The growth of these qualities within us will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive. We are magnifying to the world the presence of grace in our lives and what it looks like to have the divine nature within us. By contrast, the person that does not possess these qualities is blind and nearsighted. Since his life does not reflect the grace of God, the world does not see God working in him. Such a person has forgotten the free gift of grace that he received. He has stifled the growth of grace in his life because he refused to grow.

Verses 10 and 11 conclude this section by saying, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election **sure**. For if you do these things, you will **never fail**, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The word for “sure” referred to a warranty deed somewhat like you use today when you buy a house or property. Your godly behavior is

a warranty deed or proof to yourself that Jesus has indeed cleansed you from your past sins. The word “fall” can mean stumble. The word means to trip up or experience a reversal. The person who is maturing in Christ will not trip up in his spiritual life like the one who is immature and nearsighted.

Jesus will welcome us home someday. I want to live my life in such a way that it is evident the grace of God is within me. We are to be reflections of His splendor to the dark world around us. I pray He will increase that in all of us. I want to hear Jesus say “Well done, son. You did what I asked you to do. You represented me well.”

