Discovery

Yves Perriard

June 2025

10 STEPS to a New Life

12 PRINCIPLES for this New Life

9 GUIDELINES for Church Leaders

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About the author

For further information you can go on my own website:
healingallnations.org

I did not grow up religious and never set foot in any religious building until I was 18 years old. At that time, while isolated as a shepherd in the Swiss Alps, I accidentally discovered a Bible (I had never seen one before!). As I began reading it on my own, I became fascinated with the Gospels and **immediately loved Jesus.** A few months later, when I came down from the mountains, I found a group of traveling Gypsies who baptized me. After talking with them, I knew I wanted to proclaim Jesus to all the nations of the earth!

Since 1983, for more than 40 years, **I have been planting and nurturing churches** all over the world.

Some churches grew rapidly, with hundreds of members, while others were smaller, with 50 to 100 people. In some places, I stayed just a few months, but in most, I spent an average of about five years.

My journey has taken me to well-known cities like Geneva, Boston, Paris, Berlin, Zurich, Vancouver, Odessa, and Jerusalem, as well as lesser-known places like Wroclaw in Poland; Irkutsk on the beautiful Baikal Lake near Mongolia; Gorno-Altaisk near the mountainous border of China; Barnaul in the cold

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plains of central Siberia; Voronezh in the heart of Western Russia; and several cities in Israel, including Nazareth, Rishon Letzion, Ashkelon, and Beersheba.

In all of this, I have been driven by the passion to restore the early church model, aiming to better reflect Jesus and change the world. As a result, I have witnessed countless baptisms and miracles of all kinds, while also facing the **constant trials** of starting churches and being a foreigner on three different continents and in eight countries.

Due to my ongoing quest for more truth, I have **twice lost everything** and had to go through two painful "deserts" afterwards. The first time was with a denomination that was once the fastest-growing in the world. As it became increasingly legalistic and sectarian, I chose to leave, letting go of 10 years of my life there. The second time came when I had a radical encounter with the Holy Spirit, which forced me to leave the church I had been part of for eight years. Despite these experiences, I hold no hard feelings toward either group and view those "losses" as valuable parts of my spiritual growth.

My intellectual and professional pursuits are as diverse as my passion for life. I initially studied **agriculture** and worked in that field for a few years before majoring in **painting and history of art** in Geneva. I later studied **geopolitics** at the Sorbonne in Paris and worked as a top manager in **business**. I earned a BA in **linguistics** from Russia, becoming **fluent in half a dozen languages**. Later, I completed a **master's degree in Global Leadership** from Fuller Theological Seminary in California. My spiritual gifts include **leadership**, **healing**, and **prophecy**.

I was born and raised in Geneva, making **me Swiss**, with a **German mother** and a Swiss **French father**. While changing planes, I met my future **Russian wife**, Anna, in an airport. I fell in love with her immediately, took her phone number within 30 minutes, and three months later, on November 6, 1994, we were married. She grew up in the Soviet Union (see pics of her on the right) and, like many Russian Jews of that time, had never attended a synagogue or read the Bible. In 1991, after just two weeks of translating Bible lessons for American missionaries, she became convinced about her Messiah and was baptized.

Our two American sons are believers and work in North America, one in the film industry and the other in politics.

In 2019, **we made Aliyah to Israel**, becoming Israeli citizens. We have started numerous congregations across the Holy Land, encouraging messianic assemblies and teaching nations about restoring the Jewish roots of the early Church.

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The goal and challenges of this book

After 40 years of personally bringing numerous individuals to Christ, starting churches all over the world, and years of graduate studies, I have gained some convictions of what Christianity should look like. This book was first written for the Slavic world, but it is relevant for anyone in the western world, particularly non-religious people. Many of its principles are simple enough to transcend most cultures.

This manual, **which gives a very practical foundation of the Christian life**, has 3 goals:

The first part gives you a pathway so that you can personally convert unbelievers.

The second part gives your converts a very practical foundation of the Christian life.

The third part is for the leaders who want to build a growing, healthy, and more biblical church.

(In this book I use the widely accepted term "Christian", but in the first century it was a derogatory term used by unbelievers, which is why the Bible mentions it only 3 times. "Disciples" or "The Way" are the usual and better biblical terms)

Bible knowledge without character change is useless (2 Pet. 1:8)

In which ways this book is different from other books ?

It has some views that are very **challenging,** as you can see below:

First part: the process of the conversion

- Before unbelievers are baptized, they should have a very clear and specific understanding of what they should repent from, go through a deliverance from demonic influences, and fully accept the high price of following Jesus.

- Everyone should receive as soon as possible the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, not a cheap and weak speaking in tongues. Real power with real supernatural results.

Second part: how to live the Christian life

- Disciples should study the Bible and pray every day. They should also have the humility to constantly analyze theological views that are different from theirs.

- Disciples should all eagerly seek supernatural gifts and constantly grow in them. This is necessary to convert unbelievers and edify the church.

- Believers should always have enough financial resources to help others. But at the same time they should have a simple and very sacrificial lifestyle of living by faith. The theology of prosperity is often a coverup for greed and materialism.

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- Christians should all be very healthy. All want healing miracles, but unfortunately very few are willing to be wise and disciplined in the five areas of health described in this book.

- All Christians should evangelize until they find open people whom they baptize. After this, they should personally train their own converts in the basics of the Christian life. A Christian who is not personally making disciples is selfish and useless to God. God's strategy to change the world is making disciples one person at a time.

- Christians should never gossip and keep resentments against others. Instead, they should be thoroughly trained to become experts at solving conflicts.

- Disciples should easily welcome constructive criticisms and at the same time they should always speak the truth with love. This takes hard and long training, and this is what the church is for.

- Disciples should be submissive and sacrificial in the various roles they have in life.

- All believers should willingly be involved in deep relationships of mutual accountability that transform their characters. If someone does not change, he is prideful and ineffective.

Third part: Church Leaders

Bible knowledge without making disciples is disobedience (Matt.28:18-20)

- All leaders should be examples in how they evangelize, convert and make disciples who make disciples. If they don't do this themselves how can they expect their congregations to do the same?

- Leaders should all choose and train their own disciples. (For instance mature evangelists should mentor young evangelists, pastors future pastors, etc.…). Few leaders today have been empowered and loved by "spiritual fathers" and this why very few have their own "Timothies".

- Church leaders should not only daily study their Bibles, but they should have the humility to constantly study biblical doctrines or world related issues that are different from their own.

- Leaders should have church gatherings where people can really meet God, and where conversions and supernatural manifestations happen regularly. This is the NT standard.

- Leader should identify legalism so as to foster an atmosphere of grace in their churches.

- Leaders should try to restore as much as it is feasible the Jewish roots of the Early Church

Finally, and this is what sets this book totally apart from any other book, every leader should know and meet all the biblical standards concerning the 6-fold ministry. It is only when the Church will have true biblical pastors, biblical evangelists, etc.… that we will be closer to the model of the Early Church!

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10 STEPS
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Step 1

God wants a relationship with you

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1 - GOD WANTS A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU

God created us to have a relationship of love with Him

- "*God created man in His own image*" *(Genesis 1:27).* This explains why there is a longing in all of us to think, communicate and even create like God. This divine potential in us allows us to have a living relationship with Him.

- He created us to be in a relationship of love with him, because that is His very nature. "*God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God*" *(1 John 4:16)*

Love implies freedom

- Love does not involve manipulation, blackmail, or intimidation. "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love*" *(1 John 4:18).*

- Love always leaves the freedom of choice. God did not create us to be human marionettes so that He would control every step we make. He could have created us in such a way that we never make any mistakes and perfectly obey Him, but that is not the kind of relationship He wanted with us.

- He wanted a relationship that we have freely chosen and in which there is always the possibility to leave. Such a relationship is the basis for true happiness.

Freedom implies risk

- In giving us a free will, God took the huge risk that man could go his own way.

- Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened. In the garden of Eden man basically said: "I don't need to listen to God, I know what the best for me is and from now on I will do what I want"

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Man made a choice that had dramatic consequences

- That decision became a butterfly effect that changed everything for man. It affected his relationship with nature and with other human beings, and eventually brought pain, death and a separation from God.
- The truth is that we are always free of making choices in life, but never free from its consequences. We were created to be in harmony with God and if we refuse this, we are like fish who want to live outside of the water.
- The problem of suffering in this world is not God's fault, but our choice of not wanting to have a relationship with God.

God still loves us even if we rebelled against Him

- Man's rebellion did not stop God's love. He still wanted to have a friendship with us.
- From that time on, He revealed Himself through all kinds of people to let us know how much He loves us. He spoke through Moses and through all the prophets. All of this is recorded in the Bible. Unfortunately, despite of all those great revelations, most people still went their own ways. Some even used God for their own selfish purposes, as many religious people tend to still do today. The fundamental problem of our separation with God was not solved. There had to be a better solution.

The final answer is in Jesus

- Finally, God came to us through Jesus. He became a man so that we could fully understand His love, his power, his wisdom and his plans for us. This was the best and final way to let us know how much He loves us. In Jesus, we have the answer how we can have a relationship with God that brings an abundant and meaningful life. Jesus himself said

  "I came that they might have life and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

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Conclusion: You must seek God from all your heart until you find Him

- *"This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you" declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity" (Jeremiah 29: 10-14).*

- This verse symbolizes everything we have talked about until now.
  1. **We are suffering** because we have gone our own ways.
  2. **God still loves us** and even assures us that He is not against us, as we might be tempted to feel.
  3. **He has great plans** to rescue us and give us hope and a future, but there is one condition: we must seek Him with all our hearts.

Questions:

1. **Why did God create you?**
2. **Why is there suffering in this world?**
3. **What God expects from you from now on?**

Challenge:

- **Now that you know that God wants a relationship with you and that He has great plans for your life, are you ready to seek Him with all your heart?**
- **Concretely, what does "seek God" means for your life today?**

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Step 2

JESUS

IS THE ANSWER

2 - JESUS IS THE ANSWER

He was 100% man:

He had the same body, emotions, will and mind like us

Jesus was in many ways like us. As a child, he had to learn things (Luke 2: 52). He could be tired (John 4:6), thirsty (John 19:28) or hungry (Matthew 4:2). He could be overwhelmed with joy, deep sorrow or even be surprised (Luke 10:21, Matt. 8:10, 26:38). He had a will of his own (Matt.26:39) and did not know all things (Mark 13:32). Like us, Jesus was fully dependent upon the power and the leading of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28, Acts 1:2).

He suffered like us

Like us, Jesus suffered and was tempted in all things (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15) but he never sinned.

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted... For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are–yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15)

There were times when he was deeply troubled and even cried (John 11:33–35, Hebrews 5:7). He agonized on the cross, experiencing the painful feeling of being abandoned by God (Matthew 27:46) and he finally died (Luke 23:46).

So, we cannot say that God is far away in heaven, and He has no idea how difficult our life is!

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Because God became a man, He can fully relate to all our problems, limitations and temptations. He knows all our feelings and He can perfectly understand us!

Picture above from James Tissot - What Our Lord Saw from the Cross

He was 100% God

Whoever met Jesus even for a short time was never the same again. The soldiers who were sent after Him came back with empty hands saying, *"No man ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46).* The centurion who observed how He died said, *"Surely, this man was the son of God" (Mark 15:39).* The crowds were amazed at His miracles and said, *"We have never seen anything like this." (Mark 2:12)*

Kings were disturbed, crowds were amazed, and enemies were confused or enraged at Him, **but nobody ever remained neutral towards Him**. People either loved Him, or they hated Him. Why?

Jesus never left the slightest possibility for people to have a neutral attitude toward Him or to think He was just a good guy. Even today, many people want to think He was a great prophet, a fantastic teacher, a genius or even one of the greatest men who ever lived. But Jesus never presented Himself in such a way, nor did He allow any of His followers to believe He was just one of those kinds of people.

Instead, He said of Himself, *"I am the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).* It is very clear that Jesus did not claim to be one of the many ways we can use to come to God; **He claimed to be the one and only way to the Father** and as such constantly called people to believe in Him, declaring that their eternal destiny would depend on their answer.

He never wanted people to follow Him on the basis of some feeling, but rather because they had clearly and unmistakably understood who He was. Faith in Jesus is not based on irrational and religious feelings that cannot be explained, but it is founded on some of the following evidence:

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1. He did miracles like nobody else

John 20:30; 21:25 — Jesus did so **many miracles** that John did not have enough room to include them all in his gospel.

Matthew 12:22-32 — He did **miracles in such a way** that His enemies could not deny even a single one.

John 10:37-38; 14:11 — He did **miracles with such ease** and naturalness that He could say, "Don't believe me unless I can back up my claims with miracles".

2. He claimed to be without sin

John 8:46; 18:23 — He challenged even His enemies to **find anything wrong in Him** and He received no answer.

John 19:4-7, Matthew 26:60 — **His enemies could not find anything wrong in Him** except that He had claimed to be the Son of God.

No humble, wise, realistic man in all the history of mankind has ever made such a claim of perfection! Furthermore, all men have at times asked the forgiveness of God for themselves or other men, but Jesus never asked for forgiveness for Himself, because He was never in need of it.

3. He claimed He had the authority to forgive sins

Matthew 9:1-8 — He clearly demonstrated that He had as much **authority to forgive sins** as He had power to instantly heal a paralytic.

Matthew 20:23, 26:26-28 — He claimed that His **death would bring forgiveness of sins**.

We can forgive others if they sin against us, but we have no authority to forgive anything that is between them and God. But Jesus did exactly this.

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4. He claimed many other things nobody else has ever claimed

Matthew 5:17	He is the **fulfillment of the Law**
Matthew 7:21-23	**Judge of all men**
Matthew 7:24-27	**Rise or fall depending on your obedience to Him**
Matthew 24:30-31	**Will come back** in power
Matthew 26:63-64	**Son of God**
John 8:12	**The light of the world**
John 8:54-58	"I AM", which every Jew understood to be **God** (Exodus 3:14)
John 10:30-33	I and the Father are one, which Jews understood that he made himself **God**
John 11:25	**Resurrection and life**
John 14:6-10	**The way, the truth, and the life and the only way to God**

No other great religious leader in history has ever dared to make all the above-mentioned claims!

5. He claimed He would rise from the dead and He did it!

Some religious leaders throughout history have been foolish enough to make such a claim but none of their followers have been foolish enough to have preached the resurrection of their leader.

Without the historical fact of the resurrection, Christianity would have never started and would have never continued. It is the keystone of the arch of the Christian faith. Remove the resurrection and everything else will immediately crumble into ruins.

Some facts about the resurrection of Jesus:

Confucius' tomb	- occupied
Buddha's tomb	- occupied
Mohammed's tomb	- occupied
Jesus' tomb	– **EMPTY!**

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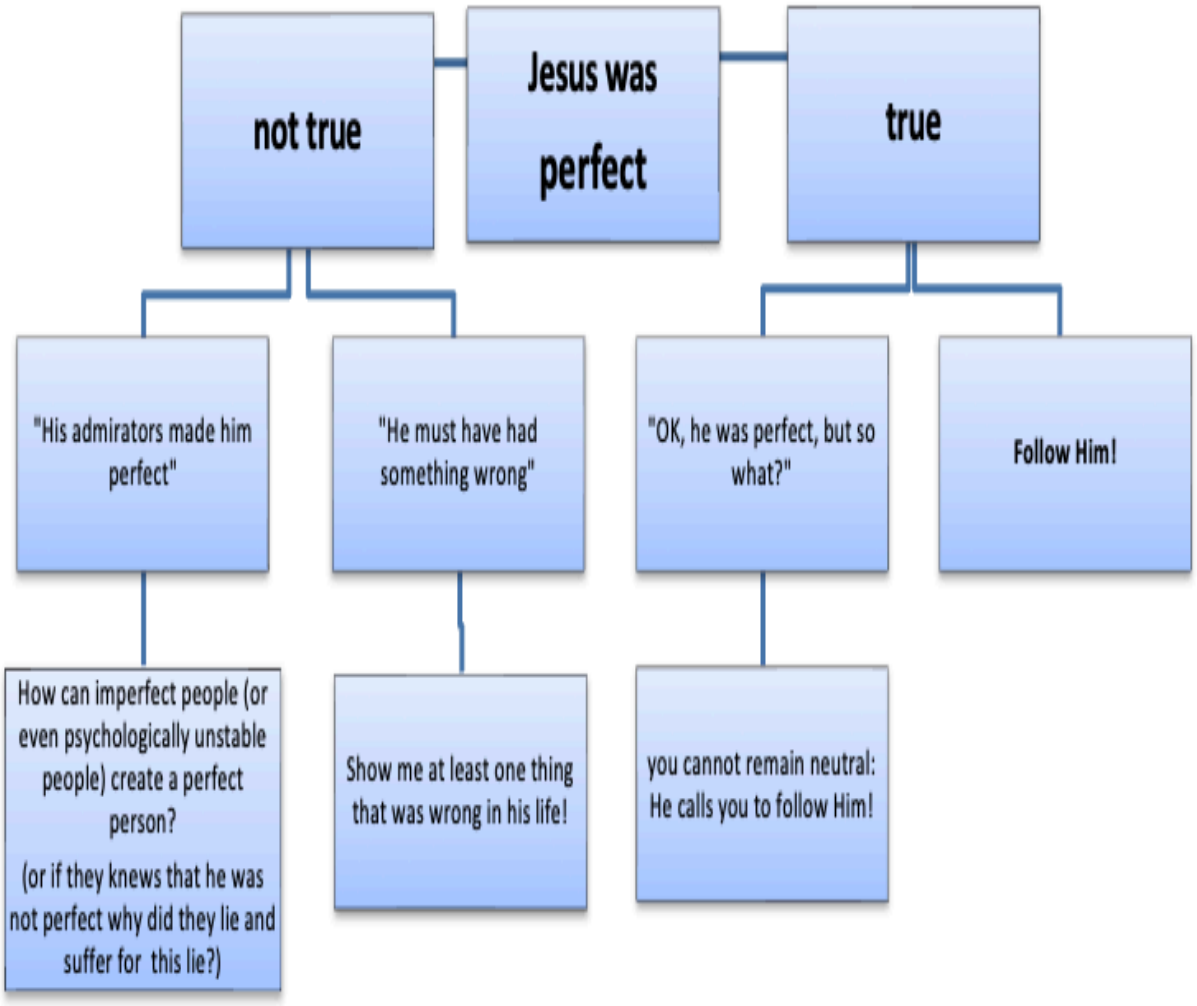
Consider again the evidence concerning Jesus:

1. **His miracles**
2. **His life without sin**
3. **His authority to forgive sins**
4. **His unique claims**
5. **His resurrection**

CONCLUSION:

Jesus was perfect: he never sinned, and no one has ever been able to accuse him of any sin. He even claimed that his perfection was such that he had the right to forgive the sins of any human being! He did the greatest miracles of history, and he even came back from the dead!

This is why Jesus said that **whoever saw Him saw God** (John 14:9). This is a claim that no religious leader has ever made about himself!



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QUESTIONS:

1. **What is the difference between Jesus and all other religious leaders in history?**
2. **Who is Jesus for you personally?**
3. **What does the humanity of Jesus mean to you?**
4. **What does his divinity mean to you?**

CHALLENGE:

1. **Do you believe that Jesus was without sin? That he was perfect?**
2. **In other words, do you believe that He is God who became a man?**
3. **As a result, do you believe He is the only way to show God, the only one who can forgive us and save us? That no other religion can offer this?**
4. **Are you willing to follow Jesus and do what he tells you?**

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Step 3

THE BAD NEWS

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3 - THE BAD NEWS

You have sinned

You were created to have a living relationship with God, but instead you went your own way and did not seek God. You have been **indifferent** and maybe even **rebellious** towards Him.

Because of this, you do not have a living relationship with God, and you do not know how to live and how to love. As a result, there is selfishness and pride in your life.

This attitude is what the Bible calls sin, and it describes you in the following way:

"There is no one righteous, not even one!

There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.

All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways,

and the way of peace they do not know.

There is no fear of God before their eyes…

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" *(Romans 3:10-18, 23)*

Your sins control you

Your sins control you. In other words, you are not free and because of this **Satan has the right to harm you**.

He is extremely powerful and deceitful, and he will do anything to steal good things from your life. Eventually, his ultimate goal is to destroy and kill you. (John 10:10).

The thief (Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I (Jesus) have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10)

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Your sins take away joy and peace

You will never have real peace and happiness in this world as long as sin controls your life. No matter how much you seek happiness, you will never escape what God said concerning your life:

"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil."
(Romans 2:8-9)

Your sins will find you out and you shall suffer

You may try to convince yourself that any sin you have ever committed will not have any consequences in the future. But in the spiritual world, there is no time and expiration date. You think it is buried in the past, but this is a lie! Do not be deceived, one way or another, your sins will ALWAYS find you out! It is only a matter of time. *"But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out". (Numbers 32:23)*

In fact, it will make things far worse because sooner or later every seed of evil you sowed will grow and bring a harvest of great suffering!

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:7-8)

Your sins bring curses

Because your sins separate you from God, **curses have the potential and power to work in your life**.

A curse is a specific **problem that repeats itself repeatedly in your life**, in a way that you often cannot explain and avoid. This pattern can be observed in the lives of some of your brothers and sisters as well as your parents. It is the same sickness that repeats itself, the same financial problem that repeats itself, the same problem in relationships that repeat themselves.

Curses tend to be **transferred from the parents to the children.**

"At midday you will grope about like a blind person in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you … All these curses will come on you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed … You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life." (Deuteronomy 28: 29, 45, 66)

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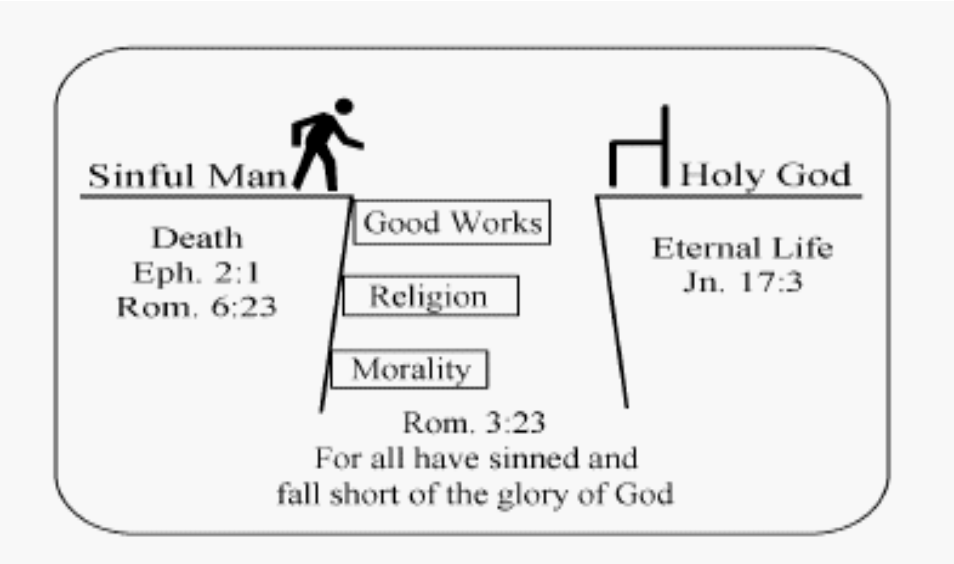
Your sins have crucified the Son of God

Jesus experienced a terrible, painful death on the cross, and even God turned his back on Him for a while. You are personally guilty of this.

All your sins have put Jesus on the cross. Therefore, you are responsible, together with the rest of humanity, of having crucified Jesus. (Acts 2: 23+36)

In this short excerpt from the movie the Passion we see how much the Son of God had to suffer because of your sins:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR-aZkiN-VM
(On YouTube look for "The Passion of the Christ - Worthy Is The Lamb")

You cannot remove your condemnation by your good deeds



As illustrated by the diagram above, **Your sins separate you from God.** You cannot cross the gulf that separates you from God.

You cannot change this separation with God by trying hard to be a good and worthy person.

In fact, none of all your good works or morality can never make you cleaner or draw you nearer to God. They are all tainted with sinful motivations:

> *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; We all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isaiah 64:6)*

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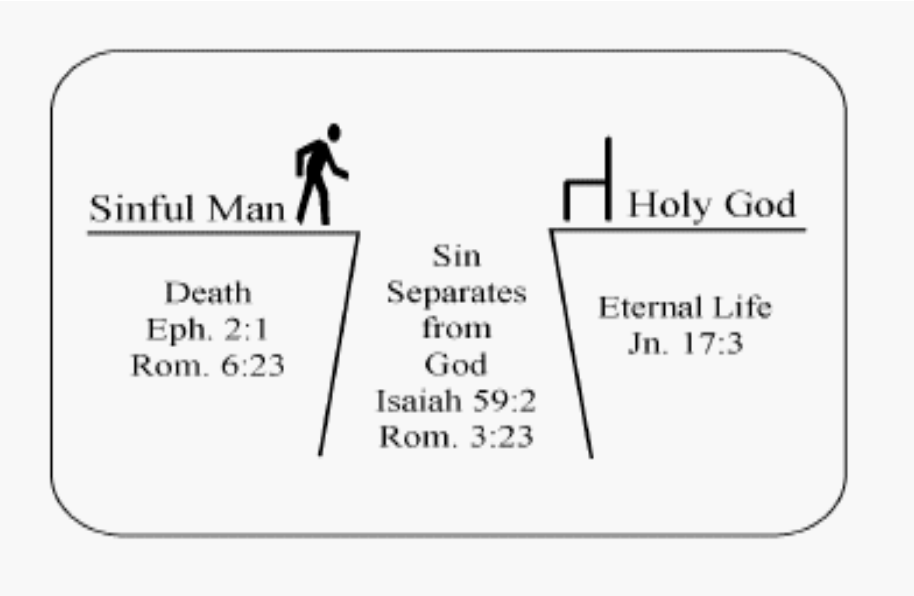
In this life your sins separate you from God



Your sins prevent you from having any living relationship with God, regardless of how small or big those sins are. **It is impossible for God to FULLY hear you and bless you like He would like.**

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2)

After death your sins will completely separate you from God

As soon as you die, you will go to a place called in Hebrew "Sheol", or "Hades" in Greek. This is the temporary residence where all human beings go after their death. There they all wait until the Final Judgment. In the Sheol there is an immediate separation between two different places, and it is impossible to cross between them. The good place is called the "Bosom of Abraham" or "Paradise", the bad place is called "Hell".

If you loved God and sought Him, you will go in Paradise, the place where God's love can be felt. If you reject Him, you will go to Hell, where God's love is painfully absent. In other words, if you wanted to be with God, He will be with you, but if you did not want to be with Him, He will not force you to be with Him.

In this life on earth, you can always feel the love of God in nature, in children or in the love between humans, but in Hell **it will be absent, and you will feel its absence with desperate regrets and pains.**

The suffering in that place will be particularly difficult because in the afterlife time stops to exist. A few days will feel like many years, and years will feel like an eternity. (Luke 16:22-26)

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You will be judged and condemned

After waiting a “long time” in that place of suffering, there will finally come the judgment day. You will be judged in the following way: (Romans 2:1-3, 8)

Every time in your life that you have judged someone for doing something negative, but you did the very same thing yourself, you will be judged yourself.

In other words,

God will judge you on the basis of YOUR OWN moral standards!

Because of this **you will have absolutely no chance to escape the righteous judgment of God,** and you will be **thrown in the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20:15, 21:8)

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QUESTIONS:

1. What is your fundamental problem with God?

2. What are ALL the consequences of your sins in your life today?

3. What will happen to you after death?

CHALLENGE:

• How do you feel and what are you going to do?

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Step

4

The

GOOD

NEWS

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4 – THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus is the Good News! On the cross, He took upon himself all your sins, all your curses and everything that separates you from Him!

You can be completely forgiven and free and have an abundant life full of amazing blessings.

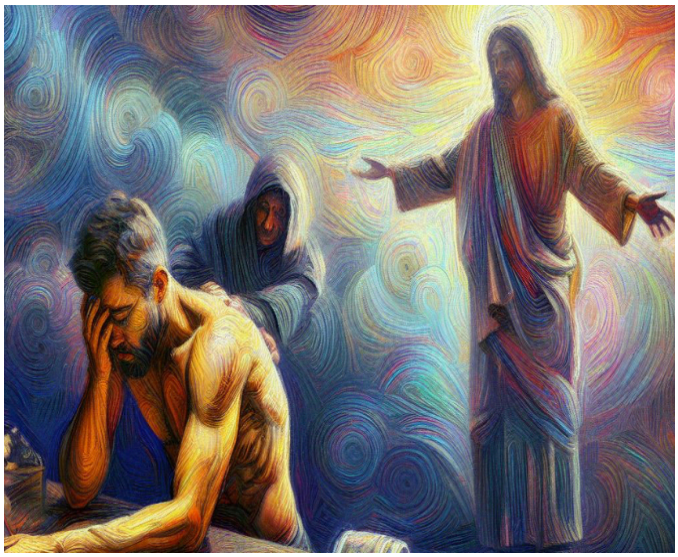
God the Father takes you into His family so that you become His son or daughter and His friend, and He gives you His Spirit so that you can become His partner, and together with Him change the world!

On the cross Jesus took on himself your sins, your curses and your condemnation

"Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6).



"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." (Galatians 3:13)

Jesus took on himself your guilt

"But it pleased God to strike Him, and He gave Him up to torment; if we place our guilt on His soul, He will see the long-lasting offspring, and the will of the Lord will be successfully done by His hand." (Isaiah 53:10, literal Hebrew translation)

"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies". (Romans 8:33)

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On the cross, Jesus was abandoned by God to take your place

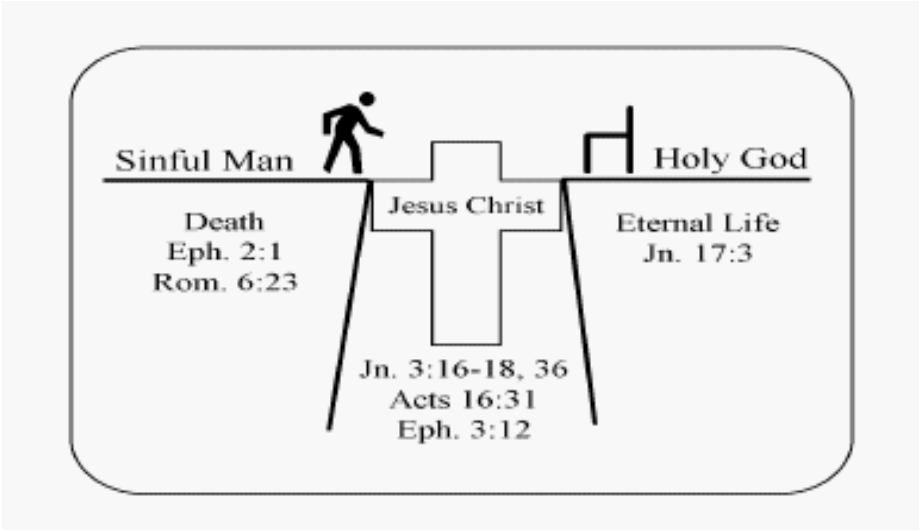
We all deserve to be completely abandoned by God because of our sins. (The final expression of this is the place of agony where unbelievers are after death. There God is absent). Jesus experienced this at your place when he died on the cross. He cried *"My God, why have you forsaken me?"*

(Matthew 27: 45-46)

All your sins have been forgiven

"Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them." (Romans 4:7-8)

Because of what Jesus suffered on the cross, all your guilt and sins have been forgiven so that you can cross the gulf that separates you from God. You can have a living relationship with God, as illustrated by the following diagram:



God has adopted you as His own child into His family (the Church)

"He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (EEphesians 1:5).

Illustration: Imagine you had no parents and even grew up on the streets, fending for yourself. One day a very rich and loving person finds you and want to adopt you. As you accept the offer, he gives you all the rights and privileges of becoming his child and being part of his family. The same happens

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when you become a child of God. You receive his name, his inheritance, his authority, a new identity, and a new family!

You will never be condemned

You can have the absolute confidence that after you die God will not condemn you.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17)

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:21-22)

God offers you an amazing life with the following 12 benefits

1) **I am forever forgiven of all my past and future sins**. No one and nothing can make me feel guilty because God forgave absolutely everything.

2) **I can see myself as God sees me** (I am forgiven, pure, righteous, special, God's child, I have his authority, his rights, a new identity, etc.…)

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3) I have a **living relationship with God** who answers my prayers. He is not only the Lord of all creation, but also my heavenly Father, my best friend and I am his partner in all the adventures of life!

4) I have a **real purpose in life.** I am no longer living just to meet my own needs but to change people and improve the world around me in a very tangible way.

5) I can **always have enough money** for myself, my family and for those who need my help because of God's abundant favor on my life.

6) I can become **healthy** as God wants to heal me of any kind of sickness and give me wise revelations on how to remain healthy.

7) I am **no more controlled** by sin, fear, any kind of dependency (drugs, alcohol, smoking, illicit sex, etc...) or demonic forces. I can be tempted, but I am no longer controlled. I am free because the Holy Spirit lives permanently in me!

8) I can **really change my character** and become all that God wants me to become. The positive and difficult things I could not feel, say, or do are now all possible with God!

9) I have reliable **Christian friends** whom I can trust and who will help me in the most difficult times of life. I have one big family, the church, where I can find support and encouragement.

10) I am supernaturally **protected** from tragedies, evil plans and curses. Even if some bad things happen, Satan is limited in what he can do against me because **God's plans** always end up for my best interest.

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11) **I have the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit in me**, which allows me to see what God sees and do what He wants me to do. Because of this I can influence people in amazing ways. For instance, I can do healings, miracles, and all kinds of things that are normally impossible.

12) **Heaven is waiting for me.** There, I will be forever with my God and all my friends. There will be no more tears, no fears, and nothing bad that exists in this world.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the essence of the Good News?

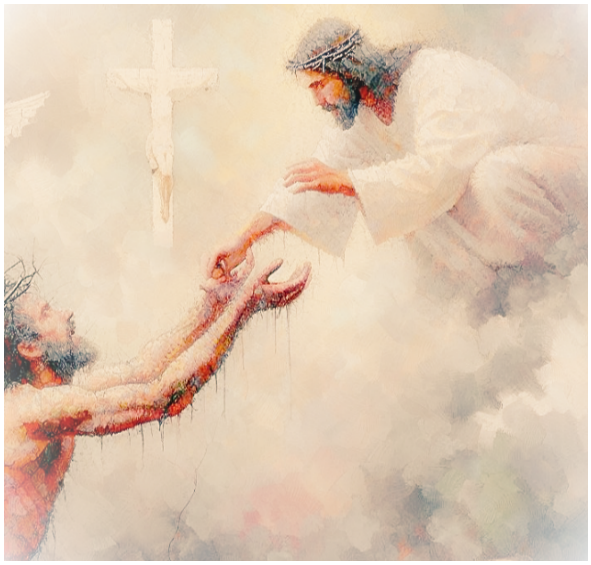
2. What are the key attributes of the Good News?

3. What are some of the blessings of the Christian life?

4. What do you personally like the most about the Good News?

5. Do you believe that on the cross God forgave all your sins?

6. Do you believe that because of this you can see yourself worthy and pure?



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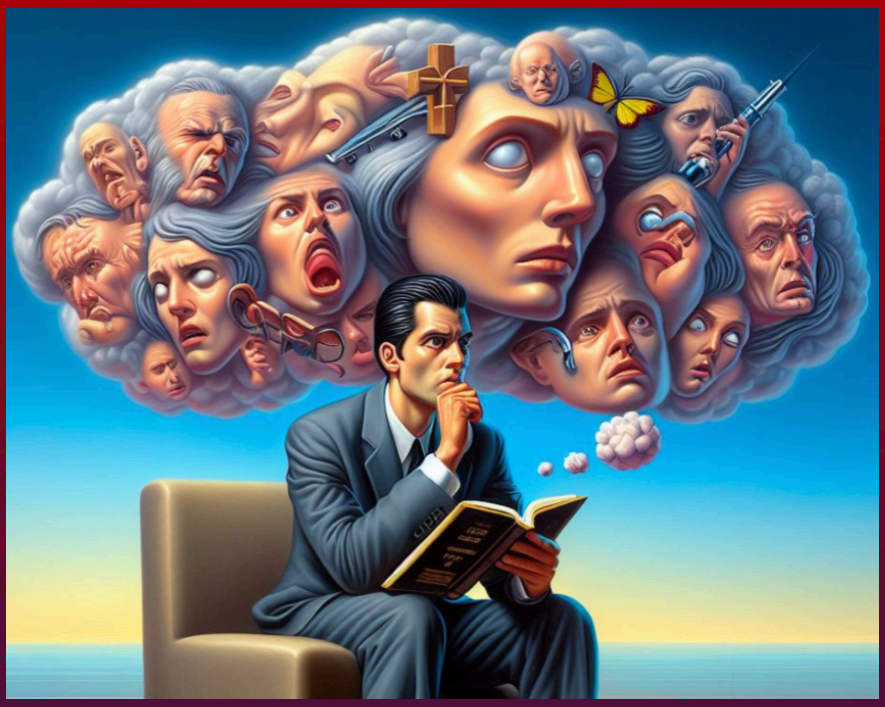
Step

5



RECOGNISE YOUR SINS

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5 – RECOGNIZE YOUR SINS!

In order to change, we first need to acknowledge what sin is, according to the Bible, and not according to what everyone around us considers sin.

Many people think that sin is limited to a few bad things that are obvious, such as murder or theft, being dependent on drugs or alcohol, but in fact it includes far more.

In essence, sin is all that prevents us from loving and being in perfect harmony with God, others, and ourselves.

List of Bible verses regarding sin:

Isaiah 30: 9 - Matthew 15: 19 - Mark 7: 21-22 - Romans 1: 18-32 - 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10 - Colossians 3: 5-9 Galatians 5: 19-21 - Ephesians 5: 3-6 - 2 Timothy 3: 2-5 - Titus 1: 10-12 - James 4:17 - Revelation 21: 8 and 22:15

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts–murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander". (Matthew 15:19)

"For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come–sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly". (Mark 7:21-22)

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"Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 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". (Romans 1:28-32)

"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God". (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices". (Colossians 3: 5-9)

"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God". (Galatians 5:19-21)

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person–such a person is an idolater–has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient". (Ephesians 5:3-6)

"People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God– having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people". (2 Timothy 3:2-5)

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars–they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" .
(James 4:17)

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YOUR OWN SINS

As you examine all the sins mentioned in the next few pages, write the following pluses and minuses:

(—) **MINUS** For all the sins that you have committed in the past (you can make a circle around the horizontal line)

\+ **PLUS** For all the sins you still have in your life (you can put a vertical line on the horizontal line, transforming it in a plus)

(Use a simple pencil, not a pen, to make it easier to erase after and Ask a friend who knows you well to check if you marked everything correctly, because we often cannot be objective towards ourselves)

Laziness, irresponsibility

(Look as well on pages 155-156 for a concrete description of an irresponsible person)

— Passivity, gloom, apathy, depression

— Makes impulsive, irrational decisions, not thinking how they can affect other people (never wonders: “will it harm anyone?”)

— Never seeks to do an excellent work with the best possible quality. Instead does a sloppy job that has bad consequences for others

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— Unreliable, rarely fulfills his promises

— Does not have clear goals and discipline to improve his situation

— Not punctual, does not plan and does not organize his time correctly

— Does not inform others when changing plans, does not answer calls nor call back

— Rarely finishes what he started and does not notify others about changes to what was agreed

— Does not have a clear budget, savings, often borrows money

— Takes loans without a clear repayment plan

— Spontaneously spends money on unnecessary things, instead of buying first what is really necessary

— Does not want to work or improve his life, and always finds excuses for this

— Even when being in a difficult financial situation, does not want to look for any job

— Spends his life on projects that do not bring financial profit or any tangible results

— Often depends on the financial assistance of others, thinking that the whole world owes him

— Anything that shows no self-control is laziness (impulsive behavior, alcohol intoxication, oversleeping, etc.…)

Selfishness

— Self-centeredness, Narcissism

— Only acts for his own interests, without thinking how to make others feel good at the same time (in other words, purely satisfies his needs at the expense of others)

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— Incapable or unwilling to act in considering the interests of others (so that the result suits both parties – “win-win”)

— Throws trash on the street and leaves his place dirty so that others have to clean up after him

— Does not know how to be sensitive, does not care what the other person feels

— Has no compassion for the suffering of others and no desire to help them (it is their problem, why should I help?)

— Helps others only to get something for himself (“what will I get out of this?”)

— Wants to always control the behavior and decisions of others, cannot trust and delegate

— Easily manipulates others for his own interests

— Bad listener, mostly talking about himself

— Expects admiration, status in society is very important

— Vanity, spends money to impress others

— Ungrateful, doesn't remember what you did for him, but instead often reminds you what you should or could do for him

— Will constantly feel that others are not loving him the way he wants to be loved.

— Uses emotional blackmail and threatens to leave you if you don’t follow his lead

— Abortion (high form of selfishness as it borders murdering)

— Ultimately, a very selfish person always becomes mean (he will therefore be easily aggressive, manipulative, cruel, etc.…)

— A very selfish person absolutely never sees that he is selfish. Like pride, selfishness is this other sin that completely blind those who have it. Selfish people are therefore easily on the defensive if you show them their selfishness

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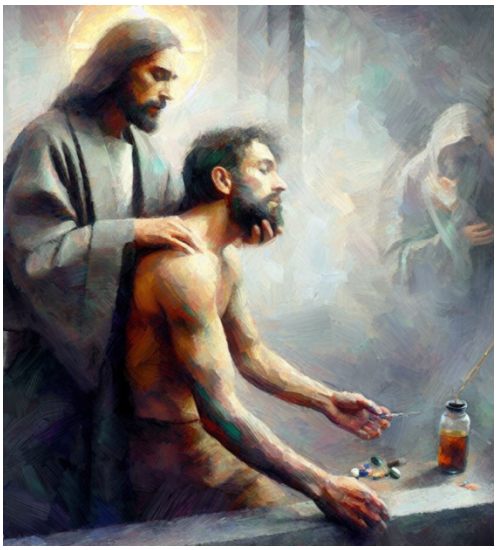
Addictions



- Alcohol
- Drugs
- Cigarettes
- Pornography
- Sex outside of marriage
- Gambling, online gambling, casinos, etc..
- Food (overeating), junk food and all processed food
- Some foods that you take in excess (such as coffee, sugar, meat, etc.…)
- Phone, internet, and TV
- Movies, music, and internet games that glorify fornication, horror, evil, death, violence, and the suffering of others
- Buying certain things (clothes, etc…)
- Workaholism, can never stop and truly rest
- Idols. These are invisible but very powerful addictions! They are so powerful that we put them before God and everything else! They can be our job, our personal goals, certain people, etc...)

Anger and hate

- Murder
- Any religion or political propaganda that supports murder and stealing
- Anger
- Aggressiveness, fits of rage

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— Murder

— Outbursts of anger

— Irritation

— Violence, rudeness

— Humiliation of others

— Bullying and laughing at others

— Sarcasm

— Rape

— Hatred

— Racism, any form of nationalism that hates other nations

— Rejection of certain social or ethnic groups (hatred of rich or poor people, hatred of Jews, of Palestinians, of Ukrainians or Russians, etc...)

— Hatred of anyone who does not have Christian values (hatred of homosexuals, transgenders, left leaning politicians, etc...)

— Loosing self-control, impulsive behavior, being drunk

The primary reason we love our enemies is to convert them, so they stop being our enemies !

<u>Some of the typical excuses people make regarding being angry:</u>

— I have every right to be aggressive because you're wrong.

— You don't respect me, why should I talk to you differently than when you talk to me?

— Only in this way will you listen to me.

— It doesn't matter how I say it, what matters is what I say.

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Low self-esteem

— Does not have a positive self-image, instead has a negative and unhealthy view of oneself. (Of course, it has different levels for different people!)

— Deep insecurity. Low self-esteem is just another form of pride = someone who belittles himself is just as insecure as someone who speaks highly of himself)

— Does not have an objective and realistic picture of himself

— Seeks attention and approval, fishes for compliments

— Easily complains about life. (Will easily blame others for his problems and complain that no one understands and support him in order to get attention and sympathy)

— Suicide (the highest form of low self-esteem)

Some of the usual excuses that people make about this sin:

— Nobody cares about me, nobody understands.

— My parents, society, spouse, no one ever accepted me.

— I'm unwanted, not loved.

— It's all my fault.

— I feel unworthy.

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— I will never succeed in anything.

— I'm a loser, a victim.

— I'm so afraid of it, so...

Some of the possible consequences of this sin:

— Bulimia, anorexia

— Abortion

— Self-rejection and its accompanying spirit

— Self-loathing, self-depreciation

— Depression, despair

— Loneliness

— Nightmares (persistent and severe, not the rare ones)

— Suicidal thoughts or in a state that is constantly on the verge of death

— Self-mutilation, curses uttered against oneself ("I wish I died", "I wish I was never born")

— Unjustified sense of guilt or unworthiness

— May have very aggressive and unexplained behavior at times

— Abnormal and constant fears of any kind (about the future, about driving, about failures, about being alone, about what others think, about getting sick, about losing your job, about not having enough money, about death, about certain people or animals, about never getting married, etc.)

— Sudden panic attacks, paranoia

— Strange or unusual behavior – A person prefers to be lonely, thinking that people are reading his mind or laughing about him or talking about him, even when no one is around, easily nervous, has uncontrollable tics or convulsions, wild imaginations, fantasies, avoids eye contact, does not want to be hugged or touched

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Self-righteousness

— Sees himself morally above others in order to increase his self-esteem

— Easily belittles and judges others, especially those who have moral or religious expectations that are inferior, and never sees this as a problem

— Legalism (this is when someone creates religious laws that are clearly not in the Bible which burden and punish people). Such rules always make people self-righteous

— A strong desire to control the behavior of others, because such a person always feels justified that he is right, and others are mostly not

— Feels that God is on his side when he judges and looks down on others ("I thank you, God, that I am not like these sinners")

— Sees himself so righteous that as a believer he will never seek to attend any church. If he creates his own group, it will be with the attitude that “we are the only ones who know the truth”

Occultism

— Fortune telling (by hand, on a tea leaf, coffee, on a crystal ball, on candles, etc.…), reading Tarot cards, curses from Gypsies, clairvoyance of prediction, interpretation of omens, phrenology, numerology/gematria, psychometry

— Communication with the dead, mediums and spiritism

— Predicting the future to others

— Sorcery

— Spirit guide

— Horoscope

— Witchcraft, magic (white or black)

— Any book on occultism can have an impact on you

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— Spells, parapsychology, telepathy, astral projections

— Spells and pronunciation of magic formulas (this is even used at times during computer games!)

— Levitation, telekinesis

— Automatic or spiritual writing, holy waters

— Using amulets and talismans (things like shark teeth, tiger claws, horseshoes on the door, Egyptian cross ankh, red filaments, etc.)

— Satanic rituals and music (Black Sabbath, Kiss, Marilyn Manson, etc.…)

— Neopagan groups and initiation rituals in their groups

— Animal sacrifices, drinking blood

— Hexagram and Kabbalah (most of it is esoteric and occult, and it has an unbiblical view of God!)

— Hypnosis

— Martial arts (karate, kung fu, etc... give an increasing supernatural power, which is demonic)

— Contact with "aliens"

— Hallucinations, wicked trances

— Horror films (open the door to demonic influences)

— Acupuncture, iridology, etc. Some types of alternative medicine open the door to demonic influences

— Rituals where sexual sins and occultism are practiced at the same time (they create very strong and dangerous demonic bonds in a person!)

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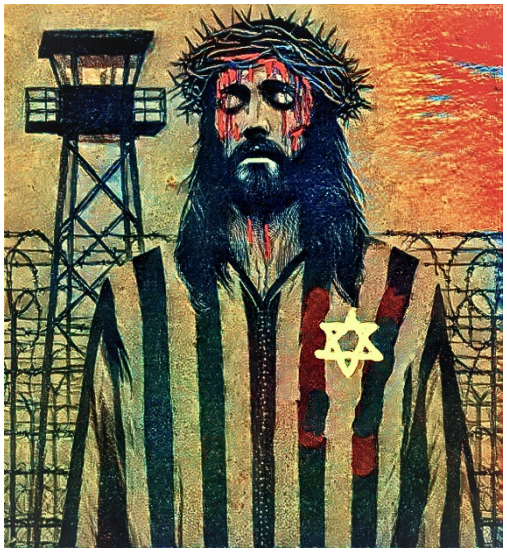
False religions and philosophies

Test all things and keep the good. Reject every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22)

— Humanism in all its forms (man is the center of everything) atheism, agnosticism

— Most aspects of postmodernism. (We partially agree with Postmodernism that science and technology does not bring “success” but completely reject their position that there is no truth, objective reality or knowledge, and therefore reason, logic, language and all formulations are subjective. Practically it means that everyone has its own truth and subjective morality!)

— Left liberalism, critical race theory, WOKE culture, identity politics, intersectionality, social justice and cancel cultures, BLM, etc..=> Anything that judges others by their skin or social status is a sin



— LGBT activism, especially those who want to impose their values in schools and condemn you for not accepting them

— Any kind of unchristian feminism, especially the one that humiliates men and opposes the Christian values of the family

— Atheism, communism

— Stalinism, Fascism, Maoism, Putinism, today’s 2023 Chinese, Iranian or North Korean governments or any political systems or political philosophies that legitimize the concentration of political power in the hands of just one person or a few. (Authoritarianism, dictatorship, totalitarianism, no freedom of press, of judiciary, of religion and of thought, etc.…). Such forms of government ALWAYS end up in democides and/or genocides. There is no exception to this historical fact. Genocide is when a nation massively kills another nation (e.g., Nazi fascists), and democide is when a nation kills its own people en masse (e.g., communists). On top of this, such countries almost always end up attacking other countries as well (as did the Nazis or communists). It's all evil, and that's why Satan wants to build such forms of political regimes => Murder is always a sin, no matter how idealized and institutionalized it is

— Victimhood mentality where the “lower” you are on the racial, ethnic, social, financial or sexual ladder, the more rights you have to hate the ones “above” and demand benefits from them

— Any political philosophy that supports a “DARVO” behavior (denial by the aggressor that any violence has ever taken place; attacks the victim for trying to bring them to justice and claims that he, the "offender", is actually the victim in this situation, thus swapping the victim with the

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aggressor. Examples: Russians attack Ukrainians, and then they are the victims and America is to blame. Palestinians attacks Israel and then they are the victims and Jews are to be blamed)

- Any kind of aggressive irredentism that will break any former treaties and violently attack another nation => Stealing a territory that does not belong to you is a sin, and violence and murder are sins as well. God's goal on earth is peace and prosperity, and not an aggressive nationalism that destroys others

- Any political philosophy that legitimizes the concentration of dishonest wealth in the hands of a few (kleptocracy, nepotism, oligarchies) = > Theft in any form is a sin

- Any nationalism that encourages hating other nations or ethnic groups

- Anti-Semitism and hatred of Israel

- New age

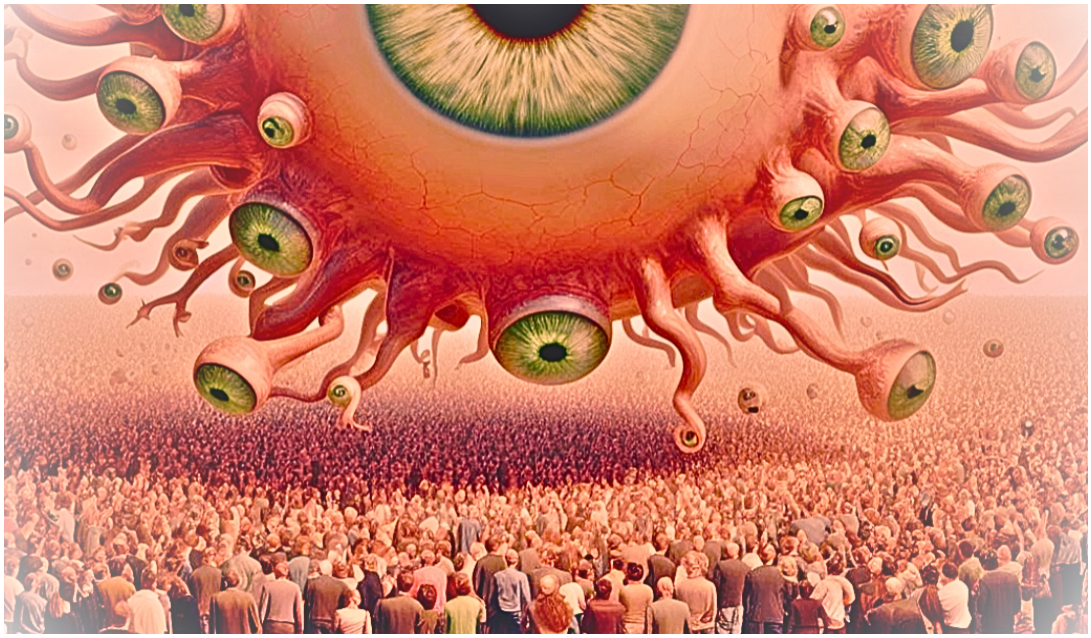
- Yoga (not all the physical exercises themselves, but the mental and spiritual aspects)

- Reincarnation and belief in chakras and transmigration of souls

- Transcendental meditation

- Shamanism, Eastern mysticism

- Freemasonry, Rosicrucian, secret societies



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— Scientology, Unitarians

— Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Krishnas, eastern religions

— Jehovah witnesses and Mormons

— Other sects and their heresies (that hold doctrines that are outside of Christianity, especially the rejection of the divinity of Christ and salvation through your own merits)

— Unbiblical doctrines within the Catholic and Orthodox Church (worship of Mary and icons, prayers to the saints, salvation through your own merits or the prayers of priests, etc.) Those doctrines of demons open the doors to demonic influences

— Any church or religion that uses the government to oppress, murder, and exterminate other religious minorities (Like the Muslim religion or the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches have done over the centuries)

— The doctrine of "grace alone" (meaning that everything is by grace, and you don't have to worry about sin and salvation)

YOUR SINS IN RELATION TO OTHERS

Pride

This is the first and most serious sin, because it prevents you from recognizing all the sins that are present in your life. This is why the Bibles says that the worst sin of all is the “the sin against the Holy Spirit”, because when we refuse to admit that we have sins and that we must repent, we cannot receive God’s forgiveness. In other words, it is only when we have the humility to recognize that we have a problem that we can accept God’s solution.

— Does not respond positively to criticism, constantly interrupts, makes excuses

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— When shown his mistakes, quickly attacks back or on the contrary retreats in silence

— Does not listen carefully what others say, and as a result is not capable to understand exactly what they say

— Feel like they're always right and you'll never be able to tell them anything. If you do, they will immediately get all the excuses and even turn everything against you. They see absolutely nothing wrong with their proud behavior

— If you try to reason with them, they will become extremely defensive and completely irrational. They will categorically refuse to listen and seek any truth

— Very difficult to recognize his weaknesses and sins and apologize. In fact, even when he does, he brings many justifications and explanations why he did what he did

— Try to cover his past mistakes or sins and cannot openly admit “yes this is who I was and did”. In fact, feels easily hurt if it is reminded

— Incapable to objectively see the good and bad sides of his character

— Not looking for advice and corrections to improve his life

— Very difficult to submit to the authority of those who can help him improving his life

— Knows everything, does not learn easily from others, arrogant

— Never learns anything from his past mistakes, constantly repeats them.

— Easily blames other people or circumstances for their problems. Difficult to take full responsibility for his life

— Seeks praise from people, likes to boast about what he knows and has done

— Shows arrogance, constantly compares himself with others

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Common excuses that proud people have:

— Most of the time I'm right, and so I know what I'm doing.

— Don't tell me to change, you're not in my situation, you don't understand.

— You also have this or that problem (why should I change?)

— I won't change until you change first.

— I don't need anyone to tell me anything, I know what's best for me.

— I don't regret anything.

— It's just who I am.

— It's not my fault, they made me do it (parents, spouse, society, etc.)

— I'll prove how good I am, I'm much better than everyone else.

— When I reach that and that level, then they will finally love/respect me.

— I only listen to God and no one else.

Sexual immorality

— Any kind of sexual relationship with someone other than your legal, authorized spouse (premarital sex, infidelity)

— Living together without being married

— Swinging, exchanging partners for sex

— Homosexuality, lesbianism

— Transgenderism

— Pedophilia

— Orgies, sex in groups

— Incest or any sex with members of the family

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— Sex with animals, sex with demons

— Obsessive thoughts of lust

— Sexual fantasies, sex on the phone or internet

— Pornography

— Voyeurism

— Public nudity, nudism

— Pole dancing associated with erotic dancing

— Striptease

— Flirt, behavior and clothes that are sexually provocative

— Sadomasochism, any type of sex that brings physical pain

— Sex that is unsensitively forced against your spouse's will (such as oral sex, anal sex, or sex during menstruation)

— Rape

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Lies, betrayal, dishonesty

- Steal and find justifications for theft (bad health, tragedy, the government is bad, etc.…)
- Betrayal in every possible form (spouse, friends, etc.…)
- Deceit, cheating, deceiving
- Lies of every kind
- Half-truths and "white lies." To lie is always a sin! (Except when saving lives)
- Exaggerations in describing facts or stories
- Hypocrisy, any kind of double face
- A refusal to call sin as a sin is just as evil as loving lies! We must confront lies
- Takes loans without the possibility of repayment
- Does not pay off debts and does not adhere to any financial obligations towards friends and business partners
- Does not return what was found or borrowed (money, things, etc.…)

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— Does not fulfill 100% his promises or agreements, and always has justifications

— Swindler, scammer engaged in dishonest business

— Takes bribes, corruption

— Any form of bureaucratic or political corruption, nepotism

Rebellion

— Has no desire to submit or obey to anyone

— Difficult to accepts directions or even suggestions from anyone

— A controversial spirit that always criticizes the authorities (husband, parents, etc.)

— Does not follow laws, does not want to obey authorities

— Stubborn, does not listen to anyone and always does everything in his own way

— Resist discipline in any possible form

— Negative attitude to authority in general

— Grumbling, mumbling

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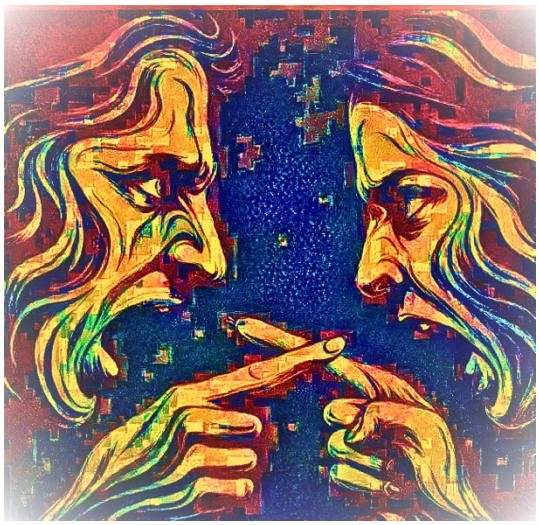
Envy, jealousy, greed

- Does not feel good around people who are smarter, prettier or richer than him
- Rejoices when others have problems and even tragedies
- Wishes bad things to those who are more successful than him
- Desires to possess something or someone who does not belong to him
- Greed = money controls every decision, it is higher than God, family or any moral principle

Unforgiveness

- Resentment
- Keeping grudges in the heart in relationship to others
- You feel bad at the sight or the memory of someone who has hurt you, and you try to emotionally distance yourself
- Vengeance
- Unforgiveness, bitterness
- Unforgiveness can be not only in relation to others, but even:



  - To yourself (you constantly blame yourself and can't forgive yourself for past things)
  - To God
  - It can even be in relation to some ethnic groups or nations (Palestinians, Ukrainians or Russians, etc.)

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Divisions

- Discord
- Constant criticism
- Easily grumbles and complains about others
- Not being completely honest with friends (or tell them only half the truth)
- Conceal information that could easily solve problems for others
- Gossip behind people instead of speaking directly to them
- Damage the reputation of someone by saying things that are untrue, exaggerated or even true
- Create animosity between friends or family

Do not fulfill their family roles

A bad husband

- Does not provide regularly and enough financially, so that the family does not have financial stability
- Doesn't think in advance, instead makes impulsive and unreasonable decisions based on emotions
- Does not involve his wife in all important decisions, particularly with money, so that unexpected and unpleasant situations often arise in the family
- He is rude to his wife and children. Easily annoyed and screaming at them
- Does not show respect for his wife in front of children, but rather humiliates her with offensive words
- Does not take the time to listen to his wife so that she can feel that he loves her and understands her

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— Does not speak honestly and openly with his wife about his plans and problems

— Behaves like a "log", does not show positive feelings and emotions, so that the wife feels protected

— Lazy and passive, sitting at home in front of a TV or a computer, instead of spending time with his family

— Spends little time with children (for him, work or something else is more important)

— Does not support children with positive words to affirm their self-esteem (“I love you; I believe in you, you will succeed”)

— Does not punish children but allows them to do whatever they want (so that they often end up with bad friends, they say and decide what they want and how they want). In his family, his wife is the only one mostly engaged in the discipline of the children

— Does not give wise and clear directions to his children, but leaves this responsibility to others (wife, school, etc.…)

— Does not seek advice from others to become a more disciplined person and a better family man. He is proud, thinking he knows everything

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— His work becomes the priority of his life, and his family revolves around or even after it. Because of his work (a sailor, military man or businessman), he is most of the time away from his wife and children, which is selfish and irresponsible (why start a family if you are constantly not at home?). Having such a work is acceptable when you are single because you can achieve your financial goals, but when you have a family, your wife and children should become the main priority of your life, and everything should revolve and be organized around them

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (1 Peter 3:7)

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (Colossians 3:19)

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her .... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself." (Ephesians 5:25-33)

A bad wife

— Does not easily follow her husband directives and expectations, because she does not consider and treat him as the leader of the family. She does what she wants to do regardless of what he asks her

— Ignores his authority, makes important decisions without asking him

— Does not create a cozy and calm atmosphere at home (it is dirty and noisy, and when the husband comes home from work, she dumps all her negativity on him, instead of feeding him with a hearty dinner and letting him rest)

— Raises her voice against him in situations of conflict, talks aggressively to him like a mother talking to a child in situations where she feels he is doing something wrong

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— Does not treat him with great respect and gentleness, but often nags him and easily argues with him

— Instead of giving respectful suggestions, she gives him orders, with the arrogant attitude of "What are you doing? Do this! Don't do that"

— Wants to control the behavior and the decisions that her husband makes (she has the full legitimate right to ask questions and give him advice in a respectful way, but after this, she needs to trust God that her husband will make the right decision)

— Constantly criticizes him; instead, she should often tell him compliments and praise him to show how much she admires him

— Is not trying to be interested in what her husband is interested in, so that they can spend time together (sports, films, hiking, fishing, etc.)

— Does not make every effort to improve their intimate life and fully satisfy him sexually

— Does not try to be beautiful and attractive (general appearance, weight, clothes, cosmetics, etc...)

"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." (1 Peter 3:1-4)

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything". (Ephesians 5:22-24)

"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife." (Proverbs 21:9)

"A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm" (Proverbs 27:15)

"Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife." (Proverbs 21:19)

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Bad parents

- They control and manipulate the life of their children, even after marriage, trying in some cases to destroy a young family

- Do not give children the opportunity to realize their talents (sports, music, etc.)

- They don't help with the preparation of lessons; they don't explain the complex material so that children learn better

- They do not teach children how to take responsibility for their behavior (instead cover their bad deeds, instead of allowing them to suffer the consequences)

- Do not discipline or punish children

- They do not support and do not inspire them, constantly saying positive words and compliments

- Do not instill in children moral principles about good and evil (respect elders, not cheat at school, etc.)

- They do not help them set life goals and priorities so that they can shape their character

- Deprive children of the opportunity to honor their parents by taking rent from them

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Bad children

— They do not 100% obey their parents (children must do whatever their parents tell them, except when it is sin). Once children have reached adulthood and are living on their own, they are free

— Bickering and arguing with parents, talking to them disrespectfully

— Constantly whining and showing discontent

— Make decisions without asking permission or advice from parents

— Do not honor parents in old age. Honoring parents means thanking them and saying kind words (parents are not always right, but we must still respect them).

QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. Look at all the checkmarks you put. What does that say about you?

2. What are your most serious sins (3-5) the ones that now control your life?

3. What do you feel when you see your sins? Do you want to change?

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Step 6

STOP SINNING!

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6 - STOP SINNING

True repentance means not only to admit that you have sinned, but it is a decision also to change the direction of your life by 180 degrees. In other words, repenting does not mean that you ask God to forgive you so that after this you can keep on sinning again.

On the contrary, **repentance is a sincere tearful recognition of your sins accompanied by as serious intention to change.**

Furthermore, when someone has truly repented, there must be visible changes in all areas of their life. In biblical terms, this is called "the fruits of repentance" (Matt. 3:8):

"*Therefore, produce fruit that proves your repentance*" (New English Translation)

"*Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance*" (American Standard Version)

"*So produce fruit that is consistent with repentance*" [demonstrating new behavior that proves a change of heart, and a conscious decision to turn away from sin]; (Amplified Bible)

Things you should do to change

- **Get on your knees and confess all your sins to God first, then…**
- **Ask forgiveness from the people whom you have sinned against.** Obviously, it cannot be the whole world, but in your conscience, you must decide who needs to hear your apology (Parents? Children? Former husband or wife, etc.…). This is especially important if you uttered words to hurt people or even cursed them. In this case, you not only need to ask for forgiveness from these people but also pronounce words of blessing upon their lives. Even if those people do not want to

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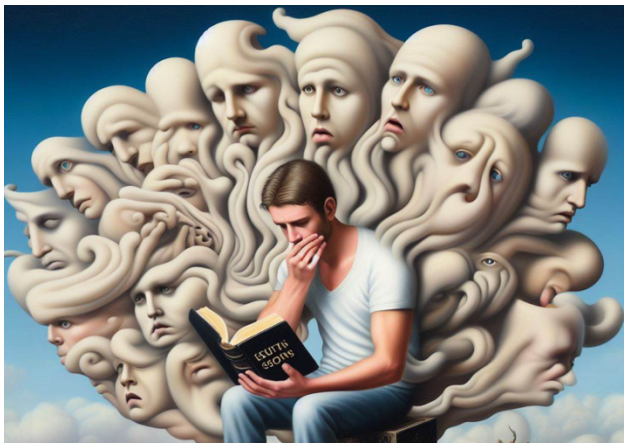
forgive you, and if nothing is improved, it does not matter, what matters is that you recognize your own faults and apologize



- **Forgive those who have offended you**. You will not be forgiven if you do not forgive. (Matt.5:15) Furthermore, keeping resentments and hurts inside are sins that will make your own life worse.

  "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins". (Matthew 6:15)

- **Confess all your sins to a mature Christian friend who can help you.** It does not have to be a church leader, but any good Christian friend you trust and who has the maturity and spiritual authority to help you. (1 John 1:5—10). If you are not willing to confess your sins, you are not really willing to change and receive help. Sometimes, only confession and prayer can heal and set you free (James 5:16). This is especially true for sexual sins that were bound to occult practices as they created strong spiritual and emotional ties in your souls

  "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:6-10)

- **Renounce verbally your sins.** After you confessed your sins to someone, you need to choose all the sins in your present life that control you and say out loud to God in the presence of that person: "I decide now before God and before you to no longer commit this sin and that one, etc.…." (Or the person can make you repeat what she said)

- **Be seriously prayed over** by the person who heard your confession. It could be that the sins you committed bound you to demonic influences who need to be cast out of your life. Ask an experienced Christian who knows how to deal with demons, like for instance your pastor

  "Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

- **If you swore an oath to someone, it is a sin** (Matthew 5:33-37), and you need to ask for forgiveness from these people and from God

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- **Destroy any objects** (books, figurines, souvenirs, talismans, charms, etc.) that are clearly related to occultism or false teaching (burn them! Acts 19:19).

- **Give, sell, or return all items** (watches, rings, gifts, pictures, etc.) related to sinful or painful relationships in your past, as they attach you emotionally and spiritually to these people (1 Corinthians 6: 16-18).

- **Stop living and sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend.** Sex outside marriage is a sin for Christians. If your partner is open to become a Christian, which means that he attends the church and start repenting from sin, then he will respect your choice to temporarily go living in another place. Eventually when he becomes a Christian, you can make a decision to be married. If he is not open to become a Christian, living together will only influence you negatively and eventually you will abandon your faith!

  "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14)

- **If you stole anything or if you have unpaid loans, go back to the offended people, ask them forgiveness and pay back whatever you agreed between you.**

- **Cut all the relationships with the people who could tempt you to sin**. (Former friends who will get you to be drunk, to be dishonest, sexual immorality, etc.…) If you are not strong enough to influence them to become Christian, then leave them!

  "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33)

- **Do not go in places where you could be tempted to sin** (Discotheques, clubs, bars, etc.… Matt. 5:29-30)

Essentially, repentance is to:

1. **Stop committing** all the sins mentioned earlier! (This includes a complete change of mindset and behavior!)

BUT equally important:

2. **Do the right things** that nullify and correct all the evil you've done (in other words, do good deeds towards the people you've harmed, like getting their money back, saying the right words for reconciliation, forgive, etc.).

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"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds." (Acts 26:20)

"Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need." (Ephesians 4:28)

3 fundamental motivations for changes

1. I change because God loves me as I am

All my changes will not change God's unconditional love for me. I do not have to change so that God will love me more. He already loves me as I am, unconditionally. He always loved me and always will. I do not have to prove myself to Him so that He will better accept me or make me more worthy. When Jesus suffered on the cross, he made a sacrifice that made me absolutely pure and right in God's eyes. In other words, my main motivation to change is that God loves me as I am, and He already sees me as perfect through Jesus. So, I feel thankfulness and want to improve!

> Illustration: a woman had a husband who had an extensive checklist of all the tasks she was supposed to do every day. At the end of the day, when he would come back, if she had not fulfilled everything, he would be angry and even sometimes beat her. That husband died and she eventually remarried to a husband who deeply loved her. A few years later, she accidentally found the checklist of her former marriage and as she read it, she was very surprised to discover that she not only did all the things on that list, but in fact she did far more!

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2. I change because at the end it is good for me and …others

God does not want me to make changes just for Him; He wants me to make change for me and others as well. The reason is He wants the very best for me! Indeed, if I have a strong discipline and love, I will experience far more happiness. If I constantly push the limits of what I could do, my life will have meaning and results. In other words, if I constantly improve my character, I will have increasing success in life, greater influence for God, and finally more joy, peace and satisfaction in life.

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you–even Jesus." (Acts 3:19-20)

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

3. I change now because I do not want to suffer later

There is spiritual and universal law that no one can escape: sooner or later our sins come back to us. In other words, if I am not willing to get rid of my sins now, they will find me later, first in this life and then in the next one! So, the sooner I change the better it will be.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8)

"But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out". (Numbers 32:23)

QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. **What is repentance?**
2. **What are some practical examples that show that you have repented?**
3. **What should motivate you to repent? Name 3 motivations.**
4. **Have you done everything that is written above? Why not?**

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Step 7

COMPLETE DELIVERANCE

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7 - A COMPLETE DELIVERANCE

What are demons?

1. Demons are spiritual beings; this is why they are called evil and unclean spirits.
2. They do not fly like angels but walk in waterless places.
3. They look for bodies to inhabit and control.
4. The headquarter of demons is in Satan's kingdom, and they have two basic orders:
   - To not allow anyone to come to Christ.
   - To minimize the effectiveness of believers.

Demons have:

1. Various names
2. Multiple forces (some of them are much harder to kick out)
3. Different roles within their hierarchy
4. Varying degrees of wickedness and stubbornness
5. Various functions to cause harm (physical and mental, they can also endow people with supernatural abilities)
6. They control different territories and places
7. There may be more than one demon in one person
8. They don't act alone
9. They hide themselves and become apparent during times of deliverances

Demons can speak, they have their own will, they have knowledge, emotions and even names, so in many ways they resemble humans.
Because of this, some believe that they are **the souls of lost people** who died and returned to earth to achieve their evil goals. (That's why they need bodies.)
Others believe that they are **the dead souls of the offspring between angels and women** (Gen. 6:4)
Regardless of their origin, it is important for us to know what to do with them, which is to cast them out!

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Can demons influence us?

Various expressions are used to describe the control of demons:

1. "To have an unclean spirit"
2. "To be under their influence"
3. "To be demonized"
4. "To be possessed by the devil"

In each Case in the New Testament, the Greek term «demonized» shows different degrees of influence from demons on people.

There are three different stages of demonic influence:

1. They regularly come and leave
2. They are "very close" to humans (forms of oppression)
3. They are "inside" a person (which is possession)

Can anyone (and even Christians) be under such a "demonization"?

The answer is an unequivocal "yes!" because Ephesians 4:27 clearly shows that **when we sin** (this verse speaks of wrath, theft, etc.) **we give the devil a place!**
The word "place" can also be translated as "territory" or “room”; from the Greek word "topos" (which gave us words like topography, topology...).

Demonization is a biblical term describing the various influences of demons on humans.

In other words, every time we sin (on a permanent and voluntary basis), we open doors for demons to enter certain areas of our lives, whether it is in our memories, our thoughts, our will, our emotions, or even our bodies.

If we refuse to sin, we keep those doors closed, and the demons don't have access to our lives. If we open some doors, the demons will come in as long as those doors are open. If we sin a lot, those doors will be wide open, and eventually demons will settle in certain areas of our lives. So, it all depends on what doors we opened and how much.

When we sin, we open the door for demons to enter our lives.

That's why everyone, including Christians, needs to be completely freed from demonic influences. It can be a one-time deliverance, but sometimes it can be more. We know that in the life of every person there are several areas where liberations are necessary because of rejections, lies, traumas, sins, generational or self-imposed curses.

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Can demons go away on their own, without being cast out?

Yes. Christians who truly seek the truth and holiness and walk in complete humility before God and people will more and more expose demons to the light, and in the end, these spirits will not want to be around them. If we hate certain sins, eventually the spirits behind those sins will go away. Usually, this gradual deliverance occurs after years of walking with the Lord, but rarely at the beginning of the journey.

The more we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the less Satan can influence us.

For this reason, every person should strive for the maximum deliverance as soon as possible. Why go a long and painful process when it can be done much faster! ?

Stages of Demonic Influence

Control is when certain sinful thoughts and behaviors control us. This foundation allows demons to carry out the following 3 stages:

1. **Oppression** is a feeling of heaviness, a burden, acting on the mind or on the body.

2. **Torment from demonic influence** is a state where demons have seized you and are holding you. This is the state of a person who is constantly scattered and disturbed by something, some strange ideas or feelings (for example: the fear of death).

3. **Possession** is when you're under the full influence of evil spirits, like being demon possessed, sleepwalker, crazy, insane. Webster's dictionary explains possession as the right to own or receive that possession. This is the very last stage of a demonic influence.

To assess the demonic influence on people, we use a scale from 1 to 10:

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People who are in the stage **of oppression by demons** – the average anxiety – are located at the top of this scale from 1 to 3.

Those in the second group - **torment from demonic influence** -a strong anxiety - are located in the middle of the scale from 4 to 7.

Possessed people, who can no longer be in the midst of normal society are located at the very bottom of this scale from 8 to 10. An example of the most recent category is the demon possessed man from Gadara. Most people we work with are in the first two categories, on a scale of 1 to 7.

Obvious signs of demonic influence

If there's something below where you see a problem, make a check mark.

- Complete enslavement from his sins (constantly committing the same sins and unable to make any lasting changes in character).
- Extreme antisocial behavior, no friends, can never maintain any relationship, unable to listen to others and submit to any authorities.
- Unusually aggressive behavior, constantly angry, unable to forgive, constantly holds grudges, unusually proud, arrogant.
- Unusual low self-esteem, all the time feeling sorry for himself, unhealthy and dysfunctional view of himself, inflated egoism.
- Incessant suicidal thoughts, self-harm.

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- A state of constant fear and depression - heaviness on the heart, which cannot be explained, phobias.
- A state of absolute apathy and detachment that paralyzes any initiative or decision.
- Complete dependence on alcohol, drugs, fornication, etc.
- Serious health issues that go far beyond reasonable and medical explanations.
- Irrational mental health problems, insanity, voices.
- Supernatural abilities not given from God.
- Constant and recurring tragedies in one's own life and in the life of the family (fires, accidents and death of loved ones - all for inexplicable reasons, as well as returning poverty, financial collapse and debts, sexual violence, etc..).
- Incessant nightmares and demonic visits.

How are demons influencing humans?

There are four main ways in which demons can influence humans:

1. **Voluntary sins**
2. **Strongholds**
3. **Something bad from our past**
4. **Unforgiveness**

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Voluntary sins

All the sins that we have consciously chosen and that we practice on a regular basis open door for the enemy to influence us. The longer and deeper we sin, the more power demons have to come into our lives and control us. This can lead to enslavement, and it is very difficult to get free.

DECISION:

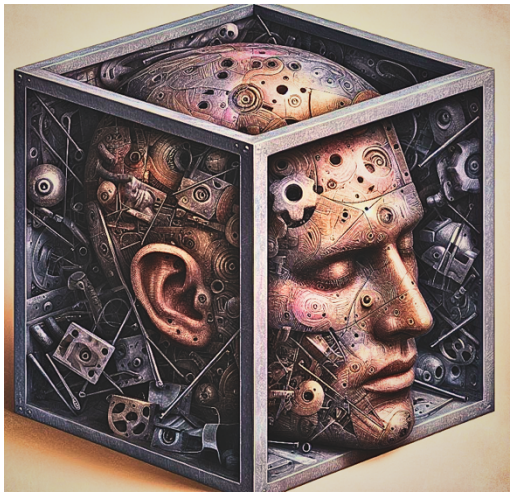
Carefully study all the sins mentioned in the fifth chapter on sins. What sins (or some aspects of those sins) control you to the point where you feel like you can't be free from them? Write them on a piece of paper.

Strongholds

Strongholds are lies that we stubbornly believe, for which we have justifications and which we don't see ourselves.

"The weapons of our warfare are not human, but they have the power from God to demolish **STRONGHOLDS** (fortress, a strong defense in which to escape). We destroy every reasoning (deep seated justification, bottom line thinking, conception, calculated argument) and every pride (very high walls, ramparts, presumption) that is built against the **KNOWLEDGE** of God, and we take captive every **THOUGHT** so that they will obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

- **Strongholds are the wrong thoughts** or lies we have created to protect ourselves and project a false image of ourselves to others and to God. They are like strong walls we have built around our inner world, which is why the Bible depicts them as "strongholds" (or fortresses). Behind each of them are demons that correspond to those lies.



- We don't see anything wrong with those thoughts because we have **good reasons** to justify ourselves and explain our behavior. What makes them strong is that they are often reinforced by strong **emotions.**

- Strongholds are very hard to recognize! The reason is that they are deep within us and therefore **invisible** to us. This is what makes them so strong and so dangerous!

- The only way to break down those inner walls of lies is when they are exposed to the truth. It is only when we allow the Holy Spirit, the Bible and Christians around us to open our eyes that we can accept God's will and become free.

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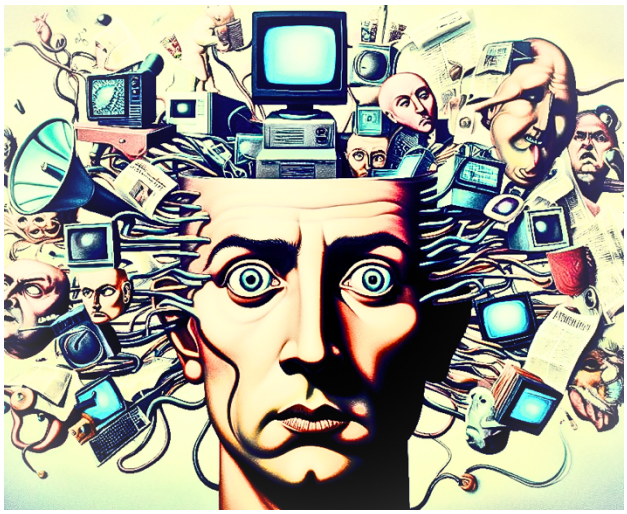
Strongholds have to do with how we think. Behind these very thoughts are extremely stubborn spirits. That's why they will do anything to blind us and stay with us.

Our thinking is shaped by the following influences:

1. **The family values that we grew up with**. What our parents taught us, and the model they left us have left an invisible and at the same time a very strong influence on our minds. It is only later in life that that we realize this as we begin to know the Truth.

2. **The sinful characteristics of the city and the country where we grew up**. Every nation has certain sins, some even more than others (see, for example, the shocking description that Paul gives of the Cretans in Titus 1:10-16!). Most of the time, people are completely blind to how much they have been influenced. What makes this influence so powerful is that it is demonic. The reason is that above every city and every nation are certain principalities and armies of demons, whose mission is to blind and enslave people with specific sins.
   Here's a simple test: If you can't see the specific national sins associated with your own country and how most people around you think wrongly, you have every chance of being influenced by the same demonic influences!

3. **The media and the internet** (hours of watching and listening to all the lies of this fallen world will definitely shape our thinking! Just look at how different propagandas have been able to affect millions of people!)



4. **School and university.** That's why the Bible talks about doctrines or teachings of demons! (1 Tim. 4:1).

5. **Our religion and moral values** (if you had the wrong religious views, they are very strong to blind us)

6. **All the life experiences** that have shaped the way we choose to think (tragedies, encounters with certain people, etc...)

Here **a few examples** of what strongholds look like:

- The husband is irresponsible and selfish towards his wife, but he never sees anything wrong with it as he has every reason to behave like this ("my wife does not love and respect me", “If she did this, I would not have to do that”).

What we think creates not only a connection to the visible world, but also to the invisible world.

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- The wife controls her husband, she is constantly aggressive and argues with him. She sees absolutely nothing wrong with it as she puts all the blame on him. This is an unconscious pattern of rebellious behavior that she received while growing up as she saw her mother doing exactly the same.

- Some people constantly feel that they are the victims, and they are always looking for attention. Even if they suffer from it, they see nothing wrong with their self-pity.

- Some people think they're always right and you can never tell them anything. If you dare to do it, they will immediately find every possible excuse and even turn everything against you. They see absolutely nothing wrong with their pride.

- Some people are brainwashed by a fanatical religion or a political propaganda. If you try to reason with them, they will become defensive and even irrational. They will categorically refuse to listen to you and seek any truth. This is a clear sign of demonic influence.

- Some people invent convenient excuses regarding a sin they committed so that they will not feel bad. Eventually, they believe the very lie that they created.

In all the above cases, these people never see what is wrong with their thinking because they have excuses that support them in their sins. That's how demons influence them!

DECISION:

Consider the questions below. Ask the Holy Ghost, your friends, and mature Christians to show you the truth! The goal is for you to finally see the lies you believed and all the false excuses you made up that kept you from changing. (These sins and excuses may have allowed demonic influences into your life!) Write your answers on a piece of paper.

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- **Carefully study the entire list of sins mentioned in chapter five. Are there sins (or specific aspects of sin) that are very difficult for you to consider as sins and repent? Which ones? What are your excuses for not changing?**

- **What sins do your spouse and even your adult children see in you? Do you agree? If so, why haven't you changed?**

- **Ask friends who know you well (and even ask a few people who don't like you) to tell you what negative traits they see in you. Do most people see the same sins? Which ones?**

- **Are there sins that other people have repeatedly accused you of over the years? Which ones? Why haven't you changed?**

- **Has your childhood negatively affected you in the way you see yourself and others? Can you see the sins your parents may have passed on to you?**

- **Can you accurately see the sins specific to your city and the country where you grew up? Which ones might have influenced you?**

- **Look specifically at the sins of pride and low self-esteem in chapter five. Are there aspects where you recognize yourself? What do you think is the reason? When and how did it start?**

- **What are your biggest fears or insecurities and why?**

- **How do you see God? Very caring and loving? Very distant and indifferent? Disappointed with you or even angry at you? Do you feel like you have to prove something to Him? Why?**

The Bad from Our Past

Often, if you've had deep negative events, experiences, or words in the past **that still torment or depress you today**, demons can affect you. This is especially characteristic of occult activities, some tragic events, or words that still emotionally bother you today.

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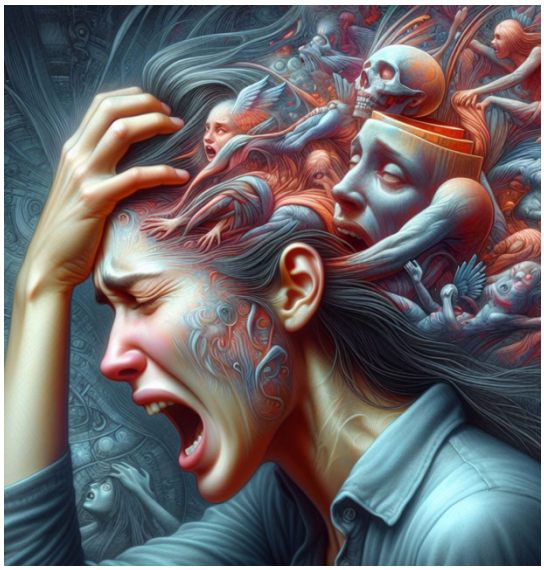
At the same time, not ALL the things mentioned below have automatically opened the door to the enemy. You may have changed so much that God has healed your memory and all your mental and emotional wounds. In this way those doors may have been completely closed so that the enemy can no longer influence you today.

In other words, the Holy Spirit with the help of wise Christians can give revelation and bring you freedom.

Below is a list of possible things in your past that COULD have opened the door for demons to influence you until today:

If you see in the list below something that could have opened such a door, circle it or write it down on a separate piece of paper:

- **Tragic events** that opened the door to demonic influence:
    - Trauma/Emotional Crisis/Shock
    - Events that have created huge irrational fears in you
    - Events that have completely changed the way you see yourself (negatively)
    - Rape
    - Sexual harassment
    - Incest
    - Sexual slavery
    - Violence (fights, murder, wars, prison and torture…)
    - Childhood abuse
    - Accident
    - Death of a loved one
    - Breakdown of marriage, divorce
    - Major depression bordering on suicide
    - Failed suicide
    - Forced abortion
    - Diagnosis of multiple personality disorder
    - An event that left a deep and long memory gap where you can't remember what happened



- **Feelings of rejection from childhood**
    - Hurtful words spoken by loved ones that made you feel rejected, humiliated or abandoned, such as "we did not want you, we did not plan you, you are nobody, you will never do anything good in life", etc.…

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- Father or mother abandoned you and did not maintain any relationship after that
- Your father/mother was physically and/or emotionally absent most of the time (not being at home or not having a close emotional relationship with you)
- Rejection of father-in-law or mother-in-law
- Rejection of classmates or friends

- **Suffering from severe and prolonged oppression** (physical and emotional). This can come from abusive parents or in-laws, from the husband, from a busy spouse, from an abusive situation at work, from government oppression, time in prison, etc.…

- **Things in your past that could deeply alter and control your mind.**

  - Heavy drugs and alcohol (they greatly affect the mind and easily invite demons to enter!)
  - Hypnosis
  - Unsuccessful cases of general anesthesia
  - Trance or extra-bodily experience (in a non-Christian context)
  - Meditation, emptying the mind, reciting mantras
  - A deep and long addiction to movies, music, and internet games that glorify fornication, horror, evil, death, violence and the suffering of others

- **Curses** uttered **against us**. These can be hurtful words or even serious curses that someone said to us that we still remember and believe. Now, if we do not believe what others have said against us, those words have absolutely no power over us (Pr. 26:2). The exceptions are justified curses - when you committed evil against someone who in turn cursed you. It is important in that case to repent and reconcile with this person (and possibly compensate for the damage caused), otherwise those curses will be justified and will continue to operate!

- **Curses** we have uttered **against others.** It can be hurtful words or even serious curses that we said to another person. For example, "May you die!", "I curse the one you love!". But it can also be careless words that we said to loved ones that have deeply affected them, like "Someday I will divorce you" or "You will never succeed." We should be seriously concerned if we know that these words have negatively affected others. We should say the right words to the people concerned, and if it is not possible repent of them and destroy the power of these words in the spiritual world.

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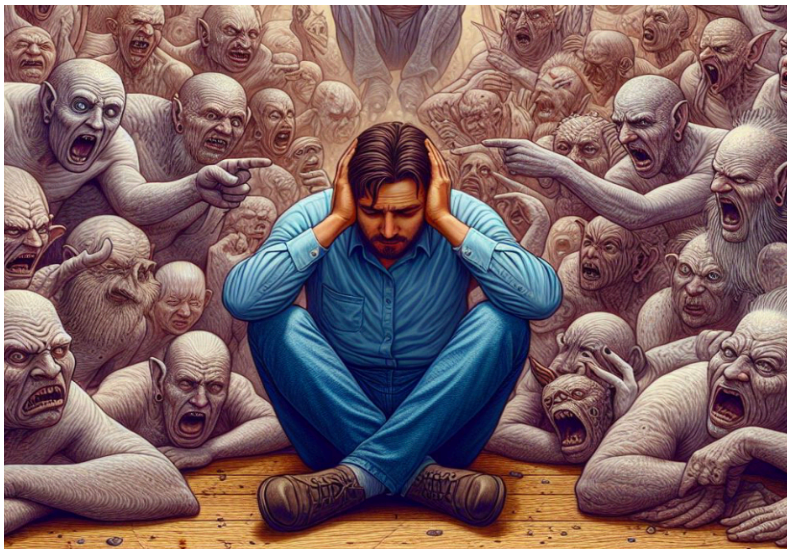
- **Curses** we uttered **against ourselves** ("I wish I had died!", "I don't want to live!", "I will never succeed in life!", "I will never find a good spouse", etc.)

- **Ancestral curses** are sins that our parents passed on to us. Even 3-4 generations can be affected by this (Exodus 34:6–7). For example, if our great-great-grandfather was an alcoholic or sexually promiscuous, these same sins and demons behind these sins can be passed down from generation to generation and reach us. This transmission comes with any kind of sin, regardless of whether we consider them "small" or "big." You can inherit sins that are from your father's side, or more from your mother, or a mixture of both. This parental influence often generates two extremes as well: we either amplify their sins or we hate their sin and go to the other extreme. (For example, if they were poor and lazy, we become greedy and materialistic; if they were very controlling, we let our children do whatever they want, and so on) The tragedy of this influence is that everything that we hate in our parents reproduces itself one way or another into our own lives!

- **Oaths and promises.** There are 4 types of them:
    1. There are bad ones said out of stupidity
    2. There are good and reasonable ones, but you have not been able to fulfill them and, therefore, you feel guilty and ashamed
    3. Made to enter certain political or religious groups (Communist Party, Secret Societies, Freemasons, Mormons, etc.....)
    4. Occult /satanic



- **Past involvement in occult activities** – Occult activity always opens the door for demons to influence us! This is especially true if the occult was mixed with sexual rituals! If there was no repentance, renunciation, and prayer of deliverance, they can still exert an effect on us today! Some occult activities may not appear very serious, such as Ouija boards, tarot cards, or astrology, but

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they are no less pernicious! Others are more serious, such as séances/necromancy (contact with the dead), divination, witchcraft or satanic rituals and vows, etc. ... (see the section of sin relating to the occult)

- **False religions** have the same influence as the occult, and the reason is that they are doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1). Indulging in them is to directly indulge in demons. Such false religions can be Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Transcendental Meditation, Freemasons, etc. (See the section under “Your own sins” titled “False religions and philosophies”)

- **Sins in which you were deeply involved.** Just like occult or false religions, deep involvement in certain sins might have opened doors to demons! This is especially true if you still feel a strong attraction to them today or if you have an unhealthy sense of guilt or shame about them (e.g., fornication, pornography, homosexuality, addiction, theft, deep selfishness, suicidal tendencies, etc.…)

- **Wrong soul ties** are strong and unhealthy psychological and spiritual bridges that connect two people.
    - They arise when we entered in a forbidden and secret sexual relationship and became one soul with another person (1 Corinthians 6:16). If this person had demons tormenting him, and if you had sex with him, then this connection united your souls. Therefore, the demons who tormented that person also have the right to torment you. (This does not apply to couples who are married, as there is no unhealthy soul tie from the intimate relationship of marriage)
    - It could be an unhealthy dependence between a mother and her child (manipulation, control...)
    - They may come through an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend with whom we had sex, and we are still attracted to them even though we are already married
    - These connections can be through blood covenants and vows that we have taken or pronounced

<u>DECISION:</u>

Carefully study everything that has been mentioned in this section above. What are the possible bad things that could open doors for the enemy to affect you until today? Write them on a piece of paper.

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Unforgiveness

You still have unforgiveness if:

1. You can't forgive someone and feel bitter or resentful of them.
2. There is something left in your heart against someone (parents, siblings, spouses, colleagues, etc.), or against some groups of people (Arabs, Ukrainians, Russians, etc.).
3. You constantly blame yourself or can't forgive yourself for past mistakes.
4. You have a grudge against God.

If we don't forgive others, God won't forgive our sins. If God doesn't forgive us, our sins stay with us, which gives demons the right to influence us and ultimately to lose our salvation!

Unforgiveness is a strong reason why so many people are subject to emotional and even physical torment! They are under demonic influences!
Read Matthew 18:23–35, and you will see that "tormentors" are demons!

It is therefore important not only to forgive others, but also to forgive yourself. In some cases, you may even need to ask God for forgiveness.

DECISION:

Who are the people you need to fully forgive, including yourself? What are you going to say to them?

The deeper and longer we keep resentment and unforgiveness, the more demons can influence us!

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How does a deliverance go?

A deliverance should include the following **4 steps:**

1. **Find out the sources of demonic influences.**
2. **Confess and renounce. Ask for forgiveness and forgive.**
3. **Cast out demons.**
4. **See yourself in a positive light and proclaim it.**

It is important to note that the first 3 steps do not have to go in the above chronological order! Often in the process of deliverance, they may not follow in this order.

The fourth step is usually left to the end of the deliverance to make sure that the person closes all the doors and does not bring the demons back into their lives.

Let's take a closer look at what those 4 areas cover:

1. Find out the sources of demonic influences

- The more clearly we see what is wrong with us, and how the demons were able to influence us, the deeper and faster the process of deliverance goes.

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Set aside a few days for **fasting and prayer** (this is not necessary, but desirable) before proceeding to the deliverance. Set aside a **time** when you can be alone with God and your conscience.

- During this time, when you are alone, **carefully study the 4 areas where demons can influence us and accurately write all your answers** on a piece of paper.

- After that, just before the deliverance occurs, spend time in prayer and **have open conversations** with experienced Christians you really trust. Try to be as open and frank with them as possible, remembering that you are really doing this for yourself and not for them.

- The goal of those conversations is not just to confirm what you have already identified on your own, but **to discover** everything that you did not see yourself (each of us has blind spots where we are not able to see in ourselves.)

- It's important to be **humble** and sensitive to what the **Holy Spirit is trying to show you**. Friends may tell you what they see, but if you don't see it for yourself, it might be all in vain.

- **Identify** clearly and precisely all the sins, the wrong thought patterns, the problems of your past, and any resentment and unforgiveness that might have affected you.

2. Confess and renounce. Ask for forgiveness and forgive

Confess and renounce.
Essentially, to renounce and confess our sins means that we hate our sins, and we want to bring them to the light through our confession.

God cannot deliver us from sins we love! Even if demons have been cast out of us, these spirits will return if we love the sins that are behind them.

Here are all the negative things you should give up:

1. Sins that you have voluntarily practiced until now (I renounce pornography, deception, gluttony, etc.)

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2. Wrong patterns of thoughts, lies and excuses that you believed until now (I refuse this rebellious attitude, this false ideology, etc.)

3. I renounce all the negative influences of past events or words spoken against me, I renounce all the words that I have spoken against other people and against myself; I renounce all the wrong soul connections I made with some people; I renounce all the occult practices I've done, etc.).

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (James 5:16)

- **Get rid of** rings, statues and other religious artifacts related to witchcraft, as well as books on the occult.

- **Get rid** of all the things (watches, rings, gifts, photos, etc.) associated with sinful or painful relationships in your past, as they bind you emotionally and spiritually to these people.

- **Ask forgiveness from the people you have sinned against.** Of course, you cannot ask forgiveness from the whole world, but your conscience should tell you if you said words that have hurt or even cursed some people. In this case, you should not only ask forgiveness from those very people but also say specific words that bless them. Even if those people did not forgive you, although you have humbly asked for forgiveness, or even if the relationship between you does not improve, it does not matter. What is important is that **you** have admitted your mistakes and asked for forgiveness.

- **Ask God** for forgiveness of your own sins and for the fact that you have not seen yourself like He sees. You may have to say out loud, "Lord forgive me for seeing myself in such a negative light when You see me in a positive light!" .

- **Forgive other people** (even if they are not around). You can say these words: "These people did not realize what they were doing, and now I forgive and bless them!". For instance: "Parents, you could not give me something that you yourself did not receive or did not have, so I forgive you, and now I even thank you and bless you"!

- In some cases, you may even have **to forgive yourself.** "I forgive myself that I was such a bad example to my children"; or "I forgive myself that I made this decision", "I forgive myself that I did not live up to the trust and expectations of such and such people"...

- If you don't know which words to say, the person praying for you can help you by saying, "**Repeat after me**..."

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3. Cast out demons

The process of deliverance might need to take place **many times,** and it can be conducted not just by one person, but by **several people**. In all cases, this should be done with a mature Christian who has experience in this area of deliverance. In addition, it is best if this process is accompanied by a person who has the gift of words of knowledge and/or discernment of spirits. The reason is that it makes the deliverance faster and more effective.

- **It is important to understand what allowed demons to enter your life** so that you can close those doors and take away their right to influence you. There are many ways by which they gained access to us: through our sins, the sins of our ancestors, which leads to ancestral curses; unforgiveness, which prevents us from receiving God's forgiveness; immersion in the occult, satanic vows, fear, etc.…

- Once the problem is identified, this person begins **to pray in the name of Jesus with the faith** that those demonic influences will leave you. (He himself needs to prepare himself for this through prayer and fasting.) He may say, "In Jesus' name, I take power over every evil spirit that is upon you, and I command each of them to submit to the authority given to me by Jesus Christ!"

- As demons leave you, various **outward manifestations** may be visible, like coughing and yawning, your body shaking or voices of demons speaking through you.

- So, **do not be afraid**, trust the person praying for you and let the Holy Spirit do His work! Turn all your attention to Him!

- During this process, don't be afraid to **ask questions** and tell the person about what's going on with you and how you're feeling.

- You should feel a **noticeable relief** after the demons are gone.

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Essentially, prayers for deliverance should include the following:

- **Lord, forgive me for …, thank you for Your blood which cleanses me from …**
- **Toward any sin: I hate and disown you and break all the curses associated with … (hereditary, induced, and deserved)**
- **Toward any evil spirit: I bind you and command you to go away in the name of Jesus Christ.**
- **I proclaim that I am the very opposite of ….. , and I proclaim blessings in this affected area.**

4. Think of yourself in a positive light and proclaim it

It is very important that after this deliverance, you immediately begin to **change not only your behavior, but especially the way you think and see your present and past**.

The reason is that if you keep your old ways of thinking and acting, the devil can influence you again and then your situation can even become worse (when a demon is cast out, he can come back with many others if your house is not in order, Matt. 12:43-45)

When an unclean spirit comes out of a person, he wanders through arid places, looking for a place to rest, but does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to the house I left." When he returns, he finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits, even more wicked than himself, and they go in and settle there. And the final condition of that person is even worse than the first. (Matt. 12:43-45)

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Here are a few principles you should follow:

- **See your past differently**, from a Christian perspective, so that you will think and feel differently about yourself. For example, when you see your past, instead of feeling like a victim or a fool, you need to imagine the amazing plans and blessings that God has for your life; instead of feeling abandoned, think of Jesus on the cross, instead of feeling unworthy and blaming yourself, you need to forgive yourself and see yourself as pure. Instead of feeling rejected, see yourself loved; Instead of feeling cursed, see yourself blessed. Instead of blaming others, take responsibility for your sins, etc...

- If you are a Christian, God sees you now not only as forgiven, **but He also sees you today as His perfect child**. In His eyes you are absolutely pure, worthy, righteous, holy, justified, glorified, free, chosen from the beginning of eternity, and have all authority and power, all the gifts, and all the blessings in Christ! If you understand this, it will completely change your self-esteem and direction in life.

- You **no longer have to believe the lies** about yourself. **Read the chapter on how God sees you positively in page 157-159** and proclaim every day its positive confessions. They should help you to **see yourself as God sees you**!

If we don't address the very reasons why demons entered into a person, and if we don't correct the thinking and the behavior of those people, demons will return, even if they were cast out!

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QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. **What are the clear signs that someone is under demonic influence?**

2. **What are the four main areas in which demons can influence us?**

3. **What are strongholds?**

4. **What are some of the most common things from our past that demons can use to influence us?**

5. **What are the 4 main steps to experience deliverance?**

6. **Can you briefly describe how each step goes?**

7. **What are your most encouraging confessions? Which ones are the hardest to pronounce?**

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Step 8

GIVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE TO GOD

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8 - GIVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE TO GOD

If you've repented of your sins and want to start a new life, you have to finalize it through water baptism. But a last step before doing this is to understand what it implies to follow Christ. This means a radical way of life where you completely die to your selfish desires, and you live for God by serving others.

Stop living for yourself

You no longer exist for yourself. This is what Jesus said when He called us to take our cross and make Him the Lord of our lives. Read carefully the following:

"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters~yes, even their own life~ such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" (Luke 14:25-34)

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This text above shows that to follow Christ is to die to yourself. Indeed, taking up our cross is a symbolic way to say that we are on the path to crucifixion, just as condemned people were in Roman times!
This text also says that there is a price in following Christ (v. 28), and that this price is to give up everything! (v.33). This is the only way our lives will have value (like salt, v.38)
If you have clearly understood this passage, you should be prepared to say:

"I decide to not live for myself anymore. Jesus will be the number One in my life. From now on, He will be more important than my family, my friends, and any of my own desires. He is my Lord, and I will do absolutely everything He wants me to do, regardless of the price to pay."

(Of course, this passage doesn't mean we should stop loving our families, quite the opposite! It means that God becomes such a priority that we begin to love our family much better (by being selfless, responsible, forgiving and not sinning, etc.).
Below is a list of what should be some priorities for you if you want to live the life of a Christian. (Of course, the Christian life is much more than this small list, but if you can't be faithful in small things, how can you be faithful in even greater things?

Live for God and for others

If you want to become a Christian, do you agree to the following conditions?

1. **Spiritual**

   You must organize your life so that you have the opportunity to **read the Bible and pray every day**. Grow to love and worship God, fast and often pray with others.

   "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

2. **Committed**

   Do your best to **come to ALL the church meetings**. If possible, try not to work on the days when gatherings are taking place. Also, build relationships with others and take part in weekly small groups.

   "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another–and all the more as you see the Day approaching". (Hebrews 10:24-25)

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3. **Submitted to church leaders**

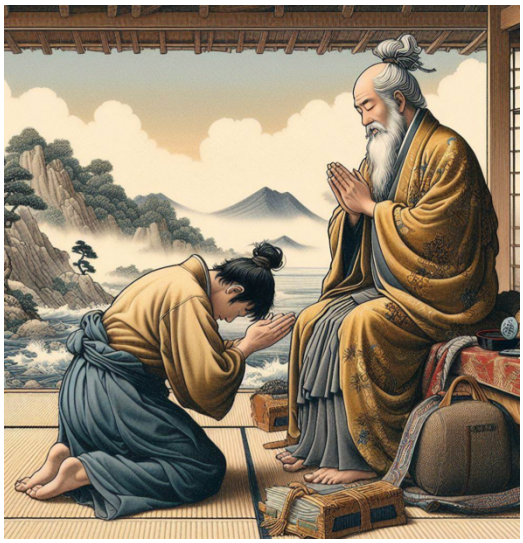
You always have the right and in fact the obligation to speak with the church leaders if you have any disagreements or questions. But you do not have the right to criticize and rebel against them. Once you agree with them on what to do and how to think, **you must respect and try to follow what they teach you, except when it is a sin.** You cannot say anything behind their back. This gossip is hypocrisy and betrayal, and it leads to divisions in the church.

"Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. (Hebrews 13:17)

4. **Humble**

Learn to accept **corrections** from other Christians. Learn to also ask **advice** from mature and wise Christians because you don't know everything about everything! In our church, **we expect everyone to change his character, so we are not afraid to speak openly** and encourage such changes. We do not tolerate people who do not listen to others, who are constantly protecting themselves and do not want to change. In other words, there is no place for the proud among us.

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)



5. **Peace-loving**

There can never be bad relationships in our church! You cannot have the slightest negative feelings towards any other church member. If you have the slightest conflict with anyone, you should immediately solve it one-on-one.

• If someone has something against you, you cannot ignore it, you must go to that person and talk. (Matt. 5:23-24)

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5: 23-24)

• If the two of you cannot solve this problem, you should invite someone else.

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"But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matthew 18:16-17)

- If you still have not solved the conflict, you should ask the leaders to help you, and they will decide what to do.

You must follow the above biblical principles. **If you continue to hold grudges in your heart or criticize those who offended you behind their back, you commit one of the worst sins in our church. We absolutely do not tolerate gossip!**

6. **Sacrificial**

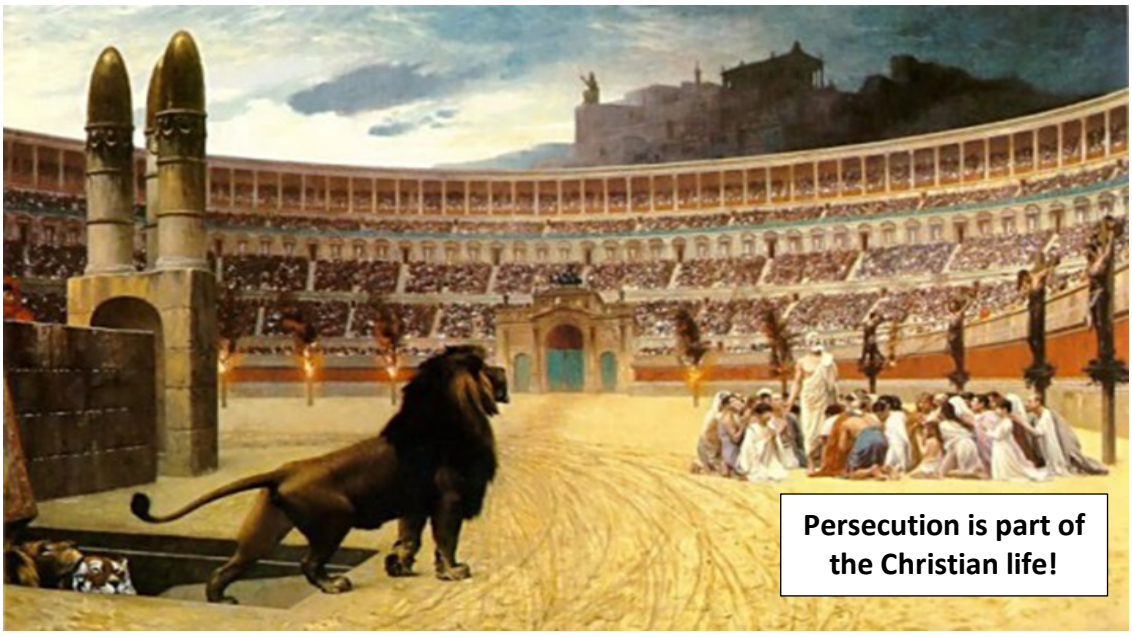
Learn to give to the church 10% or **any amount of money** that you want.

- Do not borrow money from other Christians.

- If you have financial problems, discuss this issue with the church leaders, so they can help you

"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

Be ready to pay a price that **the world will persecute you**. You will have to learn to love your enemies, be kind and forgiving, because some will hate you and oppose you.
"All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12)



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7. Make disciples

Help unbelievers find Jesus and make strong disciples of them. This is the most important mission of your life.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

This process consists of three stages:

1) Look for any ways that will help you bring unbelievers to Jesus and teach them according to the principles set forth in this booklet (the one you read now ☺). Your goal is to bring at least one person to Christ within one year. If you are afraid or embarrassed, do it with a mature Christian.

2) After a while, when they are ready, baptize them.

3) Immediately after this, you must help those you have baptized to grow in their faith, and you must teach them to do the same with others as you have done with them. This is the only way the church will increase its number of disciples. This strategy is the only way that the world can change.

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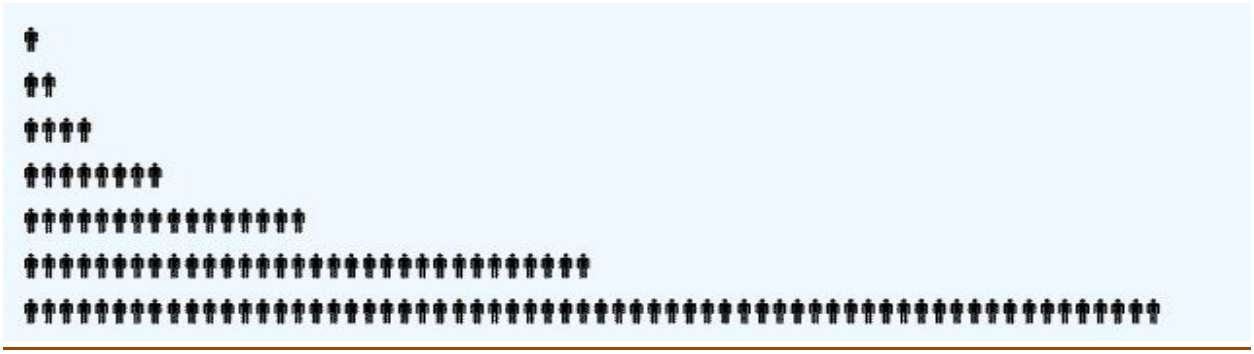
One disciple makes disciples who in turn make other disciples

In the long run, this strategy of Jesus is the best way for churches to grow.
All is needed is that every year one disciple makes just another disciple, and then a process of multiplication can take place.
This is not just the pastor's job, but everyone's responsibility and privilege



QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. What are the 7 fundamental principles of the Christian life?

2. What will be the most difficult for you to do and why?

3. Do you agree to comply with all the above conditions?

4. Are you ready to die to yourself and make Jesus the Lord of your life?

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Step 9

BE BAPTIZED

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9 - BE BAPTIZED

Christianity is both a birth to a new life and a death for a past life. That is why baptism takes those 2 pictures: a burial and a birth.

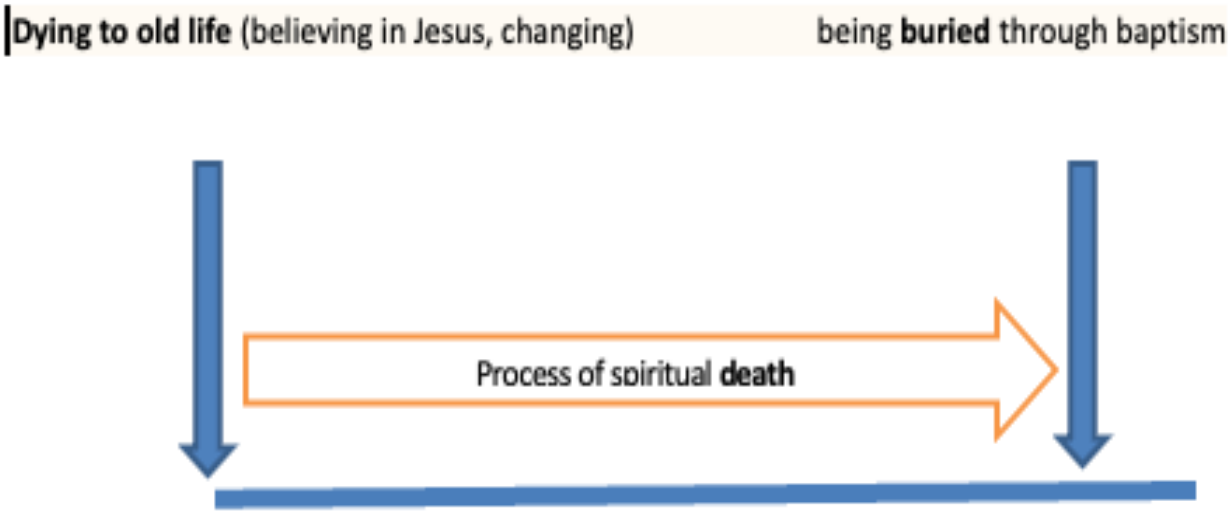
A burial

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 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 6:3-7)

"Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12)

As soon as you believe in Jesus and stop sinning, you begin to die to your past sinful life. This process can be very fast, or on the contrary it can take some time.
As soon as you feel ready to die 100% to your past life, you need to be baptized. That is why baptism is compared to a burial, because a funeral is the final and clear sign that a person has died (we are not burying people who have not completely died!)

If Christ is to be the Lord of every area of your life, you must be ready to die to every sin and every desire to live for yourself. Baptism is the final expression of this death.



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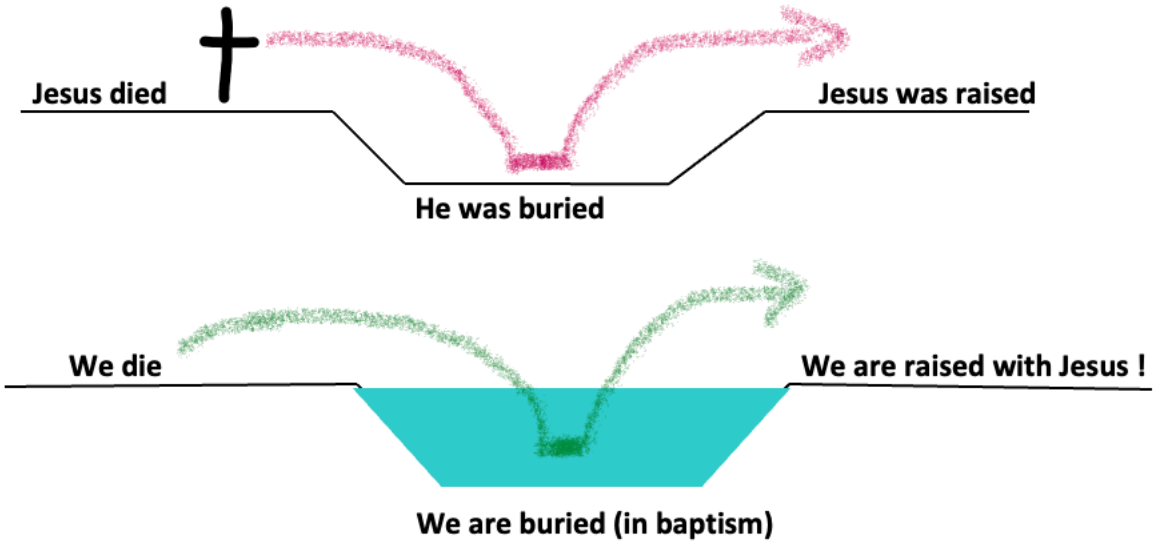
A resurrection with Jesus

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."
(Galatians 3:27)

"Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12)

"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His." (Romans 6:4-5)



As soon as you get out of the waters, you start a new life with Jesus

A birth

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5)

"Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:5-7)

As soon you believe in God, a "spiritual conception" begins in you. In other words, the new life of God is being born in you. This can happen during a prayer, it can be when you make an emotional decision

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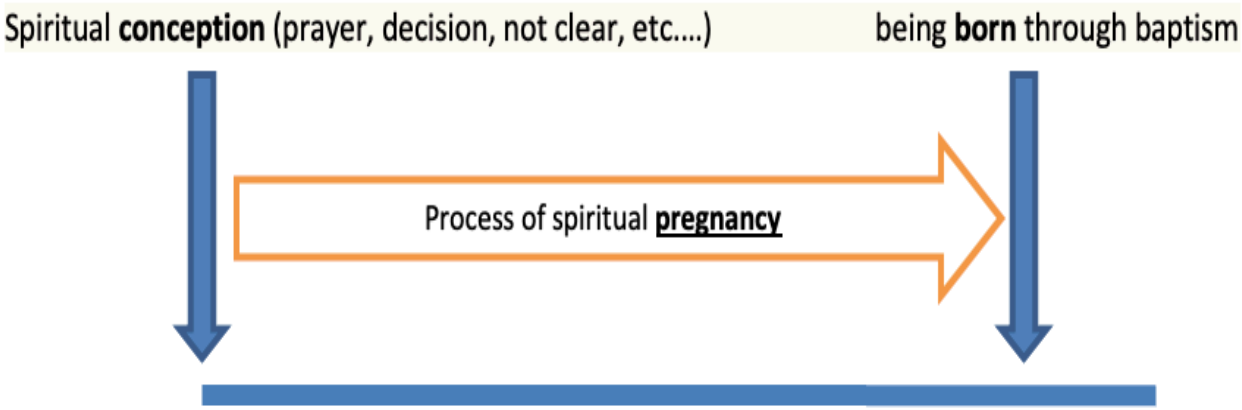
for God, or it can even be that you cannot remember the exact moment of this “spiritual impregnation”.
The following is a period that can be called a “spiritual pregnancy”: you are growing more and more in God.
And finally, you make the decision to completely give your life to Christ at baptism: at this very moment you are "born of water and the spirit."



A full immersion in water

The Greek word for baptism “baptisma” indicates a full immersion, which is the only form practiced in the early church. It is a perfect symbol for a burial, as we do not bury people by sprinkling some dust on their heads, but instead we completely “immerse” every part of their bodies under the earth. Baptism was practiced in all kinds of places, whether rivers or anywhere where there was enough depth to immerse people (John 3:23). You as well as any believer are free to choose any Christian who will baptize you.

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Unbiblical practices regarding baptism

Infant baptism:

- An infant cannot understand what water baptism symbolizes
- An infant cannot place his faith in Christ to die and start a new life with Him (Rom. 6)
- An infant cannot make a pledge of a clear conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21)
- An infant cannot be a disciple who needs to be baptized (Matt. 28:18-20)
- An infant cannot repent of his sins (Acts 2:38)
- In fact, infants have no need to repent and be forgiven as they are considered pure in God's eyes (Matt. 18:3,10 and 19:14)
- This is why the Bible does not have a single record of any infants being baptized. (The general term "household" (Acts 16:15) refers to all the many people (slaves, workers, family members, etc.…) who lived under one house)
- In fact, history shows that no infants were baptized until the 3rd century
- Infant baptism as sprinkling or pouring goes against the biblical form which is a full immersion in water

Baptism without repentance:

If someone was baptized as an adult but did not sincerely repent from his sins and did not make Jesus the Savior and Lord of his life before baptism, then his baptism is no different than the one of an infant. It has absolutely no validity because it is not bound to a saving faith. That person must first become a disciple of Jesus and then he can be baptized.

Postponing baptism for the sake of convenience:

Churches that baptize people only at certain times that is convenient to them essentially believe that baptism is not part of the conversion process. In Acts we see that people were baptized as soon as they believed, repented and were ready to live the Christian life. (In fact, there is not a single conversion in Acts that does not include baptism!)

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Questions about baptism

➔ Can someone who started to repent and believe in God be saved if he died before baptism?

Somehow yes, as the life of God starts in anyone from the day he starts believing in God. (Salvation is entering into a living and sincere relationship with God in which we desire to trust and obey everything He tells us). But the process of conversion must go until the end, because if a person dies before baptism he will be like an unborn baby. The life of God was in that person, he was somehow in "the womb of God", but the process was interrupted by an abnormal end.
In other words, yes, an unborn baby is a real person with a name, but it is not the normal pattern of life. Let us not build a theology on abnormalities and exceptions, but follow the biblical model laid out in Acts.

➔ How long should I wait before I get baptized?

The book of Acts shows that people were baptized soon after they believed in Jesus. It was often in the very place where they converted. Unlike what some churches do today, they did not wait long when someone believed in Jesus. They immediately baptized those who gave their lives to Christ. If someone really understands who Jesus is and has immediately started to make serious changes to follow him, he should not wait longer.
One extreme is to rush people who hardly believe in Jesus and are not really willing to change, but the other extreme is to wait too long.

➔ Can someone become a Christian by just inviting Jesus in his heart?

There is never an example in the Bible of someone becoming a Christian by just making one prayer. The idea that we can "invite Jesus into our lives" and be instantly saved is taken out of context because it applies to people who were already Christians (Rev. 3:20). Instead, the model we have in Acts is one where people were emotionally touched (through a sermon as in Acts 2:37, a tragic event (Acts 16:30), etc.…) they started to believe, then they repented of their sins and soon after they were baptized.

The idea that someone can become a Christian without a sincere repentance and baptism is not in the Bible.

This means that making a prayer or a making a decision to follow Jesus is a **good step to start our relationship with God**, but we should not stop there. For instance, the apostle Paul had a dramatic encounter with Jesus and yet he was encouraged to stop waiting and be immediately baptized (Acts 22:16).

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➔ **What are the two unbiblical extremes to avoid regarding baptism?**

One extreme is to say that we are only saved at baptism,

while the other is to say that we are saved without baptism.

The biblical truth is that God starts a process of salvation as soon as we believe and repent, and He finishes it at baptism.

Verses that show baptism is **connected to salvation:**

"And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also–not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ". (1 Peter 3: 21)

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit". (Titus 3:5)

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'" (Acts 22:16)

Benefits of baptism

- I receive the **full forgiveness** of all my sins, past, present and future
- I become **worthy, righteous and pure** in the eyes of God
- I receive a **new life and a new identity** in Christ as I begin to see myself as God sees me
- I make the final step to enter God's family (before this I was like a baby in the womb of God, but at baptism I enter a new world). This step means as well that I am automatically added to the local church (Acts 2:47)
- I join both the local church and at the same time the universal Church

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"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." (Acts 2:38, 41)

- The Holy Spirit comes to live permanently within me to free me from the power of sin
- I receive a "good conscience" after I ask God to give it to me at baptism

"And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21)

All the reasons given above show the urgency of baptism. In the book of Acts, this is always closely related to any conversion. As soon as people believed and repented, they were always immediately baptized.

3 observations must be made regarding the Holy Spirit:

1. From the very second I start to believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit works within me to help me to completely give my life to God. (This process differs from people to people, depending on how quickly they allow Him to work in them).

2. At baptism the Holy Spirit comes to live permanently within me, so I am no more under the power of sin.

3. After baptism, and exceptionally before, the Holy Spirit descends on me to fill me up with His power. (This experience is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit).

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How does a baptism look like

• After you have **repented** of all your sins and acknowledged all the emotional problems that are in your heart, one of the mature church leaders will pray for you.

• **You go down into the water**. Since you only need to baptize by total immersion, we usually baptize people in the sea or other body of water. If for someone the water in the sea or river is too cold, you can baptize in a pool, a special baptismal or even in a bathtub.

• Being half in the water before being baptized, or before entering the waters, you can make the following **confession of faith**: "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for my sins and that He was resurrected for my justification". You may say something else like: "Jesus is Lord!" or whatever you want to say about God or what you want to do for Him.

• You are **completely submerged in the name of Jesus or the Trinity**. The person who discipled you can baptize you, this does not have to be a pastor. At this very moment, through burial with Jesus, your sins are completely washed away.

• Once you get out of the water, Christians **lay their hands on you** and pray that you may receive blessings or even the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. What are the 3 basic symbols of baptism?

2. What are some of the most common views regarding baptism that contradict the Bible?

3. What are the benefits of baptism?

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Step 10

BAPTISM of the HOLY SPIRIT

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10 – BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

What is it?

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the moment when the Holy Spirit fills you, falls or descends on you in such a **powerful and tangible** way that you know that God has really touched you!
- Others around you can also see and hear it. (Acts 2: 6, 8:18)
- This experience is described as "receiving" the Spirit or being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6)

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Why is this needed?

This may lead you to **experience the presence of God** like you never had before in your life, and in turn lead to a greater intimacy with Him, but this is not its main goal.

The main purpose of the baptism of the Spirit is for you to receive:

Supernatural power to be an effective witness for Jesus

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Most denominations present this inaccurate view that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is mostly a personal experience for ourselves. The truth is that it is mostly for others. This is NOT so that we will feel good, be more holy, closer to God or anything else, but to gain supernatural power to convert unbelievers.

As practice shows, in most cases, **those who do not have a passionate desire to evangelize and therefore do impossible things for God will not experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit (or it will be a very limited experience).**

The reason for this is simple: if you are satisfied with your own wisdom, with your talents and your strength, why should you look for something more?

How does this happen?

There are 3 possible ways:

1. You receive it because you eagerly sought it in prayer

Acts chapters 1 and 2 = The disciples received it because they prayed and expected what was promised to them.
Luke 11:13 shows that we must ask for it with great zeal.

"So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13)

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2. You are completely taken by surprise

Acts 10 = both Cornelius and Peter did not expect this!) Cornelius was a righteous man who sought God, and therefore God who sees hearts rewarded him. If you obey God and you have sincere intentions, He will surprise you (God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him = Acts 5:32)

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles." (Acts 10:44-45)

3. You receive the Spirit through the laying on of the hands

This happens through Christians who are anointed by God. This way of receiving the Spirit is often mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 8:17-18, 9:17 and 19:6). This is why the laying on of hands is one of the fundamental doctrines of the New Testament (Heb. 6:2)

"When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

" When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." (Acts 19:6)

It should be experienced AS SOON as possible after water baptism

• The greatest example for us is **Jesus**: The Holy Spirit descended upon him as soon as He emerged from the water.

"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3: 21-22)

• We see the same on the **eunuch** (Acts 8:39 – Absent in English translations, but present in the Russian Synodal translation which uses another Greek manuscript).

And both descended into the water, Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on the eunuch, and Philip was taken by an angel of the Lord, and the eunuch no longer saw him, and he continued on his way, rejoicing (Acts 8:38-39).

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• **In Acts 2** Peter told the crowds listening to him that the promise of receiving the Spirit would be given to everyone after repentance and baptism.

'Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

• **Hebrews 6** shows the same sequence of things: repentance, faith in God, water baptism, laying on of hands. This is paralleled in what we see in Acts 2:38: repentance, water baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit!

"Not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." (Hebrews 6:1-2)

• As soon as Peter and John heard that the **Samaritans** were baptized, they went to them to receive the Spirit.

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. " (Acts 8:14-17)

• Paul also did not wait long when he met the **disciples of Ephesus** in Acts chapter 19: his first question was whether they received the Spirit when they believed. Upon learning that this did not happen, he immediately asked what baptism they received, which shows that he saw a close connection between water baptism and receiving the Spirit. So, following the pattern, he baptized them, and immediately after that he laid his hands on them so that they would receive the Spirit.

"There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So, Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." (Acts 19:1-6)

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Could it happen at other times as well?

This may happen **later**: the Samaritans did not receive the Spirit immediately after baptism.

This may happen **before**: Cornelius, on the contrary, experienced the infilling of the Spirit before water baptism. Paul may have experienced the same when Ananias laid his hands on him before baptizing him (Acts 9:17-18).

Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days. (Acts 10:46-48)

"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord–Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here–has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized" (Acts 9:17-18)

If I have not experienced it, I am missing something?

Yes. According to Jesus you need supernatural power from above!

• **The disciples of Jesus** received the Spirit when the risen Jesus blew on them (John 20:22), but nevertheless later they still needed to receive more power!

With these words, He blew on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22)

The above verse shows a different experience than the one below:

"But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (Acts. 1:8)

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• **The Samaritans** had been baptized, and yet they still needed to be prayed over in order to receive the Holy Spirit (This is the very reason why the text says that they had "**only**" been baptized, thereby indicating that they were missing something, that they needed something more).

"Because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 8:16)

• **The disciples at Ephesus** were already believers, and yet Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. Why did Paul ask such a question? Obviously, he believed that something **more** than a conversion had to happen!

"And he asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2)

What are ALL the manifestations accompanying the baptism of the Spirit?

• **You may start speaking in other languages**. The fact that in Acts the baptism of the Spirit was often accompanied by other languages shows that the whole experience was mainly intended for outsiders (Speaking other languages was a powerful sign for unbelieving Jews to show them that God was by now the God of all nations, and not just the God of Israel. For them, who had for centuries been taught to have nothing to do with non-Jews, this sign was particularly clear and unavoidable! (1 Cor. 14:22)) And today the goal of the gift of speaking in other languages or of any other supernatural gift remains exactly the same: God wants through us to reach unbelievers! (In other words, do not limit yourself to just this one gift of speaking in other languages, but let God give you everything that He wants so that you will become a powerful witness to unbelievers).

• **Praise God with power and emotions** (Acts chap. 2) like for instance to cry, laugh, scream, dance, clap

• **Utter prophetic words** (Acts 19:6)

• **You may experience shaking** in your body, be completely paralyzed or in a **trance**, have **visions** and receive **revelations**

• **Natural phenomena** that are unusual may accompany the experience (the powerful wind of Acts 2 or the earthquake in Acts 4).

• The spirit may appear in the form of **tongues of fire** (Acts 2: 3) or a **dove** (Mark 1:10)

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Can these manifestations be different for different people?

Yes. For some people the baptism of the Spirit is accompanied by strong spiritual and emotional manifestations, while for others they may be few. Why are there such differences?

However "weak" your experience of this baptism might be, the most important is that afterwards you should start to grow in supernatural power

1) The first obvious reason is that we all expect different things. Some people really want the Holy Spirit to fill them as much and as soon as possible, while others do not desire this. Luc 11:1-13 shows a **very clear connection between earnest and persistent prayer and receiving the Holy Spirit**. The same passage emphasizes that God is good and fulfills his promises. Therefore, if we ask with faith and perseverance, God will "get up and give us as much as we ask." If we ask from the bottom of our hearts, we will receive. We see this in the example of the 120 disciples in Jerusalem: for many days, they fervently prayed for the promise, and God rewarded them with power.

But, if we have doubts, if we feel unworthy, and if we do not want to persistently pray until we see result, then we will get either nothing or very little.

2) Secondly, God will not give us His Spirit if we do not want to obey Him (Acts 5:32). If we are not really interested to evangelize, He will not spend his resources on us.

In other words, **the more we want to be effective for Him, the greater our desire to receive power from on high will be!** All of this is interconnected.

"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:32)

3) And finally, the third reason, which is just as important, is that people who lay hands on us may have different levels of authority and power. Some have great anointing and experience, and that can make all the difference. This reason may explain why, for example, Philip preferred the apostles to do this rather than himself, so that the Samaritans had to wait until the apostles came themselves to them. In other words, your own faith is important, **but the faith and power of the anointed servant of God can also help.**

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria... Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:14, 17)

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All the the conversions in Acts show a clear pattern:

	Pentecost	Samaritans	Ethiopian	Cornelius	12 disciples	Paul
Believed	X	X	X	X	X	X
Laid hands		X			X	X
Spirit came down	X	X	X	X	X	?
Visible signs	X	X		X	X	
Water Baptized	X	X	X	X	X	X

QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

2. What are all the possible accompanying signs of such a baptism?

3. What are the three ways we can get it?

4. Can these signs and ways vary among people? Why?

5. What is the main goal of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

6. When should I receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

7. What are the conditions to receive it?

8. If I have not received this baptism, am I missing something?

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IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN AND WANT TO JOIN OUR CHURCH

Very Important: This chapter is **ONLY** for people who consider themselves **Christians!**

You are a Christian if you believe in Jesus and his unconditional forgiveness, if you have completely repented of all your sins and surrendered all aspects your life to Jesus, and if you have been baptized by complete immersion in water.

1. You cannot leave unresolved conflicts behind you

If you left your former church because of a conflict, you must do absolutely everything in your power to resolve it. Problems between Christians must never be left unresolved. If you refuse to solve this former conflict, even if you were right, God cannot bless you and you cannot be part of our fellowship

If your church is located in another city, solve this issue by phone.

If the conflict was many years ago, make sure that there is absolutely no resentment in your heart, that you apologized or forgave the people who hurt you, and if possible, that they did the same towards you. If not, you need to make every effort to meet and talk to them.

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A few people leave their churches because of unbiblical teaching because their leaders seriously sinned, or maybe because they were not growing spiritually. However most Christians leave their churches because they did not resolve conflicts. This is a tragedy and … against the Bible!

2. You must agree to practice the values of our church

First, read carefully what is written in Chapter 8 regarding the basic priorities of the Christian life. Then, read this condensed form below:

1. Try to devote time every day to prayer and reading the Bible, nourishing yourself spiritually.

2. Attend all church meetings regularly to serve and encourage others. If you do not have the desire to be devoted, faithful and active, to love others, it is important for you to reconsider your priorities.

3. Express a sincere respect for your church leaders and try to obey everything they ask you to do (except when it is a sin). You have the right and, in fact, the obligation to always ask questions if you disagree with their teachings. And if you do not agree with their teaching, you must personally talk about it with them! But if you criticize them behind their back, you are rebelling against their authority, and it is a very serious sin before God.

4. It is important to have the humility to listen to other Christians when they encourage you to change your character or repent. In other words, humility must not only be with your leaders, but also in relation to other brothers and sisters. If you refuse to listen to others and claim to listen only to God, you are a proud person, and this is a serious sin.

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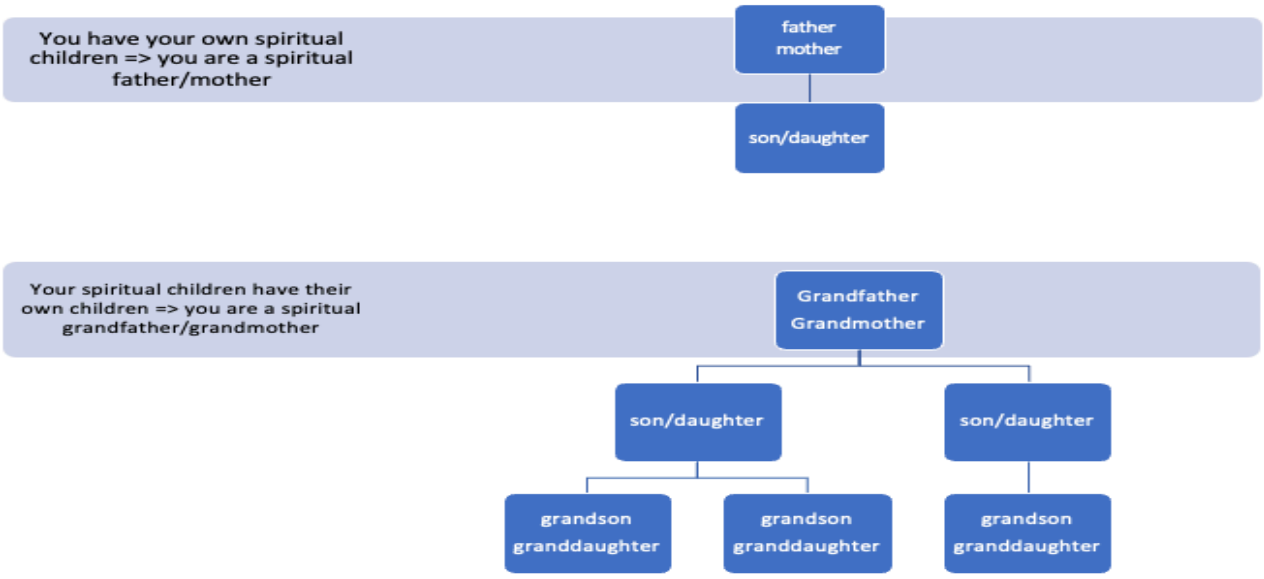
5. You can never hold in your heart even the slightest negative feeling against any Christian. You can't talk badly about someone until you talk to that person first, otherwise it's gossip. If you have a disagreement with someone or someone has offended you, even if the conflict seems very minor, you should immediately go to that person and talk to him about it. If he refuses to listen, you have to take another believer and try to resolve the conflict. If that doesn't work, you have to go to the pastor. If you refuse to listen and do that, you are causing divisions in the church, and this is a very serious sin.

6. It is very important to sacrifice some of your time and finances, using your talents to serve others.

7. It's important to regularly preach the gospel to unbelievers and to help them becoming Christians. Then you should make them disciples of Christ. If you're afraid or don't know how to do it, that's okay: we can always teach and help you. If you refuse to evangelize and make disciples, you're not fulfilling the Lord's command. The purpose of your life is to become a spiritual father/mother and ultimately a spiritual grandparent. (See the diagram below)



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3. Speak with one of our leaders

If you agree with all of our 7 values mentioned above, contact one of the leaders and talk about becoming a member of our church. We do not have a formal way how to become a member, a conversation with our leaders is all that is needed.

Summary: to become a member of our church you must:

1) **Every day pray and read your Bible**
2) **Come regularly to all the gatherings of our church**
3) **Submit and respect our leaders**
4) **Listen with humility to other Christians**
5) **Never say anything bad about anyone in our church, but immediately solve conflicts**
6) **Sacrifice some of your time and money**
7) **Evangelize and make disciples**

QUESTION - CHALLENGE:

1. For what reason did you leave your previous church?

2. If there was a conflict, did you resolve it in accordance with the Bible?

3. Do you agree to put into practice all 7 characteristics of our church? If so, which one will be the most difficult for you?

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SUMMARY on how to become a CHRISTIAN

I believe that Jesus is God who became a man. He is the only way to salvation. No other religion can bring salvation except Jesus. My only source of truth is the word of God

I believe that I am a sinner and that my sins have crucified Jesus. I am separated from God, I am cursed, lost and worthy of judgment. After death, God's just punishment awaits me

I understand that neither my good deeds, nor religious rituals, nor any of my personal qualities can bring me salvation.

I believe that on the cross Jesus suffered for my sins, that he died and was risen. This gives me freedom, absolute forgiveness of all my sins and the gift of eternal life.

If I believe in all of the above and make a decision to abandon sin, to completely surrender my whole life to Him and be baptized by complete immersion, then I will receive the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

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ANSWERS for each of the LAST 10 CHAPTERS

God wants a relationship with you

1. Do you understand why God created you?
He wants a living relationship with you.

2. Do you understand why there is so much suffering in this world?
We have rejected God and have no relationship with Him, and as such our disobedience has influenced every area of our lives and even the whole creation.

3. Do you understand what God expects of you from now on?
To seek Him with all your heart until you find Him.

The answer is in Jesus

1. What are the 5 main differences between Jesus and the leaders of all other religions?

1. His miracles
2. His life without sin
3. His power to forgive sins
4. His unique claims about Himself
5. His resurrection

2. Who is Jesus personally for you?
(Not a great religious figure, etc. but God who became a man)

3. What does the human nature of Jesus mean to you?
God really understands my problems and my temptations.

4. What does His divine nature mean to you?
God can solve any of my problems because when He was a man on earth, He showed us how to solve them.

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The bad news

1. What is your fundamental problem with God?

Our refusal to seek God, our indifference or even our rebellion towards Him.

2. What are ALL the consequences of your sin in your life today?

- I am under the power of sin
- I have no lasting peace and joy
- I will never escape my sins and will suffer
- I am under curses
- I am guilty of having crucified Jesus
- I cannot do enough good works to change this reality
- I am separated from God in this life. Between me and God is an insurmountable separation

3. What will happen to you after death?

- I will be completely separated from God and wait in the Sheol where I will suffer
- I will be judged and condemned according to my own moral standards
- I will be thrown into the lake of fire

The good news

1. What is the good news?

Jesus is the Good News! He took away all my sins and everything that separates me from God, I can have a living relationship with the Father, who loves me unconditionally

2. What are the essential elements of the good news?

- On the cross Jesus took all my sins, curses and condemnation upon himself
- He was even abandoned from God because of my sins and suffered hell at my place
- God has forgiven all my sins
- God has added me to his family, and I am His child
- I am no more condemned
- I have an amazing life full of incredible blessings

3. What are some of the blessings of the Christian life?

- I am forgiven and free from condemnation and guilt
- I see myself like God sees me
- I have a living friendship and partnership with God
- I have a sense of purpose in life
- I am blessed financially
- I am blessed with physical health

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- I am free from the power of sin
- I am able to change every aspect of my character
- I can have great friends
- God protects me, and he has wonderful plans for me
- I have the fruits, the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit
- I have the hope of heaven, my final destination

4. What do you personally like the most about the Good News?

Feel free to answer anything you like, but the best answer is that God loves me unconditionally!

5. Do you believe that on the cross God forgave your sins?

At this point someone may not be fully aware of his sins, but the idea of a full forgiveness should show how much the good news is Good News!

6. Do you believe that because of this you can see yourself worthy and blameless?

At this point someone may not fully understand how much God sees us so positively, but this should show how much the good news is really Good news!

Stop sinning

1. What is repentance?

Repentance is to stop sinning and do what is right.

2. What are some practical examples that show that you have repented?

1. I have sincerely confessed my sins to God and to some people and stopped sinning.
2. I have sincerely forgiven those who have offended me.
3. I have humbly asked forgiveness from those I have offended.
4. I have destroyed all occult or bad objects.
5. I have gotten rid of everything that makes me sin.
6. I have stopped having a sexual relationship with someone I'm not married to.
7. I have started paying off my debts and given back what I have stolen.
8. I have avoided those people and places that tempt me to sin.

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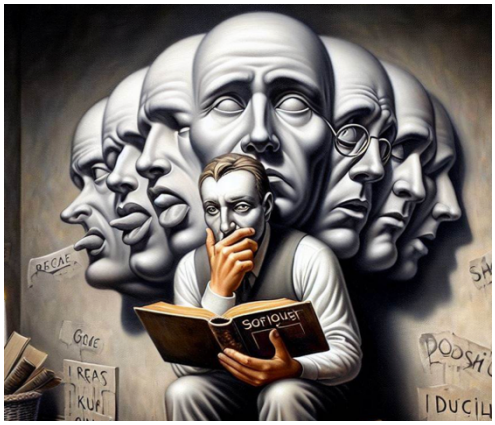
3. **What should motivate you to repent? Name 3 motivations.**

   I change because I know how much God loves me
   I change because my life will get better
   If I don't repent my life will gets worse



4. **Have you done everything that is written above? Why not?**

   It's important to find out why some people don't want to stop sinning and try to help them understand that sin is ruining their lives and repentance is beneficial.

Give your whole life to God

1. What are the 7 fundamental conditions to live like a Christian?

1. Pray and study your Bible every day
2. Attend all the church meetings
3. Respect and submit to the church leaders
4. Humbly listen others to change your character
5. Have no conflicts and bad feelings with any Christian
6. Sacrifice your time and money to help further the kingdom of God
7. Evangelize and make disciples

2. What will be the most difficult for you and why?

I need to understand that every condition is not only good for me personally, but also for helping the church to become large and strong.

3. Do you agree to fulfill all of the above conditions?

If I want to follow Jesus, I have to give Him every aspect of my life.

4. Are you ready to die to your life and make Jesus the Lord of your life?

If you have completely repented from all your sins and agreed to follow all of the above conditions, this means that Jesus is really the Lord of your life.

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Complete deliverance

1. What are the clear signs that someone is under a demonic influence?

1. Can never change anything in life, enslaved to his sins
2. Constantly rebelling against any form of authority
3. Inability to forgive, constant guilt
4. Extreme low self-esteem, depression, or apathy
5. Cannot control himself, aggressiveness, and impulsivity
6. Self-harm / suicidal urge
7. Severe addictions
8. The same tragedies and problems in life are constantly repeating themselves
9. Diseases that defy any medical and rational explanations
10. Recurring nightmares and demons visiting them in dreams
11. Supernatural abilities that are not given by Christ

2. What are the four main areas by which demons can influence us?

1. Voluntary sins
2. Strongholds
3. Bad things from our past
4. Unforgiveness

3. What are strongholds?

Strongholds are lies that we deeply believe and for which we have excuses

4. What are some of the most common things from our past that demons can use to influence us?

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1. Tragic events
2. Feelings of rejection from childhood
3. Unforgiveness
4. Curses Uttered Against Us, Against Others, and Against Ourselves
5. Oaths and promises.
6. Occultism, witchcraft rituals and vows
7. Soul ties
8. Generational curses

5. What are the 4 main steps to experience deliverances?

1. Determine the sins, strongholds, the bad of his past, and unforgiveness
2. Confess, renounce and repent, ask for forgiveness and forgive
3. Let mature Christians pray for you
4. Declare positive confession of faith about oneself

6. Can you briefly describe how each step goes?

1) Pray and maybe fast before and during the deliverance.

- Allow mature Christians and especially the Holy Spirit to show you your sins, strongholds and past wounds.
- Start seeing your past differently.

2) Renounce all the bad things that you have said/done against God, others and yourself.

- Ask forgiveness from God and other people.
- Forgive Others/Yourself

3) Let a mature Christian pray for you.

- Get rid of objects with bad influence.
- Do not be afraid of unexpected manifestations, but focus on God
- Help the person who prays for you by opening up.

4) See yourself as God sees you.

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- Stop believing lies about yourself.
- Make positive bible confessions about how God sees you, others, etc.

7. What are the most encouraging confessions of faith for you? Which ones are the hardest to pronounce?

The best confessions are the ones that give you faith in yourself, and the hardest confessions are the ones that make you change. It's clear that they are also interchangeable!

Baptism

1. What are the 3 fundamental symbols of baptism?

1. BURIAL = it is the final process of death (when I believe in Jesus I start to die to my own life and at baptism I bury it.

2. BIRTH = It is the final process of life (when I believe in Jesus, I start to have the life of God being formed in me and at baptism I am born into a new world).

3. RESURRECTION = I die with Jesus, and I am risen with Him.

2. What are some of the most common views regarding baptism which go against the Bible?

- To baptize infants
- To not baptize by full immersion
- To baptize people who have not repented from their sins
- To believe that baptism is not needed in order to become a Christian

3. What are the benefits of baptism?

- I start a process of complete deliverance
- I receive the complete forgiveness of all my past, present and future sins
- I become worthy, righteous and pure in the eyes of God
- I receive a new life and a new identity in Christ as I begin to see myself as God sees me
- I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (but not necessarily the baptism of the Holy Spirit)
- I become His child and thus enter into His family, the church

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The baptism of the Holy Spirit

1. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the moment when the Holy Spirit descends upon someone in such a powerful and tangible way that they know for sure that they are "immersed" in Him. There is a definite difference in one's life between "before" and "after" this experience

2. What are all the possible signs accompanying this experience?

- Speaking in unknown languages
- Praising God in all kinds of physical and emotional forms
- Prophecies
- Trances, being prostrated, visions
- Unusual signs in the physical world around us

3. What are the 3 possible ways to receive such a baptism?

1. Coming on us in a direct and unexpected surprise
2. After eagerly seeking through prayer
3. Through the laying on of hands of anointed Christians

4. Can these signs and ways of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit vary from one person to another? Why?

Yes, they can be very different! It depends on:

1. How much people want it
2. How obedient and righteous they are before God
3. How anointed/experienced are those who lay their hands on them

5. What is the main purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

To receive supernatural power and authority to become the best witness of Jesus. This is as well the experience that opens the door to all the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

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6. When do I need to receive this baptism?

As quickly as possible during or immediately after my conversion, as it is described in the book of Acts. And, of course, better late than never!

7. What are the conditions to obtain the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

• My primary motivation to receive supernatural power is to become an effective witness for Jesus.

• I must strongly believe that I will receive what God has promised. I will not give up until this happens.

• I sincerely want to be obedient to God so that the Spirit can be given to me (Acts 5:32). Cornelius lived such a righteous life that he received much more than he expected.

• I am ready to pay any price, and I will pray, fast and wait until I receive what I want. The more I desire, the more I will receive. It also helps to do this with others, as shown in Acts 2.

• I am open to any ways by which God will empower me (either by full surprise, prayers or laying on of hands).

8. Did I miss something if I have not experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

-Yes! It is God's will that I be endowed with power from above. There is a big difference between trying to do something on my own or doing it with the supernatural power of God!

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For Christians who want to become members of our church

1. For what reason did you leave your former church?

There are only 3 reasons why you could do this:

1. If there was a non-biblical teaching or heresy taught in your church – define specifically what it was. Did you tell your leaders about this? If not, you have to do it.

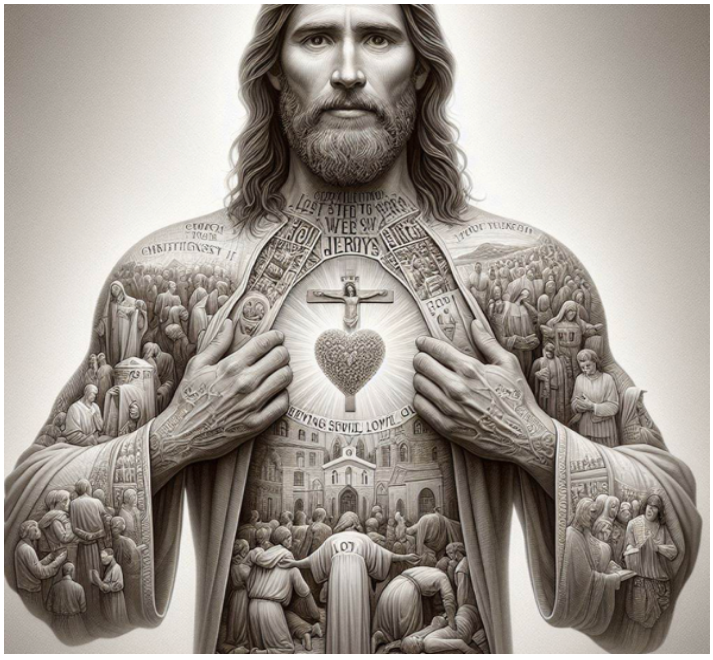
2. If church leaders refused to repent from some sins. What sins was it? Did you talk about this directly with them?

3. If you felt that you were not growing spiritually. Did you make any constructive suggestions while meeting the church leaders? Did they listen to you? If not, why?

2. If you left due to a conflict, did you try to resolve it in accordance with the Bible?

3. Do you agree to accept and practice all the 7 characteristics of our church? If so, which one will be the most difficult for you?

All these conditions should be extremely clear to you. You have to be honest with yourself and with the church leaders.



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12 PRINCIPLES
for the
CHRISTIAN LIFE

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THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

Some Christians believe that the goal of the Christian life is to be happy and free from everything that brings us suffering in this world. This is partially true as Jesus came to deliver us from all evil and bring heaven to earth, but this is not all there is.

The goal of your life is not happiness but becoming like Jesus

Happiness is not the final goal of the Christian life. The ultimate purpose of our existence is to have such a relationship with God that we become more and more like Jesus, and this is never easy.

In fact, this is extremely challenging and seems impossible to most people, but this is the best life that we could ever dream of. To live like Jesus is the ultimate adventure, and if we are willing to pay any price for it, we can become all that God has us created for. Yes, we will never be fully like Him, but when He gave us His Spirit, He gave us an unlimited potential to become like Him.

Now what does this mean practically to become like Jesus? It covers 3 main areas:

1) **To have Jesus' character.** Through our friendship with God, we should seek to have all the moral qualities of the character of Jesus, like His unconditional love, His uncompromising attitude against sin, His wisdom, His perseverance, His humility, His discipline, His peace, His joy, etc.…

2) **To make disciples.** Jesus had disciples whom he loved to death. He trained them and sent them out, and they eventually changed the world.

3) **To move with supernatural power**. Jesus lived in a perfect sensitivity to the Spirit of His father. He made many miracles, He healed every kind of sickness, He delivered people from demons, He prophesied and brought restoration to multitudes of people who were seeking His help.

Most believers today believe that to become like Christ is only limited to the first moral area. Very few are willing to practice the other two remaining areas.

God became fully like us so that we would become fully like Him!

But if you desire to be the best reflection of God in this world, you should not only seek to have a perfect character, but you should seek as well to make disciples who will reproduce your same priorities in other disciples.

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Finally, you should seek to have many supernatural gifts so as to bring as many people as possible to God. This in essence, is what the Christian life is all about and this is why this book was written.

Your motivation is everything

If you love Jesus, you will want to follow Him in everything. It is like this in all human relationships. A son who deeply admires his father will want to perfectly imitate him. When couples really love each other, over the years they become more and more similar to each other and merge all their qualities to become one. To live like Jesus is the most challenging and even impossible life to live. But with love it is much easier. What is your motivation in imitating Christ?

1 - STUDY YOUR BIBLE EVERY DAY

7 suggestions to study your Bible

1) **Make the decision that every day you will spend time in God's word**
   God commanded to Joshua to meditate on His words day and night so that he would have victory (Joshua 1:8). The more often you let the Bible speak to you, the more success you will have in life. And be sure that it is the Bible, and only the Bible. Listening to sermons, videos and reading all kinds of books or internet articles is certainly important, but you need to learn to hear God for yourself by reading the Bible with your own heart and your own mind! God has a unique and very individual way to speak to each one of us through His Word and this cannot be replaced by anything and anyone else in this world.

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2) **Make it a priority by scheduling it into your day**

The "whenever I have time today" approach never really works as there is always something that prevents us from doing it. You need to see the value of every single day and for this you must have clear priorities (Psalm 90:12). Consistency and regular discipline are absolutely indispensable if you are going to let God transform your life, therefore you should dedicate at least 20 to 30 minutes every day in studying the Scriptures. This time should not necessarily be in the morning, but experience shows that if your thoughts have been influenced early on in the day, they will determine the outcome of the whole day.

3) **Start with a good time of prayer before and after your study**

Studying the Bible is not just an intellectual exercise but hearing God and receiving revelations that will unlock His purposes for your life! (John 14:26) This is why you should always start with the expectation that God will speak to you and pray accordingly. Finish as well with prayer as you will have all kinds of feelings to express to Him (thankfulness, asking for strength to apply what you received, etc.…)

4) **Have a systematic plan to study**

The random approach "God give me something today" while flipping open the Bible will not give you a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. You should have a daily plan that will help you to cover entire books of the Bible over a certain length of time (Psalm 119:15). If you want to have a deep and global understanding of what God says, you should always study in depth the linguistic, social, political and historical context of any passage or any book.

5) **Meditate and practice**

You need to constantly study the Bible and for this you need a lot of intellectual discipline. This love for the truth will not avoid you falling into all kinds of unbiblical doctrines, but this is what God wants: The first commandment says that we are to love God from all our mind. But you need as well to love God from all your heart and all your strength. This means that you should allow the Word to touch you emotionally and lead you to concrete changes in your life. This is where meditation comes in: After you have correctly understood what a verse or a passage means, and only after this, then move to the next level and ask yourself: "What does this text mean to me personally? Do I like it? Why? Do I want to follow it? Why not? What are my fears? How can I apply it practically to my life today?" (Ezra 7:10)

6) **Be open to original and unique revelations**

You should not only study and meditate but allow God to give you surprising and "irrational" revelations as you read the Bible. For instance, you may read one passage of a certain war in the OT and all of sudden you see a parallel and develop a specific strategy for your own business. You may read a verse that describes a certain place with specific names, and this

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helps you to choose the name of your restaurant, your organization or even your future child! You may read just one verse and all of a sudden you clearly see a potential danger or on the contrary a great blessing for your life. Allow the Bible to surprise you in this way as well!

7) **Have a booklet close at hand**
Write insights gleaned from your study. Write what impressed you, decisions you made, surprising revelations you received. Writing on a computer has its usefulness, but the old fashion fountain pen and a beautiful personal booklet where you slowly put down all your thoughts has its charm and power. Write as well on a separate piece of paper all the questions that come up, because you may forget them.

4 Basic principles to interpret the Bible

Usually, a Bible text means exactly what it means, but sometimes it is not the case. This is why you should always ask yourself the following questions:

- **What is the socio-historical context?**
  How did the people back then understand what we read today? Symbolically? Literally? In other words, is there information from their socio-economic, religious, political and cultural context that gives us a different understanding for us today?

For instance, if people knew what kind of evil child murderers lived in Canaan, it would not surprise them that God ordered Joshua to kill all of them! We should always read the Bible within its historical context and only after this we can make relevant and objective conclusions for today.

- **What does the Hebrew or the Greek say?**
  Does the text in its original language give us a complimentary meaning? Or even a different meaning? What are other translations showing?

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For instance, when Jesus asked Peter in John 21 if he loved Him what Peter replied was not yes, I love you but rather “yes, I like You”. The Greek language has different ways to express love, something that many languages do not have. If you read the Bible in other foreign languages you know, you will quickly discover that the meaning of some words or passages can sometimes be quite different. So always go back to the original text if possible.

- **<u>What does the surrounding context say</u>?**
  What are all the other verses before and after the studied text say? Do they give a complimentary or a contradictory meaning?

For instance, when Paul said that “Eating the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner will bring judgment” most people read only this verse isolated and come up with all kinds of interpretations of what it means to be worthy when taking the Lord’s supper. But Paul had something else in mind: he simply wanted the Corinthians to respect each other and wait on each other when they came together. He wanted them to see and act as a united and loving Church, something they failed to do. In other words, the immediate context of Paul’s command had more to do with interpersonal relations than with individual holiness.

- **<u>What do other verses or doctrines in other books of the Bible say</u>?**
  Do they complement this text or on the contrary contradict it?

For instance, 1 Timothy 2:11-12 shows that women should be silent in the presence of men, but then 1 Cor. 11:5 shows clearly that women could pray and prophesy in the presence of men! So, should women be silent or not? And if so when and how? By failing to put ALL the “contradictory” verses together many Christians have come up with all kinds of theologies that are not correct.

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Always study the opposite view!

You cannot ever claim that you love the truth until you have heard the other side of any biblical teaching! This is why:

If someone presents you with one doctrine that differs from yours, then have the humility and the discipline to thoroughly study his view until you have come to your own conclusion.

If needed, take a third perspective, one that is neither bound to his view or your view, then and only then can you claim that you strive to know the truth.

In other words, do not be afraid to **think for yourself and always compare** any teaching with the Bible. Take the example of the Bereans who compared the teaching of the apostle Paul with the Bible to see if it was correct (Acts 17:11).
A Christian who loves the truth will constantly examine every doctrine, no matter where it is coming from. Truth has no monopoly so that dummies and even heretics can teach you a few things that are biblically true! This is why you should never be afraid to question any doctrine you hear, even if most people around you sincerely believe it! This is obviously a very difficult thing to do, because if you really love your church and you start believing something different than most people around you, you will eventually have to decide for yourself what is the truth.

But whatever you believe, always remember this famous motto: In Faith, Unity; In Opinion, Liberty; In All Things, Love. In other words, if you believe in the fundamental doctrines that unite all Protestants (Nicene Creed, saved by faith, Bible only, etc.…) but differ with some of them on certain doctrines, give them enough respect and freedom to think differently! **In fact, it is possible to strongly disagree with another Christian and still respect, love, and remain friends with him!**

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2 - PRAY EVERY DAY

Prayer is your lifeline with God! You cannot expect to receive a lot if you pray little. But the more you pray, the more God will fill you with love, with power and with wisdom. This is why, train yourself to pray every day!

Start with 20 minutes and increase this amount of time every day

The 5 basic elements of prayer ("PG 3R")

P - Praise
G - Gratitude
R - Repentance
R - Requests
R - Revelations

PRAISE

Praise is different than thankfulness. Thankfulness is basically recognizing all what God has given and done for you, while praise is focusing on all the attributes and qualities that God has. Gratitude would be like saying "thank you" to a friend, while praise is to give him a compliment. Learn to praise God for who He is, even if you have not received anything from Him. Often when we thank God it has much to

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do with all that He has given us, while praising Him may have little to do with what we received from him.
This is why, while you are praying, have a list of all the attributes of God or read the Psalms out loud by saying “God You are wise, You are powerful, You are patient, etc.…”. This will help you to be less focused on what God has done for you and be more focused on Him.

THANKFULNESS

In your thankfulness, there are millions of reasons you can have for all the people, the circumstances or all the things you have received from God, but do not forget to thank Him for who you are as well.

REPENTANCE

Listen to your conscience and heart while you pray, so that God can reveal to you all the hidden sins that you may have in your life. Ask Him to not only see those sins, but to hate them so that you will want to sincerely change. Ask forgiveness as well and thank Him for showing you your weaknesses.

Remember that when He reveals your sins it is not because he is mad and want to hurt you but because He loves you and wants to eliminate all the bad things in your life that hurt you. The most liberating and yet most challenging truth of our relationship with God is that the more we see God, the more we see ourselves as we really are, which means sinners in need of forgiveness.

REQUESTS

As you pray for unbelievers, pray as well that God will open you opportunities and that you will bring the Gospel with clarity and boldness!

Praying for them without being willing to do your part is not biblical

Ask things for yourself, for others, for the Church or for the entire world, there are no limits! But when you ask, keep in mind these 3 principles:

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First of all, **ask according to what God wants** because He will always answer according to His will! (1 John 5:14-15). If His will is not clear, then pray until it becomes clear! (See the next point about revelations).

Secondly, **ask with faith**, because if you doubt you will not receive anything (James 1:6-8, Matt. 21:21-22).

Finally, **pray with intensity.** James 5:17 shows us that the way we pray is actually very important: if you speak in a passive and tired way, then your prayers will be like weak and unfruitful. If on the contrary you set your mind to be focused, intense and awake, then you will have much better results.

Because the choice of what you can ask is without limits, it is very important to ask within the perspective of the final following category:

A word of wisdom:

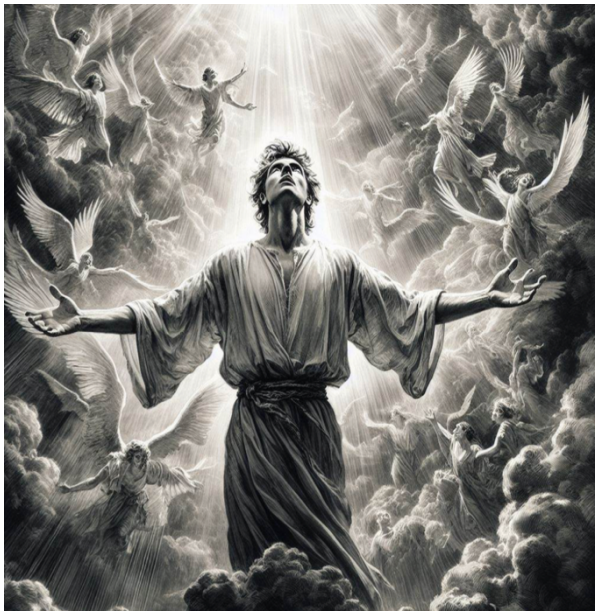
Pray more for God to change you rather than for Him to change others!

This is particularly the case if they refuse to listen to you and change. You will end up being a much better person who is less frustrated!

REVELATIONS

You should feel the Lord's leading in such a sensitive way that He can give you precise revelations regarding every aspect of your life. This can be:

- Bible verses that He brings to you while praying
- Theological revelations
- Hidden things about yourself from your past or your future
- New professional strategies
- New desires or goals
- Warning concerning others
- It can even be amazing revelations of his future plans years ahead
- It can be visions far beyond your earthly situation



- It can be in the "natural" or in the "supernatural"
- It can be something so important that all of a sudden you need to write it down quickly on a piece of paper (keep one available, you never know when God will call you to "write down the revelation!")

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In all the above examples:

- You have to learn to listen and discern God's voice for yourself
- You can do this while being completely still or
- While you walk
- You can be prostrated on the floor or
- Standing still with our arms lifted up
- It can be in any position, the important principle here is that you must develop such a sensitivity until you have heard his whisper, and you "know" that God has spoken to you

We wish there were a clear "trick" to tell you how to receive such revelations, but all we can give you are the following three principles:

First of all, **always expect God to speak to you,** in whatever ways He chooses to, because if you don't have this kind of expectation, then you will receive little.

Secondly, **take enough time** until you can clearly hear him. If you rush and want instant solutions without learning the process to "be still and know that I am God (Ps. 46:10)", then you will only have what you are willing to pay for. Take a lot of time to pray and you will see that the best things of God are hidden and wait to be fully revealed. As Proverbs. 25:2 describes so aptly, "it is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings!"

Thirdly, prayer is not a spiritual shopping list, **but a relationship.** As Oswald Chambers said, "Prayer is not getting things from God, that is the most initial stage; prayer is getting into a perfect communion with God". The main purpose of prayer is to discover all who God is and who we are in our communion with Him. If you have reached this level of intimacy where God reveals Himself to you, then don't worry, he will give you revelations about all the other issues and concerns of your life!

We easily spend 30 to 60 minutes every day watching the internet, movies or our phones. Could we not spend the same amount listening and talking with God?

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Practical suggestions for prayer

- If you **fast** for certain prayer needs, you will have greater insights and power.

- Find a place where no one and absolutely **nothing disturbs you** (no friends or noises around, turn off your phone, etc.…) If the only thing that helps you is to isolate yourself in nature far away from everything, then do this!

- In most cases it is better to **pray away from your home** as you can better concentrate in a place that is different than your usual surrounding.

- Try to pray at the **same time and the same place,** we humans tend to have a better discipline when we have a daily ritual or habit!

- Have a **booklet with you** so you can write down the things you receive while you are praying.

- Have a **Bible with you** because you may want to read out loud certain passages while you pray, or God may want to show you precise verses He brings to your mind.

- In the early stage, you may pray little, like 10 minutes, but **grow more and more** until you can have a very long time in His presence.

- Pray in such a way that **you will not sleep** (if needed, stand and walk). Having exercised and taken a cold shower before you start can considerably help you to be more alert and energetic.

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- Make yourself **comfortable enough** to be fully concentrated in your prayers, but not so much that you are distracted (it should not be too hot nor too cold, etc.…)

- **Pray often with other Christians!** If you are married pray every day with your family. And do this not only when things go well but pray with others as well when they go bad. In the most glorious or most difficult times of his life Jesus took his best 3 friends to pray with him. (Luke 9:28, Matt. 26:37) The early church took this same example, and this is why it is mentioned 18 times in the book of Acts that they prayed TOGETHER!

If you cannot take at least 20 minutes every day to pray,

then do not complain about the fact that you cannot hear God!

Prayer is not easy, but it is the key to open all the flood gates of heaven

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3 – SEVEN WAYS HOW TO HEAR GOD

We all need clear revelations from God regarding future plans, making important decisions or how to get out of difficult situations. This is why it is so incredibly important to know how God speaks personally to us. To hear God accurately is the difference between having a bad life, a good life, or the best possible life. We are all very different so that God will speak to each of us in specific ways, but there are still universal principles that apply to all people in all situations. Below are 7 channels HOW God always speaks. In some rare cases He will use only one means, but very often He will use a few channels, and we must put them together to have a clear picture of what He is trying to tell us.

God speaks through:

1. **The Bible**
2. **Your desires**
3. **Obedience**
4. **Prayer and fasting**
5. **Mature people**
6. **Supernatural revelations**
7. **Your own peace**

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1. God speaks through the Bible

(2 Tim. 3:16)

Obviously, the Bible is the first and most important channel by which God speaks to us. In the Scriptures we find principles for absolutely every area of life. For instance, the Bible has many clear instructions regarding how to build a great marriage, excel in our profession, prosper in our finances, health, or relationships. This is why we need to constantly study the Scriptures and discover what God wants.

Now, the problem is that in many areas we do not always have precise instructions from the Bible on how we should do things. For instance, "What job should I take?", "In which place should I live?", and "With whom should I get married to?". These are areas that are not so clearly defined in practical terms and where we have a lot of freedom. For instance, it is very clear in the Bible that your future wife should be a believer or that she should have such and such moral qualities. What is not clear is what kind of physical appearance, temperament or personality she should have, in other words what would make her the best match for your life. This is a situation where you need to learn to tune in with God so that you will discover who is the best wife for you.

Luke 16:31 shows that if we are not willing to listen to what the Bible says, why would God speak through miracles?

The following 6 criteria will help you make the best decisions for your life. And again, make sure that whatever you decide NEVER ever contradicts the Bible. It is always the first and last authority over every other criterion.

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2. God speaks through your own desires and gifts

(Ps. 37: 4-6, 20: 4, 21:2, 145:19; 1 Cor.14:1 Phil. 2:13, Prov. 13:12, John 15:7)

Besides the Bible, the first and most powerful way by which God speaks is very simple: "WHAT DO YOU WANT? What are you gifted with? What do you see yourself doing for the rest of your life that would give you the greatest joy and success?" Because we often have all kinds of selfish motivations in our desires, we tend to wrongly believe that most of our human desires tend to be wrong. This is not always true.

God will often put desires in us that are really from Him, but we will need to be tested in our motivations. For instance, Moses had the noble desire to rescue his Jewish nation, but his prideful motivation to do it all on his own needed to be refined through 40 years of shepherding in the desert. The same can be said of Joseph who had a great dream from God, but he needed to be broken by years of slavery in Egypt until his dream became a reality.

In other words, there are desires, dreams and talents that God placed in you that have prepared you for a unique life. This is why it is unlikely that the Lord will send you to Antarctica if everything inside of you wants to go to Africa. He will not call you to be a mathematician if you hate numbers. He will not force you to be married to an African woman if all you want is a blue-eyed blond girl. You are so different and so exceptional that only you can live your life. So, if you don't like your job because you dream of something much better and for which you feel gifted, then make plans to go where your heart tells you!

In other words, do not let fears, disappointments or what others think of you prevent you from ever asking yourself: "What do I really like and want to do with my life for God?" Use your talents and the godly desires you have, or else you will miss the very purpose of your destiny!

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3. God speaks when you first obey

(John 15:7; 1 John 3:22, 5:14-16)

If you intentionally sin (we are not talking about being perfect but consciously choosing to do what is wrong), then God will not reveal you his will. (Romans 12: 2, Ps. 65:18). For instance:

- If you are not giving your very best at work, then do not expect God to give you revelations regarding your professional future, you are disobedient! (Col.3:23).
- If you are disrespectful and insensitive toward your wife (or your husband!), then do not expect God to answer your prayers, you are disobedient! (1 Peter 3:7).
- If your first priority in life is not seeking the kingdom of God (regularly attending the church, evangelizing, giving money, etc.…) don't expect God to give you answers regarding your own needs, you are disobedient! (Matt.6:33)

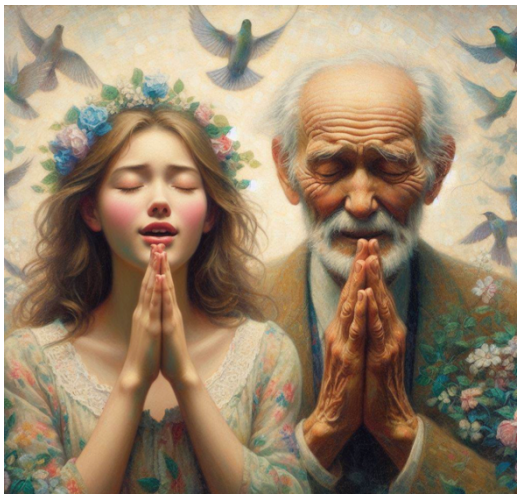
But if you know in your conscience that you are fully obedient in every area of your life, then just be patient, the revelations will surely come! If you are obedient to love, to forgive and be patient in afflictions, then God's Spirit will be over you and He will speak to you. Often God wants us to learn precious and indispensable lessons until we are fully ready for the next stage of our life. Sometimes He may give us no other revelation than the confirmation that we are on the right track and that we must keep on until the next stage of our life

So just trust Him, He knows exactly what He is doing! Joseph or Moses had to go through those stages of preparation, and at the right time God spoke and everything changed.

4. God speaks through prayer and fasting

(Jer. 29: 11-13, Acts 13:2)

If you are committed to take a LOT of time to pray, in time you will learn to clearly discern God's voice for you. (Look again on page 145 revelations you can receive through prayer) There is a promise that if you are God's sheep, then you can hear the voice of your shepherd (John 10:27). It may be a small and quiet voice, but it will always be very clear (Ps. 46:10). If you really want answers, take at least 1 hours of prayer every day for 40 days or even more, add total fasting, and you can be absolutely sure that God will clearly reveal his will to you: "Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and unsearchable secrets you do not know" (Jeremiah 33: 3)



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5. God speaks through the wisdom, reason and experience of others

(Prov. 15: 22; 11: 14, 15: 32)

There are things that only you can discover, like for instance having a clear vision for your life. But others can give you wise principles from their own experience that will greatly help you fulfill your dreams, and this is why you need to seek advice. Why reinventing the wheel when someone has done the very same thing you want to do, and he had great success? Ask advice from him!

Some Christians tend to over spiritualize things by expecting direct supernatural revelations from God when all they need to do is ask wise and experienced people! God speaks through common sense and reason as well! Maybe you are not sure when to start your project, maybe you are not sure about your business partners, maybe you need a better plan, better goals, etc.… so take advice from gifted and smart people! Particularly ask those who are successful in the very areas in which yourself want to have success (Proverbs 11: 14) This will be mostly from spiritually mature Christians, but sometimes God can certainly speak through unbelievers. (Even Jesus said that in the area of money some unbelievers can be wiser than the children of Light!)

For instance, if you do not know how to build a successful business, ask honest and experienced businessmen. If you are not sure whom to marry or even how to save your marriage, ask those who had a successful marriage! If you do not know how to obtain important papers, ask those who have a talent in this area. And be sure that you do this with a few wise persons. If most of them all give you the same advice, there might be a chance that God is trying to tell you something!

6. God speaks through supernatural confirmations

(Acts 16: 6-10, 1 Thess. 5:20-21)

God can speak very powerfully through dreams, visions or prophetic words. He can stop you or on the contrary give you the green light through supernatural means (Acts 16: 6-10) If He speaks directly to you through visions or dreams, usually it will be very clear. But if you hear prophetic words, be very careful and make sure that they are really from mature and humble people who hear God or that their timing is right.

The New Testament tell us indeed that some prophecies can be wrong, and this is why you have a personal responsibility to filter and test them (1 Thess. 5:20-21 the literal meaning of the word "test" is to put an object under an intense fire to purify it). There are 2 good tests to see if a prophecy is from God or not: the first one is that God NEVER gives prophetic words that go against the Bible. For instance, God will not give a prophecy to leave your whole family

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behind with no money and go on the mission field for many years! (It contradicts 1 Tim. 5:8). Secondly God almost never gives prophetic words that go against the very desires of your own heart. On the contrary, the primary purpose of any prophetic words is to give confirmations of what He already put in your hearts. For instance, if you deeply want to go to Africa, it is very unlikely that God will send you a prophecy to go to Antarctica!

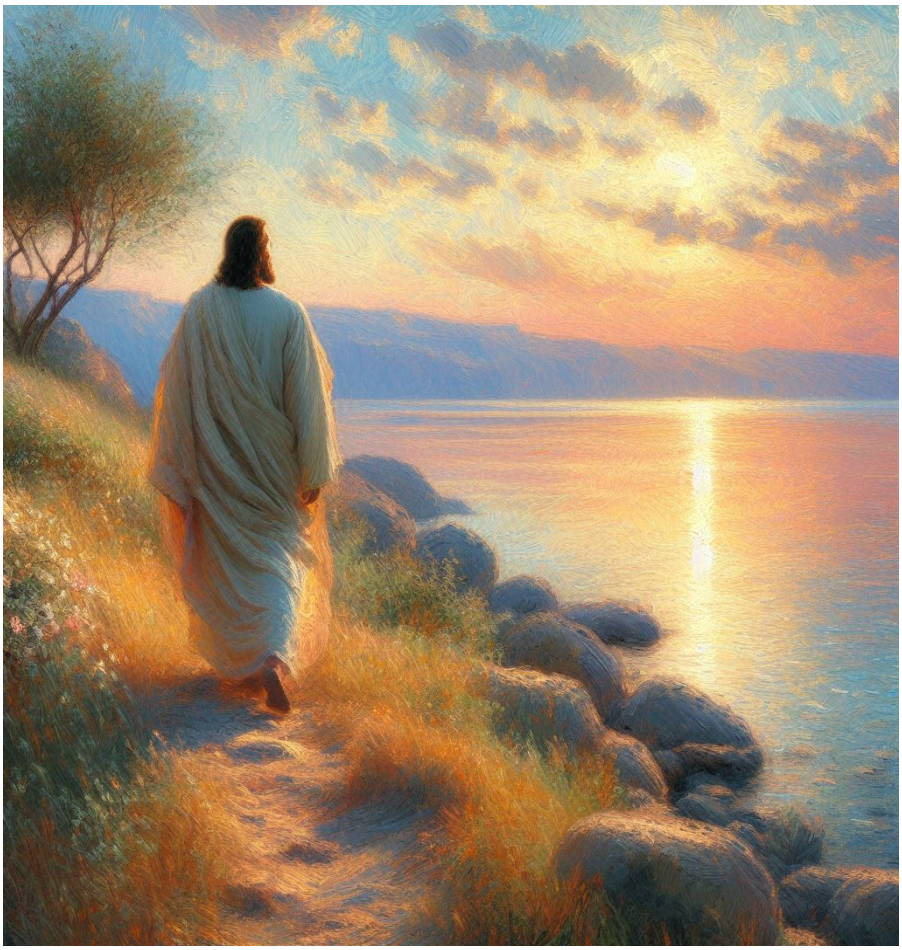
So, if you don't know what you want, your very first priority is to ask God to reveal the very desires of your heart, and then he may bring you supernatural confirmations.

7. God speaks through the peace in your hearts

(Phil. 4:6-7)

The one overruling principle by which you can be sure if it is God's will or not is whether you have His peace or not (Philippians 4: 6-7). We are not saying that you will never have some worries and even fears. Some bold steps of faith can be very challenging. But it is possible to feel inner pressure and at the same time to be filled with a peace that surpasses every understanding.

So never rush to start anything if you have really no peace in your heart. Wait upon the Lord until He gives you His perfect and supernatural peace.



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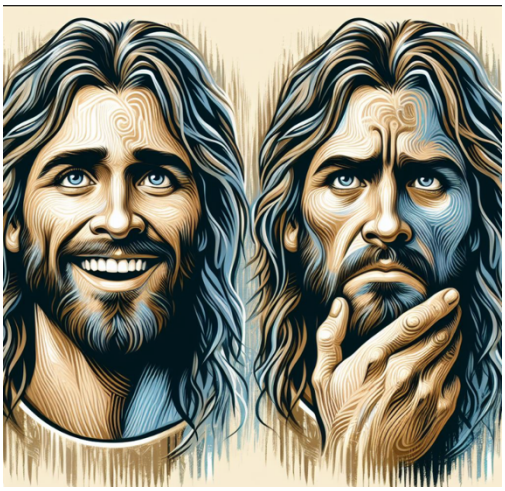
4 - SEE YOURSELF LIKE GOD SEES YOU



God has 2 sides (Rom. 11:22), therefore…

A kind side	A severe side
He is perfectly loving and gentle, and extremely patient	He is perfectly righteous and holy, and never compromises with sin
He loves you as a person	He hates your sins
He sees you perfect, as you will be one day in heaven	He sees you imperfect, still struggling on this earth
You should see yourself in a very positive way	You should see yourself in a very realistic way

If God has those 2 contrasting sides, you need to see BOTH of them!

1) **You need to face the painful reality of who you are, which is to clearly recognize your weaknesses and sins.** ("Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment" (Rom.12:3). "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8)). This does not mean that you have to hate yourself. On the contrary! If you love your life, hate your sins! If you really want to become a better person, one whom you will like, then get rid of your sins! Sin is not good, even if it looks so appealing and deceiving!

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2) **You need to see yourself through God's love and make positive declarations of faith about yourself.** God does not see you as the world sees you or as you even see yourself. He sees you purified and perfect through the blood of His Son. He sees you through His love, in such an incredible way that you have the right to see yourself the way He sees you too!

Why do you need to see **BOTH** sides?

Some people tend to focus on that is negative about themselves, and as a result their self-esteem is low, and they have great difficulties changing! Others on the contrary remain in a religious illusion: they only want to hear positive things about themselves and as a result they refuse to see their weaknesses and never change!
In other words, you need to see BOTH sides at the same time. See yourself realistically and yet positively!

SEE YOURSELF REALISTICALLY

In order to improve your life, you need to have a very clear and realistic picture of yourself. You need to know precisely what your present sins and weaknesses are. This is only possible if you have an objective standard by which you can measure your progress. Obviously, Jesus is your perfect model, but maybe His example is too hard for you to follow. So, start with the basic minimum: develop a mature character! (There is more on page 283 (Test: are you a mature Christian?)).

Characteristics of a mature Christian character

Loving God

- You regularly pray and fast
- You regularly study the Bible
- You regularly evangelize and make disciples
- You often have joy and peace

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Humble

- You easily listen and accept corrections
- You ask and follow advice to improve your life
- You easily submit to the authority of people who can help you to become a better person
- You have nothing to prove or defend about yourself

Disciplined

- You work hard and never depend on others to help you
- You know your goals in life and have clear priorities
- You have a high degree of control over:

    - Your money
    - Your time and priorities (do you have time limits with TV, internet or your phone?)
    - Your emotions
    - What you say and how you talk
    - Your body, such that you are rarely sick or moody. (No overeating, no unhealthy food, no dependency on alcohol or cigarette, etc.…)

Wise

- You can not only see the difference between what is good and bad, but even between what is good and what is the best!
- You are not impulsive, instead you think before you act or speak.
- You are wise because you listen to experienced people who can advise you in their own areas of expertise.
- In fact, you always consider 2 or even 3 sides of any opinion.
- You constantly learn from your mistakes and do not repeat them.
- You do not build friendship with people who have a negative influence on your life.

Loving

- You never keep resentments and never gossip
- In fact, you easily forgive and accept people

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- You are gentle and kind
- You always think what is the best for others before your own interests
- You are thankful and never concerned about yourself
- You are generous and easily serve others
- You are patient as you always believe the very best in others
- You are never aggressive and not easily angered
- You are faithful to your friends and never leave them

Responsible

- You never blame anyone (parents, society or even circumstances)
- Instead, you always take full responsibility for your mistakes
- You always do what you say
- People can always count on you in everything
- You are punctual and organized
- You manage your time and money well
- You think about the consequences of everything you do
- You plan most things in advance
- You have no debts (this does not concern buying your apartment or car)

In other words, to make things very clear, you are NOT responsible if:

- You feel no obligations and no guilt to give any answer to anyone for your behavior
- You do not think carefully how your actions may negatively affect others
- You do not do what you said you would do
- You do not finish what you started
- You have no clear goals for your life and family.
- You are often late and not well organized.
- You have a messy and disorganized room (or apartment)
- You throw stuff and garbage on the floor for others to pick up

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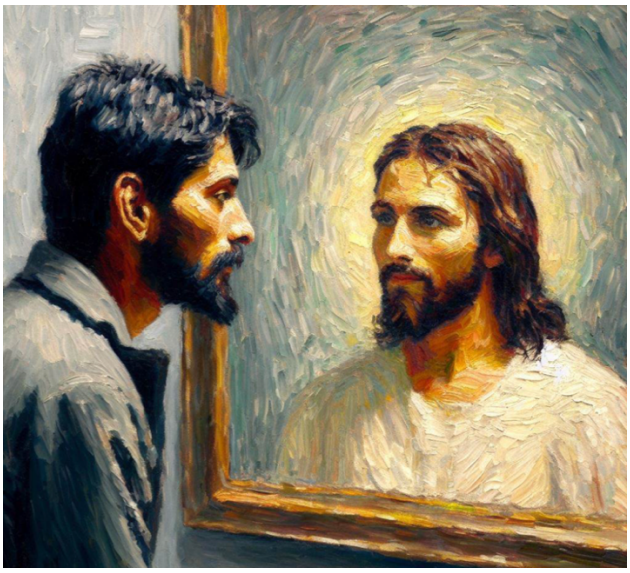
- You almost never answer your phone or messages when people try to reach you (or do not call back to say that you will call later)
- You had no regular work and no regular income for a long time, easily depend on others to help you.
- You easily borrow money.
- You do not pay your debts in time
- You have no precise budget
- You do not regularly save money for emergencies and for specific goals (which is why you easily borrow from others!)
- You make important decisions without consulting and informing the concerned persons (family, friends, work partners, etc.…)
- You change your plans and do not warn the concerned persons about it
- You always have a good explanation for all your problems and easily blame others for them

What are all the precise things you see about yourself? Do you have problems in your relationship with God? How humble are you with others? How much discipline, wisdom and love are in your character? Are you fundamentally a responsible person?

If you cannot see anything clearly about yourself, then your first problem might be pride. If this is the case, ask God to show you who you really are.
Secondly, accept what other Christians see in your life (Read the chapter about being humble)
AFTER you see your sins and weaknesses, and only after this, then you can concentrate yourself on the solution, which is:

SEE YOURSELF POSITIVELY



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The way you see yourself and how you talk to yourself determines your life. If the world around you is constantly telling you that you will always be poor and have tons of problems, and if you say to yourself: "I will never be a winner" then eventually you will end up living this! If on the contrary, you see yourself having success and say to yourself: "With God, I will always be a winner" then your life will become like this.

In other words, the way you choose to see yourself and talk to yourself will make all the difference in your life. Even Jesus said that "whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but **believes that those things HE SAYS** will come to pass, he will have **whatever he says.**'" (Mark 11:23). In other words, "Death and life are in the power of YOUR tongue." (Proverbs 18:21)

Your thoughts control your words

Your words control your actions

Your actions control your habits

Your habits control your character

Your character controls your destiny.

So, if you control what you think and say to yourself, you can change your whole life!

This is why you need to stop seeing yourself through your own eyes or even the eyes of those around you and see yourself through God's eyes.

Jesus shed His blood to purify you, so you have the right to see yourself as God sees you. In His eyes you are absolutely perfect because He sees you as clean, righteous, totally worthy, having all power, all privileges and all authority! In other words, He certainly sees you having already all you need for a godly life, so see yourself in this way!

Below are a few statements of who you are in Christ. Read them and start speaking them to yourself! If you tell yourself regularly all the things you want to become, over time you will start to see yourself differently, and this will slowly change your feelings and behavior. For instance, if you feel that you cannot do anything, say to yourself: "I can do all things through Christ!" If you feel you are at the bottom, say: "I am the head, not the tail", if you feel you cannot love, say to yourself that you can love; tell yourself that you can have discipline, you can be responsible, you can become all what God wants you to be!

Every day make such positive declarations of faith of who you are in God's eyes, and together with the discipline needed to make such changes, you will eventually change!

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List of positive confessions to see yourself like God sees you

Who I am in Christ

- I am God's creation to do good deeds. My old life is in the past. My spirit was created in the image and likeness of God (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10)
- I am righteous. I have a right position before God, as if I had never acted wrongly (2 Cor. 5:21)
- I am a child of the Almighty God and a joint heir to Christ (Romans 8:16-17, 1 Peter 1:23)
- I do not live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20)
- I am His chosen one, full of mercy, kindness, humility, and patience (Romans 8:33; Col. 3:12)
- I am the light of the world (Matt. 5:14)
- I am the head, not the tail; I am above, not below (Deuteronomy 28:13)
- I am the temple of the Holy Spirit; I do not belong to myself (1 Cor. 6:19)
- I am part of the chosen ones, from a royal priesthood, from a holy nation, set apart for an inheritance (1 Pet. 2: 9)
- I am a messenger on behalf of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- I am a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20)

What belongs to me in Christ

- My sins have been washed away by the blood of the Lamb, and I am forgiven (Ephesians 1:7)
- I have been redeemed from the curse of the law (poverty, disease, and spiritual death (Galatians 3:13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14)
- I am free from depression; fear doesn't come near me (Isaiah 54:14)
- I have the fullness of life through the One who is above all powers and authority (Col. 2:10)

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- I am blessed with all spiritual blessings in heaven (Ephesians 1:3)
- My heavenly Father answers ALL of my needs according to His richness (Philippians 4:19)
- I have received the spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to know Jesus better; the eyes of my heart are enlightened (Ephesians 1:17–18)
- I have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2: 5; 1 Corinthians 2:16)
- I am born of God; the devil will not touch me (1 John 5:18)
- By the stripes of Jesus, I am healed (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5)

My position in Christ

- I am delivered from the power of Satan, and now I am in the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13-14)
- I am part of the body of Christ, and Satan does not have power over me (1 Cor. 12:14-20; Luke 9: 1 and 10:19)
- I am seated in heaven, above all power of darkness, and everything is under His feet (Ephesians 1:20-23)

What I can do in Christ

- I can do everything through Christ strengthening me (Philippians 4:13)
- I am a partaker of God's nature (2 Peter 1:3–4)
- In the power of the Holy Spirit, I can testify of Jesus (Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20)
- He who abides in me is greater than he who is in this world (1 John 4: 4)
- I overcome everything by the power of the One who Loved me (Romans 8:37)
- I received the power of the Holy Spirit and can lay my hands on the sick, and they will be healed, I can cast out demons and speak other languages. I have power over any hostile spiritual powers, and nothing will hurt me (Mark 16:17–18; Luke 10:17, 19)
- God gave me special gifts in order to serve Him (1 Peter 4:10-11)

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5 - SUFFERING, FAITH, and DISCIPLINE

SUFFERING

How we view suffering is how we will go through life. Our perception on whether our problems are good or bad will determine absolutely every single thought and emotion of our existence. This is why it is crucial that we have God's perspective so that we can filter and classify all the troubles of life in 2 categories: the good suffering and the bad suffering.

The reason for this categorization is that if we go through a suffering that can be defined as good, then we can always have joy, trust and peace because at the end we know that everything will always turn to our advantage.

If on the contrary, we realize that we have problems that we should never have had, then instead of wrongly believing that God wants us to suffer for some benevolent purpose, we decide to view our suffering as "bad", and then we can take full responsibility for our problems and get rid of them!

What is a good suffering and what is a bad suffering?

Bad suffering is everything that is created by our own sins.

It can be our lack of faith, our disobedience, our unwise decisions, our ignorance, our pride, and in most case … our stupidity! Bad suffering is when we impulsively rush to do what we desire, and then we suffer. Bad suffering is when we stubbornly refuse to seek God's will or to listen to anyone or even our own conscience, and then we pay a heavy price. Basically, if we are not willing to seek wisdom, discipline, humility and true love, we will always have a bad suffering. If we make unwise choices with

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spouses and friends, if we are lazy and irresponsible at our jobs, if we mismanage our health and our money, all of this will bring a suffering that should always be categorized as being bad! In essence bad suffering is every pain in life for which we are guilty!

Good suffering, on the contrary, is every trial for which we are not guilty.

It is the pain caused by our desire to obey God and truly love others. If we really want to be more like Jesus in all areas of life, then we will suffer. Selfless and sacrificial love will always cost us something. To forgive, to be kind and patient is never easy. To confront others about their sins with firmness and yet love is a huge challenge. To be around people who behave in an irresponsible or selfish way towards us can be a constant pain to the soul. And there are times when we must preach Jesus and repenting, and some people will not like it. In fact, they may even hate us and persecute us. In other words, the more we try to improve our character, the more we influence others, the more we suffer! All of this can be called good suffering.

"God will judge us not according to how much we endured, but how much we could love."

Richard Wurmbrand (Romanian pastor who suffered 14 years in communist prisons)

Take the example of Jesus, because it defines perfectly what is good and bad suffering: the whole nation of is under a lot of bad suffering: there is the oppressive military occupation of the Romans. Social and even religious injustices are seen everywhere. Millions suffer under the heavy burden of poverty and sickness.

But in the midst of all this Jesus is never poor, he is never sick, and he never worries about anything. He has no fears for His future, and he never struggles with mistakes and doubts. In other words, he never experiences any bad suffering.

Instead, He goes through all the good suffering of feeling pain for those who suffer, agonizing in His prayers for those whom he loves, and walking thousands of miles to serve thousands of needy people who are all running after Him. In addition, on top of all this, He constantly faces oppositions and misunderstandings of all sorts, and He finally ends up being rejected and crucified!

Apostles follow the same example of good suffering: They never suffer low self-esteem and complain that they are being treated like the world's garbage (2 Corinthians 11:28, 1 Corinthians 4:13). Instead, they work hard while starting churches, they often are persecuted, and they all die as martyrs!
In other words, our attitude and behavior determine the kind of suffering that we have in life. We either have the good suffering of loving and forgiving, or the bad suffering of keeping resentments and

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hurting others. We have either the good suffering of being humble, disciplined and seeking God, or the bad suffering of being prideful, lazy and not seeking God. Either we suffer from boldly sharing our faith or we suffer by remaining silent and cowards. Either we suffer in doing the right thing or we suffer by sinning.

Either way, we all suffer one way or the other. Suffering cannot be avoided.
But we can all choose if our suffering will be a good one or a bad one.

If, according to the tables below:

- **You are in good suffering, hold on, learn your lessons, particularly to love and be joyful, and trust God until all His good promises will be fulfilled.**

- **If you are in bad suffering, look yourself in the mirror, change with discipline and trust God to forgive you and help you!**

Obviously, no suffering in life falls 100% into one category or the other.

Often it is a mixture of both, and this is why we must learn to constantly categorize.

If the suffering is our fault, we should have humility and discipline.
If it is not, we should have peace and joy.

But in all situations, we should always learn to love and trust God.

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BAD SUFFERING	GOOD SUFFERING
-I suffer because I sin (I am irresponsible, selfish; I do not listen to God and others, etc....) -I suffer because I make no improvement to my character (I remain passive, lazy, depressive, etc....) -I suffer because I refuse to speak and do nothing to challenge and improve people around me, so that their problems eventually affect me -I have problems created by me (for instance today 90% of all the sicknesses in the western world are entirely our fault, and it is mostly the case with cancer and heart diseases; I suffer of tensions and a possible divorce because I refuse to seek help and change my character; I have problems with people because I have a difficult character, I am poor because I am lazy, irresponsible, making unwise and impulsive decisions, etc....)	-In my conscience I am innocent as I have not sinned (it does not mean that I am blameless, but at least I am not aware of anything that caused me problems) -I suffer because I do everything to love and forgive others -I suffer because I radically and constantly improve my character -I suffer because I improve the world so that it persecutes me -I have problems not created by me for which I am not guilty (for instance I suffer of sicknesses which are not my fault like bad environment or sins of others around me; I suffer because my spouse refuses to change and ask outside help; I suffer because some people sin against my own will; I suffer because I serve God in a difficult setting; I suffer because Satan attacks me for no reason like a car accident, tsunami, someone attacking someone I love, etc....)
What to do: -Be humble and ask God and the concerned people to show me concretely what is the precise sin for each problem I have -Take full responsibility for my problems instead of wrongly thinking that God wants me to suffer (or even blaming Him!) -Trust God's promises (see section on faith) -Never give up but have discipline (see section on discipline)	**What to do:** -Keep on being very humble so that if God shows me any sins in my heart I might immediately repent -Keep on loving people, learn my lessons so that I will become more like Jesus -Trust God's promises (see section below) -Never give up but have discipline (see section on discipline)

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Take responsibility for your bad suffering!

Ask God to give you humility and try to go through the following self-examination: Can you remember all the times of your life where you suffered (or even all the ones you have now) and can you determine which ones were “bad suffering”? (In other words, a suffering that you created yourself, of which you are guilty, and therefore a suffering that was not needed)?

Was God wanting this suffering? No. Did God use this suffering for something better? Yes.

So far, so good. But now comes a problem that is common to many believers: because God uses all our bad decisions and actions to still bring something good in our life, **we often tend to minimize our own responsibility**.

Instead, we remind ourselves that God is good, and He will bring something beneficial out of all this, and instead of changing, we keep on repeating the same sins. This is a terrible deception and unfortunately many believers suffer from this delusion!

So, if you can look at your life and admit your own responsibility you have done the first and most necessary step to escape the vicious circle of useless suffering. But this is only the first step. After this, there are two other fundamental steps that you need to take, and they will change the entire course of your life: First, you need faith in God and secondly you need discipline.

The reason is that with **faith we have the motivation to see difficult or even impossible things becoming possible, and with discipline we have the strength to persevere until they are realized**.

Those 2 principles are absolutely essential to life because if we have no **vision** of what God shows us, we will never have any desire to start anything. And if we have no **discipline,** we will never continue in our vision.

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FAITH

Faith is to "see" all the things that God has shown you and promised you, and firmly believe that they will come to pass even if all your emotions or the reality tell you the opposite.

There are 2 kinds of revelations that we need to "see":

Bible revelations and personal revelations

Bible revelations

These are all the promises that are contained in the Bible like forgiveness from all our sins, healing, deliverance from bad habits, supernatural empowerment, being filled by the Holy Spirit, wisdom, love, peace, hope, encouragements in the darkest times of life, meeting all our needs, go to heaven, etc….. All of these are clear and objective revelations that are for everyone for all times.

Personal revelations

These are the subjective and personal "visions" that are not directly in the Bible, but that God has "promised" us through our own faith. For instance, it is "seeing and believing" in the success of a certain job, "seeing in advance" the person who will be our life partner, seeing the house that will be ours, seeing a new place where we will move, seeing some personal goals fulfilled, etc…. (Read the chapter "Learn how to hear God"). Those revelations/promises should obviously never contradict what God has promised in the Bible.

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The above revelations are themselves divided in 2 categories:

Long-term promises and short-term promises

Long-term promises are the kind of promises where we have to wait many years until God finally gives us what he has promised, whereas short-term promises are bound to dramatic miraculous situations that happen within a very short period of time.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we see that all God's promises can have 2 different lengths of time. There are long-term promises and short-term promises:

Long-term promises

Here are a few biblical examples of long-term promises:

- Many years before the world would be destroyed, God promised Noah to rescue him.
- Abraham and Sarah were given the promise of a child many years before Isaac came to be born.
- Jacob received promises that took decades before they came to pass.

Here are examples of long-term expectations that we nourish about our lives:

- Waiting many years for the right partner or the right job.
- Seeing a family member becoming Christian.
- Closed doors finally opening.

They involve many years of preparation until we enter a new and better stage of our life. For instance, Joseph and Moses had to patiently wait many years in a very humbling situation until everything turned around.

This kind of faith seems to be quite "passive" as there is little we can do except not give up and believe that God will keep His promises. But as passive as it can appear, it is actually extremely challenging because as human beings we always want to control things and come up with our own solutions.

For instance, instead of waiting on the child that God had promised to Sarah, Abraham took the matter in his own hand and slept with Hagar to have God's promise coming sooner. It made things worse. In fact, all the problems we have today in the Middle East are the result of this rushed decision! (Hagar's child is the ancestor of all Arabs).

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Short-term promises

So, life is made of those long-term promises that take years to happen, but it can be characterized as well by those short-term promises that change everything within the shortest time. This is illustrated in Hebrews 11 with those who

- Stopped the mouths of lions.
- Quenched the violence of fire.
- Had outstanding military victories.
- Saw their dead ones coming back to life.

These are the kind of situations that require an "active" faith that brings instant miracles. It is the kind of faith that expects God to move quickly and powerfully in a supernatural way. It is the attitude that produces incredible results just at the right time. For instance,

- Joseph had the supernatural ability to interpret the dream of Pharaoh, and in one hour he became the second most powerful man in the world!
- Moses liberated millions of God's people with his miracles in just a few days.
- The Christians of the early church did amazing miracles on a daily basis, and they turned the whole world upside down.
- The same kind of faith is demonstrated today if you heal the sick, cast out demons, give prophetic words or do all kinds of instant miracles. It can change everything in the shortest time!

FAITH is a mixture of:

LONG term PROMISES that we see many years before they happen and for which we need a lot of patience to never give up

and

SHORT term PROMISES that we act upon as soon as they come, which make our daily life incredibly exciting.

Good fear and bad fear

Now, we should not only have a GREAT faith, but as Mark 11:23 says, we should have as well ZERO doubts because they can neutralize our faith. Doubts are often rooted in our fears, and this is why it is important that we have a biblical understanding of fear. Fear, like suffering, can have 2 sides: a good one and a bad one. A good fear is one that pushes you to change a situation because there is something you can do about it, whereas a bad fear is to do nothing when instead you should do something!

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A bad fear is when you are afraid that something bad will happen to you and you do NOTHING to avoid the coming problem. Often religious people cover their laziness and fears by saying that we should trust God and believe in His good plans, instead of taking responsibilities for their lives and doing something about their situation. Their fear is a bad one.

A good fear on the contrary pushes you to action: If you are afraid to not have enough money, you get yourself on your knees and then you start working harder and smarter. A good fear is when you are afraid to lose your marriage and you start seeking counsel and serious help, instead of naively hoping that time will cover everything. A good fear is when you are afraid to become sick and you start seeking common sense, wisdom and discipline, instead of waiting for the last-minute miracle!

In other words, if your fears push you to improve your situation it is a good fear. But if there is absolutely nothing you can do after you tried everything you could do on your side, and you still hold on to a fear, then it is a bad fear. It adds nothing and changes nothing. What you should do is bring all your feelings to God and trust Him to do the things that you have no power over it.

GOOD FEAR is one that motivates you to improve your life

while

BAD FEAR is one that paralyzes you so you do nothing to improve your life

DISCIPLINE

Having a clear vision and faith of all that God has promised us is the first step, but not the last one. If you read the famous chapter on faith in Hebrews 11, you not only see amazing victories, but you also see a lot of suffering as well. In other words, if we are ever going to reach all that God wants to give us, we will need a lot of discipline as well! Some Christians only claim the power of a triumphing faith, but they never want to go further than this. They talk and dream about having great resources, great power and great influence but their lives show little because they are not willing to pay the high price of discipline.

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Discipline covers absolutely EVERY area of life, because everything we do, everything we say, everything we think and everything we feel requires discipline. It would take an entire book to cover all the spheres where discipline is needed, but there are at least 3 areas that are absolutely essential if we are ever going to have a disciplined life:

The first one is your relationship with God. You need to meditate on the Bible and pray at least 30 minutes a day to seriously seek the face of God. Without this daily discipline of discovering God's will for your life, much of your own discipline may be useless. Unfortunately, many are those who had discipline with their money, their time and their bodies but eventually they lost their souls and families because they did not care to seek God with all their strength. This booklet should give you enough principles on how to get started on this.

Secondly, you need to know how to set goals. People who have discipline have not only goals, but they know how to reach them. Having clear goals is only great if you know how to reach them. In other words, you need to know the principles of discipline that will help you reach your goals.

Thirdly, you need to know what makes you healthy. You may have all the discipline to reach most goals of your life, but if you do not have the wisdom and the discipline to remain healthy and strong, it will destroy everything good you may ever have built. In most cases a strong health is a good indicator of a wise and disciplined life, particularly in today's world!

Let's look at the last 2 principles, being healthy and setting goals:

Be healthy – 5 fundamental principles

"My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). You can keep on being unhealthy, tired and have an early death with cancer, heart attack or all the sicknesses of our ignorant society or you can gain God's wisdom and have a long and healthy life. Understand the following:

Over two thirds of Christians die from heart diseases and cancer. This is a tragedy because this could be totally avoided if they had knowledge and discipline!

1) 90% of all the sicknesses in today's western world are **caused by our complete IGNORANCE** of the most elementary principles on health (in other words, most sicknesses like cancers and heart problems, which make up most deaths today, are completely avoidable!)

2) It is **God's will for all to be healed and remain healthy!** The Bible has many principles about health.

3) **Health is NOT limited to 1 or 2 areas.** Like money or many other areas of life, health is made up of many different factors which are all important and should all be kept in balance with each other. The 5 following principles are ALL EQUALLY important:

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1. Do regular physical exercise!

- If possible, choose a sport that combines the agreeable with the useful (walking/running with the dogs, gardening, repairing house, farming, sports with friends etc.…)

- Preferably do all your sport in nature with fresh air and sun, avoid closed rooms/gyms as there are all kinds of bacteria and little oxygen in them. Fishing, hunting, hiking is great for this!

- Do not exaggerate, avoid extremes that will have negative consequences in the future, and therefore know your limits! In other words, listen to your body and have rests if needed! It is better to have some exercise very regularly, even if it is not a whole lot, than to have a lot at irregular times.

- Whatever sport you choose, it should always include **a mixture of muscle strength, cardio and stretching (you absolutely must have those three components**, and not just one of them or you will end up having problems on the long run! To have some strength in your muscles, a good flexibility, a strong heart and resistant lungs are the keys to a long life!)

2. Eat healthy food!

First problem: do you know which food is good and which one is bad?
"Their end is destruction; their god is their belly" (Philippians 3:19)
"My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)

Second problem: do you have the discipline to buy and eat only the right food? Where and how do you shop? "Therefore, anyone who knows what is right, but fails to do it is guilty of sin." (James 4:17)

We all agree that taking drugs and too much alcohol is the work of the devil.

Why then do we not see Satan in unhealthy foods?

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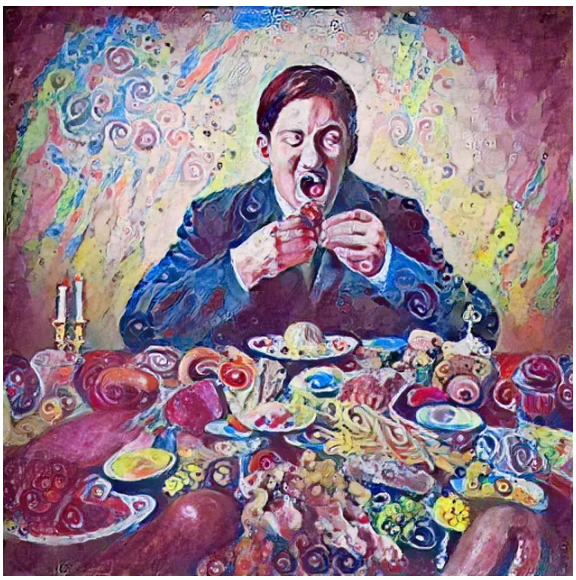
Third problem: Do you control your body or does your body control you?
"But I discipline my body and bring it under my control" (1 Corinthians 9:27)
The real issue is not overweight, but a dysfunctional metabolism created by bad food!



- Avoid ALL bad food (Food that is processed and most canned food (the exception is the home-made food with tomatoes, pickles, sauerkraut, etc.…) This means avoid most food from boxes, food that is packed, that has additives, preservatives, flavors, colorants, sweeteners, hydrogenated oils, and anything high in sugar! Educate yourself, examine everything you eat because there is a LOT of junk being sold today! Most food that is sold in stores today is not healthy, and some is even dangerous and will make you sick. Eat products from your own garden or from people in the countryside whom you trust so that you can be sure what you eat.

- Eat very rarely animals that the Bible designs as "impure" (not Kosher) It is well proven that pork contains many parasites, bacteria, viruses and toxins. Shellfish—shrimp, crabs, lobsters, etc.…clean the polluted bottoms of seas by eating dead and decaying matter of our environment.

Churches teach that smoking is bad. Why do they not teach that eating the wrong food is bad?

- Avoid all soft drinks, particularly those that have a lot of sugar.
  Drink only 1 to 2 glasses of fruit juices or smoothies a day as they have a lot of sugar as well (even if it is "good sugar"). If you absolutely must drink Coca-Cola or similar drinks let it be on very rare exceptions.

- Always use a very good filter for water or else you will slowly get sick with what polluted waters and old plumbing systems bring (to boil water it is not enough!)

- Avoid anything that has more than 15% alcohol, drink only wine that is of good quality, possibly self-made and organic as that does not contain sulfates. Drink never more than half a glass of day.

- Eat a lot of whole, organic vegetables that are preferably in season.

- Keep the following balance 60% alkaline products and 40% acid. If you need to restore health, take 80% alkaline - 20% acid (Generally alkaline are most fruits, green vegetables, peas, beans, lentils, spices, herbs and seasonings, seeds and nuts. Generally acid: meat, fish, poultry, eggs, grains and legumes).

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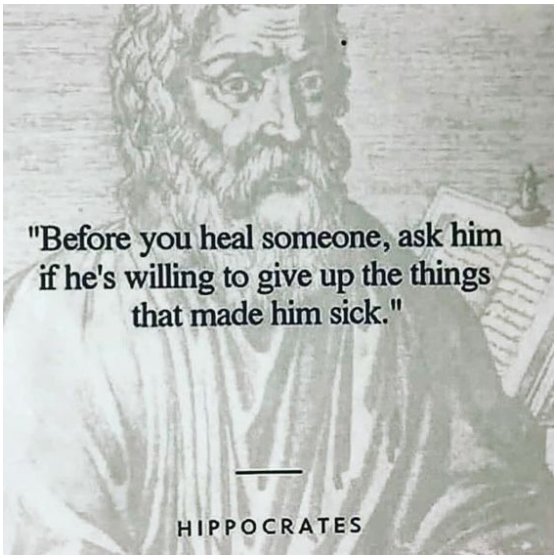
- Eat at least every day half an apple and a few fresh fruits. Preferably eat them with your morning porridge or muesli. Buy those fruits from the same farmer or grandma whom you know at the market.



- Eat a lot of organic whole grains of high quality as well as buckwheat or oatmeal porridges.

- Make your own bread. Invest in a bread machine as you will eventually save money and be healthier. Never ever eat any white bread as it is full of additives that will produce acidity and health problems on the long run. Avoid by all means anything that is made with white refined flower as it has no value and sometimes it even has harmful additives. If you buy brown bread, make sure that it has no chemicals in it, which is very often the case.

- Eat only maximum 15-20% of meat so you have 80% of vegetables and grains. To have meat every day is not good! Ideally have meat only 2 days a week maximum or at least have meals that contain only a proportion of 20% meat and 80% of the rest.

More than three quarters of the farmland on our planet is used for meat consumption!

If ate less meat, we would drastically reduce environmental harm!

- Eat only the meat, fish and poultry of which you know the origin, possibly from a farmer whom you know he is not giving bad stuff to his animals.

- Eat preferably meat like chicken, beef, lamb or goat and if possible, avoid pork and certainly all processed meat.

- Choose preferably meat that was slaughtered in the Jewish (Shechita) or Muslim way (Halal) as a quick death and immediately draining blood is healthier.

- Eat little dairy products and very little sugar.

- Eat plenty of olive oil and other healthy fats oils (but only cold pressed).

- According to your specific needs, add everyday a lot of very good quality vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, omega 3, enzymes and natural supplements like wheat germs, oils of all kinds like fish, olive, flaxseed, etc.… (but cold pressed only!), all honey products, probiotics, nuts and seeds.

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- Use all kinds of medical and culinary herbs (Echinacea, thyme, turmeric…) algae (spirulina…) roots (ginger, ginseng…) teas (green, herbal teas…) etc.… Use them in every possible form, (infusion, decoctions, tinctures, etc.…) not only to heal diseases, but to prevent them.

Never ever cook any food over 50C as it kills all vitamins and minerals! (Except of course for meat and a few vegetables like potatoes, beets, etc.…). Always cook everything slowly at a low temperature, for instance by using a slow cooker. Never steam (as it is 100C!), never use microwave or Teflon, but instead use cookware material like surgical stainless steel, crock pot (ceramic), clay (e.g.,Romertopf), glass or enamel. Get rid of cooking hardware that is old and of bad quality, as it will bring you serious problems on the long run.

- Have at least 30% of raw food in your overall diet (lots of salads and fruits). In the summer when much is available, try to have even far more raw food. The less you cook what you can eat fresh, the better. For instance, a raw carrot contains far more vitamins and minerals than a cooked carrot!

- Be always a little bit hungry for a meal, eat slowly, and never overeat. Eat more in the morning, less in the evening.

- It will cost you less on the long-term if you eat moderately and only good quality food than a lot of bad food with many hospital bills! Eating healthy is actually far less expensive than we think!

- “Poor” food (porridge, potatoes, honey, self-made bread, etc.…) is often healthier than rich and refined food. The Bible says that “Daniel made up his mind not to harm himself by eating the king's rich food ... after ten days they looked healthier and stronger than the young men who had been eating the king's rich food.” (Daniel 1:8, 15)

- Always thoroughly clean all your food, as it is covered with all kinds of germs and pesticides! Not just with water, but with spraying or immersing in water mixed with either vinegar, lemon juice, baking soda, etc.…

- To have the right proportions of food is just as important as the kind of food you take! (For instance, you can have meat or dairy products of excellent quality, but if you take too much of them you will end up having health problems!)

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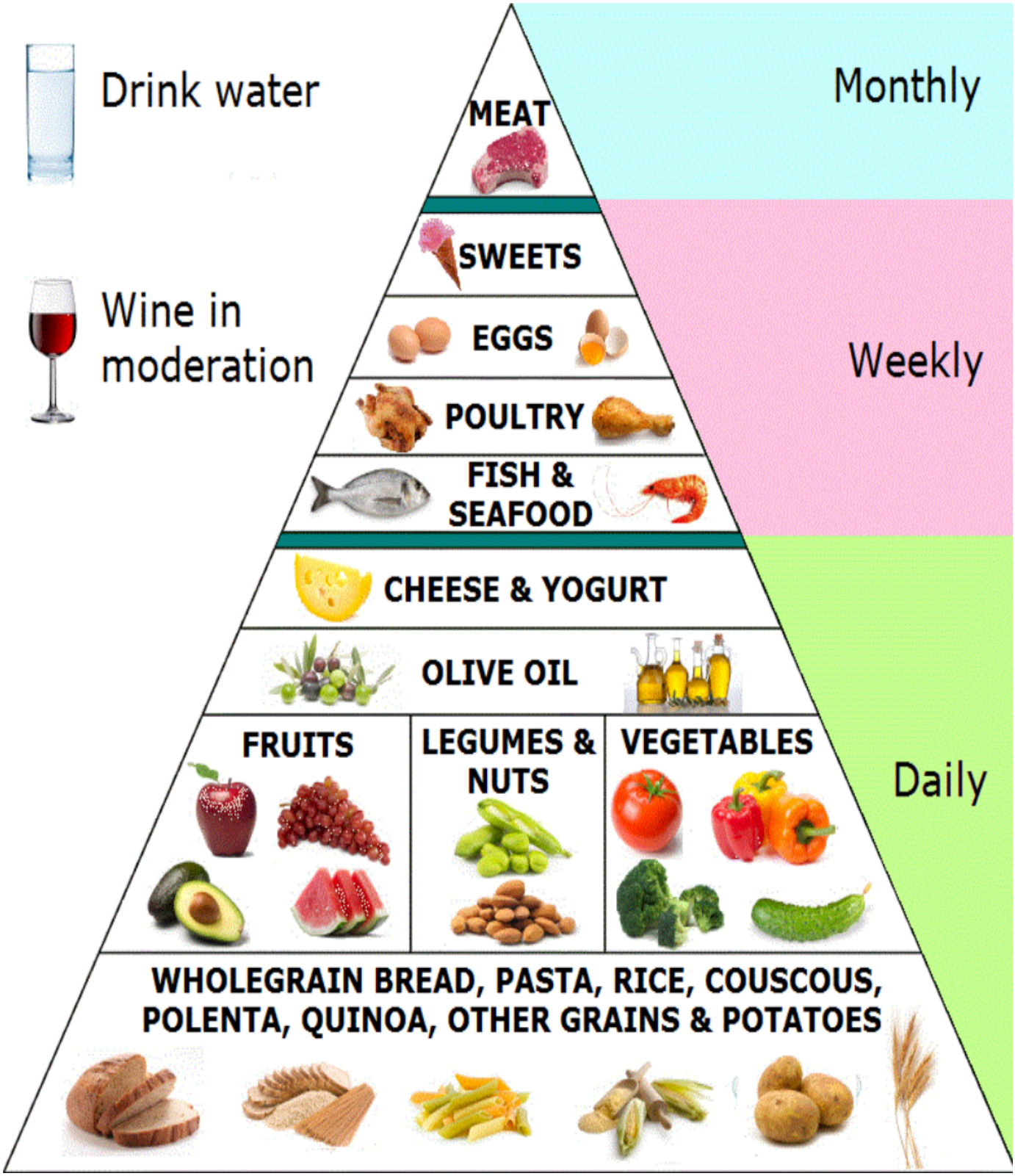
This food pyramid indicates the proportions of food we should have:

This pyramid is the model food that Jesus ate (the "Mediterranean diet"):



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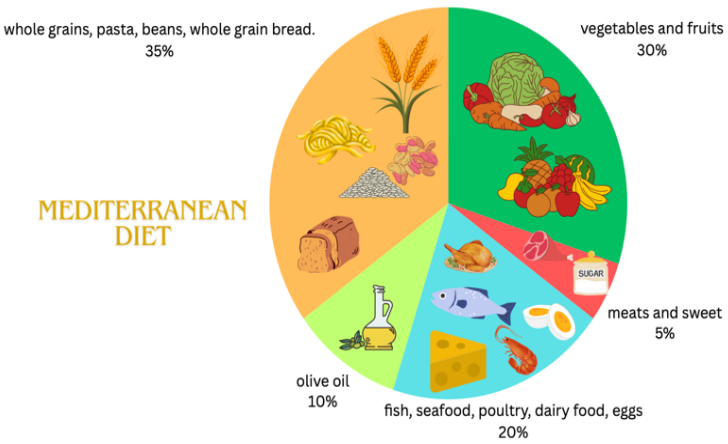
- A huge amount of organic, whole and diverse vegetables, fresh and dry fruits
- A lot of organic, whole grains (high quality), and lots of high fiber bread (no GMO!)
- Little fish, poultry, lamb or goat (with no blood and little fat) and very little beef
- Some dairy products on special occasions
- Wine, olive oil and a few other healthy fats oils (cold pressed) present in every meal
- NO "IMPURE" FOOD (pork, etc.…)



3. Do regular fasting and cleanses!

- These are fasts you should regularly practice. These are the minimum of course, you can always do more, but avoid doing this while you have a hard physical work at the same time (By fasting we mean not food at all and only drinking very pure water):
  - **1 day every week (either 12 or 24 hours)**
  - **2-3 days every month**
  - **1-3 weeks every year**
  - **40 days at least once a life**
- Do a fasting where you drink only juices from fruits and vegetables and nothing else (Use only organic fruits and veggies that detoxify your body, and which are freshly pressed with a juicer). Have a glass of fruit juice in the morning, and one glass of vegetable juice in the afternoon.
- Do special cleanses that detoxify your body with specific juices, like lemon, pure water with some apple cider vinegar, herbal teas, mixtures of detoxifying elements like ginger, turmeric, etc.…) There is enough info on the internet.
- Do cleanses that eliminate harmful stuff in your body (toxicants, metals, additives, etc.…each problem has its appropriate ingredients). In this regard, avoid using creams, shampoos, and deodorants, etc.… that are not natural, so that chemicals will not penetrate into your bodies. And in the same way, use a filter on your shower to avoid chlorine, fluoride, lead and a host of

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other terrible chemicals to do the same! (Over 30% of the shower water gets into your body through the skin)

- Do cleanses every 3-5 years to completely cleanse your intestinal tract (as it is the solution to obesity and many other health issues (the best cleanses are with psyllium husk (not seeds, husk, all info is on the internet))

- Regularly clean your hands + nails and your gum (with water floss)

- Avoid overheated rooms and always sleep with fresh and cold air

The power of purifying our bodies is so amazing that even a total fast of 40 days has sometimes completely healed incurable diseases like diabetes or cancer!

4. Have regular rest and therapies, as much as possible in nature!

- Respect the Sabbaths! Organize and purposely force yourself to take rests! (One day a week, vacations, spontaneous rests, a major rest every few years)

- Do a lot of relaxation or hobbies in nature. Do your best to get a lot of sun, fresh air and enjoy the creation. If needed, move out to live in nature as a bad environment will affect your health! Avoid exposures to negative electromagnetic waves of all kinds, cell phone towers, phones near your body, routers off for the night, etc.…

- Have various therapies with water, oils, music, magnetism, etc...

- Have regularly Russian or Turkish bath, sauna, Jacuzzi, etc.…If you use infrared sauna, which are safe and reach deeper into the tissues, use ones that have the lowest electric and magnetic field radiation (EMF).

Thousands of churches today like to preach about healing. Where are the ones that teach about being healthy?

- Swim in all kinds of waters (you could even become a regular ice swimmer☺, cold water is excellent for many things).

- Respect the sleep cycle (find your own exact cycle, sleep early and rise early, always go to bed and get up at the exact same times, have "power naps" of no more than 20 minutes during the day, have your own rituals before sleep with stretching, relaxing, not taking sugar/alcohol before bed).

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- Have a back massage at least every year. Hours of incorrect sitting (computer) have deformed our backs. In turn this affects our hips, feet, shoulders and neck, and even creates headaches and intestinal problems!

Unhealthy living is like sin: it never feels bad until it hurts us

- Have this kind of thorough manual massage that "elongates" and puts all your nerves back in place. (Not the gentle massage, but the one that fixes things!) Even all spine deformations can be fixed this way if they are treated early enough!

- Repeat this at least every 6 to 10 months for the rest of your life! Your spine needs this kind of check-up and maintenance just like your teeth need this regularly. If you wait until you hurt, it may be too late.

5. Have a positive and spiritual attitude!

- Your thoughts have a HUGE influence on your health, therefore:

- "Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need are with prayers, requests and thanksgivings. Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus "(Philippians 4:6-7)

- Think positive about yourself and others!

- Have clear purposes for your life!

- Bible meditation, worship and much prayer!

- Believe that God wants you to be healthy.

- Rejoice and have much fun (Proverbs 17:22 "a cheerful heart is good medicine")

- Belong to an interest group – friends who positively influence you (church, sport, …)

- Have healthy relationships (1 Corinthians 11:30 = bad ones make us sick! (=psychosomatic))

- Never keep resentments – Always forgive!!!

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A healthy life must have ALL those 5 elements in balance:

1. **Exercise** every day but reasonably in nature. Must always have those 3 elements:
   - Cardio
   - Muscles strengthening
   - Stretching, flexibility

2. **Eat** real food, possibly organic and kosher, correctly cooked + supplements and multivitamins of high quality
   -Avoid packaged, processed, artificial, chemical-filled food and overeating.
   -Respect the proportions of:
   - Food groups (very little sweets, little meat, some dairy products, more fish, oils, and nuts, but a lot of cereals, vegetables and fruits)
   - Acid/Alkaline balance
   - Cooked/Raw (at least 30% raw)

3. **Detoxify** your body with monthly and weekly regular fasting +cleanses and good hygiene. Avoid polluted environment, radio waves…live in eco-friendly houses as close to nature as possible.

4. **Rest** regularly + therapies (sauna, massages, etc.…) with the maximum exposure to fresh air, sun, and natural elements.

5. **Positive attitude** and have excellent relationship with others and God.

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The perfect balance implies that

However healthy you eat = you must also purify your body.
If you exercise regularly = you must rest as well.

And a positive mindset keeps everything together.

Learn to set goals

If you are ever going to have a life where your dreams become a reality you need to learn how to set goals and reach them!

1. Have God given, clear, realistic and positive goals

- Make sure that you really sought the Lord and got clear goals from Him, whether they are for a few months or a few years (Read the chapter on "7 ways how to hear God"). If you have not done this, you may work very hard in the wrong direction and end up being very frustrated. There is nothing more discouraging in life to ask God to bless us for things that He will not bless because it is not His will!

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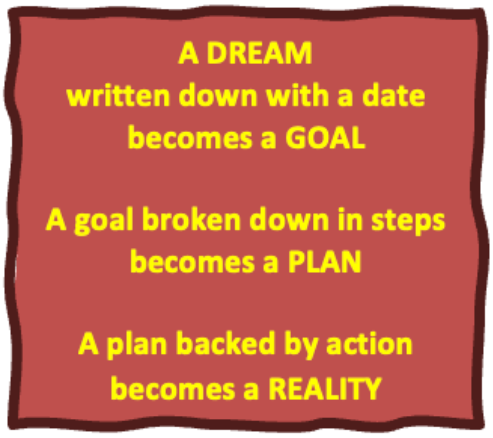
- Furthermore, if your goals are not clear and specific, you will never reach them. For instance, if you say: “One day I will be rich”, this is vague and most likely you are dreaming. But if you say: “At the end of next year I will make 1000 $ a month” this is a clear goal!

- Finally make sure as well that your goals are realistic so that you can reach them. If you set the bar too high and fail, it will discourage you and later you may not want to set other goals.

- Finally, your goals should always be expressed in a positive faith-building way. To say: “I will not fail school” is not the same as to say: “I will have this school diploma!”

2. Write all your goals on ONE piece of paper and constantly look at it



This paper should be constantly visible to you and to everyone else (Habakkuk 2:2). Placate those papers in different parts of your home so that you will be constantly encouraged and reminded of your goals. Choose between 2 and a maximum of 5 goals, all of which can be listed on one page. If you have more goals, then you will end up being overwhelmed and you will give up.

Here are a few areas where you can set yourself some goals:

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1. **Your family, relationships**
2. **Your health, sport**
3. **Your intellectual development, diploma**
4. **Your professional, financial life**
5. **Your spiritual life**

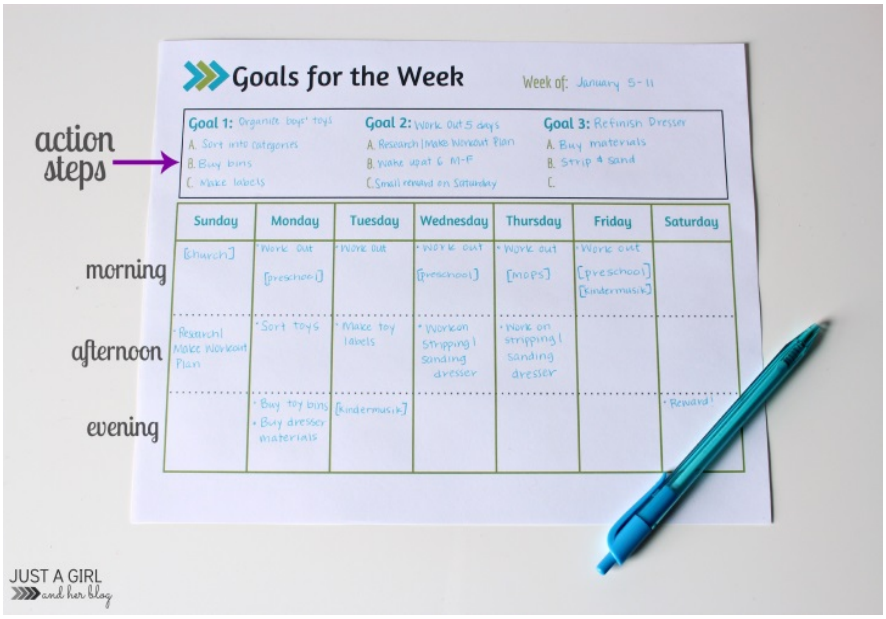
If you do not decide what you want for your life, then people and circumstances will decide for you!

3. Set a precise deadline for your final goal

As long as you refuse to do this you will drag your goal for ever or never reach it. Only a limit in TIME makes the difference between your goals and vain wishes! If you say: "I plan to lose weight sometime this year" it is not the same as saying: "I will lose 12 kg within the next 6 months."

Only things you do every day will change your life! This is why you should have daily goals.

4. Break down your final goal in smaller goals



Break your goals in monthly, weekly and then daily tasks. A goal becomes more realistic when you realize you don't have to take a giant step to reach it. One small step at a time will do. The smaller the steps, the easier the climb. If you need to finish something in one month, know what needs to be done every week and then what this means every day (Eccl. 3:1)

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For instance, to take the above example, if you decided to lose 12 kg in 6 months, make sure you lose at least 2 kg every month, it will be easier. Another example, instead of reading a book of 180 pages in 3 days just before an exam, read 6 pages every day for one month. This will be much easier! If you have more than one goal, then write them all on a piece of paper so you will know exactly what you must do every day.

You will never change your life until you improve what you do every day.

The secret of your success is found in your daily routine.

What do you eat? How much do you exercise? How much time do you spend with your family? With studying your Bible? With praying? With making disciples? What are your priorities?

5. Tell your goal to everybody and if possible, take partners with you

Once you have made yourself accountable to others (or a specific group of people) some will be glad to pray, encourage and help you during the whole process. The primary reason for this kind of public accountability is that once you have reached your goals, people will praise you and you will feel great about yourself. If on the contrary you are about to give up, then the very thought that you may have to explain your failure to everyone will actually motivate you to keep on!

Obviously the most effective strategy to reach your goals is to find yourself a partner who shares the same goals as your so that you can do it together. There is no greater encouragement and easier accountability than this!
(For instance: not being late, getting up early, eating or not eating certain foods, cleaning your room, pray and read Bible for X minutes, do certain tasks, not being angry, communicate in this precise way, etc..)

Of one the "easiest" and most successful ways to change your character is to choose only one precise negative aspect of your character and work every day on it over a period of 40 days.

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6 - HAVE THE CORRECT PERSPECTIVE ON MONEY

Sixteen of the thirty-eight parables of Jesus talk about money and one out of ten verses in the New Testament deals with that subject. There are twice as many verses on money than all the verses on faith and prayer combined. And yet most Christians do not understand how to view money correctly:

Some claim that we should be rich and have a lavish lifestyle as a proof that God wants to bless us financially. So, they strive to have big houses, expensive cars and live way above the average of most people around them.
Others, on the contrary, take examples like Mother Theresa and teach that God wants us to never get rich because Jesus lived a very simple life.
The truth is that BOTH are wrong!

For us our model regarding how to deal with money is Jesus. We see in his example a paradox that many people have not understood: On one hand, He had huge financial resources through which he could take care of his disciples and even feed multitudes of people. Every day all kinds of miracles were happening; they had a purse to meet the needs of at least a dozen people, and if Judah could often steal from it, it implies that it was always full! At the same time money never controlled Jesus. He did not live in a palace and the only thing He left behind Him was a coat. He lived a simple lifestyle; He helped the poor and He never had to worry about any financial needs.

To live like Jesus means that we should expect God to generously bless our finances, and at the same time we should have as simple life and help those who are poor.

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Again, read the New Testament and you will see this ongoing paradox: there are numerous promises that God wants us to have financial abundance, so that we can always be generous in all kinds of good works (2 Corinthians 9:11), and yet many warnings to never love money and be content with a simple lifestyle (1 Timothy 6:8-9)

In regard to money the Christian life is a huge paradox:

you should have so much money that you are <u>never poor</u>

and yet

you should sacrifice so much money that you are <u>never rich</u>!

Try to imagine a millionaire who has a lifestyle which is a little bit above the average of most people around him and you would never know how rich he is until you see how much money he gives to help people! This would be a rare example and yet this is how Jesus lived!

The apostles, to whom huge sums of money were laid at their feet, lived like this**. <u>They had everything and yet they lived like they had nothing!</u>** They described themselves as being **"poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything"** (2 Corinthians 6:10). If needed, they could easily lose all they had, (and at times they did!) because they had the whole world at their feet!

This is why those apostles could call us to be content both in richness and in poverty because money is never an end but only a means. (Philippians 4:11-13) Unlike some religious ministers today who have many expensive houses, many cars and even personal jets, the apostles had every possible resource available and yet they taught us to be content with the bare necessities of life which is food and clothing! (1 Timothy 6:8). They did not care about having a lot of material blessings and this is why they were completely free from financial worries. In other words, they were never controlled by money, but they controlled how much money they wanted to have! What a radical and inspiring example!

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To be like Jesus:

We should always have

Tons of resources

and yet have a

Simple lifestyle

that is totally dependent on God
and
always generous towards the needy

To have this paradoxical lifestyle, you need to change 3 things in your perspective:

1. Saving souls should be the top priority of your life!

If saving the lost is the passion of your life, you will never be tempted to amass a lot of money for yourself! God has promised you that the more money and time you will give for His kingdom, the more He will provide you with huge financial resources! (Matthew 6:33). Do not ever lose this perspective! There have been many servants of God who started with zeal, and as God gave them more and more money to be used for evangelism, they started to take more and more money for themselves, and eventually they fell in the trap of a secure and comfortable life! They abandoned the risky and extraordinary life of being totally dependent on God! Look at the apostles who said of themselves that they were poor, yet they made many rich; they had nothing, and yet they possessed everything! (2 Corinthians 6:10)

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2. Be disciplined and very shrewd in how you deal with money!

Some Christians think that because God is so generous with us that we can be irresponsible and careless in how we manage money. This is a very serious mistake! If you do not work hard, if you do not regularly save money, if you do not plan ahead with a wise budget but on the contrary make unwise and impulsive decisions, and if you do not surround yourself with careful financial advisors then do not expect God to bless you! The parable of the talents is about being wise stewards of what God entrusts us. If you are not responsible in small things, God will not give you more, but if you are trustworthy, He will greatly increase your resources. The Old Testament and particularly the book of Proverbs has many wise principles regarding money, and this may explain why many Jews have always been some of the wealthiest people on earth!

3. Put your faith in God, not in money!

There are 2 pitfalls that you should avoid:

1. Be free from a spirit of greed!

If you start to prefer what money can offer over what the kingdom of God provides, then repent immediately! If you worry more about your future than winning souls, repent! If you let money determine all the important decisions of your life, then repent! Your love for money will bring you all kinds of problems, so stop while it is not too late! (1 Timothy 6:10)

Some believers see God as an investment fund or a vending machine. They give money to the church so that God will reward them with more. This is a religious cover-up for greed! God is not obliged to give you money according to your own terms and timing. God may give you a lot because your motivations are pure, but He may give you little because you are selfish and greedy. Never give money to God in order to become rich! Give because you love His Kingdom, and you love people. Every other motivation is greed, and it will send you to hell!

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If you want to know whether you love God more than money there is an easy test to make:

How would you feel if God asked you to give it all?

2. Be free from a spirit of poverty!

Satan wants you to believe that you will never have any success, and you will always remain poor. Poverty in the Bible is always described as a curse, and it is an evil spirit that keeps millions of people in doubt and oppression. If you follow the first 2 principles (kingdom of God first + wise management of your money), then you will never have to worry about anything! God will immensely bless you. His resources are beyond your imagination; His power is without any limits!

Below are a few financial promises that you should proclaim over your life every day! What you say to yourself will determine the way you believe and feel, and eventually it will affect your daily behavior.

While you read out loud all **the promises** below, believe that they speak personally to you:

1) I am the head and not the tail, I will always be above and never under! (Deuteronomy 28:13)

2) I have been redeemed from the curse of poverty (Galatians 3:13-14)

3) I will lend and never borrow (Deuteronomy 28:12)

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4) The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not lack anything. (Psalm 23:1)

5) God takes pleasure in my prosperity (Psalms 35:27)

6) I will increase more and more, and so will my children (Psalm 115:14)

7) The blessing of God makes me rich, and He will add no troubles to it. (Proverbs 10:22)

8) Because I have sown generously, I will reap generously. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

9) God's blessings will *overtake me*. I will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country, blessed when I come in and blessed when I go out. (Deuteronomy 28:2-3, 6)

10) God will meet all my needs according to his glorious richness (Philippians 4:19)

11) I will *always* have *abundance* for every good work in every situation. (2 Corinthians 9:8)

12) God will open the floodgates of heaven and send me so many blessings that there will be no room to store them, and nothing will destroy them (Malachi 3:10)

13) The Lord will command a blessing on me and my storehouse and on everything on which I set my hand (Deuteronomy 28:8)

14) God will give me the power to get wealth, and I will become a blessing to others (Deuteronomy 8:18; Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Proverbs 11:24, 25)

15) I will leave an inheritance for my children and grandchildren because God will prosper me (Proverbs 13:22, Psalm 112:1-3)

16) I will be like a tree planted by streams of water, always having fruits in its season, whatever I do will prosper (Psalms 1:3)

4. Financial principles to bless you and protect you

- Give generously to your church. You may want to give 10% or any percentage you freely choose. For rich people 10% is not a whole lot while for poor people it is. What is important is that you stick to your commitment as it will teach you discipline and faithfulness. In any case, always do it with faith, with joy and never with a heavy heart. Never give out of constraint: God

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does not need your money; He is just testing how much you love him. The promise is that if you give generously, God will always reward you far beyond your imagination.

- Help the poor who genuinely cannot help themselves, like orphans, poor children, elderly people, widows or handicapped, particularly those who are not guilty for the financial problems that came upon them.

- Help the poor with strategies so that they can slowly help themselves and eventually come out of poverty. ("Do not give a man a fish but teach him how to fish"). If not, you create dependency toward them and harm them on the long run. Generally speaking, those who are able to work should never be given anything for free.

- Never help the poor who have no have no humility to listen to you. You may give the first time, but if they come to you the second time and have no desires to submit to your conditions for improving their life, like going to a rehab center, accepting a small job you offer them, putting their life in order, stop drinking, etc.…you are wasting your time and money! The book of Proverbs makes a clear distinction between helping the real poor and the false poor. The real poor are those who had misfortunes, but they want to get out and are willing to change, however slow the process may be. The false poor are those who are lazy, irresponsible and so prideful that they are not willing to change anything!

- Never ever help Christians who are lazy and do not want to work! This is a command, not a suggestion! No work = No food! (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

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- Do not give money to greedy Christians or pastors who have a lifestyle which is far above the average of most people around them. Just like you should not give your money to lazy Christians because you are not helping them to repent, do not give your money to ministers so that they can have a self-centered and greedy lifestyle. If all Christians stopped giving money to such people, they would quickly become poor and maybe repent!

- Do not take loans (Romans 13:8, Proverbs 22:7, Psalms 37:21). There may be a few very rare exceptions like having a clear plan of action and borrowing money to buy a house, starting a small business or studies leading to a good diploma, but these are only exceptions. Make sure that if you do so, you have a clear plan and enough variants of work so that you can pay back within the time you have planned. Never take the risk to borrow money so that if you cannot repay you may lose a lot (like losing your flat, your car, etc.…) In all cases always ask advice from wise people before you do this because once you have started this process you will always be a slave to the one who lent you money.

- Never ever put yourself in a situation that you have to mortgage or sell your flat. If you end up being on the street or having to rent a place, your life will go worse and worse.

- Never borrow small amount of money here and there. If you tend to often do this, you are an irresponsible person. If you had discipline and goals for your life, if you regularly saved money so as to prevent difficult times, or if you simply used your brain before you acted, you would never have to ask any money from anyone!

- If you borrowed any amount of money, you should always have the respect to tell when you are going to pay back. If you cannot keep your promise, apologize and ask the person when she wants you to pay back.

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- Never lend money with the hope that people will pay you back. In other word, always lend your money like a gift. If people give 100% back: great; if they only give 50% back: great; if they give nothing back, great! This means that you should only give what you are ready to never see again. If you do this, you will have no regrets; you will sleep fine and will have no enemies!

- Never ever lend your money to people who are lazy, irresponsible, who have not saved money, and have no budget (If you are not sure about them, ask questions!) If you do this, you are not helping them! As long as those irresponsible people will find naïve people who will help them escaping all the bad situations that they have created, they will never learn anything and constantly repeat the same cycle of tragedies and begging for help. The very best you can do for them is helping them to suffer the painful consequences of their actions.

- Regularly save money for emergencies and for financial investments (but never put your money into anything that will bring returns for more than 8-10%, as anything above is either risky or suspicious)

- Always convert your savings into something safe like gold, land, real estate, a good car or a stable currency, etc.…

- More than anything else, always plant financial seeds to help any good project for the kingdom of God. This is always the best investment you can always do. If your heart is to sincerely see God's kingdom prosper, and not using God for your own greed, then you can be sure that God will always reward you.

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5. How and to whom should you give your money?

Prioritize your giving:

- Your local church should be your first priority so that their leaders can work full time and your church can grow in numbers and quality.
- Your giving should be planned and systematic, purposed in the heart, rather than emotional or impulsive. This way your church can operate smoothly, ensuring consistent budget planning.
- Do not give your money to your church if their leaders have a lifestyle that is way above the average of most members (unless they receive money from another source than the church).
- If your church is not improving after a long time and your leaders show no humility to listen and change, stop giving. This will quickly force them to make changes!
- In that case, invest in trustworthy and productive ministries (a farmer does not sow seeds in a bad soil!)

Before giving to any ministry outside your church, ask the following questions:

- How many people are converted through this ministry?
- How many people are being established and strengthened in the faith through its outreaches?
- Is multiplication taking place? Are ministers being produced and churches being established?
- Is good being accomplished in the world and in the Body of Christ through this ministry?
- Is its message one of truth?
- Is the ministry a good steward of its finances? Does he have papers to prove it?
- Are the methods used in ministry and in fundraising ethical and wholesome?
- Is the ministry financially accountable?
- Is the ministry legally recognized by the government?

If the ministry is outside the western world, the above criteria can be hard to prove or even fake, so look for the following as well:

- Is the ministry having a good reputation from reputable churches around?
- Can they give letters of recommendation from them?
- Are they known by other pastors? Do they attend pastors meetings?
- Can they give names of westerners who have visited them?
- What is your spiritual intuition telling you?

Do not give your money to ministries that:

- Do not follow the above conditions.
- Exert pressure, encourage impulse giving, or induce guilt.
- Use hype, emotionalism, or outlandish promises.
- That do not promote local churches and do not work closely with them.
- Spend more time fundraising than actual ministry work.

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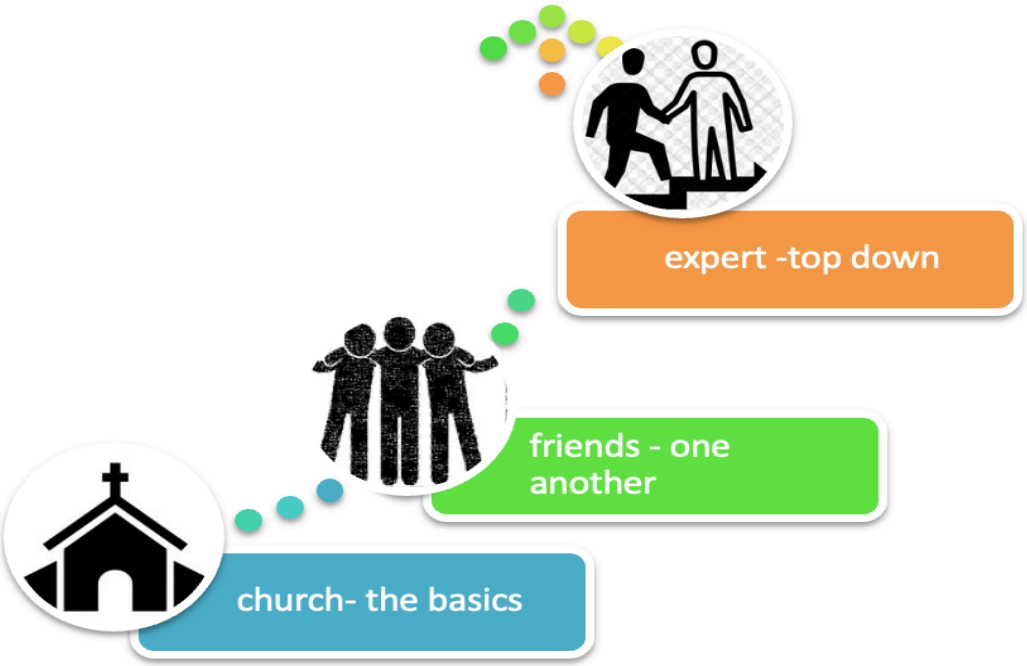
7 - THE THREE LEVELS OF MATURITY



The Christian life has 3 levels of training. Each level helps you to become more mature in your relationship with God and with others. They are the following:

1) Be active in your church = The basic training

2) Build life-changing friendships with a few Christians = The horizontal training

3) Be trained by an expert and train like an expert= The vertical training

The first level is very basic but absolutely essential. It is when you attend regularly all the meetings of your church and serve others with whatever gifts you have. At this level you gain some maturity, but it does not necessarily mean that your character will change a lot. The sad reality is that many believers can be active in their church for years and yet never change the way they see themselves and how they treat others. This lack of maturity in their character is due to the fact that they do not have deep relationship of mutual accountability.

This is where the second level is needed. It is a friendship that you voluntarily choose and therefore it is not imposed on you. At this level you learn to be open with your friends so that they can tell you honestly what they see in your life, and you can do the same with them. It is only when you have reached this level of mutual accountability and praying for one another that you start to really change. This is the "one another" model of the New Testament and this is the way it should be for all Christian.

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It can be qualified as a “horizontal training” because you do not have an authority above you who trains you, but you are in mutually chosen relationships where you are all equal.

The third level is the ultimate form of training: it is when someone who is very experienced in one area or gift chooses you, like Paul did with Timothy or Jesus with his disciples, and he trains you so that you are able to grow to your maximal potential. After this you reproduce the same pattern of training by choosing your own people and training them. This training can last for years and involve all aspects of your life, or it can be limited to a few months to get some basic foundation in some gifts or responsibilities.

It is not for everyone as it is a top-down type of relationship, like a coach who chooses and trains his athletes. This is why it can be defined as a “vertical training”.

Each level is a steppingstone to the next level. Once you have learnt the basics of attending your church and serving as much as you can, then you will be ready to enter into some life-changing relationships. Eventually, as you have gained enough maturity and a good reputation through those relationships, you will be ready to be taken for further training by someone who is an expert in his area, and later on you may train others yourself.

1. THE BASIC TRAINING = Be active in your church

The purpose of all eternity and God’s grandiose plan throughout history has always been the Church. Jesus loved His church, and He gave his life for her. In fact, he keeps on loving His church today even if she is not perfect (Ephesians 5:25) You too need to have the same priority: Love your church and give your life to her! Love their people even if they do all kinds of wrong things. What you want your church to become, do it yourself. Become like Jesus and stop being a self-centered person who naively believes that the Church was supposed to be perfect and fulfill all your expectations. As long as there will be people on earth, you will always be disappointed, even in the church. So, learn as soon as possible that there is more joy in giving than in receiving.

In other words, come to ALL the meetings of the church and be actively involved! If possible, you should try to arrange your work schedule in such a way that you will not work at the same time when the church has gatherings. It is a question of setting the right priorities and having discipline.

To miss or neglect the meetings of the church can lead to a habit that will have disastrous consequences. (Hebrews 10:24-25, Psalms 122:1) To attend the church is absolutely essential for the following reasons:

- It is the only time and place where you can **experience the presence of God** with other believers. When many people worship God together, there can be something special, supernatural and unreal that you cannot ever experience when you are alone. No recorded videos nor online translation of any worship will ever give you the same feelings and experience.

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- This is the only place where you can learn to **use your spiritual gifts** to help others. This is why the more you attend all the Church meetings, the stronger you will become.

- The church is the only place where you can **encourage,** help and love other believers. If I meet them not often, it is very difficult to build any kind of strong relationship.

If you treat the church like something that makes you feel good so you can better escape your reality, than you are not different than someone who seeks a drug!

The church should rather be like an army that disciplines you or like an hospital that heals you

- It is the only place where I can **change my character**. If I do not allow anyone to come into my life, then it is impossible to really change.

- Here I can find a **new strength** when I want to leave everything and give up. If I stop attending the church, there is a real danger that I can eventually leave God.

3 things you should always do during the church gathering

1 - Worship with all your emotions!

In the Old Testament, worship was a lively and emotional experience where people sang and danced! (This is why the same happens today among some Orthodox Jews). This is the biblical standard. If you can be excited for sports or anything you really love, then you certainly can praise God with all your feelings and even your body! Some of us may argue that it is not natural for them to express openly their emotions. The fact that it is not natural does not mean that it is not right, and this is why the Bible commands us to "to love God with all our hearts".

We must learn to worship God with all our emotions until it becomes natural to us. Furthermore, worship is a bold expression of faith: when you sincerely praise God you are making a declaration of faith that in spite of all your problems and negative feelings, God is in control, and everything will be OK.

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2 – Come to receive!

Come to church with the expectation that God will speak to you, that He will touch you and that great things will happen, no matter what happens around you! Take notes of the sermon so that later you can meditate about what you wrote. Expect God to speak to you through sermons, through prophecies, through prayers and any kind of spiritual experience.

3 – Come to give!

Be interested in people around you, particularly newcomers. Do not stay silently on your chair and wait until others come to you! Every Sunday there are people who need your ears, encouragements and prayers! If you come with the attitude to encourage and positively influence someone, it will certainly happen! This is why when you sing, watch and sing with an attitude to encourage others. If possible, talk with the church leaders to see what you can do to serve others with your spiritual gifts.

What a great worship service looks like:

- ✓ Most people come to the service with an attitude of anticipation and faith, and they come as well with an attitude to encourage or help someone.
- ✓ Most people sing from all their hearts to God and to each other, and the musicians really help them to do so.
- ✓ Supernatural manifestations are regularly happening, whether it is people being healed, delivered, baptized in the Spirit, or receiving prophetic words, and the presence of God is always tangible.
- ✓ The preaching is always inspiring, as it presents the Bible clearly, relevant, and practical.
- ✓ Collection is a time when people are built up.

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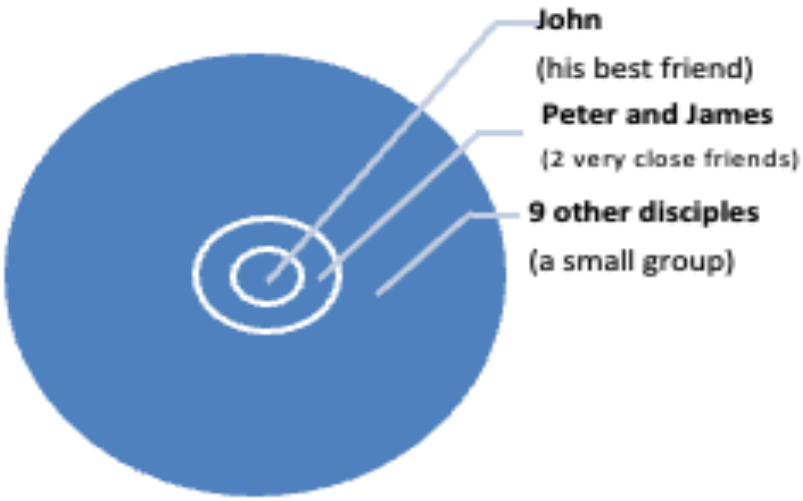
2. THE HORIZONTAL TRAINING = Build life-changing friendships with a few Christians

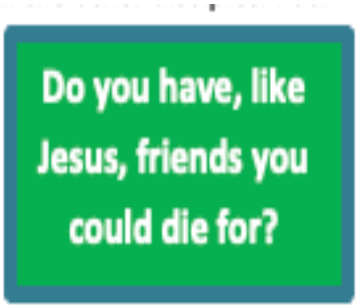
It is important to be involved in different activities of the church, but at the same time it is equally important that you build some very close friendships with a few Christians. If you go regularly to church but do not have some very close Christian friends who will positively influence your life, then what is the point of the Church?

In other words, imitate the example of Jesus: He not only had huge crowds of people around him, but he also had a small group of friends. This group was made of his best friend, 2 very close friends and 9 others.



Jesus' 3 concentric circles show you how you should organize your priorities in live:

1. Have a best friend



Jesus and John had a very special friendship, one that was deeper than with all the other disciples. Paul shared the same kind of special relationship with Timothy, which is why he said there was no one else like him who understood and loved him so deeply. They went through everything together and their relationship was a reflection of the friendship that David had with Jonathan.

To have a best friend is one of the greatest blessings in life, particularly when it is with someone of the same sex. Now, such deep friendships should not stop once we get married. In fact, outside friendships bring a healthy balance to marriage. Men were created to have deep and special friendships with other men, just like women need this with other women.

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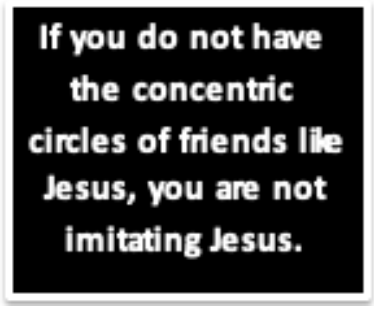
2. Have a few very close Christian friends

Jesus not only had a very close relationship with John, but with Peter and James. He took those 3 disciples with Him in the most glorious times of His life, for instance on the mount of Transfiguration. He allowed them as well to be with Him in the most difficult times of His life as in the garden of Gethsemane. During this difficult time, He was extremely open and humble with his inner feelings when they saw how much He struggled in having to go to the cross.
(Matthew 26:36-46)



Jesus' relationships show you how you should be with your own friends: Be open, sincere and transparent with them. Share not only your greatest victories, but your struggles as well. If the Son of God was real with His feelings and fears, as we see Him doing in Gethsemane, should you not imitate His example?

If you want to be like Jesus, your friendship with 2-3 friends should include the following characteristics:

- You should be totally open with your friends about your deepest struggles and sins as well as your dreams and plans
- You should be able to easily ask advice from them
- You should not be afraid to take any criticism from them
- You should be able to fully count on them through any kind of problems
- You should be willing to sacrifice everything you have for their sake
- You should be able to deeply and completely trust them

3. Have a small group

Finally, Jesus had a group of 9 other men besides his special relationship with the three. A few women were even part of that group. Together with this group they went through all kinds of adventures. They went fishing, they ate around a fire, they healed and fed multitudes of people and of course they went through all kinds of difficult challenges together. There is a dynamic in having such a small group of friends that is simply irreplaceable in life. You should be part of such a small group in your church, even if it consists of only a dozen people.

Obviously, it is possible and even wonderful if your own family partially provides for some of those relationships (like having a fantastic friendship with your wife and with your grown-up children). But

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there is a dynamic in having outside friends that is unique and that your own family will never be able to give you.
Often people argue that such friendships are impossible to have, that they fall on us by chance. The truth is that we intentionally choose all the relationships we want to have in life, just like we chose our marriage partner. Yes, it takes caution, wisdom, and much time to filter, and yes, we will make mistakes, but at the end we have what we want to have, and we should not complain or blame anyone but ourselves!

Let's summarize what it means to be like Jesus in our relationships: we should have at least one best friend, 2-3 very good friends, and a few other distant friends.

If we do not have this pattern, then we do not love like Jesus, and this reveals deficiencies about our character. Maybe it shows that we are insensitive so that people do not want to be around us or perhaps we are so prideful that we can never keep any relationship for long. Most likely, it may be that we simply do not care about having such relationships because we have been hurt or do not see the value in having them. The truth is that God wants you to have them because you were created for them. Deep friendships are one of the most fantastic blessings of life!

3. THE VERTICAL TRAINING = Be trained by an expert and train like an expert

A vertical training for 3 categories of people

This kind of training is called "vertical" because unlike the horizontal type of training that you get through deep friendships where you are all equals and grow at your own pace, here you have a trainer who is "above" you. Obviously, it does not mean that he trains you against your will or that you know

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nothing, and he knows it all. It is vertical because he can bring you to a higher level that would be impossible on your own.

In other words, it implies a certain submission and willingness to learn and obey. This discipleship will be applied to 3 categories of Christians: for those who work full-time for the church, for those who need some basic training for a limited responsibility, and for those who just became Christian.

1. For those who work full-time for the Kingdom

- This is only for ministries like evangelists, pastors, prophets, teachers, deacons, worship leader or anyone who usually has a full-time responsibility in the church. This is the model we have in Jesus with his disciples or Paul with Timothy.

- The trainer will choose and trains those with similar gifts and callings. This is what Paul did with Timothy. For instance, a more mature evangelist will take another younger and less experienced evangelist, and he will train him. A prophet will do the same with another prophet, a pastor with another pastor, etc...

- This training will be for many years as both of them work together in the same ministry with the same goals.

- Obviously, the trainer should be gifted and experienced in his area and have a good reputation in his character since he will influence the characters of those he trains. His life and marriage will have to be blameless. In other words, this is not for just any Christian who wants to train others, it is for the spiritual experts, those who usually work full-time for the church. Nothing is more harmful to a church than having a trainer whose reputation is not solidly established, because he could badly influence many people.

- The trainee will have to have a good reputation and potential as well. This is what Timothy had, and this is why Paul took him.

- The trainee will have to understand and accept the conditions of the trainer as it might involve some painful sacrifices and commitment. For instance, Paul wanted to circumcise Timothy if he was going to follow him, and he was willing to accept this. When a church tries to impose a pyramidal system of

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authority where the trainers and the trainees cannot mutually and freely choose each other, it creates all kinds of abuses of authority.

- This training encompasses absolutely all areas of your life, whether it is being equipped in your particular gifts or improving every aspect of your character because the whole person is being equipped for a responsibility that will influence many people.

- This kind of training involves a lot of time and commitment, and this is why it can mostly be done for those who work full time for the church.

- It is not only a deep friendship, but since it has a "vertical" dimension of training it is very much like a father son type of relationship.

- Since both of them work for the church, they will do everything together and this way all the training is hands-on and therefore very effective. Unlike most of the theoretical and almost useless forms of training that prevails in most churches today, where you go to a Bible school, a seminary or a special workshop, this form of training is practical and life changing because you learn as you go. You learn as you imitate. You learn as you obey. You learn as you love and respect your trainer.

2. For those who need training for a specific responsibility

- This is for anyone who does not work full time for the church but needs some basic training in a specific area of gifting.

- The person who wants the training needs to have some minimal maturity and a good reputation in both his character and in his marriage (if married).

- Usually, it will last for a few weeks to a few months.

- It is for someone who has some responsibility in the church (for instance, someone leading a small group of believers during the week, teaching the children on Sunday, a ministry to reach out to the poor, being an usher, etc.…)

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- It can be for someone who wants to grow in a potential gift and needs a basic foundation (for instance someone who wants to know how to pray effectively for the sick is being helped by someone who has a proven gift of healing, and the same happens for someone who wants to prophesy, someone who wants to teach, etc.…)

- This training is limited to certain skills and basics, it does not touch much of the character like the complete training of those who work full-time.

- The authority of the trainers is limited within time, within a certain area and within what the leaders of the church have decided.

3. For those who just became Christian

- This is for anyone who has been brought to the Lord.

- The training will cover the basic foundation of the Christian life and therefore addresses some issues of the character (how to pray, how to read the Bible, how to evangelize, how to build good relationships, how to have faith, discipline, forgiveness, etc.…)

- It is best done by the person who has brought him or her to the Lord but having another more mature Christian alongside is suitable. The best dynamic is when both the spiritual father/mother and the spiritual grandfather/grandmother are present (In other words a grandfather helps his spiritual son to helps his grandson!)

- It is only between the same sexes as it avoids some sexual temptations. Plus, the dynamic is much deeper and richer when a man trains another man or a woman another woman. The exception is a couple with another couple.

- It lasts a few months to usually one year maximum. It is on a regular, at least weekly basis, and it involves as much time as both sides are willing to give. It finishes when the spiritual child has enough basics so that he can start to bring and teach unbelievers himself.

- Because this training is so essential to the health and the numerical growth of any church, it will be addressed more in depth in the following chapter “make disciples who make disciples.”

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Summary of what those 3 levels of maturity mean for a local church:

A wise church will allow the following 3 levels of maturity to coexist:

1) **The first group, by far the largest, is made up of Christians who are involved in all kinds of activities of the church.** Some will come only to the worship services, while others will want to serve more actively with their gifts. Some may even attend small groups. For various reasons those people will not want to make the commitment of deeper relationships, and they should not be pressured into them (some people need time to trust others, while other people have no time or desire for this).

2) **The second group, smaller, is made of Christians who willingly choose to be involved in relationships of mutual accountability with other Christians**. Usually, small groups will have this dynamic, but they might have different levels of depth, depending on what they want to focus on (some people may want to specifically improve their marriage, others some issues of their lives like health or addictions, etc.…) The more a church has such groups of mutual accountability, the more it allows its members to mature.

3) **The third group, very small, is made up of all the Christians who were successfully involved in the relationships of mutual accountability of the second group, so they can be chosen and trained in some specific area,** whether it is leading a small group, having a specific ministry or working full time for the church.

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8 - MAKE DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

ONLY 2 CATEGORIES OF CHRISTIANS

There are only 2 kinds of Christians in this world:

- **Those who seek God for their own interests**
- **Those who seek God for HIS interests**

The first category is made of immature Christians.

They are what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 “small children”. They are fundamentally self-centered and constantly seek their personal interests. Consider a small child: does he ever think how he can help and serve his parents or people around him? Of course not! The whole world must evolve around his desires and his whims!

Unfortunately, many Christians live like this. They see God like a vending machine that is supposed to meet all their physical and psychological needs (“God give me a partner, give me a child, give me a house, give me a job, give me a prophetic revelation, give me this and that, solve my problems, help me, bless me, protect me, fill me with your peace, your joy, etc.….). All their prayers and church activities are primarily motivated for what is good for them and their immediate family. Even when they give money to the church it is always with the idea that their sacrifice will come back to reward them.

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The second category is made of mature Christians.

They seek God for HIS interest. And God's greatest concern is very simple: He wants to save and transform as many people as possible. So mature people do everything to help all people become mature Christians. In other words, they act like spiritual parents. Paul said to the people he had helped to become Christians that he was their spiritual father and that they should imitate his example. In essence, he told them: "Be like me, stop being small immature children and become mature spiritual parents!" (1 Corinthians 4:14-16).

So, in which category are you? The answer is very simple: if you do NOT give birth to spiritual children and do not care for them, then you are an immature Christian and you need to change the way you see God and yourself.

The first mission that God gave to the human race was: "Be fruitful and multiply (have children!); fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 28). The first mission that Jesus gave to his church was: "Go into the whole world, make disciples who will make disciples, and I will be with you" (Matthew 28:18-20). In essence God's purpose, whether it is in the physical or the spiritual realm is the same: He wants us to have children who will multiply and rule the world with authority.

In other words, He wants us to become spiritual fathers and mothers who make disciples, and not self-centered immature children who are only concerned about our needs!

This is what is written in Matthew 28:19-20

Every Christian is at one of the following levels:

1) **You are a spiritual child**, as you have not brought an unbeliever to Jesus by teaching and baptizing him.

2) **You are a spiritual father/mother**, not only because you have taught and baptized unbelievers, but because you have been involved in taking care of their spiritual growth.

3) **You are a spiritual grandfather/grandmother**, because you have helped your own spiritual children to become spiritual parents when they started to have their own spiritual children.
On which level are you? How many spiritual children and grandchildren do you have?

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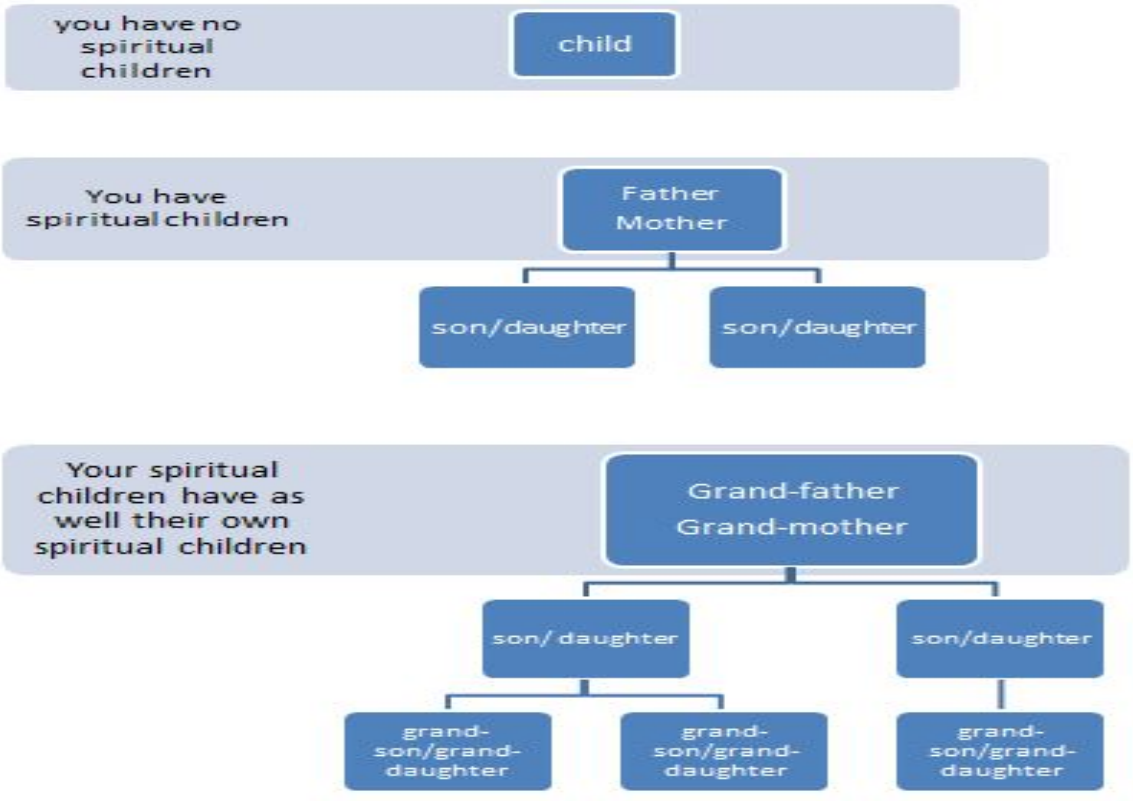
God wants us all to believe and make every effort to have spiritual grandchildren. This is the main strategy of our Creator. This is what Jesus did. He concentrated all His time and strength on a few disciples, and this had amazing results.



Immature Christians	Mature Christians
Children	Parents
Seek God for themselves	Seek God for others
Have no spiritual children	Have spiritual children
Do not teach them to obey	Teach them to obey
No multiplication	Multiplication
No authority	Great authority

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THE MISSION OF YOUR LIFE :
Matthew 28: 18-20

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore

1- **GO** and …

2- **MAKE DISCIPLES** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and …

3- **TEACH THEM TO OBEY** everything I have commanded you. And …

Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew28: 18-20)

The great commission is made of 1 promise and 3 fundamental priorities:

THE PROMISE of POWER

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me…surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Every time throughout the Bible when God promised to His people that He "would be with them", it not only implied a supernatural protection, but a miraculous power that would help them defeat all their enemies. When Jesus said that ALL authority in the universe had been given to Him and now, He is always with us, He is saying that we have all the supernatural power needed to be victorious and defeat all our enemies.

The same promise is given in Mark 16:15-19. If we are willing to go and preach the good news, then God will not only supernaturally protect us, but He will perform all kinds of miracles through us, whether it is healing people or casting demons from them.

In regard to miracles, there are only 3 kinds of Christians:

1. Those who try to evangelize with all kinds of non-miraculous methods (fliers, conferences on how to improve your family, your finances, etc.… fun activities, concerts, humanitarian

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help, etc.…) The results? Usually few results and much discouragement, particularly in places where the people are not really open to the Gospel.

2. Those who go to every possible conference to see the supernatural in action, but they almost never go out to influence non-Christians. The results? Usually, they have no power and no gifts.

3. Those who actively evangelize AND at the same time exercise the supernatural authority that God has given them. The results? They usually see many miracles of all kinds. They are following the model of Acts 4:29-30 = they pray for the boldness to evangelize AND for miracles! They do not pray for courage OR for wonders, but for BOTH! Usually those who strongly want to bring unbelievers to Jesus end up being empowered in a supernatural way. This is a universal rule that can be observed everywhere and in every century.

In other words, if you are seriously wanting to make disciples, then believe the amazing promise that God wants to accompany you with His supernatural authority. It will make your mission much easier and…much more interesting!

1. GO

The first step in making disciples is often the most difficult: Go! You have to get out from your comfort zone and reach out to people. Staying and waiting until they come to us will rarely produce results.

Here are some possible evangelistic strategies:

- Call old or new friends and build a relationship so that you can eventually lead them to Christ. If they show you that they are not interested, do not completely cut them off, but do not invest much time either. Maybe one day they will be open.

- Use a gift in which you have good results like working with children, orphans, elderly, etc.… or use your talent in music, psychology, internet, business or sports to attract people and tell them about Jesus.

- Use social or humanitarian help to attract people who have problems.

- Go on the street and invite people to a church event or simply try to find someone who is open to change his life. To invite total strangers may be challenging, but God might have prepared the right person just for you. Maybe that person has gone through such problems that he is ready to listen. Always pray and be ready for that person. The bottom line is that you need to develop a lifestyle where you are always ready to talk to people about your faith, whether you go shopping or wait on a bus.

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- Never argue with people, never tell them how wrong they are but instead always give a testimony of what God has done in your life.

Your testimony should include the following 3 points:

1) My life before Christ
2) How I came to Christ, and
3) My life since coming to Christ

Or differently put:

1) My problem,
2) How God changed my problem,
3) My victory since then (e.g., freedom from alcoholism, overcame a bad temper, found a way to forgive someone, etc.)

The reason why a testimony is so powerful is that most people are usually interested to discover how a "bad" person became better. Never miss an opportunity to briefly present them the Gospel so they will know how much God loves them. They may not respond right away, but at least you planted a seed. Always leave them a card with information so that they can contact you later on. If they are open, always take their phone numbers. Never assume that just because they liked you, they will call you. Most people are busy with their own lives, and they will forget you if you don't call them yourself.

- Keep on a piece of paper a list of all the people that could be open and pray regularly for each one of them.

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- Another effective and biblical strategy is to use and develop supernatural gifts. As long as there will be people who are sick, under demonic powers or confused about their future, then healings, deliverances, prophetic revelations or interpretations of dreams will always open doors and make your message of the good news a really good news! So, seek to have those gifts and use them on the streets, and you will be amazed how God will use you!

- Whatever you do, pray every day this prayer: "God, help me today to find just ONE open person who will be willing to become a disciple of Jesus!" If you sincerely and seriously set your mind to find this one person, you eventually will find that person!

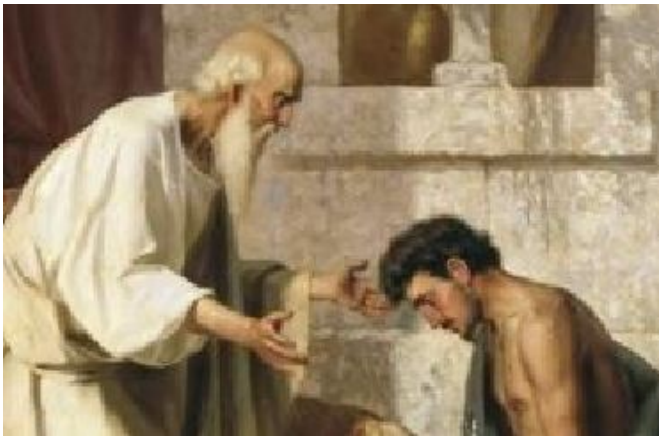
So whatever methods you try, always keep in mind that your ultimate goal in evangelism is to find a person who is willing to become a disciple of Christ. Your goal is not just to have a good conversation or a touching prayer. This may be a great start, but it is not the end. Your goal is to take someone by the hand and accompany that person until he has made the firm decision to die to his old life and he is willing to follow Jesus at any cost.

In other words, you want to lead the person into a process that starts with faith and ends up with water baptism and even more. Many churches naively think that an emotional decision is enough for people to become Christians, but in most cases this approach has brought no lasting results. What works is making solid and lasting disciples who clearly understand why they want to follow Jesus and who receive a solid training before and after their baptism.

So, when you meet someone who is interested in the Gospel, what are you looking for in that person? It is very simple. The ONE quality that you are looking for is humility. That person may have tons of psychological and social problems, but they do not matter if he is humble.

So, what are the **characteristics of a humble person?**

- He is teachable, in other words he is not arguing. The Bible says that we should look for "a man of peace" (Luke 10:6), and not someone who has a contentious attitude. There is a difference between someone who has serious questions and even disagreements and someone who knows it all and wants to teach you.



- He must be worthy (Matthew 10:11). The person must be worthy of your time and your efforts. If you sacrifice yourself for that person but over time you feel that the person is only using you and has no thankfulness, you are wasting your time and money. In other words, you are throwing your pearls to pigs (Matthew 7:6)

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- He responds positively to your challenges. When Peter said, “You guys have a serious problem”, they reacted with an attitude “What should we do?” (Acts 2:37). If you confront someone about his sins and he feels he has all the answers and everything he has ever done in his life is fine, then you do not have an open person!

- He is willing to do what you tell him. This is the ultimate test because someone may agree with you, but if he still ends up doing things his own way, then you do not have an open person. Humility means obedience. An open person has a basic attitude of trying his best to do what you tell him. Now obviously you cannot expect a perfect obedience from the very first day you meet someone, but you want to see regular progress, even if it is slow. If he constantly finds excuses why he has not done what you asked him, or continually resists everything you tell him, you are wasting your time, that person is not humble.

If you do not want to find a humble person who has the above characteristics, you are simply wasting your time! Now, you do not necessarily have to cut off all ties with that person but be wise how you use your time. Maybe they will experience some events later in their life and then they will listen. Just accept that there is a time for everything, and we cannot force people to change according to our timetable.

2. MAKE DISCIPLES

Once someone is humble enough to want to become a Christian, you need to start the process of discipleship which includes the following principles:

- Meet individually with him and study the Bible and this booklet in order to prepare him for baptism. Finish all your Bible studies with a time of prayer. Meet at least once a week and do this very regularly.

- Find other times when you do something other than studying the Bible, like help him with his needs, have fun or anything that can help you to become good friends.

- Stick to that person and organize all your priorities around him. This person is the number one priority of your life. If your time allows you to have more than one person, then bring all your disciples together so that you are going to have your own study group

- Never rush things but never slow down either. Be regular and consistent. A few rare people may take a few days or weeks, but usually most people take a few months.

- By the way, stick to the same sex. If you are a man only study the Bible with a man.

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Your goal in studying with that person is that step by step the person will be totally convinced of each of the following points:

1. I believe that Jesus is the only way, He is God who became a man to save me
2. I am a lost sinner; I need forgiveness in order to have a living relationship with God
3. I believe that Jesus died on the cross to forgive me of all my sins
4. I understand what my sins are, and I sincerely want to repent from them
5. I understand clearly what price I have to pay to follow Jesus
6. I want to bury my past and start a new life through baptism

3. TEACH THEM TO OBEY

Once a person has been baptized you don't leave that person to himself! It would be like leaving a newborn child to decide for himself how he wants to live! You have a personal responsibility to train your spiritual child to maturity. Yes, the church gatherings will certainly help that person, but he has specific needs that can only be met in a one-on-one relationship.

So, meet every week and spend at least 2 hours studying the Bible, pray and seek to help him grow spiritually and emotionally. Try as well to combine this time by doing other activities like fun, serving others, evangelizing, etc.…If you do this you are establishing a spiritual foundation that will help that

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person for the rest of his life. It is like a child: everything you do in the beginning of his life is extremely important as it will shape his life for many years to come. This period of formation will last a few months, maybe much longer if you are a leader who sees a potential in him and wants to equip him as a leader.

Jesus did NOT just say: "Teach them", but he said: "Teach them to OBEY".

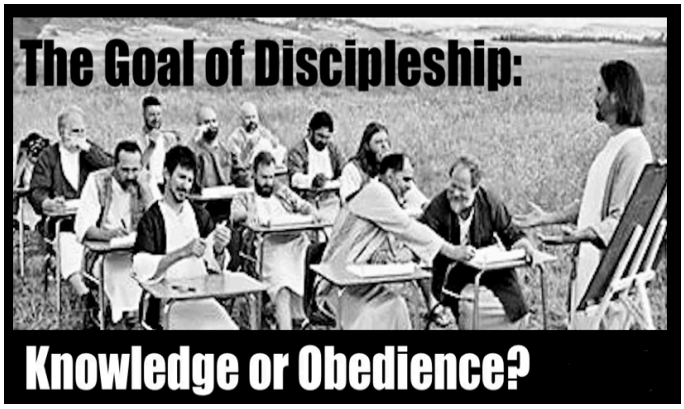
Discipleship is not only about knowledge, but about obedience!

Now what is the main goal of your training with your disciple? Jesus said, "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you".

Now listen very carefully: Jesus did NOT say: "Teach people". He said: "**Teach them to OBEY**". Do you see the difference? When you educate your children, you really don't care how much they know about your expectations. What you want is that they put in practice what you told them! The same should be true with your spiritual children! A lot of churches give a lot of teaching about the Bible, but they do not expect their people to obey. No wonder they have so few results!

Christianity is not about Bible knowledge but obedience. It is not about information, but transformation. So never be afraid to hold your disciples accountable to Jesus.

In other words, be like a trainer, ask them questions and make sure that they are doing well in all the following areas:



- They should attend all the church gatherings
- They should study the Bible and pray every day
- They should always have very good relationships with everyone, so as to solve conflicts effectively
- They should have personal disciplines, like having a budget, good health, a good job, etc.…
- They should evangelize until they have found an open person
- They should help that open person to become a Christian
- They should help that person whom they converted to bring others to Jesus

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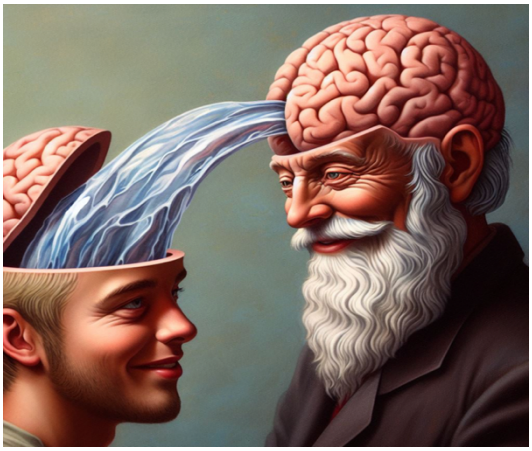
How do you help that person to obey all the above?



1. Study the Bible and this booklet with him.

2. Pray often together, over the phone and when you meet face to face.

3. Serve him, like repairing his car, apartment, work at his garden, etc.…

4. Always encourage him a lot, especially by showing him how God sees him in a positive light. The rule should be 10 encouragements for every 1 criticism.

5. Help him to clearly see the pluses and minuses of his character. You are probably the first person in his life who had the courage to tell him things he never heard and saw about himself before. If you do it with love and respect, it will have a huge impact on his life.

6. Have fun, like go out fishing, hunting, etc.… With men it is often best to do activities that are physical, like a work that is useful, whether it is to build or repair something together.

7. Serve others together with him, like meet someone in a hospital; go pray and help someone who has problems, etc.…

8. Go out evangelizing together.

9. Once you have found someone open, study together, the 3 of you

What if your spiritual child has a difficult time to obey? You always need to keep the following 2 qualities in balance:

1) You must always be patient, gentle, kind and respectful. Never shout or show a lack of respect, regardless of his sins. Keep your words and emotions always under control. If he admits the problem, be gracious and help him step by step. As long as there is progress, even if it is very small, then keep on encouraging him.

2) At the same time, you must be firm and never compromise. If he sins and you say nothing, he will start to believe that it is OK to compromise, that he can be lazy and lukewarm, and over time he will slowly drift away and leave everything behind.

You need to understand that there is a **big difference between a weak person and a rebellious person.** A weak person wants to obey but he has difficulty, so you need to be very patient. You need to often repeat the same things over and over until he slowly changes. A rebellious person is someone who

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basically tells you "I am NOT going to do what you tell me". The difference may not always be immediately visible, but over time, it will always show up. When someone defies your authority, you need to respectfully but firmly confront him, warning him that his sins will have consequences.

The simple and revolutionary strategy of Jesus = A multiplication of disciples!

The final goal of all your training, which marks the end of your time with him is when your spiritual child becomes a spiritual father, then you become a spiritual grandfather! You pass the baton from one generation to the next and to the next. This is what Paul told to Timothy, his spiritual child: "And the things you have heard me say entrust them to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:22). Try to imagine if every Christian in this world had this goal of making disciples who make disciples: we would have an exponential growth that would change the world! (Consider the following diagram below).

If every member of our church was to bring only ONE person to Jesus, then in theory a church that started with 10 members could have 10 240 members after only 10 years! In 20 years, we would have almost 21 million disciples and after 30 years more than 10 billion people!

"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

year	disciples
1	10
2	20
3	40
4	80
5	160
6	320
7	640
8	1280
9	2560
10	5120
11	10240

Of course, not everyone responds, and many abandon the faith, but the more disciples are made the more chances are given for everyone to hear.

This is what happened in the first century: Jesus took a few disciples and within less than 30 years there were so many millions of Christians that all the 60 million people within the Roman Empire had heard about the Gospel! (Col. 1:23 = proclaimed to every creature! The Roman Empire was the "whole world" of Col. 1:6 and Rom. 10:18). Obviously not many became Christians, but all heard as Paul wrote, and the same can happen today.

Not all will become Christians, but we must give the chance to everyone to hear the good news. This is why you must see your own responsibility to make just ONE disciple who will make another disciple. It is part of God's strategy to change our world in ONE generation!

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SUMMARY of the 3 areas of DISCPLESHIP:

Vertical discipleship (pages 200-203)

More experienced and gifted people should train people who have similar gifts like an evangelist with an evangelists, a pastor with a pastor, etc.. It is usually for ministers working full time, but it can be with any "smaller" gifts like a musician with a musician, or someone working with youth, with drug addicts, etc.…

- There is some degree of top-down authority even it includes a deep friendship. (Thus it is "vertical")
- **Who**: It is only for a few trainers, because not all have the maturity to train. (The discipleship movements where young and immature leaders train people under them bring all kinds of abuse and control). It is only for a few trainees because not everyone can be trained. (In fact, only those who have a good reputation and good relationships at the horizontal level should be chosen)
- **Goal**: Improve particular gifts and skills, leadership, and at a deeper level, the characters
- **Examples**: Jesus and disciples, Paul and Timothy, 2 Tim.2:2

Horizontal discipleship (pages 199-200)

Believers should choose to build deep friendships that will bring mutual encouragement and character changes ("Iron sharpening iron"). This can be just with one friend, but preferably with a few others, especially if it happens within small groups or house churches.

- No one is above the other. (Thus it is "horizontal")
- **Who**: For all who want (it is voluntary, not imposed). Humility to change and build life transforming relationships is the primary condition.
- **Goal**: Improve relationship skills, characters and all areas of life
- **Examples**: There are over 100 verses in the New Testament that deal with "one another" relationships. This is the basis for all the relationships in the Church.

Follow-up conversion discipleship (pages 203 + 212-216)

New converts should receive an individual basic training right after their conversion from the very people who converted them. It is only for a limited time (usually a few months), as the training is limited to some basic teaching (like for instance going through "The 12 principles of the Christian life" of this book) and until the convert starts to evangelize himself. Obviously the friendship can last long after the training is finished.

- It is a "top-down" relationship because you teach someone to obey basic principles from the Bible
- **Who**: For anyone who was converted. If believers come from outside and want to join your group, we recommend that you study and see if they agree with the goals and values of you congregation.
- **Goal**: Not to lose any converts and help them to evangelize, this way a multiplication can happen
- **Examples:** Many conversion in Acts, especially Acts 2; but especially Matt.28:18-20 which is the golden rule of discipleship. It clearly shows that disciples are made before and after baptism, and they are expected to do the very same with others.

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9 - GROW IN YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

One of the most fulfilling joys of life is to know and practice the very things in which we are gifted. When people try to practice the things for which they have no talents and no affinity, they usually end up being frustrated and miserable.

This is why all of us need to discover the things that attract us, because with discipline and perseverance, we can become very good at what we do and eventually we will have great success in life. God has promised us that if we excel in our abilities, then we will have great authority and prosperity in life ("Do you see someone skilled in their work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men" (Proverbs 22:29))

To grow in your spiritual gifts you need to apply the following 7 fundamental principles:

1) Understand what gifts and callings are.
2) Have the right motivations.
3) Discover your spiritual gifts.
4) Stop having a wrong view of gifts.
5) Eagerly desire some spiritual gifts.
6) Practice your gifts with boldness and regularity.
7) Practice your gifts with mentors and in groups.

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1. UNDERSTAND WHAT GIFTS AND CALLINGS ARE

Manifestations-gifts-callings

1 Corinthians 12: 4-6 shows that there are 3 progressive levels of how the Spirit works:

1. Manifestations

2. Gifts

3. Callings

Manifestations are momentary and occasional ways in which someone will experience the working of the Spirit.

For instance, you may pray for sick people, but you only see a healing once or twice a year. Or you may give a correct prophetic word to someone, but this happens rarely, like once every 6 months. In other words, the Holy Spirit may work through you in some areas, but this is not often and usually it is surprising and unexpected.

Gifts is the next level. If you experience manifestations in some areas, and you eagerly seek them, they will become more and more frequent. Eventually, after a lot of practice, you will reach a point in time when such occurrences will be happening on a regular basis. This is when people will say that you have a gift.

For instance, you will pray for the sick and see people being healed all the time. You will prophecy on most people and your words will most of the time be accurate. You will teach and audiences will listen attentively. Your successful results will come naturally to you. At this level, we can say that you have a gift. In fact, you will not need to say that you have a gift, people around you will testify of your ability and seek you for this.

Callings is the final level when your gift as reached such a strong level that you feel called to use it in a full-time capacity. This is described as having a calling or a ministry.

For instance, if your gifts of healing and leadership are strong, you will eventually want to work full-time as an evangelist. If your gift of prophecy is powerful, God will call you to become a prophet. If your gift of teaching is amazing, you will want to work as a teacher. If you have a specific gift in serving, and this includes a huge number of possibilities, whether it is serving children, technical abilities or being a musician, you will want to become a deacon. If you have the gift of teaching and pastoring people, and you led your own family well, you can one day become a pastor.

The New Testament shows 6 different kinds of callings, (apostles, evangelists, pastors, prophets, teachers, deacons) and they are precisely described on pages 342-353)

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The stages and dualities of callings

The first stage, which takes many years, is when one slowly develops all the gifts that are bound to his calling.

The second stage is when that person has met all the biblical conditions so that he can be officially recognized as such. For instance, someone may work for many years as a "potential" pastor or deacon even if his children are still not grown up. When this finally happens and he has proven that he was able to lead his family well, then he can be officially appointed by his congregation as a "biblical" pastor or deacon.

It must be said that except for pastors and deacons, who need an "official recognition" that they have good characters and good families, all other ministries do not have this requirement, and therefore it is not always clear when they move from the first stage to the second. What is clear are the results. If someone has with a supernatural anointing planted numerous churches on which he has established pastors, he is an evangelist. If someone is regularly being invited to prophesy in various churches because he has integrity and a good reputation as a prophet, then he is a prophet. The same can be said of a teacher.

There can be a few callings at the same time or at different times:

It is possible and is often the case that people have 2 strong gifts that lead them to have 2 callings at the same time. For instance, Peter was an apostle while being a pastor in the Jerusalem church. Most apostles were prophets at the same time, as Ephesians 2:20 seems to indicate. The same is

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true for pastors who must not only have a pastoral gift, but one of teaching as well (1 Timothy 3:2). Philip was a deacon and eventually an evangelist (Acts 6:5 and chapter 8). Usually, one gift will be stronger than the other, so that for instance someone can be a strong teacher first, and a pastor second (or vice-versa).

It could be that you still do not know today what the Lord has called you to become one day. Do not worry, work with all your strength to develop your gifts, build your character and in time you will see where the Lord is leading you.

2. HAVE THE RIGHT MOTIVATIONS

Love God

When children are more interested in receiving presents than pleasing their parents, it shows their level of maturity. In the same way, when Christians are more interested in loving spiritual gifts than loving their heavenly Father, it shows something selfish about them. Unfortunately, there are tragic examples of very gifted Christians who became so successful with their gifts that in the end they loved the success and money that came with their gifts more than God. One day they will hear God telling them: “I have never known you!” (Matthew 7:23). The success associated with some gifts can be the biggest deceit of our lives because we start seeking God more for our own financial security, our own glory or our own pleasure than seeking Him at any price.

We are not saying that we should not seek His gifts, because in fact we should (1 Corinthians 14:1), but we should always be ready to examine the motivations of our hearts so that God will always remain our first love.

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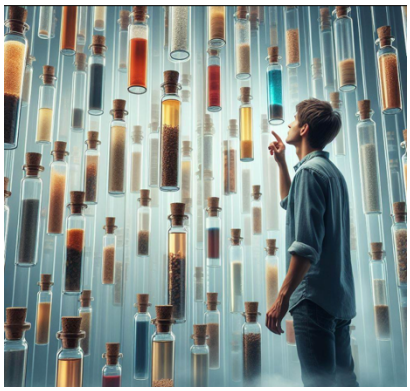
Love people

The whole purpose of gifts is to edify and encourage others. The Corinthians had all kinds of spiritual gifts working among them, but at the same time they were selfish and insensitive toward each other. For instance, they spoke in tongues, but it was only to edify themselves, instead of edifying each other through an interpretation. They prophesied but they did not respectfully wait on each other and there was chaos. This is what Paul wrote to them, that all their gifts meant nothing if they did not have love (1 Corinthians 13!)

Gifts are fantastic if we sincerely love people, but they can be so counterproductive if we do not have love! So, we should always be willing to ask ourselves: "Why do I do what I do? Do I sincerely love those people?" "Do I really want the best for them or am I here just for myself?". If you see that you have wrong motivations while using your gifts, then repent and learn to love people unconditionally.

3. DISCOVER YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS



Gifts can be divided in two categories: the supernatural gifts and the natural ones.

Natural gifts

Natural gifts are the gifts that do not require a supernatural, miraculous dimension. For instance, teaching, serving, or feeling compassion come in this category. They come naturally, by "default", whether it was at our birth or when we became Christians. Every single Christian on earth has at least one "natural" gift.

It is very important to understand that natural gifts are absolutely not inferior to supernatural gifts, as if someone having miraculous abilities is more spiritual than other Christians. All gifts are crucially important to the Church, and this is why we all need each other (see 1 Corinthians 12)

- Leadership
- Administration-organization

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- Teaching (To small or very large groups, adults, children, special needs, etc.…)
- Compassion (above average capacity to really feel empathy for what others feel or suffer)
- Service (These are people who genuinely enjoy serving, no matter the job or the position, which can imply thousands of different roles)
- Craftsmanship-artistry (Exodus 31:1-11, this is the unique ability to create and design, whether it is with your hands, your voice, your writing, being a musician, etc.…)
- Being a shepherd (pastor) to people
- Being evangelistic
- Making a lot of money and generously giving it away
- Encouraging
- Being hospitable

Supernatural gifts

Supernatural gifts have a "supernatural" (or miraculous) dimension given through the Holy Spirit. They do not come naturally, and they can only be obtained when we become Christians and eagerly seek them.

Those who have such gifts are not more special, more spiritual or above those who have "natural" gifts, as ALL gifts are from the Spirit and they are ALL needed for the Church, but they have a power that opens many doors. They move in a world of unlimited opportunities which tremendously improves the way they see God and themselves.

- **Word of wisdom**: These are supernatural insights (keys, strategies, plans, precise information, etc…) given to someone so he can wisely respond to a difficult or even impossible situation.

- **Word of knowledge:** This is a precise information spontaneously given about someone or a situation which was impossible to discover in a normal human way. ("How on earth could he know this?") It can be an encouragement or a warning for the person who receives such words. For instance, Jesus told the Samaritan woman: "you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband" (John 4:18). Those revelations only apply to the past or the present. In this way they differ with the prophetic gift which speaks into the future.

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- **Prophecy:** These are supernatural revelations regarding the future of individuals, groups or situations in a way that cannot be gained through a normal human process. They bring hope, faith and even repentance because people know that "only God could reveal this". They usually act as a clear confirmation of what a person was already feeling in his heart before he received a prophetic word.

- **Seer:** A prophet hears words from God, but a seer, another kind of prophet, sees visions, symbols, colors or anything visual that has a prophetic connection.
  Some seers can even receive prophetic revelations through their physical **senses** (for instance smell pleasant or bad odors, feel a pain for others, sense heat or cold, seeing colors on people, sensing manifestations in the nature (winds, etc…) or delimited territories in the supernatural world, all things which are totally invisible to others.

- **Dreams and interpretation of dreams:** This is the supernatural ability for someone to have precise and complex dreams to which he can give a perfectly appropriate and timely interpretation. They can be related to the life of the dreamer, to individuals, to nations or international events. It mostly deals with future events, so that it can be included in the category of prophetic gifts.

- **Faith:** This is a supernatural confidence, incredibly higher than the average, often given in a spontaneous way, to believe and accomplish tasks which are humanly impossible (receive impossible amount of money, start impossible tasks against all odds, etc.…) It is a foundation for the gifts of healing and miracles, but it often goes deeper and beyond those areas.

- **Gifts of healings:** This is the ability to supernaturally heal people of all kinds of diseases, whether the areas are physical, psychological, or spiritual. The fact that the Bible mentions gifts of healing in the plural could indicate a variety of healing "specializations".

- **Miracles:** This is the ability to perform supernatural acts which transcend all laws of nature. (Like feeding thousands of people with hardly anything, having a car run with almost no gas, etc.…) They often have a creative nature and are perceived as being "higher" than just healings (like having parts of the body that grow or bringing back to life dead people).

- **Distinguishing between spirits:** This is the supernatural ability to discern whether the spirits behind a certain behavior or a situation are divine, human or satanic. Often works in conjunction with a deliverance ministry that casts out demons from people.

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- **Casting out demons**: This is the supernatural ability to cast out demons from people.

- **Tongues:** This is the supernatural ability to pray in a language that is not known by the speaker. It can be humanly known (as a "real" language like Chinese, Arabic, etc…) or it can be unknown if it is an angelic language or a lost language (in the last 2000 years humanity has lost more than 90% of its languages). Its primary purpose is to be a surprising sign to unbelievers and when interpreted, to edify the church. For instance, someone speaks in tongues and then the interpretation is given like a prophecy or a strong encouragement for the church. Indirectly, like all gifts, it can bring self-edification (but that it is not its main purpose). Like all gifts, it is not required for all, since we are all gifted differently. It often accompanies strong experiences, whether the baptism of the Holy Spirit or any encounter with God. It must be emphasized as well that having a manifestation of speaking in tongues is not the same as having the gift. A manifestation is something that happens rarely from time to time, whereas a gift is something that happens very regularly.

- **Interpretation of tongues:** The ability to interpret a message given by someone speaking in tongues in such a way that it edifies the church. Tongues and interpretation of tongues should always work together, and this is why Paul urged those who speak in tongues to pray for the interpretation so that other people around are edified.

4. STOP HAVING A WRONG VIEW OF GIFTS

- **"Supernatural gifts are superior to natural gifts"**
  Not really. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12 that all gifts are needed and that we should treat those who have gifts of "lower" importance with greater honor. There is always a risk to become arrogant and make others feel inferior to us when we have supernatural gifts. But at the same time Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:31 that we should strive for the bigger gifts. In other words, supernatural gifts are "bigger" because they have the potential to bring more edification to the church (14:1). In other words, do not be prideful, treat everyone with respect, but at the same time do your very best to gain supernatural gifts!

- **"I have to be very mature to receive gifts"**
  Not really. Maturity helps in the exercise of the gifts but not in receiving them. For instance, the Corinthians were very immature and yet Paul encouraged them to strongly seek those gifts! Matthew 7 is another disturbing example that that some people can have outstanding gifts and at the same time have major problems in their characters! A gift is like any present we receive: it has nothing to do with how worthy we are, but how much we are loved. Children do not receive gifts because they are so mature but because their parents love them (the Greek word for gift

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"charismata", which has given us the word charismatic, comes from the word "Charis" which means grace!)

- **"Supernatural gifts are for my spiritual growth"**
  Not really. They are all for the benefit of others! Of course, a gift will always indirectly build you up, but it is not its primary purpose. For instance, speaking in tongues will edify you (1 Corinthians 14:4), but it is not its primary purpose. It first goal is to have an interpretation that builds up the church. Healing people will certainly build you up, especially if you see incredible miracles, but its purpose is not for you but obviously for the people who are getting healed! All gifts have only 2 fundamental goals: one is to either build the Church (1 Corinthians 14:12) and the other is to convert unbelievers (Mark 16:15-18). There is never in the New Testament this selfish idea that God gives gifts just for ourselves!

- **"Gifts are only restricted to a few people"**
  Not really. We must be free from a fatalistic attitude. Gifts are for all, with no limitation on anyone! Yes, it is true that we all have different gifts as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12, but it does not mean that we should remain where we are for the rest of our lives. If we do not have a gift today, we should make every effort to seek it until we obtain it! We should all have the attitude that we can receive as many gifts as we desire, as it entirely depends on how much we want them. If this was not the case, then Paul would have never written that we should eagerly seek and practice the spiritual gifts. We are commanded to desire for the very simple reason that sometimes we do not even desire. Spiritual passivity can destroy in us any desire to receive more.

- **"We either have some talents or not, and there is nothing we can do about it"**
  Talents are different than spiritual gifts, and we should not confuse them. They have nothing to do with each other. Talent is something you are naturally born with and there is nothing you did to obtain it. (For instance some people are born with a talent for music, others in mathematics, in sport, etc…). A spiritual gift on the contrary is something that you can obtain if you really want it, and this has nothing to do with your personality, your brain or your genes. What is striking about Jesus are not his talents but his spiritual gifts. Jesus is not known as an exceptional musician, poet or a genius in some area, but as someone filled with all the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. So, the only example that Jesus left us to imitate in Him, besides His moral qualities, are His spiritual gifts. This should encourage all of us, because if we are to become like Christ, then we do not need to be very talented.

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5. EAGERLY DESIRE SPRITUAL GIFTS

Have a strong desire and dedication

1 Corinthians 12:31, 14:1 = ZEAL

The word “eagerly desire” comes from the Greek word “zeloo” which is an onomatopoetic word, imitating the sound of boiling water. Literally it bubbles over because it is boiling hot. It implies the idea of burning with zeal, to be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire – “to be earnest, to set one's heart on, to be completely intent upon”

It has given the same meaning in the English word “zeal” which implies both the idea of having a passionate desire as well as having a behavior that is totally dedicated to a goal. (Which is why some Bibles translate “pursue” the spiritual gifts as it involves more than a desire).

In other words, we should not have this passive and fatalistic attitude that says: “I will wait until God does something”. Instead, we should have this intense and passionate desire that says: “I will ask until I have received!”

This idea is backed up in so many stories of the Bible that shows us that God will only give us His blessings if we really want them. Jacob fought a whole night with God telling him that he would not let Him go until He blessed him. (Genesis 32:26) Many parables of Jesus emphasize the same point that if we are to receive anything from God then we should ask.

This is true as well for spiritual gifts. God will not give us His gifts if we do not desire them, and this is why the Bible commands us to “eagerly DESIRE the gifts”. A desire must be in our hearts, and it must be strong enough that it will lead us to do something about it. Obviously if we have no serious desire, we will not do anything about it and we will remain like this for the rest of our lives.

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So, if we have absolutely no idea what we want, then, as the Bible commands us, we should pray until God creates in us a desire for some specific gifts. In other words, when people passively wait hoping that a spiritual gift will fall upon them, or when they have this false religious humility that says I wait until God decides, they have a completely wrong idea of gifts.

They must first have a clear desire of what they want and then ask God to give them that very gift and do all the other things mentioned below. So, ask yourself: "Which gifts do I want? What do I see myself doing? Healing people? Prophesying? Casting out demons? Leading? Teaching? etc…".

Obviously, nobody receives all the gifts all at once, so in the beginning concentrate yourself on the one or two gifts that you really want the most, and then with time you will be able to get other gifts as well. You must be faithful in your beginning with "little" and as you will mature then God will give you more and more gifts.

We should not only seek spiritual gifts, but the higher ones

=> Some gifts are higher than others!

Ask until you receive

Luke 11:1-14 = PERSISTENCE

- To desire the things of God is certainly the first right step, but not the last one. Jesus has left us with many parables that teach us that we should boldly and tirelessly ask until we receive. We need a determination in prayer to never give up until we obtain all that God has prepared for us. This is especially true for His Spirit. So, pray relentlessly that God will give you the very gifts that you want, and you shall receive them!

1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1: 6, Rom. 1: 11

- As you eagerly desire a gift, God may confirm it through a prophecy and then give it through the laying on of hands of an anointed minister.

6. PRACTICE YOUR GIFTS WITH BOLDNESS AND REGULARITY

Acts 4:29-31 = BE BOLD

- Be bold! The Christians of Acts 4 did not just ask for signs and wonders, but they asked as well for boldness!

- Be bold but be wise: start small and grow more and more. For example: if you have never prayed for sick people, don't try right away to heal the blind or raise the dead! Start with

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"small" things like headaches, back problems, etc.…If you have never given prophetic words do not start with a large group but instead prophesy within a small group context. If you fail, you will not be humiliated and discouraged in front of a lot of people.

- If you have little success, do not blame yourself. If you have great success, do not take any credit. All is from the Lord.

- Do not be discouraged if you have small results or even failures, with time you will have better and better results if you do not give up! Every gifted person started small.

1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6 = BE CONSTANT

- You do not become gifted overnight. For instance, a teacher is not a teacher in 3 days, it takes years of training until people can say that he is gifted! The same principle of progressive growth for natural gifts applies to supernatural gifts as well.

"The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work" (Emile Zola)

- A gift can be "transferred" as in Romans 1:11, meaning that a spiritual seed can be given, but we still have the responsibility to make it grow by practicing it. Only a regular and long practice, as in any area of life, makes us experts.

Matthew 25:29 = PROGRESS

- Gifts multiply each other. The better you become in one gift, the more opportunities it will open for other gifts because all gifts are interrelated. But if you chicken out, you risk losing even the little that you already have! (Some people had great desires or even started well, but their fears or failures stopped them).

7. PRACTICE YOUR GIFTS WITH MENTORS AND IN GROUPS

Mark 3:14-15

- Try to find a MENTOR who will train you in the gifts he has. The more experience a person has, the faster you may learn from him! If such a person does not exist, try to go to conferences that have practical training for your gift.

- As soon as you become good in one area, train others in that very area so that it will force you to grow yourself more.

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THE 2 MOST COMMON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Since the supernatural gifts of healing and prophecy are the most sought out and the most common in the church, we need some instruction on them:

The GIFT of HEALING

There are 3 principles that need to be followed if you want to see a lot of healings happening:

Preach the unconditional love of God

The first and most important aspect of your message is not only to lift up Jesus, but to show that Christ never made any exception to heal anyone. He never said to anyone who came to him for healing that his faith was not enough, that he had not repented enough, that he should wait longer, that he still had curses to break, that he needed to forgive others or himself, or that he needed to learn more lessons in order to become more humble and holy, etc.…

In the Gospels we see that Christ never put any conditions on anyone, except to come to him with the child like faith that they would be healed. Virtually anyone who came to Him were healed, regardless of how bad, religious or good they were.

In other words, God wants everyone to be healed, without any exception. His grace is unconditional, that means for all, at all times regardless of any problem.

Remove their doubts

Before you pray for the sick you need not only to teach them that God wants them to be healed, but you need to remove their doubts as well. Jesus said indeed that not only our faith was needed to remove mountains, but we should have no doubts as well (Matt. 21:21).

Usually with unbelievers all you need is to preach the Good News that God loves us as we are, and that Jesus wants to heal us as we are. It usually works well because they do not have all those religious prejudices that prevent them from receiving healing. But with Christians unfortunately you often need to address their specific doubts because many of them have been influenced by all sorts of wrong religious doctrines.

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Here are the usual 10 doubts that most people have regarding healing:

1. It may not be God's will to heal me

- Jesus is the perfect revelation and the exact representation of God, so you can know perfectly the will of God regarding healing. If you see again and again Jesus healing multitudes of people without any exception, don't you see God's will? The disciples understood this after being 3 years with Jesus and this is why they healed multitudes themselves.

- Jesus repeatedly healed all who came to Him. If you had been in the multitude, you would have been healed yourself.

- God shows no respect of persons, favoritism or preference. You are not an exception.

- James 1:5-8 = If you do not know what God wants, you will be like waves thrown back and forth wondering if God wants to heal you or not and eventually you will receive nothing! You need to make up your mind regarding God's will and receive your full healing!

- Jesus illustrated it by saying that as fathers we would not want to harm our own children but give them the very best. We hate our children to be sick, why should you think that your heavenly Father is different towards you?

- The very fact that you may go to the doctor is a demonstration that you want to be healed. If you believe that God wants you to be sick, going to the doctor would be against His will!

2. God may have a purpose in keeping me sick

(This is the idea that God may be using this sickness in my life to teach me something, to improve my character, to test me, to discipline me and judge me for some sin. Basically, He has a divine and benevolent mystery for my sickness).

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- **Sickness is always revealed as a curse and not a blessing in the Scriptures.** From the Old Testament to the New, you will never find a positive verse about illness. In fact, in Acts 10:38 it is written that Jesus healed all who were under the power of the Devil.

- **Christ never revealed a purpose in being sick:** He never hesitated to heal. He never stopped to see whether he should heal or not. He never said: "let me ask the Father to see if it is His will to heal or not". He treated every injury and sickness like an enemy. The disciples never revealed a purpose for sickness either.

- **The answer is never in us, but in Christ:** If you have repented from every possible sin you could think of, if you have corrected your life in any way you knew of, if you had the maximum of wisdom and discipline to bring yourself healing, if you have done everything possible on your side, you probably wonder how far you should still go. The answer is clear: there is a limit to your own responsibility, God alone can heal what you cannot, so go to Him, not to yourself!

- **A lot of diseases are not just physical but related to demons.** Many healings in the Gospels are actually deliverances! (at least a quarter of them!)

- **The sufferings of Job:** It does not mean that if God allowed Job's suffering that He wanted it. Satan is the one to blame, not God. Eventually Job got healed and James wrote that we should imitate his endurance because faith is about not giving up (James 5:10-11). It must be said as well that Job got only sick for about 1% of his life. So, the simple message of Job is that Job was sick for a very short time, for which Satan is to be blamed, but God healed him because of his faith.

- **Paul's Thorn in the Flesh**: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10: The context is very clear, his thorn was not a sickness, but an ongoing persecution, which included a lot of injuries and even being stoned, but in all of this he kept going (in other words a supernatural protection of healing was on him. How often do you survive stoning?)

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3. God has a specific timing or anointing for my healing.

- When the people decided to come to Christ, they were healed in that very moment. God's time is always today. In fact, Christ declared that the Kingdom was at hand. Now. Present. For God, the day of salvation (or healing as it is the same Greek word) is always today, not tomorrow!

- Progressive healing is OK. There are examples of this in the Gospel. In other words, you may receive a part today, another part tomorrow and the third part of your healing later. God works according to your faith and in some cases, it takes time.

- Therefore, avoid the "all or nothing attitude" that says I need all my healing right now. If you have something now, and more and more later, it is OK. Perseverance is a demonstration of your faith.

4. I may not have enough faith.

- According to Matt. 17: 20 it is not the size of your faith that matters, since a mustard seed is enough. And how do you measure the amount of faith that you have inside of you anyway? Stop looking at yourself, but at Christ!

- Faith is often a matter of not giving up, to persevere until we get an answer. The 2 blind men, the Syro-Phoenician woman, Bartimeus, Job, Epaphrodis all cried out for mercy, and they got it because of their persistence!

5. I may ask too much. I don't want to push God. I need to remain humble

This is false humility! There is never in the Bible this wrong idea that some kind of religious humility is bringing us healing. On the contrary, we see in the Gospels many people who had the boldness to do the most foolish things in order to get healed, and Jesus rewarded their faith and even commended them for it. God likes when we take bold and risky steps of faith, and even if we argue with Him! This idea fills the entire Bible from the beginning until the end.

6. What about those Christians who had a great faith, but they did not get healed?

- We can never fully know what is inside the hearts of others, even the people who are very close to us. We hardly know what is inside of us, how much less about others. We particularly never know how much people struggle with in the face of death. What we know is that it is much easier to have a great faith for others, but we often have a small faith regarding our own problems. Therefore:

- We cannot ever say that they had a big faith.

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- We neither can say that they did not have enough faith.

- In other words, we cannot let the faith or the lack of faith of someone be the standard for our own faith. We cannot compare ourselves to anyone. The Bible is our only standard, and it is a high one.

- The purpose of the church is to be an encouraging place where we look at all the people who had victories, and not at those who had defeats.

7. God has shown me this and this, I wait for a specific revelation or prophecy:

- You do not need to wait for any other revelation. The Bible is the best and final revelation of what God wants for you; you don't need more!

- Prophecies can be encouraging, but misleading as well if you place your faith outside of the Bible.

8. I am getting what I deserve; I cannot forgive myself, feeling guilty and not worthy.

- Whatever wrong you have done in the past is completely covered by the cross. Therefore:

- Repent of anything wrong you may still do, as it prevents your conscience from feeling forgiven.

- See yourself totally worthy - See yourself covered in a white dress – Imagine if you had personally met Jesus 2000 years ago: He would have looked in your eyes with compassion and grace, laid his hand on you, and you would have been immediately healed

- Grace is excessive kindness. It all starts with grace, ends up with grace, and everything in-between is grace. God is not a perfectionist.

9. Is not death always preceded by sickness and suffering?

- Absolutely not. In the Bible, as well as outside of the Bible, there are many examples of people who died of a natural death at an advanced age. It is a biblical promise that we should live long and healthy, and therefore there is nothing wrong in dying healthy! (Prov. 3:2)

- Today, most of the sicknesses that kill us, like cancer and heart diseases, have been created by our own ways of living, so we certainly cannot blame God for dying with suffering.

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10. I am under a curse that needs to be broken in order to be healed:

- There is not a single passage in the Old Testament or New Testament that says that we need to break curses. We do not see a single instance of Jesus doing this in order to heal. This unbiblical teaching leads to fear and legalism where people are constantly asking what is wrong in their past whenever they get sick.

- Curses do indeed exist, but you don't remove them by digging in the past in order to break them. You go to the source of all curses which is repentance, faith, casting out demons and teaching believers to see themselves like God sees them, which means being free from all curses (Gal. 3:13). In other words, you are not responsible for what you don't know but for what you know.

Grow more and more in your results

Do not let small results discourage you.

In the beginning you may pray for 100 people and only see 2 or 3 being healed. Look at the glass half full and not half empty! If you keep on doing this over time you will see your percentage of healed people growing. It will climb to 10% then 20-30% and over the years it may even be 50 to 70%!!!

Grow in the quality of your healing.

Expect healings to be more and more amazing. In the beginning you may see only "small" healings like back pains, knee pains or headaches instantly removed, but over time you will see "bigger" healings like cancers, deafness, blindness, or paralysis healed. The reason you may not see fantastic healings right away is that your faith needs to grow.

Faith is not just a theological understanding that God is able to do anything, but it has an emotional/psychological component as well. For instance, if you have to pray for someone who is deaf or blind, this is not a challenge to your thinking but to your emotions because you have never seen a healing happening to this level before and you have all those fears and doubts of what will happen if it does not work. But once you see it happen something changes within you. You are free from some fears and the next time you see a person who has the same problem, you have a greater boldness to expect a miracle because if it happened before it can happen again.

In other words, your faith is building itself more and more on successful experiences and with time it is more and more ready to expect amazing things. (As a word of wisdom, in general first start with "small" healings and as your faith grows progressively, attack the "bigger" ones. If you right away want to heal the blind and raise the dead and it does not work, you may end up being very discouraged).

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Always help people focus on Christ, not on you.

Your own faith can sometimes be so strong and clear that you know 100% that the sick person will be healed, independently of them. (For instance, in Acts 2 the beggar had no faith in being healed, but the apostles had). But there are situations when it is not like this, so it is always good to help the people to have faith in Christ the Healer, and not in your gift, your anointing or anything else.
Relax and watch what God is doing. Some sicknesses are demonic in nature, so you would want to discern which spirits are behind.

The GIFT of PROPHECY

Intro to the prophetic

1. Prophecies give supernatural revelations regarding the present or the future of individuals, groups or situations in a way that cannot be gained through a normal human process. They give hope, faith and even repentance because we know that "only God could reveal this".

2. The equivalent of Old Testament prophecies are NOT the New Testament prophecies, but the written words of the apostles in the New Testament, which were infallible and absolute and therefore could not be questioned = "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

3. New Testament prophecies, on the contrary, never give moral and spiritual absolutes regarding God and His will but have a human subjectivity which in itself can have some errors.

4. This is why New Testament prophecies need to be constantly tested. Some can be right, some wrong and some a mixture of both. (This is why it is written "Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but TEST everything. Hold on to the good." 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 - "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should TEST what is said." 1 Corinthians 14:29).

5. Prophecies should never be in contradiction with the Bible or else they are not from God.

6. The prophetic gift is one of the most mentioned and needed gifts for the Church ("that all may learn, and all may be comforted" 1 Cor. 14:31)

7. Therefore, every Christian should seek it ("For you may all prophesy" 1 Corinthians 14:31).

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The nature and purpose of the prophetic

1. Most of the time it is for encouragement “He who prophesies speaks to men for their up building and encouragement and consolation" (1 Corinthians 14:31).

2. Sometimes it is to give predictions about the future in order to warn or instruct what to do (the belt of Paul or a famine in Judea).

3. It is almost always to confirm and encourage desires or intuitions that God has already put in the hearts of people before. (Peter had a desire to walk on the waters but needed a confirmation from Jesus before doing it). We should always instruct people the following principle: “Be careful about prophecies that will lead you to make major decisions when you have no idea what you want yourself. Earnestly seek God in prayer and fasting and if God has not spoken, His silence may well be an answer. Most of the time you need to walk by faith, and not by prophecy”.

4. Prophecies bring repentance “If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

The different ways in which the prophetic works

It comes in a multitude of various ways, which all have to do with our personality and gifts. It can include the following ways. Discover how God speaks through you, you do not have to imitate others. He speaks through:

- Impressions; intuitions; still small voices.
- Open visions, trances
- Pictures (either one clear image or a series of multiple images: a car, a mountain, a landscape)
- Symbols of which we must give an interpretation (a dragon, a huge golden key, a blue volcano)
- You “see” spirits, which in turn reveal what to say and possibly warn
- Through the physical senses (smell, feel physically either pains or pleasure, hear, etc.…) Seers usually have this sensorial ability working very strongly through them

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- Emotions (you feel hidden sorrow, despair, victory for others, etc.…that are indicative of where they are at)

- Something about the person prophesied precisely reminds you either of something or someone you know, or it gives you a parallel with your own past life, and this can give you specific insights of what to say
- Words (words of knowledge or words of wisdom)
- A play on words, even if it makes no sense
- Bible verses
- Dreams and interpretations of dreams
- You see gifts in others because of your own similar gifts (for instance one can have a gift of leadership so he easily "sees" leaders and callings, or evangelism so he always "sees" people in a church who are unbelievers. One may be money, so he sees opportunities or financial dangers)

The 3 steps process

Sometimes a revelation can be so clear and self-explanatory that no "explanation" is needed. For instance, when Agabus prophesized a famine, this was clear in itself. In most other cases, when there are impressions, symbols, words or pictures that are not clear, then we need to go through the process of the following three steps:

1. The revelation (What you "see")

Just report what you received. The person may perfectly understand what the revelation means, even if it makes no sense to you. She might, on the contrary, not understand anything on the spot. Do not worry; if you had the right revelation, at the right time she will clearly remember and know what to make of it. In any case, just report what you see and avoid giving any interpretations and applications unless you have very clear insights, or you have a strong prophetic experience to do so. Then there are 2 other levels:

2. The interpretation (What you make of the revelation)

Be very sure that your interpretation is really from God because you might have a correct revelation but a wrong interpretation that might completely destroy the validity of your revelation. If you are not sure about the interpretation, it is better to be silent and only deliver the revelation with no explanations. If it is ambiguous, be honest with people to tell them about your doubts of what it could mean, usually they will know.

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3. <u>The application</u> (what people should concretely do about the interpretation)

In this area, we should always be extremely careful and wise. In most cases, let us be humble to leave it up to the people what to do, or at least to say that we would do this way, but if they want to do it otherwise, it is fine. In most cases, most people will know what to do. As long as it is not a sin, people should not feel guilty to "disobey" the practical applications we might give them. Paul received correct revelations and interpretations in regard to going to Jerusalem, but he chose a different application.

Example of the 3 steps process:

- <u>Revelation:</u> You see a big dollar bill above the head of someone.
- <u>Interpretation:</u> It could mean the person will become rich or on the contrary he will lose money, he might have hidden debts, be corrupted, etc.…
- <u>Application:</u> Invest more in what he does, withdraw, be careful, etc.…

Biblical example of the 3 steps process in Acts 21:10-12

1. Agabus received a <u>correct revelation</u> in seeing Paul's belt.
2. <u>He gave an interpretation, but it was not 100% correct</u> (It is not the Jewish leaders who bound and delivered Paul to the Gentiles, it is the Romans who took Paul and bound him. Now one can argue that the Jews caused this to happen, thus they did it).
3. <u>The Christians gave to Paul one application, but Paul chose another</u> (they urged him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul, on the contrary, took the prophecy as a confirmation of what he had already decided to do. He wanted to go there, and he was willing to die for this. We see earlier, in Acts 21:4, Paul had been told not to go there, but he still chose to do so).

<u>Practical suggestions for those who want to grow in the prophetic</u>

- **Eagerly desire and progressively grow in the prophetic**. "Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (1 Cor. 14:1) This is the first and most important principle. Unless we do not want to have this gift, you will not get it. Miraculous gifts do not fall on us by some miraculous manifestation, as some people tend to believe. They are progressively acquired as we strongly want them and as we make every effort to grow in them. For instance, no one will become a teacher or a leader all of a sudden. We clearly understand this for natural gifts, and we should have the same perspective for supernatural gifts.

  According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-5, all gifts come in 3 progressive stages:

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- ⇨ **Manifestations or workings** (this is when the Holy Spirit works in a way that is not frequent and consistent, maybe every 3 to 6 months you can prophesy something).

- ⇨ **Gifts** (when manifestations start to happen so frequently and consistently with effective and predictable results, so that eventually most people around you say that you have a prophetic gift).

- ⇨ **Callings** (when your gift matures to such a level that you feel called to exercise it as a ministry, then it becomes a calling. For instance, a very strong prophetic gift leads you to become a prophet).

- **Your gift does not work because you are perfect.** This gift not only comes because you desire it, but because you remain in his grace. In other words, it does not come because you are perfect but because of his unconditional love for you. In Greek, the word gift is "charismata" which come from the word "Charis" which means grace. All gifts are an expression of His grace, and when God gives, He does not take back (Rom. 11:19). The proof of this is that the Corinthians or even the people mentioned in Matt. 7 could prophesy and yet at the same time they were very immature.

- **Never prophecy in contradiction with the Bible** (or "the faith" as Romans 12:6). In doubt, abstain. For instance, if a prophecy encourages someone to divorce or create divisions in the Church it is not from God.

- **You may see things as you look at people, but do not be fooled by the appearances.**

- In the beginning, **start prophesying indirectly through your prayers** (Lord, you see that this person has this and that) Praying is less bold than directly prophesying to people (this is when you can single out people and directly tell them what you see in them).

- **Test and train yourself** the easy and safe way: for instance, if you sense something about someone, start a **conversation and find out** whether what you saw prophetically was right or wrong. (For instance, if you feel someone has no children, sensitively ask them if they have children; if you see someone being in a certain profession, ask them what he does; if you feel he will want to do or that, ask them if they ever thought of doing this or that, etc.…) If you do this regularly, eventually you will gain great confidence of areas where you were almost always right in seeing the secrets of their hearts. If you have done this regularly, then you will know the areas where you can start prophesying over people.

- **Find your own system of confirmation**. If the impression you have about someone is not sure, especially if it is a strong and life changing prophecy, ask God to confirm it in ways that work for

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you (for instance for me the same impression repeats itself in an ongoing and clear way). With time, as you have found a very clear way how to receive confirmations from the Lord, you will grow more and more confident in how you read people.

- Start in the **small setting** of limited groups or one on one, and not right away before a large group. The reason is that if you give a wrong prophecy before a large group, it will not only be bad for the group, but for your own credibility. Once you have gained enough experience and confidence, you can progressively move to a "higher level".

- **Do it outside**. Within the same church it eventually becomes limited to be prophetic simply because you already know the people (the more you know the people, the less you can be prophetic about some aspects of their life). The exception is if you are in a large church of a couple of hundred people, then there will always be new people and therefore the prophetic can be always fresh.

- **Correct people in private** and praise them in public. If you prophetically see that someone needs either a minor correction or a strong rebuke, it should be done one on one in a private setting and not before a whole group. This is the biblical model of Matt. 5 and 18.

- **Deeply love people**, be patient, gracious and gentle even if you have strong things to say. The whole purpose of the prophetic is to build up, and not to tear down. We are the New Testament prophets, and not some Old Testament prophets of doom. If you don't like people, you will hurt them.

- **Do not seek recognition nor be afraid of rejection**

- **Be sensitive. Prophesying problems over babies, telling people whom to marry or not, etc.… are no-noes**.

- **Do not sin:** usually sinful strongholds affect the way we view people and therefore the way we prophesy (We do not see things just as they are, but as WE are as well. It is a combination of both. For instance, if you are struggling with money and prophesy over rich people, it may affect the way you speak to them. Same with lust when talking to beautiful women, etc...)

- **Dare to make mistakes**, the prophetic always involves some risk and therefore it requires faith. Romans 12:6 says that if we prophecy, we should do in the proportion (or measure) of our faith. In other words, the more we believe we hear the Lord, the more we should speak out.

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- **Come across with humility** ("This is what I sense, I could be wrong"). Be willing to have your words tested (And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (1 Corinthians 14:29) in 1 Thess. 5:21 "examine" is the expression "being put under the fire").

- **Leave full freedom for people to choose what to do with your prophecies.** There is always a risk that the more authority your prophetic words have, the more easily people tend to do whatever you tell them. It should not be so. We speak what we think is from God, but they chose and are fully responsible to do whatever they think is best.

- **Do not say anything if you do not see anything**. In our loving desire to bless someone with prophetic words, we sometimes may say what they do not need to hear at this time. Worse, we might even tell things that the Lord has never said.

- If you **see some obstacles**, clouds, walls or anything "around" the person that prevents you to speak clear prophetic words, then you might just want to tell the person the truth and leave her to her own conclusions. Just be sensitive ("I do not want to hurt you") and humble ("the problem might be on my side") when you say such words.

- One small picture or word may be all you need to powerfully encourage someone. **One small word from God is much better than thousands of words which are not from Him!**

- **A general revelation can be good as well, and even very powerful. Do not think because it has no dramatic details that it is not from God**.

- **Ask people the permission to receive your words**, this is particularly true of unbelievers. We never force God on people, they always have a choice.

- **Always send the people to go to their church leaders** when they receive a word of which they need help or advice. In fact, do not hesitate to take such leaders near you when you give words of which they will need some follow-up.

- Minister within your assigned authority and not beyond. However right you may be, **always submit to the authority of the local leaders**. If they give you the authority to speak a prophetic truth that may bring changes, go ahead, but if not keep things to yourself.

- **Fasting** can help to have more discernment.

- **Get mentors** who can train you in this gift. If they are not available, learn as much as you can by being around Christians who have some experience in this area.

- Let's **work in groups**, that is with other prophetic people (we prophecy in part, do not always have the full picture and therefore a team is better, 1 Cor. 13:9)

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Personal hindrances for the prophetic:

- We do **not love** the people we minister to (feel resentment, anger, negative feelings, etc.…)
- We so much love the people that we tell them things God has not shown or that are **exaggerated.**
- We are **afraid to be rejected** because of what we have to say. It is always possible to say challenging things in a loving and sensitive way.
- We seek **recognition** (we want to get attention of how spiritual we are through our gift)
- We are **not clear about the vision and interpretation** (if you don't know, you don't know. Just bring the exact details, no more and no less then leave it all to God).
- Usually, **sinful strongholds affect the way we view** people and therefore the way we prophesy (We do not see things just as they are, but as WE are as well. It is a combination of both. For instance, if you are struggling with money and prophesy over rich people, it may affect the way you speak to them. Same with lust when talking to beautiful women, etc...)
- We may have **doctrinal views** that are not biblical and in turn, affect the way we see things and prophesy.
- We prophetically **read people through their physical appearances** (Samuel was a strong prophet and yet he still saw David by his outside appearances!)

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10 - BECOME the best NUMBER 1 or 2

1. FULFILL YOUR ROLE

The whole creation is made of numbers 1 and numbers 2. The numbers 1 give the principles, while numbers 2 magnify and glorify those principles.

For instance, husbands bring their seeds of life into women, and women, who are the number 2, grow and magnify those seeds through pregnancy and birth!

Another example: parents, as number 1, give directions, and children, as number 2, expend those directions and even multiply them through their own children.

The entire creation is made of this perfect interdependence of number 1 and number 2.

Unfortunately, when Satan refused to act as the beautiful and powerful number 2 for which he had been created, he did everything to reverse this order. He not only tried to become number 1 against God, but he convinced Eve to become number 1 against her husband, and then she convinced Adam to become number 1 against God!

Today Satan's strategy has not changed: he wants children to be disobedient to their parents, wives to be not submissive to their husbands and every number 2 to rebel against their number 1! In fact, the more he can confuse the roles of any number 1 or 2, the more chaos and suffering he will bring in our world! To inflict the maximum pain, everything has to be turned upside down!

But this is not God's will! Jesus had every right and potential to seek equality with His Father the perfect number 1 (Philippians 2: 6-7). Instead, he showed us what it means to be a perfect number 2. He completely humbled himself and was totally submissive to the will of His father whom He lifted up in every situation. Through His attitude he showed us that it is possible to have a world where:

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1) Children fully obey their parents (until they leave to get married), and honor them for the rest of their lives (Ephesians 6:1, Galatians 4:1-2, Colossians 3:20, 1 Timothy 3:4).

2) Wives respect, honor and are totally submissive to their husbands in absolutely everything (except obvious sins. Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, 1 Cor. 11:3, 1 Peter 3:1-6, Titus 2:5, 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

At times God allows bad authorities to exist for only one reason:

To humble unbelievers and bring them to Him

3) Employees respect, honor and are submitted to their bosses. (1 Peter 2:18, Ephesians 6:5-8, Colossians 3:22-24, 1 Timothy 6:1, Titus 2:9).

4) Citizens respect, honor and submit to the government officials and laws (unless they do not go against Christian principles and act with justice, not with corruption and oppression of the poor and the minorities. Romans 13:1-7, Matthew 22:21, Titus 3:1).

5) Men are humble and submissive to mature and more experienced Christian men who teach and disciple them (Matthew 28:20, Ephesians 5:21, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, 1 Peter 5:5, Philippians 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 5:12-13, 1 Corinthians 14:32). In the same way, Christian women are submissive to mature Christian women (Matthew 28:20, Titus 2:4)

6) Members of a local church imitate, respect, and fully obey everything that their church leaders ask them (Hebrews 13:17, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:13-15 and 5:5, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Every one of those 6 areas has a clearly defined role where a number 1 gives directions, and a number 2 fulfills and magnifies them.

Role of number 1

For parents/husbands/bosses/political leaders/more mature men or women/church leaders

- They should be sensitive, patient, gentle, and not overbearing.
- They must pay attention to all the needs of their number 2, protecting them, speaking blessings over their lives, encouraging them, and treating them with great respect.
- They must continually teach, correct, train and influence their number 2.
- They should always listen and sometimes even seek the opinions of their number 2.
- Finally, since they are number 1, they must always assume full responsibility for anything that may go wrong. This means that they cannot ever blame their number 2 for any decisions they make, unless of course when their numbers 2 refuses to submit to them.

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What does a number 1 leadership mean for a husband?

- He constantly thinks and makes every decision for the very best of his family. The family is his first priority; his own desires always come second. He sacrifices all his desires and ambitions for them.

- He is totally responsible for a stable income of money that always blesses and protects the family. If anything goes wrong, he never blames his wife, circumstances or starts to have self-pity, but he takes full responsibility and learns to be a man!

Love is more than a feeling.

It is a behavior that seeks what is good for others.

- He is willing to have wise, spiritual, and responsible men in his life from whom he seeks wise advice and accountability. This is particularly needed in the beginning of his marriage, for every major decision that will affect the family, and especially if the marriage has serious problems. Those husbands should obviously be good examples through their own family. The reason for this submission to other men is simple: How can he expect his wife to submit to his authority if he himself is not willing to submit to the authority of other men in his life?

- He always consults his wife for all the important decisions that will affect her emotional and financial well-being. He carefully listens to her suggestions. Therefore, he never ever makes rash, impulsive and self-centered decisions that will have painful consequences for her and the family.

- He openly shares all his future plans and inner struggles to her; she is his friend and partner.

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- He never talks to her in a loud or aggressive ton of voice, and never says anything negative to her in the presence of children or anyone else.

- He never ever keeps any slightest resentment or any negative feelings towards her. He immediately communicates so that there is full forgiveness and peace.

- He listens with genuine empathy to all her emotional ups and downs. He finds ways to builds her self-esteem and faith in God.

- He always takes time to help her at home, particularly in the responsibilities that he has agreed to help.

- He takes time to be with his children. He constantly builds them up with his words, and when needed, he takes responsibility to discipline them (he does not leave this to his wife).

- He takes the role of a spiritual leader by helping the family to have family devotionals and times of prayer together.

The above shows what a great husband should be.
(Look as well in pages 60-62 to see what a bad husband looks like).

Role of number 2

For children/wives/employees/citizens/less mature men/church members

Number 2 should fully trust, respect, and obey the leadership of number 1.

They should do everything to honor their authority and magnify their example.

They should learn and apply their principles as much as possible so that the influence of number 1 will be expanded through them.

As 1 Pet. 3 shows, often the primary reason we should submit to bad authorities is so that we can convert them!

It is impossible to become a great number 1 if you have not learned first how to be a great number 2. So, if you grew up with parents who gave you a negative view of authority, or if many of the number 1 in your life (your boss, husband, political leader, etc…) were bad examples, you still must become a great number 2 like God wants it. It is only after this that you can become a great number 1!

Read all the stories of great leaders in the Bible: they all had to learn the painful lessons of being great number 2, and in time they all ended up being fantastic number 1! There is no other way. Learn from them and do not rebel against God's order!

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What does a number 2 submission mean for a wife?

- She always obeys everything that her husband tells her to do, except when it is an obvious sin.
- She never argues and opposes his will. She never defies his authority, even in the slightest way.
- She never tries to control or manipulate him, especially when she does not agree with him.
- She learns to fully trust God especially when her husband's decisions seem to be unwise or insensitive.
- She always reacts in a humble, submissive and very respectful way when she does not agree with him.
- If she has different or better opinions, she follows the rules of a good communicator as expressed in pages 276-279 so that her husband will want to listen and accept her views.
- She never criticizes him in any possible way. Instead, she always finds ways to praise him.
- She never gives him orders. Instead, she only makes gentle suggestions so that he never feels pressured or manipulated.
- She learns to like what he likes so that she can please him in every possible way (her physical appearance, sex, a quiet and orderly home, her communication, the small details he likes, etc.…)
- She never makes important decisions without consulting her husband first.

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- She never complains as if her husband was somehow the indirect source of her problems.
- She always has a tone of voice and attitude that shows a gentle, quiet and kind spirit.

The above shows what a great wife should be.
(Look as well in pages 62-63 to see what a bad wife looks like)

You want a marriage that works? Make a list of mutual expectations!

1. On one piece of paper write down all the things you want him/her to change.

Nothing improves a relationship more than when both spouses sincerely agree with their mutual expectations and make every effort to practice them

You must be extremely specific so that the other person knows exactly what needs to change!

(For instance, you don't write: my husband needs to love me better, as it is not clear and practical. You write: I want him to never leave his socks on the floor, I want him to always pick up the garbage, to spend that much time with the children, I want him to never shout at me, I want him to tell me what and when he buys something, etc.... Or I want her to cook this and that, to lose that much weight, she must talk like this when she does not like something in me, I want her to do sex like this, etc....). Only such a list of precise mutual expectations can bring immediate and possible changes.

Most info in books, conference and the internet will often not help. The reason is that most people are frustrated because they have some very personal and specific expectations regarding what they want the other person to change, and unless those specific problems change in the other person, they will never be happy. This is why we should start first with those mutual expectations because they can bring an immediate relief and hope to a situation that often looks impossible to turn around. Other problems, often deeper ones, will eventually need to be addressed, but at least if we feel less frustration, we can have hope to face future changes.

2. Only write down what is possible to change, what is reasonable and what is biblical.

With faith in God, with love for the other person and with an iron will discipline a huge number of things can be improved in life.

But sometimes we have unrealistic expectations, or at least too far away in the future. For instance, if you want your wife to look the same as Jane Fonda at age 40 your expectation may not be very

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reasonable, even or if it's not possible. The same can be said of your husband to become rich when he never knew how to handle money. (Ask people who help you if your expectation is OK or not)

If nevertheless your partner agrees with your huge expectation, cut it down into small expectations that can be more easily reached over a period of time.

But more important than anything else, write down expectations that are biblical. It is always right if we expect him or her to pray with us, to read his/her Bible, to attend church, to forgive, etc.…

3. Look at your own responsibility.

Whatever your spouse has written down on that piece of paper is your responsibility to change! In fact, unless the other person wants you to do this, do not pray for him or her to change. Instead pray and concentrate yourself on all the things you need to change in your own life!

Maybe what you need to change is not much in comparison to the other person, but if the goal of your life is to become like Jesus, which means perfection, perfect self- control, perfect patience, perfect kindness, then you will always have something to work on!

If the other person does not want to change, this is not your problem. In fact, be ready that your spouse may never change. Your problem is to perfectly fulfill what God asks of you and then He will be able to hear your prayers. If you pray that God will change the other person, but you are not willing to suffer for your own changes, God will not be able to answer your prayers. But if you are righteous, which means you only look at your own responsibility, there is a promise that your prayers may avail much.

4. Decide what is the one or two most important things that you need to change.

Sometimes there are so many things to change that you cannot change them all at once. And sometime one issue is so hard to change that you cannot concentrate on any other issue as well.

So, start with the one that the other person wants you to change first and stick with it as long as it is needed. Usually within one to two months some changes should appear that should encourage you and your partner. (Psychology says it takes 40 days for a behavior to change).

If this happens, then add another issue you feel can change. If the problem did not change at all, ask help from outside (see point below). If you feel very discouraged by a problem that is too big to change, concentrate yourself on a minor change that is easier to make so that you and your partner can feel encouraged. (**SMART** goals: **S**imple, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**ime sensitive)

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5. Make yourself accountable to one or more couples

Choose some friends who can clarify, encourage and pray for you regarding those specific issues. (A couple is better than one individual because the man can work with the man and the woman with the woman, which makes the pill easier to swallow and allows you to talk about very personal issues).

This couple does not need to be super spiritual or have much experience in counseling. In fact, this couple is more like mediators who are willing to help with what you have already decided to change for yourselves. In other words, they do not have to bring new and deep revelations, they mostly help you to clarify what you want and then help you with your own decisions.

This means that all what is asked from them is that they meet regularly with you, like for instance every week, and they help you to follow your own list of mutual expectations. They can simply ask: Ok, how was your week? Did he pick up his socks? Did he help the children? Did she speak the way you liked? Why not? What happened? What needs to happen to improve? Is there any way we can help you in this? This approach makes them more neutral and therefore it is easier to accept their help.

> The marital example of your parents has influenced you far more than you realize it. You will repeat exactly the same sins in your own marriage and will not even realize it! This is why you need to admit you need help!

What if our marriage doesn't work? Can I divorce?

When can I divorce?

According to the Bible, there are only 2 reasons why you have the right to divorce and remarry:

1) **Adultery** (Matthew 5:32). If your partner has cheated on you, you are free to divorce (of course you are free as well to forgive and give them another chance, but in that case, adultery demands a counseling process).

2) **Your partner wants to leave you** (1 Corinthians 7:15). That person may claim that he/she is not wanting to leave, but if he/she has been doing most of the following things below for a few years, he/she has de facto already left:

> **Outside of those 2 biblical reasons, you should never choose to divorce on your own.**
>
> **Go to the leaders of the church to seek help**

- He/she is physically living in another place, or almost never shows up at home
- He/she does not want a relationship; does not make any meaningful contacts
- He/she does not bring money for the family, or nor enough to contribute to their basic needs

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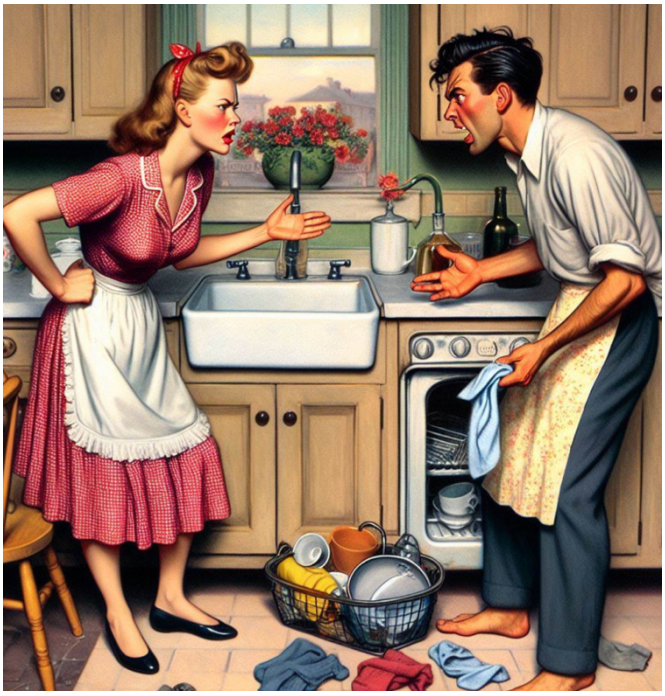
- He/she does not provide sex and emotional support

- He/she is physically and verbally abusive. (This one is especially a non-negotiable!)



If your partner has left you in all the ways that are described above, and he/she categorically refuses to talk with the leaders of the church in order to solve the situation, that person clearly behaves like a non-believer and is therefore a non-believer. So according to 1 Cor. 7:12-13, you are free to divorce. But he/she still wants to talk with the leaders of the church, then you must immediately go to them and start a process of marital counseling (see further below).

You cannot refuse this process for 2 reasons:

First of all, **it could be that you have some issues on your side** that explain why your partner no longer wants to be with you. Leaders need to have the full picture on both sides in order to fully help your marriage.

Secondly, this counseling through the church leaders will **protect your reputation.** Indeed, if you did everything you could to save your marriage with the help of the church, but the other person was not willing to change, then you are not the one guilty before God. In other words, you will always have the perfect right to remarry by saying the following: "Ask the leaders of my former church, they will tell you that I did this and that and that I am completely innocent, so I have every right to remarry".

This is how the process of a marital counselling should go

- Both of you must fully submit and **obey any practical directions** that the church leadership may tell you that will immediately improve the situation (for instance: leave this job, take that one, move out or clean and repair your apartment, do this with the children, etc.…)

- Both of you should agree on a clear list of **biblical expectations**. This seems to be obvious, but shockingly many Christian couples today have more the self-centered expectations of the world than the ones of the Bible. Once both fully agree about their respective roles before God, then we can see what that means practically. (See pages 246-249 for those roles).

- Both of you should make a practical list of **mutual expectations** (see previous chapter above on page 249) and then you must make yourself accountable to 2 mature persons whom you trust and who will help you (a brother will help the husband, and a sister will help the wife) Those two

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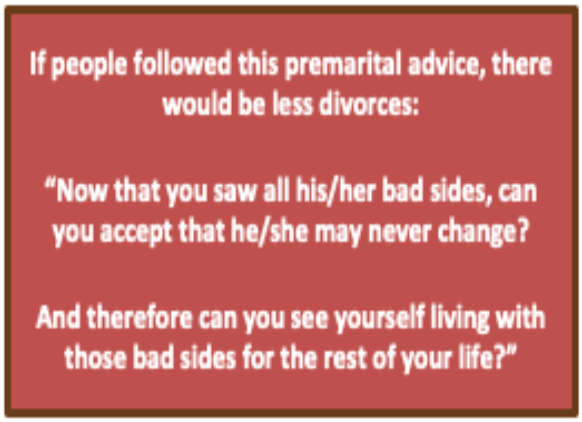
individuals might not be married to each other, but usually it is much better when it is a couple. In fact, depending how serious the situation is, two couples could be even better.



- This couple should deeply help you on **a regular basis** (There should be a weekly meeting. In the first few weeks, it is recommended to have daily phone calls. Eventually as the situation improves, it can be spaced out). Only this kind of lengthy process of regular accountability can restore a marriage! One-time conferences or workshops on marriage never really work because they never address the deeper issues of the character. And character is shaped by what we do every day over a couple of months.

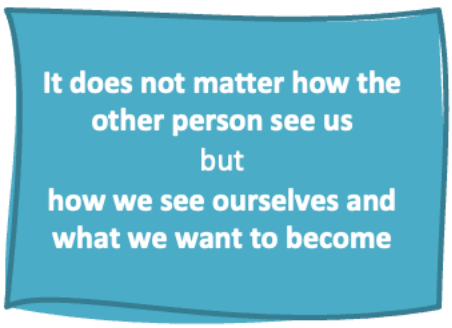
- If available, you should be part of an **accountability group** where other couples share their struggles to each other. (Something similar to AAA groups where people are open with their struggles).

- This process should **last a few months** until there is real progress.

I have no biblical reason to divorce, but life with him/her is so difficult, what should I do?

As mentioned above there are only 2 exceptions for divorce, which is adultery and when your spouse leaves and refuses marital counseling. **IN ALL OTHER CASES YOU CAN NEVER divorce.** So, what should you do if the situation is so painful that you want to divorce?

1. **Accept the painful reality that the ultimate purpose of your life is not happiness but becoming more like Jesus**. Everything bad that your spouse does can either make you a worse person (you become more aggressive, impatient, depressed, etc…) or a better person (you become more self-controlled, gentle, forgiving, patient, spend more time in prayer, etc.…). The goal of your life is perfection and whether you like it or not, your partner is helping you in this process! To be able to love those who don't love us is one of the ultimate expressions of being like Jesus.



2. **Your spouse cannot make you unhappy if you choose not to be unhappy**. If you want to become like Jesus, you can learn the difficult but not impossible process of mastering your emotions. You can find happiness in the fact that God loves you and that His peace surpasses all understanding.

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3. **Don't expect anything from your spouse.** The Lord's prayer shows us that we should forgive every kind of debt that people have towards us. A financial debt is to expect someone to pay us back. An emotional debt is to expect someone to treat us in a certain way. Free yourself from all your expectations of what your spouse should do for you and you will be happier.

4. **Accept the fact that your spouse may never change**. You do not have this guaranty (1 Cor. 7:16). It will help you to put your hope somewhere else and make you happier.

5. **Pray for yourself to change rather than pray for your spouse to change**, it will help you to relax, particularly if the other person does not want to change. Ask God to give you a perfect love and behavior, being absolutely blameless and having a peace that surpasses all understanding. Your primary focus in life should always be on your own changes first.

6. **Your perfect behavior may help your spouse to see Jesus through you** and maybe turn to God. (1 Peter 3:1).

7. **Concentrate yourself on teaching your children to look up to God**. Eventually they will see the truth for themselves. Susana Wesley was married to a horrible husband who was drinking, but she raised children who founded the Methodist church, a denomination that greatly influenced the world.

8. **Do not fight alone but share your struggles** with mature Christians who can support you

9. **Live separately for a defined time** if your spouse is abusive or puts the children in a terrible situation, maybe over time he/she may want to listen and improve.

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2. HOW DOES CHRISTIAN OBEDIANCE PRACTICALLY WORK?

If a number one (your husband, your boss, your pastor, etc…) asks you to do something, whether it is a direct order or a simple desire, you only have 4 situations:

Situation 1 = You do exactly what is expected of you

Never argue or show an attitude of defiance. You should obey to men as you would obey to God himself (Ephesians 5:22, 6:14-15). The Bible says that Jesus, although He was the Son of God, learned obedience by the things he suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

Obedience is never easy, particularly in situations when we feel that the consequences will be negative. **This is when we must trust that God will turn any unfair situation to our own advantage, and He will bring His judgments against those who have wronged us**.

Make sure that when someone asked you something that you repeat in your own terms what you understood the other person said. ("If I understood you correctly, you asked me to do this and that, am I correct?") The reason is that sometimes we understand one thing, but this is not what the other person asked. (In fact, for the people who do not really want to obey this is very convenient. They can always argue that they misunderstood what they heard so they can end up doing what they want, but with this principle it is impossible to lie!)

Situation 2 = You feel you have a better idea

In this case there are 3 things you should always say:

1. **Understand** - "I understand what you want and why you want it" (describe precisely) (=> number 1 feels respected because you perfectly understood him).

2. **Submit** - "If you do not accept my suggestion, do not worry, I want you to know in advance that I will still do everything you want me to do" (=> it makes him feel relaxed because he knows in advance that you will NEVER argue with him!)

3. **Suggest** - "If I were you, I would do this and that, because it would be better for you and me" (=> he feels respected because you don't directly criticize him or give him an order, and you present your suggestion in a way that is not just good for you, but for him as well).

Never forget that you bring suggestions and not orders or criticisms! If you make him feel **free to decide** whatever he wants (because you do not manipulate or impose your view on him), then it will be easy for him to listen to you! If you do not want to practice this principle, then even if you are perfectly right in what you think, your number 1 may not want to listen to you.

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Remember that **HOW** you say things is more important than WHAT you say. If you always maintain this attitude of respectful submission and if your advice proves to be consistently wise, then, if he is a smart leader who seeks his best interest, he will eventually ask you for your advice! Remember the example of Joseph or Daniel who started as slaves and ended up being elevated to high positions of authority! (Gen. 39:5-6, Daniel 2:48)

Situation 3 = You have a compelling reason why you cannot obey

For instance, you are sick, you have a force majeure, etc.…In this case you must respectfully explain that you would like to obey, but you cannot do it. Present things in such a way that he can freely decide. If you present things like "I have this problem, you have no choice, you must do what I want", you are not showing a respectful submission. If number 1 is wise and sensitive he will listen and make a compromise, but if you disrespectfully push him, you are not wise. He may decide against your will and then you will have to suffer the consequences.

Situation 4 = You are convinced that what is asked of you is a sin

This is a conscience case: you cannot obey as it is a clear sin (for instance to steal, to not go to church, etc...). In this case, you must be absolutely 100% sure that it is a sin (and if your number 1 is a Christian you must show where it is found in the Bible, anything else is not acceptable). If it is something that you don't like, it does not mean that it is a sin.

Another important point: Do not confuse how someone asked you something and what he asked you to do. A person might ask you something in an insensitive or even aggressive way, and you may obviously not like it, but if what he asked you is not wrong in itself, you must still do it.

A very important principle: NEVER ever express your suggestions or disagreement to number 1 openly in the presence of other people around! This is not showing respect towards him! Do it face to face in private. (That means a wife never shows her disagreement to her husband in front of the children, a Christian never shows openly his disagreement with the pastor in front of other church members, etc.…)

3. ROLES OF CHURCH LEADERS AND OUR ROLE TOWARDS THEM

The role of church leaders

- They must deeply and unconditionally love you.
- They are to be the spiritual fathers who will bless you, protect you and help you in your needs.
- They are the shepherds who will sacrifice their lives for you.

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- They should be blameless examples through their lives and marriage, so that their own children fully obey and respect them. If they cannot do this, they cannot be leaders in the church. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? (1 Timothy 3:5)

- In regard to money, they should be generous, hospitable, never greedy and if they are richer than average, it should be because of their own hard work, and not because they take money from the church.

- Their primary responsibility is to help you become more like Jesus, and this is why they need to be very patient and always encouraging.

- At the same time, they should gently correct you when you sin and firmly warn you if you refuse to repent. In other words, they should be like God, meaning that they are always kind but at the same time severe when needed (Romans 11:22).

- They should be spiritual parents who help you to grow to your maximum potential. This means that in the beginning of your Christian life they have the right and obligation to have some control over your life, just like protecting parents do with their small children. But as you grow in maturity, they should more and more trust you and give you responsibilities, and one day they should set you totally free. Parents who keep controlling their grown-up children are bad, and so are church leaders who keep controlling everything and everyone after many years!

- This model of parenthood follows the principle of Matthew 28:20: we are commanded to teach people to OBEY. Obedience is the very DNA of everything we do as Christians, and this is why no one can claim that he obeys God if he has not learned to obey men. This is why the Bible says “Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.” (Hebrews 13:17)

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Submission is never conditional because it NEVER depends on others.

It always depends on us.

We choose to obey and submit even if the other person is not worthy of our respect

Your primary role is therefore to submit and do everything they tell you. If you feel they have sinned or taught something wrong, you MUST immediately go to them and talk until the problem is solved. Keeping bad feelings inside of you against them is a sin (read the chapter on how to solve conflict).

You should as well honor them, highly esteem them and imitate their example. The Bible is extremely clear on this: If you do not want to listen and work well with your leaders, but instead criticize and rebel against them, even in the mildest way, you are a traitor like Judah; you are opposing God's order and are on Satan's side. Rebellion is a very serious sin! "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Samuel 15:23, Matthew 28:20, Philippians 2:12, Hebrews 13:7+17, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:13-18, 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, Romans 13:1-5).

Diverse situations regarding submitting to Church leaders

Never ever openly criticize or even disagree with your leaders in front of others!

Instead, respectfully talk to them in private

"I will only submit to them if they sincerely love me and do their job very well". Of course, if they were ideal, it would help, but this is not your problem. Each man will have to give an account for his own responsibilities in life. Their responsibility is to lead you wisely and gently, and if they failed, they will be severely judged. Your responsibility is to obey them (as long as they do not call you to sin), and if you refuse, you will be judged.

"I do not like to be under pressure, there should be only love". If you feel pressure, it is most likely because you are a rebellious person who is critical of your leaders! If you had a supportive attitude towards them and if you had the humility to listen, you probably would not feel pressure! (Hebrews 13:17 shows that an unsubmissive attitude brings us problems)

"The church is not an army. Here I am a volunteer, so I am free to obey whenever I want". You are completely misled: First of all, you are never free to do whatever you want, but only what God wants. Secondly, the church is God's army, where you must learn to obey to all the generals that the Divine

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Marshal has put above you (Matt.28:20). Those leaders are responsible for your very soul (Hebrews 13:17), so opposing them is opposing God.

"This leader did this and that wrong in the past, so I cannot submit to him today". If this leader sincerely apologized and changed, you have no right to keep grudges against him. Instead, you should forgive and learn to trust again. In the case he did not ask for forgiveness, but instead keeps on doing the same sins, then you should do the following:

"This leader is sinning; I cannot obey him". In the case of a "minor" offense (like for instance he was insensitive or rude towards you), you should talk to him privately, and if he listens to you, apologizes and changes, then you must obey him afterwards. If it is a serious sin (like you think he has stolen church money, he is sexually immoral or ask you to do something that is clearly against your conscience or against the Bible), then you should take 2-3 other church leaders and expose your view. In other words, you can NEVER gossip in the back of a leader, but you should talk directly to them until the problem is solved.

A submissive person =

"I tell you respectfully my disagreement BUT I still do what YOU want"

A rebellious person =

"I tell you disrespectfully my disagreement and I do what - I - want"

DECISION TIME

You must now make a decision regarding your role as number 2 in life. If you are like most people around you, you will find it very difficult to submit and obey. As a Christian, you cannot go on like this. God will never be able to bless you and change your life if you are rebellious towards the authorities he has put above you.

Now is the time to repent and make the following prayer: "God, I have been rebellious and disrespectful toward this and that number 1 in my life. I now repent from this evil attitude that Satan wanted me to have. I now choose to submit, to respect and honor those people, regardless of whether they are going to behave well or not. Bless them as number 1! I trust you. You are in control. You are the God of order, and You will reward me for my obedience. Thank You for forgiving my sins of rebellion. In the name of Jesus, amen".

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11 - TELL THE TRUTH AND BE HUMBLE

If everyone in this world was honest with those who act wrongly, we would have far less problems. And if everyone had the humility to accept corrections, we would have even less problems! In other words, telling the truth and being open to criticism are the keys to a transformed world. Unfortunately, most people in this world are controlled by fear and pride. But Christians should not be like this. They should be known as people who are never afraid to speak the truth and never afraid to listen and improve their characters.

1. TELL THE TRUTH

To **whom, when** and **how** should I tell the truth to others?

Almost NEVER confront unbelievers

Unless you have a personal interest, like for instance getting your money back, improving a situation to your own advantage, or possibly defending someone, you should be cautious when confronting unbelievers with their sins. If you do this, they may hate you and you might make things much worse. (Proverbs 9:7-8, 12:1, 13:1, 15:12, 17:10, 19:25).

The only exception is those who are willing to humbly listen or those who want to become Christians.

The goal of the church is NOT to improve the world, but to convert the world.

Our mission is to fully transfer the maximum of citizens of the kingdom of darkness into our kingdom and then to radically change them.

It is only when the church grows in numbers and in perfection that the world around us can improve.

This is exactly what Paul meant when he said that we should leave the unbelievers alone:

"What business is it of mine to judge those **OUTSIDE** the church? Are you not to judge those **INSIDE**? God will judge those **OUTSIDE**" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13). In other words, making loud public demonstrations or raging on the internet against politicians and unbelievers who have their own immoral ways is not God's will.

It does not mean that we cannot have a civil and respectful debate and fulfill our political duties, but more than this is not only useless it is even detrimental to the Church. Leave them alone, in due time God will judge them according to their own ways as every seed always produces its results. Our duty is to be ready when they are broken by their own ways and welcome them in a family that loves sinners unconditionally.

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RARELY confront Christians who are NOT part of your church

If a Christian from another church sins directly against you, then speak one on one with him as Matthew 18:15-20 commands us. But if he sins in his own church against someone else, and not against you, then you may want to inform the pastors of his church to deal with that person as it is his responsibility and not yours! This is a matter of understanding and respecting the authority of their leaders (for instance you have no right to correct children from someone else, unless they do something directly against you. This principle applies as well to different churches). If every church had that attitude, we would have far less divisions in the body of Christ!

ALWAYS confront Christians from your OWN local church

There are 2 different situations:

1) **The first situation is when someone sins, but it is not directly against you, or it does not directly affect anyone negatively in the church.**

   In this case ask the permission from the other person if you can show him the problem you see. The reason is that the church should not be a place where everybody jumps on everyone as soon as they see problems, as this would create quite an uncomfortable atmosphere.

   It is not our business to judge Christians from other churches.

   The exception is if we are their leaders or if they have sinned directly against us.

   Furthermore, some Christians are insecure / prideful, and they do not easily take criticisms, so you can only challenge them if they are willing to welcome your corrections.

   Finally, since your time is limited, only challenge the people to whom you are willing to give time. Addressing problems without following up on them is not very loving.

2) **The second situation is if someone sins against you or sins against others in such a way that it either creates division or brings a bad reputation to the church.**

   In those 2 cases, the Bible is extremely clear: you should always speak up (Matthew 5:22-24 and 18:15) Look at the next chapter on how to do this step by step. Obviously, this principle applies as well to your family: if your husband or wife has sinned against you, you cannot run away and ignore the problem. You must speak until it is solved, whether it is first addressing the issue between you, or secondly by taking a third person or thirdly calling the church leaders.

   If you refuse to do this, you are disobedient to God. You cannot ever remain silent and distant. You cannot have an unresolved conflict with another Christian, especially your spouse, or you are siding on Satan' side. His strategy and greatest desire are that people will have bad feelings against each other so that he can separate them. He is the Master of divisions, the enemy and the accuser, and this is why he hates when people speak the truth because truth always sets us free.

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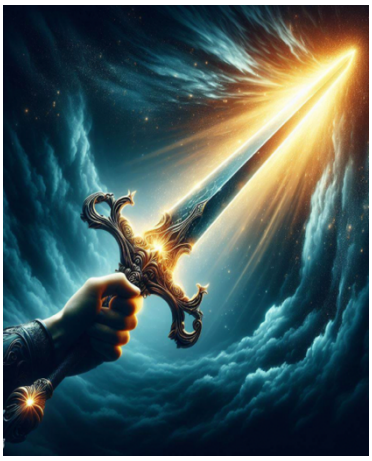
How and why should I tell the truth?

Do not tell the truth while you are angry. (Ephesians 4:26 when we speak while being angry, we can create all sorts of problems!) Pray until you can be quiet and self-controlled, or else you may have to eat words you never meant to say.

- **With humility.** (Matthew 7:1-4, 12). We can be wrong or not have the full picture in what we perceive being the truth, which is why we should come across with caution and humility, or else we will embarrass ourselves.



- **Briefly and clearly.** If you cannot define the issue in less than 5 minutes, then you do not see the problem clearly! For this, you may want to think before you open your mouth. Furthermore, if you drag on and on what you see as being wrong in the other person, you may bring heaviness and discouragement. The best rebukes are short and to the point.

- **With gentleness.** This quality is one of the most difficult ones to develop in the process of telling the truth, because most of the time we only tell the truth with some tension or even irritation. But it has incredible power to break any kind of opposition ("through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone"-Proverbs 25:15). Together with a firm attitude, softness can create wonders ("Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far" -Theodore Roosevelt)).

- **With love.** We should make every effort to do it with sincere love, because love truly helps to "cover a multitude of sins". People will always swallow our pills much better if they feel that we are more concerned about their problems than we are concerned about our own frustrations. It is very important to understand that loving people does not mean that we accept them as they are. It is a lie and illusion to say that we accept people as they are, because we never do! People have sins that are part of their personalities that we will never accept. To love means that we address their problems in a way that they feel respected, even if they don't like or agree with what we have to say. In other words, we speak to them with patience and self-control, which implies that we are not aggressive or arrogant. As the Bible says, "gentleness can break bones" (Proverbs 25:15). This is why the Bible says that we can love our enemies. It obviously does not mean that we accept the behavior of those who hate us, but we can speak to them in such a way that they know that we are kind and forgiving.

It is not a contradiction to **love** our ennemies and call their ways **evil**!

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What are some of the reasons we are afraid to tell the truth?

- **We do not want to appear hypocritical.** In some areas, we feel we have no right to speak because we are not practicing ourselves what we would like others to change. But we can still do it, with the humility that says: "I am struggling with this problem, but I call you nevertheless to change together with me". In this way we will not only become an inspiration to others, but we will force ourselves to take measures to change. Challenging others to change is one of the greatest WIN-WINS of the Church!

- **We are more concerned about ourselves than we are about the other person.** The classic example is the one where we prefer to let someone have his zipper open in front of everyone, instead of having to tell him the embarrassing truth ourselves. Somehow, the same is true with every other situation when we do not confront others with their sins. We show that we care more about what the confronted person will think of us, rather than thinking what others might think of that person, which is selfishness.

- **We are afraid of being rejected or misunderstood.** Every truth telling has the potential of bringing tensions and negative reactions. (Galatians 4:16 "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"). People who are afraid to tell the truth, as they want to please everyone, usually end up pleasing no one. This is particularly tragic when leaders act this way. "One who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than one who flatters with the tongue" (Proverbs 28:23)

- **We are afraid to hurt others.** Often the reason behind this is because some truths have hurt us in the past, so we do not want to hurt others. The desire to be sensitive is legitimate only up to a certain point. When we let others suffer because of sins they are not seeing in themselves, we stop being loving.

- **We think that it is not our problem if the other person has a problem against us.** According to Matthew 5:22-24, it is always our responsibility to speak up.

- **We think that we should not bring judgments**. According to Matthew 7:1-6, we are not to judge *people*, but only their sinful behavior, and this must be done with humility and grace. 1 Corinthians 6:1-4 in fact, calls us to make judgements, because one day we will judge angels ourselves. When we do not judge, but remain silent, we have already made a judgement anyway.

- **We do not believe that the other person will change anyway.** 1 Corinthians 13:7 "Love believes all things." We can never be assured whether people will listen and change accordingly, but we can still plant seeds on which God will water and produce changes in His own way. A loving correction can be remembered and eventually bring its fruits in time.

- **We love ourselves more than we love God.** Finally, this is the bottom-line reason, because as difficult as it may be, if God tells us to be truthful with others, either we obey God or we don't.

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2. BE HUMBLE

Humility comes through:

1. **God's presence**
2. **Seeking corrections and advice from others**
3. **Studying doctrines that are different than ours**

Humility starts by being in God's presence

Humility always first starts in our prayers. If you are truly and sincerely willing to pray: "God help me to see You" then you will experience the paradox that all the saints and prophets experienced when they saw His holiness, His grace and His power. They cried out like Isaiah "I'm doomed! Everything I say is sinful, and so are the words of everyone around me. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD All-Powerful." (Isaiah 6:5).

If we truly want to see God, we will see ourselves at the same time. And it will always be a bitter-sweet experience because to see Him is truly the best reality of life but at the same time it is painful. This is what John the Baptist experienced when he said that the more He increases in us the more we want to decrease. True humility is to see God and ourselves at the same time. So, if God shows you things about you as He shows you things about Him, then rejoice!

Humility is seeking corrections, advice and transparency

Some religious people claim: "I only listen to God, and I don't care what people think of me". This is a prideful attitude. Obviously, not everyone is right about how they see you, but if most Christians around you perceive you as someone who has great difficulty to listen and accept corrections, then there is a high probability that you are prideful!

The truth is that if you are not willing to genuinely care what most Christian friends around you think of you, then you are already prideful. The entire Bible is filled with verses that show that humility before God always means humility before men.

So, the first thing you need to do is to attentively and humbly listen to what people are trying to tell you! In fact, if you are not able to do this, you will NEVER change! This is why you need to completely

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change your attitude regarding corrections. You need to stop seeing them in a negative light and welcome them!

If your church is not helping you to radically transform your character, but only makes you feel good and socially entertained, you have been deceived by Satan.

This is exactly the kind of religion that the Devil wants you to have.

Secondly, you cannot have wisdom and a better life if you think you already know it all and are not willing to receive advice and directions. This is why you need to seek wise counsel for your life!

Thirdly and finally, you cannot have meaningful, deep and life changing relationships if you put up a wall to impress others and are not open with your own weaknesses and sins. This is why you need to become a real and transparent person!

In other words, humility can be summarized in having an attitude that constantly seeks corrections, advice and transparency for your life.

1. Seek corrections

To be humble is a choice that has nothing to do with the other person but everything to do with us!

We choose to be humble independently of how prideful others are

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that a wise and humble person always welcomes corrections, but a fool rejects them! (Proverbs 10:17, 12:1, 15:12,32)

You are a prideful person if: (see as well pages 53-55 for a description of pride)

- You say: "I don't need anyone to tell me anything, I only listen to God"
- You are easily on the defensive and even react emotionally when people try to tell you critical things about you
- You stop being friends with people who dare to tell you the truth about yourself
- You interrupt people and justify yourself when they correct you
- You do not invite your friends to tell you what they really think of you

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- You are incapable to summarize exactly what the other person told you when they corrected you. In other word, you do not listen.
- You cannot immediately admit your mistakes and sincerely apologize
- You cannot clearly and precisely see your sins and weaknesses
- You oppose the authority of church leaders who correct you

If you cannot clearly and precisely see all the sinful characteristics of your own nation, how will you recognize your own sins?

Our national sins are often our biggest blind spot!

The unconscious reason why we run away from correction is that we are afraid that people will discover who we really are, and they will reject us. Unfortunately, this is a reality that often prevails in the world: usually when potential friends tell you what is wrong with you, it either means "I don't really like you" or "good-by!" And because of this we do not like criticism! But among Christians it should not be so: we should be frank with our brothers and sisters and as they react with humility, we should forgive and love them as they are.

<u>Here are a few principles to build a relationship where corrections will be welcomed:</u>

- Chose yourself a few Christian friends and agree at the very beginning that you are going to have a relationship where corrections will be normal (if you naively hope that it will "naturally" come with time, you are totally misled).
- After some time of getting to know each other in different situations, take the initiative to ask openly: "So what do you see in me that needs to change?" If you invite corrections, it makes it much easier for the other person to correct you, and eventually the other person will do the same with you.
- Listen very clearly to what you have been told, repeating in your own terms what you have heard until the other person can confirm that it is really so ("If I heard you correctly, you told me that I have this and that problem, is this correct?")
- If you are not sure whether the other person is correct on his assumption of you, ask him if it is OK to invite someone else.
- Sincerely thank the person for having told you the truth, it will make him more comfortable to be always frank with you.

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- After some time, you should come up with a VERY CLEAR list of all your strengths and weaknesses. The more precisely you identify them, the better you will be able to make changes. It should be specific enough that you can put it all on one piece of paper.

- Make a concrete plan with your friend HOW you will change. (If it is not followed by a long-term strategy with specific goals to improve your life, the whole issue of correction was useless!)

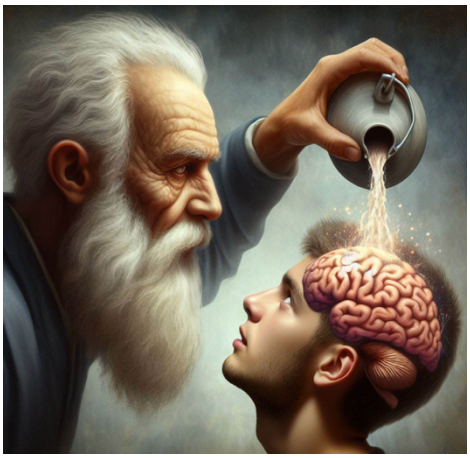
Humble people can understand you even when they do not agree with you, because they know how to listen.

Prideful people are incapable to understand you because they do not know how to listen

2. Seek advice and directions

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the wise and humble seeks advice, but the fool does not! (1 Peter 5:5, Prov. 11:14, 12:15, 15:22, 19:20)

You are a prideful person if:



- You are not seeking advice from a few friends for your important decisions and projects in life (you decide everything on your own)

- You don't like people showing you specific ways to improve your life

- You are an independent person who wants no one to tell you anything about your "private life"

- You refuse to humbly seek and take directions from your church leaders

We are so used to count on ourselves that when we make plans, we never ask wisdom from people who are wise and experienced in their area. Often it leads to disastrous results that could have easily been avoided. This is why before any important decision, consult people who are experts in their very area of expertise. If every time you receive more or less the same answer from each of them, there is a chance that there might be some wisdom in it.

For instance, if you want to have a good advice regarding marriage or family ask it not from a single person, but from a Christian who has had a strong and exemplary marriage for many years. If you want to start a business, ask from someone who had a successful business for years.

When seeking advice, be sure to clearly present the whole picture of your situation. If you conceal information because you want to appear smart and in control, then what is the whole point of asking?

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3. Seek transparency

In the world, people wear masks and unconsciously do everything to show their very best side. Why? They want to be respected. Others do just the opposite by telling you with self-pity how bad they are or how miserable their life is. Why? They want to be accepted. Both approaches have the same goal: people want to gain attention and be loved. As Christians we should not try to impress people by showing them how good or how bad we are. We should be transparent.

As we see in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was open with his deepest struggles before a few of His disciples (Matthew 26:36-46). Although he was the son of God, He did not try to show that He was strong and in control. On the contrary, He revealed himself weak and real. Paul said of Timothy that he knew *everything* about his way of life and suffering (2 Timothy 3:10-11). David made himself very vulnerable toward Jonathan, giving him his coat and sword, to such an extent that he could say that their friendship was even better than the one with women! (2 Samuel 1:26)

You are a prideful person if:

- You do not have one or a few Christian friends with whom you can share and confess your deepest feelings, sins and weaknesses
- You always try to show a good image of yourself to everyone around
- You are concerned by what people think of your life achievements
- You try to explain away your past failures (or why you have not achieved this or that result)
- You blame most of your present feelings and problems on circumstances and people around you

We are not saying that you should share all your deepest struggles and sins to everyone. In fact, this is not wise or needed. Like Jesus, choose a few close friends with whom you will be totally open. And obviously do this only with people of the same sex!

We need some close friends with whom we can be totally transparent, but there is a place and time as well to confess your sins to mature Christian leaders (James 5:15-16)

Be real with most people about weaknesses that will not shock them. You do not always have to give the impression that you are smart and strong. But as you share some of your problems, share as well some of the solutions you see. If not, over time you will give an impression of being someone who is pitiful and self-centered.

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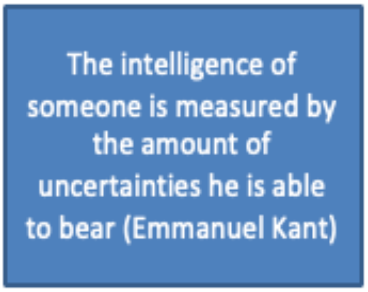
Humility is sincerely seeking the truth

Prideful Christians are those who have no willingness to question things, no humility to study an opposite view and take the Bible as their ultimate standard. When faced with views that are contrary to theirs, they usually come with the following excuses:

- *Stop judging me.*
- *You're not the theology police.*
- *There's more than one way to interpret the Bible.*
- *God is Love, not Doctrine.*
- *This is between me and God.*



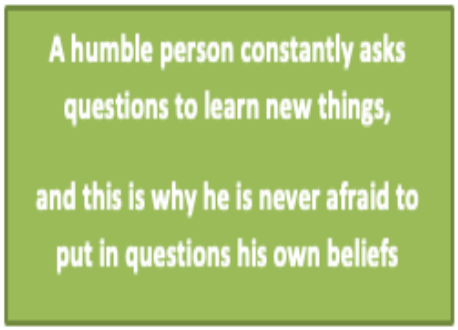
Humble Christians, on the contrary, have the same curiosity that pushes children to ask questions and learn. They have this passionate quest to seek the truth anywhere, because all truth is God's truth, wherever it may be found. This means the following principles:

Be willing to find the truth anywhere!

No one has a monopoly on the truth!

Your own church may have 95% of truth, but maybe there is a 5% that is not true. Will you have the courage to reject the 5% that is not true?

The opposite may be equally true: you may disagree with 95% of what a religious group believes, and yet they may have 5% of truth! Will you have the humility to accept this 5%?



In other words, no denomination nor your own church has a monopoly on the truth. Even your pastor believes certain doctrines that are not in the Bible! So always have the courage to push aside your own emotions and listen carefully to what any serious Bible teacher teaches. (Don't listen to the many self-proclaimed teachers on the internet, but only those who have a good moral reputation and serious academic credentials!) Always ask a lot of questions, do not rush, and only after much time of study, make your own conclusions!

Always study more than one view!

You cannot ever claim that you are a humble person if you have not carefully and thoroughly studied any subject from the opposite perspective. The Christian world is made of all kinds of denominations where each one claims to have a certain specific view that is biblically true.

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Did you have the humility to thoroughly study each one of their doctrines? Can you say precisely what they believe, and why you do not agree with them? Can you pull out the verses that explain your position?

So, until you have fully heard everything that a person believes, you have absolutely no right to argue with him. Instead, you must ask many sincere questions to fully inquire about his position. Only after this you can show your position

There is not a single person in this world who is perfectly neutral and objective:

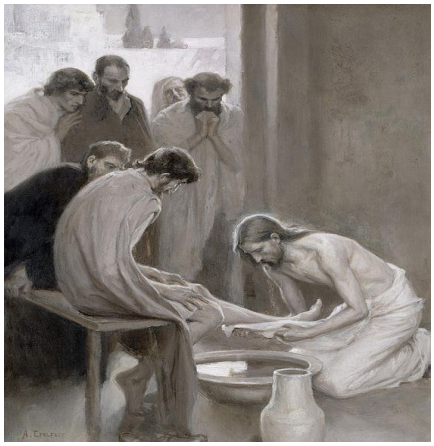
We have all been biased by all sorts of experiences and doctrines and you are not an exception!

So have the humility to study what others believe,

it could be that you are totally wrong on some issues!

What are the positive results of humility?

- We can see ourselves as we really are, and not as we would like to project ourselves to others.
- Our self-esteem increases dramatically because we are free from what others think of us.
- People respect us far more.
- We have much deeper relationships.
- People are not afraid of us.
- We motivate others to change (if you want others to change, start giving the example yourself!)
- We walk in the light, so Satan cannot use our hidden sins to destroy us.



- People can never black mail us because we have nothing to protect about ourselves.

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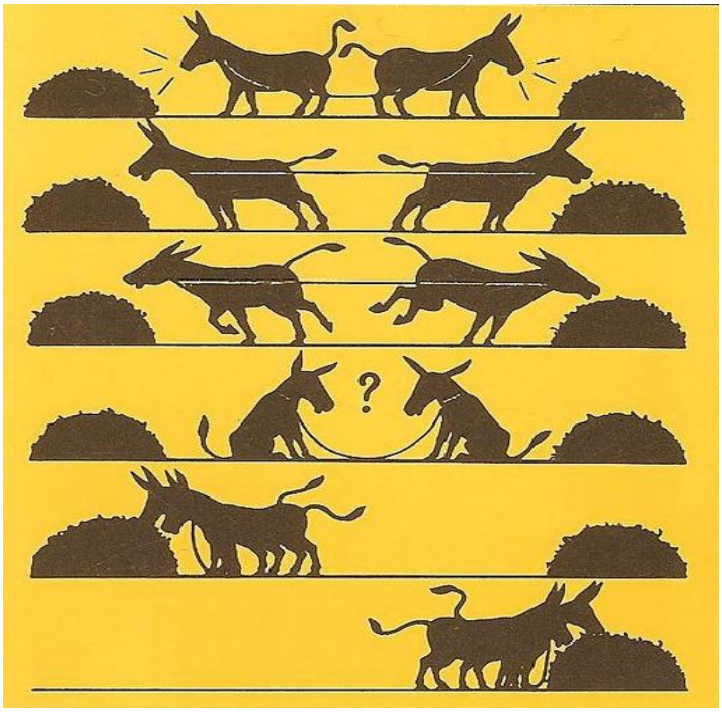
12 - SOLVE CONFLICTS ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE



Outside the Church, in the non-Christian world, it is completely normal to have unresolved conflicts and feel bad with some people. It is normal to gossip and criticize others. It is normal to keep resentments.
In the Church all of this is absolutely NOT acceptable! **God's will is that EVERY Christian should be in complete peace and good feelings with all other Christians.** For this Jesus has given us very clear directions HOW we should solve every conflict, and we must obey what He has commanded us!

The Bible gives us fundamental principles how to solve conflicts in the church:

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24)

""If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (Matthew 18:15-17)

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If you know that a friend, your spouse or any Christian in the Church has sinned against you or you have a problem against him, or if you are aware that he does not like you, even in the slightest way, here are 4 things that you can NEVER do:

1. NEVER AVOID A CONFLICT!

1) **YOU CANNOT IGNORE HIM**.

You cannot say "This is not my problem, if he does not like me, it is up to him to come to me". On the contrary Jesus told you that YOU are the one who must take the initiative to go to him and talk to him face to face! If you are afraid to make the first step, you are siding with the Devil! If you refuse to immediately solve the conflict but instead say: "I forgive him", then you are a prideful religious hypocrite who is disobedient to what Jesus commanded you! The truth is that maybe you are the one who did something wrong against the other person, and by refusing to talk with the other person, you do not want to face the painful fact that you will be the one who has to apologize and repent!

If you got in conflict with another Christian and then avoid that person and keep the conflict unresolved, you are sinning against God

2) **YOU CANNOT KEEP ANY RESENTMENT INSIDE YOU**.

You cannot keep the slightest negative feeling inside of you against that person. You must immediately solve the conflict. If you do not do this, bitterness will grow more and more in your heart and eventually it will explode and create all kinds of problems in the church (Heb. 12:15).

3) **YOU CANNOT GOSSIP**.

You can never say the slightest negative bad thing against anyone behind his back. If you say only the smallest negative word against someone without first talking to that person, you are an evil gossiper! In fact, you cannot even go to another Christian or even to your pastor and say: "I have this problem with that person, can you please give me some advice on how I should speak to him?" This is gossip as well. Gossip is an extremely serious sin, one of the worst ones in the church. They always lead to divisions and those who create divisions will be thrown in the lake of fire!

If you have a conflict with someone and go to your pastor to talk about it without having first talked to that person, you and the pastor are both sinning!

Any talking in the back of people is gossip, which is a very serious sin

4) **YOU CANNOT WAIT**.

According to Ephesians 4:26 you cannot let another day go by with negative feelings in your heart. Instead, you must immediately go to that person and start the process of reconciliation.

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This is how this process of reconciliation must go:

1) **YOU MUST IMMEDIATELY TALK TO THE PERSON**.
(See the detailed principles below how to solve a conflict)

2) **BOTH OF YOU MUST FEEL GOOD WHEN THE CONFLICT IS SOLVED**.

This is very important that at the end of the conversation, BOTH of you feel good about each other. If you still hold some negative feelings against that person, even the slightest, then the problem is NOT solved. You must talk until there is absolute FULL forgiveness and repentance on BOTH sides. (Sometimes people say I have forgiven, everything is fine, but their negative feelings inside show that it is not so). If the problem was still not solved between just the two of you, then according to Matthew 18:15-18 you must…

If you refuse to talk face to face with a Christian with whom you have a problem, you have been deceived by Satan!

3) **TAKE A THIRD PERSON THAT WILL HELP YOU SOLVE THE CONFLICT**.

You can even take two persons. What matters is that they are mature and wise Christians who have a neutral position. In other words, they must love both of you and have nothing against any of the persons who have the conflict. Talk until the problem is solved. Usually, most problems are solved at this level. If this is still not solved, then you must…

4) **BRING THE CHURCH LEADERS**.

They have the wisdom and the final authority to decide what is the problem, who has sinned (maybe both have), and what needs to be done. At this level, if this person (or both) refuses to solve the conflict with humility and forgiveness, and disobey what the leaders ask them to do, then they must leave the church.

If a Christian has a problem with another Christian and he comes to you under the religious pretext of seeking your advice and prayers, he is guilty of gossip! You must tell him the following: "I refuse to listen to you. Instead, I expect you to immediately go to this other person and solve your problem between you. If you cannot solve it, then I will gladly help both of you. But if you refuse to do this, you are sinning, and I have no other choice but to inform the pastor that you are spreading gossips and causing divisions."

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The blessings of being forced to solve conflicts

God commands and expects everyone within His church to always solve any conflicts. We cannot ever have unresolved conflicts. This is true for any relationship, whether it is between individuals, in our own marriage, or between parents and children. The idea of a private personal sphere separate from the church is a lie.

If we are Christians, whether we are married or not, and if we have unresolved conflicts, we need the help of other mature Christians. The church is supposed to be God's instrument to solve all our conflicts. This divine system is excellent because it brings the following blessings:

The church is a dictatorship of love where people are FORCED to solve conflicts until they are reconciled.

They have absolutely no freedom to avoid conflicts

- It forces Christians who have no skills in solving conflicts to learn those skills. Sometimes the only way we learn those skills is by being forced to talk with people with whom we do not want to talk!
- It forces shy Christians who are conflict avoiders to become bold and assertive. Some of them always get hurt but never have the courage to stand up for themselves.
- It forces insensitive and prideful Christians to recognize that they are the ones who usually create problems, and not the others. It forces them to become humble and admit their sins.
- It brings unity and keeps Satan from dividing us through gossips and unresolved conflicts.
- It forces couples who have ongoing and unresolved conflicts to come to the light and accept help from outside, which often brings reconciliation and improves their marriage.
- It forces parents who are unwise or harsh to listen to outsiders.
- It forces children who are disobedient and disrespectful to listen to outsiders.

Disagreement is not the same as conflict!

Some Christians argue since Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement (Acts 15:39) it is ok to leave unresolved conflicts between us as Christians. This is a wrong interpretation of the text. First of all, the text does not imply that it is OK to have conflicts. Secondly, the Greek word does not say conflict but disagreement. Thirdly, it does not show who was guilty and sinned against the other. All it says is that they strongly disagreed and parted ways, but later we see that Paul talks positively of John-Mark as a fellow worker (Philemon 24) who was useful to him (2 Timothy 4:11).
In other words:

- It is OK to totally disagree with the opinion or the decision of a Christian, and as a result we might not be able to work together.

- It is **NOT** OK to have a brother sinning against us (either by sinning or/and by treating us in an unloving or sinful way) and leave it this way. We must talk until the conflict is solved so that we both have good feelings towards each other.

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Love does not mean that you ignore conflicts

Some Christians believe that since "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8) or that "hatred stirs up conflicts, but love covers over all wrongs" (Proverbs 10:12), then we are to cover or not pay attention to the sins of the people we love. In other words, some believers argue that if someone sins against us, it can be OK to remain silent. This is a lie from Satan.

What the Bible means is that if we love, we should be forgiving, which implies the idea of covering. But forgiveness does not mean that we ignore sin. On the contrary, we should always lovingly, gently and very patiently tell people who sin against us what they have done wrong, and as they repent, we should forgive them and not hold grudges against them.

The idea of remaining silent in the name of love is fundamentally dysfunctional and even dangerous. Couples or churches that put problems under the so-called carpet of love all experience in time that "your sins shall find you out" (Numbers 32:23) So true biblical love rejoices in the truth, and therefore exposes evil, but it quickly forgives as well.

2. SOLVE ALL CONFLICTS EFFECTIVELY

Tragically, in most conflicts the problem is not what started the conflict but often HOW we solve the conflict! In other words, all conflicts can be solved if we want them to be solved and if we have the wisdom HOW to solve them. Below are a few simple principles that will help you effectively solve any problem. They are quite simple, but you must have the discipline to apply them every time a problem comes up until they become a second nature to you.

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When you must address a problem

Before you present a problem:

1. Solve the conflict as soon as possible
2. But cool down and pray
3. Be short

1. Do not **delay** the resolution of the conflict, it will only make things worse.

2. On the other hand, try to **cool down** and pray before the conversation, as your emotions may only mess up the way you present things.

3. **Be short**, no more than 3 minutes. (If you need more than 3 minutes to present the problem, then you do not understand the essence of the problem!)

How to present a problem:

1. Be humble and gentle
2. Compliment and show understanding
3. Attack the problem not the person
4. Share your feelings
5. Present your own solution

1. **Come across humble and gentle**
   ("maybe I might be wrong in what I see", "tell me if I am not right". And mean it! If you do not sincerely believe that you might be wrong, you are a hypocrite and a manipulator, and usually people feel it) Remember that HOW you speak is more important than WHAT you have to say (The tone of voice, the loudness, the expression of your face, your body language, etc.… Remember that the tongue can break bones (Proverbs 25:15).

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2. **<u>Tell something positive about the person</u>**
   Empathize with his motivations before your criticism and show if possible that you **<u>understand him</u>** (I am sure you did not want to act like this since you are a smart person, but….). When Jesus criticized a church in the book of Revelation, He always first said something positive about them.

3. **<u>Criticize the action and never the person</u>.**
   Make every effort to separate the person from his actions or words, so that the person does not feel that you attack him/her as a person. (For instance, do not say: "you are irresponsible, but say: "the way you behaved was not very well thought out")

4. **<u>Try to precisely explain how you feel</u>**,
   Use emotional feeling words so that the other person wants to understand you (for instance, I feel frustrated, discouraged, etc...) Presenting your feelings is not a manipulation but simply a way for the other person to see how you view the problem. Sometimes people can genuinely recognize the problem but have absolutely no idea how bad you feel about it. This is particularly true between men and women.

5. **<u>Show what he could have done right or better</u>.**
   Presenting your version of the problem is one thing but presenting your own solution can be quite another thing! Bring your own solution in a practical, respectful, and indirect way like "If I were you, I would have done this and that" or "Wouldn't you agree that doing this and that would have been better?" or "What do you think if you did this or that?"

<u>Example according to the above 5 rules:</u>

My dear husband,

1) Maybe I missed some important information and might be wrong.
2) First of all, I want you to know that I really appreciate your hard work for us, and I am sure you were very tired. So, I understand that you needed some relaxation and wanted to be alone with your friends.
3) Now, I never received a single phone call to inform me of your plans and I waited 3 hours here without knowing where you were and what happened to you.
4) I am not feeling good or respected.
5) It would have been very nice if you called me to warn me. I could have planned things differently with the whole evening and the meal and the children.

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When someone presents his problem to you

1. **Carefully listen** and only ask questions in order to better understand what the other person said. **Never interrupt!** (This is not polite and respectful) **Never argue** and **never justify** yourself. Do not push aside and ignore the criticism you just heard by saying: "but you have this other problem", that is kindergarten communication! Only open your mouth when the other person is finished and then say the following:

2. **Repeat** in your own words what you understood the other person ("***If I understood you clearly, you said this and that, right?"***) If he says: "Yes you correctly understood me", and you immediately see the problem, then apologize, but if it is not possible, then….

3. **I take time to think and pray about it**. I ask the other person if he can give me some specific amount of time so I can think about the problem. It must be very specific, like "Can you give me 10 minutes (or 1 hour) to think about it?" (And not so vague that the other person does not know when or if I will come back to solve the problem!) According to Ephesians 4:26-27 it must be done the same day. The exception is that I am so tired that trying to solve the conflict late in the evening may make things worse.

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4. **Explain precisely what you did wrong** (with detailed facts, showing that you clearly understand what was wrong, and not generalities that could mean anything).

5. "**I should have done this way and that way**" (It shows that you not only understand what was wrong, but what you should have done correctly).

6. "**I understand what you feel**" (possibly tell him what he might exactly feel, this will show him that you sincerely care about him).

7. "Please **forgive me**"

8. Is there anything else **you want me to do** about this?
(If you are truly sorry then you should be ready that your words are not enough, that the other person may want you to do something to clean up your mess)

9. **Define and write down a behavior rule that** resulted from this conflict. This is especially important within a family or any new relationship, so that you can think more about it, pray about it and be ready when the same situation comes again.

If you can repeat in your own terms what the other person told you,

And then he confirms that you have correctly understood him,

Then you have solved a huge part of the conflict!

<u>Example according to the above 8 rules:</u>

My dear wife,

1) I listened very carefully to what you told me.
2) If I understood you correctly, you do not feel respected that I did not call you before going out with my friends and as a result you could have planned things differently? (She says: yes, so you apologize).
3) Can you give me that number of minutes to think and pray about it? (If needed, maybe it is not)
4) This was wrong of me to just leave with my friends and not call you.
5) I should have called you.
6) I can see how you do not feel respected.
7) I am sincerely sorry, please forgive me.
8) Is there anything else you want me to do about this?
9) I write down a family rule for myself ("I always inform my wife of my plans when I go out with my friends")

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3. FORGIVE

A conflict can be solved in the sense that you stop fighting and decide to be on good terms. But sometimes the pain of resentment or even bitterness still remains, and it keeps on playing in your heart over and over again. This is when you need to make a decision that either you will keep on being a slave of those feelings or you will let them go. This is what forgiveness is all about. Now, before you can forgive, you first need to clear all the misunderstandings of what forgiveness is NOT.

What forgiveness is NOT

- **Forgiveness is not a feeling**.
  It is a decision. If you wait until you feel like forgiving, you will probably never do it!

- **Forgiveness is not a weakness**.
  It takes a lot of strength to acknowledge your own pain to yourself and let it go.

- **Forgiveness is not an escape**
  It is not pretending that it never happened.

- **Forgiveness is not a covering of the wrongdoing**.
  It is never a condoning, an excusing or even a justification of the wrong. We can forgive the person without excusing the act.

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- **Forgiveness is not trusting.**
  Forgiveness should be freely given, but trust must be earned.

- **Forgiveness is not necessarily forgetting.**
  Some things will never be forgotten, and in some cases they should not be so that we become wiser. Forgiveness is not so much about trying to forget, but more about trying to not remember.

- **Forgiveness is not a hope for restoring the relationship**.
  This may never happen

- **Forgiveness is never conditional.**
  It does not depend on whether the other person apologizes, asks for forgiveness or even changes. You forgive independently of him/her

What forgiveness IS

- **You stop expecting anything back from the other person.**
  Matt 6.12 says that we have to forgive our debtors. Obviously, forgiveness is more than forgiving financial debts, but includes every kind of emotional, relational, or psychological debt. Every time we feel that someone owes us love, respect or understanding, we are asking that person to pay us back his/her debt of love towards us. To forgive is to cancel that expectation. In other words, if the person wants to do his/her part fine, but if he/she does not want to, we still decide to give up our expectation. To stop expecting people treating us well is the essence of forgiveness.

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- **You decide to not dwell on what happened**.
  Stop replaying in your mind the problem over and over again! Press the stop button!

- **You decide to give that person something that he absolutely did not deserve**.
  Remember that God has forgiven you of everything wrong you did in life, and you were absolutely not worthy of this! Remember as well that you will still make mistakes and so you want others to treat you in the same way that you choose to treat them now

- **You decide to give up your right to punish that person**.
  You decide that you will not bring this incident again and use against that person. You basically let God deal with that person.

- **You decide to trust God that something good will come from all of this.**
  Even if right now you see absolutely nothing good in it, maybe later you will love people differently or maybe something in the future will happen to that person that can change him, maybe some hidden blessings will come for you out of this, etc.…)

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Test yourself: Are you a mature Christian?

To be defined as mature, you first have to pass the most elementary test of being a mature, responsible and disciplined person (according to what is written on page 154-157). If you did, you could examine the following check list below. This list is obviously not exhaustive, and it certainly does not mean that you are perfect, but if you can fulfill those basic characteristics, then you will be able to call yourself a mature Christian (Philippians 3:15).

In regards to God:

- Can you explain all the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith? (The problem of evil and suffering, sin and salvation, the afterlife, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the end times, etc.…)

- Can you explain the fundamental differences between some of the major doctrines in Christianity? (For instance, between a Calvinist and an Armenian view? The different views on the millennium? The Trinity?)

- Do you have the humility and discipline to constantly study views that might be different than yours? Even from people that you don't like or do not agree with? (This is not only true for doctrinal views but for every other area of life). If you said yes, would anyone who knows you well agree with your own view of yourself?

- Do you regularly enjoy praying and fasting, and can you most of the time clearly hear the voice of God in all kinds of situations?

- Do you have a total dependence on God so that you often see supernatural miracles in all kinds of areas?

- Are you constantly seeking spiritual gifts, and are you growing in them? Are you right now working on acquiring new spiritual gifts? (This is true not only of "natural" gifts, but of "supernatural" gifts as well).

- Do you have regular and diverse experiences with the Holy Spirit?

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- Do you have an attitude of total surrender and obedience to God? One that says: "I am ready to sacrifice anything for the sake of the Gospel, my own life does not matter, I have only one passion in life, Jesus and the advancement of His Kingdom"?

In regard to yourself:

- Can you clearly describe your potential, all your talents and all your gifts? Can you really see yourself positively in the same way that God sees you?

- Can you at the same time see objectively all of your weaknesses, your sins and all the precise areas where you should improve your character?

- Do you have discipline with your health? In other words, do you practice the 5 fundamental principles of what makes someone healthy? (If you cannot have discipline with your body, you have little control over your life).

- Can you clearly enumerate the top 3-5 goals of your life? Do you have a plan how you will reach those goals within the next few months or years?

- What are 3-5 things you do every single day that help you to reach the above goals? In other words, do you have discipline with your time?

- When you have problems for which you are not guilty, do you usually keep an attitude that has joy, faith, and perseverance?

- When you have problems that you caused yourself, do you take full responsibility for them, blaming no one and no circumstance, and making every effort to change your situation?

- Are you blessed financially, because you know how to manage your money well, how to live by faith, and how to sacrifice your money for those who need your help?

In regard to people:

Discipleship

- Do you regularly share your faith with unbelievers? Is a part of your lifestyle that you constantly want others to know about Jesus?

- How many people have you personally brought to Christ? Did you personally train those persons and did those persons convert and train other people as well?

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- Do you have a deep, life changing friendship with another Christian? The kind of David-Jonathan, Paul-Timothy, Jesus-John relationship where you could give your life for that person? The kind where you can be totally open about all your sins and struggles?

- Did you or do you still have a trainer-mentor who helped you to grow in the basics of the Christian life? In your character? In your gifts and skills?

- Are you now personally training a person so that he/she can reach a certain level of maturity in his/her gifts and character? (In other words, do you now have a disciple you are training?)

Humility

- Do you seek and easily welcome critics because you constantly want to improve? Do you always take criticism with humility and self-control?

- Do you easily seek advice for any major decision or direction of your life?

- Are you transparent with your life, because you have nothing to hide, nothing to impress and you are not afraid of what others think of you?

Relationships

- Do you love in such a sincere way that you never keep any resentments or even the slightest offense in your heart for more than a few days?

- Do you make every effort to solve any conflict in a way that both parts feel fine?

- If you cannot solve a conflict with someone, do you immediately take outside Christian mediators until the problem is fully resolved?

- Can you say that you never ever gossip or even say the slightest negative thing about anyone behind their back?

- Do you easily confront people with the truth? Do you know with whom to do it and when to do it? Do you do it with sincere love, gentleness, and self-control?

- Are you a person who easily forgives and move on?

- Do you easily submit to the authority of those who are above you, whether it is at work, in your family, in the church, in relationship to the government or to more mature Christians?

What areas of your life do you need to grow in order to become a more mature Christian?

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9 GUIDELINES
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CHURCH LEADERS

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9 GUIDELINES for CHURCH LEADERS

Below are some practical principles that you will not really find in church leadership books

1. **Study ALL the different doctrines of Christianity.** This is necessary not only to protect your church against heresies, but you might bless them with doctrines that could be more biblical. Furthermore, if you diligently study the views of others, you will bring an atmosphere of humility and unity within your own church.

2. **Confront every contemporary issue through the Bible.** Today the internet has an incredible power to negatively influence people. This is why you should analyze every contemporary issue and confront them from your pulpit. If you naively refuse to do this, your church members will be influenced by all the political, social and philosophical lies of this world. This should not be so as Christians should be the ones influencing the world through their biblical convictions and not the opposite!

3. **Do not be legalistic.** Legalism has destroyed more churches than all the sins of hell put together! The reason is because legalism is invisible and hides itself under the mantel of zeal and righteousness. Identify it!

4. **Preach with excellence**. The better you teach and preach, the greater your influence will be. Tragically, few leaders understand the basics of homiletics, and as a result their authority is diminished.

5. **Build a church with a biblical worship service.** Today most Christians can get a lot of biblical teaching through the internet. But the one thing that the internet cannot offer is to experience collectively the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Understand the principles that make this possible!

6. **Restore the biblical DNA and the 6 ministries of the Early Church**. The best way a church will be biblical is when everyone is making disciples, when everyone is willing to change his character and when you clearly define and restore the 6 ministries of the early Church!

7. **Organize your church like the early church.** The way a local church and a network of churches is structured strongly influences its numerical growth, its spiritual health, its unity and its protection against false doctrines and persecution. In other words, its organizational structure makes a huge difference.

8. **Restore the Jewish roots of the early Church**. Have a clear understanding of the Torah and then identify what could be restored, what is strongly recommended and what is optional.

9. **Know what desert times are**. Once in a lifetime, but sometimes more, leaders must go through a “desert time”, a phenomenon common to all leaders in the Bible. If you know what such a time looks like with its 4 phases and goals, you will be equipped to endure it.

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1 - STUDY what other Christians BELIEVE

The majority of Christians today have little humility and discipline to examine doctrines that are different than their own views!

If you think you are not like this, then consider the following 8 questions:

1. Have you examined and put in question ALL the doctrines that are specific to your own denomination or local church? (Do you even know what is different than others?)

2. Are you taking the time to constantly and deeply examine all the doctrines that are influencing the Christian world today? (Below is a list of over 64 different topics, but there is far more!)

3. When you hear a teaching in the Bible that you have never heard before, do you immediately have the reflex to question it and find out if it is according to the Scriptures?

4. When someone knows well a doctrine that is very different than yours (and of which you have little knowledge), do you have the immediate reflex to ask him many questions, not in order to argue, but to really know his position?

5. Do you always have the reflex to consider a third view after you have studied a view that is different than yours? (Below you will see that some topics have more than 2 perspectives)

6. After you have thoroughly studied a view that is different than yours, can you repeat in your own words what this person exactly believes? (And of course, the test that you have

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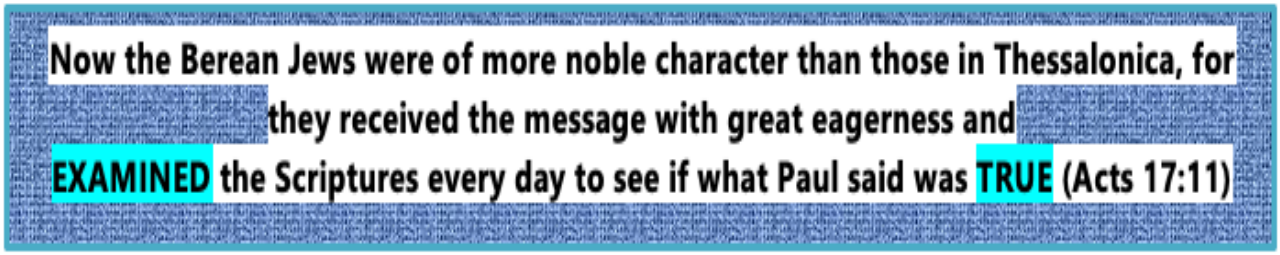
done this is that the other person is able to say: “yes from what you said, I can see that you understand what I believe”).

7. If you have thoroughly studied a different view, but disagree, can you perfectly explain why you disagree with that view? Can you clearly back it up with Bible verses?

8. Do you have the attitude that you are always willing to question and reject any of your own doctrinal positions regardless of the consequences? (In other words, if necessary, are you willing to experience tension and even rejection from your local church or denomination?)

If you cannot sincerely say YES to ALL the questions above, you are basically saying that you already have all the truth, which is pride. No one has ever had a monopoly on truth, we are always changing if we love God. Besides, if you think that other individuals are wrong in their views and they should consider yours, then why don’t you have the very same attitude yourself?



Below are all kinds of Christian doctrines that are very different than yours. If you are humble and love the truth, you should thoroughly study every single one of them until you have developed your own convictions.

If you are able to examine views that are different than yours, and then even change, you show that you not only have humility and intellectual discipline, but some respect for other believers, which is absolutely essential to all leaders.

42 Fundamental Christian Doctrines

What GOD KNOWS and CONTROLS about our FUTURE		
God knows everything that will happen to you in your future as settled facts. Since He knows everything in advance, he controls everything as well that will happen to you in the future.	Like the Calvinist views, God perfectly knows and controls everything that will happen to you in your future. But the difference is that at the same time you have your own	Unlike the Calvinist and Arminian view, God has defined an adventurous relationship with humans where He has chosen to not know what will happen to them in the future.

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Even your own will is in his perfect control. God Himself produces the desires in people to be born again, which implies as well that God knows and determines in advance who will be saved or condemned. As a result of His preordained plans, you should totally trust God for every single good or bad thing that happens in your life and future. (**Calvinism**)	will that mysteriously balances things out. How God's perfect foreknowledge and control work together with your free will is absolutely not clear, they are like 2 rails of a railroad track that never touch each other but work in parallel in the same direction. And yet there are hundreds of examples in the OT where God seems to NOT know and control the future: -God regrets things He has done -He expects some good things to happen, but they turn out to be bad -He gets frustrated -He tests people to know for Himself what they might do -He says that certain things in the future might happen, or they might not -He changes His mind about things He said or wanted to do In all the above examples, both Calvinists and Arminianists argue that these are all anthropomorphist figures of speech. God acts like a human just to show us how much he understands and loves us, but in reality, He cannot have such changing emotions and decisions. He is perfectly stable and unalterable in everything He thinks and feels. As a result, you should trust God that whatever you do, together with whatever He plans, will all work out for your very best. (**Arminianism**)	Yes, He knows all the millions of possible variants and consequences of what you might want to choose, and as a result He can always come up with the most perfect solution for any of your choices, even the worst ones, but He does not know what you will exactly end up choosing. (In other words, He does not know your future as absolute settled facts, but only as open opportunities. Of course, there are a few exceptions on this road of freedom as God already chose in advance certain things like your birth, your country, your talents, etc…He has as well determined a few things in your future (this is why prophecies exist), but they are very flexible and contingent on your own walk with Him. Since He does not know and control your future, He can be surprised, and His emotions and decisions can change (see the examples in the middle column). In other words, He is an emotionally loving Jewish God and not a Greek god with cold and unchangeable emotions. As a result, since everything is open in the future, absolutely everything that you chose to do in partnership with God really matters. Since very little is written in advance, all your prayers and decisions have a huge influence on your future. (**Open Theism**)

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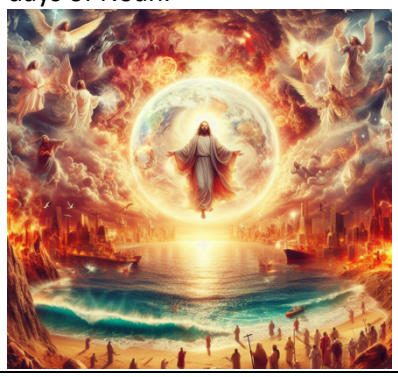
A THOUSAND YEAR REIGN

There will be a great tribulation all over the world. Some believe that the Church will be taken in the air before this tribulation, while others believe it will not. After this tribulation Jesus will come back and start a literal 1000-year reign on earth. After this He will judge the world and Eternity will start. (**Premillennialism**)	Through the success of the Gospel, God will gradually usher his reign on earth. This will culminate in either a symbolic or a literal 1000-year reign on earth. That reign will improve the whole world in every area. Many will be saved, and faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of men and of nations. After this, Christ will return to judge the world and Eternity will start. (**Postmillennialism**)	The 1000 years reign is a symbolic description of the kingdom of God on earth today, which most view as being the Church. It therefore started on Pentecost in Jerusalem, and it will end when Christ comes back to judge the world. After this, Eternity will start, and this will include an eternal reign with a new heaven and a new earth (**Amillennialism**)

Can we know the signs of the END of the WORLD?

Absolutely Yes. We have all kinds of precise and clear signs that can help us to foresee and be prepared for the end of the world and Jesus' return (for instance Armageddon, the antichrist, great tribulations before His coming, earthquakes, etc.… all the signs mentioned in Matthew 24, in the books of Daniel and Revelation, etc.…)	Yes and No. We do not have precise signs but still a few approximate tendencies like the return of the Jews to Israel, the Gospel being preached to the whole world or a general globalization of evil like in the days of Noah. 	Absolutely No. We have absolutely no signs that indicate when the end will come. The best proof of this is that Matthew 24 is divided in 2 major parts: the first part gives clear signs of what would happen around 70 AD so that believers then would be ready in advance (fig tree illustration). But the second part shows on the contrary that we have absolutely no signs regarding His coming, so all we have is to be ready every day (thief in the night or the flood illustration).

THE DUAL NATURE OF CHRIST

Views that are usually considered unbiblical: **Semi-Arianism**: Christ has a divine nature which is similar, but not the same as the Father	**Miaphysitism** ("miaphysis" means one nature) Christ is fully divine and fully human, but in ONE nature. This united nature retains all the characteristics of	**Dyophysitism:** Christ has TWO natures (divine and human) which are separate and yet completely and perfectly united in one person

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(This is not to be confused with Arianism which a heresy as it denies the divinity of Christ) **Nestorianism:** The divine and human natures of Christ are independent, suggesting in effect that they are two distinct persons loosely united rather than a unified person. **Oneness Pentecostals:** They believe in the deity of Jesus but understand Jesus to be a physical manifestation of the God of the Old Testament. In this way, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are considered titles pertaining to the one God, not descriptions of distinct individuals. Jesus and the Father are one essential person, though operating as different modes.	both, with no separation, mingling, confusion or change of either nature. (All Oriental Orthodox Churches like the Coptic, Armenian or Ethiopian churches) **Eutychianism** (considered a heresy in 451 AD): The exact opposite view of the above. The human nature and divine natures of Christ are dissolved and synthesized into one new nature. Christ' humanity is different than other humans because it has been absorbed and transmuted by His divinity, just like the ocean consumes a drop of vinegar (In other words, Miaphysitism teaches that the two natures are united in a single person, while Eutychianism teaches that the two natures are fused together into a single nature).	(which led to the Chalcedonian Definition held by most Christian Churches today. Protestant, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox church). In other words, dyophysitism emphasizes the distinction between the two natures ("two natures in one person.") While Miaphysitism emphasizes the unity between them ("one nature in one person.") (But this does not mean that in Miaphysitism the two natures are mixed or blended together, but rather that they are united in a way that is inseparable and indivisible.)
<u>HEALING</u>		
Possibly, but we cannot be sure. God is sovereign. He chooses to heal if He wants. As such we cannot ever be sure if, when and how it will happen.	Yes, but with conditions. God wants to heal all, but we must meet certain conditions to have this happen (like repent, forgive, breaking curses, etc.…)	Yes, and with no conditions. God wants to always heal all, and He does not require any condition in order to be healed, except to believe that He loves us as we are, and that He wants us to be well.
<u>WEALTH</u>		
God has not destined all of us to be wealthy. This means we should all be content with our own situation. Only those who have a talent in this area will be wealthy, all others not.	God wants everyone to be as rich as possible because He wants us to enjoy life and be a blessing to others. So, it is OK to have an opulent lifestyle. If we believe this and sacrifice our money to the church, it will happen.	God wants us to have rich financial resources so that we can advance the kingdom of God. But we should live a very simple lifestyle like Jesus, which means to always be ready to sacrifice everything and live by faith.

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LIFE AFTER DEATH

After death all the souls go in an intermediate place where they are “sleeping”. They are removed from time and space in an unconscious state until their bodies are resurrected on the Judgment Day. (Soul sleep)	After death, the souls go directly in heaven or hell. This reality is briefly interrupted by the Judgment Day, but it continues afterward for eternity. Some variants of the above include the idea that the righteous are not fully in heaven, but in an antechamber of preparation or purification until the fullness of heaven is revealed after the Judgment Day. 	All the dead go in a place called Sheol in Hebrew, or Hades in Greek. There, they are two places that are totally separated from each other. One place is for the righteous and it is called Paradise or Abraham's bosom. The other one is a place of torment for the unrighteous, and it is called Gehenna (or Hell in English). The righteous are fully aware of their bliss and so are the unrighteous with their suffering. In fact, because of this some unrighteous seek contact with the world of the living. (This explains mediums and demonic activities). Both groups are “waiting” until the Judgment Day after which their ultimate destiny will be finalized.

Shall CHRISTIANS be JUDGED on the Judgement Day?

Not a single Christian will even appear before the Throne of Judgement since we have already been judged at the cross and have no condemnation in Christ.	All Christians will stand before the Judge, but it will be a quick formality, since the positive outcome has already been decided in advance.	All Christians will be judged on everything they did in this life and rewarded accordingly, and some will be condemned.

PUNISHEMENT OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS

All or most will be saved (Christian Universalism, Unitarian, heretical for most). Right after death every human will still be given a free choice between Heaven or Hell, but in every case, they will choose what they love, what they fear and what they are attracted to	After the Judgment Day, (or right after death, as some believe), the Unrighteous are thrown in hell or the lake of fire and there they are tormented for eternity because the human soul is eternal. They are very conscious of their suffering. (Classical view of hell)	Immediately after death, the unrighteous suffer for what feel a very long time in a place of torments. But after this, on Judgment Day, they are thrown in the lake of fire to be destroyed so that they stop to exist. Eternal life is not given to them; instead, they perish because the human soul is not eternal.

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(Swedenborgism-Considered borderline unbiblical by most).		The reason why the fire of that lake is eternal is because the Devil and his angels (and only them) are tormented there for eternity (Annihilationism).
Can WOMEN lead a group of men or even be PASTORS?		
They can never lead any group where men are present. Therefore, they can never be pastors of any church.	They can lead any mixed group of men and women. Therefore, they can be pastors over an entire church.	They can lead mixed groups but only under the authority of other men or their husbands. (Like a man and a woman leading a family together. The woman can advise and influence, but men are always the final authority). Therefore, they can be co-leaders, but only under the leadership of men.
Can WOMEN TEACH men?		
Women can never teach men (but they can teach children and young boys).	Women can teach any men in any kind of setting and in any form they choose to.	Women can teach men (The early church had women prophesying, which is an indirect form of teaching), but they should never do it with an attitude that control them or tell them what to do. In other words, they should never take authority over them.
Should we KEEP the SABBATH?		
YES. It is compulsory for all people and for all times and has never been abrogated. Not keeping it is a sin (Adventists and Sabbatarian groups). It has been replaced by Sunday and should be kept in the same way and spirit as the Saturday Sabbath. (Many Reformed Christian, Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, etc.…)	NO. It has been abolished and spiritualized and therefore Christians are no longer obliged to keep any day in any way or form. Only the principle of physical and mental rest remains. 	YES and NO. It is good and important and was not abolished. The early church kept it, and therefore no one should be judged for practicing it. On the other hand, if anyone regards other days as equally important and does not keep the shabbat, he is free and should not be judged either.

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The "Filioque" controversy:		
The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26) (Most Oriental Orthodox churches)	The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (Filio=son, que=and) because the Spirit is sent by Christ, and it is called in Paul's letter as the Spirit of Christ (The Catholic Church and most Protestant churches).	Others believe that the formulation has led to an unnecessary controversy because if the word "proceeds" is understood that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, then both sides can be satisfied. In other words, if the dogma does not imply the idea that the Son is the cause of the Spirit, then there is no problem!)

FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY	
The 5 ministries do not really have any clear biblical definitions and requirements; they might even have symbolic meaning. So, it does not really matter. Every denomination is therefore free to choose its own definitions and conditions.	The 5 ministries (6 if we add the roles of deacons) have very clear and precise biblical qualifications and conditions. We are not free to give them our own definitions. In fact, the New Testament warns us to recognize and reject false apostles, false teachers or false prophets and it clearly defines what pastors, deacons and evangelists are.

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Who can be called a PASTOR?	
Anyone who sincerely loves God, has a solid knowledge of the Bible, a good character and leads a church can be called a pastor. This includes any non-married person as well as any woman.	Only those who fulfill ALL the conditions given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 can be called pastors (Shepherds, bishops and overseers are all different terms for the very same function. Therefore, pastors are only men who did not divorce as Christians, who are blameless, not overbearing, have good reputation among unbelievers, their grown-up children believe and respect them, etc….) Those biblical conditions disqualify a lot of people who are called pastors today.
Can CHURCHES be ORGANISED in any way they choose?	
Churches are completely free to organize themselves as they choose, because the Bible does not give any precise organizational pattern. => They might have one pastor over one local church or a senior pastor with other pastors. They might have one or more pastors with a parallel group of so-called elders. => They can have any kind of hierarchy over the local church (usually some kind of top leader or bishop with all the various leaders under him). Some denominations do not have any hierarchy but can have councils or superintendents who visit the local churches.	Churches must follow the exact pattern of the New Testament, which is the following: => Each local church has a group of pastors who lead all on an equal basis (They are called shepherds or elders in the New Testament). This group is supported by deacons and can have the influence of traveling or local prophets. => The local churches have absolutely no hierarchy of authority over them, but only the long-term influence of the evangelists who planted those churches. They can also have the temporary influence of traveling prophets and teachers.
Has the CHURCH REPLACED ISRAEL?	
Israel has been fully replaced by the Church when most Jews rejected Jesus. Now God only works through the Church and Israel is just one nation among others that need salvation. Everything He does is for His Church; He has no separate plans for Israel.	God has never rejected Israel. In fact, when a Jew believes in Jesus, he fulfills the Mosaic law, the Covenant and all his Jewish traditions perfectly. This is why God has a strategic plan to fully restore them as a nation on their own land. His goal is to save them and then to use them to improve the Church and to redeem the whole world.
Should we FOLLOW JEWISH FEASTS?	
We have no need nor any obligation to celebrate any of the biblical feasts, particularly if we are not Jewish.	We should try to follow all the biblical feasts, particularly if we are Jewish, but should avoid judging others

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Should we CELEBRATE Christmas, Easter, and other NON-JEWISH FEASTS?	
We should not celebrate any of them as most of them have pagan origins.	We are free to celebrate any of them and assign to them any spiritual meaning we wish to.
RAPTURE	
Jesus will come twice, first to snatch believers into heaven for a few years while the world keeps on (the rapture) and then a second time, to set His feet on earth.	Jesus will only come once, and it will coincide as well with the end of this world.
ORIGINAL SIN	
All humans not only inherit the guilt of Adam, but they are in a state of sin from the very moment of their conception. (Hereditary guilt and hereditary sinful nature).	Every man is only guilty for his own sins, and not the one of Adam. Yes, his transgression has brought us death and the potential to sin, but not a collective guilt or the incapacity to do anything right. In fact, infants are born pure and innocent until they are slowly influenced by a sinful world around them.
PREDESTINATION	
God has predestined some of us to be saved, others to be lost. (Calvinism)	God has predestined all of us to a good or bad outcome, but this outcome is entirely determined by what we freely choose. (Arminianism and Open Theism)
Can a CHRISTIAN be under the control of DEMONS?	
Christians can never have demons in them nor even be under the control of demons, because the Holy Spirit lives in them.	Christians can be under the influence or even the control of demons if they choose thoughts and sins that open the doors to demons.

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CAN A CHRISTIAN DIVORCE?	
A Christian can only divorce if the other spouse committed adultery. All other cases are not accepted.	A Christian can divorce not only if there is adultery, but if the other spouse leaves and categorically refuses to fulfill his/her marital duties. If the other person represents a physical danger to the family, separation and possibly divorce is allowed as well.
CAN A DIVORCED CHRISTIAN REMARRY?	
A divorced Christian can never remarry. If he does, he commits adultery.	A Christian can remarry if he was not the one who caused the divorce (or he was willing to fully submit to the help of the church leadership, but the other partner refused).
CAN CHRISTIANS MARRY UNBELIVERS?	
A Christian should never marry an unbeliever.	A Christian is free to marry any unbeliever, but it has consequences.
IS BAPTISM needed for SALVATION?	
Baptism is not needed for salvation, because baptism can be considered a work, so it cannot save. Only faith is required, and to some extend repentance.	Baptism in itself does not save, as only faith saves. But faith is expressed by repentance and baptism, and so those elements are included in the overall plan of salvation. (In other words, faith, repentance, and baptism are all needed for salvation).
WHEN are we SAVED?	
We are saved as soon as we believe, which usually happen when we invite Jesus in our hearts or made the sinner's prayer.	We are saved as soon as we believe in Jesus, but this process must be finalized with a sincere repentance and with water baptism. (In other words, it is a 3-step process, not just one)
SALVATION POSSIBLE for those who have NEVER HEARD the GOSPEL?	
If someone never heard the Good News in this world, he/she will be automatically lost. There is no other opportunity.	If Jesus went to the Sheol, the place where all dead people end up, and if He presented the Good News for those who had never heard it, why would this same opportunity not remain today? (It does not imply that those who hear it will be saved, it only means the choice could still be available). For those who had this choice on earth, but refused it, no other choice will be given.

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CAN WE LOSE OUR SALVATION?	
Our salvation is eternally secure, we can never lose it. (If someone repudiates Christ, that person was never really born again in the first place).	We can lose our salvation if we consciously reject Christ, stop living like Christians and die without repentance. (In other words, we don't lose our salvation just because we had a bad day!)
CAN CHRISTIANS BE CURSED?	
Some of us Christians can be under unknown curses, and if we earnestly seek God, He will show us who, when and how we were cursed, and then how we can pray to break those curses.	Curses cannot have any power over us if we believe that Christ took upon Himself all our curses on the cross, and if we repent and do not commit the very sins that activate those curses. This is why the idea of "breaking curses" is totally absent in the New Testament.
Is the BAPTISM of the HOLY SPIRIT for ALL?	
Being baptized in the Spirit is equivalent to becoming a Christian, so in this sense it is for all. If it is to be considered a separate experience from our conversion, then it is only for a few special Christians and it should not be expected for all	This is an experience separate from the conversion, and it should be expected for all Christians. It is usually obtained by directly seeking it in prayer; it can come by having others praying for us and sometimes it comes by surprise. It can happen before our conversion, but it usually happens after
Are TONGUES required for ALL BELIEVERS?	
All Christians are supposed to speak in tongues, especially if they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. It is a strong means to edify oneself and a sign that you are filled with the Holy Spirit.	Not all Christians are supposed to speak in tongues, no more than all are supposed to heal or prophesy. But like all gifts, it can be sought and obtained, and like all gifts, it can edify oneself. It will often accompany the baptism of the Holy Spirit or strong experiences in the Holy Spirit.
Can we drink ALCOHOL?	
It is always a sin to drink any kind of alcohol in any amount. If for some it might not be considered as a sin in itself, at least we should never drink it as it is a terrible example to others.	It is never a sin to drink alcohol but only being drunk or have any kind of addiction. The exception is that if another believer has a problem with it, we should not tempt him by drinking in his presence.
WHEN and WHO can take the LORD'S SUPPER?	
We should never take it if we know we did something reprehensible or if we feel unworthy. In other words, the primary purpose of this meal	We can always take it regardless of how unholy we might feel. (The only exception is when we have an unresolved a conflict with another

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is to help us to examine ourselves and to test how holy we are personally. As such children and unbelievers should not take it.	Christian. In that case, we should first be reconciled with them, and only after this we can take it). In all other cases, we can always take as it helps us to feel how much God loves us, and not how unholy we are. This is why children and unbelievers can take it.
Are we free to WORSHIP GOD HOWEVER we want?	
There is only a certain way to worship God, whether it is without instruments (a Capella), or only with certain instruments, or only with a certain style of "appropriate" and decent Christian music. This means that some styles of music that exist in the world (rock, rap, etc.…) should never be used in the Church, and some places should be avoided.	We are free to worship God in absolutely any style of music or any architectural or cultural setting we choose, as there is no "right" place or any one style of worship music. The only exception is using words that have bad connotations.
Should CHRISTIANS serve in the ARMY?	
Killing is not always wrong, especially if you have to defend your own family or innocents. So, Christians can serve in the army in any role they choose.	Killing is most of the time wrong. Non-violence is a better option, and if this is not possible then believers should be in places where they do not have to directly kill someone. (Civil service, hospital, or other variants)
Should CHRISTIANS always SUBMIT to GOVERNMENT?	
We should always submit, even when the government acts wrongly, unless it clearly forces us to disobey God (like not going to church, denying God, etc.…)	We should not always submit to a government that acts wrongly (like paying taxes to corrupt politicians, supporting an evil war, etc.…)
Is TITHING a COMMAND imposed on every Christian today?	
Tithing existed before the law. Under the law of Moses, ALL the Jews without exception had to give 10% of their income. All the Israelites were commanded to give three tithings, so Christians should imitate the same generous example today. 	Tithing happened with only a few individuals on a one time and voluntary basis before the law. Under the law, ONLY farmers and shepherds had to give 10% of their fruits and animals! (And NEVER from money except when traveling far). All other Israelites NEVER tithed on their incomes. Instead, they only gave occasional free will offerings. Farmers and shepherds gave only a maximum of 13%. Their first tithe was the one mentioned above. Their second tithe, the festival tithe was NOT for the temple, but to support their own trip to Jerusalem; Their third tithe was for the poor

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We are not free to give whatever we want. If all Jews did this, then obviously all Christians should be doing the same today. In fact, not doing this is being disobedient to God and robbing Him (Malachi 3).	(the one that Malachi wrote about) and it was only every three years (Which meant only 3% annually) In other words 10% + 0% + 3% =13% There is not as single command in the NT to tithe! (In fact, the only 2 times it is mentioned, it is not positive!) In other words, we cannot condemn anyone, as people are totally free to give whatever they cheerfully and sacrificially choose! (Whether it is 5, 10, 20% or even more!).
Should Christians pray against TERRITORIAL SPIRITS?	
We should identify the territories where certain spirits are dominating (spiritual mapping), and after we defined their names, pray against them. We do this by praise marches, prayer walking around certain perimeters or in making some specific declarations against evil powers in certain places.	The more certain sins prevail in one place, the stronger that specific demonic stronghold is over that region. Therefore, the ONLY biblical strategy to get rid of those territorial influences is by liberating individuals one at a time. This is first done by praying that doors for preaching the Gospel will be opened, and then by repentance and casting out demons. Furthermore, confronting demons without casting them out of their human habitations is not only completely useless, but also even dangerous.
IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTENCE	
We should identify and confess the national sins that some groups have committed in the past and ask God for forgiveness on their behalf (Like Japanese asking to Chinese to forgive them for what their ancestors did to them in the past, or what white Americans did to Indians or black people in the past). We should not only do this for something in the past but even for something happening in the present. (For instance during the war a Russian believer is telling a group of Ukrainians: “Please forgive us for all that we, as a nation, are doing against you”). In parallel to this we can have prayer journeys for strategic places accompanied with spiritual mapping. By doing this, we can remove a foothold of Satan and even nullify so-called “generational curses”.	It is unbiblical to ask forgiveness to a group of people on behalf of a group of people who have not repented or have shown no willingness to do so. Each individual is responsible for his own sins, as Ezekiel 18 teaches. In other words, we are never responsible for the sins of others and therefore we have no need to ask for forgiveness on their behalf. In fact, this is psychologically insane! (Imagine that a group of criminals murdered my neighbor, would I go to his wife and ask her to forgive ME? Or imagine if Jesus said on the cross “Father, forgive ME for they don’t know what they are doing”?) The only exception when asking forgiveness is legitimate, is when I collectively represent a whole group of people who are now ALL willing to repent. This is what Nehemiah or Daniel did. (But even in this case, the asking for forgiveness was addressed to God and not to a group of people).

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	This doctrine is misleading because it confuses forgiving a group of people and asking forgiveness in their name. These are 2 different things. For instance, as a Jew, I can forgive as many Germans as I wish. But as a German today, I cannot represent any German of the past and then ask Jews to forgive what those Germans did to their ancestors! (See the reasons above). In the same spirit, none of our prayers can ever remove the curses put on others. Only the ones guilty can remove them by their own repentance.
Can PLACES and OBJECTS spiritually AFFECT us?	
YES. Some objects or places can influence you in ways you don't know and even bring curses on you. You need to pray over everything to clean them, and if needed thrown them away or burn them.	NO. Only objects or places that have an obvious spiritual or emotional relation with something bad for our conscience should be removed (like statues of Buddha, occult objects, the ring of former lover, location used for satanic rituals, etc.…) But for anything that we are not aware of, we should never worry because nothing can ever influence us. If that were the case, then virtually everything in this world could be a hidden curse and a demonic influence on us. In other words, only what we choose to believe can influence us.

22 doctrines with very different views

1) **Wars of conquest in the Old Testament**: Did God fully sanction them, and if so, what does this show about Him? Did He on the contrary not want those wars, but He made some temporary compromises in the light of His further plans and if so, what does this show about Him? Is there a mixture between those two views?

2) **Harsh social rules in the Old Testament:** (like death penalties, treatments of slaves, etc.…) Why did God give them and what does this show about Him? Do these laws reveal His character or rather His plan to temporary and gradually adapt Himself to a social setting that He himself did not want?

3) **Slavery:** Did the New Testament support the whole concept, or submission was only asked from the slaves so that they would eventually convert their masters?

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4) **<u>Unclean (non-kosher) food of the Old Testament</u>:** Should we abstain from eating them today, and if so, why? Are we free to eat anything we want? If so, why? Are there some foods we should really avoid while most other foods we can eat?

5) **<u>Polygamy:</u>** Always forbidden in the New Testament? If so, why? If not, why? Are there exceptions and if so which ones?

6) **<u>Birth control</u>**: Allowed by God, If so, why? If not, why?

7) **<u>Dancing:</u>** A sin? If so, why? If not, why? Are there exceptions? Does it depend on the kind of dancing?

8) **<u>Smoking:</u>** A sin? If so, why? If not, why?

9) **<u>Gambling:</u>** A sin? If so, why? If not, why? Are there exceptions?

10) **<u>Masturbation:</u>** A sin? If so, why? If not, why? Are there exceptions? Why is one of the most practiced behaviors on the planet not even mentioned once in the Bible?

11) **<u>Clothing:</u>** What defines modesty in the way a person is dressed? How far can some parts be visible, some not and why? Is it cultural? Does this apply to swimming clothes as well? Are some clothes not allowed for women and if so which ones and why? Are some clothes not allowed for men and if so which ones and why?

12) **<u>Women covering themselves while praying:</u>** Should they and if so, why and when? If not, why?

13) **<u>Washing each other's feet:</u>** Required, if so, why? If not, why?

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14) **How to help the needy and poor:** Should we remain anonymous while helping them or not? Should we expect them to help themselves according to our conditions or not?

15) **Excommunication (disfellowship):** Still valid today? What are the biblical and main conditions for disfellowshipping someone? How should this be done? Is shaming someone an effective and biblical motivation or not? Why?

16) **Spiritual covering:** How biblical it is? How far should submission go?

17) **Prophecies regarding Israel:** Which ones are literal? Which ones are symbolic? Which ones happened only one time and which ones repeated themselves a few times? Can any prophecies repeat themselves or not?

18) **Origin of evil and suffering:** What are all the different theories and what is yours?

19) **Hermeneutics:** What are the different theories on how to interpret the Bible? For instance, should we be silent where the Bible is silent, or on the contrary, are we free to speak in places where the Bible is silent? What are your criteria? Are there exceptions?

20) **We shall see our pets in heaven:** Some believers assume that animals do not have a soul/spirit and therefore we shall never see them again. Others believe that animals, or at least some, have souls and therefore we shall see them again in heaven.

21) **Creation, evolution,** or a mixture in-between?

22) **Aspects of salvation**: which doctrines do you believe?

- Christus Victor doctrine (God overcame all the powers of Satan, hell and death through the cross and made His love visible to men).
- Penal substitution doctrine (Christ died in the sinner's place and appeased the wrath of God toward sin).
- Ransom from Satan doctrine (Christ paid a ransom to deliver us from Satan)
- Moral influence doctrine (God left such an example of love that it invites us to want to change)
- A mixture of the above? Which ones?

- Is salvation limited to forgiveness or is it more? Does it include being healed, delivered from demons, being restored in our souls or relationships? Does salvation include as well the receiving of the Holy Spirit and God living in us?
- Is salvation a onetime act or it is a process by which we become more and more like Christ? Or is it a mixture of both?

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2 -CONFRONT every CONTEMPORARY ISSUE through the BIBLE

"Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

Do not be an immature child that is tossed back and forth by all the unbiblical and foolish theories of this world!
We look at all the people who believed in Christ in the last 2000 years Christians and think: "Why did it take them so long to see all the evils of the Catholic and the Orthodox Church? How could Martin Luther be so blind in hating the Jews? Why did it take so long for believers to recognize the evil of slavery or colonialism? Why is that biblical laws regarding the treatment of women, children or even health and hygiene have taken so long to be finally applied?" And today we look at so many believers and ask ourselves: "Why is that so many refuse to study what is going on around them in the light of the Bible? Will future generations wonder about our present ignorance and stupidity?
Some believers have this so-called spiritual attitude that we should not care too much about the issues of this world but just convert people. But this begs the following provocative question:

If we converted most people around us and if we thoroughly taught them, what would our world look like after a few years?

Would it be better, or would it be the same mess as it is today?

Are we not supposed to be the light of the world? When Christianity comes to a nation, should it not fundamentally improve every sphere of life, or are we just putting a religious coating on people?

This is why you must examine everything that happens in this world from a Christian perspective. You cannot let the world decide how you are going to think and behave. If you don't take the time to examine every issue diligently and constantly around you and compare them to the Bible, you will end up following the majority of people around you! Do you have the courage to think for yourself? Do you have the humility and the intellectual discipline to examine all the following issues below?

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Should CHRISTIANS be involved in POLITICS?		
No. We should not be involved at all in politics. The church and the world are two different and separate kingdoms. It is useless as most masses are ignorant and most political systems are corrupt anyway. It might be harmful as the world may hate us for being involved in wrong governments.	Yes. We should make every effort to interfere and be a strong voice in politics (marches, petitions, promoting some politicians, changing laws, etc...), so we can influence the social and moral direction of the country (or at least minimize its moral decay).	No and yes. We should only limit ourselves to our civic duties but in parallel within our churches we should teach biblical principles that help Christians to make the right political choices. The exception are those Christians who feel called to become politicians.
Should Christians be a moral VOICE in the society?		
No. We should not say anything negative or judge anyone. Instead, we should focus all our efforts on preaching the Gospel and make our churches morally strong, this is the only force that will change society on the long run.	Yes. We should try all we can to denounce and fight evil in every possible way, whether large and peaceful marches, no-violent protests or through any kind of public information or publications.	No and yes. We should never openly criticize the government, the society or any evil doers, because it will attract more persecution and give us a bad image as a Church. Instead, we should openly advertise the justice and social good we do and infiltrate all the strategic spheres of influences that shape society, especially the political and legal spheres.
Should Christians improve the world through HUMANITARIAN HELP?		
No. Our mission is not to improve the world physically but to preach the Gospel. It is only when unbelievers become Christians that they improve the world around them.	Yes. Any physical improvement is part of the Gospel and shows compassion. Therefore, we should always help everyone, regardless of whether people are open to the Gospel or not.	No and yes. All our money should first go to help our own people in need. If anything is left it could be used if it clearly helps to convert unbelievers.

Is Global Warming the biggest issue of our time or not?	
No. Climate change is not backed up by science, as there have been periods in history that had their own global warming and global cooling, and they had no clear correlations.	Yes. Global warming reveals a serious problem of pollution, but it is only the top of the iceberg. The bigger issue is not the climate, but how much we pollute everything in every possible direction. What is the point of limiting emissions if we have no forests, no fishes, and no potable water? Let's attack the root problems and not the symptoms!

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Socialism, capitalism, or a mixture of both?	
Some believers advocate a capitalistic government that has as little interference from the State as possible. Basically, everyone is on his own and most institutions should be privatized. Other believers want a socialist government which is heavily involved in helping the poor and taxing the rich.	Some advocate a government that has a mixture of "biblical capitalism" and "biblical socialism": **Biblical capitalism:** Hard work should always be rewarded. This means that the rich should never be overly taxed as it invites corruption and little incentives to earn more. Instead, creative and tax-deductible ways to give money to private charities should be reinvented, not only for the rich, but even for the poor. **Biblical socialism:** The poor should always be helped, but laziness clearly condemned. This means that any kind of welfare towards people who refuse to work and be accountable should be avoided, as it creates dependency and poverty. Preferably, this should be done through private charities as they are more accountable (the exception would be unemployment and retirement money). So any socialist government that helps the poor is acceptable as long as it does not take aways individual and religious freedoms, and if it advocates as well personal responsibilities and private property rights. Any socialism that leads to the concentration of power in the hands of the state is dangerous.

1. Issues you must consider

- **Wars:** when are they needed and justified? When not? When can we be neutral and when not? What are the best ways to prevent them? When are commandments of not killing and not stealing being transgressed? (In other words, how do we define murder and theft when a country attacks another country and seizes its land?)

- **Irredentism:** when is a nation entitled to take back its territories, and when not? What are the exceptions?
- **Gun control:** strict limitations? None? Exceptions and so which ones?
- **Prison systems:** what are the most effective and the most destructive?
- **Racism:** what defines it and when does it start? Are there situations when the color of your skin matters more than your character?
- **Palestinians:** can you explain all the lies of the Palestinian propaganda?
  What is the most humane and biblical solution for the Palestinians? A progressive and total annexation that will allow them to integrate into the Israeli State? A two states solution? A

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massive financial help that will allow them to emigrate wherever they wish? A mixture of those various solutions?

- **Postmodernism:** What are its biggest lies? Does it have positive elements and if so, can they be used to draw people to Christianity?

- **Banks:** What is the good, the bad and the ugly about them? Is there a fair interest rate? Are there better biblical alternatives to banks?

- **Loans and debts:** Are debts always wrong? When is it acceptable to have debts and when not? When is lending with interest against the Bible, when is it not? Does it depend on the kind of people you lend money to or not? What is the solution to stop debts? Can Christians borrow money from each other within one church?

- **Wealth segregation**: Is it a moral/psychological problem or a social and economic problem? (Or in some cases a racial problem?) Or a mixture of both? Is it morally right that a minority of people is far richer than the vast majority of other people in one country? In which case is it OK, in which case should it be eliminated, or at least refrained? And if so, how? In which cases is it harmful to get rid of an elite or very wealthy people?

- **Overpopulation and underpopulation:** What is biblically right or wrong in this area? What is scientifically correct? What should we do?

- **Meat:** What are all the situations when eating meat is wrong? When is it acceptable? What are the advantages and limitations of being a vegetarian?

- **Stem cell**, cloning, genetic modifications in our bodies or in our food: what is right or wrong?

- **Euthanasia and choosing when you die:** Are they never allowed or are there exceptions? If so, what is their biblical basis?

- **Digital surveillance**, microchips and biochips: In which areas should they be limited? In which areas should they be encouraged? How far is this possible?

- **Artificial intelligence:** How dangerous is it? How far should it be part of our life? Should we program it with Christian values such that it will be able to help believers and even churches? And so which values?

- **Nationalism:** Can a Christian be a nationalist or not? What is the difference between being a patriot and a nationalist?

- **Christian nation:** Is the concept of a Christian nation biblical or not? What are the possible benefits of such a dream and what are its major pitfalls?

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2. Issues where you should never compromise

- **Muslim religion:** Why have Muslims committed numerous genocides and murdered millions of people, far more than any other religion on earth? (In fact, twice more than all the genocides combined in history!) What does this tell us about the very nature of their religion? Why is that most Muslim countries in the world today are under violence, dictatorship, and poverty? What are its main lies to the Western world? What are its greatest dangers, and can they be avoided? If so, how? What elements can be used as evangelistic bridges to Christianity? In which areas in the western society can we cooperate with Muslims, and in which ones should we never compromise?

- **The Catholic and Orthodox Church:** What are some of their doctrines that Christians cannot accept and why? (Salvation through good works, the prayers of orthodox priests after death, the worship of Mary, the veneration of icons and prayers to the saints, the infallibility of the Pope, the alliance of the Orthodox Church with the government and their persecution of outsiders, etc.…)

- **Mormons and Jehovah witnesses:** Why are their doctrines heretical and why can we not consider those people as Christians? (Especially their view of Christ and of salvation)

- **LGBDQIA+** issues: The moral issues are extremely clear from a moral and biblical point of view, but from a point of view of their place in a free democratic society, what can be accepted, and what should be rejected? How far can their freedom go?

- **Critical race theory, identity politics, intersectionality, critical social justice movement and cancel culture:** Why are all those theories morally evil and dangerous for any society? Why is it that people should always be treated according to their character and human worth, and never according to their social status or the color of their skin?

- **Abortion:** What is morally wrong with abortion? Are there some areas where abortion could be justified? What are the real causes of abortion? (Just a disregard for life or some deeper issues? Which ones?) Abortion clinics: What is morally wrong and dangerous for democracy when they are funded by the government?

- **The major international pharmaceutical and agricultural complexes:** Is there anything good about them? Why do they exist? What is so frightening about the mutual interdependence of Big Pharma and Big Agro? What are the worst evils about them? How can we change this?

- **Major Food Corporations:** What good do some have, and what are the many evils that most of them have?

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3. Issues that are absolutely crucial to life on earth

The following 3 issues are by far the most important to our life on earth because they determine how long and how well we shall live:

- **Our health:** What should we know and do every day to live a long and healthy life?
- **Our environment:** What should we know and do to restore, protect and even embellish the physical world in which we live?
- **Our government:** What should we know and do so that we will not have autocratic governments murdering and oppressing us?

Our health

"I pray that you may enjoy good health" (3 John 1:2)

To be energetic and live a long and healthy life is certainly better than being sick and having a short life! This is why Satan will do everything he can to deceive us in this area, and unfortunately, he has greatly succeeded so far.

Seeking health is like seeking holiness: we never reach perfection, and yet we should make every effort to reach it

It is indeed heartbreaking that the overwhelming majority of Christians today do not have any clue of what it takes to have a long and healthy life! They eat and live like everyone around them, most of them get cancer, heart disease, diabetes and a host of other diseases and the tragedy in all this is that they don't even understand why! All this suffering could be avoided! If only we made every effort to become wise and disciplined in this area! If only we did not follow the lifestyle of 99% of the people around us but had the courage to go against the mainstream!

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Health is a top priority on God's agenda. Just open any chapter of the Gospels and almost every time you will see Jesus healing someone! The apostle John tells us that He performed thousands of them! He could have chosen many other means to convince us that he is the Messiah, so why did he choose to heal thousands of people? Is this just a matter of compassion or does this not show us how important our health is to Him? As believers, we should all become experts in this area and attract unbelievers by a lifestyle where we live a strong, long and healthy life!

Our environment

We cannot claim that we love God if we do not love His creation. What God called "very good" (Gen. 1:31) cannot be treated as a garbage can! If we do not have a clear, radical and even fanatical conviction in this regard, we are not part of the solution but indirectly contribute to the huge environmental disaster in which our world is today.

As Christians we should all become experts in this area and teach our children about this top priority. We should make every effort to restore and protect our environment, and it should be seen in our daily behavior (energy consumption, reduce waste, compost, using solar, earth and wind energies, organic agriculture and architecture, permaculture, etc.…)

We should do everything, even with demonstrations and sit-ins, to stop greedy companies and our government from polluting our world. We should push for environmental laws that are radical and even dictatorial so that all offenders will be harshly punished. **We will never do too much and go too far in this area, as Satan will do everything He can to destroy our planet.** (Air and water pollution, soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, overfishing, depletion of natural resources, plastics and hazardous waste, deforestation, destruction of habitats, etc.…)

This should be the absolute and first political priority of every nation on earth. Everything else should be secondary. If we destroy nature, animals and everything else, we not only damage our own health, as it already is the case in most places on earth, but our very future. To shovel it all under God's carpet by pretending that God controls all things is totally reckless. God expects us to be responsible managers f this world, and not selfish and irresponsible fools! If we love our children and their descendants, we should leave them a much cleaner and prettier world than the one we have today!

If everyone in this world was a Christian, what kind of world would we have? What we believe today defines tomorrow's world!

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Our political system

Be on your guard against all forms of dictatorship!

The history of the human race clearly proves that nothing is more dangerous to life and freedom than being ruled by one or very few people!

If you look at the last 100 years, you observe that governments that have authoritarianism or dictatorship have murdered more people than all the wars of history combined! Totalitarianism has killed 297 million people, which is more than the Spanish influenza and the Black Death put together! In virtually all the regimes that were controlled by one of just a few individuals, you observe 4 historical facts:

We cannot ever be politically neutral as believers: Every single thought or teaching always ends up having political implications!

Totalitarian systems:

1. They have gone to war against other nations
2. They have committed genocides
3. They had horrendous famines (55 million)
4. They have been mass murdering their own people (this is called a democide). In the last 100 years democides have killed 242 million people, more than all the wars of history combined!!!!

If you take ALL the communist regimes and a few colonial powers and add a dozen of other nations that have murdered at least one million of their own people, you always see one irrefutable and shocking fact: In virtually every single case it happened because political power was in the hands of just a few people!

But in all the democratic nations where power is diffused, checked, and balanced, you discover 4 amazing historical facts:

Democratic systems:

1. They never committed genocides
2. They never committed democides
3. They never had famines
4. They never attacked other democracies

The whole Bible and the history of the Church shows that very few leaders finish well. In fact, most end up bad and hurt many in the process.
The history of world leaders is even worse. This is why a democratic system of checks and balances is so needed!

That's why Satan will do everything so that people do not understand how incredibly dangerous authoritarian systems are. In fact, he will even convince some Christians that democracies are not important.
But the Bible clearly teaches against any forms of autocratic leadership. God rebuked the Israelites for choosing themselves a hereditary and often oppressive monarchy, instead of maintaining the loose confederacy of God appointed judges that existed before. ("I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you" Judges 8:23). The early Church was made of autonomous congregations with a plurality of equal leaders at their head, but the Roman Catholic Church

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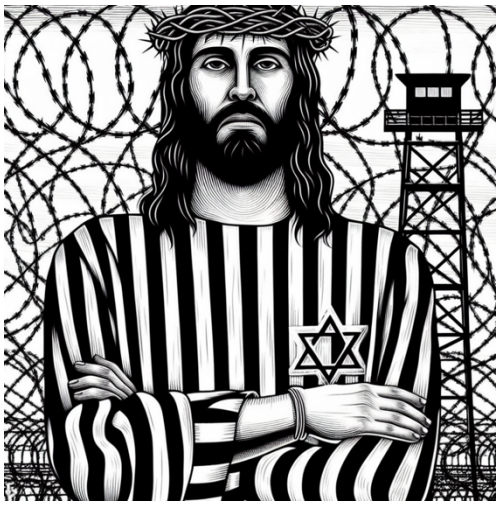
transformed it into a vertical hierarchy with one leader at the top. This has led to tragic results. The same can be said of so many protestant churches today where you have just one pastor who is not accountable to anyone. In religion like in politics, one single uncontrolled leader is always dangerous and harmful.

Democracy does not always guarantees good results, but political concentration always bring disastrous results!

Some Christians argue that we should not have any political convictions because Jesus taught His disciples to not take up arms against Rome and love our enemies. This is true regarding our weapons, but not true regarding evil. If you read the book of Revelation, you clearly see that **God has absolutely nothing good to say about the Roman empire !!!** It is viewed as the Great prostitute, Babylon and the Beast! Against this evil empire God reserved vengeance and many cups of terrible judgements! Nothing good can ever be said of authoritarian regimes!

So, what are we to do if we have all the signs that such oppressive regimes may come in our country?

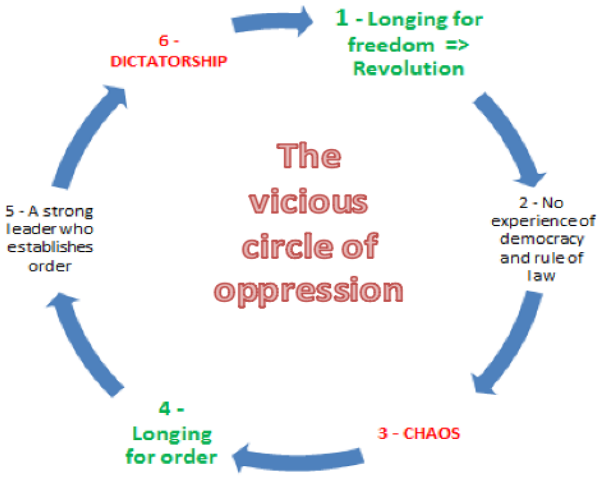


- Before it is too late, if this is possible, you should intervene through all the available political means and in the last resort through pacific and non-violent ways.

- While it is still possible, **FLEE** wherever God will show you! Jesus told to Jewish Christians that when they would see the signs of imminent Roman destruction, then they should go to a safe place that he had designed for them. (Matt. 24:15-16). In other words, fleeing is not cowardice but obeying God's command to protect life, particularly if your family is concerned.

- Stay only if God very clearly shows you, because you and your family may suffer and be killed (which is why Paul recommended to remain single in the case of political terror, 1 Cor. 7:26)

- In all cases, pray and call people to immediate repentance because when hard times come, they will remember your prophetic warnings.



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What could be an ideal political system today?

Obviously represented democracies are infinitely better than all other political systems, but their biggest flaw is that politicians who are elected at a certain time can later make decisions that do not reflect what most people want. Furthermore, corruption, lobbies and centralization can easily creep in.

Since the Bible has answers for every issue in this world, then we should look at how the early church was organized and imitate its organizational principles:

In the Bible kings, priests and prophets were separate ministries so that power would not be concentrated into one person. The same principle of decentralization applies today!

- In the early church, their leaders were chosen by all the members of the local church. There was not a "delegated democracy" but a **direct democracy** !

- In the early church, pastors could not be elected if they were accused of being greedy and in fact few pastors were paid => **few politicians should be paid, and their salaries should be moderate.**

- In the early church, pastors all worked together on an equal basis and there was not one single pastor over the local church: => There should **not be one man or any political elite deciding for all**, but a group of political **leaders who all work together on an equal basis.**

- The early church had no centralized hierarchy and local churches were autonomous => a political system should be highly **decentralized** and give great **autonomy** to local regions.

It is interesting to observe that since Switzerland was deeply influenced by protestant values, they got themselves a political system that closely follows the above principles.

In other words, it is possible to create a political system that can hugely improve the life of its citizens!

The more the world follows biblical principles, the better it becomes!

- Swiss people have no president, no prime minister and no politician who has any kind of power over the internal and external affairs of the country.
- Their citizens have a direct democracy as they decide on virtually any issue they wish to improve within the country.
- In other words, this country is not influenced by a president, a parliament or its lobbies, but only by its people
- They have a bi-cameral parliament, but it is limited in its power since citizens can always vote and block any law that the government brings up.
- Furthermore, most of their members do not work full time as many have their own job, and of those who do, they do not earn much money. So political corruption is virtually absent.
- The whole political system values consensus-building and compromise, and it is built on the principle of power-sharing.
- Their federal system is highly decentralized as it gives to every region great autonomy.

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Our kingdom is not from this world!

Too many believers have put their hope, prayers and zeal into political solutions! There are two main reasons for this:

They do not have a passion for the kingdom of God!

They do not see that their own church is growing in numbers and impacting the society, so they are bored or disillusioned and put their hearts into politics, sport or something else. My observation is that when believers are busy converting people and changing lives, they have little time nor interest for what is going in politics!

Just imagine in a nation where every believer and every church had only one passion: expand the kingdom of God by making disciples who multiply themselves into more disciples. It would be a matter of just a few years until they would become the majority or a powerful and growing minority. This in turn would affect the votes, the kind of politicians they would have and eventually the kind of society they built. As Proverbs 14:34 says, “righteousness exalts a nation”.

In other words if every Christian saw its own personal responsibility to change radically one life after another, we not only would have less of those ineffective, people pleasing and boring churches where little is happening, but we would eventually impact the world!

They have a wrong understanding of what the kingdom of God is all about.

Jesus made himself very clear that His kingdom is not about gaining political power, enforcing laws, or ruling over others. It is about radical love, sacrificial service, and trusting in God's way rather than worldly systems.

Jesus rejected political control and taught his followers to transform the world through humility and self-giving love, not force. In the first few centuries, the disciples embraced this attitude. However, when Christianity became the majority, the *Constantinian Paradigm* emerged. This shift began after Emperor Constantine’s conversion (4th century AD), when the church aligned with political power. Christianity transitioned from a persecuted faith to an imperial religion, blending church and state. This model led to institutionalized Christianity, political influence, and a loss of its early Christian distinctiveness.

This “Constantinian Model” still attracts many today, but Christ made it aboundantly clear that **seeking to establish a "Christian nation" through political means** is against his teachings and his example!

1. We are not of this world!

Believers belong to a different kingdom, one that is not rooted in earthly power or national identity.

- **John 18:36** – Jesus says his kingdom is not of this world and does not operate through force.

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- **Luke 4:5-7** / **Matthew 4:8-10** – Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, revealing that worldly power is under his rule, but Jesus refuses it.
- **Philippians 3:20** – Our citizenship is in heaven, not in any earthly nation.
- **Revelation 18:2-4** – God's people are called to come out of the corrupt systems of the world.
- **1 John 2:15-17** – Love for the world and its power structures is incompatible with devotion to God.

2. Our weapons to change this world are the cross and loving our enemies, not politics!

Transformation comes through sacrificial love, not through political control.

- **2 Corinthians 10:3-4** – Our fight is not waged with earthly weapons but with divine power.
- **Matthew 5:43-45** / **Luke 6:27-31** – Jesus commands us to love our enemies rather than seek to defeat them.
- **Matthew 20:25-28** – True greatness is found in servanthood, not in ruling over others.
- **Philippians 2:5-8** – Jesus rejected power and humbled himself, even to death on a cross.
- **1 Peter 2:21-23** – Jesus suffered injustice without retaliation, trusting in God rather than seeking revenge.

Confront all evils from left to right!

We are not from this world, and yet we confront every evil of this world. Our primary goal in doing so is not to change the world but to keep the Church pure from all outside influences. This means that we must filter every single political idea that enters the Church and expose it to the truth of the Bible. For instance, the Early Church was not afraid to show that worshiping the emperor was evil, that the Roman empire was Babylon and the Great Prostitute, and that Gnosticism was a dangerous philosophy.

The Church rarely had the same attitude. Millions of Christians saw nothing wrong with political concepts like colonialism, slavery or even fascism and communism, so the Church never became a laud voice that immediately opposed those evils. Instead, it became like the rest of the world.

The same is happening again today! There are so many Christians who refuse to take the widely accepted political ideas of the left AND the right and confront them with the Bible. Evil is on both sides! And then we wonder why unbelievers do not like our kingdom and why Christians are even foolishly involved in all kinds of political activism!

Criticisms of LEFT leaning Ideology	Criticisms of RIGHT leaning Ideology
Punishes the rich: To endorse a society where the rich are unfairly taxed not only drives them away from their country (and eventually impoverishes it), but it also encourages hiding money and corruption.	**Dictatorship of the big three industries:** Through greedy lobbies and politicians, the Pharma-Agri-Food Complex controls nations and ultimately destroys our environment and our health. Their monopoly is evil and harmful.

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Encourages laziness and irresponsibility: To promote a culture of constant entitlement opposes the biblical principle of rewarding hard work. It rejects the biblical work ethic and always leads to poverty and societal decline.	**Major financial and political systems control and impoverish third world nations**: Through abusive banks loans, exploitation of resources, unfair trade policies, political interference and monopolies poor nations are unfairly dependent on the rich.
Promotes globalism: To support global governance paves the way for outside control and leads to the loss of national sovereignty and personal freedoms.	**Our nation first:** Excessive nationalism leads to a selfish prioritizing of our nation over others and potentially conflicts with the Christian principle of helping all nations universally.
Open borders: To allow very open borders and uncontrolled immigration compromises national sovereignty, potentially allowing harmful ideologies and criminal groups to infiltrate and harm citizens.	**Rejection of Refugees**: To oppose the acceptance of all legitimate and legal refugees who sincerely want to assimilate into the culture of their new nations contradicts the Christian imperative to welcome and care for the stranger.
Supports lawlessness: To defund the police and make permissive laws that decriminalize people invites chaos, crime, and societal collapse. It fosters lawlessness, endangering communities, and contradicts God's call for justice.	**Economic Exploitation**: To support anything that exploits the poor and vulnerable and prioritizes profit over people contradicts the Christian teaching to care for the least among us.
Weakens National Defense: To reduce military strength invites foreign aggression, endangers the nation, and fail to protect innocent citizens as mandated by God.	**Militarism**: To glorify war, grow disproportioned military budgets and solve all potential conflicts through military solutions contradicts the Christian teachings on peace and reconciliation.
Promotes Islam and the Palestinian lie. To promote Islam as a peaceful religion is a lie. To allow the unrestrained immigration of Muslims is absolute foolishness and destroys democracy and western civilization (Muslims always end up dominating and killing all oppositions).	
Attacks Israel and promotes anti-Semitism. This aligns with very powerful demonic forces, which only bring horrifying curses upon individuals and nations.	
Weakens parental rights: Policies that put the State as the ultimate moral authority over the parental authority in order to indoctrinate children with liberal agenda destroys the family unit and leads to societal breakdown.	**Misinterpretation of Scripture**: To use apocalyptic narratives and selective scripture passages to justify political agendas or leaders distorts the true message of the Bible.

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Violently attacks anyone who disagree with them, especially churches: To censor conservative voices suppresses the truth; it threatens religious freedom and paves the way for totalitarian control. To encourage violent demonstrations against opponents destroys democracy.	**Religious Nationalism**: To blend Christianity with nationalistic ideologies dangerously fuses the Church and the State; they should remain separated. This can exclude other faiths, and it distorts the universal message of Christianity. In fact, any kind of religious nationalism is always dangerous, as history shows us.
Normalization of child abuse: To Introduce children to pornography and sexual education is child abuse, it corrupts innocence, and it violates God's design for childhood.	
Normalization of homosexuality: This is demonic and corrupts children, while advocating same-sex marriage undermines God's design for marriage.	
Gender confusion: To promote gender fluidity rejects God's creation of male and female, it leads people away from their true identity. It rejects scientific facts, embraces delusion, and leads people away from reality.	
Wokeness and cancel culture are evil: They viciously reject biblical morality; they foster division between races, genders and cultures, and they strongly encourage a victim mentality.	**Racism and Xenophobia:** To hold any hatred and prejudiced views against any race, ethnicity or even anyone contradicts the Christian belief in the inherent dignity and equality of all people.
Overregulation: Bureaucracy and heavy economic government control always stifle businesses and innovation.	**Economic Inequality:** To allow policies that favor too much deregulation can unfairly favor the wealthy and increase economic disparities. This conflict with justice and caring for the poor.
Sanctity of Life: Actively encouraging and supporting abortion is endorsing the murder of innocent children, directly contradicting the commandment "Thou shalt not kill."	**Environmental Neglect**: To ignore environmental stewardship and denying global warming or other major environmental threats is not only neglecting the Christian responsibility to care for God's creation, but also a crime against humanity.
Politicians who have too much economic power: They experiment and control socialist policies that have disastrous consequences for millions of people.	**Idolatry of politicians**: To elevate some politicians as the saviors of our nation is always dangerous as it can lead to potential dictatorship

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3 - DO NOT BE LEGALISTIC

All churches agree that legalism is bad, but the biggest problem is that very few can define what it is! All religious communities have their own set of religious rules, but very few would see them as "rules" and certainly none of them would see them as legalistic.

For instance, some congregations will have dating rules that they see as safeguards against an immoral world, but they appear as legalistic to others. Other churches have a dress code that appears legalistic to some, but modest and pure to others. From birth control, drinking alcohol, dancing, mixed swimming, playing cards or listening to only a certain type of music, denominations have come with countless regulations that seem legalistic to some but holy to others. So how can we define legalism?

Two thousand years ago the Church faced the same problem. The apostle Paul had very strong words to say against those who wanted to impose circumcision and yet he himself circumcised Timothy. So, how do you explain this paradox? When is a religious practice legalistic and when is it not? From what Paul wrote in Galatians, in Colossians and in Romans, we can have clear guidelines that help us to identify what legalism is, and what it is not:

Whenever a religious group has some "laws" you have to go through the following 3 step filter:
The first filter is to ask yourself which laws that a church follows have an absolute clear biblical validity that every believer must uncompromisingly follow; the second filter is to ask yourself if some of those church laws are neutral, meaning that they can be followed as "laws' for those who want them, or not followed by others; finally the third filter is to see if the church has transformed the laws that could be considered as neutral into absolute laws that necessitate punishments. In this case, this is legalism
Let us examine those 3 categories:

1. **Absolute laws**
2. **Neutral laws**
3. **Legalistic laws**

1. Absolute laws

These are the kinds of biblical moral laws that find a clear general consensus among all Christians. From abortion to premarital sex, homosexuality or not stealing, these rules are binding on absolutely all Christians. In all those cases churches have the biblical authority to apply pressure and punishment for those who refuse to follow them.

The biggest problem in this category: what laws should be defined as absolute and which ones should be considered as neutral? (see neutral category below). For instance, when is a certain level of nudity or dress no more neutral but immoral? What kind of movies should not be watched? What music should not be listened to? How far can you go when dating? When is a behavior offending to some believers and therefore it should be avoided? (Like drinking alcohol, wearing make-up or some clothes, not covering your head, etc…)

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2. Neutral laws

These are rules that you are free to keep or not. In other words, they are not binding on all Christians, and therefore no pressure or any form of punishment can be imposed for following or not following them.

For instance, we know that the apostle Paul followed all kinds of Jewish laws and traditions himself, but he never imposed them on anyone else. This is why he wrote that believers were free to follow all the Jewish festivals, the sabbath, consider some days as more special, eat certain foods, or they were free to NOT follow them at all. He really saw many rules as being perfectly neutral and he proved this by living at times like a Jew and at other times like a non-Jew.

Practically, it means that an ideal biblical church should have enough room for people to have different expectations. That church could still strongly recommend her own rules, but it should not condemn anyone for not following them. For example, within the same church believers should be able to have freedom to do as they please in the following areas:

- How much money they give to church
- How active they are within the church
- How they worship God
- What kind of bible-based teaching they listen to on the internet
- What kind of other churches they visit
- Whether they moderately drink alcohol or not (within obvious limits)
- What kind of clothes, dress, makeup, or jewelry they choose (within obvious decency)
- What kind of movies or music they like
- Whether they follow some religious feasts or not (Christmas, shabbat, etc...)
- Whether they follow Jewish traditions/laws or not (circumcision, Leviticus 19 laws, etc…)
- How they date (within obvious moral limits)

<u>The biggest problem in this category:</u> the leadership has to clearly define its church rules in such a way that they can be presented as expectations, even strong ones, but not as rules that bring fear, group pressure and condemnation. In other words, they need to differentiate between rules of the first category (biblical and absolute rules) and rules that are neutral.

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3. Legalist laws

These are all the neutral rules of the second category that are enforced with various punishments. If you do not follow them, you will feel bad, pressured and eventually ostracized!

In other words, a legalistic church is not necessarily one that has strong rules, even if some of them might appear bad, but one that uses those rules to control you and punish you!

There is nothing wrong to want to be the best church.

What is wrong is to look down on all other churches for not being like you

For instance, Paul viewed circumcision as a neutral rule. He himself had no problem with circumcision since he circumcised Timothy, but when he heard that some Galatian Christians were trying to impose this practice and condemn those who did not follow it, then he got really upset. This example clearly shows that legalism is not to believe in some rules for yourself, but to condemn other Christians for not following them.

Another classic example was the animals that had been sacrificed in pagan rituals and then their meat was sold to markets to be eaten (1 Corinthian 8, Roman 14). For some believers eating that meat was an absolute no-no and they were condemning anyone eating this meat. Other believers on the contrary felt that there was absolutely nothing wrong with that meat and they were looking down on those who had a problem with eating that meat. Paul objects by showing that that both groups were wrong since all of this was a neutral issue. Christians were free to eat or not to eat and therefore any condemnation on eating or not eating was legalistic.

The biggest problem of this category is not that some churches want to strongly hold some rules, but that they do not regard those rules as neutral. Instead, they make them morally binding on all Christians and this gives them the right to condemn anyone for not following them.

Clear signs that your church is legalistic:

Your church cannot make a clear difference between neutral laws and absolute biblical laws; in fact, it transforms all neutral laws into absolute expectations, and as a result:

- It brings a group pressure and eventually condemnations on those not following a certain behavior.
- It creates doubts regarding salvation.
- It creates a mentality of elitism (we are the best, the chosen ones, the only Church to follow the truth, etc.…)
- It judges other churches for not behaving like them.

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- It creates a group conformity where all must think the same and no one can question things (No room for differences and diversity!)

- It creates an atmosphere where all must perform equally, so that there is no room for the weak

All churches should determine their absolute and neutral laws without becoming legalistic:

Absolute

No stealing, no killing, no sex outside of marriage, no homosexuality, etc....
Everyone should follow our rules because they are clearly defined in the Bible.

Neutral

Can give that much money or time to the church or not; can (moderately) drink alcohol or not; can view some days as important or others as not important; can dress this way or not, etc....
Everyone should follow our rules, BUT no one will be pressurized and condemned.

Legalistic

If you don't give that much money or time to the church, you will be condemned; If you don't dress or behave this way, you will be condemned, etc....
Everyone must follow our rules and if they don't, they will be condemned.

If you want more information and my testimony regarding legalism, look as well the chapter 8 "Restore the Jewish roots of the early Church"

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4 - PREACH with EXCELLENCE

You would not listen to a preacher on the internet more than 2 minutes if he was boring or unclear, right? Then why don't you apply the same standard of excellence to yourself? As a public speaker your sermons should never be boring, unclear, irrelevant, uninspiring or impractical. They should be excellent, and for this you need a lot of humility and discipline.

Humility is to accept criticisms from what people think of your sermons. Prideful people are afraid to discover that their sermons might not be as good as they want to believe, so they never ask any feedback. If you are humble:

1. **Don't find theological excuses!**
   Prideful people argue that since Paul wrote that his "preaching was not with persuasive words of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:4) or that Peter was an uneducated person, it does not matter how well we speak. Yes, both apostles did not care about eloquence, but their sermons were never unclear or boring! They always preached with purpose, clarity and passion, and people were "cut to the heart"!

2. **Always ask a short feedback after your sermon.**
   Write down what you were told and make the needed changes. Do this for a few weeks.

3. **Have your friends fill up the "checklist for a sermon" (see below)**
   Do this right after your sermon and ask them for explanations and suggestions. Do this for a few weeks and you should have a pretty objective picture of what you need to improve!

Discipline yourself to constantly improve. If you know what you need to change, but you don't put a lot of efforts to improve, you are deceiving yourself. The only way you are going to improve is if that every time you speak you prepare for hours until you have reached a level of excellence. Musicians know this and this why they rehearse for hours. You should do the same.

HOW TO PREPARE A GOOD SERMON:

What are their needs?

It is crucial that you know and feel the precise needs or problems of your audience. A good sermon is not just what you have to say, but what people need to hear. People have all kinds of needs, hurts or worries and when you know them, you become like a doctor who has the correct diagnosis and

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therefore gives the correct medicine. So, if you don't know your audience, seek God until He will clearly show you what to preach. He knows their needs.

What is your overall goal?

Once you have defined the problem, you need to come up with a solution that you can summarize in one short phrase or one word. This will be the goal and therefore the main theme of your sermon. If you cannot do this, either you are not sure of your goal, or you have too many goals. Obviously, a goal always implies a practical change that you want your people to make. You don't just transmit information; you want a transformation in them. Example of a goal defined: "Husbands love your wives like Jesus loved His church".

Divide your overall goal into a maximum of 3 to 5 points

For instance if the overall goal is "Husbands love your wives" you can choose a text like Ephesians 5, verses 25-28 and divide it into 3 points: 1. Be sacrificial 2. "Wash" her through your words 3. Love her like yourself. When this structure follows exactly one passage, it is called an "expository sermon". If you do not want to follow just one passage but prefer to take 3 different verses with 3 different topics, then you will have what is called a "topical sermon".

If you choose a topical sermon your biggest challenge is that **all your points must be in harmony with your overall goal.**

The goal of a sermon is NEVER to bring information, but a transformation in the way we think and behave

For instance, if your first point is serving your wife, your second point is listening to her, but your third point is when will Armageddon happen, you are throwing your people off from your main goal! Of course, this example is exaggerated, but it is absolutely amazing how many preachers easily throw points that have little in common with the other points.

Remember this picture: you are not someone who shoots in every possible direction with the hope that one of your bullets will reach the target. You are a sniper that uses all his bullets precisely on one objective.

So, at this point write on a piece of paper the following structure:

My main goal: …….. (It should be one short phrase. If it is too long, your goal is already not clear!!!)

Point # 1: …….. (It should be one word, or one short phrase)
Point # 2: ……..
Point # 3: ……..

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Point # …… Usually 3 points for a sermon is more than enough. But if you want to go for 4-5 points, then you have to be very careful to keep ALL of them in harmony with each other and with your main purpose. If you don't do this, people will not be able to follow you! And make sure that they all will fit in your timing. If you have to rush your final points, people will feel it and you will appear disorganized. **Ask yourself: Are all my above points in accordance with my main goal? Are they more or less in harmony with each other?** If not, make the necessary adjustments. Only after this can you proceed to the next step:

Fill up every single point with WHAT – HOW – WHY – DO IT

1. **WHAT = You explain your point and the biblical text**

   For each point find one verse or one small text. Then explain what they mean. For instance, you can have a brief explanation of what some words mean in their original language. You can bring as well sociological, historical, or geographical explanations. But ONLY do this if your explanation is absolutely needed or if it really enhances your point in a very original and thought-provoking way. If not, you will appear as someone who wants to show how much knowledge you have, and people don't respect this.

   At this point you transmitted the "WHAT", the knowledge. Unfortunately, a lot of teachers only remain at this first level. They explain the text, but do not go further. A good preacher must go behind this and show HOW and WHY the biblical text should be applied today.

2. **HOW = You illustrate how your members can practice what you preach**

   Never assume that people know how to practice what you preach. Some people have absolutely no clue how some verses practically apply to their lives today. For instance, don't just tell people to evangelize. Explain to them very concretely what this means today. Help them with many useful examples. (For instance, to serve your wife means to take the garbage out or help with the children's homework, wash her through your words means to say positive words like this and that, etc.…) At this second level, your goal is not to convince but to show concretely what some verses mean today. Once people have a clear and concrete idea of what God is trying to show them, then you can start to speak to their hearts, which is the next point

3. **WHY = You convince them and bring stories that inspire them to do what you preach**

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People should not only know how to practically apply the Bible to their lives, but they should also be convinced that they have to do it! This is why, when you prepare your sermon, try to identify all the possible fears, sins and doubts that are preventing your people from doing what you want them to do. Then prepare solid arguments so that you can remove those obstacles from their minds and hearts. For instance, try to think why some husbands do not want to say some positive things to their wives, and then you warn, encourage, plead, or challenge them! However you say it, you want to convince your people of two things: First of all, you understand how difficult it is for them, in other words you are on their side. Secondly if they do it, it will be good for them. Your goal is to inspire them.

Doing the above convincing is necessary, but it is not enough. You want to bring great and touching stories, preferably from your own life so that your arguments will stick. Stories are the best way to make your point remembered. In fact, the power of stories is so amazing that people may not even remember anything you tried to explain, but they will remember your great stories. This is why you should take a lot of time to prepare emotional and inspiring stories that will move people. You should be able to deliver them by heart, knowing exactly which emotions you will use at what time. To put it differently, if you want to destroy your sermon, bring cheap and not well-prepared stories!

4. **DO IT! =** You **challenge them to put in practice what you preached**

When your people know what to do, how to do it and why to do it, then it is time to call them to action! Your final goal is that your people will make a decision to practice what you told them. You do not necessarily have to make an emotional appeal at the end of every single point, but instead you can keep that for your conclusion at the end of your sermon. Whatever you choose, make sure that your people have clearly understood what you expect of them.

Example from the above structure: Your goal is to show that “a loving husband serves his wife”.

1. **The verse and explanations:** You explain that according to the Bible, a loving husband serves his wife. You show a few Bible verses and explain the context. You may even add what the Greek or Hebrew word for serving means. You may add some historical explanations that show the contrast between how husbands in the Bible were supposed to treat their wives and compare it to how other cultures viewed women (for instance Greeks did not even consider that women had a soul!)

2. **The illustrations how to do it:** You show concretely what the verse means by giving practical and even funny illustrations. For instance, serving today means taking out the garbage, helping with the children, and even doing all kinds of small things that will surprise her. You give personal illustrations from your own life. (For me serving means this and that. I even know a guy who does this and that for his wife).

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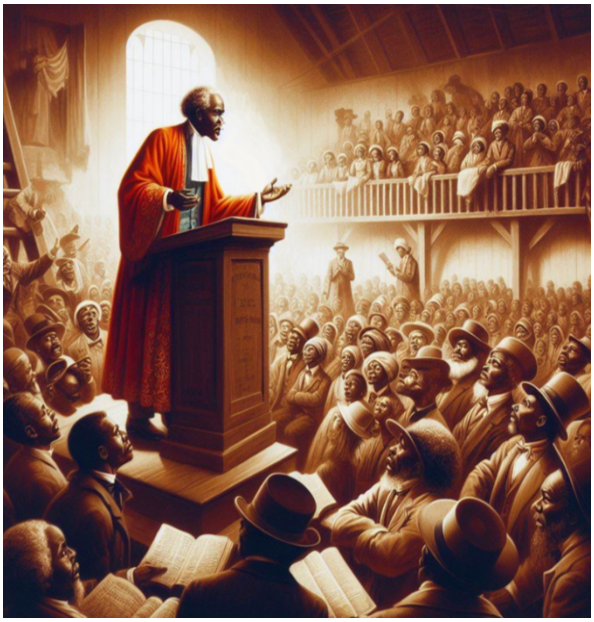
3. **<u>The convincing and stories</u>:** You bring out all the bad reasons why some husbands do not want to serve, so they can identify with you and recognize the very problems they have. You bring then all the good reasons why serving is actually good for them. You finish with a personal and emotional story of how you were a macho man who loved to be served, how you almost divorced and one day you decided to do this and that for her and everything changed and now your marriage is transformed because you serve your wife.

4. **<u>The challenge</u>:** You make an emotional appeal for brothers to make a decision to serve their wives!

Obviously when a preacher has mastered all the above, he does not have to follow exactly the above chronological order. What matters is that for every point he ALWAYS uses ALL those elements.
In other words:



- He makes the Bible passages clearer and more insightful after his explanations
- He has illustrations that make all his points practical and relevant for today
- He has many touching stories that inspire people to action
- He calls the people to change their minds and make decisions on what he preached

Attach an introduction and a conclusion to your outline

Write the introduction and the conclusion **only after** you finished the entire structure of your sermon, and never before!!!

Write both your introduction and conclusion **at the same time** so they will complement each other. The obvious reason is you don't want to have an introduction that has little to do with your conclusion, or the opposite.

Give a **lot of preparation** for those two elements because most people may forget a lot of what you preached, but they will rarely forget how you started and how you finished!

In fact, you may even **memorize** them so that you can totally focus on your listeners and not on your notes.

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How to make a great introduction

A good introduction has two goals: the first one is to **introduce** your audience to your speech. In other words, whatever you say MUST have an obvious connection to your sermon.

Secondly, a good introduction is supposed to **get the immediate attention** of your audience. Most people are usually flying in their own world with all kinds of thoughts and worries, so your goal is to immediately stop them and bring them on your planet. If you do not succeed in this, they will keep on staying in their own galaxy. It is a proven fact that your first 3 minutes will determine their attitude for the rest of your sermon. If you are boring or confused, you are creating negative feelings which will be difficult to change afterwards. An introduction is similar to a trailer for a movie: If it is engaging and intense people may want to watch the movie, but if it is boring, they will not. This is how powerful a first impression is. In other words, you never get a second chance to make a first impression!

This is why your introduction should not only be clear and engaging, but it should be **short**. In other words, it should never be a mini sermon before the real sermon!

Tricks that you can use to make a good introduction:

- a pointed personal question, or a few in the same direction
- an initial, impacting statement that surprises or even shocks (paradoxical or unfamiliar)
- an information about global events/local happening
- a reasonable challenge (that people can or want to take)
- a story (real or invented)
- a parable or fable
- a Bible passage read in an original way (by children, a special voice, through a song, etc…)
- a headline from a newspaper
- a quotation from known person/a book a poem/a few lines from a book
- a joke or funny personal experience
- a short song (read or even played)
- a presentation that appeals to the visual or auditory sense (or a mixture of both)
- a short theatric presentation
- a brief, captivating presentation of the sermon
- a personal and emotional expression of your feelings
- a statistic (precise and revealing, possibly even shocking)

> **The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending,**
>
> **then having the two as close together as possible.**
>
> **(George Burns)**

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Bad introductions:

- Today I am going to talk about this and that…
- I am glad to be here today, how are you, blablabla that has nothing to do with your sermon
- Yesterday I was trying to think what I could say today and…
- Being apologetic (I am not really ready for my sermon, I was wondering what to preach, I did not have a lot of time, I hope that you will like what I have to say…)
- You right away start by reading a verse
- A bad improvised joke (If people did not really laugh, you are off to a rough start!)

How to make a great conclusion

The goal of a conclusion is to **wrap up** all your points or **remind** the overall goal of your sermon in a way that people will be **inspired and challenged to action**.

Principles to make a good conclusion:

- **Memorize your conclusion**. This will avoid you looking at your notes and you can have full eye contact with your audience.
- **Use trigger phrases** such as "in conclusion" or "in summary" to prepare your audience for the end of your speech.
- **If you say you are going to finish, then finish quickly**! Do not have a long conclusion (maximum 3-4 minutes) as people will start wondering what you meant by finishing. The essence of a conclusion is to conclude! Land your plane!
- **Either… paraphrase the key points of your sermon** (do not repeat them word for word!)
- **Or remind them of the overall goal of your sermon** (If you choose to not paraphrase the key points).
- **Finish with a story**, an anecdote or a quotation that captures the theme of your speech.
- **Call them to action**, and not to reflection! The goal of your sermon is supposed to make them think, but the goal of your conclusion is to make them decide.
- **Never ever introduce any new points** or supportive evidence into your conclusion as it will confuse your audience.

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Cut every part of your sermon in time segments

Give every single part of your sermon an approximated timing and bring it to a total, and you will see how long your sermon will last. This is especially important with stories, because all of them have a minimum amount of time that you cannot reduce. If you refuse to do this evaluation before, be ready for unpleasant surprises at the end of your overextended sermon!

Introduction	2 minutes
First point (1 explanation = **4** minutes, 1 illustration = **1** minute)	5 minutes
Second point (1 explanation = **3** minutes, 1 story = **2** minutes, 1 story = **3** minutes)	8 minutes
Third point (1 explanation = **3** minutes, 1 illustration = **1** minute, 1 story = **3** minutes)	7 minutes
Conclusion (1 story of **3** minutes)	3 minutes
TOTAL	25 minutes

CHECK LIST for a SERMON

SKELETON

1. Goal:	**Yes**	**Almost**	**No**
Was it clear? Could you define exactly what the speaker was saying?			
Was the goal the same as the title of the sermon?			
Was it adapted to the present situation of the people? (In other words, according to their problems and needs?)			
Was it aimed at information alone, or transformation of the people's lives?			
Was it inspirational? Did it cause the people to WANT to practice what they heard?			
2. Structure:			
Was there a clear and logical interpretation of the biblical text?			
Were the verses and main points in harmony with the goal?			
Were the verses and main points in harmony with each other?			
Were the transitions between the main points clear and smooth?			
3. Introduction:			
Did he get an immediate attention?			
Did he introduce the message well?			
Was the introduction short enough?			
4. Conclusion:			
Did he inspire/challenge according to the goal?			
Did he summarize the sermon well?			
5. Timing:			
Did he go smoothly within the allocated time?			

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MUSCLES

1. **Stories / illustrations**	Yes	Almost	No
Were they well thought out? Interesting? Original?			
Were they well told?			
Were they connected with the points?			
2. Personal:			
Did he use stories or illustration connected with his life?			
Did you feel like he was talking with you?			
Did he use enough questions to sound like a personal conversation?			
3. Practical:			
Were there many specific instructions on how to apply the goal to life's situations?			
4. Challenging:			
Did it call people to change their thoughts and/or behavior?			
5. Inspiring:			
Did he motivate people to change? Did he make people feel good about God and about themselves?			

SKIN

1. **Voice:**	Yes	Almost	No
Was the voice clear? Pleasant?			
Did the voice vary between loud and quiet?			
Were pauses well chosen?			
Was the articulation clear and distinct?			
2. Language:			
He had NO "ticks"(space fillers like heu, you know, etc....)?			
He had NO repetitions?			
Was the grammar correct?			
Was there a rich and varied choice of words?			
Were the words correctly pronounced?			
Were there some phrases eloquently spoken?			
3. Body language:			
Did he often use facial expressions?			
Was there often eye contact?			
Did he use gestures?			
Did he use all of his body?			
4. Emotions:			
Did he vary his emotions?			
Did his emotions fit the points?			
Were his emotions well used to express his convictions?			

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Why the images of a skeleton, muscles and skin?

The skeleton is the very structure of your sermon. This is what holds everything together. People should have a **clear idea of what you talked** about and where you were leading them, or else your sermon will look like a wobbly amoeba that floats in every direction.

Muscles are the strength of your sermon. You may have a logical structure, but if you don't add **inspiring stories and practical applications**, your sermon will be as dry as a skeleton.

Finally, the skin is the appearance of your sermon. You must have more than structure and strength. You must have a **language, emotions and a body language that connects you** to your audience. If not, you will be like someone who has only muscles but no skin. Not a pretty picture.

Be led by the Spirit, but do not be lazy!

Obviously, you absolutely must pray and even fast so that the Holy Spirit will touch your people while you preach, because all the best human preparation without a dependence on God will not bring God's results! It is only if you have a strong fellowship with the Holy Spirit that you will be able to bring with power what the people need, and the Spirit will be able to open the hearts accordingly.
But again, make sure that your spirituality is not a justification for laziness! Prepare yourself with excellence to give an unforgettable sermon! For instance, musicians may pray all they want but if they don't rehearse well before, God will not be able to cover their musical mistakes. The same is true with preaching.

Summary of how to build a sermon: (follow exactly in this order!)

1. Determine exactly what is the main purpose of your speech (this goal should be defined in 3 to 5 words, no more!)

2. Define exactly all the points of your sermon (they should all be short and clear) and make sure they are all in harmony with your main goal

3. Find 1-2 verses that matches each point

4. Have a clear explanation for each point that matches the verse

5. Find illustrations and stories for each point

6. Find a thought-provoking introduction (you find it only after you did all the above!)

7. Find a conclusion that summarizes and inspires

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Example for a sermon structure:

Goal: XXXX

- **Introduction**

- **Point #1**
  - Verse
  - Explanation of point 1
  - Illustration and/or story related to point 1

- **Point #2**
  - Verse
  - Explanation of point 2
  - Illustration and/or story related to point 2

- **Point #3**
  - Verse
  - Explanation of point 3
  - Illustration and/or story related to point 3

- **Conclusion**

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5 - HAVE AMAZING CHURCH GATHERINGS

Great worship services have not only excellent preaching, but the following elements:

1. Everyone sings with passion to God as well as to each other
2. The supernatural gifts are fully integrated and regularly practiced
3. The collection is motivating and instructive

1. HAVE GREAT WORSHIP

A bad worship is when most people are **passively listening** to a group of musicians who are giving a concert.

A great worship is when **most people** are **actively singing** to God AND to each other with all their hearts.

To have a great worship we must have the following:

- **The voices of the people should be lauder than the worship team! The singers and the crowd of worshippers are more important than the instruments!**

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Your worship team should never be so loud that people in the crowd cannot hear themselves sing**!**

In fact, they should NEVER be loud!!!! The voice of the people is what matters the most!

So, while the worship goes on, the person on the synthesizer should walk back and forth in the hall, estimate the volume and cut down the loudness of the musicians! (This will be extremely challenging for him because usually most people on the synthesizer like it loud, and they never see a problem with this!)

If God inhabits in the praises of His people, but we are passive and hardly praise Him, then where is He during our worship?

If you are not convinced of this fact just know that for the first 8 centuries, the church never used any instruments of music, which is why the word “acappela” means “the way of the church”! In fact, even until recent times most protestant denominations hardly used any instrument. The reason for this priority of the voice over the instruments is not because the instruments did not exist (see for instance the loud noise of instruments in the Old Testament), but because God chose in the New Testament that voices were more important than anything else. This should be our priority again today. So let all the voices on the stage and in the room be a priority and let all other instruments accompany our voices and not the opposite!

- **Instruments on the stage should never be louder than the voice of your singers!**
  If your bassist or drummer is louder than your singers on the stage, cut them off!!!! The rule of thumb is that the voices of your singers should be twice louder than all the instruments put together. Make sure your synthesizer guy understands this principle!

- **Sing not just to God, but to one another.**
  For centuries most songs in the church were made so that people could teach and exhort one another. Often those songs were talking about God in an indirect way. (Our God is a mighty fortress, amazing grace that saved a wretch like me...) Today most songs are addressed directly to God (Lord, I love you…), which is excellent, but one another dimension has been completely eliminated so that worship is a very individual experience where we only sing to God and to no one else.

  In the early church people did not just have psalms so as to express their love for Him, but they were singing as well hymns and spiritual songs to express their love to each other. We need to restore this biblical balance today.

The model of the early church is not singing just to God, but to <u>ONE ANOTHER!</u>

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The New Testament has only 3 verses about singing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, 1 Cor. 14:26) and those 3 verses all show that the primary purpose of singing in the New Testament is to teach, encourage and even correct one another.

Yes, we are to sing psalms, which many of them invite us to sing to God, but we are as well to sing hymns and spiritual songs to each other. In other words, according to the will of God, we should not just sing to God alone, but to one another!!! This means that when we sing,

- We should choose **specific songs** with lyrics that allow us to sing to one another (if we have songs that are only addressed to God, we can never do this).

- We should be **looking at the people around us and specifically sing to them!** This is what the Bible says: speak to each other through songs. How can we do this if we don't look at anyone? How can you have a song that says, "Be bold, don't give up" and watch no one and only sing this to yourself?

- The church should allow a **format that individuals can sing to the whole church** if they have something to tell them (See more under "concert song"). What is relevant here is not the beauty of their song, but what they have to say through their song. This is exactly what the early church did. Individuals came up not just with prophecies or interpretations of tongues, but they came before the whole church with ... songs!

- We should put many **microphones in or above the crowd** so people can better hear each other while they sing.

- We could from time to time put all the **chairs in one big circle** (or semi-circle) so that people are all seeing each other while they sing. This physical change is actually good as it breaks the usual routine and brings some creativity.

- We may even want to **put the musicians into that circle** so as to remove the distance that sometimes exists between the semi-gods on the stage and the mortals below.

- If you have a large choir, sometimes you should try to **remove this large group of singers from the stage and put it right among the people**, it will remove all the barriers and show that it is not about a few professionals singing to a crowd, but about everyone singing together.

- **Have as many singers as possible singing on the stage.** And have them showing what it means to sing to one another. Nothing is more powerful than a visual example.

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- **Use "shower songs" that most people can easily remember and sing**!
  "Shower songs" are songs that people easily sing under their shower. In other words, those songs have a melody that is catchy and therefore they can be immediately remembered. Since they are easy to sing, you can involve most people in singing them, and this brings a lot of power and emotions.

  When you don't have such songs, people do not really follow you and they remain passive and just listen. The problem is that a lot of church musicians, particularly those who are professional, use songs that seem easy for them, but they absolutely don't understand that for the average person, those songs are not easy to sing! So, musicians should adapt their songs to the level of their public, and not the contrary!

Sing songs that 99% of the people can sing!!!

Help the people to sing!

Stop this passivity created by a few musicians who are not in touch with the crowd!

- **How can I know if a song is a "shower song"?**
  There is a simple test: have all your musicians play a new song and then ask separately a few people who are not musicians to sing what they just heard. If most of them cannot immediately repeat that song, or at least its melody, then you know that this song is not a "shower song" but a "concert song". It is called a concert song because this is what people do at a concert when they listen to beautiful songs. There is nothing wrong with such songs, except that the church should not be a concert hall where people are passively listening. It should be a place where people sing actively to God and to each other.

- **From time to time it is OK to use "concert songs".**
  This fits the New Testament model of speaking to one another through songs. Make sure that this is not a talent show, but a means for individuals to teach something spiritual through songs. In fact, you can even invite the crowd to be silent and pay attention to the words that are being sung.

- **Never drag a song on for more than 5 minutes**
  Unless there is a strong and obvious anointing. Again, if a worship leader can read his audience instead of flying on his own planet, this problem will not exist. Having shorter songs allow for more songs, and therefore for more diversity.

- **Use acappela here and there.**
  There is something very powerful and beautiful when musicians completely stop playing their instruments during some parts of the songs so that their entire audience can sing in unison! Specifically choose some songs in advance that are suitable to do this.

- **Worship leaders, your primary role is to inspire people to sing from all their heart to God and to each other**.

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For this you must fulfill all the following responsibilities:

- **Spend enough time in prayer before the service** so that you can be fully used by the Holy Spirit. If you come unprepared with all your worries, you will not read your people and you will be minimized in your usefulness.

- **Do not sing to God while you forget the whole world around you.** Your role is not to be floating on your planet while everyone has lost you. Your role is to bring people closer to God and to each other. This is why you should not often close your eyes but watch the people to see if they are singing with you. Feel your people, sense them and then lead them to sing with you!

- **This is not X factor!** You are not singing TO the people or FOR the people, but WITH the people! You are not here to show how talented you are but to be a motivator who is helping people to sing. Your role is not to be a star, but a trainer, an inspiration.

- **Be totally in tune with your people.** When you are on the stage, you should always feel where most of your people are emotionally and spiritually and act accordingly (are they tired, sad, bored, absent, worried, anticipated, excited?).

- **Never push your people** to go where they need to be. Instead inspire them through your own emotions and the prayers you have between the songs. For instance, if you feel that repentance is needed, ask for forgiveness yourself, if it is joy, express this in your prayer, etc.… Basically be the first to show the emotions that God would want your people to have.

- **Be fully in touch with other team members** on your worship group. Maybe one of them will want to say or pray something, and for this you need to observe and sense them.

- **Walk among the crowd of people and sing** if you need to tell them something. Sometimes to get down from your platform and be among the people is a great way to communicate something.

- **Constantly filter and select the songs that people like, not the ones you like!**
  You can easily find this out if you are willing to read your public or make a survey (How many are singing this song? Do their faces and bodies show participation? Is there passion and enthusiasm? etc.…). Some songs can be great for a while, but eventually people get tired of them. So have the courage to put those songs aside for a few months. If you have different worship services (youth, etc..), this is the perfect opportunity to use different songs for different publics.

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- **Strive for a diversity of songs.**
  People have different tastes, so if you can please most people, rather than just a few, it will be better. The church should not be under the dictatorship of a few musicians who like their own songs, but under the democratic taste of the majority.

- **Choose songs that are 3-4 minutes and not longer.**
  In fact, it is better to have 2 songs of 3 minutes than one long of 6 minutes, as it allows for more songs, and therefore a greater diversity of songs.

Musicians should not choose the songs they like, but the ones most people like!

- **Label and categorize your songs according to the moods you want to create**.
  Usually there are 3 categories: There are the soft songs that invite people to pray and cry, the dynamic where they want to praise and shout, and the ones for dancing and jumping!

- **Choose the order of songs according to the atmosphere you want to create**.
  Some churches like to start right away with up-beat songs, while others prefer starting with soft songs and gradually increase to more dynamic songs (as the example below shows). Some like to finish the service with everybody dancing, while others prefer everybody praying. You may have a certain template you use for every service, but you want to be flexible as well, as people have different moods. (For instance, if you feel that the atmosphere is heavy, forcing the people to dance may not be the best).

- **Have a schedule of songs over 4 or 5 weeks**.
  If you use 5 songs for one worship service, you will have to come up with 20 of your best songs for 4 weeks. If you have a plan of 5 weeks, it will take 25 songs. These are the 3 main reasons to do such a 4–5-week planning:

    - You will avoid repetitions as **most people will remember the songs you sang 2 weeks ago, but they will have forgotten them after 4-5 weeks**. Worship leaders who use the same songs every 2-3 weeks are insensitive and create a boring atmosphere. Even if people like the songs, they can get tired of them if they hear them too often. If on the contrary you keep a distance between them, they will sing them with freshness and enthusiasm.

Do not repeat the same songs over and over again! Keep a distance of at least one month between them!

    - It will produce excellence because it is better to stick to 20-25 songs that you know very well rather than 50 songs that you don't really master. Of course, if you have two worship teams and a lot of excellent musicians you can do this, but if you have only one small worship band and a little time, stick only to 20-25 songs!

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- It will allow for your musicians to rehearse privately in advance because they know weeks in advance which songs will be played.

- **Introduce one new song every month.** First of all, this will give you enough time to rehearse that song as you have one month time, and secondly you can renew your entire repertoire over a period of 2 years. (One new song every month gives 12 new songs after one year and 24 new songs after 2 years).

Example of a 4 weeks planning over 2 months:

- The very same songs repeat themselves after 4 weeks (for instance song # 1 and 19 are only repeated exactly one month later).

- One new song is introduced every month (Btw, it can be any type of song, not necessarily a very dynamic song as the example below shows).

- One concert song or more can be brought up every month.

	January					**February**			
Type of songs	**Week 1**	**Week 2**	**Week 3**	**Week 4**		**Week 1**	**Week 2**	**Week 3**	**Week 4**
Very soft	Song 1	Song 6	Song 11	Song 16		Song 1	Song 6	Song 11	Song 16
Soft	Song 2	Song 7	Song 12	Song 17		Song 2	Song 7	Song 12	Song 17
Dynamic	Song 3	Song 8	Song 13	Song 18		Song 3	Song 8	Song 13	Song 18
Dancing	Song 4	Song 9	Song 14	Song 19		Song 4	Song 9	Song 14	Song 19
Very Dynamic	Song 5	Song 10	**Concert song**	Song 20		Song 5	**Concert song!**	Song 15	**A new song!**

2. USE the SUPERNATURAL GIFTS during your GATHERINGS

If your weekly gatherings are going to be amazing, they must have more than great preaching and great singing! The early Church had none of this, but they had the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and this is why they turned the whole world upside down!

So, if you want to grow in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it will only happen if you are intentional about it. Here are a few principles that will help you:

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- People should **first exercise their gifts within a small group**/house church or with unbelievers. (To know how to do this, have them read the chapter of this booklet called “grow in your spiritual gifts”). After many months, once those people have a good reputation (that is good tangible results), then you can move to the next step.

- Allow those people to **exercise their gifts in all other small groups** of your church. If this is successful, then you can move to the final step

- Move those people to **exercise their gifts during the worship service**. The best way to have this happen is to allocate some specific places in the very hall where the worship is taking place. It can be a stand in a corner where people can go. If your church is so large that it has many different gifts you can have a corner for healing, one for prophetic, one for dream interpretations, one for deliverance, etc.… (a word of caution regarding deliverance: Sometimes strong reactions may happen, be ready to have them in another separate room).

- It is better that the people go to those stands while the worship goes on, as it creates a better atmosphere to exercise those gifts. Furthermore, the volume of the worship can cover anything that happens in those stands (emotional reactions, loud prayers, etc.…)

- If people are having consistent good results with their gifts during the worship**, recommend them to other churches to minister there** so they can move to the last and highest level of experience.

- If you invite **outside speakers (and you should do this as much as possible) ask them if they can train your people alongside while they minister**. The more they are exposed to different styles, the more experienced your people will become.

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3. DO NOT PREACH about giving money – INSPIRE them with different themes

Since the collection is usually used as a platform for novice speakers, they all end up preaching about sacrifice, faith and give us your money! If people hear the same music of "give, give, and give" every Sunday, it ends up being counterproductive. You don't have to always preach about giving, you can talk about the many different areas where God wants to bless us financially and, in this way, people will be indirectly motivated to give. Here is how you can do this:

- **Have a 3-month plan that presents various principles on money** (if you have 3 months that means you should have a dozen different themes, like how to be free of debts, how to start a business, giving to the poor, whom to help or not help, seeds of faith, how to activate God's favor, taking financial risks, being free from financial worries, when to take loans or not, why and how to save money, why and where to invest, etc.…)

Do not preach on how much people should give, but on how much God will bless their lives financially!

- **Have every speaker choose a theme in advance** that he personally likes and can illustrate with a great story or a personal testimony.
  Help that speaker to thoroughly prepare his speech in advance (see the point below). The fact that a speech is short does not mean that it has to be mediocre. (Imagine a church where people would wait to hear about the collection, because their speakers are inspiring, relevant or even funny?) If you want excellence, have your speaker give his speech before you and then you tell him what he needs to improve. Then a few days later he should present his second speech again before you. At this point he should have only minor improvements and then he should be ready to speak before the church. This system allows you as well to discover and train potential speakers within your church.

Ideally, we should never preach about money since our giving should be done in secret!

Use a basket somewhere and have people giving anonymously!

- **The speech should be short**, which implies 1-2 verses, one practical explanation and one story. It could be longer if the theme is longer and is presented by specialists of their areas (like how to have a successful business). It should have an introduction (usually here a pointed, thought-provoking question is the best way to start) and a conclusion. Usually, a good story serves as a conclusion.

- **The speech should always be positive, not coercive or leading people to guilt.** This is not only recommended as unbelievers are present, but the NT never coerces anyone into donations. It is always a voluntary and generous giving from sincere hearts. (Using Malachi 3:8 for Christians is not biblical, as this verse only applies to priests and no one else. In fact, the only other Jews who tithed were farmers and those who had sheep and cattle, no one else! Other Jews were never supposed to tithe!)

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- **Share from time-to-time different church projects** that require specific financial goals to reach. People like to be partners by giving money to concrete goals or for specific people. It works better than "give your money to the church and we will decide how to use it". Even if they may trust and have an idea of where the money goes, a personal involvement is good from time to time. Do it with videos or motivating presentations.

6 - RESTORE the DNA and the 6 MINISTRIES of the EARLY CHURCH

If you are to become like the early church, there are 3 areas that you need to fully restore:

1) **All the relationships in your church should have one final goal: Character transformation.**

2) **Most people in your church should make disciples who in turn will make disciples.**

3) **You must restore the 6 ministries of the early church with their biblical qualifications.**

1. All the relationships in your church should have one final goal: Character transformation

If you examine the reason why most Christians go to church today you will find out that it is to have answers for their personal problems, to be encouraged and to possibly experience the presence of God. All of this is important but there is one major goal that is tragically absent:
Most churches today don't expect their people to fundamentally change their characters!

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A Christian can attend his church for years and still remain the same person. He can have a lot of Bible knowledge, and yet have very little discipline with his health, with his finances or his marriage. Behind the walls of the church, many Christians don't know how to be humble, wise, loving and self-controlled.

The main reason for this lack of growth is that they were never involved in relationships that regularly challenged and helped them on a personal level. If churches today expected all their members to be involved in deep mutual friendships where they would learn to be humble and honest with each other, then we would not have so many divorces and so many moral failures!

In other words, if your church does not call you to be in relationships where you will have to radically improve your character, then your church is basically useless. A church that is biblical is one that understands that the very goal of all our discipling relationships is obedience to Jesus (Matthew 28:20)

A church that follows the biblical model of "one another relationships" is defined by the following question:

- ⇨ Do you have deep and open friendships with 2-3 Christian friends, and possibly a few others, that are radically changing your life? (Do you challenge, warn, encourage, and pray for one another regarding all sorts of personal issues in your life, so as to build humble, loving and disciplined characters?)

A biblical church expects all its members to become humble and fundamentally change their characters.

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2. People in your church should make disciples who in turn will make disciples

A church is supposed to grow in quality, which is achieved when individuals have strong and godly characters, and it is supposed to grow in numbers as well. The only way to do this is to imitate the Master's strategy. Jesus took a few disciples, and after training them he asked them to do the same with others (Matthew 28:18-20). In other words, he asked us to make disciples who make disciples.

The vast majority of churches today do not have this strategy and focus. When they convert people, they will bring them to Bible classes, to special courses or to conferences. In other words, they fill up their heads with tons of knowledge. When someone wants to become a pastor or some kind of leader, the same pattern will continue: he will go to Seminary or Bible school and again it will be all about diplomas and knowledge!

This is not the model that our Lord left us. **Jesus trained His disciples in all kinds of very concrete situations. The theory was never separated from the reality because it is the only way we really learn. Classes on evangelism or prayer don't really work. Only practice and examples give effective results. This is what discipleship is all about.**

Paul did the same with Timothy, as he took him and became a father for him, and this is what every church should do today: when someone is converted, we should "adopt" that person as our own spiritual child and personally take that person by the hand and help him/her to walk the first steps of the Christian life. This will imply a lot of time and efforts for many months or even years. The same pattern should be when leaders want to train other leaders.

The model of discipleship that Jesus left us is summarized in the following 5 questions:

1. When you became a Christian, did someone personally train you in the basics of the Christian life and how to evangelize?

2. Did you personally bring unbelievers to the Lord since you became a Christian? If so, how many? (If you are offended by the question, it shows clearly what convictions you have)

3. Did your converts bring others to the Lord? (In other words, did you train them so that they would do the same with others?)

4. If you are a leader, do you or did you have a mentor who personally trained you in certain areas?

5. If you are a leader, do you now have your own Timothies (that is disciples whom you are personally and regularly training?)

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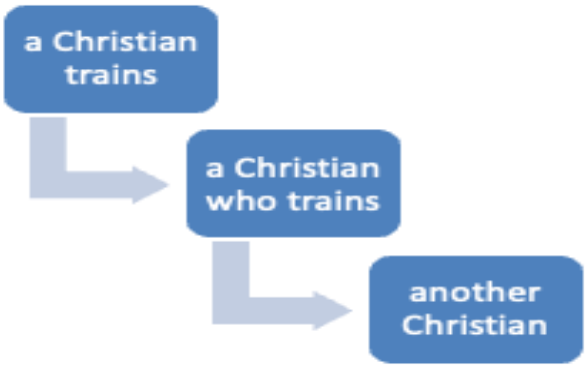

A biblical church should expect every individual to make disciples who make disciples

2. You must restore the 6 ministries of the early church with their biblical qualifications

Why does the above image 6 fingers, and why do some have similar colors?

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Apostles and evangelists are very close to each other, as all evangelists can potentially become apostles, and all apostles are former evangelists (in other word evangelists are "mini apostles" and this is why they are sometimes confused with apostles as both are planting churches with miracles and appoints local pastors.)

In the same way pastors and deacons are close to each other because usually all deacons are potential pastors, and all pastors are former deacons. They both have the same conditions in having exemplary families, but the difference is that pastors must be able to teach.

The early church had more than 5 ministries, it had 6! Deacons are the one ministry that no one mentions today and yet it is the one that could include more believers than any other one! Yes eventually all appointed official deacons have to be blameless through their lives and families, but initially a lot of people can serve in whatever gifts they have, and in this way become deacons. (the word "deacon" comes from the Greek word diakonos which means to serve).

Today there is not a single denomination in the world that has a correct biblical understanding of what we commonly call the "fivefold ministry"!

Their views are influenced by their own religious traditions, and because they have faulty views, they have faulty results.

For instance, all of them define evangelists, pastors or apostles according to their own faulty denominational traditions and because of this, they do not have the results of the NT.

For instance, often their pastors do not have very high moral qualifications of being blameless through their examples and through their families, their evangelists are not the church planters who have supernatural anointing and who train and appoint local pastors, and their so-called apostles are tourists in comparison to the apostles of the book of Acts! In other words, most denominations today do not have biblical results because they give biblical titles to people who do not have biblical qualifications!

Nobody gets offended that we expect doctors or plumbers to be professionally qualified.

Why are we not doing the same with all the ministries in the Church?

Professional standards and qualifications do matter. For instance, we would not want to be treated by someone who is not a qualified dentist or to fly with someone who is not a qualified pilot! Why is that when it comes to the Church, we do not have the professional expectations of the Bible?

Unlike most denominations, the Bible asks to test true from false apostles (Revelation 2:2) and it gives us an extensive list of all the qualifications that are required for pastors, so that a church will always be led by pastors who are tested and qualified! (1 Timothy 3) The goal in defining those 6 ministries is not to judge, limit or exclude anyone, but to stop the mediocre and sometimes disastrous results that have been defined by denominational standards. Let us restore biblical standards if we want to have a biblical church!
In other words, if we are ever going to have a church that looks like the one in the New Testament, we must have leaders that meet the precise definitions and qualifications of the New Testament!

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So let us look below at what kind of leaders God expects. They are defined in the New Testament in six categories. (To make sure that no one is blinded by his own denominational view, we were forced to define them by what they are NOT. This way you will see the difference between the Bible and your own human traditions).

Unbiblical model	Biblical model
Unbiblical pastor	**Biblical pastor**
There is only one pastor for one church.	There are always a few pastors for one local church. There can NEVER be just one pastor!
One senior pastor over all the other pastors.	All pastors are leading on an equal basis.
They make differences between elders and pastors.	In the New Testament there is absolutely NO difference between pastors and elders, they are simply different synonyms for the same function!
The titles of pastors, elders, bishops and shepherds correspond to different functions and different hierarchies. All of this is an invention of the catholic church that was transferred into protestant denominations.	Pastors, elders, bishops and shepherds are all the SAME and ONE function! In the New Testament there is not an elder and a pastor or a pastor and a bishop! A pastor is an elder and vice-versa! These are all the same responsibility with just different names! We can see this interchangeability in Titus 1 where the term bresbiteros =elder (v.5) and episkopos=overseer (v.7) describes the very same function. Acts 20:17, 28 have all the 3 Greek terms (episkopos, presbyteros and poimen=shepherding (as a verb) used to describe what is obviously the very same position.
Unbiblical pastors are not obliged to fulfill biblical conditions (for instance they have been Christians for just a few years, their reputation and character are questionable, they have no exemplary marriage, or they divorced while they were Christians; their children are still small and not grown up, if the children are grown up, the character of those	Pastors must be men who have led their family well (they must have proven that they were good leaders in their own family before they can be leaders of God's family!). Their grown up and believing children must respect them, they must have a blameless reputation inside and outside the church and they must be able to teach.

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children is not good and they do not respect and obey their parents, etc.…) They are chosen as pastors because of their theological training and often they come from outside the local church. The wives of pastors do not have to meet moral standards. Women can be pastors.	 They are chosen by the members of the church because they are a blameless example, and obviously they can only prove themselves to be blameless if they were involved a few years within the local church. If the church was started by an evangelist, he will appoint them together with the church. The wives of pastors are to be trustworthy in everything. Women cannot be pastors since pastors must be "MEN who have led their own family well".
Unbiblical deacon	**Biblical deacon**
They do not meet the high moral standards of a blameless character and of an exemplary family.	Being a deacon (or a "servant" since this is what the Greek word literally means) is the category that is the most open to most Christians. The reason is that anyone who actively serves God in his gift is automatically a "potential deacon". Later, if he has fulfilled the conditions of a deacon (see below) then he can be recognized "officially" as a deacon. In other words, 90% of Christians can have a calling in becoming "servants" since it is much broader and not so hard to qualify as the other 5 ministries. Deacons serve in all kinds of ministry (music, children, finances, organization, benevolence, etc.…) Deacons must have all the exact same qualifications as pastors (like a good marriage, an excellent reputation and character, etc.…) but they are not required to have the 2 gifts of teaching and leading the church. (Those 2 gifts are the difference between pastors and deacons). Women can be deacons, as it not a position of leadership (1 Timothy 3:11, Romans 16:1)

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Unbiblical teacher	Biblical teacher
The teachers and pastors are viewed as 2 very separate groups.	If pastors must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2), if the construction of the Greek in Ephesians 4:11 shows a close relationship between the 2 roles and if 1 Timothy 2:12 equals teaching with leading, then it shows a solid connection between teaching and pastoring, which is why it is reasonable to have the following expectations of teachers:
Their personal life and their relationship to people is not relevant.	Teachers should have some similar characteristics as pastors, which is having a good character and loving people.
They are isolated from local churches.	Teachers should be involved in a local church.
They often have no disciples of their own.	Teachers should, like Jesus, have their own disciples whom they personally train and teach.
They are often in an academic environment isolated from the world.	Teachers can have a trade as Jewish rabbis had for centuries (or even the apostle Paul!)
They can be independent from any church authority and teach whatever they want.	Teachers are submitted to the local church authorities. (In fact, in the New Testament all the ministries are submitted to one another!)
They are women who through their teaching take authority over men and attempt to lead them.	Women are “teachers” every time they share testimonies, give prophecies, give interpretations of dreams and tongues or pray in the presence of men. The key is that they do it with a spirit that does NOT take authority over men in order to lead or control them. In other words, it is not a problem that they teach but HOW they teach and for which purposes (1 Timothy 2:12).
Unbiblical prophet	**Biblical prophet**
They are not accountable to any men.	Prophets are submitted to other prophets and to their local church. If they travel, they keep themselves accountable to them.

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They do not feel they have to be accountable to anyone for their words. They are or want to be governing authorities. They can have revelations that contradict the Bible. They make vague, imprecise, or even false predictions. They can only prophesy in certain settings and not for everyone. They speak against the social and political injustices of a nation, which is what you see in OT prophets, but the not in NT prophets. They either give prophecies that express their own unresolved anger (which is always wrong), or that never challenge anyone.	Every single prophecy must always be tested, no prophet is infallible. Prophets are never in position of church leadership (unless they are functioning at the same time as apostles AND prophets, which is what the Greek construction of Ephesians 2:20 shows (they are at the same time apostles AND prophets) Prophets should never have revelations that contradict the Bible. They consistently make specific and supernatural predictions for individuals or groups regarding their future and "expose their hearts" regarding their present. They can easily give prophetic words in any setting to every single individual present. The prophets of the NT speak mostly to the Church, in order to correct or encourage. The church is the "nation" they are the most concerned with. Their prophecies should have an encouraging balance of challenges and encouragements. Women can be prophetess, as prophesying is not a responsibility that involves taking authority over men and leading them.
Unbiblical evangelists	**Biblical evangelists**
They do not really plant churches. They convert people whom they leave in the care of other churches. They have little pastoral experience.	Evangelists plant churches, therefore: Evangelists personally take care of all their converts, their churches and their pastors. Evangelists have a lot of pastoral experience.

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They are not required to have great leadership skills.	Evangelists are strong leaders who train strong leaders themselves (they will often train other evangelists themselves).
They do not choose and train pastors. They want to control everything and everyone.	Evangelists train potential pastors and together with the local church they appoint them.
They become the main leader of the church they started, they never really delegate their authority as they want to control everything and everyone, and they remain there for a very long time.	Evangelists appoint local pastors as they fully delegate their authority to them, and then they move on to plant other churches, they usually never remain long in the same place.
They have little or no supernatural power.	Evangelists have great supernatural power (Philip impacted an entire region with miracles and even a strongly gifted man like Simon the magician was amazed at this!)
They are independent from churches.	Evangelists are inter-dependent with churches as they feel a total responsibility for all the churches they have started. Women can be "co-evangelists" together with their husband (and only so) as the example of Priscilla and Aquila seem to suggest.
Unbiblical apostles	**Biblical apostles**
They have not personally and directly seen the Lord; they have no clear mandate.	Apostles have seen the Lord and have received a very specific calling.
They are managing the network of others, often inheriting churches they have not started.	Apostles plant their own churches, often creating entire networks together with evangelists who work alongside with them.
They build on someone's else foundation.	Apostles start churches in spheres where no one has gone before them or regions that are very difficult to evangelize.
They do not train evangelists, as many of them do not even have the experience of evangelists. In fact, in most cases those who have planted many churches and have a good	Apostles train evangelists because all apostles were evangelists before they became apostles. (All evangelists are "mini apostles", and all apostles are "super evangelists").

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level of supernatural should not be called apostles but simply evangelists!	
Some women call themselves apostles.	Apostles can only be men since they have to lead and take authority over evangelists and pastors, something a woman cannot do.
They have little or no supernatural power, often they do not even reach the strong level of supernatural power that biblical evangelists have.	Apostles have an extraordinary supernatural power and outstanding miracles, the same as in the book of Acts (raising the dead, healing the paralytics, etc….) Men with such power are very rare today.
They are not a very dangerous threat to Satan, and this is why they will not experience much opposition and live a relatively comfortable lifestyle.	Apostles are under dangerous, heavy and ongoing persecution, often thrown in prisons because they have a high level of miracles that attracts both large crowds and therefore a huge opposition from the enemy!
They have a secure and wealthy lifestyle as they live off from generous and often imposed donations (receiving tithing).	Apostles have a "garbage of the world" lifestyle so that money is never a priority to them! In fact, when necessary, they even work with their own hands so that they will never be a financial burden to anyone!

What do the above 6 "job descriptions" PRACTICALY mean for us today?

Apostles

- **We should never call apostles or "apostolic" individuals who do not meet ALL the biblical qualifications of apostles.**

Unless your local church has a few thousand members, it cannot have all the 6 ministries in one place! (Unless you have a non-biblical definition of them)

When we do this, we diminish the role of true apostles, and we bring confusion between true apostles and evangelists. All apostles were former evangelists before, but not all evangelists become apostles.

There are few apostles today in the world (For instance as of today there is not a single apostle in western or eastern Europe, in North America or in Australia. But a few biblical apostles exist in Africa, Central America and Asia).

If a strong leader has started churches, and if he has healings and miracles and a strong pastoral gift, he is not an apostle, but simply an evangelist! There is nothing wrong and diminishing in the term

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evangelist, quite the contrary! Timothy, who is called by some theologians as "assistant apostle" was actually an evangelist! Philip, who rocked an entire region with powerful miracles, was just an evangelist. True apostles do not need advertising: their lives speak for themselves.

If you read "the Acts of apostles" you will immediately see the difference between their acts and the acts of all the so-called apostles of today! (It is amazing that there is an entire book in the Bible that clearly defines what apostles do, but people still come up with their own human definitions!!!)

Evangelists

- **Churches should have a very clear and biblical definition of what an evangelist is** for the following reasons:
    - If someone started a church, he has the potential to be an evangelist, because evangelists always have a strong leadership. This person should then make every effort to fulfill the two other main conditions of a biblical evangelist, which is first to train and appoint future pastors and secondly to grow in supernatural authority himself (healings and miracles).
    - If they fulfill those two above biblical qualifications, evangelists should never be called pastors, senior pastors, missionaries or church planters, but simply evangelists.
    - If someone is not fulfilling the two above qualifications, but grows in that direction, he should be regarded and called a "potential evangelist" or an "apprentice evangelist".
    - If someone does not want to train future pastors and grow in healings and miracles, he is not an evangelist, but possibly a pastor.
    - Any woman who works closely with her husband who is an evangelist himself is merged into the role of an evangelist (we see Priscilla and Aquila doing this as they evangelize together).
- **Churches should not be afraid of evangelists**. If they are truly doing what God has called them to do, evangelists are not supposed to take over the leadership of a church. Instead, they are to train potential church leaders, appoint them and then move on.
- **Pastors should seek the ongoing training from evangelists in order to become more evangelistic themselves.** This means the evangelists should frequently visit the churches and train their pastors or train any potential evangelist in their midst. They should especially start evangelistic projects under their supervision (there is no better training in evangelism than to evangelize!)

Timothy and Titus were evangelists. Therefore, the letters that were sent to them give us a very clear and extensive description of what evangelists must do. This is why those letters should never be called pastoral letters, but the letters for evangelists.

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- **Churches should invite evangelists for evangelistic projects** or for planting churches in their own town. Nothing equals the gifting and experience of evangelists in this regard.

Struggling churches need to invite evangelists who will intentionally equip the leadership and motivate their church for evangelism.

- **Churches should recognize young potential evangelists in their midst and send them to mature evangelists who can train them**. This is important for 2 reasons:

    - First of all, young potential evangelists can often be frustrated in being in a church that is not evangelistic and dynamic enough for them, and history has often shown that when church leaders repress that gift, instead of channeling and honoring it, then it brings tensions and even divisions. If they initially give a place for a potential evangelist to grow and later send him to be trained by a mature evangelist in another church, they will avoid this problem.

    - Secondly, when churches send their own young evangelists to be trained in other churches, they automatically create new ties with those churches, which is beneficial on both sides (even financially as the welcoming churches can support those new evangelists).

- **Evangelists should never have to ask for money**. Churches should make every effort to financially support evangelists, especially those who have a good track record in planting churches. And particularly if they are coming from their own local churches. In fact supporting evangelists should be the first priority of any church because the more evangelists we have, the more churches will be started.

- **Evangelists should constantly train potential evangelists** while they are evangelizing and planting churches. (By the way, if every minister, whether he is a pastor, teacher or anything else trained people who has similar gifts, we would no longer need all those schools, institutions or parachurch organizations!)

The main priority and leadership style of evangelists:

Evangelists should be like fathers to their churches, which implies understanding the 3 different stages of development in a church:

-Toddlers - In the early few years, it is perfectly OK that you have total control and protection over the church you started. (You don't let your young kids do whatever they want, you gently but very firmly direct them where you want and protect them from bad influences). In other words it is totally irresponsible for leaders who start churches to leave their converts to themselves or under little supervision. If you make children, you take care of them!

-**Teenagers** – After many year you not only have chosen leaders whom you have trained, but you have delegated to them a lot of trust and freedom. In other words, the leaders who after many years have to keep on controlling everything that happens within their churches are like parents who keep

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on controlling their grown-up children: they create dysfunctional children or rebellious children! (Churches that are under the control of authoritarian leaders eventually produce churches where their members end up rebelling and creating divisions).
We see this fatherly relationship of Paul who was often visiting the churches he had started and sent letter to their leaders. He was in the dynamic of a father with teenagers, pleading and sometimes correcting, but mostly bringing a lot of encouragement and instructions.

-**Grown up children** – The day comes when fathers finally let their children go on their own. There has to be an official time when the evangelist will delegate all his authority to the pastors who will be responsible over their own flock. This is what Paul asked Titus to do in Crete where there were churches that had elders who needed to be officially appointed. After this, the evangelist will keep on maintaining a relationship of encouragement and advice with them, just like wise parents have with their grown-up children.
So, evangelists have two major tasks at the same time:

- Preach the Gospel with the supernatural power so as to bring many people into the churches they started.
- Progressively select the future pastors of those churches and train them in all sorts of pastoral issues so they can eventually take over the work.

Evangelists evangelize with supernatural power and train the leadership of their planted churches for pastoral and numerical growth.

To keep the above balance is not easy. The key is to do both at the same time by involving your leaders in everything you do. Wherever you go, they go with you, whatever you do, they do it with you. In this way they will learn by your example and the responsibilities you give them. This is the model that Jesus left us: He was busy healing and reaching huge crowds while at the same time He kept training his disciples in public and in private. Eventually after more than 3 years, they were ready (our experience has shown us that you need at least that amount of time to train potential pastors who have the biblical qualifications).

Pastors

The DNA of the early Church:

Evangelists must start churches, train their pastors and delegate their authority to them.

Pastors must all be great leaders of their own families

- **We should never call pastors those who do not have the biblical qualifications of pastors according to 1 Timothy 3**. If their children are still not fully grown and their reputation remains to be tested, they may possibly start working as future pastors (1 Timothy 3:1 = he desires the work of a pastor) but they should be viewed as potential pastors or future pastors and not as official or biblical pastors. Obviously a woman should never be called a pastor, but the wife of a pastor or any other calling like deaconess or prophetess.

- **There should always be a team of pastors who lead together on an equal basis**. One pastor for one church is not biblical. What is possible and biblical is that an evangelist started the church, and then he is in position of authority to train all the future potential pastors.

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- **There should never be a senior pastor**. The idea of one pastor above other pastors is absolutely not biblical. This is what historically has led to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and all the other unbiblical forms of organization in every denomination. If the senior pastor has the qualifications of an evangelist, which is often the case with strong senior pastors, then he should not be called a senior pastor, but an evangelist! This means that he should work as an evangelist, which means he trains and appoints pastors over the church, and then he starts other churches! If he is not qualified as an evangelist, then he should create a team of pastors, and together with them lead the church on an equal basis.

- **Pastors should train future pastors**. It is only in the very beginning, when an evangelist starts a church that he is the only one who trains the future pastors. Once those men are appointed, then they are the ones who keep on training other future pastors.

Teachers and prophets

- Traveling teachers and prophets who have an international audience should be totally accountable to a local church so that everyone can check what kind of reputation and family they have. The reason for this accountability is that if they are hiding major issues in their character, nobody should invite and listen to them. This way they will lose their financial support, and this punishment might bring them to repentance. If a local pastor is accountable for his behavior, why should we not have the same standard for traveling teachers and prophets?

Deacons

- Anyone who actively serves within the church is a potential deacon, for the simple reason that a servant or a deacon is the same word in the original language of the New Testament. When such a servant will want to take a higher leadership role within the church, then he will need to be recognized as a great leader of his family. This is the leadership principle that God wants for His church: only those who can lead their family well can lead God's family.

- To serve as a deacon is often a platform to become an elder, because both roles require to be excellent family leaders.

- Anyone who works for a para-church organization but is willing to be accountable to a local church should be welcomed as a potential deacon.

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7 - Be ORGANIZED like the EARLY CHURCH

Today there is not a single denomination in the world that is organized like the early church, and that is why churches have so many problems!

The way the Church is organized is not a trivial thing left to the whims of human desires. The Bible leaves us a clear pattern. It has a huge importance!

Church structures that are not biblical

- A church that has ONE pastor at its head is not biblical! It should have a plurality of elders!
- A church that has ONE senior pastor and a group of pastors or elders under his leadership is not biblical! (In fact, to have separate groups of pastors and elders is not biblical since this is exactly the same function with 2 different terms!)
- A local mature church that has any kind of leadership above them is not biblical! Every local church should be entirely autonomous in their leadership and their decision making.
- A large church that is not decentralized into many house churches is not biblical. The reason is simple: the primary responsibility of pastors is not to be managers, but to be shepherds, as their name indicates. The only way they can shepherd is by having a small group of maximum 100 people and therefore house churches are needed.
- It is unbiblical for a church planter to start a church and then remain in power for decades. He should train local elders, appoint them, and move on to plant other churches. This is what biblical evangelists do.
- Local churches that do not receive the ongoing encouragement and evangelistic training of evangelists are not following the biblical model.

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- Local churches that do not receive the periodic visitations of reputable prophets and solid teachers are not following the Biblical model

In other words, the early church was not a pyramidal structure, but a completely **decentralized network of autonomous churches**.

Each church had its own group of pastors leading them and they had no leader above them. The only influence they willingly accepted was the one of traveling evangelists, prophets or teachers who were visiting them. If an evangelist had founded that church, the relationship was deeper and stronger, like a parent with their grown-up children, but it was never coercive.

Unlike what the Catholic and Orthodox did later, the Early Church did not have to create itself an organizational structure.

It had 6 different ministries, and as each one did their specific part, it automatically defined the organization of the church at the local and regional level.

Traveling apostles and evangelists influenced entire regions through the many churches they had started. As soon as they appointed pastors over those churches, their influence diminished, just like parents with grown up children. So eventually pastors, deacons and teachers were the ones who influenced their own local congregations. Some of the prophets or teachers who travelled around could have some influence, but it was only encouraged or limited by local leaders.

The relationships that apostles, evangelists and prophets had with their various local congregation determined as well the relationship of local churches with other congregations.

In other words, the entire organizational structure of the early church was not defined by some kind of hierarchy but strictly by the relational skills and spiritual gifts of each of those 6 ministries.

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The structure of the early church

- ✓ House churches that organically and spontaneously multiplied everywhere, they chose themselves their own pastors and deacons
- ✓ Plurality of pastors in local churches, they were all equals, not one was above the others
- ✓ Autonomy of local churches, no one was above the local church
- ✓ Decentralized movement, no pyramidal structure, and no main leaders over it
- ✓ Local churches had house churches, which themselves had small groups
- ✓ Evangelists and apostles were influencing but not controlling and affecting the local autonomy, except during the time when they started a church until they fully delegated their authority to the pastors they had trained
- ✓ Teachers and prophets were influencing their local churches and the ones they visited
- ✓ At times leaders in a region gathered to debate issues, but they held zero control over the entire universal church
- ✓ The common denominator of all 6 ministries was personal training and multiplying

If we are going to restore this kind of biblical organization, then we must define the responsibilities and the limitations of the 6 roles of the early church:

- **Evangelists and apostles stopped controlling the churches once they left them.**
  Initially, when they started their churches evangelists and apostles had a high degree of control over the churches, just like parents have with their small children.

  But after a few years they delegated their authority and officially appointed the local pastors they had trained. They did this as soon as they left or later as Titus did in Crete.

  The ties were maintained with letters and visits, but as maturity came, the relationship became more like one of parents with their adult children. This respectful attitude of "if you love them, you set them free", which is the goal of all ministries, explains the absence of a pyramidal structure of control above and within the local churches.

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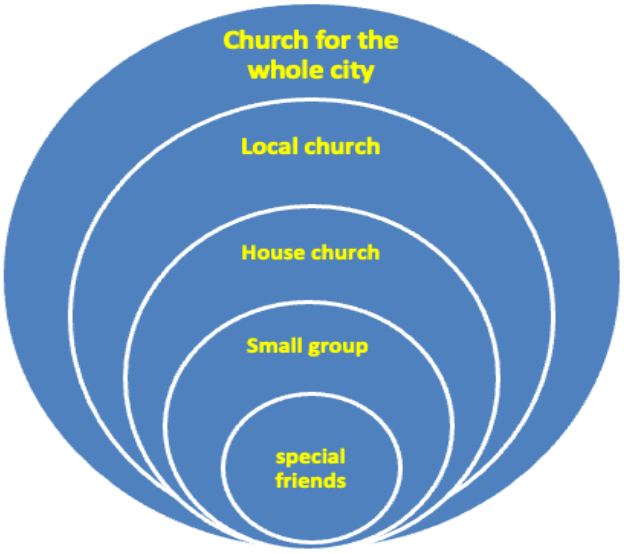
You see this in Acts 15 when all the apostles and pastors of the Jerusalem Church decided TOGETHER what would be the best for the churches. They sent a letter in which there is no control, no command and no threatening but just a gentle recommendation ("it seemed to us that you would do well if you did this").

- **Traveling prophets brought some influence, but not leadership to the churches they visited.**
  The primary role was to hear from the Lord and give revelations either locally (as we see this in Antioch) or to all the churches (like Agabus warning all churches of a coming famine).

- **Pastors were all equal partners, and not under one leader.**
  It is only in the second century that the idea of one bishop over local churches started to take form. Eventually it became a hierarchical structure that became the Catholic Church. In the early church, local churches did not have just one leader over them. You always see a group of mature leaders deciding things together, as we see the example of Acts 15:6. Whenever they wanted or needed it, those pastors got together to meet their former founders (Acts 20:17), to solve some important theological questions (Acts 15:22) or simply to wait upon the Lord in fasting and worship until they received directions (Acts 13).

- **There was One Church in one city, which itself was made of a multitude of local churches.**
  In the 7 churches in Revelation, or in the letters of Paul, we always see ONE church for ONE city. When Paul wanted to talk to the Church in Ephesus, all the pastors of that city came to hear him. In other words, local churches saw themselves as being part of one big church for the very city in which they lived. This showed their unity.



- **Each local church was itself made of house churches.**
  From Acts 2 to Romans 16 we see that house churches were the central place where everything was happening. There they not only had all kinds of spiritual experiences, but they even ate together and took the Lord's Supper.

- **The ultimate DNA of ALL ministries was not control (therefore there was no pyramidal structure!!!)**
  It was training, empowering and releasing people into their own ministries so that they could do the same. It was an organic and spontaneous multiplication. Apostles and evangelists trained other evangelists (Paul did this with Timothy, Titus, etc.…) Prophets trained other younger prophets (as the Elijah and Elisha model shows us). Pastors took potential pastors or deacons to help them become pastors. This is the model that Jesus left us: He took 3 years to train his own men, He empowered them and then He "left" while keeping an encouraging "supervision" over them.

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What about parachurches?

In theory, the concept of parachurch ministry has a great usefulness. *Para* in Greek means to come "alongside." By definition and design, then, parachurch groups should come alongside churches to provide a help that those churches cannot fulfill alone. Those for instance that are doing Bible translation, medical work, publishing Christian literature, helping churches in legal or financial issues, mask themselves as secular organizations in order to send missionaries to forbidden places or fund local evangelists, etc.…such groups are truly helping the churches.

But parachurch organizations which do all the main tasks of churches like evangelism, teaching, counseling, training local leaders, sending missionaries, doing charity, etc.. if they do all those things in parallel and totally independently of local churches, they are not strengthening them but weakening them!

"If a parachurch ministry or mission is contributing to the strength of the local church, it should be encouraged and supported.

But if it weakens the local church, it should be discouraged and not supported." (Yonggi Cho -pastor of the largest church in the world)

They are not coming alongside churches; they are replacing them! What they should do instead is **completely work WITH and FOR the local churches,** merge with them and make themselves accountable to them.

If this is not possible, then let them completely reorganize themselves as biblical churches! God's dream on earth is not for everyone to build his own independent kingdom, but to have living, healthy and growing churches where all the various calls and gifts are united and complement each other!

In other word, a legitimate parachurch organization is asking: "How can we 100% serve you so that your church or movement of churches will grow in numbers and in quality?" Those that do not have this attitude should not be called parachurches, but parasites because they suck the members and the money out of local churches!

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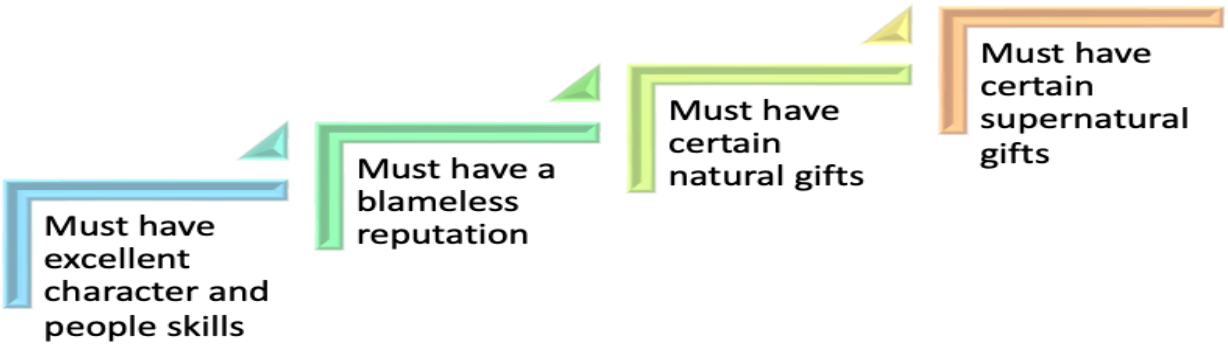
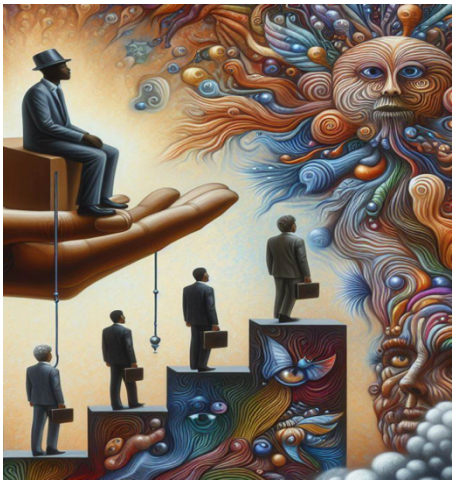
The 4 levels of authority in the Early Church

The early church was an organization where their leaders did not have an authority based on a certain hierarchical position, something we only see happening in later developments of church history.

Their authority was only defined in the following way:



This above diagram defined the 4 levels of authority of the early church. One could not jump directly to the last level, he first had to excel at the lowest level and eventually over the years he could be moving to the third of fourth level. This model should be the one that we use today in churches. You will quickly understand why if you consider each level:



1. **Authority through character and loving people: (for all ministries)**

   The first level of authority is how well a leader can build loving relationships where his people will trust and respect him. This is a basic requirement for any Christian leader, because if he does not have the kind of character that is sensitive, wise and humble, he will never have many followers, however gifted he might be.

2. **Authority through the example and the reputation of our lives: (for all ministries)**

   The second level of authority of a leader is his reputation. To love people is not enough, he should have an unblemished reputation as well. For instance, in the early church a pastor had to be a blameless example in how he had led his family for at least 20 years (since his grown-up children had to have a good reputation (Titus 1:6)) and even deacons had to be tested before serving. So having an excellent reputation that has been tested by local churches should be the minimum requirement for anyone who wants to lead within the church.

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3. **Authority through NATURAL gifts: (for pastors, teachers, deacons).**

The third level of influence is determined by gifts. A leader can be very loving and be a strong example in his character, but only his particular gifts will move him beyond the two levels mentioned above. For instance, only a gift of teaching will allow him to become a teacher or a pastor. Only a certain gift will allow a deacon to serve in a specific ministry (music, children, etc.…)

4. **Authority through SUPERNATURAL gifts: (only for apostles, evangelists and prophets).**

Finally, a difference must be made between natural gifts and supernatural gifts, because a miraculous anointing increases even more the authority of a leader. For instance, only supernatural gifts like miracles and healings can allow someone to become an evangelist or an apostle (Paul argued that his authority was demonstrated by signs and wonders). Only a gift of prophecy can allow someone to become a prophet. (This obviously does not mean that those gifts are superior to the "natural" ones. It simply means that "greater gifts" increase their authority (1 Cor. 12:31)).

Examples of the above:

If we have a good character and reputation, we have the authority to become a deacon and serve within a specific ministry in the Church. If we have the natural gift of teaching, we can work as teachers or pastors, which is a higher authority. If on top of this, we add supernatural gifts like prophecy or healing we can work as prophets or evangelists which is an even higher level of influence. So, the better our character and reputation is, the stronger our natural and supernatural gifts become, the higher our influence for God will be.

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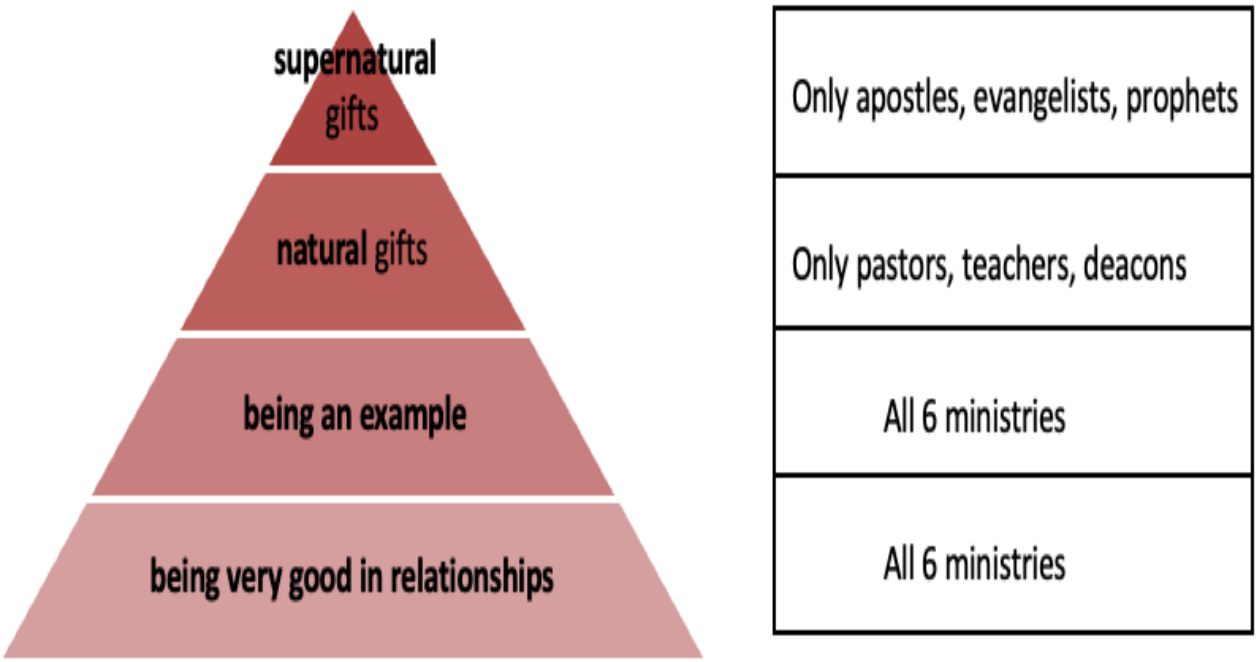
Those 4 levels of increasing authority defined the very structure of the early church



The early church had the above pyramid of authority.

Why should churches be decentralized?

Decentralisation should not only be happening at the level of a denomination but even at the level of a local church. This is especially the case with those congregations that have a few hundred members or more.

Such congregations should have multiple house churches that have their own shepherds and finances. This autonomy of house churches does not mean that they might not have a common worship service or do all kinds of activities or projects together. It means that when a group of 50 to 100 people does not have their own shepherds and a control on how they want to use their money, then they are dependent on a centralised form of governement.

So, what are the advantages of decentralisation?

First, this is the best way to protect the Church against any form of persecution.

The examples of the early Church or the house church movements in China or Iran demonstrate this.

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Even the secular examples of the Apaches against the Spanish invaders, P2P against MGM, or autonomous revolutionary groups against entire governments show this paradox: when attacked, a decentralized organization becomes much stronger as it becomes more creative and flexible.

Spiders (central organizations) are killed more easily if one takes out their head, whereas starfish (decentralized organizations) have their intelligence throughout the system, and therefore they can easily mutate and independently multiply.

Secondly, it has a tremendous potential for spiritual and numerical growth.

The secular examples of Wikipedia or E-bay show that when you allow small circles of people to become independent, after you have transferred them a basic ideology and your unconditional trust, they will really want to contribute.

When people feel they can become experts, it releases an amazing potential of power within the church. There is probably no better place to see this happen then within a smaller group where different gifts are being exercised. "When you give people freedom, you get chaos, but you also get incredible creativity. Because everyone tries to contribute to the community, you get a great variety of expression". The Corinthian church had chaos, but we often seem to forget that they had power and creativity as well!

Decentralize your church structure to:

- empower your leaders
- grow numerically
- resist persecution.

Finally, decentralization shows how well we have trusted and trained our leaders.

If churches have the goal to make any group they start autonomous, then they are forced to train their leaders in such a way that one day those leaders will take full ownership of their groups. Such a delegation shows the quality of the training. If it is not happening, it shows that they cannot train effectively, or they are not willing to give up control. As the saying goes: "If you love someone, set them free. If they come back, they are yours; if they don't, they never were!"

Initially it is perfectly normal and even necessary that a church will have some kind of centralization around the vision and the values of its founder. What is dysfunctional is that it continues like this many years after.

The model of the family is what should be applied to the church: In the first few years parents have a high level of control over their children, especially in the early years. But their authority slowly diminishes and eventually the time comes when those children are on their own. If parents keep on wanting to control their grown-up children, something very wrong is happening that will cause serious problems.

The same should be happening with church leaders: they should progressively delegate their authority to their leaders and allow them to have their own autonomy, which ultimately will lead the whole church organization to be decentralized.

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8 – RESTORE the JEWISH ROOTS of the EARLY CHURCH

WHY THE JEWS?

Many believers hold this view that the Church has replaced Israel in God's plan, meaning that the blessings, privileges, and covenant promises originally given to Israel in the Hebrew Bible now belong to the Church. In this belief, the "New Covenant" through Jesus Christ is seen as superseding the "Old Covenant" with the Jewish people, implying that God's favor has shifted from Israel to the Christian Church.

Is this view biblical? I believe not and I have 4 biblical reasons that prove the opposite:

1) God has not rejected Israel

For anyone back then who was thinking that God had rejected the Jews, already 2000 years ago Paul wrote black and white "I ask then: Did God reject his people? No, let this never happen! ... God did not reject His people, whom He knew in advance." (Romans 11:1-2). He even goes further by saying that they might be your enemies now, but "as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable." (Romans 11:28-29)

And God is not just saying things. He proves them:

2) The supernatural blessings on Israel prove it

If all the blessings of Abraham had been stopped and transferred to the Non-Jews how can we explain that after 2000 years the Jews are still immeasurably more blessed than any other group on planet earth? From whatever angle you look at it, Jews have a supernatural favor that cannot be explained in human terms. Just look at history: wherever Jews were given an opportunity to thrive, they "ruled" far above anyone else, and this has been true everywhere and in every single area of life. (For instance American Jews are only 2% of the population and yet they make up one third of all American millionaires and billionaires, one third of all actors, two thirds of producers, etc.…The same "disproportion" can be found everywhere else). The sheer fact that they are only 0.2 % of the human race and yet a quarter of all the Nobel prices in history have been attributed to them cannot find a rational human explanation!

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Mark Twain himself said it better than anyone else: *"The Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race…but his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk…His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and education are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. ….All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"*

The answer should be obvious: They are still the apple of God's eye! The blessing of Abraham is still heavily on them! (Genesis 12:2-3: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"). Paul himself summarized it all when he wrote: "Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises." (Romans 9:4-5). They had it all back then, they still have it today, and with the exception of the Temple, all the promises that God gave them are still valid today!

3) The strategic plans of God prove it

If you study the history of Jews, you see one irrefutable pattern. Every time when things go bad, God turns around their situation and makes it better! This is true in the Bible and has been true for the last 2000 years.

Those who remove the Jews from God's plan do not understand His heart and His wisdom. From the very beginning of the Bible until the end, God is specialized in one trick: every time we try to cheat Him, He outsmarts us! Every time we do something bad, He turns it around in something better for all of us! And this is especially true for the Jews! No wonder Paul writes in this very context, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33)

With this perspective, we can easily understand the paraphrased version of Romans 11:15 "When most Jews rejected their Messiah, it still brough an amazingly positive result for the whole world, can you imagine what will happen when they finally accept Him? It will be as powerful and shocking as a resurrection from the dead!!!"

Yes, God hid Himself 2000 years ago from most of His People, but it was just temporary. The day is soon coming when He will fully reveal Himself again! And then, as Paul wrote, "if their transgression brought such a richness to the world, can you imagine how much more richness will their full inclusion bring to the world?" (Romans 11:12) These are the themes of Ezekiel 39:21-27 and Deuteronomy 32:17-21, 43 which are underlined in Romans 9 - 11. **There is a rebellion, God hides Himself, so the hearts are hardened, but eventually He reveals Himself and turn everything around for our absolute best result!**

This is why the apostle writes: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.'" (Romans 11:25-26).

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4) The prophecies of Jesus prove it

Anyone can pull out any prophecy of the Old Testament and make it say whatever they want for today, but no one can do this with 2 specific prophecies of Jesus:

God has tied the end of the world to one group of people, the Jews, and to one place, Israel

1. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem…look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’.” (Matthew 23:38-39)
Here Jesus said that He would not come back until Jerusalem would welcome Him. In other words, there has to be enough Jews in Jerusalem who believe in Him for this to happen. For two thousand years this was impossible as Jews were dispersed across all nations. But this has started to change as more and more are coming back to their homeland, and more and more are believing in Him.

2. “They (the Jews) will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24)
This too is starting to change as Jews were “prisoners to all the nations” but they are now coming back. (Zechariah 8:7-8 "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem.") Jerusalem was trampled by all the nations, but this too is starting to change.

In other words, the return of the Lord on earth will happen:

- **When Jerusalem will no more be trampled by the nations (time of nations will be fulfilled)**
- **When the Jews have returned to their homeland.**
- **When there will be enough Jews to welcome Jesus’ return.**

This is the main reason Satan wants to eliminate Jews and Israel! From Pharaoh, Haman to Hitler, He has tried numerous times to exterminate the Jews but since He failed over and over again, and now they are back in the land, his time is very short. So now His main goal is to eradicate Israel from the map so Jesus prophecy will not come to pass. If He fails Jesus will come back! (This briefly explains antisemitism, the holocaust and the growing hatred against Israel).
But God has not been stopped in His plans. As millions of Jews are returning to their ancestral land and more and more are recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, He will protect them for the sake of His covenant in order to reach the whole world.

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Paul wrote that when this will happen, it will be for the whole world like a resurrection from the dead! (Romans 11:15). In other words, not only has God **NOT** rejected Israel (Romans 11:2), but He has strategic plans to use them to revolutionize the world! **The redemption of the world started with the Jews, and with them it will all finish!**

WHY THE JEWISH ROOTS?

The Church and Israel remain inseparably bound to each other. In Jeremiah 31: 36, which is quoted in Hebrew 8, it says that "if these decrees vanish from my sight, declares the Lord, will Israel ever cease being a nation before me". This verse promises that as long as the New Covenant will last, Israel will keep on existing as a nation! This is why the Church' very existence is tied to Israel and here are 5 other reasons, all taken in Romans, that support this view:

1 **Brought salvation**: It was precisely through Israel's failure that salvation came to the nations (Rom. 11:11) and that the Gentiles were brought into Israel's history of election (11:13-24).

2 **Brings a continuous warning:** Israel's failure is depicted to the Church as a permanent warning. No one who is called may become arrogant; God will not spare an unbelieving Church more than he has spared an unbelieving Israel (11:20-22)

Returning to our Jewish roots is restoring the Early Church

3 **Gives hope**: Israel's failure confers a stable, indestructible hope. The Church can learn from Israel that God is faithful and that He never withdraws His grace. Despite its failure, Israel remains called (11:29). It is not rejected (11:1) but forever loved by God (11:28). One day it will again become the true Israel (11:26-27) and then through its salvation it will bring life to the entire world (11:12).

4 **Forces the Church to be an example**: The Church has the ultimate priority of making Israel jealous (11:11, 14). It must live its existence so convincingly that Israel will abandon its reserve and come to His Messiah. The unbelief of Israel is thus a permanent question for the Church, as it asks if the church makes real in a credible manner its existence as people of God. Thus according to Paul the Church cannot exist without Israel.

5 **Forces the Church to learn:** In Romans 11, Paul uses the metaphor of grafting olive trees to explain how the Gentiles are included in God's people. Normally, cultivated branches are grafted onto wild trees, but God grafted the wild branches (Gentiles) into the cultivated tree (Israel). This shows that **Gentiles are nourished by the Jewish spiritual roots and therefore they should discover the source and the heritage from where they came from.**

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POSITIVE aspects of the Law

Before we try to tackle the whole idea of restoring Jewish roots, **we must first have a very clear understanding of the role of the law in the New Testament** because no other subject has more influence on Christianity and how we view Judaism.

Did you know that there are more than 230 references in the New Testament regarding the law? This is not a small concept. In fact it is one of the most debated and repeated themes in all the letters of Paul.
So when you think of the law, what first comes to your mind? Something good? Something bad? Or something not really clear because you are not even sure what it is?

Let me first define how the apostle Paul used the term. By law I mean the compilation of all the moral laws and decrees found in the first five books of Moses, what we usually call the Torah. But to a larger extend it is everything that is contained in the Old Testament, particularly when it concerns biblical feasts, customs and anything that is still applied in the Jewish world today.

So how does the Bible view the law? Of course the Old Testament presents the Torah as being the very best thing that ever happened to Israel. In essence it says that

- **If practiced, the law brings prosperity:**
  - Joshua 1:8 “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful”
  - Deuteronomy 6:24 "The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.”

- **The law defines the greatness of the Jewish people:**
  - Deuteronomy 4:8 “And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"
  - Deuteronomy 28:1-2 “If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth”.

But the verse that summarizes it all is

Psalm 19:7 "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul."

Now what does the New Testament say?

- **The law is good, holy, righteous, wise, true, spiritual and perfect:**

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- Romans 2:20 “In the law is the embodiment of knowledge and truth”
- Romans 7:12 "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."
- Romans 7:14 “The law is spiritual”
- And now you have all heard of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “ALL Scriptures equips us for every good work and of course you immediately think that it is the whole Bible. Well stop for a second: the New Testament did not exist! When Paul wrote all Scripture he only meant the Old testament! In other words read this differently: Paul wrote that the Torah equips us for every good work!

- **This is why it fits our deepest human aspiration to practice it:**
  - Romans 7:22 “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law”
  - Romans 7:25 “In my mind I am a captive of God’s law”
  - Romans 8:4 “In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us”.

- **The law is perfect because its ultimate expression is in love:**
  - Romans 13:8, 10 "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law...therefore love is the fulfillment of the law"
  - Galatians 5:14 "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.”

- **This is why the law is not abolished but perfectly exemplified in Christ:**
  - Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."
  - Romans 3:31 “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold (establish, make stronger) the law.”
  - Romans 10:4 "Christ is the culmination of the law”.

- **Its biblical feasts and customs reveal God’s character and His redemptive plans:**
  - Leviticus 23 The various feasts all have a spiritual and a prophetic meaning that are excellent for both Jews and for Christians. This is why Paul wrote:
  - Colossians 2:16-17 "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day."
  - 1 Corinthians 5: 8 "Therefore let us keep the Feast”

- **At the same time, the law reveals what is sinful and therefore brings true justice:**
  - Romans 2:15 “They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.”
  - Romans 3:19 "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."
  - Romans 3:20 - "Through the law, we become conscious of our sin."
  - Romans 5:13 “Sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law”
  - Romans 7:7 “I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law.”

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- **The law can bring restraint and control, and as such it can lead us to Christ:**
    - 1 Timothy 1: 9 “We also know that the law is made not for the righteous, but for those who break the law”.
    - Galatians 3:19-22 "Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed (Christ) to whom the promise referred had come."
    - Galatians 3:23 “Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.”
    - Galatians 3:24-25 "So the law was our guardian (In Greek it means “pedagogue” or tutor, teacher for children) until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."

Paul followed the Law 100%

In the light of everything positive mentioned above, it is no surprising that Paul and Jewish believer all followed the law. They never gave up their practice of the law when they believed in Jesus!
We see this very clearly exemplified in the life of Paul the apostle:

- **1 Corinthians 5:8** He observed the Passover feast, and this is why he called the believers in Corinth to all celebrate it! (read it yourself in context, Paul said let us keep the feast!)
- **1 Cor. 16:8** When it was not possible to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem he did it in Corinth.
- **Acts 16:3** He circumcised Timothy because of the Jews around.
- **Acts 17:2** He kept the Shabbat and therefore attended the synagogue service as it was his regular habit.
- **Acts 20:6** He kept the feast of unleavened bread.
- **Acts 20:16** He made every effort to go to Jerusalem in order to celebrate Shavuot because this was a specific command addressed to all Jews to celebrate Pentecost in Jerusalem.
- **Acts 18 and 21** He did the Nazirite vows two times, which was not drinking wine and cutting his hair.
- **Acts 21** He underwent 7 days of purification rituals and even paid for the vows of others, which was an expensive act of devotion to the Temple.
- **Acts 21** He did everything to prove that he was following the Law because some people had doubts about it

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- **Acts 24:17** He gave money to the Temple in favor of the poor (he did not bring it for the poor of the Church, as most Christians wrongly interpret it, but for Jews who were not Christians).

- **Acts 27:9** He might even have kept Yom Kippur!

Those many examples above should be enough to show that Paul lived like an observant Jew!

This is why he repeated at least 6 times in the book of Acts that he had never done anything wrong against the Jewish law, against Jewish customs or against the Temple. (Acts 22:3,12 / 23:6 / 24:14 / 25:8 / 26:22 and 28:17). He even claimed in Philippians 3:6 that "as for righteousness based on the law, he was faultless"!

In fact he was so blameless in the way he lived his Jewish lifestyle that when he appeared before the Sanhedrin he could confidently declare that until that very day he had fulfilled his duty before God in all good conscience! (Acts 23:1). If that was not the case, he could have never dared to make such a bold claim to people who were looking for every possible way to accuse him. If that was not the case, he would have never dared to make such a claim!

In other words, Paul kept on living like a Jew even after he believed in Jesus! The same can be said of every other Jewish believer in the first century. Just look at this surprising verse:

"Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law." (Acts 21:20)

And yet it seems that Paul wrote certain things that presents the law in a negative way:

"NEGATIVE" aspects of the law

- **The law's expectations are never enough.**
  - Romans 8:7 "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."
  - Galatians 2:14 "I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew".
  - Galatians 5:3 "I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law."
  - Galatians 6:13 "Not even those who are circumcised keep the law"
  - James 2:10 "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it"

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- **So the law leads to frustration so that …**
    - Romans 5:20 "The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase."
    - Romans 6:14 - "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace."
    - Romans 7:5 "For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death."
    - Galatians 2:19 "For through the law I died to the law."Romans 8:3 - "For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh"

- **The law is a burden.**
    - Galatians 5:1-6 if we put ourselves under the law we are under a "yoke of slavery"
    - Romans 7:6 "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."
    - Romans 10:5 "Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them.""

- **The full practice of the law cannot ever make us righteous.**
    - Galatians 2:16 "Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."
    - Galatians 2:21 "For if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"
    - Galatians 3:11 "Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith.""
    - Galatians 5:4 "You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."
    - Romans 3:20 "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law"
    - Romans 3:28 "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."

- **It cannot give us the Spirit.**
    - Galatians 3:2 "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?"
    - Galatians 3:5 "So again I ask, does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?"

- **It leads to pride and self-righteousness.**
    - Luke 18:11 "God I thank that I am not like other people"
    - Romans 3:27 "Where then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith."
    - Romans 10:3 "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness"
    - Galatians 6:3 "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves."

- **Therefore to divisions.**
    - Galatians 5:15, 16, 18 "If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other…walk by the spirit …you are not under the law"

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- **And finally, it brings curse, wrath and death.**
    - Romans 4:15 "The law brings wrath"
    - Romans 7:10 "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death."
    - Galatians 3:10 "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

If the law is described in "positive" and "negative" terms then how can we explain this apparent contradiction ?

The answer is so simple that few have fully understood it.

Paul was not against the law, but against LEGALISM!

All the verses above seem to lead to one shocking conclusion: there is nothing good to be under the law! So if the law is good as we saw last time, then how can we explain this apparent contradiction?

I will give you an answer that is very simple and which explains everything:

Paul was not against the law; he was against legalism!

Legalism is using religious laws to **elevate** ourselves before God and others,

and then **imposing** them on others to **judge** them.

Now let me ask you a challenging question: What is legalism? How do you define it? The webster dictionary will tell you that legalism is a strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law. Others will tell you that it is to keep external laws without having a living relationship with God. Some will argue that it is putting your own laws above God's law, or to depend on your own discipline instead of being totally motivated by grace, by faith or by humility. In my view all those definitions are wrong! The reason is that they all present a strict obedience to the law as being legalistic and bad. They all end up saying that either you follow the law, or you follow grace and faith, you cannot do both at the same time. I believe that when people get caught in this dichotomy, they completely misunderstand what Paul wrote.

Let me give you the key verse that perfectly defines legalism. Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 1:8 "We know that the law is good if one uses it properly".** Or as the complete Jewish Bible translates it, "We know that the Torah is good, provided one uses it in the way the Torah itself intends."

In other words, **legalism is NOT in following the law, even to the letter, but in the wrong application of the law.**

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We see this when some believers in Galatia and in Rome tried to impose the Mosaic law on others so that they could appear more righteous before God and before others. This in turn gave them the right to condemn others and in turn it led to all kinds of tensions within their communities.

To this Paul answered the following: “OK. You want to obey the law to its maximum in order to become the most super-righteous Christians? I warn you it will never be enough. There will always be something more, you will feel increasingly burdened and enslaved by your desire for more obedience, and eventually you will fail. The bottom line is you will never be fully righteous, neither before yourself, before men nor before God, so you should stop with your attitude of self-righteousness and judgement! If you want to live out the law, do it with completely different motivations”.

In other words, Paul wrote that legalism is not having many difficult laws by which you try to sincerely live by. **Legalism is trying to impose those very laws on yourself and on others so you can elevate yourself before God and before others. And when they fail, you can judge them and exclude them.**

Let me give you an example from my personal life to explain what legalism is: When I was a young believer I joined a denomination that called all their members to have the following lifestyle: Every day you were encouraged to pray and read your Bible. Every day you were supposed to go out, evangelize and find disciples whom you would baptize and personally train. Every day you had to build relationships of discipleship. Most people sincerely practiced those principles, lives were radically changed, and our churches all grew at a phenomenal rate.

But with our numerical “success” those expectations slowly became unwritten laws, and they became the spiritual norm by which we could define true disciples. This in turn gave us the right to put any kind of pressure on weak members and judge every other Christian outside of our denomination. The spirit of love and enthusiasm of the early years slowly left, and heavy legalism came in. So eventually I left but I felt very confused. The reason is that their rules were biblical, but the spirit in which they practiced them was not. They had biblical expectations, but they were all infected by a spirit of control, self-righteousness and judgment.

This, in my view is exactly the same problem that Paul faced. In essence he said: **“The law is good, but your motivations and its applications are not”.**

This is why Paul came up with a lengthy and elaborated theological filter against legalism:

Every time you find a verse in the New Testament that seems to present the law in a negative light,

you know that Paul is not talking against the law, he is speaking against legalism.

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But the genius of his theological model is that it goes beyond the law of Moses. Paul was against any system of rules that would bring any righteousness outside of Christ! He saw legalism everywhere, whether it was in following a certain pagan calendar (Col. 2: 8), in keeping a certain ascetism (Col.2:20), in eating only certain foods (1 Cor. 10), in having a certain social status or even in being a man or a woman! (Galatians 3:28). We humans love to create rules so that we can makes ourselves look better than others.

Yes **legalism is one of the most deeply ingrained problems of the human race.** You will find legalism in every branch of Christianity, where people have taken verses from the New Testament and come up with all kinds of rules that have created thousands of denominations. You see it in Judaism where the Orthodox have burdened themselves with all kinds of traditions and laws that have absolutely nothing to do with the Bible, and you will discover it in every religion on earth.

And what makes it so powerful and so **dangerous is that most of us are completely blind to its influence!** We can easily see around us sins like greed, immorality or laziness, but how often do we see legalism? Have you ever heard in your life someone confessing that he is struggling with legalism? Or self-righteousness? Personally I have never heard it, and this shows how deceitful and invisible this sin is. This is why Paul took so much time and wrote so many warnings against it.

> We are free to follow or not follow the law, but either ways it does not make us righteous and give us the right to judge others.

So what is the conclusion of all this? If you want to follow the feasts, the customs and all the ethical precepts of the law you will definitively experience the blessings that are attached to them. But as you do so, be careful:

With great discipline and success comes the temptation of pride, self-righteousness and condemning others. So you can follow the Torah, and even any other religious "laws" according to your conscience, but don't fall into the trap of legalism.

Misunderstood passages regarding the law

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 = When Paul said that at times he became like a Non-Jew, he made compromises and therefore he did not always follow the law

The first problem with this view is that it makes Paul a hypocrite and a liar since he repeatedly claimed that he was following the law! (The book of Acts shows this 6 times and even the verse 21 shows this! ("I am not free from the law")).

The second problem is that people assume something that cannot be proven. We cannot find a single example in Paul's life where he made compromises with the law.

The third problem is that people have a wrong understanding of what it means to be "all things to all men". Every missionary will tell you that to be effective, you have to make all kinds of radical cultural adaptations, but it will only go up to a certain level. For instance, a western missionary can live, dress

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and talk like a Chinese and yet still choose to not eat snakes and bugs or practice ancestor worship! The same was certainly true for Paul who kept kosher rules and all the moral obligations of the law. He was as flexible as possible, but only within the boundaries of the law! (In fact, this is what the school of Hillel was teaching ,Talmud, Shabbat 31a).

1 Timothy 4: 1-5 = When Paul wrote that all foods are good and he opposed those who forbade certain foods, he clearly showed that he rejected kosher food.

Absolutely not! Most people assume that this text talks about Jews or Judaizers who promoted a kosher lifestyle, but it is wrong for 2 reasons. The first one is that those people forbade to marry (verse 3). Now, if there is one thing we can be sure about Jews or Judaizers is that they NEVER forbid people to marry, so it is clear that those people were not Jewish but pagans! The second reason is that if those people taught against eating pork, Paul could never had said that their teaching was demonic (verse 1), or else he would have implied that the law was demonic! In other words, in this text Paul is not speaking against the law but against some Non-Jews who taught some form of religious ascetism.

1 Cor. 10:27 = Food sacrificed to idols was against the law, and yet Paul said it was OK to eat it when invited by Non-Jews: he was then encouraging them to break the law

No. Paul always taught against eating food sacrificed to idols, but he had to adress one particular situation, which was:

- If the invited believer wanted to come and obviously did not know the food's origin.
- If the meal was a regular social event, not idol worship.
- If the host himself never mentioned any connection to idol worship.

In that unique situation Paul said that the believer was not guilty of anything and he advised to not question the food's source which could have created an unnecessary conflict towards the unbeliever. It would be the same if today, in front of all, you asked the host who invited you: "By the way, the food you serve me now, is it from animals that were raised in cruel factory farming conditions or not?"

Colossians 2:16-17 = We should not follow the law and all its Jewish customs

No, just the opposite! The irony of this is that this text could easily be interpreted the other way around! It is because some believers practiced kosher rules, festivals, new months or the Shabbats that they were being judged! Paul answer is threefold:

1) Nobody should judge you for doing this (unlike what "Christians" have done for centuries against converted Jews).

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2) Christ is the very source of all those Jewish customs (He is the body, and those feasts are the shadow). In other words, through Christ those Jewish customs find an even greater meaning and richness!

3) Those feasts are a foretaste of the next world! (They are a shadow of the things that WILL come). Pay attention to the present tense verb in the Greek text: The feasts were not a shadow of the things that would come, but they ARE today a shadow of the things coming!!!

Hebrews 8: 6-13 = We don't need any more the Old Testament, it is eliminated

According to Hebrews 8:6-13, the Old Covenant is not eliminated, but rather fulfilled and updated. The ceremonial and sacrificial laws tied to the Temple, which were temporary, are considered obsolete because Jesus' sacrifice has fulfilled them. This is why the text says the Old Covenant would "soon disappear," referencing the impending destruction of the Temple.

However, the moral and spiritual principles of the Old Testament, such as the ethical teachings and God's laws, remain unchanged. Jesus Himself clarified this in Matthew 5:17, stating that He came to fulfill, not abolish, the Law and the Prophets.

Thus, the Old Covenant is not abolished but transformed. The principles of the law remain, now written on the hearts of believers, as promised in Jeremiah 31:33**. The New Covenant doesn't replace but fulfills the Mosaic covenant**, updating it with an internal, heart-based relationship with God.

Implications for today

The Early Church was so heavily influenced by the law and Jewish practices that it often created tensions with Non-Jews. But by the third century Non-Jews had become the majority and as antisemitic tendencies grew, this Jewish influence was completely removed. So today we are left with two groups:

One group, which is the vast majority, are Christians who have absolutely no clue how Jewish the Early Church was, and what this could practically mean for them. The other group is made of Christians who so much believe in the Jewish roots that they easily judge others for not wanting to be like them. So what should we do? The answer is as clear today as it was 2000 years ago:

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Paul formulated a universal rule for all the churches: (1 Corinthians 7:17-24).

- **If you are Jew, remain a Jew!**
  (In other words, fully enjoy and keep your Jewish lifestyle! In fact, don't call yourself a Christian, not even a messianic Jew, but simply call yourself a Jew who believe in Jesus! If you grew up as a secular Jew, you are free to adopt any kind of Jewish lifestyle, or…not!).

- **If you are not a Jew, don't try to become one!**
  (In other words, if you are not a Jew, there are many Jewish things you don't have to mimic, and this is especially true of all the Jewish traditions that are not commanded in the Bible! (There is a reason why Non-Jews were given only 4 rules! (Acts 15:28-29)). Having said this, if you want to discover and restore many of the Jewish elements of the Early Church, like for instance the feasts, then you are free to apply them as well. Paul did not encourage nor discourage those who wanted to practice Jewish things, as long as they did not condemn others

Practically, it means the following:

1. **Do not judge and condemn those who want to follow Jewish customs and laws!**

2. **Do not judge and condemn those who do NOT want to follow Jewish customs and laws!**

3. **Whatever you choose, do it with conviction but with cultural sensitivity towards others (Romans 14:22-23)**

4. **You are free to follow any Jewish or Non-Jewish rules and traditions, as long as they are not opposed to the Bible and do not lead you to become legalist (judging others and seeing yourself superior to them)**

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Restore the JEWISH ROOTS if you want to restore the EARLY CHURCH !

It is a historical fact that for the first 2 centuries the disciples of Christ lived in coexistence with the synagogues where the law of Moses (the Torah) was being preached (Acts 15:21). As a result, the whole religious culture of the Early Church was Jewish. As the Church grew in numbers and as Jews became increasingly hostile to Rome, which culminated in the Bar Kokhba revolt, Christians progressively distanced themselves from them to be better accepted by Rome. (See for instance "The dialogue with Trypho" that tried to prove to Rome that Christians were the true people of God, not the Jews). With this, every Jewish element got slowly purged out, and today's Church has very little in common with the Early Church. So if we want to restore that original model, it is imperative to go back to the Jewish sources of Christianity.

Before doing this let us remind you that **it is not a sin if you don't want to go back to the Jewish roots of our faith, and this is especially the case if you are not Jewish.** You have everything you need in Jesus and His salvation. But if you really are committed to reestablish the pattern, the life and the practice of the Early Church today, you must discover and restore its original Jewish identity!

My experience as an Israeli Messianic believer has taught me that there are 3 main areas in which believers can restore Jewish elements which will draw them closer to the model of the early church:

1. **There are minimal obligations for all.**
   This is for all believers, whether they want to restore the Jewish roots or not.

2. **If you want to restore the Jewish roots there are 7 basic principles and other commandments.**
   In this second category you only have elements that are commanded or clearly mentioned in the Bible and their practice is attested historically. Because of this, they not only have a particular relevance for Messianic Jews, but a biblical authority for any church that wants to restore the Jewish roots of our faith.

3. **Not a must but culturally recommended if you live among Jews or in Israel.**
   In this third category, you have elements that are NOT commanded in the Bible, but they are deeply established traditions within the Jewish world. As such, they are only culturally relevant for Messianic Jews, especially in Israel, and churches really have no need to practice them if they want to restore the Jewish roots.

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Minimal obligations for all

If you are Jewish = circumcision (This is a command of God and the one identity mark that separates Jews from Non-Jews, and this is why it should NOT be imposed on Non-Jews! This explains why Paul was upset with the Galatian believers who tried to impose this on Non-Jews!)

If you are not Jewish= Keep the 4 laws of Acts 15. (In essence these were the "Noahide laws", which defined the minimal expectations that Jews had for Non-Jews to behave righteously)

7 basic principles if you want to restore the Jewish roots (commanded in the Bible)

The following 7 guidelines give a general foundation for Jews who want to start a messianic congregation or for Non-Jews who want to be closer to the ideal of the New Testament.

1) Have a strong connection and identification with Israel.

"Your people will be my people". Practically, it means the following:

a) **Accept the divine order of priorities**: Even if Israel might at times behave negatively, God will directly deal with them, our priority is to respect them and understand our place. We, non-Jews, have been added in the lineage of Abraham, we have been included in the New Covenant He made with the Israelites, we have inherited all the promises made to Jews and have become fellows citizens with them; In other words, it is not them who become part of "our" church; it is we who become part of their family, the commonwealth of Israel. They are the natural branches; we are just the wild ones grafted in. We do not support the root, but the root supports us. In other words, let us never become arrogant by somehow considering ourselves superior to them.

b) **Love the Chosen People and their God and live in such an exemplary way that they become jealous of us.** After 2000 years of antisemitism, the best way to convince Jews are not words only, but to show them that we love Israel AND sincerely love all the Jews.

c) **Protect, stand up and even collaborate with Jews and Israel**. (Defend synagogues, manifestations against anti-Israel and antisemites, hide them when persecutions come, do business partnerships with them, etc…). This will not only be beneficial for the Jews, but it will bring tremendous blessings in return for the Non-Jews! History clearly proves that all the kingdoms that were more tolerant towards the Jews all experienced great prosperity. Can you imagine if the Protestant Reformers had come up with a theology that deliberately respects,

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protects and works with the Jews? This could have been a win-win that would have changed the course of history! (Jews would have been more open to Jesus and churches would have benefited from the gifts and the supernatural favor that rests on the Jews!)

d) **Support Messianic Jews**. The Bible shows that in God's plan they have a strategic importance greater than any other nation on earth ("To the Jews FIRST!"). This is why we should support them financially. "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?" (1 Corinthians 9:11).

e) **Learn from educated Messianic Jews**. The first century church had Jewish values and priorities which turned the whole world upside down! If we want to see a spiritual revolution today, we must discover them again! Learn especially from messianic congregations in Israel that live like Jews among the Jews. They are the ones that are the closest to the original model that we see in the New Testament.

2) Use a Jewish theological and cultural filter to understand the New Testament.

Since the entire New Testament was written by Jews (and yes Luke was Jewish, contrary to the assumed tradition), it is therefore profoundly Jewish. This is why we should make every effort to discover and read it through its Jewish background. Without being aware, we can have views that are not influenced by a Jewish filter, but by Greek lenses. (Hellenized Church Fathers, Neoplatonism and Aristotelian philosophy deeply influenced western theology).

Here are a few examples:

- The Greeks had a dichotomy of either good or bad, while the Jewish worldview is more nuanced: at sukkot Jews wave 4 species, which symbolize that Israel has four kinds of people: one is good, one is bad, and the 2 others are variations of good and bad; exactly the same can be said of the 4 seeds that Jesus mentions.

- The Greeks view God as perfect in the fact that He never changes, He is emotionally impassive and always knows absolutely everything He will do and decide, while the Jewish view of God is more "human" in the fact that He can easily change His moods and decisions and adapts Himself as He goes along.

- The Greeks believe in the immortality of every single soul, but not the Jews. The righteous may resurrect and go back to God, but for the unrighteous everything ends up with death.

- The Greeks emphasize the next life, while the Jews seek mostly this life and the legacy they will leave behind.

The few examples above show how much the Greek thought has influenced our Christian theology! (Many Christians have a black and white view of people and life, a view of an impassive and never changing God, an emphasis mostly on hell or the next life, etc.…).

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Here are more examples that show how a Jewish filter gives different interpretations:

- Matthew 9:20 the "fringes" of Jesus were actually "tzitzit" which completely changes the way we look at this passage if you know what Tzitzit meant to Jews.

- Matthew 6:22 having a bad/good eye means being stingy/generous.

- The "Son of man" is not the human, but the glorious side of the Messiah (Book of Daniel).

- Taking Jesus "yoke" means taking His teaching.

- When Jesus said "my God why have You forsaken me" he was inviting His hearers to look at Psalm 22 and make the parallel with Him (Back then chapters and verses did not exist so the only way to remember and locate a passage was to quote the first phrase of that passage = "My God why have you forsaken me" is the first line of Psalm 22)

- The use of 4 principles of Jewish exegesis (the PARDES method– Pishat, Remez, Derash, Sod). For instance Matthew 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1 which has nothing to do with Jesus, and therefore out is of context, but he does this is an example of Remez to draw a parallel between Israel's exodus from Egypt and Jesus' return from Egypt, linking Jesus' life to Israel's history and destiny.

- Many events in Revelation, in the Gospels, and particularly in Matthew, are only understood with a Jewish filter. (For instance, the ritual of the cups in the Lord's supper are aligned with the Passover meal, all the symbolic of Revelation is Jewish).

3) Keep the Shabbat rest.

"Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment." (Luke 23:56)

Whatever you may do or not do on that day, it is different and separate from all other days, and this is why it is called "holy".

If for practical reasons you might not be able to keep the Saturday but only the Sunday, the most important is to keep the spirit of Shabbat by having no physical work, buying/selling, long travel, cooking, laborious activity, rest from TV, phone and internet, etc… Enjoy your family and have relaxing fun and spiritual activities, and more than anything else, learn to fully stop and rest! Receive! Stop the stress of packed Saturdays or Sundays with tons of activities! (which is

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why everything should be prepared in advance before the shabbat, so that your wife does not stress out). You are obviously free to practice any of the traditional “39 laws” of Judaism.

You can do this sometimes as a congregation, but make sure that every Friday night (or Saturday night), you have a special shabbat meal with your family. Nothing will unite you more with your family and friends than keeping this religious ritual every week!

This seder meal is the heart and strength of Judaism, it has kept Jews together for centuries! (Traditions vary, but usually the lighting of candles by women before the shabbat starts, the kiddush, blessing the children, the hallah, songs and prayers are all elements worth retaining).

You might <u>close the shabbat with the **Havdalah:**</u>

This is a special ceremony involving blessings over wine, spices, and a braided candle. It is so particular that interestingly even the Hasidic movement of Chabad calls it the “Messiah meal”!

This is a ritual that the early Christians kept. We see this clearly in Acts 20:7 “On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people…until midnight”.
This is proven by the following three facts:

1. First of all, it mentions Sunday according to the Jewish calendar and not according to the Roman schedule. (For Romans or the Western world, a day starts at sunrise whereas for the Jews it starts on the evening of the day before. In other words, for Jews Sunday starts Saturday evening)

2. Secondly, they met to eat. “Breaking the bread” was in that case more than just the Lord’s supper, it was a collective meal to mark the end of the Shabbat. (This is what the Havdalah ceremony is all about).

3. Thirdly, the fact that they celebrated the Havdalah shows automatically that they kept the Shabbat as well. (This very ritual is to mark the end of the Shabbat)

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4) Celebrate the seven biblical feasts.

Celebrating those feasts is one of the greatest spiritual revolutions happening in the Church today. They give us a yearly routine so we can better understand God and ourselves in a very practical way. Some see in them a prophetic calendar while others see surprising parallels with events around them.

They deeply strengthen the unity of our communities and our families; they transmit spiritual lessons to our children and create bridges from one generation to the next. Many of those feasts directly command us to intentionally remember certain principles or even command us to be happy. As a result, they contain instructions that are life changing!

Feasts like Tisha B'av, Simchat Torah, Hannukah, Purim or the receiving of the Torah at Shavuot could be optional since they are not explicitly commanded in the Bible. And obviously the way the 7 feasts are celebrated will greatly vary according to the traditions. Some will use the whole Haggadah at Passover, others will build and stay under tents at Sukkot and wave the Four Species, some will count the Omer (the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot), some will use the Machzor (a special prayer book) at Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, etc.…

5) Read the weekly Torah portions and preach accordingly.

You read out loud a section from the Law (called Parashat), then from the Prophets (called Haftarah), you can add a corresponding text from the New Testament and then have a sermon on any of the texts you read.

Although the liturgy was not fixed as it is today, the synagogues both read and preached the law and the prophets. ("For the law of Moses has been preached …AND read in the synagogues every Sabbath"(Acts 15:21)), and the early Church followed that very pattern. We see this clearly in Acts 13:14-15 "On the Sabbath Paul and his companions entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

First of all, this ancient model brings a systematic and much deeper knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. (It is proven that people remember the Bible better through textual preaching than thematic preaching). Secondly, the Jewish traditional schedule of readings is adapted around the biblical feasts throughout the year, so it gives you harmony.

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6) Return to the Jewish model of organization.

The early church copied the model of the first century synagogue. Since they played an essential but secondary role to the Temple, the synagogue's main focus was on prayer, study and communal life. As such, they were not centralized and their authority rested in the hands of local elders, teachers and scribes, rather than one singular leader like the modern Rabbi. (In fact rabbis back then all had secular jobs, and this practice lasted until the 19th century!) Restoring an organizational structure where a few local leaders make decisions based on consensus is not only closer to the early church model, but it fits much better the Jewish temperament. ("Where you have 2 Jews, you have 3 opinions and 4 political parties!")

7) Make disciples the Jewish way.

- **Rabbinic Schools and Teachers:** By the first century, there were already established rabbinic schools (yeshivot) where Jewish teachers (rabbis) taught students (talmidim). Famous rabbinic figures from this era, such as Hillel and Shammai, led schools that engaged in rigorous study and debate over Jewish law (Halacha) and interpretation of the Torah as well as the Oral Law.
  (Jesus himself was honored and called Rabbi 16 times and Teacher 63 times).

- **Mentorship:** Rabbis would choose and mentor their disciples closely, not only instructing them in the details of the law but also modeling ethical behavior and piety. This mentorship was integral to the discipleship process, as students would often live with their teachers, observing their behavior and learning from their daily practices. As such the whole process was not merely academic, but it shaped the character and actions of the disciples.

- **Collective Learning**: The Jewish approach to study emphasized collective engagement with texts. Disciples would often study in pairs or small groups (chavruta), fostering a dynamic environment where discussion and debate were encouraged.

- **Practical Application**: Disciples were expected to apply their learning in everyday life, observing the mitzvot (commandments) and living according to the ethical standards taught by their mentors. This focus on action and practice distinguished Jewish discipleship from purely theoretical study.

  Much of the same remains in many yeshivots today, and we could restore this Jewish approach if we want to make well trained disciples.

> "Be deliberate in judgment**, raise up many disciples**, and make a fence around the Torah."
> Pirkei Avot 1:1, Talmud

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Bonus: Integrate some Jewish liturgical elements in your worship

With possibly the exception of the Aaronic blessing on children and families, this eighth and last principle is mostly relevant for messianic congregations, especially in Israel. If churches want to use the elements below, they will have to use much creativity and flexibility to integrate some of them into their worship services!

It is a historical fact that the early church used all the Jewish elements that we find today in synagogues like singing Psalms, the Amidah, the Shema, the Aaronic blessing and other liturgies. For instance in Romans 11:33-36 and Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul is indirectly quoting the Kaddish, which is an ancient group of prayers used in Jewish liturgy that exalts God's greatness, sovereignty, and eternal glory and express a hope for the establishment of His kingdom.

So spontaneous prayers certainly have their place and value, but there is also a great power in reciting and memorizing the biblical truths that those various elements contain, particularly with the children.

The **Amidah** includes:

- Three opening blessings of praise.
- One middle blessing specific to Shabbat, focusing on the day's sanctity.
- Three closing blessings of gratitude.

The **Shema** is a central Jewish prayer that proclaims the oneness of God, expresses devotion, and includes commandments about loving God and teaching these principles to future generations.

The **Aaronic Blessing** is a biblical prayer for protection, grace, and peace, recited to bless the community and families. It has a very powerful influence on children that they will remember all their lives. (In traditional Judaism, only male descendants of Aaron (kohanim) can formally recite the Aaronic blessing).

Jewish liturgies for life-cycle events encompass the prayers and rituals associated with key milestones in a person's life, such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.

For all the above congregations could use different kinds of **Siddur.** (It is prayer book containing the daily, Shabbat, and holiday prayers). The “Koren Siddur” is very good, even if a few elements need to be filtered (like singing “there was no one greater than Moses”). Some messianic believers have come up with their own messianic Siddur.

Obviously the format in which this is recited can vary. In most synagogues, particularly orthodox ones, it is all sung acappella, but you could use instrument with melodies of you own and have diversity and creativity for the whole order of the service.

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More biblical commands if you want to go deeper

- **Non-Kosher food.** It includes pork and animals without split hooves and that do not chew cud, shellfish (such as shrimp, crab, and lobster, which lack fins and scales), and carnivorous animals (including predators like lions and bears). If not for religious reasons, at least do it for health reasons as it is scientifically proven that they are not good for your health!

- **Forbidden fats (chelev**) around the liver, kidneys, spleen, rumen, and other digestive organs, as well as fats surrounding the intestines. Do not eat as well as the sciatic nerve (in Hebrew the "**Gid Hanasheh").**

- **Do not eat blood** (It is even forbidden for Non-Jews according to Acts 15:20). For this reason, have the meat slaughtered through the **shechita** ritual so it drains the blood completely and avoid some parts.

- **New moons/new months**. This one-day celebration included sacrifices in the temple, but even after its destruction, it was still kept (Colossians 2:16). Just like the moon renews itself every month, people are called to an introspection and to a fresh start every month. As with all Jewish feasts, it reinforces communal ties, and in some communities it has a special significance for women who gather for prayer, worship or social events.

- **Charitable giving in an anonymous way (tzedakah**). For Jews it is more than an act of compassion, but an obligation that contributes to the Tikkun Olam (repairing the world). Unlike the public collections of many churches, doing it anonymously is the highest form of charity. Jesus Himself taught us this (Matthew 6:3). Much can be learned from Maimonides (Rambam) who outlines eight levels of charity, the highest level being in helping someone become self-sufficient. For instance food stores could give almost expired products to the poor and declare them in a tax-deductible way. This could be a win-win for all.

- **Providing interest-free loans** is part of the above approach. In fact, it is forbidden to charge interest so all loans to fellow Jews should have zero interest.

- **Purity laws for women and men's behavior with them** (no sexual relationships during menstruations and after childbirth). The bed ("Koite") of Hebrews 13:4 seems to point out to this, and since the letter to Hebrews was written to Jewish believers, this would make sense.

- **Do not wear clothes from the opposite sex**. Obviously the cultures vary, but do not dress with clothes that are typically associated with the opposite gender, underscoring the importance of maintaining traditional gender roles (Deuteronomy 22:5).

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4 laws tied to the land of Israel

(That nevertheless have a universal application, as you will see).

- **Give rest to the land every 7 years (Shemitah)**. This has relevance not only for Israeli farmers, but anyone wanting to do organic agriculture and yes… save the planet! The reason is that letting the land rest every seven years replenishes soil nutrients, improves its structure, controls weeds and pests, boosts microbial health, prevents erosion and even helps increase its carbon content! In other words, it not only enhances the fertility and productivity of our soils, but it prevents their long-term destruction and desertification!

- **Laws of pe'ah** (leaving the corners of fields unharvested for the poor), **leket** (leaving gleanings for the poor) could have relevance for so many poor countries.

- **Cancelling debts every 7 years (Shemitah).** Doing it could have tremendous consequences not only for individuals, but for businesses and even entire countries.

- **Jubilee Year (Yovel**). Beyond giving rest to the land, canceling debts, and freeing slaves—practices with practical relevance even today—it had a striking feature with potentially significant modern implications: the return of land to its original owners. For example, the "Jubilee 2000" campaign led to the cancellation of over $100 billion in debt for 35 of the world's poorest countries.

Commanded, but only Jews follow them:

The laws below are commanded in the Bible, so that some could argue that they should have the same universal application as the laws above, but most people will admit that they are strictly limited to the Jewish culture, so we should keep it this way. (Imagine if Non-Jewish Christians all started to wear tzitzit and talit!)

- **Mezuzah** (Parchment scroll with Torah verses affixed to doorposts) and **Tefillin** (Leather boxes with Torah passages worn on the arm and forehead during prayers) are commanded in the Torah, but since there are no specific instructions on how to make them, we are left with various traditions.

- **Tzitzit** (Fringes attached to the corners of a garment as a reminder of the commandments). The bible verses leave freedom so tradition defines the frequency (every day or only certain days?), the gender (Number 15:38 = Bene Israel includes all, so women could wear them), the age (under 13 allowed?), the color of a thread (blue, blue purple?) and even the length (Matthew 23:5 = what is too long?)

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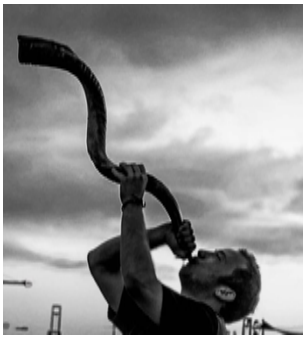
- **Tallit Gadol** (large prayer shawl worn during prayer services). It is not explicitly commanded in the Bible but developed on the basis that tzitzit have to be attached to something. Additionally, there is as well a **tallit katan** (small prayer shawl) that can be worn daily to fulfill the same commandment.

- **Mikvah immersions** (Ritual baths, preferably in running water) are required for women for ritual impurity, including after menstruation, childbirth, and before marriage. It is even required for anyone touching dead bodies. It is often practiced before major festivals like Yom Kippur or certain spiritual activities, and for converts to Judaism (of which Christianity took baptism).

- **Hafrashat Challah**. There was a command in Numbers 15:19-20 to offer a portion of food to the priests and to God. Even after the destruction of the temple, the tradition was maintained to separate a portion of dough when making bread (called Challah). It is a way to acknowledge God's blessings and sanctify the act of preparing food. It is also an opportunity to gather people, especially women, before shabbat or any particular events to make bread and have special prayers.

- **Blowing the shofar** is commanded in the Torah and primarily associated with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but it has also been used in other contexts such as to alert the community in times of war or national crisis, during Sukkot, in the Jubilee year, historically in the Temple, and occasionally in wedding ceremonies or for special announcements. It is a call to repentance, reflection, renewal, and even a call to arms and prayer! It serves as a reminder of the divine sovereignty and the importance of spiritual awakening.



Biblical commands which could have implications today

- **Nazirite vow**s are voluntary and strictly personal commitments described in Numbers 6:1-21 involving abstaining from wine, cutting hair, and avoiding contact with the dead. It can be done for any purpose and for any length of time. At the end of the vow period, they are required to shave their heads. (Acts 18:18). The purpose is to dedicate oneself to God for a period of heightened spiritual devotion and separation.

- **Wages must be paid on the same day** the work is completed, ensuring fairness and justice for laborers. Obviously today no one does this, particularly in the western world, but the principle remains: never delay paying your employees!

- **Return lost property** to their rightful owner and do not ignore them if found.

- **Return a Borrowed Item Promptly**. You must return borrowed items before sunset, ensuring fairness and avoiding causing hardship to the lender.

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- **Make restitution for stolen property**, including paying back more than what was stolen as a form of repentance and restoration.

- **Levirate marriage** (Yibbum). If a man dies without a son, his brother is commanded to marry the widow to continue the deceased brother's lineage. In a few countries in Africa and Asia, where there is polygamy, levirate marriage is still practiced as a way to support widows and preserve family lineage.

- **Cannot remarry his ex-wife** if she has married another man after their divorce. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). In other words, it goes against the very idea that if you divorced you must go back to you first spouse. (which the verse says it is an abomination!)

- **Must be free from any stressful situation during the first year of marriage** (Deuteronomy 24:5)

- **Set clear boundaries for children**. (=Build a parapet (guardrail) on your roof to prevent falls.)

- **Respect nature.** Do not make cuts or mar a fruit tree; for the first three years, fruit from newly planted trees is considered "orlah" and may not be consumed.

- **Treat animals kindly.** Send away the mother bird before taking eggs or chicks, slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day, not boiling a young goat in its mother's milk, not muzzling an ox while it is treading grain, allowing the animal to eat as it works, not using an ox and a donkey to plow together. Some interpret some of the above verses as showing "**transitional support**" to parents when their children leave the family nest.

- **Do not bring objects associated with idol worship into your home.** Some see this as anything that might have a spiritual connection with evil things (Deuteronomy 7:26).

- **Practice social justice**. Cities of refuge for accidental killers, prohibition against returning a runaway slave who seeks refuge, treat a woman captive in war with dignity, no false witnesses, harsh punishments for kidnapping.

- **Do not put together what does not go together**. Not planting different kinds of seeds in the same field, breeding different species of animals, or wearing garments made from mixed fabric. (Some people and things are not meant to be together)

- **Make war justly** (offer peace first, no destruction of the environment, treat prisoners and animals fairly, etc.…)

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Not commanded in the Bible, but culturally recommended for Jewish believers, especially in Israel

- **Meat-milk separation**. One can easily argue that it is a wrong interpretation as the biblical text speaks against animal cruelty or against pagan rituals (compare it with Abraham who gave meat and butter to angels in Genesis 18:8) and groups like the Karaite Jews do not practice this, but as it is the standard practice among religious Jews, it is culturally needed if we want to reach out to them. The same can be said of all the subjects below:

- **Wearing a kippah**. It is not commanded in the Bible. Its practice is historically absent in the first century and only comes later in the Middle Ages. This may explain also why men in the early church did not cover heads (1 Corinthians 11)

- **Peyot** are sidelocks or sideburns grown by men, following the commandment in Leviticus 19:27 not to shave the sides of the head. Since it is bound to a prohibition against practices associated with pagan mourning rituals or idolatry, some do not see this as being a binding rule. (Karaites Jews do not follow this).

- **Tattoos.** Commanded in Leviticus 19:28 but since it is the contexts is associated with practices related to idolatry and pagan rituals; some do not accept it as a binding rule.

- **Bar/Bat Mitzvah**. It is not commanded in the Bible, but it seems that Jesus showed a similar transition to adulthood in Luke 2. Obviously, since you can only do it if you are Jewish, it has no validity for Non-Jews.

- **Simchat Bat**. Celebration for the birth of a girl, similar to a Brit Milah (circumcision).

- **5 major fasts + 2 minor fasts.** These are fasts for Yom Kippur, Tishah B'Av, the Fast of Gedaliah, the Fast of Esther, and the Fast of the Firstborn, while minor fast days include the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet and Yom Kippur Katan. Fasting 24/25 hours for those specific days can have a spiritual relevance. (Except for Yom Kippur, fasting is not commanded in the Bible for all the other 6 days. They are simply traditions).

- **Jewish daily prayers**

  Shacharit: Morning prayers with psalms, Shema, and Amidah.

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Mincha: Afternoon prayers with Ashrei and Amidah.
Maariv: Evening prayers with Shema and Amidah.
There is also Musaf on special days and the Bedtime Shema before sleep.

- **The Siddur** is an excellent Jewish prayer book with the set order of prayers for daily, Sabbath, and holiday services. Much of its content comes from the Bible, especially Psalms, along with passages from the Torah and rabbinic additions like blessings and the Amidah. It reflects different traditions (e.g., Ashkenazi, Sephardi) and is used for both communal and personal worship.

- **Funeral customs**: The body is purified (tahara), buried usually within 24 hours, and followed by a 7-day morning that is deeply communal (shiva), and an annual remembrance (Yahrzeit)).

- **Wedding ceremony:** Before: ritual bath to achieve spiritual purity (mikveh), ketubah (marriage contract that is read aloud during the ceremony), 7 specific blessings recited under a Chuppah (wedding canopy), breaking of the glass. After: the couple spends a short time alone (yichud))

THE ORAL LAW CONTAINS GREAT BLESSING BUT FALSE DOCTRINES AND LEGALISM!

- **All the rabbinical traditions**, called the "**Oral Law**" is the body of all the Jewish legal and interpretative traditions passed down orally. They complement the written Law of the Bible and are codified in the Mishnah (written codification of oral laws), the Talmud (rabbinic discussions on the Mishnah) and the Midrash (interpretative commentaries on the Bible).
They have produced the "**Halakhah**", which has 613 commandments and many other rules that dictate how to live the Jewish life today.

We must thoroughly filter all the elements of the Oral law, particularly those that are legalistic!

  - **Some are GOOD,**
  - **Some are NEUTRAL,**
  - **But some are BAD!**

For instance, the same can be said of the **Kabbalah,** which has some interesting insights, some even claim they secretly reveal Jesus, but it has as well many esoteric elements that are close to witchcraft and heresy.

WARNING!

MANY BELIEVERS IN JESHUHA WHO HAVE COMMITED THEMSELVES TO FOLLOW ALL THE UNBIBLICAL TRADITIONS OF RABBINICAL JUDAISM

…**HAVE LEFT THE FAITH!**

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9 - IDENTIFY DESERT TIMES

We have included a lengthy chapter on desert times because it is an aspect of suffering that all leaders have to go through and yet very few of them understand it because it is not taught in churches (How many times in your life have you heard a sermon or any teaching about desert times? Probably never).

This chapter brings principles that are very useful when we go through very difficult, dry or lonely times in life.

1. Have a biblical perspective of what desert times are.

Most believers greatly suffer during desert times, not just because such times are extremely challenging, but especially because they have no clear understanding of what is happening to them.

Yes, we cannot avoid the pain that comes with the stripping and brokenness of such times, but we can have a correct perspective that really helps us if we understand that they are perfectly normal in God's plan. In fact, **they are unavoidable for all who want to serve God, especially Christian leaders.**

They are recognizable by their very characteristic pattern of 4 phases and their accompanying moods.

They are painful transitions that prepare us for new and better seasons of our lives.

They normally happen once or twice in our existence, rarely more, and they can last from a few months to a few years. Jesus, our supreme example, went through a desert-isolation time of 40 days, and many other biblical characters, whether Moses, Elijah or Paul, all experienced it for a few years.

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They should not be confused with the usual crises of life where we have enough hope and strength to get back on our feet. **Desert times take all our securities away, and they last long and deep enough to completely crush and change the way we see God and ourselves**.

Therefore, outsiders can never understand our loneliness, because they are not aware that isolation times always get us to a point where we feel spiritually and emotionally dry, lonely and empty (This is what happens in deserts, thus the name).

The main reason for such negative feelings is because everything that defines our core identity has been taken away.

In such times we therefore not only question ourselves, but how we should serve God, and even how much God matters to us. When Jesus was in the desert, the one temptation that came all the time was His identity in relationship with God ("if You are the Son of God…"). When Moses was in his long isolation, he was no more a prince of Egypt, but a shepherd. Joseph was no more the beloved son, but a slave. In such a setting, it is therefore not unusual to experience a "dark night of the soul" as we struggle to perceive God's voice.

If we "successfully" go through them, (by having learnt the needed lessons, instead of becoming bitter or depressed, as for instance most of the Israelites did in their own desert time, we leave a major phase of our lives behind and start a new one with a new identity and a new way of serving God.

2. The four periods of desert.

Periods of desert are all divided in 4 stages. It is necessary to precisely identify them, so that we have hope and perspective of what we should feel and do.

1. Stripping and breaking

We are typically led into desert times by surprise, or by progressive shocks that get us deeper and deeper down into what seems like "the valley of the shadow of death". Positions, possessions or securities are usually lost in a way that we never expected, such that shame, anger and confusion are feelings which are not uncommon at this early stage.

There can be various painful means that force us to enter desert times: a severe sickness, a divorce, the loss of someone or a secure job, or even persecution and prison times.

One way that makes it particularly painful and confusing is after we did something righteous, we end up being treated unfairly. For instance, we wanted to improve things within our church, our job or our family, and we end up being criticized, misunderstood or even rejected. Moses, for example, tried to do something for God and he got "rewarded" with the unfair treatment of being led into a long desert time. The same happened to Elijah after he spoke to Ahab, as well as Joseph when he shared his dream with his brothers.

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2. Struggling to find God and ourselves

The second phase determines whether we simply have a life crisis that will eventually pass, or we have entered a desert time. The way to find out is through the following 3 signs.

The first sign is that after we have spent a lot of time to forcefully change our situation, with all the discipline and wisdom we could think of, we slowly realize that **we are "stuck".** Nothing has really changed, and we have absolutely no perspective of when it will ever finish. We have been put aside, isolated, most people cannot relate to what is happening to us, and our whole situation is definitively not what we had chosen.

Worse, we start to have this nagging feeling that God Himself had a plan to bring us into this dry and isolated place where no one wants to join us (isn't this what deserts are?). As it is written: "the Spirit led Jesus into the desert" (Matthew 4:1).

The second sign of a desert is that **we are being tested in how we see ourselves**. For instance, the three times that Jesus was tempted in the desert always had to do with His identity ("if you are truly the Son of God "). The reason that we go through an identity crisis is that before we entered our desert time, our whole person was tied and shaped by an environment and responsibily that completely defined us; once those have been removed, we have a hard time to know who we are.

The third sign and most evident characteristic that we have entered a desert time is the confusing feeling that **God is somehow silent**. He does not seem to hear our prayers, and worse, we cannot really recognize His familiar voice.

In the worst cases, some Christians start to even battle with the emotions of loneliness, depression and "spiritual cynicism" that is described in the third chapter of Lamentations:

*"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. **God has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.** He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. **He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer**. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked. Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with **bitter** herbs and sated me with gall. He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. **I have been deprived of peace**; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So, I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord." I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me"*

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Of course, the primary reason that *we cannot **hear** God* is that *we cannot **see** ourselves* clearly. Since we do not know who we really are any more, we cannot hear God in the same way as before, such that He seems to be silent.

In other words, because our identity is being changed, so is the way in which we perceive God. During that confusing period, many Christians are forced to ask themselves: "What has God really created me for? Who am I now that no one recognizes me any more for what I used to be?" In essence, we struggle with the following question: "Who am I now that I have no past and no future, and how much does God mean to me in all this?"

3. Finding genuine intimacy and peace with God

There comes a point when eventually our mourning and bitterness must cease. We can either keep on with the depressive feelings of the second phase, or we can cry out to God until we find enduring peace and real intimacy with Him. We cannot remove ourselves from the desert, but we can choose our attitude in it.

This, in turn, determines how long we will stay in it. For instance, most Israelites were meant to go through a short time of wilderness after Egypt, but because they chose idolatry, bitterness and unbelief, their desert became a long process of 40 years and most of them never entered the Promised Land. Deserts are not meant to kill us spiritually, but to prepare us for a better stage in life. They cannot be shortened, but our attitude can make them longer.

This is when we must choose to seek God with a different attitude. This is the kind of situation where we have absolutely no other choice. Either God is nowhere, or God is now here! We desperately need God, and a quick fix through Him will not do it. However long it may take, we must press on through surrender, prayer, worship, fasting or whatever "breakthrough" that works for us, until we finally start to perceive His voice and find real peace. Now, it is very important that if we are going to seek God, we sought him with the right motivations. Often, even unconsciously, we pursue Him for the following two wrong reasons:

The first wrong motivation is to seek Him **so that He gives us a precise plan of action of what to do for Him**. The reason is that unconsciously we want to do something so at to redefine our lost identity. In itself there is nothing wrong with building our self-esteem through some activity, but there is a danger that we miss the whole point of desert. During such times God wants us to slow down, take a lot of time in prayer and discover who we really are as we discover who He really is.

At this point in our lives, our being matters more than all our doing. God wants to transform the way we see ourselves through Him. He does this by revealing all the prideful and egocentric motivations we had in our "former life", to show us that He **does not see us through our jobs, our positions or even through all the people we loved.** In deserts God does not see us as "the prince of Egypt", as "the

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preferred son of Jacob", or as "the prophet of Israel". **He sees us as we really are - sinners who do not need to prove ourselves to Him or to others.**

At the same time, we are not just sinners, but dearly beloved children of His, who have a priceless value to Him. The more we understand this paradox of our identity, the deeper we are being transformed. **It is precisely because in the desert we have nothing to show for ourselves that we are able to understand our true value before God.** It is a time when our self-esteem cannot be defined by our accomplishments, and therefore we must find it in our intimacy with God.

The second wrong motivation we have in seeking God may be the fact that we seek more temporal and earthly answers than God Himself. Unconsciously, we seek Him to get back the job, the house, the mate, the ministry or the situation that we have lost. Now, there is nothing wrong with seeking such blessings, but there is always a danger that they become more important than God Himself. Idolatry is never a danger with bad things, but with good ones. We get so blessed by God that we forget Him and become self-centered and self-deceived.

Desert times are meant to bring us back to seek God just for Himself, beyond all that He can give us: the Giver is more important than all His gifts. When a human being has reached the point that God's presence matters more than all other blessings, pleasure and securities in this life, then such a person is truly blessed. This is why Christians who have endured long times of prison with God usually come out with an authority, a peace and a love that cannot be explained in human terms. This is why God allows even His best people to be thrown in prisons. From time to time the reset button of isolation-desert times needs to be pushed, so that we see life through the Giver rather than through His gifts.

The most obvious sign that we are "successfully" going through the third stage is the sense of peace and surrender that characterizes us. If we can genuinely say to God: "however long you want me to stay in that unchangeable situation, I trust You and praise You for this, because your presence matters more than anything else in my life", than peace will certainly rule in our hearts.

Another sign is that we become **transparent and humble.** We do not have to prove ourselves to anyone, so we can just be ourselves.

Another encouraging sign is the **miraculous favor of God for our physical needs** as we learn to supernaturally depend on God. For instance, Jesus was served by the angels and Elijah was fed by the ravens. Directly related to this is the ability to **walk in the supernatural**. Joseph became an expert at giving interpretations of dreams, Moses had his burning bush experience and miraculous signs, and Elijah was raising the dead and multiplying flour and oil.

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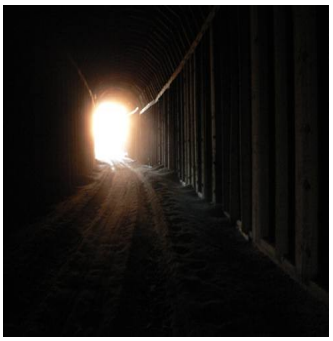
4. Seeing the end of the tunnel and patiently exiting.

At the beginning of this final stage, God usually gives us some signs in advance that our situation will end, in order to encourage us. It can be a supernatural revelation, a dream or an intuition that shows us that things will take a different turn, or it can be through people or conditions that give us a clear confirmation of what is already in our hearts. Usually, if we have fully surrendered and not put false hopes in people or circumstances, (as we used to do in the early stages of our desert times), then we can recognize God's voice for ourselves.



It is very important in this final phase that we keep on with the same attitude of trust and peace that we had in the third stage, by not forcing the final outcome. Often, when we see the light at the end of the tunnel, we can be tempted to speed up the process, instead of having the patience to wait on God. He has the perfect timing, and sometimes this final stage of the whole process may take longer than we hoped.

The reason we do not have to speed up things is that desert times usually finish with dramatic turn-around. After 14 years the slave Joseph becomes prime minister overnight; after 40 years the long-forgotten Moses suddenly comes back and within days two nations are completely shaken; after 3-4 years Elijah radically revolutionizes everything in one day at Mont Carmel; after 30 years, Jesus, who is not known before, ends up His desert and starts His ministry with a spectacular demonstration of miraculous power. God may keep us a long time in the waiting, but when He moves, it is fast and with power!
The way we described each of the above sequences may not be as "extreme" for some of us, but they always include the following 4 characteristics:

Summary **of the 4 phases:**
In the first phase, we are painfully removed from our secure environment and role. This leads us in the second phase in which we experience some "dark night of the soul" as we struggle to find God and our real identity through Him. The third phase begins by a desperate seeking of God until we finally find surrender, peace and genuine intimacy with God. In the final stage, we receive early on encouraging signs that the whole process of isolation will eventually finish.

3. What you should do during desert times.

Have the right perspective: every lesson is a preparation for the future

We must be convinced that deserts are a training ground for a future phase of our life. They are a crucial time of transition that equips us for a greater effectiveness in our next season in life. Its primary purpose, therefore, is to create in us a new humility to teach us things we could not learn before. So, the key is to learn our lessons well, and not resist, or else we will end up with the same fate as the Israelites in the desert.

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Because they refused to learn their lessons well, they looked at their past with nostalgia (Egypt), and they were not ready to face the challenges of the future (attacking the giants of the Promised Land). Tragically, because of their wrong attitude they got stuck in their desert and even died in it. So, desert times either make you better or worse spiritually. Whether it has to do with deep character issues or how you walk with God, identify clearly the lessons you have to learn, and start today. One day, when you will be in your next Promised Land, you will look back and be thankful that you submitted to the training of the Master-Teacher.

Increase your time of prayer until your maximum limit.

It is usually challenging to take a lot of time in prayer during the first 2 phases of desert because we are in the survival mode. Eventually, it starts to change in the third phase as we surrender and sincerely want to praise God. So, take a LOT of time to pray as it is the only way to make it through the aridity. Every day push your own limits of how much you can pray, and eventually you will understand that God is preparing you for something great. As Samuel Logan Brengle wrote, “the great battles, the battles that decide our destiny and the destiny of generations yet unborn, are not fought on public platforms, but in the lonely hours of the night and in moments of agony."

Serve with all your heart, as to the Lord.

Mediocrity is very tempting in life situations where we feel “stuck”. Particularly if we end up there unfairly. We are not saying that we should not do everything to improve professionally, but dream jobs are rare in the deserts. Elijah was probably wondering why he had to serve a poor and dysfunctional widow, when his calling was to a whole nation. Moses, the former prince of Egypt, was probably feeling the same around his sheep. Similarly, Joseph had all the reasons to retreat in his self-pity and do a terrible job. Instead, he chose the unthinkable by serving his oppressors with EXCELLENCE, and in due time God lifted him up. The lesson from this is that we should give our very best in every situation, even with our “oppressors” and even in our “slave job”. Not only God may send us some “Potiphars” or “Jethros” who help us alongside, but in the process, He shapes our character and prepares our future leadership.

If you have no dreams, dream for others: eventually it will all come back to you.

In the early stages of desert, we are obsessed to find any revelation that would get us out of our situation. In other words, the last thing we care about is empowering others in THEIR dreams. However, when Joseph gave interpretations for the dreams of OTHERS, it not only saved his life, but a lot of other people! The paradoxical lesson from this is that however unclear (or even dead!) our own dreams can be, we can always empower others in their desires for greatness, and eventually our dreams will finally come true. Carefully listen to others, help them to find the keys that will unlock their dreams, and one day you will find out that God has not forgotten yours.

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Learn to depend on the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

When we have nothing and feel like nothing, then the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit can mean everything! For this reason, desert times are one of the most powerful opportunities to learn to move in the supernatural. Expect unbelievable provisions for your financial and physical needs (the equivalent being the manna for the Israelites or the raven feeding Elijah). Expect supernatural encounters with the unseen world (the burning bush of Moses or angels ministering to Jesus) and expect God to use you to help others (Elijah raising the dead or multiplying the oil and flour, or Joseph giving supernatural interpretations of dreams). Every single person in the Bible who went through the desert not only experienced the supernatural, but they all came out with *greater* miraculous power after it ("Jesus returned to Galilee in the *power* of the Spirit", look at Moses and the 10 mighty plagues or Elijah on Mount Carmel).

Choose 2-3 friends with whom you can be totally open.

During desert times, it is tempting to retreat from most people. So, our recommendation is not big social gatherings or "church activism", but to choose 2-3 friends with whom you can become very real and build a deep spiritual intimacy. In Gethsemane, Jesus took His 3 best friends when He was in his worse struggle, and He was not afraid to be open about it. If the Son of God was vulnerable with His inner battles, so should we. Apart from a healthy marriage, deep and authentic friendships can be a refreshing oasis in the desert. Pray and seriously seek to have this and it will sustain you when everything else fails.

Forgive... and do not become a victim.

Desert times are usually birthed by the injustice of a few and painfully nurtured by the indifference of most. Like Joseph, we must learn to not let resentment grow in us but see people who have wronged us through the eyes of genuine forgiveness and compassion. At the same time, because deserts tend to produce a very fatalistic attitude in us, we can easily allow people to trample on us, which is not right either. We cannot avoid some people taking advantage of us, but we should certainly not encourage them either. Joseph, for example, was completely forgiving towards his brothers, but at the same time he was very shrewd and wise with them as well. Let us be doves and serpents at the same time, learning the delicate balance between grace and wisdom!

You are not alone.

Remember that you are not alone! At different times in history believers have been prepared through the isolation of deserts and at the right time God took them out of nowhere and mightily used them for His purposes. He will do the same with you if you remain humble and faithful.

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Challenging questions after reading the whole book

The questions in **red** are even more **challenging** ☺

Did you experience a biblical life changing conversion?

- Did you experience a conversion where you clearly saw all your sins and radically turned away from them? Did anyone help you in this process? Are you teaching others with this expectation?
- Did you experience a real deliverance from certain sins and issues of your past? Did the demons that were connected to them leave you? If not at your conversion, did you ever experience this later on in life? Can you help others in this area?
- Before your baptism, did you clearly understand the cost of radically giving up everything and making Jesus the Lord over every aspect of your life? Are you helping others to have this attitude before you baptize them?
- Did you ever experience, in a tangible way, the Holy Spirit coming down on you and filling you with power? Are you expecting young converts to experience this too?

Do you live like Jesus?

- Do you spend a good amount of time every day in prayer and reading your Bible?
- Do you clearly know how God speaks today? Can you help others with this knowledge?
- Do you see yourself very positively like God sees you?
- Do you have a very clear and objective picture of all your strengths and weaknesses/sins?
- Can you clearly differentiate good suffering from bad suffering and act accordingly?
- Have most of your long-term dreams been realized? Why not?
- **Do you regularly see all kinds of incredible miracles happen for you and through you?**

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- **Are you all the time in excellent health? (except for some accidents or genetical reasons).**
- Do you always have enough money and yet your lifestyle is always sacrificial and modest?
- **Do you have (or had) best friends with whom you are totally open and would die for them?**
- **Do you have a small group where you have mutual relationships that are changing your life?**
- **Were you or are you now being trained/discipled by mature Christians?**
- **Are you constantly evangelizing with the purpose to eventually find your own disciples?**
- **Do you have disciples whom you are training in their character and their skills?**
- **Do those disciples imitate you in such a way that they too make other disciples?**
- **Are you eagerly seeking supernatural gifts? Do you constantly grow in them?**
- Do you know how to improve your marriage? Are your friends and church helping you in this?
- Do you easily submit to all authorities above you? Do you know how to respectfully disagree?
- **Do you constantly confront your people with the truth? Do you do it with love and wisdom?**
- **Do you easily and humbly welcome any corrections, always seeking advice and transparency?**
- **Do you always immediately speak to Christians in your church who have things against you?**
- Do you know how to present your problems and how to listen when others present theirs?
- Do you easily and fully forgive? And do you know as well what forgiveness is not?

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Are you a leader according to the Bible?

- **Do you quickly and humbly study the 2, or even 3 sides of any new theological view?**
- **Can you clearly explain all the main theologies that are very different from each other?**
- **Do you diligently examine and confront every issue of this world in the light of the Scriptures?**
- **Can you easily recognize and define any form of legalism in any church? Possibly in yours?**
- **Are people saying that your preaching is excellent, very clear, challenging and yet inspiring?**
- **Are your gatherings characterized by an amazing worship and supernatural manifestations?**
- **Can you show what is unbiblical with every single definition of the 5-fold ministry today?**
- **Do you know why and how the early church was organized and what this means for yours?**
- **Do you know which Jewish roots could be restored and how to implement them today?**
- **Do you know what biblical desert times are? Can you clearly identify its 4 main phases?**

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