

Therapy with God

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Wonderful Counselor, Comforter, Friend

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Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.
(Psalms 42:11 KJV)

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly
John 10:10b

Susan Henderson McHenry



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Therapy with God
Wonderful Counselor, Comforter, Friend
by Susan Henderson McHenry

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DEDICATION



This book is dedicated to all of my family and friends who reviewed it and gave me their invaluable feedback, and to all those who have encouraged me all along the way.

It is dedicated to my courageous clients who honored me by allowing me to be a part of their transformation at the hands of Jesus Christ.

It is dedicated to my wonderful husband, Stuart, who has encouraged me when I felt insecure, lifted me up when I felt down, and pushed me along when I needed that shove. I feel loved by him, and I love him from the bottom of my heart.

But it is mostly dedicated to God the Father who called me, to the Holy Spirit who guides me, and to the Lord of my life, Jesus Christ, without whom I would still be living in the dark. To God be the glory.

* * *

My heartfelt and humble ‘thank you’ to you all.

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SECTION 1

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

I -- INTRODUCTION



*“And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart”
(Jeremiah 15:16).*

I have experienced something amazing in my work with clients that I would like to share with you. Reflect on this profound truth for a moment:

Jesus Christ is the best mental health therapist on the face of the planet, and His Holy Bible is the best mental health book.

See Him that way, regard His book that way, invite Him to change you and change your life, and you will never look back.

Meet with Jesus in the pages of His Holy Book. Seek His counsel, rely on His judgment, and lean on His shoulder -- not weekly, but day by day and minute by minute -- and your life will be transformed. That transformation is there for you, and you can do it. Bask in the restorative powers of your ever-deepening relationship with Jesus, and watch it happen. I know it can happen for you. I've seen it. I've taught it. I've lived it.

This book is about change. It is about replacing what is wrong in your life with what God has to offer: peace, contentment, and unspeakable joy. It is about walking with Jesus and hearing Him whisper tender words of healing into your ear. It is about emotional renewal, and it is about mental health victory.

This book will help you change how you relate to God, Jesus, and the Bible, and will help you cultivate those new relationships to effect profound changes in your life. Jesus wants to work with you - not judge or condemn you - if you will let Him. He will encourage you gently and lovingly, over time, to help you see yourself and your world through His eyes. Through this new perspective, you will develop a deeper knowledge of God, the world, your own purpose, and your place in His kingdom. This knowledge will then build your faith, and you will learn to trust that He is there, He loves you, and He will see you through all of your trials. Start slowly and give yourself a lot of grace as you work through this process. Don't give up. Remember that you are addressing ways of thinking and habits that have years of roots in your soul.

What Is The Purpose Of This Book

On the surface, this may look like a guidebook to teach you how to read your Bible. Learning how to read the Bible is a certainly a big part of the process, but the purpose is much larger than that. The purpose is to have you open your Bible and find Jesus everywhere you look. It is to draw you into a closer understanding of who He is and what He can mean to you. It is to invite you and guide you into His healing arms.

The ultimate purpose of this book is to help you find that unspeakable joy in 'the land of promise,' the land flowing with milk and honey that God talks about in the Old Testament: the "Christian Promised Land," so to speak, of an extraordinary relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. It is intended to shed light on the following dilemma:

"I have always heard that if I give my life to Jesus Christ, I will have the solution to every problem I could ever face. I know the Bible has the answers, but I don't know where to go or how to find them."

As a nation, we spend millions of dollars annually on what we refer to as 'self-help' books. They teach us to rely on our own

strength and become self-sufficient and independent of God, hence the name ‘self’ help. We keep spending and reading because we are looking for answers in all the wrong places. Like bad relationships, they make us feel better for a season -- until the next crash. Because the solution does not include God, we’re no better off than before. The crash is because their advice sends us off in the wrong direction -- a direction toward ‘self’ that takes us farther and farther away from God, and farther and farther away from the real answer to our questions.

So why do we keep turning to the self-help books? Because we don’t know where else to turn; we don’t know how to use the Bible that way. We have a Creator who knows us better than we know ourselves, but we don’t know how to go to Him. He knows how we tick. He knows how we react. He knows what we want and what we really need. He knows what satisfies us and gives us peace and joy. If we could only sit with Him and talk to Him, maybe He could give us the answers to our deepest questions.

To really experience God’s best, we need to connect with Him on a spiritual level, and learn to think, feel, react, and love as He does. Since He does know us better than we know ourselves, He can transform our lives if we let Him. Remember that God loves you and wants your heart overflowing with his Spirit -- His true blessing¹ and the source of true joy. Like any good Father, He’s miserable when you’re miserable (Judges 10:16), He wants to guide you into a life of peace and contentment and purpose, and He has painstakingly created for you His divinely-inspired guidebook to lead you through that process. It is in those glorious pages where you can seek and find the person Jesus Christ to love you and mentor you toward that God-filled, joy-filled life.

We all crave that wonderful relationship with Jesus, and we know that the Bible shows us the way. But sometimes, it just seems too daunting, frightening even, like a river running too fast. *Therapy with God* will help you wade in slowly enough to feel safe and comfortable, and yet deeply enough to allow true changes to permeate your life.

The purpose of this book is to point you to Jesus -- it is not a self-help book or another therapy technique. It is to help you find the

ultimate Counselor, Jesus Christ. It is in His arms alone where you will find true and lasting relief.

Why I Wrote This Book

I started my private practice as a Christian Mental Health Therapist in early 2005 after having dedicated my life to the Lord in 2001. The idea for this book started to take shape in my thoughts shortly after I began my practice with Christian clients. After several years as a secular therapist, it was astonishing to me how rapidly using Scripture and working with the Holy Spirit could move my Christian clients to recovery. Therapy with God worked, and it worked miraculously. Today, my practice is exclusively Christian-based. As a Christian Mental Health Therapist, I see the power of God at work daily, and I could never go back to a secular approach of therapy without God. I love what I do, and it works. It is extremely exciting to witness the power of Scripture and the intervention of the Holy Spirit transforming lives before my very eyes. The look of awareness in my client's eyes, then the healing, often instantaneous, all attest to the power of God's healing hand.

But what I came to realize was that before we began our work together, most of my clients did not understand the power they held in their hands and in their hearts. I knew that Jesus has the answer -- *is* the answer -- to every single problem we face in our lives. My clients knew that as well, but they didn't know how to find those answers through their relationship with Him. I realized that if they knew what I had learned about Jesus and Scripture, they would be set free. It was far more than I could communicate to them in weekly 50-minute sessions, so I knew I had to write it down.

So what was it that I knew? What is it that I know? Through my studies, I have come to realize that every story and every character in both the Old and New Testaments can, in some way or another, be applied to our lives today. The practical applicability of every single page of Scripture is nothing short of miraculous. These stories and the people in them visually bring to life the Christian principles that Jesus taught and lived while He was with us in the flesh. They teach us who God is, who we are, how we can serve Him, and how we can

live our lives to the fullest. Let the Holy Spirit teach you how to personalize what you read. Let Him show you how to weave the Old Testament stories into the New Testament truths. Let Him lead you through the door into a deeper understanding of how you can apply those amazing truths to your life.

Reading Scripture is a grand and glorious treasure-hunt. Seek those wonderful, life-changing moments when you hear directly from God through Scripture. Let Him fill that treasure-chest in your heart with the knowledge and the fullness of Him. When you and the Holy Spirit find the buried treasures together, your faith will grow, your love for Christ will grow, and you will sing praises to God. As you go through the pages of this book, you will learn how to do just that.

This book is a compilation of what I've learned working with clients, my personal experiences and research, and the journey I've taken with Jesus. I have included my own interpretation and applications of what I've learned as a Mental Health Therapist in general, and incorporated what I have learned through the influence of endless sermons, books, conversations, and personal encounters with God, Himself. Many people have influenced what ended up in these pages, and to the extent it serves to bring people closer to Christ, I give them all thanks, and God gets the glory.

So those of us who are privileged to call ourselves Christian Mental Health Professionals will continue to try to be Jesus with skin on for you, but we will never come close to the Master. It is my prayer that once you understand the process of studying your Bible from a personal perspective and experience its transforming power, Jesus will become your every-day therapist, and your life will never be the same.

Who Should Read This Book

So who is my target audience? I've narrowed it down to four broad groups of people. I was each of you at one time or another, so I welcome you all.

1. People who suffer and are hungry for answers from God,

2. Professionals who want to help those people find those answers,
3. Seekers trying to understand more about God, and
4. The curious non-believer who just wants to listen in.

I currently fall into a couple of those categories, and I'm assuming that since you're reading this book, at least one of them applies to you as well. Frankly, I don't know anyone who hasn't suffered at some point in their life, and likely will again.

Mental health is a difficult problem in our complex and secular world. Being filled with joy, contentment, and complete satisfaction in our station in life is virtually impossible without the Spirit of God. Looking to Jesus for the answers will bring you peace, and this book is to show you how to use your Bible in that way.

Now I can hear some of you saying, "But I don't know anything about the Bible. What if I can't do it?"

Please hear me: *You can do it.* Yes, this is a book about mental health and the Bible, but for those of you without psychology or theology degrees, be comforted. This is a down-to-earth, roll-up-your-sleeves, practical guidebook for learning, in a step-by-step fashion, how to improve your mental health God's way. It's for you. It is not about what you know about the Bible or mental health or anything else: *It's about having a heart for God.* I will give examples, specific instructions that you can follow, explanations of terms you might not understand, and an encouraging 'peering over your shoulder' as you work.

There is no question that it involves some effort, but if you went so far as to pick this book up in the first place, I know that you are ready to work. Neither this book, nor the work itself is above anyone's head. All that it requires is a desire to draw closer to God and a Bible in your hands. It is the *desire* that will propel you, and it is the Holy Spirit who will guide you. You cannot lose, and you cannot fail.

I will say this, though: Anyone can read this book and gain an understanding of how Christianity helps Christians, but to really understand this book and apply the lessons to your own life, you need to know Jesus Christ personally. You need to have His Holy

Spirit living in you. You need to love Him and be submitted to Him -- however loosely or inadequately -- or it won't make any sense at all. If you believe you are not a Christian but would like to be, or if you're just not sure if you are or not, then please stop now and read Appendix A, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ." In it, I describe what the word 'Gospel' means and how you can become a Christian. That's the first step toward allowing Jesus and the Bible to change your life.

A Word About Style

I have written this book in conversational style. I don't use fancy language, and some of it may even be grammatically incorrect to make it more natural to read. It's not meant to impress the scholars. I want it to be casual and comfortable, like an old pair of jeans.

One of the things you will notice as you read this book is that you will occasionally find some repetition. I do that for a couple of reasons. The first is because it's a good teaching technique. Repetition means the student will likely learn the lesson faster and retain it better. The second reason, and actually the more important one for this book, is because there are illustrations and Scripture verses that simply apply to more than one section. To have left them out would have been to leave you with less understanding and depth in the section than was optimum. So if you find yourself saying, "Didn't I read this before?", then you may very well have. I tried not to do it too much, but what is in here is intentional.

Also, just as a personal preference, I don't like the common use of the pronouns 'him/her,' 'himself/herself,' and 'he/she' with the slashes. When I need to use personal pronouns to make the sentence make sense, I will alternate between 'he' and 'she' and 'him' and 'her,' etc. When you see one of those pronouns, please know that I am generally referring to both genders. When I'm not (as in the case of husbands and wives), you'll know.

So relax, put your feet up, grab a cup of something hot, and join me in some fun and exciting Bible time.

How To Read This Book

Now, go ahead and grab your Bible. It'll be a bit before we actually get into it, but just get used to having it next to you as you read. You can use any translation you'd like. If you don't have a Bible and don't know what I mean by 'translation,' then go to Appendix C, "How to Select the Right Bible." You'll definitely need one to get the most out of this book, so please don't skip this critical step.

My Bible is the New American Standard Bible, NASB. Unless I say otherwise, it's the one I'll be using wherever I include quotes. Your translation may be different in terms of the words it uses, but the meaning should essentially be the same.

Now, there is something important about this process that you need to be aware of. I would love it if this was a book you could read reclining in bed as you drop off to sleep, but it's really not. If you approach it that way, you're not going to get nearly as much out of it as you could. This is just a little instruction manual on how to draw close to Jesus and to use the Bible in a unique way. It's that relationship with Christ and your use of the Bible that will transform your life, and if you don't use the Bible as you read, you are cheating yourself.

If you just don't know where to begin, I have included a lot of information you may find useful in the Appendices. Check them out to see if there is anything there you could use to help you with this process.

I refer to the Bible frequently, and include many references to specific verses in parentheses. It looks like this (John 3:16). When you get to those notes, stop and read the verse(s) in your Bible. That's a critical part of this process. Read the verse. Please don't skip this step.

And whenever you've been referred to a specific verse, remember your mother's advice: *Look both ways before crossing the road.* Don't just read the single verse itself and expect to really understand it. *Always* read a few verses above and a few verses below to understand what they call 'the context.' Some of the most damaging 'truths' that have been drawn out of the Bible are at best misleading,

and at worst heresies because they've been taken so badly out of context. Don't let that happen to you. Get a sense of what the author is trying to say in the section -- not just the single verse.

Remember that the Bible is not there for you to interpret any way you choose. You need to try to understand what the *author* meant. In the end, the author is God working through the human authors, so you're trying to learn from and understand God.

Please know that this approach means that it is going to take you a little longer to get through this book than you might have originally thought. The whole purpose here is to help you incorporate some very important changes into your day that will radically improve your mental health. Although this book will give you ideas to help you, it's the changes in your life patterns that will make the big difference, and the biggest changes will be in your relationship with Christ and in how you use Scripture. You have to actually *use* it to get that life-changing benefit out of it.

If you don't know how to use your Bible at all, then stop here and go to Appendix D, "How to Use the Bible." In it I explain, step by step, how to navigate around your Bible. I explain how to find the different books of the Bible and the specific verses I'm referring to. I explain some of the codes, cross-references, and other items of curiosity you'll find when you get in there. If you're totally new to Bible reading, that's the place to start.

I have not included most of the text of the verses themselves for several reasons:

1. I want the Holy Spirit to have a chance to speak to you directly from Scripture,
2. If you're not already, I want you to get proficient at looking them up yourself,
3. I want you to learn to regard your Bible as a comfortable, old friend,
4. I don't want to impose my version on you, and
5. They would take up way too much space.

Even if you see yourself as being familiar with the Bible and its verses, please do not skip the readings. The deeper understandings

of the subject won't come from my writings -- they come from God - - and you never know what God is going to tell you through a particular verse *this* time. I've seen it happen way too many times where people release years of pain because they followed this simple guideline, and came across the one verse that set them free. God wants to speak to you through these verses -- don't muzzle Him by not reading them. A single encounter with the holy God can change everything.

Except for the Appendices, read the chapters in order. The book builds on lessons and concepts, and you might miss something critical that you need for later chapters.

Let me suggest that you stop now and read through the short Footnotes section in the back of the book. There are some footnotes that you won't care about because they're just the references to the sources of information in the text, but there are others you will find interesting. If you pre-read them, then when you get to that section, you'll have some memory that there was something interesting about it and go back and look. Otherwise, you'll tend to just ignore the footnotes altogether (like I usually do) and miss some interesting stuff.

Also, have a pen and paper handy. You may have thoughts, insights, questions you need to look up later, whatever. Have it handy so you don't have to break your train of thought to find something to write on. I've also included some blank pages in the back of the book. If you'd like to personalize it, you can jot down some notes there as well.

Get a partner, if you'd like, to work through the process with you, or use it in your small group studies. You can support one another, you can help each other with questions as you go, and you can hold each other accountable for working the process. But the biggest benefit to the partnership approach is that it will be a lot of fun. Christian fellowship is always a very good thing.

I have included an "Intermission Verse to Ponder" periodically throughout the book. It has no particular relationship to anything in the surrounding text; it is just meant to give you a break and give you something Scriptural to think about for a moment. Read them, and see if there's something there that God can speak to you through

about your own life.

Finally, before we get started, a friend of mine once told me that before people are going to be interested in what I have to say, they're going to have to know a little about me personally. To that end, I have included my testimony and some information about my history in Appendix F, "Introduction to the Author." If you are curious about who I am and where I am coming from, that's where you'll find it.

My Disclaimers

If you have read Appendix F, "Introduction to the Author," then you know that I am not a Bible scholar. I'm just an ordinary Christian who loves the Lord, just like you. And just like you, I have a lot more to learn. There are many concepts and precepts that aren't included here, most of which are because I have yet to discover them myself. The opportunities for discovery are endless. I pray that you will join me on my continuing journey with Jesus, to find more treasures, more faith, more love, and more of Him through His holy Word.

My apologies to any pastors, Bible scholars, theologians, etc., who might honor me by reading this book. I know there are a lot of things that I have missed because I don't have the training you have. My heart, though, is to keep it simple and personal. I want anyone with a heart for God and a desire to draw closer to Him to understand it and grow from it. I want this to inspire people to start looking deeper on their own with the many resources that are available, and know that they can do it without the formal training. There are people for whom formal training is simply not an option, but there is much that they can gain from a deeper study on their own. My hope in writing this book without that formal training is to personally demonstrate to them that that is true.

And finally, I know there are going to be some who are going to read this book and exclaim, "Yeah, but you don't understand my situation!" That's so true. I don't. I can't. Even if you and I were sitting in the room together, I couldn't really, really understand what your unique situation is doing to you inside your head and inside your unique life. No one can. But what I ask is that you understand

that these are general precepts meant to give you a different way of looking at your situation and some additional tools in dealing with it, regardless of what it is. I pray that they will be helpful to you in some way. If you feel like this misses a point that is unique to you, then again, please see a professional Christian therapist. Let them help you navigate your stormy waters and get from this book what helps you. There is much that you can learn here, even if it doesn't completely resolve your issue. As my mother-in-law says, "Take the chicken and leave the bones."

How This Book Is Organized

Section 1 -- Introduction: Chapter 1 -- This is the chapter you are reading now. It gives my thoughts about the purpose of this book, how to proceed reading it, and for whom it is intended. But you already knew that.

Section 2 -- Foundational Issues: Chapters 2-5 -- This section offers my thoughts about what the phrase 'mental health' means, how I define the Bible and how I think about it, who the Holy Spirit is, and what spiritual gifts are to the believer. It also includes my thoughts on the importance of falling in love with the man Jesus of Nazareth, and how that can be accomplished. These chapters are meant to ensure that you know my position regarding some foundational Christian concepts.

Section 3 -- Techniques: Chapters 6-10 -- This section provides specific techniques for reading and studying Scripture with a mental health perspective. These chapters represent the 'meat' of this book, including how to read the Bible and think about what you are reading, and why memorizing Scripture is so critical as it relates to mental health. It presents some examples of how to read the Bible a little differently, as well as some specific suggestions regarding prayer from a mental health perspective.

Section 4 -- Application: Chapters 11-20 -- This section provides practical applications for specific situations. It includes examples of how to apply the lessons to your life, including how to increase your faith, how to deal with trials, and how to know God's will for your life. This is where you will learn how to apply the

techniques you've been studying and gives you specific examples of how to change 'boring' Old and New Testament stories into life-changing experiences. This is where the real change will begin.

Section 5 -- Summary: Chapter 21 -- This chapter brings it all home in a concise, easy-to-reference synopsis. It is where you go when you hear yourself say, "Now, what was it she said to do?" It also contains a message to professional counselors, and how they might be able to use this book to help their clients.

Appendices -- The Appendices provide some basic Christian information intended for those of you who don't see yourselves as Christians, or for the brand-new Christians who don't know how to proceed. It presents the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and some suggestions on how to select the right Bible and how to use it once you have it. It offers 'Now What?' guidance for new believers, and a Bibliography, References, and Recommendations section for additional reading and Internet browsing. It ends with my history and testimony.

An important note: If you consider yourself to be seriously depressed or in some other significant crisis, then see a professional Christian therapist and ask them to help you work this process, encourage you, and pray with you. You need connection, understanding, and a loving heart to join you in the journey. You will find those things in Christ, but if you're in crisis, this process may be too overwhelming initially if you try to do it alone. Second Corinthians Chapter 1 says that, "we comfort others as we are comforted by God." It is in His plan that we comfort when we can, and get comfort when we need to. Get help.

As a final thought, a precious client read this book before its publishing, and shared her thoughts with me about how I should end this chapter. I offer them to you from her:

"The only suggestion I might have is to add a bit about the process -- what's going on...like God getting into our deepest thoughts and secrets, that it's going to be a challenge, that we have pretty stubborn patterns that need to break, and that no matter what, God is holding out His hand to walk us through."

Remember that the idea of this book is to help you draw closer to God and into the arms of Jesus, and to realize that the study of Scripture can be the most exhilarating experience you will ever have. Ok then, enough about the book. Let's get started.

SECTION 2

* * * * *

FOUNDATIONAL ISSUES

II -- DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH

Pathology Versus Dysfunction

The term ‘mental health’ conjures up many pictures. It spans the gamut from mild, situational-dependent depression to life-altering Schizophrenia and other major illnesses. In this chapter, I’d like to set up some parameters and definitions.

Pathology is a term that refers to a disease. For some of the serious mental illnesses such as Major Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder and others, there seems to be a strong genetic component to them, as well as some environmental factors. This means that the tendency to have them may come from your parents, but your environment could either cause them to develop in the first place, or could certainly exacerbate them when they do develop. In this way, there is a difference between the more serious, pathological, mental health disorders like those I’ve listed above, and some of the other behaviors and attitudes that wreak havoc on our lives.

I do not claim that the application of Biblical principles will cure Schizophrenia, Personality Disorders, or some instances of Major Depressive Disorder.² These are likely candidates for medication along with long term therapy. I believe there is scriptural support for the judicious application of psychotropic medications at the right time, depending on the individual situation. The purpose of these medications, whether temporary or permanent, is to stabilize the client emotionally and mentally. They will then be better able to

apply Biblical principles to their attitudes and behaviors, glorifying God and enhancing their own lives to the greatest extent possible.

It is also my deep conviction that, regardless of the existence or seriousness of underlying pathology, there are ways of thinking, habits, and life patterns that we pick up that will either add to or detract from our lives. If they detract, I call them *dysfunction*. No one is immune to dysfunction, but **everyone can be helped when Biblical principles are applied**, regardless of the underlying pathology.

Examples of dysfunction include anger, poor relationships, loneliness, bitterness, irresponsible behavior, lack of motivation to function, hopelessness, and purposelessness.

These issues are usually the result of environmental factors rather than pathology, or they can occur in conjunction with pathology. In either case, the dysfunction makes life extremely difficult for the client, as well as those around him.

The Bible addresses all of these issues and gives us direct guidance on how to resolve them. It's *never* a condemning boney-finger pointed and wagging in your face. It doesn't say, "get with the program and shape up." It doesn't say, "just pick yourself up by your bootstraps." God demonstrates and guides with an occasional gentle poke in the side to get our attention, and then gives us practical and loving instruction. His way is to ask for a series of baby steps, and then celebrates with us when they come. The only time Jesus admonishes someone severely is:

- when they impose legalistic rules that do people harm (Mark 3:5, Luke 13:15-16),
- when they impede other people from getting close to Him (Mark 10:14),
- when they cause His children to stumble (Matthew 18:6-7),
- when they dishonor the Father (John 2:13-16).

He reaches out to those who are poor, suffering, or have sinned; so don't be afraid to take His hand.

How Our Past Affects Our Present

Many of us have a terrible life history. There is so much abuse in this country, it boggles the mind. I won't go into statistics here, but please be assured that if you are a survivor of abuse, you are not alone. In any given room of 20-30 people, you will probably have 10 or more who have some sort of abuse in their past. It's horrible, it's tragic, it's infuriating, and it's terribly, terribly sad.

If you are a survivor of abuse and have never been treated by a trauma therapist, then in all likelihood, you are still experiencing some effects from it. The common reactions include: anger or rage (overreacting to negative situations), relationship difficulties, often some hopelessness, boundary issues (e.g., people walking on you and taking advantage of you, you being overly vulnerable to people, you being either sexually promiscuous or sexually closed off and fearful, etc.), as well as anxiety, depression, panic attacks, and other symptoms.

On the other side of the spectrum, some people find themselves feeling better than everyone else. They come across as smarter and more important than other people. They often become excessively high achievers, are driven to perfection, only associate with the best or most important people, attend only the best universities. They tend to come across as 'better than...', well, you get the idea. Believe it or not, these are also often symptoms of abuse as well. If you see any of these symptoms in yourself, get help. If you know someone like this, chances are good that you don't like them very much because of their air of superiority. They need help as badly as the person who is rageful or depressed. Encourage them, if you can, to get that help. Way down deep inside, they're miserable. They just hide it differently.

The good news is that none of this is a life sentence. If you are a survivor of abuse and are still suffering, please understand that your trip to recovery is going to be a little slower and tougher than what some others might experience. You have a tough battle to wage, but be uplifted -- *it is a winnable battle!* So be patient with yourself and know there is light at the end of the tunnel -- and that Light is Jesus Christ. You and He together can defeat the enemy!

Note: At this point I would like to say, if you're a survivor of severe abuse or trauma and are still suffering, try to find a Christian therapist who has special training in trauma. Bible-based therapy will bring you through it, but you shouldn't do it alone. You'll need guidance to help you deal with some memories that might crop up, some emotional reactions that might surprise you, or even some resistance to the apparent 'simplicity' of this approach. Please get the help you need in order to get the most out of this book.

Sin Versus Circumstance³

I pray that this section is received with the love and compassion with which it is offered. Jesus was described as the "Rock of Offense" (Rom 9:33, 1 Pet 2:8) and sometimes what must be said is simply what must be said. Please be assured, however, that it is not intended to offend or lay a guilt trip on anyone. This is intended to help you understand the relationship between sin and mental health, and to help you understand just how much power you actually have over your own mental health. It is intended to set you free.

First, let me state my disclaimer: There are absolutely circumstances over which we have no control, and which have directly caused or exacerbated our state of mental distress. The death of a loved one, loss of a job and the family welfare, failure to achieve our life goals, major changes in our lives, a history of abuse or trauma, etc., are each circumstances which could be out of our control and which could cause depression or other mental distress. The resulting distress is normal, and I am not going to minimize these events' impact on our mental health and the devastating effects of them on our lives. Nor is it my intention to make you feel guilty for having those feelings. This is about regaining the power through Christ to have the lives we want and that He wants for us -- the life abundant (John 10:10).

I would also like to say that many people will tell you that your depression, grief, anxiety, etc, are the result of an underlying lack of faith and not trusting God, and that this is sin. Be careful with this one. I agree that when our faith and trust improve, our obedience will become more consistent, we'll have a better relationship with

Jesus, and our mental health will improve. I would also say, however, that our walk with Christ is about building our faith progressively through our relationship with Him, and that it isn't helpful to beat ourselves up for our lack of faith and to call it sin. I spend an entire chapter on that issue later in the book, but for now, understand that your faith is what it is, and although there are lessons you'll be learning as you go through this process that will help you build your faith, give yourself a break now and don't allow the enemy to condemn you for your apparent 'lack of faith.'

Sin that is foundationally a lack of faith and sin that is willful disobedience to God are two different things, although they are related, and both will have an impact on your mental health. The fact is that there are many habits which we have picked up that, in the final analysis, are sin and cause us mental distress. We will deal with many of them in this book, and hopefully the Holy Spirit will help you see where they apply to you and you can find the courage to confront them head-on. In the mean time, remember that this is about God's *grace*.

Fibromyalgia

For those of you who don't know, fibromyalgia is a disease where the sufferer has chronic, widespread pain in muscles and soft tissues surrounding their joints, as well as fatigue, and sometimes terrible fatigue. Very often, it will control their lives in a devastating way.

I recently went through special training on Trauma Therapy.⁴ The instructor said, "I'm not saying it's not possible, but so far, I've never met a single client who had fibromyalgia who did not also have a history of trauma. When we deal with the trauma, the symptoms of fibromyalgia are either significantly reduced, or vanish altogether."

For those of you who are fibromyalgia sufferers, as you work through this book and implement the processes into your life, you may find that your physical pain will begin to diminish. Many of my clients have told me that their doctors view their fibromyalgia symptoms as partly psychological, which means that their stress, anxiety, anger, unforgiveness and the like are causing their muscles

to stay in a more contracted position much of the time, thus increasing their pain. If you can learn to find peace, contentment, forgiveness, and relief from anger and bitterness through a renewed relationship with Christ, then I am convinced that as your mood and demeanor relax, your muscles will relax, and you will feel a significant reduction in your fibromyalgia pain (Psalm 42:11; Proverb 4:20-22).

Please stop now and read Psalms 42:11. It's on the inside title page of this book, or you can look up both of the referenced passages in your Bible. It is pivotal to the essence of this book and your physical and mental health.

What Does Good Mental Health Look Like?

If a person is mentally healthy, what would they look like? There are some specific characteristics that are common in people who are the healthiest mentally.

I need to draw a distinction here for mental health as it pertains to believers and non-believers. For a Christian to have good mental health, they must have a healthy relationship with Jesus. Many of the characteristics below will naturally improve as your relationship with Him improves and as He works with you through His Holy Spirit. Without that relationship, some of these characteristics are very difficult to attain and some are virtually impossible. In all cases, a relationship with Jesus facilitates the characteristic and gives the believer the strength to achieve it. I have tried to address what the characteristic is, and then how a relationship with God helps the believer achieve that characteristic.

The clearest indication of good Christian mental health is **contentment with any circumstance**. The Apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13). People misunderstand that as meaning, 'I can perform any *task* through Christ' and certainly it is true that all things are possible with God. But what Paul was talking about here was being able to live in wealth or poverty, hardship or comfort, chaos or peace, prison or freedom. It means He is totally content no matter his circumstances, or what life situation he encounters or what gets

thrown his way. He wrote that while chained to guards in a prison cell.

If you are not content with your life circumstance -- bad job, bad spouse, bad home environment, or bad health -- then God can help you through your study of His Word. Please don't misunderstand this as saying, "just deal with it." That's not what this means at all. Studying His word can provide a deep, penetrating contentment where you *know* that God is in control and that He loves you. Scripture can enhance your trust that God has some purpose for allowing it, and He's with you through it. You can handle this situation through Christ who gives you strength. This is inner peace in the midst of the storm.

People who identify themselves as being mentally healthy and happy generally **get along well with people**. That doesn't mean they always get their own way. It means they've learned to navigate a difficult situation in such a way as to either negotiate an equitable solution, or they have simply resolved to be flexible enough to put it into its proper perspective and let it go. The goal of a mentally healthy person in interpersonal issues is peace, resolution, harmony - - not winning. Winning takes a distant back seat.

That's also not to say they're milk toasts and doormats, however. Mentally healthy people have **solid boundaries** as well. That means that they know what's in the best interest of the situation and aren't afraid to say 'no' when 'no' is the most appropriate answer. They also know how to 'let in' what people say that is helpful (even if it hurts), and 'keep out' what people say that is harmful (even if it feels good, e.g., a flattering compliment that is untrue and meant to manipulate). Their boundaries form a door to their hearts over which they have total control.

Mentally healthy people **aren't offended easily**, and when they are offended, they seek resolution quickly. They aren't afraid to confront someone who has offended them, they quickly accept apologies offered, and they aren't afraid to apologize and make restitution to those whom they have offended. Again, the relationship is the goal -- not winning or being 'right.'

Mentally healthy people tend to be **more open and honest** about their perspective and feelings. They aren't afraid to speak their

minds because their hearts are pure and they understand that the ultimate goal is to love one another. Communication then becomes a means of enhancing that goal, and the fear of hurting someone's feelings is subordinated to the higher goal of honoring God through open and healthy interpersonal relationships. Jesus said that people will know we are His by our love for one another (John 13:35). Unless we communicate openly and are willing to share our feelings with a loving, gentle, and quiet spirit bent toward resolution, we cannot have that love. Mentally healthy people know that, and they know how to do it.

Mentally healthy people know that it **isn't about them**, and they're okay with that. God says it's about Him, and He's made it about our fellow man. We are to love one another (1 John, many references; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9, others) and regard others as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Much of our dysfunction comes from our natural tendency to make everything about us, and to react negatively when *they're* trying to make it about them. It becomes a dog-eat-dog world for us, and we feel the need to defend our rights.

Mentally healthy people have **submitted their rights to God**, so there's nothing to defend.

Mentally healthy people have **purpose in their lives**. Rick Warren popularized the concept of the purpose-driven life in his book by the same name. God gave us the need to have value, to find purpose in our lives. In *The Purpose-Driven Life*, Pastor Rick gave us a framework for purpose that applies to *all* Christians. This is a critical component of having a fulfilling Christian life, and if you haven't read it, it is a must-read.

The Purpose-driven Life doesn't try to address, however, another very important component of purpose, and that is our *individual* purpose in God's world. Mentally healthy people feel a very profound and penetrating sense of **their own, unique, individual purpose**. They know where they're going and why, or they're excited and motivated to find out what it is. They know God placed them in this world for a purpose, and they're content with that alone. As driven as they are to accomplish their God-given purpose, though, they also understand that God is their driver and their power-

source, and they are to partner with and depend upon Him. With the arms and oars God gave them, they row the boat and trust that God is steering.

Mentally healthy people are **resilient in dealing with trials**. Trials are a fact of life, and becoming a Christian doesn't immunize you from them. Mentally healthy people can see that their trials are not personal, that God isn't 'out to get them' or punish them for some distant past sin, and that with a proper perspective, they can use the trial to grow. Mentally healthy people understand -- in the midst of the trial -- what the atheist Fredericke Neitzche stumbled onto when he said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." (Clearly, the truth he missed was that even that which *kills* us makes us stronger, as well! Praise God for that.)

Mentally healthy people **don't gossip**. They don't need to prove their own importance by knowing what other people don't know, or by seeming to be 'better than' others who have flaws. They know they're sinners, and they exhibit grace and mercy and not condemnation and judgment. They remember that words have meaning, and they also have the power of life and death. They use their words very carefully to encourage and strengthen the body of Christ.

Mentally healthy people **tend not to complain**. That's not to say they *never* complain. I've never met anyone who never complains (including me). It's just that they complain far less, what they complain about is generally shorter term or pertains to less significant issues, and they typically catch themselves early on and resolve the complaint in their minds in a different way. They understand that complaining is prideful, and that it says, "I'm a better judge of this situation than God is, and I don't trust that He could help me out of it if He wanted to, or that He would if He could." Rather than complain, mentally healthy people turn to God and cry out to Him for help.

Mentally healthy people **tend not to ask "Why."** They know that "It is what it is," and resolve to figure out how to deal with the reality of it rather than plague themselves with questions about why it is happening. Asking "Why" says, "I don't trust you, God. I have to understand what you're doing here to feel safe and at peace." It

says, “If you don’t explain it to me, I’m not going to be content, I’m not going to learn the lesson, and I may not even cooperate with the trial.” God says, “Trust Me, even if you don’t understand.”

Mentally healthy people aren’t afraid to **do things anonymously** because they aren’t about getting their own glory. God gets the glory and they’re thrilled.

Mentally healthy people understand that **obedience to the will of God equals happiness**. If you truly crave happiness, then purpose in your heart to be obedient to Him. Read His Word, figure out what it is He’s asking you to do today, and do everything you can to do that. When you spend a minute with Him in the morning, remember to say, “God, please speak to me today so I know how You want my day to go. Please give me clear direction, and guide my steps. I promise to be obedient to Your still small voice.”

God wants us to be blessed and joy-filled because it draws people to us, and thus to Him. As you love Him through your obedience to Him, He will bless you by filling your heart with all spiritual blessings, and you will see these wonderful characteristics of sound mental health manifested in your life.

It is an absolute truth that:

The more obedient you are -- the more joy-filled you are.

Thoughts and Feelings

Mentally healthy people know that **thoughts and feelings are two different things**. This is a huge issue, so I gave it its own section here. We often confuse the two. We either think that they’re the same thing and that the phrase ‘thoughts and feelings’ is redundant, or we let our feelings run our lives rather than our thoughts, thinking that if we *feel* something is true, then it must *be* true. If we *feel* like someone doesn’t like us, then clearly they don’t. If we *feel* that God is angry at us, well then clearly He must be. If we *feel* unhappy, then clearly we have something to be unhappy about.

Please hear me: Thoughts and feelings are two different things.

Many people yield to their feelings because they don’t know they have a choice, but doing so can be paralyzing and destructive to your

mental health. I would like to offer you a different way.

Think about your feelings, and decide if they serve you or hurt you. I'm not trying to tell you that your feelings aren't real -- they certainly are. But what I am telling you is that very often, our feelings are a result of what we're thinking, how we're interpreting our world, our baggage from the past, and the meaning we've given to our circumstances.

"I don't believe that!" you say. No? Consider this:

You have to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles to get your license renewed. The line is wrapped halfway around the room and it takes you 30 minutes just to get to the counter. Then the elderly lady behind the counter seems distracted, disinterested, and rude, and suddenly you understand why the line is so long. She takes forever and makes mistakes, increasing the time it takes to get this frustrating chore accomplished. Then to top it off, when you say something about the long line, she treats you like you're an inconvenience to *her* and she snaps at you. Inside, you're now raging, and you might have even snapped back at her. You leave, cursing her under your breath, angry and frustrated at the audacity of her to treat you that way. You grew up in a family where your mother treated you that way, and the *last* thing you're going to do is to take that attitude from some DMV clerk. Who the heck does she think she is, anyway?!

Then on your way out, someone you know is coming in and you chat. In the course of that conversation, your friend tells you that the clerk you just dealt with has recently been told that her husband of 30 years is dying of cancer, he's in a great deal of pain, and there's nothing they can do. Furthermore, she can't even get off of work to go visit him in the hospital because she's used all of her leave already. When she's not at work, she lives at the hospital. Suddenly, the inconvenience you've just experienced seems trivial, shallow, and insensitive.

Dare I surmise that your feelings about the experience might

change? My guess is that you would be feeling guilty for your reaction, and you'd probably start praying for the woman you were just cursing. The situation hasn't changed a bit, but your feelings certainly would.

Your feelings ended up being more the result of what you assumed about the woman, the meaning you'd given her attitude, and your own baggage than about the actual situation itself. Your thoughts drove your feelings. When your thoughts changed, so did your feelings.

Let me repeat that: Your thoughts, misguided as they initially were, drove your feelings.

Ok, now that I've proven to you that your feelings can be the result of your thoughts *about* a situation rather than the actual situation itself, consider another example that strikes a little closer to home, but may be a little tougher.

Let's say you're dealing with someone at work who rubs you the wrong way, and you go home every day anxious and angry, and it seems to be escalating. The guy is just a total jerk and means to make your life miserable, and furthermore, it's working, right? You've tried and tried, but there's nothing you can do to change the situation.

You then read in your Bible that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Do you really believe that God is in control? You now have a choice: You can either think this guy at work is just a total jerk who means to ruin your life, or you can choose to think he's been placed there by God to help you develop your character and learn how to deal with difficult people in preparation for something (or someone) bigger down the road. It's a choice you now have to make. Whether you go home angry and anxious or at peace is at stake. Whether your witness improves or suffers is at stake.

If you *feel* your way through the situation, then you'll convince yourself that he's just a total jerk. But if you *think* your way through it, you can see this irritating person as a 'gift' from God to train you for some future battle. Then you'll focus on honoring God's purpose for their place in your growth, and less on the irritating nature of their personality. You'll work at learning how to deal with them

productively, reducing the negative affect they have on you. What you choose to *think* about their role in your life will have a huge affect on how you *feel* at the end of the day.

See, the fact is that you have a lot more control over your feelings than you think you do. We've been trained by society to think that our feelings *just are what they are*. We've been told that our feelings are *valid*, and as part of the secular mental health therapy approach, we seek to have our feelings *validated* by others. We are taught that for our feelings to change, the situation needs to change.

Hear me now -- that is *a lie straight from the pit of hell!* Not every feeling you have will be valid. Was your feeling about the DMV clerk valid? Based on what you thought, maybe, but based on the reality? I'd say not. Satan wants you upset, anxious, angry, offended. It serves *his* purpose for your life for you to be feelings-driven because it ruins your witness and drags you farther from God.

God has a better way. Change your thoughts and perspective that you have *about* the situation and your feelings about it will change, too.

Boot-camp and Battles

Let's try a very tough example. Let's say you're in a dead marriage. Your spouse never pays attention to you and you're lonely. You've tried every trick in the book, but nothing brings your spouse around, and for years you've remained in this state.

Now, let's just say I have some inside word from God. I happen to know that God is working on you through this difficult marriage. He's paying very close attention and has a very difficult job He needs to assign to you years down the road. There's a child who is going to grow up one day and be in a marriage very similar to yours. To survive her marriage and draw closer to God, she is going to have to have some very wise and loving counsel from a Godly woman who's been there. That woman is you.

To help this young woman, you need tremendous patience and you need a very close relationship with God yourself, where you have learned to love Him and lean on Him in all sorts of circumstances. If you can succeed at this future job, the young

woman's life will be transformed, her children's lives will be transformed, her husband will come around, God will be glorified, and people will come to Him by watching this transformation take place. Many people's future depends on you performing this one job. It's a critical job that He feels you're the most qualified to handle, but He has some 'boot camp' He needs to put you through before He can assign this extremely important job for you to do.

If you *knew* that was true, would it make a difference to you in your current situation? If God asked you to go through boot-camp so you could have a significant impact on many people's eternal destination for Him, would you be willing to do it?

Well, I'm here to tell you that that's one of the primary things our trials are about (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter). Very often, they're 'boot camp' preparing us to accomplish our divine purpose. He can't send you into battle with a machine-gun in your hand until you've gone under the ropes in the training field.

As an illustration of how important this belief-system is, imagine a soldier who refuses to work hard at his training. Oh, he'll half-heartedly go through the motions, but he'll complain the whole time and refuse to do anything more than what will keep him out of trouble with his superiors. He'll get through basic training and be sent off to war, but is that the soldier you want fighting next to your brother or father or son or daughter? Is that the soldier you want fighting next to you? What are his chances of returning safely home again? He missed the opportunity to be prepared by not taking his basic training seriously.

If you think about your current environment as an inconvenience or a burden on your life, then you leave yourself open to the attacks of the enemy and will be in bondage to your feelings. But if you view it as basic training for God's battles to come, does it help you put your life into a different perspective? Does it take the edge off of your feelings somewhat?

Mentally healthy people know that **life is a series of boot camps and battles**, more training and tougher battles.⁵ If you don't view it that way, you'll be ill-prepared when the battles come -- and they *will* come, again and again.

Summary

Now, in case I've totally depressed you with this chapter, please understand that this is the ultimate -- the *goal*. I've never met anyone (including myself) who exhibits all of these qualities, and I doubt I ever will this side of Heaven. This list, however, should give you an idea of the areas in which you need God's help to grow. We are God's work-in-progress. He delights in the 'baby-steps' we take as we learn to lean on Him more and more. Stick with it. Stay the course. You won't regret a minute of it.

In general, mentally healthy people tend to be content, well-centered, successful in life (as defined by God -- not man), relational, purpose-filled, and epitomize what God means by *peace* and *joy*. Jesus, as you study His life, exemplified all of the elements of good mental health I've defined above. We will discuss some of these attributes as we go through the following chapters, but first, let's review some characteristics about the Bible.

III -- WHAT IS THE BIBLE?



What It Is

The Bible is a collection of 66 books written over a period of 1500 years, by 44 different authors, over three separate continents, chronicling the lives and history of the Jewish people, and then Jesus and the early Christian church.

But it is so much more.

The Bible is God's word. That means that although it was written by 44 different individuals, those individuals were influenced by God in such a way that every single word of it came directly from the mouth of God. The Bible refers to itself as having been inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). That means that God literally "breathed" the words into the minds of the human authors. When you read the Bible, understand that it has all the authority of God, written in a way that you can comprehend it and apply it to your life.

The Bible is a history of the origin of the world, the origin of sin, the subsequent destruction of the world (except Noah and his family), and the repopulation of the planet.

It is the history of the Jewish people, from their origins with their father Abraham in 2000 BC, through many wars and tribulations, to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and beyond.

It is a book about Jesus Christ, as the single plot throughout, with Him as the ultimate hero, from the first "In the Beginning" on page one of the Old Testament to the last ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

IV -- FALLING IN LOVE WITH JESUS



What Is Love?

This is a critical step, but one wrought with confusion and anxiety. Good Christian people will lament that they don't 'feel' the love for God they think they should, and so question their salvation.

A client once said to me that "love is a decision" and revolutionized my thinking and my life. Instinctively, I knew he was right. But how did that square with the messages we receive from Hollywood about love? Something was amiss.

I had to turn to the Greek to find the answer. If you never learn another word of Greek, learn this.

The Greeks have several different words for the word the Bible calls 'love.' I'll only describe two of them here, but the others are fascinating if you're so inclined. The two I'm going to describe are agape (pronounced uh-GAW-pay) and phileo (pronounced fih-LAY-oh). Sometimes when the Bible says, "love," it means agape, and sometimes it means phileo. Not knowing that there's a difference when you read the word 'love' in Scripture can be misleading in some cases. For now, though, just learn the meanings.

Agape is God's love for us. It's that self-sacrificial love that says, "Your needs are more important to me than my needs." Jesus' death on the cross was an act of agape love. It's not based on feelings and emotion, but a decision of the will ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

V -- FINAL CHRISTIAN CONCEPTS



Who Is The Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is not an ‘it,’ He’s a ‘He.’ He is a separate entity, the third person of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who ‘indwells’ us at the moment of our salvation (John 20:22; Acts 2:38), the moment we repented of our sins and gave our lives to Christ, the moment we were ‘born again.’ The word ‘indwell’ means that the Holy Spirit literally takes up residence -- *abides* -- in our physical bodies, intermingled with our own spirit with which we were born. If you’re truly a Christian, you literally have the Spirit of God living inside of you. Amazing.

So, what does that do for us? The Holy Spirit who lives in us serves several critical functions. First of all, He brings to us God’s divine blessing, the presence and fullness of Himself. As He fills us with His Holy Spirit, He sets us free from the things of this world. To the degree that we dedicate ourselves to Him, change our priorities, and allow Him to fill that ‘treasure chest’ in our hearts, we will be liberated from the worldly slave-masters that hold us in bondage. Then, as we face the challenges of the world, He is there to be our leader to help us build character and fulfill His purpose for our lives. ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

Intermission Verse to Ponder: “A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

SECTION 3

* * * * *

TECHNIQUES

VI -- HOW I READ THE BIBLE



What Is The Bible To You?

There's so much guidance on how to read the Bible, some people get frustrated and feel like nothing they do is the 'right' way, so they just give up. Please, don't do that.

I've discovered that reading and studying the Bible is the most fun I've ever had in my whole life, and I've had an extremely exciting life. The most important thing about reading the Bible is to approach it with the right perspective. If you can do that, everything else will fall into place.

Okay then, so what perspective is that?

When I first started reading the Bible, I thought it was a good resource for learning what Jesus was all about. Then I realized that no, it's more than that. It's also a history book about the Jews, and I was fascinated with that. As my reading progressed, I realized that, no, it was actually a lot more than even that. I could learn a lot about how to live my life by paying attention to how these people lived theirs. Some of the stories were good examples of what to do, and others were good examples of what not to do, but they were all helpful. Once I started applying some of them to my life, I started to realize how relevant they all were, first to society, and then to me. I started to notice that they seemed to be about me in some very strange, and sometimes disturbing, ways. I saw myself in there more and more, became more and more convicted of what I needed to work on, and I finally ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

VII -- THINKING ABOUT WHAT I READ



Lose The ‘Shoulds’

The biggest mistake Christians make when embarking on a study of the Bible is in how they regard the very activity itself. I can always tell when someone needs a bit of an adjustment in their way of thinking when I ask the question, “How much time do you spend in your Bible?” If they say, “Not as much as I should,” I know we have a perspective-shift to make.

First of all, let’s lose the “should” and replace it with “I can’t wait,” or “I get to.” I know that seems strange at first, kind of like saying “I can’t wait to get to my homework!” They’d lock you up. The fact is that that’s the way many people regard Bible study -- as homework.

Bible study is *not* homework -- it’s the greatest opportunity in your lifetime to get to know your Lord and transform your life. It’s a thrilling adventure in which *you* are a grand and glorious participant! As we go through this chapter, I want to help you see yourself *in* the pages of the book you hold in your hands rather than as a passive, distant observer of events long ago. You’re not high on the hill watching the events unfold: You’re in the battlefield!

The Bible is *today* and you are one of its heroes.. (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

VIII -- MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE



Why Should I Memorize?

Uh, oh. Homework.

Your Sunday School teacher assigned ‘memory verses,’ and so did your Bible teacher if you went to a Christian School. Memory verses seem like homework. Yuk. “As if I don’t have enough pressure on me already, now you’re going to add to my already too-busy day and tell me to memorize Scripture??”

Yep. That’s what I’m going to do. This is the *work* part of the work.

When I was in my early years in the 70’s, we had this wonderful ‘new’ way of boosting our wounded self-esteem. We called it “positive affirmations.” The idea was that if you say something positive and uplifting to yourself often enough, you’ll eventually believe it, and you’ll feel better.

If you grew up in a home where you received a lot of negative messages about yourself, you eventually took them on board as your own and believed them. They then became the source of much of your dysfunction and poor decision-making in later life.

Without thinking about it, fill in this blank with a descriptive adjective about yourself: I am _____. Whatever you filled that blank in with, whether it was positive or negative, I guarantee you that if you think about it for a minute, you’ll come to realize that it came from one or more of your primary....(Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

IX -- OLD VERSUS NEW TESTAMENTS



Look For Jesus In Both

The biggest surprise to me when I was a new believer was that Jesus is in the Old Testament as much as He is. Oh, I'd heard about the prophesies, so I knew they were there, but little by little, the Old Testament started to unfold for me as a book entirely about Jesus, with the stories about the Jewish history being the subplots, much like a wonderful mystery story has subplots. Jesus, though, is the plot. He's the main story -- the Hero.

“So what?” you ask. This is a mental health book. What's that got to do with mental health?

Well, pretty much everything. You see, as you become more and more aware, on a profoundly deep and personal level that the Bible was written -- every single word -- by the Creator of the Universe, the more confidence you'll have that what it says is absolutely and totally true, and absolutely and totally applies to you. We throw the terms “truth” and “word of God” around like we bandy about lemonade recipes. We often don't understand what they mean.

What it means is that the Bible is absolutely perfect. I can't emphasize that enough. Perfect. Not a single word is out of place. Not a single message has been garbled. Not a single commandment is misstated, overemphasized, inaccurate, inapplicable. Each and every statement made by God... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

X -- CHATTING WITH JESUS



Prayer

I saved this technique until the end of the Techniques section because I want it to be indelibly imprinted and fresh when you get to the application section. There is nothing you can do to improve your internal life that is more important than your close and personal relationship with Christ. If you learn nothing else, learn this lesson.

The Apostle Paul said, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

What?? How on earth do I do that? Oh sure, I pray when I get up and go to bed, I pray at meals, I pray when I need help. But what does he mean to “pray without ceasing?”

Wow, I had to give that a lot of thought, and frankly, I’m not quite there yet, but I’m getting better. Think about this:

If you were handcuffed to someone 24 hours a day, much like you see in some of the westerns and adventure movies, the probability is pretty high that you’d talk to them quite a bit throughout the day. It wouldn’t necessarily be a formal *conversation*, but just casual chit-chat all day long, on and off.

Well the reality is that you’re a lot closer to Jesus than you would be if you were literally handcuffed to him. ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

Intermission Verse to Ponder: “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven-- A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4).

SECTION 4

* * * * *

APPLICATION

XI -- THE SEVEN BIBLICAL FREEDOMS



What Robs Us Of Our Joy And Peace?

So now, let's get down to brass tacks. What's the real culprit here? What is it that actually robs us of our joy and peace? I'm going to discuss some very specific things that do that, and ask you to apply them to your own situation, carefully and one at a time, to see what fits. I don't claim to be an expert in your life. That's between you and God. These are the things that Scripture has pointed out are problems, and the degree to which these things are problems for you personally, you and God have to determine. But I will tell you this -- the degree to which these things *are* problems to you personally is the degree to which your joy and peace will be shattered.

1. Now's the time to pray, "Father, please open my heart to Your truth. Please open my eyes and let me see what's going on in my heart, and why I feel such pain. Your Bible tells me that, through my relationship with You and with the Holy Spirit, I already have peace and joy in my heart (Galatians 5:22), but I don't feel it. Help me understand what's going on in my heart, and why I'm blocking the fruit of the Spirit in my life. ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XII -- THE SEVEN JOY-ROBBERS



The Damage We Do To Ourselves

Now let's touch on the items that we all *know* are joy-robbers and disappointments to God. There's nothing paradoxical about them. These are items that we often know are wrong, but we deem them 'too hard,' or we fall into the trap that says, "Hey, I am who I am. This is the way God made me, so it must be okay."

As a Christian, you don't have that excuse. God says that you are a new creature in Christ, and that the old things have passed away and new things have come (2 Corinthians 5:17). Of course you struggle with sin -- we all do. But Jesus said, "blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). The 'mourning' He was talking about was primarily mourning about our sin. If you're making excuses for it and accepting it as 'normal,' then you don't qualify for this blessing. He knows we sin, but He expects us to *mourn* about it, repent of it, ask His help in defeating it. Once we've done that, He wants us to allow Him to comfort us by forgiving us and then giving us the strength to be free from the bondage of it.

He also said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled!*" Don't you want to be comforted and filled by Jesus Christ? He isn't saying here that we *might* be filled -- it's a *promise!*

Mourn and hunger and thirst after ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XIII -- THE ISSUE OF SELF ESTEEM



What Is Self-Esteem, And Why Do I Care?

As I said in the section on Biblical Freedoms, self-esteem is far less about how we feel about ourselves than about how we perceive that our primary caregivers felt about us, and how we feel about them. We are a reflection of them in our own eyes, so if we esteem them little, we will esteem ourselves little. If they esteemed us little, then we've 'inherited' their perception of us as our own.

The issue of self-esteem has loomed large in our social consciousness for many decades, but that was not always the case. Several decades ago we had the birth of the self-esteem movement, and became mired in the 'inner child' work that we were promised would help us reconnect with the pain of our past and give us a chance to undo the damage. We spent time with groups of like-minded people with stuffed animals on our laps, trying to re-feel what it was like to be us as children, so we could deal with the pain and grow out of it.

If you've never done it, it sounds a little crazy. But like the 'positive affirmations,' it actually worked. We felt the pain, redefined the meaning we'd given it, and felt better about ourselves. We embraced our inner child, comforted it, and grew up.

That's all well and good, but the truth is that again, it drew us farther away from God by ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XIV -- BIBLE-BASED THERAPY



The Seven Pillars Of Change

Ok, here it is. Finally. Here's the 'how to' portion of the book. These are lessons I've gleaned from Scripture as I've studied, as I've worked with clients, and as I've tried and failed and succeeded in applying them to my own life. These are the lessons that have transformed lives and performed miracles before my very eyes in my office. This is where you surrender yourself to God and fall in love with Jesus, step by step. That's true, penetrating, and lasting mental health.

This section presents what I believe to be the cornerstones of mental health therapy God's way. As I continue in my practice and in my research, I'm sure I will be able to add to this list, and I'm sure it will be evolving my entire life. But there is no question in my mind that if you embrace these changes in your life, if you study them and practice them and melt them into your heart, you will realize the joy, the peace, and the abundant Christian life you seek. Before you study these therapies, pray that God would open your heart to the truths that are presented here, and that He would coach you through your study and application of these principles.

Now, I'm a professional therapist, so it would be disingenuous for me to say there's no place for a professional therapist in this process. There certainly is. As is the case with all change, it comes slowly and needs to be dealt with in baby steps. ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XV -- IF ONLY I HAD MORE FAITH



The Truth And The Lies About Faith

Ok, I admit it, the truth is if we all had enough faith, we wouldn't need mental health therapy, we wouldn't need mental health books, and there would certainly be no need for this book.

And if pigs could fly...

See, the problem is, and the practical reality is, we *don't* have enough faith. That's just the way it is.

Did anyone beat David up for not having enough faith when he said, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1). Did anyone beat Moses up for lack of faith when he said, "But God, I am slow of speech. *I* can't go speak to Pharaoh!" (Exodus 4 10). (Actually, God did beat him up a little, but He still used him.) Where was Gideon's faith when he was hiding in the wine press threshing his crops? (Judges 6). God called him a "valiant warrior," but he sure wasn't displaying much valor that day. Did anyone accuse Peter of lack of faith for that gut-wrenching denial? (Matthew 26:69-75) In fact, Jesus prayed for him, encouraged him, and restored him. Many times Jesus said, "Oh, ye of little faith." Did He fire them as apostles? Of course not. He prayed for them, encouraged them, taught them, and their faith grew. Study Abraham, Hezekiah, and many ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XVI -- VICTORY IN TRIALS



Why Does God Allow Bad Things To Happen?

Why did God allow there to be evil in the world? We are God's creation, aren't we? Why couldn't He have just made us evil-free and then none of this horror would be happening? He's supposed to be all-powerful right? Either He's not as powerful as we're led to believe, He's not as perfect as we're led to believe, or He's just another abusive father who enjoys watching his children suffer. What's the purpose? What's the point?

I read a book once where the author was visiting a man he intended to interview.³² On the outside of the man's office was a cartoon with two turtles having a conversation. The first turtle says to the second one, "If I got a chance to talk to God, I'd ask Him why He allows there to be so much evil in the world." The second turtle responded thoughtfully, "I'd be afraid He'd ask the same question of me." That one strikes a cord.

Now think about this next illustration. If you owned a dog and you came home from work each day and the dog met you when you came in the door and jumped up and down and licked you and loved on you, wouldn't you feel uplifted and loved? Filled with joy? If people were watching, wouldn't they see that you had a great relationship with your dog and that the dog really loved you? But what if you had the dog chained to the ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XVII -- WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE?



Discerning God's Will

Ok, we've gone over a lot of good, practical stuff for dealing with mental distress and trials in our lives. One of the therapies was to "Do," remember? The implication, of course, is to do what it is that God wants you to do with your life: To find and fulfill your divine purpose. So exactly how do we do that? How can I figure out what God wants me to be doing? How can I discern His will for my life?

Let's see.

Do What You Know

I heard a sermon on this topic one day, and the pastor said the most remarkable thing:

"If you don't know what God wants you to do, do what you know God wants you to do until you know what God wants you to do."³⁷

Brilliant. ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XVIII -- EXAMPLES FOR REFLECTION



Ok, now the rubber *really* hits the road. We're going to work, painstakingly, through some specific Biblical examples to show you exactly how you can think about Scripture as you read to do two critical things:

- 1) fall in love with Jesus, and
- 2) apply it to your life

This chapter is to show you what I mean when I say, "how to think about Scripture." I'm going to walk you through my thought process as I read. The following chapters show you specific examples of ways to look at specific problems or issues, but this chapter is to show you how to use your daily reading, regardless of where you are in the Bible, to allow God to speak to your heart.

According to a class I attended at church on how to study the Bible, to really get the most out of it, it's a three-step process. In my experience, to know these steps and use them will help you understand what you're reading better, and apply it to your life more effectively. There are many good books on how to read the Bible, so if you're so inclined, ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XIX -- TOPICAL EXAMPLES: OLD TESTAMENT



Before I get into the topical examples, *please* don't skip the earlier chapters of this book. Without the foundational changes in the way you regard Scripture and Jesus, this is just another 'program' that will die on the vine. Plus, I've included many of the passages I use in therapy in the pertinent texts, so to skip the foundational chapters will be to miss some of the really good stuff.

The essence of this book is to teach you how to *personalize* Scripture and draw close to Christ through it. In this chapter, I take specific sections of Scripture and show you how you can take what might seem like distant stories about other people and make them about you, for you, and to you.

You are the hero of the Bible. You are the villain. You are the damsel waiting to be rescued, and you are the champion who will rescue her. You are the confused disciple, the prodigal son. You are Peter sinking into the sea and James and John wanting to rain fire down on the Samaritans. You are the good Samaritan and the injured Jew needing help. You are the Pharisee who passes him by.

You are Lazarus, risen from the dead.

You are all of these people. We all are. Learn to see yourself in these stories that way. ... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

XX -- TOPICAL EXAMPLES: NEW TESTAMENT



In this section, I present, in a very similar fashion as in the last chapter, how to learn specific lessons and concepts from the New Testament writings. Some of the concepts are the same as I presented in the Old Testament section because I wanted to give you a taste of the consistency of themes between the two Testaments of Scripture. This is an example of how the Bible is one book, not two, and not 66. As you see the same themes running throughout both Testaments, you will start to personalize the miraculous nature of Scripture more and more. These are just a very small sampling of the hundreds of examples where this is the case. My hope with this is to whet your appetite for more.

You may also recognize some repetition from some of the teaching chapters earlier in the book. Again, I believe repetition helps drive home a point, and I also wanted to let these three Examples chapters stand on their own to some extent. I am trying to make this book easy to read, easy to reference, and a good learning tool. Some occasional repetition facilitates that goal.

So here we go.

I Feel So Guilty About What I've Done In The Past

... (Thank you for reading this far. The remainder of chapter is available in the book)

Intermission Verse to Ponder: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God ...” (Deuteronomy 8:10-14).

SECTION 5

* * * * *

SUMMARY

XXI -- SUMMARY



The Cheat-Sheet

My prayer is that you've learned something to help you fall in love with Jesus, and to help you apply Scripture to your life in a practical, transforming way. If not, that's okay. Just go back to the beginning of the book and start over! (Just kidding... Um, actually, no I'm not.)

So now that we've gotten through it all, I want to acknowledge that that's a lot of material to remember. I have a hard enough time remembering it all, and I wrote the thing. So what I want to do here is to summarize the essential elements of this book to refresh your memory, and to give you somewhere to turn when you're just trying to remember what on earth I said. This is your 'cheat-sheet,' so to speak.

The goal of this book was to help you fall in love with Jesus and to help you apply His precepts to your life. The Bible is, in fact, the ultimate mental health book, and to the extent you can apply it to your heart that way, you will see miraculous things happen. Trust Jesus, get on His shoulders, and take the most exhilarating ride of your lifetime.

Here, I will summarize the salient points of this book to allow you to reflect and refresh your memory.

- 1. Be assured of your salvation** -- Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and a solid relationship with God, none of this will make sense to you, and it will be impossible to make it

work.

2. **Find out what your Spiritual Gift is, and put it to use** -- God says to “go and do” to get yourself out of your mental distress. Don’t sit around waiting for mental health to come knocking on your door: Go out and *get it*.
3. **Spend time in your Bible daily** -- Remember that it’s a *love letter* from God. Read carefully and lovingly, meditate on it, pray about it, memorize it, and apply it to your life. *Become* the people in the stories and see them as videos in your head. Don’t become legalistic, but ‘hunger and thirst’ to be obedient and kill off the sin in your life. Learn how to search for buried treasure in your Bible as you might for hidden silver or gold or precious jewels.
4. **Spend time with the Lord “without ceasing”** -- In addition to your more formal prayer time, chat with him throughout the day as you live your life. Include Him in everything. Consult with Him routinely. Invite Him into the room.
5. **Remember the Old Testament** -- The Old Testament isn’t just a wonderful history of the Jewish people. It is, among many other things, a precious revelation from God to help us see visually what He is trying to teach us in the New Testament. Regard it as a critical first section of a single volume, not a separate, optional, history of the Jews that has limited applicability to your Christian walk. Find its jewels and treasures, and let it transform your life.
6. **Seek God-esteem, not self-esteem** -- Remember that your life is the product of God’s plans for you. Your history, your parents, your childhood are all a part of how God is preparing you to serve Him in His Kingdom -- on earth and in heaven. When you feel yourself thinking negative thoughts about yourself, remember that you are a child of the living God, the Creator of the Universe. He *chose* you to be in His family. His promises apply to *you*. You are an inheritor alongside His Son. You are a prince or princess, the child of the King of Kings. You are His friend, His partner for all of eternity.

Don't ever forget that, and boot your self-esteem problem to the curb.

7. **Re-evaluate your perspective** -- See this world and things of the world as temporal, fleeting, like sand through your fingers. See things of God as eternal. Remember that God's blessings are internal, not external. Keep the two straight. Ask yourself, "Is this of God or of the world?" and make your life focused on things of God. See the world through His eyes.
8. **Use your trials to help you grow** -- Regard the difficulties and trials in your life as boot-camp and battles in the great spiritual battles Paul talks about. Grow through them, understand that God is not punishing you, and He's not the enemy. Let the enemy be the enemy in your life. Partner with God *through* your trials to defeat your enemy, in whatever form he comes, and make Satan powerless on earth. We are to storm the gates of hell, and you need training to win. Your trials are that training.
9. **Remember that your life isn't about you: It's about God** - Put your focus on honoring God, enriching His reputation to others around you, and glorify Him in all you do. Worship Him in your song, your praise, your prayers, your relationships, your work, your study of His Word. Keep Him at the center of *all* things.
10. **Remember that God wants you to succeed** -- God has a purpose for your life. When you succeed at accomplishing your purpose, you serve His grand purpose for the body of Christ. If you are focused on *His* will rather than your own, He will give you the gifts, talents, history, support, and power to succeed. Work with Him, cooperate with Him, focus on Him, and be obedient to Him, and you are guaranteed to be a fantastic success. To do so, you will manifest His peace and thrill and wonder and glory in your heart and in your life.
11. **Remember the love and grace of God** -- God is a God of

love, grace, forgiveness. God is a God of resurrection, power, victory. God is a God of second chances. God is a God of mercy. *Receive and share* that love and enter into His Promised Land of a grand and glorious relationship with Him.

- 12. Fall in love with Jesus** -- See Him as a *person* you can fall in love with, in addition to your God whom you love. Remember the differences between agape and phileo love and apply them to your relationship with Jesus. Let His love wash over you, refresh you, open your eyes and cleanse your heart, and let your relationship with Him bring you the love, joy, and peace you seek.

God bless you for getting to this point. You are a true champion and will achieve your goals of a new and exhilarating relationship with Christ. Your perseverance has brought you here, and your perseverance will take you to Him, as well. Congratulations. I am so proud of you I could burst.

Let me wrap up with this one final thought-gift: Recall the discussion of the word “treasure” where we defined blessings from God as “that deep, inner contentment, peace, complete satisfaction, and fullness in God.” When you ask Jesus into your life and then experience His presence with you, side by side throughout your day, you experience that blessing. The more you think about Him, pray to Him, worship Him, give to Him, and love and obey Him, the more His presence will permeate through you, and the more you will receive His sublime blessing over your life. How much blessing you receive is completely up to you.

Think of your heart as a treasure chest with only so much room. The more you treasure Jesus and allow Him to fill your life, the less room you will have for focusing on things of the world. The more He increases to fill your heart, the more His love and light will fill you, and the less you will hunger for the comforts and hurt for the sorrows and trappings that bind you. The more He is part of your thought life, the less you will have the unrighteous and hurtful thoughts and desires, and the more you will feel blessed in His

fullness. The more you walk with Jesus in your life, moment by moment and hour by hour, the more peace and joy on earth you will experience, and the more His light will shine in you and from you. As others see that light, they will be drawn to you, and will want what you have. God's blessings will flow from you and expand and grow through them. You will be building friendships in this life, and you will be "laying up treasure in Heaven."⁵⁰

Let Him be your Therapist, your Wonderful Counselor, your ever-present Comforter, and your cherished Friend. Let Him guide you, fill you with His love, and set you free.

* * * * *

Please leave me an e-mail at sue@TherapyWithGod.com. I would love to hear how you've been able to apply this book to your life, and how your relationship with Christ has grown.

Note To Professionals And Counselors

My prayer is that you have been blessed by this book and that your practice will be enhanced by it, as well. In our profession, our first and foremost goal with our clients is termination. I have found in my practice that the more my clients allow me to use Scripture during sessions and the closer they draw to Jesus, the faster they get back on their feet and are able to terminate therapy. I pray that you find that to be the case, too.

As much as we'd love to work ourselves out of a job, we know that will never be the case. There will always be hurting people who need a hand up and some encouragement. I pray this book can be used as a resource to help you in that journey with your clients.

God bless all of you. May the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ reign supreme in all your hearts, and may you be His witnesses throughout all the earth.

SECTION 6

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A -- THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST



Heaven Is A Gift From God

Since a solid relationship with Jesus Christ is the best mental health therapy there is, I wanted to make sure that what that means is clear.

Consider these words from the Bible.

Eph 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is **the gift of God**; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Titus 3:4-7 “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, **not on the basis of deeds which we have done** in righteousness, but according to His mercy...”

Romans 10:9 “...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

It breaks my heart to hear people say, “I’m a good person,” or “I hope I’m good enough to get into heaven.”

If you hope your good deeds and your good life will ensure you

will receive a place in heaven, then you need to know that God requires perfection (Psalms 5:4-6, and many, many others throughout Scripture). He requires absolute, total, life-long perfection. That means you can never have told a single lie, white or otherwise; never stolen even the slightest thing; never had a single evil thought or selfish motive; never coveted anything you didn't need. Nothing, ever. The Bible says that over and over. God can't be in the presence of sin, and He cannot look upon sin, and He's a perfect, righteous judge. If you have ever done any of those things or many more, then from God's perspective, you're wearing your sin as if it were a sweater you cannot ever take off. Because He can't look at sin and you're wearing that 'sweater,' He can't allow you in heaven. You may feel that's harsh or not fair, but it's just the way it is. Scripture is extremely clear on that, and God gets to make the rules.

The real reason that even the smallest sin condemns us is because, in reality, even the smallest sin is an outward expression of an inward problem. The problem is that from God's perspective, the sin means that we've rejected His authority in our life. If we make a decision to separate ourselves from God's authority, which then results in sin, then we have decided to live life outside the will and presence of God, and God is simply honoring that decision.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Jews sacrificed animals to pay the penalty for their sins. The animals were required to be "without defect."⁴⁶ Absolutely, totally and completely perfect. The Jews couldn't pay for their own sins because they weren't without defect. Even their own deaths wouldn't have been enough to save them from hell because to sacrifice something that is imperfect is unacceptable to God. The centuries of sacrifices commanded in the Old Testament were to get the Jews' hearts prepared for the concept of a substitutionary sacrifice. A substitutionary sacrifice is where something else can be substituted and sacrificed to pay for my sins, but that 'something' must be perfect.

The rules about sacrifices are God's way of telling us, through the Old Testament pictures, what He requires. You can't pay your own penalty for your sin because you're not perfect. You're not a "lamb without defect." I've never met anyone who described

himself as perfect, and I know I'm sure not. We can't be. Nobody is. If it were up to our own efforts and goodness, we'd all be without hope.

But God knew that and gave us a way out. He gave us Jesus. Not Christianity -- Jesus. Jesus died completely sin-free, perfect, as an acceptable sacrifice unto God to pay the price for our sins.

God sent His Son to die on the cross for us. Jesus was that perfect sacrifice, the "Lamb without defect" that was required for an acceptable offering to God. When He died, He said, "It is finished." What was finished? The total atonement for the sins of every man, woman, and child on the face of the planet who repent of their sins and give their lives to Him

Remember that Christianity is not a religion. A religion is a set of rules, a way of living your life, a way of thinking. There are many, many religions of the world, but true Christianity isn't one of them. Christianity is a relationship -- a wonderful, glorious relationship with the living Jesus, the Creator of the Universe, which transforms a life full of senseless pain, misery, and efforts to be a 'good person' to one of profound purpose and hope (Philippians 3:8; Ephesians 3:14-19).

Once we understand His sacrifice, and once we've received His salvation, then our efforts to 'do good' are borne out of our love affair with Him. They become our opportunity to show Him we love Him back. Rather than our attempt to earn His love or earn our way into heaven, they become our precious gift back to Him.

Many people will say they believe in Jesus, and they truly do, but let's think about that for a minute. Is that enough? Don't forget that Satan believes in Jesus. James 2:19 says, "...the demons also believe, and shudder." Satan *knows* that Jesus is the Son of God, the resurrected Messiah. He's met Him face-to-face in the physical and spiritual world. There must be a difference between our belief and his.

One of the differences is faith. Satan's belief doesn't require faith. He's actually seen Him, so he knows the truth. Faith is not a factor.

The other difference is submission and trust. When the Bible talks about believing in Jesus, the Greek word literally means “to totally trust as if dependent upon; to turn your ship in that direction.” In the same context, you might ‘believe in’ a loving parent, a great coach, a best friend whom you know will ‘be there’ for you. It doesn’t mean you believe that they exist -- of course they exist. It means you put your eggs in that basket. You become vulnerable to them. They have the potential to hurt you, but you know they won’t. You know they’ll be there if you need them. You *Believe* (capital B) in them.

I heard a story once that illustrates that point. A man had ridden a bicycle balanced on a rope over the Grand Canyon many times and people had watched him do it. They loved the spectacle of it. He was standing on the side, ready to go again, and people were all excited. He looked at the crowd and said, “Do you believe I can do this?” They all cried, “Yes! Go!” and clapped. He said, “Are you sure?” as if to taunt them and spin them up. Again they cried “Yes, do it!” and applauded again. And then he said, “So who will get on my shoulders?”

Your belief means you will get on his shoulders and trust Him.

It also means that you choose to agree with Him. If He says it’s sin, then it’s sin, and your desire is not to do it. You mourn for your sin, you repent of it, and you ask Him for forgiveness for having done it. That means that you “turn the other direction,” or make a conscious decision not to do it any more. That’s not to imply that you won’t slip up, but it means that it is your *intention* not to slip up again, and you ask the Holy Spirit to help you make that happen in your life.

Will you get on Jesus' shoulders and let Him carry you through life? Will you trust Him and agree with Him? That's the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If you will get on His shoulders, agree with Him, and *Believe* in Him, then you will spend life on earth as well as all of eternity in the company of the Creator of the universe. That's the Good News of Jesus Christ. That's as good as it gets, and it's a fabulous ride.

If you're ready to do this, look to Him and pray this prayer from your heart, and know that you mean it from the depths of your soul.

Speak it directly to Him. He's listening, He's waiting, and He will *run* to embrace you.

“Dear Jesus, I know I've sinned against you, and I'm sorry. Please forgive me for being disobedient and rebellious, for doing things my way and thinking I could earn my way into heaven. I thankfully receive Your sacrifice on the cross for me as the complete and absolute atonement for my sinful past. Please come in to my life and take it over. I give it to you. I trust you, and I want to be yours. Please save me.”

If you prayed that prayer and truly meant it, then welcome to the Kingdom of God, Christian. You've just made a decision that will secure your place in eternity and will transform your life on earth (John 10:10). Please tell a fellow Christian of your decision, and get into a loving, Bible-believing and Jesus-loving church. Refer to Appendix B, “I'm a new Christian -- Now what?”

If you can't pray that prayer quite yet but would like to believe, then pray the ‘skeptics’ prayer:

“Ok, Jesus, I'm not sure I believe in You at all, and it almost feels silly to be praying. But if you're there, please let me know. I'm open to the possibility, but I'm just not ready to jump in. If you're there, let me know, and give me the faith to believe in You.”

If you prayed that prayer, then I know that God will be faithful and will let you know He's there. When that happens, then come back here and pray the first prayer and join the Kingdom of God. I rejoice in your openness and what God is going to do through your life!

But My Sins Are Too Many

I've had people say to me that their sins are too many or too severe, and that God would *never* be able to forgive *their* sins.

Jesus addressed that issue specifically in two separate occasions. In the first one, a woman had come into him while he was eating lunch with a Pharisee,⁴⁷ Simon. The woman, a ‘sinner,’ which is a

euphemism for prostitute, came in and poured expensive perfume on his feet, washed them with her tears, kissed them and wiped them with her hair. The Pharisee was horrified that a Rabbi would allow this sinful woman to touch him.

Jesus addressed the Pharisee by telling him a story of three men. A money-lender had lent 50 denarii⁴⁸ to one man and 500 denarii to another. When neither of them could repay him, he forgave both debts -- wiping them completely off the books. Now which of the two men would love and appreciate him and his generosity more, Jesus asked? Of course the Pharisee knew the answer -- the one who owed him more and was forgiven more.

He then looked at the woman washing His feet and said, "He who has been forgiven much, loves much; but he who has been forgiven little, loves little."

Your sins, many and severe as they may be, are the *very* thing that will glorify God when you turn to Him. As you have been forgiven much, you will love much, and glorify God much.

If you've been a terrible, horrific sinner, then He wants you to know that you're the best witness He has. Come to Him and tell your story.

A second example Jesus gave was of two men praying: a Pharisee and a Tax Collector. The Pharisee was saying (paraphrased), "God, I sure am glad I'm not a sinner like this Tax Collector! I fast twice a week and give to the poor" (Luke 18:10-14). The Tax Collector, on the other hand, was on his knees saying, "Oh God, I am such a sinner, I don't deserve your grace and mercy!" Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisee didn't see his sin and so couldn't repent of it. The Tax Collector did both, and Jesus honored him for it.

You are a blessed one of a few who has actually been given the privilege by God of seeing your sin. Now just repent of it, turn your life over to Christ, and feel His forgiveness wash over you.

Now to really seal it, let me tell you about Saul. Saul was a Pharisee. Pharisees wore the big fancy robes, walked around like they were better than everyone else, and were the teachers of Scripture to the 'lowly' Jewish people.

After Jesus was crucified, rose, and ascended into heaven, the Christian movement took off. One of the prominent Christians, Stephen, was stoned to death for telling the Pharisees about Jesus. Saul was in "heartly agreement" (Acts 8:1) with putting him to death, and as a matter of fact, he noticed that the senior Pharisees were impressed. He saw this as a way to advance politically. Saul became ravenous for the persecution, arrest, prosecution, imprisonment, and death of all Christians -- men, women, and children, alike.

But then, on the way to Damascus to arrest some more, he met Jesus face-to-face in a flash of light. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" was Jesus' question. At that moment, Saul, the ambitious, murderous, violent Pharisee became Paul the Christian, Paul the Apostle.

Saul, now called Paul, described himself as "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor" (1 Timothy 1:13), as well as "foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

Paul reflects on his life past, and says that it's *because* he was so bad that God saved him. He puts it this way:

"Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience **as an example** for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:16).

At this point in Paul's life, he saw himself, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (which means it *cannot* be false humility or it would be a lie), as the worst sinner of every person on the face of the planet (1 Timothy 1:15). And it was *because* of this, because he was the best example of a horrific sinner that Jesus Christ saved him.

Jesus saved Paul so that from that point forward, *no one* could say, “My sins are too big for God.”

Not even you.

APPENDIX B -- I'M A NEW CHRISTIAN -- NOW WHAT?



So you've prayed the sinner's prayer and given your life to Christ. Congratulations and welcome into the church of Christ and the Kingdom of God! I rejoice with all of the angels in heaven that you have joined us.

But now what? What should you do next? I'll attempt to give you some guidance here so it doesn't seem so out of reach. It's really not all that hard, but so many people are left hanging there, feeling like they might do it 'wrong.' If you've given your heart to Christ, then you're secure, so there isn't any 'right' or 'wrong' way to do it.

However, there are some approaches you can take that will leave you in the spiritual wilderness a lot longer than you need to be. We want to move you quickly into God's Promised Land of a fulfilling and wonderful relationship with Christ, so here are some ideas.

Get A Bible

Let me be very clear at this point.

*The most important job you have to do is to fall madly
in love with Jesus, and be totally and absolutely filled*

with joy for knowing Him!

The reason your joy is so critical is because it motivates you to know Him more and spend more time with Him, and because people are watching. When other people see you moping around miserable and depressed and wracked with guilt, they see nothing in your God that they don't already have in the world. For you to draw them in -- your fulfillment of the Great Commission -- you must present to them a God who brings them something they *don't* already have -- that deeply-rooted joy and peace, in spite of their circumstances, that only He can bring.

So exactly *how* do you do that? By reading the Bible and finding Jesus in there. Read your Bible with the intention of finding out who He is and of entering into a fully-satisfying relationship with Him. That's the goal of your reading the Bible. Not to educate yourself about doctrine, find out about the Jews, or any of a dozen reasons people will read Scripture. Your job is to fall madly in love with Jesus, learn to have that Godly fear of Him, and feel the joy and peace He gives in the inner-most core of your being.

As the first step to this glorious goal, you need to get a Bible. If you already have a church, then you might want to find out what they use and use that, but if it takes you several months to find *your* church, then don't wait. Go ahead, refer to Appendix C, "How to Select the Right Bible," and get started. Appendix D, "How to Use the Bible," will help you learn where to get started with the Bible and how to proceed.

Get Into A Church

Beyond getting a Bible, the single most impacting thing you can do is to get into a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching, Jesus-loving church. I've said it several times throughout this book, and I want to underscore it here: *Please find a home church.*

So exactly how do you find the right church? Just like you do anything else -- you shop around. If you take a year to find just the right church where you feel at home and it becomes your family, then it takes a year.

Now, having said that, let me caution you about being a ‘church gypsy.’ Searching for your home church is one thing, making a conscious decision never to have a home church is something different altogether. You *must* have a home church. There is just way too much support they provide, training you can get, and friends and family you can make to miss out on that. If you ‘church hop,’ then that says you have no intention of getting serious and getting involved, and that will leave you in the Christian wilderness, wandering around aimlessly, your entire Christian life. You don’t want that, and God doesn’t want that for you.

Now, not every church is built for every person. Certainly, every person should be welcome in every church, but not every church is going to be a good fit for you spiritually. If you go into a church and it doesn’t feel warm and welcoming for you, then please just say, “This church isn’t a good fit for me,” and start again next week somewhere else. If you get in there and they never bring up Jesus or read from the Bible, then it definitely isn’t the right church. If they’re not Biblically-grounded and Jesus-focused, then move on.

When my husband and I were in church-hunting mode, we often went to two sermons a Sunday and occasionally on Saturday night as well. For several months, we went to a different church every week or twice a week. Some were bad experiences for us, and some were luke-warm, and a few were wonderful. That’s probably pretty normal, so don’t give up. Keep up the search until you find your home. If you find one that has possibilities, go for several Sundays in a row to get a sense of it. If you have a friend who recommends a particular church, then by all means check it out. Remember, though, that it has to be a good fit for *you*, and that might not be the same church as your friend’s.

Get Involved

When you are a brand new Christian, the tendency is often to either get neck-deep in ministries and Bible studies, or not to get involved at all. Resist both of those temptations. Once you’ve found a church home, talk to the pastor or one of the elders about how you might get involved in something you can handle. At this

early stage in your Christian walk, it's far more important that you get involved in some good Bible studies so you can grow in your relationship with Christ and learn how to read the Bible than it is serving in a ministry. Get involved in the studies first, and then branch into ministries later. Trust and rely on your pastor's guidance on this.

Small Groups

Once you have your home church, get involved with people at the church. Most churches these days have what they call "small groups" or "community groups" or something like that. These are groups of up to 15 or so church members who get together on a weekly or bi-monthly basis to fellowship and study the Word together. They pray together and lift each other up, and they help each other when the needs arise. It is truly the best way to turn your church into your family. You just need a closer connection than sitting in the pew on a weekly basis can provide.

So, to list them out:

- Get a Bible.
- Get into a Bible believing, Bible-teaching, Jesus-loving church.
- Get into a Bible Study.
- Get into a Small/Community Group.

And fall in love with the Lord.

APPENDIX C -- HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT BIBLE



My first recommendation in selecting the right Bible is to get into a good Bible-believing and Bible-teaching church and find out what the pastor uses. That's the Bible you should probably start with if you have a church.

However, if you don't have a home church yet, or you'd like to find something that's a more personal choice and better fit for you and you're content to just deal with the differences from your church, then I've added the rest of this section for you.

As of this writing, bible.crosswalk.com has 27 different versions of the Bible listed on their 'using' pulldown menu. That's pretty daunting when you're standing in the book store trying to figure out which one to buy for yourself, so I'll try to help you narrow down the possibilities.

I'm only going to hit on a few of them here, largely because these are the ones I'm familiar with, and can speak more knowledgably about. I'm no expert on versions of the Bible, though, and if I've misrepresented any of them here, I offer my sincere apology. I urge each of you to go on-line and do your own research to fill in any holes I've left.

Basics Of Bible Versions

So here's my best attempt at explaining them from my humble perspective.

The reason there are so many versions of the Bible is because different people have different needs, different ways of studying, and different desires and goals.

The first thing you need to be aware of is that there are 'translations,' and there are 'interpretations.'

This explanation is a little simplified, but it will do for our purposes here. A **translation** is where the translators have taken the original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and are attempting to keep the English version as close as possible to that. The purists want, to the greatest extent understandable, a word-for-word translation from the original language to the English. You would think that would be the ideal for everyone, and for people who consider themselves purists, teachers, scholars, and academicians, it is. The downside to that, though, is that it leaves the English a little harder to understand because the original languages don't work in quite the same way the English does. So to stay pure, some of the English becomes a little challenging to say the least. The trade-offs are between purity in accuracy, and understandability.

On the other end of the spectrum are the **interpretations**. An interpretation is where the translators thought about a section of Scripture and essentially rewrote it into their own words to try to capture the essence of what the original languages were trying to convey. These are typically easier to understand, but since they are not pure to the original languages, you have to be very careful about deriving hard-and-fast doctrinal assumptions from them. One of the interpretations doesn't even have verse numbers because the sentences simply don't correspond to the original languages well enough.

Interpretations fall broadly into two main categories: verse interpretation and paragraph interpretation.

In the verse interpretation, the translators took the original language and rewrote the Hebrew or Greek text into more understandable English, but stayed within the parameters of the

single sentence or verse. In paragraph interpretation, you won't have verse numbers because the Hebrew and Greek sentences have been lost in the translation. The result is a 'discussion' of what the original languages were trying to convey in more common language.

Then there are the rest of them that fall somewhere in between the two extremes.

Both extremes, as well as those in the middle, have their advantages and disadvantages. I use several different versions that span that gamut and I get a lot out of all of them.

I'm going to repeat my word of caution here, though: There are many examples where the simpler, more 'understandable' versions have lost a great deal of accuracy in the translation. Some of them even come a little too close to heresy for comfort in my opinion. Just be very careful about relying solely on the 'more understandable' versions, and always compare them with the King James Version (KJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), or New King James Version (NKJV) for anything you are going to take to heart and apply to your life.

So what I'd like to do here is to give you some specific versions and some guidance on the type of studying you can do with each.

The first three Bibles, KJV, NASB, and NKJV, are what I call the 'pure' Bibles. They are pure because the authors were very serious about translating, word for word, from the original languages. The more you deviate from the original languages to achieve understandability, the more you risk inaccuracy and possibly even heresy. The translators have to be very careful, and from what I can glean from the many debates I've heard on this topic, these are the one's most scholars believe are the most accurate.

King James Version (KJV) -- The original printed English Bible, printed in the early 1600's under the authority of King James of England. It was written in the language of the day, hence all the "thee's" and "thou's." They understood it because that's the way they spoke. The KJV is extremely accurate to the original Hebrew and Greek, so is a very good one for the purists and scholars. It is reported to be the easiest to memorize because of its poetic nature, and once you get used to it, it is quite beautiful. Beginners find it

extremely difficult to understand because of that same feature. My understanding is that this is the only version many Baptist churches recognize as the authoritative Word of God.

New American Standard Bible (NASB) -- I have heard radio commentators arguing about whether the King James or the NASB is the most accurate to the original languages. I would suggest that since the authorities can't agree on that, then unless you are going for your doctorate in theology or something, it doesn't matter much. In my early walk, I found the NASB to be easier to understand, so that's what I started with. Since then, however, I've become much more familiar with the language of the KJV, so I go back and forth. So far in my own studies comparing the two to the versions of the Greek Bibles that I have, I have found a dozen or so differences between the KJV and the NASB in the New Testament. For most of them, the differences are insignificant and don't change the meaning much.

New King James Version (NKJV) -- This is essentially just the King James Version with the "thee's" and "thou's" changed to "you" and "your." I've never heard anyone address whether this is more or less 'pure' than either the KJV or the NASB, but I have read that it is a very good translation.

If your goal is to become a serious student of the Bible, then I'd recommend you get both KJV and NASB, and possibly the NKJV as well. Read them and compare as you go. The differences you will find are enlightening.

New International Version (NIV) -- The New International Version is a translation, and does a reasonable job of staying fairly close to the original languages. I've never heard anyone recommend it, though, for those who see themselves as serious scholars and purists. The target audience for the NIV, in my opinion, is the person who wants to be somewhat close to the original language but isn't as focused on looking up the Greek or doing the other more complicated word studies. Since the translators didn't feel the need to be exactly pure to the original languages, it tends to be the

easiest of the better translations to understand. However, I have seen some websites that do a verse-by-verse comparison with the KJV, claiming that some of the differences are fairly extreme and almost heretical, so caution is encouraged. If you want to use the NIV, then I'd recommend you also get a KJV, NASB, or NKJV, and compare as you go just to be safe.

New Living Translation (NLT) -- The New Living Translation, although it is still something of a translation, is starting to creep toward more of an interpretation. You will have verse numbers, but each verse is only loosely tied to the word-by-word Greek. As it turns out, though, there are good examples of verses in the NLT that, in spite of the fact that they aren't as 'pure' to the original language, do a better job of conveying the *intention* of the original language than do the more literal translations. The reason for this is because the English language just struggles trying to duplicate the richness of the Greek and Hebrew languages. If you restrict yourself to only using one or two words to convey what a single Hebrew or Greek word uses, then you might not have any very good choices in the English. They had to make some compromises in depth to stay pure to the verbiage -- not accuracy, just depth. The NLT translators, on the other hand, have given themselves license to use as many words as they thought they needed to to convey the essence of the original language rather than the letter of it. I never use the NLT as my primary study Bible because it's just too far from the original languages, but I will use it occasionally to help me understand the NASB and KJV when the pure translation wording is difficult.

God's Word (God) -- This is a newer translation/interpretation hybrid that approximates the NLT idea. I find this version to be slightly easier to understand than the NLT in some texts, but as you get more understandable, you tend to get less accurate to the original languages, so again, there's the tradeoff.

New Century Version (NC) -- Of all of the interpretation/translation hybrids, I find this one to be the easiest to understand. Remember, though, that it also makes it the least literal to the Greek

and Hebrew, and the least accurate of those I've listed here.

The Message

The Message is by far, the book that epitomizes the term 'interpretation.' This book has no verse numbers because the sentences do not approximate the original sentences closely enough. As such, it is the easiest to read, but has lost a lot of the original language. It's a wonderful book to read casually, and I have one, but I would never use it as my primary source of Scripture. Use it as a wonderful narrative and as a way to capture some of the nuances of the original languages, but use one of the pure translations for Biblical study.

Study Bibles

There are also what they call 'Study Bibles.' They are still the versions listed above (plus those I haven't listed), but they have 'helps' with them. These 'helps' are comments, maps, cross-references, concordances, etc. There are women's Bibles, men's Bibles, Bibles for teens, Bibles for children, Bibles for students, Bibles for military people, and more. There are prophesy Bibles, and 'Finding Jesus' Bibles that show you where Jesus is throughout the Old Testament. Each of these has the same original Bible at the core as the versions listed above, but with additional comments and other aids to help the reader understand more. Some also have wide outer margins for jotting down notes as you read. That's what I have, and I love it.

Bibles can be fairly expensive, so spend some time doing some research and looking over several of them before you start buying.

So, let's boil it all down for you:

I am a serious student, and I want to go very deep, possibly into the Greek and Hebrew some: King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV), or New American Standard Bible (NASB)

I want to study Scripture, but I need something a little easier to understand: New International Version (NIV)

I have a pure Bible (one of the first three), but I'd also like something I can use to help me with difficult passages or gain additional insight: New Living Translation (NLT), or God's Word (God), or New Century Version (NC).

I have a pure Bible, but I'd like something I can read casually when I have some time to just relax in the Word: The Message

My apologies to those versions I have not listed here, and I deeply pray I have not misrepresented any that I have included here. I know each version has its pros and cons, and absence from this list should not imply in any way that they have no value. The reader is strongly encouraged to go on-line to get more information and talk to your pastor about the versions that are available and the one that's right for you.

APPENDIX D -- HOW TO USE THE BIBLE



Getting Started

When I first started reading the Bible, I was a bit overwhelmed at what I was reading. It was *huge*, and I had no idea where to start. I'd tried a few times in my life starting at Genesis (Don't you start reading a book at the beginning?), only to get bogged down half-way through Abraham, not understanding what I was reading, having no idea how my life would be changed by it, and just couldn't maintain the energy it took.

That's probably a familiar story to some of you. Some of you might have actually made it all the way to Exodus or Leviticus before you crashed and burned, but I don't know too many people who started their Bible study that way who got beyond Leviticus. Some boring, nasty, bloody stuff if you don't know what you're reading.

So I'd like to spare you that misery and give you some guidance on where to start. But before we get there, there are a couple of things you need to know.

As I said in the text of the book, the Bible is organized into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word 'Testament' means Covenant, or Promise. The Old Covenant is that God would make Israel a great nation and give them Canaan, 'the land of promise,' the land flowing with milk and honey. The New Covenant is with the Christians, and says that God has given us Jesus, the

Messiah, to die to save us from our sins. The Old Testament is the Jew's Bible, and the Old Testament and the New Testament together comprise the Christian's Bible.

If you've never compared the size of the Old Testament with the New Testament, it's an interesting exercise. Grab your Bible, divide it up in your hands with the Old Testament in your left hand the New Testament in your right. The difference in size between the two will surprise you if you've never done it before.

Now, understand that you will definitely be getting to the Old Testament in your reading, but you need to start with the New Testament. If you don't understand the end of the book, the beginning of the book will just be a bunch of boring, bloody history about the Jews. It is so vastly more than that, but the richness and the depth of it will be lost on you if you don't have as your foundation the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You already know that if you've read the body of this book, and if you haven't, you'll get there. If you don't know Christ, then you won't know what to look for in the Old Testament to find Him there.

So start with the Gospel of John. It's the fourth book in the New Testament, after Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Then, and this is fairly important, you need to learn a little history about the Apostle Paul. The Gospel of John will introduce you to the other Biblical authors, but the Apostle Paul doesn't show up until Acts. If you don't read about him, you won't know one of the primary writers of the New Testament.

So start your reading in this order:

- Gospel of John to learn that Jesus is God in the flesh, and learn about the disciples
- Acts Chapter 7 to learn about Stephen (the first martyr)
- Acts Chapter 8 verses 1-4 to learn who Saul was and what he did
- Acts Chapter 9 verses 1-30 to learn about the Apostle Paul

Actually, starting from Chapter 9 and then all through the rest of Acts is mostly about Paul. The book of Acts is about the early church, so it wouldn't hurt you to read the entire book of Acts after

you've read John to get a bigger picture of the early church. The sections in the above list are pretty pivotal, though, so don't skip them.

Once you've read John and the story of Paul, the exact order you take to read the rest of it is up to you. You can make your decision based on your church's direction, the book where your pastor is preaching from right now, or the Bible study you're in. Don't skip the above readings first, though. They're very good stuff.

And don't just skip around chapter by chapter or verse by verse. When you select a book, read from Chapter 1 verse 1 through the end of the book before you move to another book. If you don't do that, you miss way too much of the context and you'll never get to know the authors, or the Great Author, God.

I heard a sermon on-line that suggested you read a long book, then a short book, then a long book, and then a short book until you've made your way through the entire New Testament. I thought that was good advice, so I pass it along to you.

As a new Christian, spend most of your early time in the New Testament. When you get a little more familiar with it and who Jesus is, then the Old Testament can come alive to you if you know how to find Jesus there. There are many sections in this book to help you do that, if you haven't already read it.

Some general information about the books of the Bible might be helpful.

The New Testament is divided loosely into the following sections:

- Gospels -- The stories of Jesus, from four different perspectives to four different audiences for four different purposes.
- Acts -- The history of the early church of Christ and how the Gospel was spread throughout Asia, and then to the rest of the world.
- Paul's Letters (called The Pauline Epistles) -- The letters written by the Apostle Paul to churches and to specific individuals. Paul wrote these letters to instruct, encourage, admonish, and guide the people of God.

- Hebrews -- a letter written to the Hebrew, or Jewish, people to help them see how the New Testament fits into the Old Testament. Scholars aren't sure who wrote Hebrews.
- Remaining Letters -- Letters written by the Apostles John, James, Peter, and Jude to the Christians that were living in the area to encourage them through their trials and to give them guidance.
- Revelation -- The revelation directly from Jesus to the Apostle John, showing us how the world is going to end, how Satan and his minions are going to be defeated, and the glory of the return of Jesus Christ. If you're not a believer, it's a very frightening book. If, however, you are bound for the Kingdom of heaven, it's the most exciting book in all of Scripture. Whenever you have tough times and a battle with the enemy, you can proudly and confidently say, "Yeah, but *I know the end of the story, and we win!*"

Bible reading is the window into seeing and getting to know Jesus Christ, and your opportunity to have Him as your Counselor, your Comforter, and your Friend. In falling in love with Him, you will experience that profound joy and peace that He alone offers. If you view and have an approach to reading in the right manner, you will find it to be extraordinarily comforting, fulfilling, and exciting. If you don't find that to be true for you, then find people who *do* feel that way and study with them. Their knowledge and their enthusiasm will rub off on you, and you will never regret it.

What's A Verse?

Okay, you've bought a Bible and flipped it open. What on earth are all those numbers at the beginning of sentences?

When the original authors, way back in the mid first century, wrote the individual books of the Bible, those numbers didn't exist. As a matter of fact, the chapter numbers didn't exist. Each 'book' was actually just a letter written to someone, and was one long dialogue without any divisions of any kind. You would never divide

a letter you've written to a friend up by chapters and the like, and neither would they.

The chapters and verses were added centuries later. They added them because we needed some way of organizing our study and communicating our thoughts to each other. Adding the chapter divisions helped us do that, and then later adding a chronological number at the beginning of each cohesive thought added significantly to that communication.

So the numbers at the beginning of those thoughts are the 'verse' identifiers. Notice that the verse isn't necessarily a complete sentence, and sometimes a verse will actually have more than one sentence or combinations of partial sentences. Some of the sentences in the Bible are fairly long and complicated and actually comprise several distinct thoughts, so they divided the sentences up that way. You'll notice that many of them start with the word "and" or "but." As a matter of fact, you'll even find some chapters starting with the word "and."

So when I say, "John 3:16," I'm saying go to the book of John, which follows Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the New Testament, flip over to Chapter 3, and then within that chapter, go to verse 16. It says:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

So what about the letters behind the verse designation in some things I've read, like "John 3:16b." They're not in the actual Bible, but you might find them in commentaries and the like. The "b" refers to the second part of the verse. In the case of John 3:16, the "b" would refer to "that He gave His only begotten Son." In this example, there may be "a," "c," and "d" as well.

Now, when I say, "go to the book of John," you might say, "That's easy for you to say, but where *is* the book of John?!"

Great question. Actually, you'll eventually get used to where the books are in the Bible, but for now, the Bible has what every good

book has: a table of contents. Flip to the beginning of your Bible and you'll find the table of contents with page numbers. Skim down the 66 books listed until you see "John," or "The Gospel of John." Remember that the Old Testament is a whole lot bigger than the New Testament, so John will be close to the end of the Table of Contents, relatively speaking, even though it's early in the New Testament.

Also, some Bibles have small black indents in the edges of the pages with shorthand for each of the books. John would be listed as "Jn" or "Joh" or "Jno." You'll get used to it after a while.

If your Bible doesn't have that, then you can go to a Christian Bookstore and get pre-printed tabs that you can add to your own Bible. I have to tell you, though, that I did that when I was a new Christian, and I found that they tore the pages of my Bible. I guess you can be careful and not do that, but I found them to be a problem, so I took them off. Again, it's about preference and trade-offs.

Why Are Some Words In Italics?

As you read, you'll notice that some of the words in the text are in italics. This has to do with the Greek.

The translators of the Bible tried to convey the clearest meaning of the Greek and Hebrew into English the best they could while staying pure to the original languages. The problem, as I've stated before, is that the Greek and Hebrew are very rich, and there are occasions when there simply *was* no English word that adequately conveyed the subtle nuances of the original language. When that happened, they would sometimes insert an additional word in the text to further explain what was originally meant in the text. When they did that, they would put the inserted word in italics so the reader would know that there was no Greek or Hebrew word from which this word was translated, but that it was added by the authors for clarity and depth.

When you run across those words, read the sentence again without the italicized word to see if it makes a difference to the meaning. If it does, then take the time to figure out what the translator was trying to do with the added word and look the root

word up in the Greek. That's one of the places I've found some really fun treasures.

Why Are Some Words In All Capital Letters?

When you run across words that are in all capital letters, the translator is telling you that they are quoting something out of the Old Testament. Again, this can be a great source of treasures. When you see that, find out where in the Old Testament that quote comes from and go look it up. You will have some very fruitful treasure hunts that way.

Concordance

Many Bibles have in the back what they call a "Concordance." A concordance is simply an index of the words in the Bible. If you get a "Complete Concordance," which is a separate book, then you have the work of some wonderful individuals who went painstakingly through the Bible and made a list of *every single word in the Bible* and grouped them in alphabetical order. Then, for every word, they listed *every single verse* where that word appears.

So, for instance, you'd have the following as one of the words in your concordance (this is the NASB version):

Offense	Lev 19:7
	Eza 10:19
	Mat 11:6
	Mat 13:57
	Mar 6:3
	Luk 7:23
	Act 25:8
	Rom 5:14
	Rom 9:33
	Rom 14:20
	1 Co 10:32
	2 Co 6:3
	1 Pe 2:8

So if you were to read your NASB Bible, cover to cover, and count the number of times you found the word “offense” in the English, you’d find thirteen of them. The full concordance will list all thirteen verses where that word is found.

The concordances will often have a short segment of the actual verse itself as well, so you can more easily find what you’re looking for. So, if you were interested in how the word “offense” is used, or if you wanted to find a particular verse and you knew the word “offense” was in the verse, then you would go to the Concordance to find out where it is in the Bible.

The Concordance you have at the back of your Bible is a condensed version of the full one. You won’t have all the words listed, and you won’t have all of the verses listed for the words it does have, but it is still handy and it will serve a purpose. If you think you’re going to want to be doing that a lot, though, getting a complete concordance will be a good investment.

The other thing the Concordance provides is the “Strong’s Number.” For almost every English word in the Bible (barring those in italics), there’s a Greek word that that English word was translated from. The Strong’s Numbers are in the right-hand margin, to the right of the column where the verse is provided.

To use the Strong’s Number, go to the back of the Concordance. The numbers are in numeric order. Look the number up on that list, and you have an abbreviated definition of that particular word in the Greek. You’ll notice that sometimes the same English word actually has a few different Strong’s numbers. That’s because the Greek is an extremely rich language, and there is often more than one Greek word that can be translated into a single English word. That’s why looking it up in the Greek can be so helpful. Sometimes there are subtle nuances in the Greek that the English cannot convey. Spend time looking them up, and you’ll be thrilled at some of the treasures you can find.

Margin References

Many Bibles have margin references on each page. You'll see them, usually on the inside or outside margin, of every page that has Scripture. Sometimes they contain comments, and sometimes they are just references to other passages of the Bible that might have something to do with this one. It could be that the same story is located in another Gospel and it will tell you where it is; it could be that a specific word is used somewhere else in the same way; it could be that the idea is represented in a different section of Scripture in addition to this one.

In any event, there are too many of them to stop each time and look it up, but if you are on a specific verse and it has some special meaning to you today, then you might want to take a minute to check out the referenced passages as well.

One way I have found my treasure-hunting to be particularly fruitful is to go to the references to the Old Testament when I'm reading in the New Testament, or to references to the New Testament when I'm in the Old. I highly recommend checking out those references whenever you come across them. You may end up with an empty hole, but more often than not, there's a nugget for your efforts.

There's a lot of information online about how to read the Bible, and your church small group and Bible study will be an invaluable source of information. Avail yourself of those rich resources and really learn how to use your Bible.

APPENDIX E -- REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Here I'd like to share with you some of the resources I've used in my years of study of Scripture. The books are all available on-line at Amazon.com or at your Christian book store and a host of others sources. The web sites are the web addresses that were in place as of this writing.

Commentaries

Application Commentary of the New Testament, by Jon Courson

Application Commentary of the Old Testament Vol I, by Jon Courson

Application Commentary of the Old Testament Vol II, by Jon Courson

Bible Knowledge Commentary by the Dallas Theological Seminary

Jamison-Fawcett Brown Commentary

Matthew Henry Commentary

Resource Books

Zodhiates, Spiros; *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*
AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37422

- Also available in Old Testament, plus
- The Complete Wordstudy Dictionary: New Testament (Word Study Series)
- The Complete Wordstudy Dictionary: Old Testament (Word Study Series)

Web Sites -- All *highly* recommended

<http://bible.crosswalk.com> -- On-line Bible resources

<http://joncourson.com> -- Jon Courson

<http://www.gospelcom.net/> -- Ravi Zacharias

<http://www.gty.org/index.php> -- John MacArthur, Grace to You

http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/Truth_for_Life -- Alistair Begg

<http://www.calvarychapelradio.com/listen.asp> -- Calvary Chapel Radio on-line

<http://www.walkthru.org/> -- Chip Ingram, Living on the Edge

<http://www.leadingtheway.org/> -- Michael Youseff, Leading the Way

<http://www.mcleanbible.org/> -- Lon Solomon, McLean Bible Church

<http://www.frontline.to/> -- Frontline, a Youth-oriented branch of McLean Bible Church

There are many other fabulous resources. Hunt around, but be careful. There are also many “false prophets” masquerading as God’s sheep and shepherds. Be discerning, and if you have any doubt, talk to your pastor.

APPENDIX F -- INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR



By Way Of Introduction...

As I said in the introduction of this book, a friend of mine said that before anyone is going to trust what I have to say, they have to know who I am. By way of submission to her judgment, I offer here a little information about me.

As I write this book, I have been a licensed Social Worker in the state of Maryland for over 10 years and I am currently a full-time private practice Christian Mental Health Therapist. After spending nearly 30 years in the computer industry, I left that career so I could devote my full-time attention to my mental health practice. I work out of my home office in a semi-rural setting of Southern Maryland.

My Testimony

I dedicated my life to the Lord in September 2001, ten days prior to the Twin Towers attacks. I was 48 years old at the time. My sister-in-law had given her life to the Lord a year earlier, and in April of that same year, my husband had re-dedicated his life again to Christ after asking God 24 years earlier to forgive him as he went through college with an 'open' mind. Both of them had grown up in a Christian home, but my Christian roots were thin and not deeply set. In fact, through my High School and College years, I had

become an analytical and scientifically-minded academic, and finally, a devout Atheist.

After I went into cardiac arrest with the announcement that my husband was now a “Jesus freak,” he, in the most gentle and humble tone imaginable, *invited* me to attend church with him. I threatened him with divorce if he tried to “shove that stuff down my throat.” He assured me that was not his intention, but hoped I would be supportive of him “as my wife” he said, in something so terribly important to him. I relented, but literally announced myself as a “non-believer” when I went into the building.

To make a several-month-long story short, it started to threaten me less and intrigue me more, and I bought some books. I spent a good amount of money on what I called my “Is there a God?” books. I read, asked my husband and my sister-in-law endless questions, and finally, that first Saturday morning in September 2001, I ran across something profound in one of the books I was reading and just shattered into a million pieces. It felt like Jesus Christ Himself had just swooped into my living room on a waterfall. I was hooked -- transformed. I was a new person and I knew it. I didn’t understand yet what had happened, but I knew I would never be the same. It was almost like someone had just plugged in the power-cord of my life.⁴⁹

I became ravenous for the company of Christian women and the Holy Bible. I wanted to know everything there was to know as fast as I could. At 48 years old, I had a lot of catching up to do, and I didn’t want to waste any time.

My Background

Ok, I need to share this with you: I’m not a formal Bible scholar: I’m a Mental Health Therapist. As I indicated in the last section, I’m a relatively young Christian, all things considered, and I’ve had no accredited training. Initially, I wondered about my qualifications to write a book of this nature. I prayed to the Lord and sought guidance from people I trust. After those discussions and some additional prayer and reflection, I’ve come to see my background in a different light. I’ve come to see it as a real asset.

You see, my ‘lack of qualifications’ should be an encouragement to you. Like me, you don’t have to have a Seminary education for the Bible to be a life-changing experience for you. You don’t have to go through formal training to understand what God is trying to tell you. Like me, you only have to have a love for the Lord and a passion to know Him better. I’m no different from you, and no smarter. Regardless of your educational background, God wrote the Bible so that everyone can understand it and be transformed by it. He loves us way too much to make it above our heads. It’s there for us. It’s there for you.

My Master’s Degree and state license allow me to practice mental health. My Biblical knowledge comes from weekly church sermons, endless sermons on radio and CD by masters such as Michael Youssef, Charles Stanley, Lon Solomon, Billy Graham, James Kennedy, Robert Schuler, R.C. Sproul, Alistair Begg, Ravi Zacharias, John Bevere, Jon Courson, and many, many others. In addition, I have attended many Bible studies developed by such notable teachers as Henry Blackaby/Claude King, Bill Gothard, Beth Moore and others. However, my knowledge is cultivated from my daily Bible reading, cross-referencing with other versions of the Bible, referring to different commentaries, and spending a little time in the Greek.

The real credit, however, goes to the Holy Spirit. He has given me an insatiable desire to learn Scripture and draw closer to the Lord, and He guides me every step of the way.

Thank you, Lord, for your love, for your coaching, and for rescuing me from bondage.

Visit me at <http://www.TherapyWithGod.com>.

FOOTNOTES

1 A ‘blessing’ in this context is referring to a fullness in Him and Him alone, a sense of great inner peace, contentment, and joy, and a closeness to Him. I discuss this at length in the section, “Treasure,” in Chapter XIV - Bible-Based Therapy.

2 I wholeheartedly acknowledge that God is fully capable of miraculously restoring anyone to full health, regardless of the illness, and I would always pray for that. These are Scriptural principles that would be applied if He responds, “No, I want you to learn to trust Me and lean on Me through this illness.”

3 This section assumes the mental health issues are environmental or a dysfunctional lifestyle, not pathological, or that the pathology has been stabilized through medication.

4 Ferentz, Lisa LCSW-C, DAPA. 2006. *Trauma Therapy Certification Program*. University of Maryland School of Social Work, Baltimore, MD

5 There’s also R&R – Rest and Relaxation. If you’re in that phase, sing praises to God, but be mentally prepared for the next phase of training or battle.

6 Pastor Dave Huffman. 2006. South Potomac Church, White Plains, MD

7 I know, your agape love isn’t pure or consistent, but if your intention is to agape love Him, He will work with you to perfect it.

8 Go to <http://bible.crosswalk.com>. Search around and you can get definitions of the Greek terms.

9 See the Appendix, “I’m a new Christian – Now what?” for suggestions as to how to go about that.

10 This was the standard operating procedure for the armies of that day.

11 From Courson, Jon. 2003. *Application Commentary, Old Testament, Vol I*, and many sermons I cannot now recall.

12 This is not to say we should just sit around and wait for God to solve our problem. We have responsibilities and are partnered with God. I deal with this in more detail in the chapter called “Victory in Trials.”

13 Southerland, Mary. 2006. *Coming Out of the Dark: A Christian woman’s struggle with depression*. Highly recommended.

14 There are too many references to this in Psalms to list them here.

15 Bill Gothard has a series called, “The Commands of Christ” you can purchase on-line at <http://store.iblp.org/products/COCS/>. You can review the list at <http://billgothard.com/bill/teaching/commandsofchrist/>

16 <http://bible.crosswalk.com> for Greek definitions of ‘lust.’

17 John Bevere wrote a book entitled, *The Bait of Satan* that dramatically illustrates this concept. I highly recommend it.

18 The term ‘saint’ means “holy one,” or “set-apart one.” Paul refers to believers as ‘saints.’ If you’re a born-again believer, you’re a saint!

19 Piper, John. 1986, 1996, 2003. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Sisters, Oregon. Multnomah Publishers, Inc. Great Book, highly recommended reading.

20 Internet article entitled *Valley churches celebrate Thanksgiving*. (accessed 10/14/07). http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4176/is_20061117/ai_n16863221.

21 See note 13 above.

22 Blackaby, Henry and King, Claude King. 2004. *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. Nashville, TN: Holman Publishers. Refer to this book for a full explanation of this.

23 Concept taken from *The Call of the Wild*, by Jack London.

24 See note 19 above.

25 Quoted from Angel Cartegena in a sermon at South Potomac Church, Waldorf, MD on April 23, 2006.

26 Calvert, Rick. ‘*Greek Thoughts*.’ (Accessed December 15, 2007) <http://www.studyilght.org/col/ds/>.

27 For more supporting information regarding this idea, check out the *Amplified Bible* (Matthew 5:3) and the *Bible Knowledge Commentary from the Dallas Theological Seminary* (Malachi 3:10).

28 Dye, Lee. May 10, 2006. *Laughter May Indeed Be the Best Medicine*. ABC News. (accessed July 14, 2006). Also see The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor website at <http://www.aath.org/>.

29 Examples include Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, and many others.

30 I am convinced that there are those who have been given an extra dose of faith as a gift from God for His purposes. The rest of us have to build ours over time.

31 Refer back to the section on “Thank Therapy” in Chapter 14, “Bible-based Therapy” if you need to.

32 From Stroebel, Lee. 1998. *The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

33 Pastor Rick Warren is the author of *A Purpose-Driven Life*.

34 Don’t do this if it causes more pain to the victim. Be honest about this and pray about it, but if it will hurt them for you to approach them, just confess it to God and ask His forgiveness.

35 Jesus, predicting Peter’s denial of Him during His trial, and telling him how he must grow and strengthen through it.

36 For instance, I memorized Psalm 40, John 1:1-14, Ephesians 3:14-21 and others

37 Pastor Mike Hilson, New Life Wesleyan Church, Waldorf, MD

38 See note 15 above.

39 See note 22 above.

40 Ibid., page 50.

41 Ibid., page 55.

42 I have seen Mr. Bakker on television several times since his release from prison. I certainly can’t judge his heart, but it is my belief that he has recommitted his life to Christ and has a wonderful teaching ministry on television now. I hear none of his prior messages of “prosperity” or see anything close to the pomp and

arrogance you see with so many of the “prosperity preachers” of today.

43 “Abba” is an extremely personal, intimate name of God as Father.

44 *The Prisoner in the Third Cell* by Gene Edwards does an amazing job of explaining this.

45 This was traditional in ancient Jewish culture at the direction of God. If a woman’s husband dies and he has no children, she is to marry her dead husband’s brother and their first son inherits her dead husband’s estate.

46 Leviticus 1:3, 1:10; 3:1, 3:6, 4:3, 4:23, 4:28, 4:32, 5:15, 5:18.

There are 33 specific instances in the Law. Go to <http://bible.crosswalk.com> and do a search on “without defect” to see them all.

47 A religious leader in Jesus’ day.

48 A single denarii is a full day’s wage.

49 Be aware that not everyone who has legitimately received the Holy Spirit has that “Road to Damascus” experience as I did. Billy Graham did not. It took him several months to find the “fire” he sought. If that’s you, you’re in good company. Immerse yourself in Scripture and it will happen.

50 Message received from the Holy Spirit, December 3, 2007

TESTIMONIALS



“This book reads exactly like what it is; a deeply meaningful conversation between you and someone who loves you and wants you to be healed. Sue McHenry gives you the spiritual medicine you need, straight from the Great Physician Himself. You will be comforted, confronted, and brought to a place of peace you thought did not exist on the opposite side of pain. This book truly can change your life.” Kristin Ballou

“This book is an excellent resource offering practical examples of how to deal with everyday struggles. What I love most is that it shows us how to utilize the Bible as our personal instruction manual and provides a step by step approach to making Jesus Christ the focal point of our life.” Mary Ellen Tancreto, Entrepreneur

“Sue McHenry does an excellent job in inviting the reader to come in, sit down, learn about and experience first hand how God is our Comforter that we long for and need in every area and situation in our lives. Sue guides the reader in exploring the Bible to uncover life’s changing truths to set the captives free to live the abundant life God intended for all of us.” K. Walston, Christian support group leader

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