

Christian Life

How to Be a Successful Christian

Part I: Introduction

It isn't easy to live as a Christian in the natural world -- whether you're a new Christian, returning to the flock, or even a long-time Christian.

- The world and Satan are against you.

⇒ *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against **the rulers of the darkness of this age**, against spiritual **hosts of wickedness** in the heavenly places.* Ephesians 6:12 (NKJ)

Sounds pretty scary -- but don't worry, **we have help!**

- The devil might be against us, but God is for us

⇒ *What then shall we say to these things? If **God is for us**, who can be against us?* Romans 8:31 (NKJ)

In fact, we have all the tools we need to successfully resist the Prince of Darkness.

Read Ephesians 6:13-18 and fill in the blanks below:

1. What should we put on? the whole armor of God
2. How should we stand? firmly to withstand the evil day
3. What should we buckle around our waist? the Truth
4. What should put on over our chest? the breastplate of righteousness
5. How should we shod our feet? with the Gospel of peace
6. What is our shield? faith, with which to quench all the fiery darts of the enemy
7. What should we put on our heads? the helmet of salvation
8. What weapon should we carry? the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God
9. What should we do as we stand firm? pray with all perseverance

Spiritual Sustenance

Just as we have to take care of our bodies in everyday life, so too do **we need to take good care of our soul.**

- Our soul is our inner self, the part of us that is eternal

⇒ *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**; and man became a living being.* Genesis 2:7 (NKJ)

How do we care for our soul? Just as the body needs food, water, and shelter, so too does our soul.

- What do we feed our soul? the Word of God

⇒ ***Fools**, because of their transgression and because of their iniquities, were **afflicted**. Their **soul** abhorred all manner of **food**, And they drew near to the gates of death.* Psalm 107:17-18 (NKJ)

⇒ ***This Book of the Law** shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate on it day and night**, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then **you will make your way prosperous**, and then you will have **good success**.* Josh 1:8 (NKJ)

- What is living water? the Spirit of God

⇒ *Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but **whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst**. The water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water **springing up into everlasting life**.* John 4:14 (NKJ)

- How do we exercise our soul? by living a Godly life – walking the talk

⇒ *But reject profane and old wives' fables, and **exercise yourself toward godliness**. For bodily exercise profits a little, but **godliness is profitable for all things**, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.* 1Timothy 4:8 (NKJ)

- Where do we find shelter? in the Lord
 - ⇒ *The LORD will be a shelter for His people, And the strength of the children of Israel.* Joel 3:17 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.* Psalm 61:3-4 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.* Psalm 91:1 (NIV)

- How can we protect our soul? pray and seek the Lord's presence
 - ⇒ *Your are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.* Psalm 32:7 (NIV)
 - ⇒ *Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men; protect me from men of violence, who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war every day. They make their tongues as sharp as serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips.* Psalm 140: 1-3 (NIV)

Fertile Soil

God and God's Word provide us all that our souls need to survive -- but we must be careful to cultivate a receptive heart or they will not take root within us. **Read** Jesus' parable of the sower in **Luke 8:4-8** and then Jesus' explanation in **Luke 8:11**

- What does the seed represent? the Word of God
- Why did some seed fall by the wayside? it didn't take root because it was trampled by worldly woes and ways
- Who takes the seed away? Satan
- Why did the seed that fell on rocks wither? shallow roots couldn't withstand severe weather (wind, drought, etc.) – so too for our souls
- What do the thorns stand for? the worries, riches and pleasures that choke God's Word, Spirit and Lordship
- What happened to the seed that fell on good soil? yielded a crop a hundred times more than what was sown

Success Requires Discipline and Perseverance

- The enemy will try to deceive and thwart us in every way imaginable.

⇒ *Beware of **false prophets**, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are **ravenous wolves**. You will know them by their fruits. Matthew 7:15-16 (NKJ)*
- We must discipline ourselves to avoid temptation

⇒ *Watch and pray, lest you enter into **temptation**. The spirit indeed is willing, but **the flesh is weak**. Matthew 26:41 (NKJ)*
- When we fall, we must seek and accept God's forgiveness and climb back up out of the darkness and into the light

⇒ *In Him we have **redemption** through His blood, the **forgiveness** of sins, in accordance with the riches of **God's grace** that he lavished on us with all **wisdom and understanding**. Ephesians 1:7-8 (NIV)*

⇒ *We also glory in tribulations, knowing that **tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope**. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:3-5 (NKJ)*

You Cannot Do it Alone

- Christianity is a team sport -- we are either on God's team or on Satan's team by default.
- To sit on the sidelines is an illusion, because it satisfies Satan's purpose simply to keep you out of the game

⇒ ***He who is not with Me is against Me**, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Luke 11:23 (NKJ)*

When you play on **God's Team**, you have ample assistance

- Jesus Christ is the Manager
- The Holy Spirit is your Coach
- And God's Word is your playbood

Just as any other team, you need to **work with the other members** of the team in order to **win the game**.

- The team that plays together stays together
 - ⇒ *Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy **by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind**. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind **let each esteem others better than himself**. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.* Philippians 2:1-4 (NKJ)
- The team that is plagued with dissension will come apart at the seams under strife and duress
 - ⇒ *Every kingdom **divided against itself** is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself **will not stand**.* Matthew 12:26 (NKJ)
- As an individual, you cannot win against Satan's team on your own
 - ⇒ ***Two are better off than one....** If one of them falls down, **the other can help him up**. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him..... Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone".* Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (GN)
 - ⇒ *"And let us consider how we may **spur one another** on toward love and good deeds. **Let us not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage one another** -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)*

- Nor can a **team** of human beings overcome Satan without God's help
⇒ The entire Old Testament is testimony of humanity's inability to adhere to God's Law even with divine guidance.

Read Romans 8:3-6

- Why was the Law not enough to save humanity? The weakness of the flesh and our lack of self-control
- What was God's solution? He sacrificed His Son Jesus to pay the blood penalty for humanity's sinfulness

Read John 16:7-11

- What other benefit for humanity resulted from Jesus' death? It opened the door for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and indwell us
- It is through the Holy Spirit that we receive the strength, guidance and assistance we need
⇒ *But the **Helper**, the **Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, He will **teach you all things**, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. John 14:27 (NKJ)*

Part II: From Separation to Salvation

*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer,
I have overcome the world.* John 16:33 (NKJ)

The Problem of Sin

After God created the world, He placed man in the **Garden of Eden**.

Read Genesis 2:8-9

- The Garden of Eden was a perfect world for His new creation.

Among all the trees in the Garden, **which two were singled out** in particular:

1. The Tree of Life

⇒ What does this “tree” represent? eternal life

2. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

⇒ What does this “tree” represent? a world where good and evil both exist

Read Genesis 2:16-17

- What did God say about the **Tree of Life**? Nothing, therefore it was okay to eat
⇒ The implication is that we were created to be eternal
- What did God say about the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**? don't eat of it or you shall surely die
⇒ The implication is that we were **not** created to know evil and death
- Why, then, would God place such **temptation** in the Garden? He gave us free will so that we would love Him by choice, not as robots; and to test our obedience
⇒ The implication is that God created us to have a **choice** between good and evil, between God and Satan

Read Genesis 3:4-5

- What was the serpent's **bait** to lure Eve into **disobedience**? The selfish desire to become like God
⇒ Adam & Eve freely chose to listen to Satan instead of God.

Read 3:14-17

What were God's punishments for:

v14-15 - Satan: cursed; eat dust, crawl on belly (confined to the darkness of the world); enmity (bitterness, hostility); death by woman's seed (i.e. Jesus Christ)

v16 - woman: multiply her sorrows (more emotional); painful child-bearing (must have once been painless); subservience to husband (a curse, not the original plan)

v17 - man: painful, hard toil/work; many problems (thorns & thistles); physical death (dust to dust);

What are the **implications**?

- It was **Satan's** rebellion and **man's** disobedience that brought sin into this world.
- The **consequences** of this "**original sin**" is that we were kicked out of the garden into a world of pain, suffering & death
- As Adam & Eve's descendants, we are all born into a world of sin
⇒ *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Romans 3:23 (NKJ)
- The "wages" of such sin is death (of soul, eternal) (Romans 6:23)
- The **only way** out of this world and back into the garden is through God's grace and Jesus' sacrificial death
⇒ *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.* Romans 5:19 (NKJ)

- It cannot be done through our own efforts -- only by choosing God over Satan to redress the original sin.
⇒ [God] has saved us... *not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus.* 2Timothy 1:9
- All we have to do to be saved is accept God's **gracious gift**.
- However, Satan is indeed the **Prince of this World** and continues to lure us away from God with all kinds of deceptions and distractions
⇒ *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.* Ephesians 2:1-2 (NKJ)

The Consequences of Separation

One of the most painful and burdensome consequence of being cast out of the garden is our **separation from God**.

- The consequences of this **separation** are that we cannot directly hear God's voice nor see His presence.
⇒ *Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."* Exodus 20:19 (NKJ)
- In addition, **Satan** has built a wall **between us and God** to further ensure our separation.
⇒ *For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.* Ephesians 2:14 (NKJ)
- Having first chosen to listen to Satan over God, **in order to be redeemed** from this world **we must now** make a conscious decision for God.
⇒ *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.* Joel 3:14 (NKJ)

- By default, **if we do not make this choice**, the only voice we'll hear is that of Satan and the “noise” of this world.
⇒ *O my God, my soul is cast down within me; Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar. Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me. The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me.* Psalm 42:6-8 (NKJ)
- We must actively initiate contact with God through prayer.
⇒ *O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come. Iniquities prevail against me; As for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them.* Psalm 65:2-3 (NKJ)
- God also “**spoke**” to us through His prophets who recorded **God’s Word** for future reference. But it is not enough just to read God’s Word, we must write the words onto the tablets of our hearts
⇒ *Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!* Psalm 119:11 (NKJ)
- In addition, we must also meditate on God’s Word so that the Holy Spirit will bring insight and understanding directly to us.
⇒ *I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word.* Psalm 119:147-148 (NKJ)
⇒ *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.* John 14:15-17 (NKJ)
- Be careful to provide fertile soil for the Word, or else it will not take root in your heart.
⇒ *When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.* Mark 4:15 (NKJ)

The Dilemma of Free Will

All of God's Children were **created** in His image

- This means that we **possess** the characteristics of God, including **free will**.

⇒ *And if you offer a... **peace offering to the LORD**, you shall offer it of your own **free will**.* Leviticus 19:5 (NKJ)

- **Free will** is both the source and the solution to the dilemmas of the flesh.

⇒ *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that **I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing**; therefore **choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live.* Deuteronomy 30:19 (NKJ)

- God has the power to **overcome Satan**, but God will not violate our **free will**.

⇒ *Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve,* Joshua 24:15 (NKJ)

But the question arises, **how do we go about choosing God?**

- The first way is by being **obedient** to God's Word.

⇒ *Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the **blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you today**; and the **curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God**.* Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (NKJ)

⇒ *If you love Me, keep My commandments.* John 14:15 (NKJ)

- We must also **earnestly seek** to do God's Will.

⇒ *Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your Spirit is good. **Lead me in the land of uprightness.*** Psalm 143:10 (NKJ)

⇒ *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Matthew 6:10 (NKJ)

God's Grace

It is only by **God's grace** that we are saved.

⇒ For **by grace you have been saved through faith.** Ephesians 2:8 (NKJ)

But, what exactly is **grace**?

Justice is when we get what we deserve

Mercy is when we **don't** get what we deserve

Grace is when we get what we **don't** deserve

- God solved the **problem of sin** and the **dilemma of free will** by offering His Son as an atoning **sacrifice** for all our sins
- Jesus paid the penalty for sin that we all owe, thereby canceling out the debt .

⇒ *But this Man, after **He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God.* Hebrews 10:12 (NKJ)

Grace is a **gift of God**.

⇒ *Not of yourselves; it is the **gift of God**.* Ephesians 2:8 (NKJ)

- However, it is still our choice to **accept** this precious **gift of life**.

Our **acceptance** is contingent upon three steps:

1. **Admit**_____ that you are a **sinner**.

⇒ *For **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.* Romans 3:23 (NKJ)

2. **Believe**_____ that Jesus Christ can **save you**.

⇒ *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who **believe in His name**:* John 1:12 (NKJ)

3. **Confess**_____ that Jesus Christ is **Lord of your life**.

⇒ *If you **confess with your mouth** the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, **you will be saved**.* Romans 10:9 (NKJ)

Faith vs. Works

The Bible is clear that we are **saved by faith, not by works** (i.e. what we do).

⇒ *Though now you do not see Him, yet **believing**, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **receiving the end of your faith; the salvation of your souls.*** 1Peter 1:8-9 (NKJ)

⇒ *But when the **kindness and the love of God our Savior** toward man appeared, **not by works of righteousness** which we have done, but **according to His mercy He saved us**, through the washing of **regeneration and renewing** of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that **having been justified by His grace** we should become heirs according to the **hope of eternal life.*** Titus 3:4-7 (NKJ)

Read James 2:14-26:

- However, as James tells us **faith without works** is dead
- If we have **faith**, then our **works** will automatically reveal our faith.
- Our **works** represent the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
⇒ *For you were once darkness, but **now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light** (for the **fruit of the Spirit** is in all **goodness, righteousness, and truth**).* Ephesians 5:8-9 (NKJ)
- It is **not one or the other**, but rather that **faith**, if it is alive leads to works of the **Spirit**.

How Do We Know We Are Saved?

The **initial salvation experience** need not take place in a single, all-inclusive moment of time, but may occur **gradually over time**.

- It is not how dramatic the **conversion**, but rather how real it is that counts!

However, even after **Admitting, Believing and Confessing**, many people wonder if they have somehow wandered out of the light and have **lost their salvation**.

- **Can we lose our salvation?** X Yes X No (There is a lot of disagreement among theologians on this subject. We believe that no one can “lose” their salvation and, therefore, no one needs to worry about it. However, we believe that one can reject Christ, call evil good and good evil, thereby blaspheming the Holy Spirit which is the unpardonable sin (see Matthew 12:24-37)
 - ⇒ *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will **depart** from the **faith**, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.* 1Timothy 4:1
 - ⇒ *Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the **falling away** comes first.* 2Thessalonians 2:3
 - ⇒ *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, **if they fall away**, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.* Hebrews 6:4-6

What do we do if we wander off the path?

- Repent and **ask** for forgiveness
- Repeat the ABC's
 - ⇒ *Therefore we **do not lose heart**. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the **inward man is being renewed day by day**.* 2Corinthians 4:16 (NKJ)

Here is a checklist of **salvation indicators**:

1. There is the witness of the **Spirit** in your **heart**.
 - ⇒ *Those who obey His commands **live in Him, and He in them**. And this is how we know that He lives in us: we know it by the **Spirit He gave us**.* 1John 3:24 (NIV)
 - ⇒ *The **Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit** that we are **God's children**.* Romans 8:16 (NIV)
2. There is the confirmation of the **Word of God**.
 - ⇒ *I write these things to **you who believe** in the name of the **Son of God** so that you may **know that you have eternal life**.* 1John 5:13 (NIV)

3. There is the love for **others**.

⇒ *We know that we have **passed from life to death** because **we love our brothers**.*
1John 3:14 (NIV)

4. There is the willingness to **forsake sin**.

⇒ *He who **conceals his sins does not prosper**, but whoever **confesses and renounces them finds mercy**.* Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

⇒ *Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a **new creation**; the old has gone, the **new has come!*** 2Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

5. There is the joy of **the Spirit**.

⇒ *Restore to me the **joy of Your salvation**.* Psalm 51:12 (NKJ)

⇒ *I have told you this so that **My joy may be in you** and that **your joy may be complete**.* John 15:11 (NIV)

6. There is the obedience to **God's commands**.

⇒ *He who says, "I know Him," and **does not keep His commandments**, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* 1John 2:4 (NKJ)

⇒ *For this is the **love of God**, that we **keep His commandments**. And His commandments are **not burdensome**. For whatever is **born of God overcomes the world**. And this is the **victory** that has overcome the world; our **faith**.* 1John 5:3-4 (NKJ)

The Promise of Salvation

What exactly does salvation mean?

• Salvation means the deliverance from the penalty of sin.

⇒ *And it shall come to pass That **whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved**. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be **deliverance**, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.* Joel 2:32 (NKJ)

⇒ *As it is **appointed for men to die once... so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many**. To those who eagerly wait for Him **He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation**.* Hebrews 9:27-28 (NKJ)

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- Salvation means beginning a new life with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.
 - ⇒ ***You put off... the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you **put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*** Ephesians 4:22-24 (NKJ)

- Salvation means becoming justified with God.
 - ⇒ *He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge **My righteous Servant shall justify many**, For He shall bear their iniquities.* Isaiah 53:11
 - ⇒ *Therefore, as through one man's offense **judgment came to all men**, resulting in **condemnation**, even so through one Man's righteous act the **free gift came to all men**, resulting in **justification of life.*** Romans 5:18 (NKJ)

- Salvation means reestablishing a personal relationship with God.
 - ⇒ *For **you are the temple of the living God.** As God has said: "**I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.**"* 2Corinthians 6:17 (NKJ)

- Salvation means regaining eternal life.
 - ⇒ *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*** John 3:16 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *For the **promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*** Acts 2:39 (NKJ)

Part III: From Salvation to Sanctification

- When you are saved, Christ becomes alive within you.
⇒ *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be **dead** indeed to sin, but **alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord**. Romans 6:11 (NKJ)*
- Salvation, however, does **not** mean that you are spiritually mature
⇒ *That the body of Christ be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and **become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of **the fullness of Christ**. Ephesians 4:13 (NIV)*
- Maturity comes through the process of sanctification
⇒ *Now may the God of peace Himself **sanctify you completely**; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved **blameless** at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJ)*
- Salvation means that we accept God's gift of grace.
- Sanctification means that the regenerated soul gives up all rights to self interests and identifies completely with Christ.
⇒ *So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to **build you up and give you an inheritance** among all those who are **sanctified**. Acts 20:32 (NKJ)*

Growing in Christ

How, then, do we grow in Christ and become sanctified?

1. Read and study God's Word.
 - The Bible is your guidebook in your journey of faith.
 - It contains everything you need to know.
 - The Bible is literally God's written Word inspired by the Holy Spirit

⇒ *For prophecy never came by the will of man, but **holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*** 2Peter 1:21 (NKJ)

⇒ *All Scripture is given **by inspiration of God.*** 2Timothy 3:16 (NKJ)

- Jesus Himself _____ endorsed _____ the divine origin of all three sections of the Old Testament

⇒ *Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, **that all things must be fulfilled** which were written in the **Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.**"* Luke 24:44 (NKJ)

- God's Word is _____ infallible _____ -- that is, it **will achieve** God's intended purposes.

⇒ *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; **It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*** Isaiah 55:11 (NKJ)

- God's Word is _____ inerrant _____ -- that is, what the Bible teaches on any subject is **true.**

⇒ *We also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it **not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,** which also effectively works in you who believe.* 1Thessalonians 2:13 (NKJ)

- God's Word is _____ unified _____ -- that is, the 66 books written over a period of about 1,500 years holds together as the full story of God's redemptive plan

⇒ *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand,** saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."* Galatians 3:8 (NKJ)

⇒ *Do not think that I came to destroy the **Law or the Prophets.** I did not come to destroy but to **fulfill.*** Matthew 5:17 (NKJ)

Action Steps

- Commit to reading the Bible _____ every day _____
- Establish a systematic plan to read the _____ entire _____ Bible.

- Attend Bible study classes to expand your understanding.
- Study the Bible using various study guides.
- Meditate on the Word so that the Holy Spirit can bring personal revelation to you.

⇒ *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate on it day and night**, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* Joshua 1:8 (NKJ)

2. Spend time with God through prayer and meditation (not Eastern-type meditation, but rather contemplation of the Word)

- Prayer is when you talk to God.
- Meditation is when you listen to God.

⇒ *Pray without ceasing.* 1Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJ)

⇒ *Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.* Psalm 4:4 (NKJ)

- Prayer is vital to maintain a healthy relationship with God and your **prayer life** should contain the following elements:

a) Worship -- a sense of awe and reverence is the natural response to the presence of God.

⇒ *"All flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD.*
Isaiah 66:23 (NKJ)

b) Confession -- every believer needs the cleansing that comes from acknowledging our sinfulness.

⇒ *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1John 1:9 (NKJ)

c) Adoration -- we need to express our **love for God**.

⇒ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.* Deuteronomy 6:5 (NKJ)

d) Praise -- whereas worship appreciates who God is, praise **pays tribute to what God does**.

⇒ *Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness!* Psalm 150:2

e) Thanksgiving -- having received **God's forgiving grace** and **sustaining strength**, Christians owe Him deep gratefulness **at all times**.

⇒ *In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* 1Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJ)

f) Intercession -- "God first, others second, self last"

⇒ *I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.* 1Timothy 2:1 (NKJ)

g) Requests -- Jesus **encourages** us to take our requests to God **in His name** to receive divine help for our daily needs.

⇒ *Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.* John 16:23 (NKJ)

- **Asking in Jesus' name** means that what we ask for must **conform to the Will and Nature of God**.

⇒ *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* 1John 5:14 (NKJ)

- Requests are **not always answered** immediately nor in the way we expect.

3. Attend church regularly

- The word “church” means the ”called out” ones and the New Testament refers to it as the Body of Christ.

⇒ *For by **one Spirit** we were all **baptized into one body**. 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJ)*

⇒ *Now you are the **body of Christ**, and **members individually**. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NKJ)*

- The Church is a divine institution with **Christ as the head**.

⇒ *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd the church of God** which **He purchased with His own blood**. Acts 20:28 (NKJ)*

- Church membership and attendance **does not** impart salvation but it helps you to hold on to it.

Benefits of Church Membership:

- Spiritual Direction -- we can easily lose our way without instruction, encouragement and guidance.

- Accountability -- it is too easy for us to rationalize away our own sinful behavior.

- Responsibility -- we are exhorted by Christ to help care for the flock.

- Christian Fellowship -- the Christian experience is not just a relationship with God but also a relationship with God’s Family.

- Corporate Worship -- as we worship God together, we are all lifted up together by God.

⇒ *For where **two or three are gathered together in My name**, I am there in the midst of them. Matthew 18:20 (NKJ)*

⇒ ***Let us not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage one another** -- and all the more as you see the day approaching. Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)*

4. Water Baptism

Article Ten of the Declaration of Faith of the Church of God states:

“We believe.... in **water baptism by immersion**, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.”

- Water baptism was **practiced in New Testament times** as an outward symbol of an inward spiritual experience.
- Today water baptism represents a **public** testimony of the believer’s identification with Christ.
- Water baptism is more than just an outward sign, it also brings real spiritual benefits into the heart of the believer.

The scriptural basis for water baptism is stated in the Great Commission:

⇒ “*Therefore **go and make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

5. Spirit Baptism

Articles eight and nine of the Declaration of Faith of the Church of God states;

“We believe... in the **baptism with the Holy Ghost** subsequent to a clean heart [and] in **speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance** and that it is the **initial evidence** of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”

⇒ *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*** Matthew 3:11 (NKJ)

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is **not a requirement** for salvation or for sanctification.

⇒ Rather, it is one of the **gifts of the Spirit**, part of the group of gifts that include prophecy, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and the interpretation of tongues (see 1Corinthians 12:8-11)

- However, the baptism of the Holy Spirit **is a requirement** for those who are to be anointed with **power** for _____ service _____ and _____ witnessing _____ for the Lord.
 - ⇒ *He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait for the Promise of the Father**, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**" Acts 1:5 (NKJ)*
 - ⇒ *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.** Acts 2:4 (NKJ)*
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not a one-time occurrence.
 - ⇒ *While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.** And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.** Acts 10:44-45 (NKJ)*
 - ⇒ *And when Paul had **laid hands on them**, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and **they spoke with tongues and prophesied.** Acts 19:6 (NKJ)*
- A sign of the end-times is when the Holy Spirit falls upon all be-
lievers.
 - ⇒ *But this is what was spoken by the **prophet Joel**: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will **pour out of My Spirit on all flesh**; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see vi-
sions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants **I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.** Acts 2:16-18 (NKJ)*

6. Becoming Spirit-Filled

- There are **several words** that are used to **describe the Holy Spirit baptism**:
 outpouring , infilling , falling upon , and
 enduing

- According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia (1988)*, there are over
 100 million Christians around the world who testify to being
 Spirit-filled. (imagine what that number must be now!)

- Most non-Pentecostal churches teach that you are Spirit-filled when you are
 saved or born-again
 ⇒ *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**"* John 3:5-7 (NKJ)

- However, Scripture clearly shows that there is a difference between having the Spirit come alive within you and being baptised with the Spirit.
 ⇒ ***But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*** Acts 1:8 (NKJ)
 - The disciples were already born again , so here Jesus is talking about an additional experience.

- What are the **Biblical prerequisites to being filled with the Spirit**?
 1. Understand your need.
 - Unless you are convinced of the need, there will be no desire
 - You must seek to be filled with the Spirit.
 - The need comes from a desire to be of greater service to God, although the resultant blessings are bountiful.

2. Seek the Lord with a pure heart

- Be sure that everything is right between you and God and between you and others.

⇒ Forgive everyone against whom you harbor anger and confess all your sins to God.

- Ask God to cleanse you and set you apart for His holy service and purpose.

3. Praise the Lord with joyful expectation.

- The 120 believers in Acts stayed and prayed together until the Spirit came.

⇒ *And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Luke 24:52-53 (NKJ)*

⇒ *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. Acts 1:14 (NKJ)*

4. Do not resist and do not be afraid

- Just submit and surrender

- The Holy Spirit can only fill a fully yielded vessel.

5. Pray through until you are filled.

- Be both persistent and patient

- Do not become discouraged

- You are still saved & useful regardless of whether you become Spirit-filled.

⇒ It is a gift, not an obligation

7. Following Jesus

- Jesus asks a lot more of us than just to be saved -- what He really wants is for each Christian to become His disciple
 - ⇒ *If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.* John 12:26 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.* Luke 9:23 (NKJ)
- This means that we are not only to abide by God's commandments but we are also to be active in building up the Body of Christ
 - ⇒ *For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.* Romans 14:18-19 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* Colossians 3:23-24 (NKJ)

9. Stepping Out in Faith

- The ultimate test of your faith comes when you have to step out into the world with nothing to guide you but God's invisible Spirit.
 - ⇒ *So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"* Matthew 14:29-31 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* Hebrews 11:1 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.* Hebrews 11:27 (NKJ)

- In addition to **faith**, we also have the promises of God as given to us in His Holy Word.
⇒ *For the **promise** is to you and to your children, and to **all** who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:39 (NKJ)*
- But **God's promises** are a two-edged sword, holding both curses as well as blessings.
⇒ *Therefore it shall come to pass, that as **all the good things** have come upon you **which the LORD your God promised you**, so the LORD will bring upon you all **harmful things**, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. Joshua 23:15 (NKJ)*

10. Trusting God

- In order to have a **personal, enduring** relationship with God, it is necessary to **trust God**.
⇒ *The LORD is my **rock** and my **fortress** and my **deliverer**; My God, my **strength, in whom I will trust**; My **shield** and the horn of my **salvation**, my **stronghold**. Psalm 18:3 (NKJ)*
- For Christians, trusting God means accepting God's purposes as the foundation of our lives.
⇒ *God... has **saved us and called us** with a holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to His own purpose and grace** which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. 2Timothy 1:8-9 (NKJ)*
- Putting our **trust in God** does not mean that we will **avoid** suffering -- instead, it means that **we must maintain** our faith in God's promises even when times are tough.
⇒ *For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have **believed** and am persuaded that **He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day**. 2Timothy 1:12 (NKJ)*

- Putting our **trust in God means** we must forego worldly **riches** in order to attain eternal **treasure** in Heaven.

⇒ *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in **uncertain riches** but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them **do good**, that they be rich in good works, ready to **give**, willing to **share**, storing up for themselves a **good foundation** for the time to come, that they may **lay hold on eternal life**. 1Timothy 6:17-19 (NKJ)*

Part III: Establishing a Godly Lifestyle

*For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that **we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God.** 2Corinthians 1:12 (NKJ)*

- Christians will **impact the world** only to the degree that they live what they believe
- Holiness is **not an option** for the growing Christian, it is a prerequisite for service in the Kingdom of God.
- **Holiness** is an attitude of the heart that expresses itself in Godly living.

In order to establish such a **godly lifestyle**, you must:

1. Cultivate a heart for God.
2. Overcome temptation in your life.
3. Establish patterns of holy living.

Cultivating a Heart for God

- The word “heart” is used throughout Scripture to portray the inner self, including the mind, emotions & will
- The Holy Spirit wishes to fill our hearts with His Holy presence as God’s liaison with humanity.
- As the heart is filled with God, it overflows into words, actions and Godly behavior.
- In order to cultivate a godly heart, you must”
 - a) Open up your entire life to God.
 - b) Confess all known sin.
 - c) Desire the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Open Up to God

- God has never been satisfied with worship and service that **doesn't** come from the heart
⇒ *The Lord says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but **their hearts are far from me**. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."* Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

- God has **commanded** that His people **love Him** with their hearts, minds, souls and might
⇒ *You shall **love the LORD** your God with all your **heart**, with all your **soul**, and with all your **strength**.* Deuteronomy 6:5 (NKJ)
⇒ *Jesus said to him, " 'You shall **love the LORD** your God with all your **heart**, with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**.' "* Matthew 22:37 (NKJ)

- In order to do so, believers must allow the Spirit of God to **penetrate** every area of their inner lives.
⇒ *We have spoken openly to you, our **heart is wide open**. You are not restricted by us, but you are **restricted by your own affections**. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.* 2Corinthians 6:11-13 (NKJ)

Confess All Known Sin

- Once you open have **opened** up the hidden places of your heart to God, the Holy Spirit will convict you of **all your sins**.
⇒ *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the **Helper** will not come to you; but if I depart, **I will send Him to you**. And when He has come, **He will convict the world of sin**, and of righteousness, and of judgment.* John 16:9 (NKJ)

- These are not sins in general, but **each** of your sins **confessed specifically**
⇒ *If we **confess our sins**, He is faithful and just to **forgive us** our sins and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.* 1John 1:9 (NKJ)

- The power of the almighty God is activated in humble hearts that are sensitive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

⇒ *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, **With him who has a contrite and humble spirit**, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the **contrite ones**. Isaiah 57:16 (NKJ)*

Desire the Fullness of the Holy Spirit

- Throughout the Old Testament, believers are **exhorted** to seek God

⇒ *As the deer pants for the water brooks, **So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.** Psalm 42:1-2 (NKJ)*

- What was **experienced** only periodically by people of God in the Old Testament is now a permanent gift to **all believers**.

⇒ *Whoever drinks of the **water** that I shall give him will **never thirst**. But the water that I shall give him will become in him **a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life**. John 4:14 (NKJ)*

- The Holy Spirit not only **fills people's hearts** but also overflows into the **lives of others**.

⇒ *He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, **out of his heart** will flow **rivers of living water**. John 7:38 (NKJ)*

Overcoming Temptation

- As a new or growing Christian, you are **not necessarily** shielded from temptation -- in fact, you might become **more of a target** of Satan's schemes

⇒ *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is **common** to man. 1Corinthians 10:13a (NKJ)*

- God also uses temptation to test how strong our **inner convictions** are and to help us grow **in strength**.

⇒ *God is **faithful**, who will not allow you to be tempted **beyond** what you are **able**, but with the temptation will also make **the way of escape**, that you may be able to bear it. 1Corinthians 10:13b (NKJ)*

- God doesn't tempt us directly Himself but controls the level of temptation we are allowed to face.

⇒ *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for **God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by **his own desires** and enticed.*
James 1:13-14 (NKJ)

- To be tempted is not in itself sinful -- it is our **response** to the temptation that determines whether we are **passing the test or not**.

⇒ *Blessed is the man who **endures temptation**; for when he has been approved, he will receive the **crown of life** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* James 1:12 (NKJ)

How to Overcome Temptation

1. Admit your weaknesses.

- The goal is not to avoid the struggle with temptation, but rather to overcome temptation.
- Heroes are not those who don't have weaknesses but rather those who allow God to perfect them through their weaknesses.

⇒ *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **My strength is made perfect in weakness.**"* 2Corinthians 12:9 (NKJ)

⇒ *Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who **through faith subdued kingdoms**, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, **out of weakness were made strong**, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.* Hebrews 11:32-34 (NKJ)

- If you don't know your weaknesses, you will be susceptible to surprise attacks from Satan and the world.
- When Christians get too confident and proud they rely on their own talents and abilities and leave God out of their lives.

⇒ *Therefore let him who **thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*** 1Corinthians 10:12 (NKJ)

2. Use God's resources

- The power of God is unleashed when you humbly depend on Him for strength in the midst of your human trials.
⇒ *My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* Psalm 73:26 (NKJ)
⇒ *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* James 4:8 (NKJ)
- The key to overcoming temptation is to find strength in the Lord
⇒ *Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* Ephesians 6:10-11 (NKJ) -- see page 1
- Use God's Word to silence the Great Tempter and to shed light on the path ahead.
⇒ *Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4 (NKJ)*

3. Guard your thoughts

- Sin comes from the heart
⇒ *Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* Matthew 15:19 (NKJ)
- If sinful thoughts or desires are not dealt with immediately, they may lead to sinful behavior.
- The way to overcome such temptations is to learn how to control & discipline your thoughts.
⇒ *...casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.* 2Corinthians 10:5 (NKJ)

- By dealing ruthlessly with sin at the thought level, you are more likely to refrain from sinful actions.
- At the first indication of a tempting thought, quote Scripture or sing a hymn that keeps you focused on the things above, not the darkness below.
 - ⇒ *Set your mind on **things above**, not on things on the earth.* Colossians 3:2 (NKJ)
 - ⇒ *Whatever things are **true**, whatever things are **noble**, whatever things are **just**, whatever things are **pure**, whatever things are **lovely**, whatever things are of **good report**, if there is any **virtue** and if there is anything **praiseworthy**; **meditate on these things**.* Philippians 4:8 (NKJ)

Establish Patterns of Holy Living

In order to establish patterns of holy living, you must

1. Maintain Biblical standards.
2. Discipline all areas of your life.
3. Be accountable to other godly Christians.

Maintain Biblical Standards

- In order to grow as a Christian, your lifestyle must be consistent with Biblical principles of holiness.
 - ⇒ *As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "**Be holy, for I am holy.**"* 1Peter 1:15 (NKJ)
- The standard of holiness must be God's standard of perfect holiness found only in His Word.
 - ⇒ *You shall not add to the **word** which I command you, nor take from it, that you may **keep the commandments of the LORD your God** which I command you* Deuteronomy 4:3 (NKJ)

Discipline All Areas of Your Life

- Godly actions and deeds spring from a pure heart and a disciplined lifestyle.
- Patterns of holiness do not come without hard work and discipline
⇒ *Giving all **diligence**, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge to knowledge **self-control**, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance **godliness**.* 2Peter 1:5-6 (NKJ)
⇒ ***Exercise yourself toward godliness.** For bodily exercise profits a little, but **godliness is profitable for all things**, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.* 1Timothy 4:8 (NKJ)
- Not only is discipline difficult, it is often painful.
⇒ *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but **painful**; nevertheless, **afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it.* Hebrews 12:11 (NKJ)
- This discipline must extend into **all areas of your life**, including home, work, school, social, etc.

Be Accountable to Other Godly Christians

- Too many Christians tend to be Lone Rangers
- Fellowship with other Christians is not enough -- you must make yourself accountable on a deep level to at least one other godly Christian outside your immediate family.
- These individuals should be people with whom you can confess even the most personal sins and faults.
⇒ ***Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*** James 5:16 (NKJ)
- And above all, persevere
⇒ *We also glory in tribulations, knowing that **tribulation produces perseverance**; and perseverance, **character**; and character, **hope**. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.* Romans 5:3-5 (NKJ)