

SEEKING GOD



WHAT IS ORGANIC FAITH?

Quite simply, organic faith is the phrase that God gave me to describe His ultimate desire for me. It is a concept that I can hold onto when everything else seems to fail. I believe organic faith describes the type of relationship He wants to have with all men. In form, it differs from person to person. But ultimately God, the creator of the universe and the only One worthy of praise, is jealous for our lives. He seeks to hold our hearts in His trustworthy hands. God calls each person to an intimate, one-on-one relationship with Him.

Relationships are as unique as snowflakes. Each one differs, yet many of the ingredients are the same. Consider how two children interact differently with the same parents. Recall close friends in your life; each one holds a special place. Thus, it is impossible to come up with a concrete definition for organic faith. Discovering the meaning is part of the adventure. You must find it out for yourself. But here is what the Lord has shown me...

WHY IS ORGANIC BETTER?

Consider organic fruits and vegetables, produce grown without the use of fertilizers and other chemicals. Organic

produce costs more and usually looks less appealing. When it comes down to sales at the cash register, the majority of consumers are like me. They pick produce based on appearance and price. Most people are way too busy to give produce a second thought. However, there is a small minority of consumers that prefer organic produce. These consumers would rather pay more for the real thing. They are concerned about the potential health affects caused by the chemical additives.

Just like organic fruit is free from additives and impurities, we should seek a true, natural relationship with God through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Using the organic produce metaphor, something becomes an additive or impurity when Jesus is not the center. Every part of life must be lived to God's glory to accomplish His purpose in His power. Jesus, the precious cornerstone, must be the foundation for our lives. Any other foundation will not produce good fruit. It will eventually be thrown into the fire on judgment day. Impurities can include so many different things, even those things that have an outward appearance of righteousness.

**From Christian service to relationships to jobs,
everything is meaningless
without Christ.**

**We live in a world of messed up priorities
resulting in millions of
disillusioned people,
including many in the Church.**

Consider the two different types of consumers. One buys on price, convenience and appearance. The other buys based on the purity of the product. When it comes to God, what are you looking for? Is your relationship with God authentic? Are you willing to pay extra for the real thing?

Organic produce requires more care to protect and hard work to grow. In the same way, a living walk with God takes perseverance. You must be willing to press through the weeds to enjoy the light of God's revelation and joy. Without the use of chemicals, produce can be an easy target for pests and bacteria. Thus, an organic lifestyle stresses God's preeminence in supplying our every need and protecting us from evil.

Oddly, organic produce may look worse on the outside. No waxes are used to make the produce sparkle. The outer covering may show signs of infestation or bruising. Yet the inside where no pest has been remains pure because no chemicals are used on organic produce. The Christian life reflects this concept. People tend to judge others based on what they see. But God judges the inside, the heart. God loves a rowdy street biker, a drug addict or a homeless person just as much as a preacher, a businessman or a housewife.

The word 'organic' implies that something is alive not dead. Is your walk with God alive or rotting on the vine? You may think, 'Well, what does it mean to be alive? I go to church. I believe in God.' Good, that's a start. But there's much more to knowing God. Let me rephrase the question. Do you know God by name? If you honestly answer, 'No', you are missing out on the very purpose of life.

WHY IS FAITH SUCH A BIG DEAL?

The second part of God's message to me focused on faith. Fear, pride, and doubt keep Christians from experiencing life to the fullest. God's antidote is faith. According to Hebrews 11:6, without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith in God is the one common characteristic of the patriarchs, the prophets, the judges and all the godly men and women of the Bible. As explained in Hebrews, our predecessors did remarkable things because they had faith. Noah built the ark even though the earth had never experienced rain. Abraham

raised the knife against his son, Isaac, out of obedience to God. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt; he stood against the mighty Pharaoh.

**Faith requires us to accept the unbelievable
in the face of all logic
and reason;
we take God at His word.**

Faith is being certain of what we do not see. People of faith do not put any confidence in things of this world. Instead, they look forward to a better country, a heavenly kingdom. Faithful men and women do not look back out of fear; instead, they dream about the unveiled hope before them.

A perfect picture of faith and doubt can be seen in the story of Peter walking on water. After spending time alone with the Father in prayer, Jesus joined the disciples out on the water. He could have done what most people would have done and obtained a boat to rendezvous with His disciples. But Jesus wanted to make a statement. He performed a miracle by walking on the surface of the water toward the disciples' boat. Amazingly, Peter asked Jesus for permission to walk out to meet Him on the water. What led Peter to make such a request? Was he trying to show off in front of the other disciples? Or did he see something special going on that he wanted to be a part of? I tend to think Peter acted impulsively; he wanted to personally experience the miraculous in his own life. For just a minute, Peter got it. Filled with faith, he stepped out of the boat and walked on water. While all the other disciples stood in the boat with their mouths wide open in shock, Peter dared the impossible to be with Jesus. Why could Peter walk on the water? Did it have anything to do with his abilities? No, Peter walked on water by the power of God. Yet, when the waters became rough, doubt crept into Peter's

mind. He took his eyes off Jesus, doubted God's power and began to sink. In desperation, Peter called out for Jesus to save him. Jesus caught Peter and scolded him for doubting.

Although this episode has led people to criticize Peter, I believe that Peter showed more grit than the other disciples. At least Peter got out of the boat; he left the safety of the boat (the familiar) for the uncertainty of walking by faith. Had Peter kept his faith in the mighty hand of God and ignored the waves around him, he could have walked directly to Jesus without fail. God never failed Peter; doubt caused Peter to sink, not the Lord.

What in your life is holding you back? Take a leap of faith and walk on the water. God can and will do the impossible in your life if you will only believe. Are you still in the boat? Jesus wants you to come to Him and experience His joy and His power. Fear and doubt can hold you prisoner. But faith in God will set you free. Has the weight of your sin caused you to sink? Do you feel that there is no way God can or will pick you up? Repent and experience God's grace; He longs to forgive and commune with you. Don't let anything hold you back. You will never experience the fullness of knowing God until you get out of the boat.

THE DISCIPLINE OF A STEADFAST PRAYER LIFE

As a bookworm, I could spend hours delving into the Word. But when it comes to prayer, I can quickly lose interest. My mind starts to wander. I think about the events of the day. Frequently, I feel as if no one is listening. I am tempted to stop.

**Why do I struggle so much with praying?
I want to pray,
but I have a hard time
'getting into it.'**

What kind of Christian am I? What does it say about me that I get distracted talking to Jesus, my savior? Then, I feel guilty about not wanting to pray.

These thoughts have haunted me for quite a while. I was comforted when Pastor Don Coleman (a close friend and spiritual mentor) told me that I am not alone. Many people struggle with prayer. When someone decides to press into God through prayer, Pastor Don explained that there is usually a dry period before God will pour down His revelation. God wants people to really seek Him. He wants people to press through the doubt and intellectual shackles holding them captive. God desires that we seek Him out of faith and submission, a thankful heart — not for any selfish purpose. I must go consistently before the Lord without the benefit of revelation to be able to enjoy the sweetness of hearing His voice. This requires discipline. I must be willing to pray even when it seems useless — even when the well is dry.

The enemy desperately wants to keep believers from receiving revelation through prayer. The devil will tell me how pathetic I look kneeling before an invisible God. He will say, “See, you aren’t getting anything out of this praying. You should stop and do something more useful.” Then the devil will try to make me feel guilty about not wanting to pray. He will try to convince me that I have no standing to come before God. The enemy will say that is the reason God has not provided revelation or answered my prayer. These are all lies spoken by the father of lies.

I must press through the dry season. I must discipline my soul to seek God in prayer even when I don’t feel that God is listening. Feelings can be deceptive, truth remains truth. God loves me; He really hears my prayers. I have standing before God because of the blood of Christ. God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Prayer is an act of faith — believing in what is yet to come.

As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul longs for You, O God. I am thirsty for more of You. I desire Your living water which fills the parched soul. Forgive me for drinking the sand. In a dry and weary land, Your steadfast love sustains me. You invite all who are thirsty to come and drink from Your cup. Oh, God, fill me to overflowing that Your glory may be clear to all.

INTO THE WILDERNESS

One key characteristic of mighty men of God is that they all spent time alone with the Lord. Look at Paul who spent a long time in the wilderness seeking the face of God before starting his ministry. Consider the lives of Moses, David, or Elijah; all of these men set aside time to pursue God one-on-one. Even Jesus, as both God and man, set the example for us by spending forty days and nights alone with His Father in the wilderness. Jesus frequently went away to pray and commune with the Father.

Pastor Don challenged me by asking if I had ever spent a full day alone with Jesus. I had to honestly say no. Most days, I give God 30 minutes here or 10 minutes there. On super spiritual days, I may spend an hour or two alone with the Lord. I realized that God has been getting the crumbs of my life. How can God be the most important thing in my life if I put my work, family and friends in front of Him? Even time spent at church doing ‘ministry’ can get in the way of my real purpose for being on the earth. My life’s purpose is to experience a deep relationship with Jesus Christ.

Not only do I need to spend more time alone with the Lord, I should give Him the best hours of the day. I am reminded of God’s indictment of the children of Israel in the book of Malachi. The Israelites brought blind and blemished lambs before the Lord as a sacrifice. They kept the best for themselves. This was God’s response: “Cursed is the cheat

who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great King, says the Lord Almighty, and my name is to be feared among the nations.” God accused the Israelites of lighting ‘useless fires.’ They did not fear the Lord or show Him proper respect. They held the name of the Lord in contempt and had a dim view of His glory. Then they expected God to accept half-hearted worship and blemished sacrifices. If we treat God the same way today, why should we expect Him to reveal His glory to His people? God will not manifest His presence unless the Church returns to the fear of the Lord.

Oh God, I often light useless fires. Forgive me for my selfishness. Forgive me for giving you blemished lambs. I have kept the choice things for myself. I have no right to be anything but totally dedicated to you.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus talked about people who would not enter the kingdom of heaven. What had they done? Was their sin greater than others? No! Jesus said that He never knew them. Yes, they did good works in the name of the Lord. But Jesus described these works as evil. Only those who do the will of the Father will inherit the kingdom of God. What is the will of Father? The answer is to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul and mind. First and foremost, God wants His people to be in an intimate love relationship with Him.

7-11 CHRISTIANITY

Americans like everything fast, convenient and easy. But a real relationship with God is none of these things. What God wants from us runs contrary to the American way of life. From restaurants and gas stations to package delivery and even religion, we want our needs met right away. This attitude has even taken root in the Church. God is treated as a

short order cook who is just waiting to fill our orders. Then once we receive what we want from God, we go about our life as usual. Selfishness and pride are at the center of what I call the 7-11 mentality.

Most Christians, including myself, are way too busy. We pencil God in for 15 minutes between shuttling children to sporting events and attending important business meetings. Instead, we should take our day timers and give them to God. Then, we let the Spirit help guide us in how best to use the time God gives us. Does my schedule reflect a life yielded to God or me trying to run my life? All too often, I honestly live according to the latter.

Failure to turn my time over to God reflects what I believe about God.

I put more stock in my ability to manage my life. But I will never experience the Lord's perfect peace and rest while I still hold the reins to my life.

I must learn to let go and believe that God can run things better than I can. But what if God asks for me to drop everything and move to Pluto to start a church? Then I must go!

Jesus, please forgive me for not giving You my time. Forgive me for not trusting You. I give You my all, my time and my life. Fill me. Use me. Guide me by Your Spirit.

LIVING BY RULES INSTEAD OF THE SPIRIT

The topic of drinking alcohol came up during a discussion at my church's young adult fellowship. The bottom line —

should Christians drink? Some folks said no. Others said it is OK if done in moderation and with discretion. The non-drinkers said they did not want to dabble with something as dangerous as alcohol. Others said they did not want to hurt their public witness for the Lord. While we debated the point back and forth, the Lord showed me that we were focusing on the wrong thing.

All too often, Christians today focus on the rules and not a relationship with God. Jesus accused the religious leaders of doing the same thing. The heart of God is to know His people, not confine them with a tangled web of laws. But we want to know where the line has been drawn. This allows us to be ‘good Christians’ without having to give our lives to Christ. We confuse being a Christian with following a set of rules and parameters. Thus, we can go through life as we please and think that we are OK as long as we don’t break one of God’s rules. We ignore the most important thing to God – the establishment of a deep relationship with Him. So how do we go about this? It starts by hearing from God through reading the Bible and prayer. Personal times of worship and meditation on the Scripture open our hearts to the move of the Spirit. The Lord speaks to His children. Are you listening?

If we let Jesus reign in our lives, we would not have to be concerned about alcohol. We would be so filled with His Spirit and focused on the greater things that the debate over drinking would become a mute point. Each believer would know what was permissible for him because the Spirit would provide the necessary guidance.

Dear God, grow my desire to know You more. I do not want to be like the Israelites who You condemned for making sacrifices to observe the law but whose hearts were far from You. I want to seek the greater things of Your heavenly kingdom and not focus on the momentary trappings of the earth.

WHAT THE TEACHER FORGOT TO TELL YOU IN SUNDAY SCHOOL!

Whenever someone lays out the plan of salvation, usually they leave out the fine print. We, in our carnal thinking, describe all the fringe benefits — the spacious accommodations in heaven, the feast of the Lamb, healing on earth, a divine body and forgiveness of sins. But the sales pitch seldom defines what it means to accept Jesus as ‘Lord.’

Once a new convert starts to attend church, usually he or she associates making Jesus ‘Lord’ with trying to do good things such as giving to the poor or helping a neighbor in need. All of these actions are good. But God wants more than just good works in exchange for His Son’s blood. God demands our very lives.

According to the Bible, “You are not your own, you were bought with a price” (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Jesus said that anyone who tries to save his life would lose it. But those who give their lives to Christ will obtain eternal life.

Pastor Don recently asked me if I really wanted to go after Jesus. He asked if I would really let Jesus run the show. Of course I said yes.

**But I am learning that submitting to Christ
is not a one-time
decision.
I must take up
my cross daily,
deny my own desires and follow Christ.**

Making Christ Lord of my life takes desire, submission and discipline. These do not come cheaply. Jesus’ blood is truly the only free gift that will cost me everything.

The first step to being a good soldier is to receive the

love of Christ and to rest in His love. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus responded — to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. Before we “do anything” God wants us first to accept His love and love Him back. Then out of a deep relationship with the Lord, we will start to manifest Christ’s love as we walk in the Spirit. We spend so much time trying to do the right things that we miss the most important thing — our very reason for existence — to have a deep relationship with God.

In John’s gospel when Jesus speaks about bearing fruit he did not say that we would produce the fruit. Rather we carry the fruit, which actually comes from the deposit of the Spirit within the believer. The Gospel is so simple yet so hard. We must believe in the Lord and give Him the keys to our lives. Daily dying to self is the hardest part of being a Christian.

Dear Father, I want to truly make You the Lord of my life. God, please remove that which holds me back. May I not desire the things of this world. Instead, I want to be with You and daily filled by Your Spirit. I want to worship at Your feet. May I seek first the greater thing — to be with You.

STOP THE BRAIN

“Life is life, and you don’t have to always over-intellectualize everything.” That is what my roommate recently said to me when I was in one of those moods where I second-guessed everything. Yes, God gave us a brain. But sometimes it can become our worst enemy.

According to the book of James, a double-minded man is unstable in all he does. Worries and indecision toss him about just like the waves of the sea. Even though I know better, I worry, strategize and plan many areas of my life. But why worry? James goes on to say, “Why, you do not even know

what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” Why should I spend all of my time strategizing when I am not in control?

Jesus asked this important question, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” If worrying produces no benefit, then why do it? Jesus urged urges his disciples to consider the lilies. They do not labor or fret yet they are robed in splendor. If God provides for the grass of the field in such lavishness, how much more will he anchor my steps?

I just need to take a step back, breathe deep and let go. It’s not my life. I gave it away. The enemy knows my tendency to put everything under a microscope. He uses this as a way to divert my focus off Christ. What foolishness!

Thank You Lord for freeing me from worrying about my life. I am in good hands. You bring peace. I do not have to worry, plan or rack my brain about the future. You hold the future in Your grasp, and I know that You will never let me go.

THE SPIRITUAL CHECKLIST

How close I am to God does not depend on what God does. God desires to pour out his Spirit generously on all men. I am only limited by my hunger for the Lord. Those who are thirsty will drink. Those who are not will refuse to drink and will die of thirst. The Holy Spirit inspired me to apply this spiritual checklist — a way to measure to see if I am living in step with God’s desires for my life. These ideas are in no way exhaustive. But the checklist serves to let me know where I stand in my journey of knowing God.

1. Do I long to spend time alone with God?...Am I thirsty?
2. Is the Spirit actively involved in my life, revealing truth, comforting me and arming me for warfare?
3. Am I making disciples for Christ?

4. Do I live to worship and bring glory to God?
5. Am I serving “The Least of These” as Jesus did?
6. Do I care more about pleasing others than pleasing God?
7. Am I currently being disciplined and encouraged accountable by others? Am I confessing my sins to God?
8. Am I worried?
9. Am I living in way that requires active faith?
10. Am I connected to the lost? Am I really being salt and light?
11. When was the last time I was persecuted for Christ?
12. Do I love the Church despite its faults?
13. Am I living a Spirit led life?
14. Am I walking in submission to God and the authorities He has ordained in my life?

BLEMISHED WORSHIP

Lights! Camera! Action! Praise and worship can easily become a production — a big show. We are the actors, and the Lord is our audience. We put on masks and act out a part. I say ‘We’ because I am guilty of giving the Lord blemished worship.

People offer lifeless worship for various reasons. Some act out a part because they want others to notice them and think they are ‘really’ holy. Others so earnestly desire for the Spirit to supernaturally manifest His power in their life that they try to help Him along instead of waiting on the Lord in faith. Others orchestrate everything to the point that they turn worship into a ritual, a ceremony void of life and individual expression to God. None of these approaches honor God as He desires. Jesus said that there will come a time when real worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Jesus wants us to take off our masks and worship Him in truth. The Lord wants us to come as we are to sit at His feet and bask in the glory of His presence. We don’t need hymnals. We don’t need choir robes. We don’t need backup

sound tracks just in case our voice cracks. We don't even have to sing on key.

So what does it really mean to worship in spirit and in truth?

**True worship must be God centered.
Worship must be a sacrificial act
of surrender to God.**

We must set aside our agenda and schedule. We must not rely on human wisdom or formulas. We must not hide our sin and shame. We must not mock the Lord by putting on pretense; we must acknowledge His grace in our lives and accept His love. We are not putting on a show for God or anyone else. Instead, we lose ourselves as we marvel at the majesty of God. The story of David dancing before the ark comes to mind. David completely lost self-awareness. He simply let go and allowed the feelings welling up inside of him to come out. David's wife thought he was making a public spectacle of himself. David removed his royal robes and danced around in front of the multitudes in a simple tunic similar to what the slaves wore. She thought his actions common and vulgar. David responded, "I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes" (II Samuel 6:21-22). David resolved to let nothing hold him back from praising God with all of his might. David knew the key to true worship. He put the focus on God and strove to give Him maximum glory.

Worship connects us to the very heart of God. God is a spirit, and the physical world around us can blind us to God's spiritual truths. From mounting bills to struggles in family relationships to fear about the future, we can become overwhelmed by everyday concerns. Many Christians tend to focus on the here and now. But intimate worship transports us to God's Sabbath rest. Our concerns fade away as the

spiritual mysteries of God shine forth. Worship removes doubt and builds up passion for the Lord. We can give God our spirit as we worship and take on more of His Spirit. The Holy Spirit actually does His work while we worship. He conducts inner healing by stripping away the old and putting on the new.

Wouldn't church services be much better if we actually believed, or at least understood, the words that we sing? Week after week people in churches far and wide mouth the words without living out the lyrics. Christians sing about joy with a stone-cold face and dancing with feet firmly planted on the floor. Believers sing about making Jesus the center of their lives while refusing to relinquish control to God.

**On Sunday,
people sing about being
satisfied in God
alone while during the week,
they chase after everything else
but God.**

The church today is largely guilty of the same sin that Malachi warns the children of Israel about in the Old Testament. We are robbing God. We steal from the Lord by holding back the praise and glory due Him. We present blemished lambs of praise and worship. We mouth the words while our hearts remain silent. We light useless fires of praise. Once again, I use the word 'We' because I am not faultless in this charge. And I am not taking sides as to what form of worship pleases God the most. Stand, sit, kneel, raise your hands, dance, it does not matter. God looks at the heart not the action.

God made it clear through Malachi that He is almighty and should be feared among the nations. We bring praise half-heartedly before the Lord and expect for Him to be happy with it. God desires people who will worship Him in spirit

and in truth. We must be sincere and worship God as directed by the Spirit. Too often, we try to carefully schedule worship and praise time. But the Spirit, not man, holds the script. We simply have a small role to play.

As long as Christians bring spotted lambs, we will never fully experience God's blessing. He will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and unleash His Spirit to us in abundance if we hold back in praise and worship.

Dear Jesus, please forgive Your Church for seeking a worship experience rather than You. Raise up a new generation of worshippers - people who will worship in spirit and in truth. Tear down the show and regenerate Your people through the power of the Spirit. May my praise no longer be confined to this earth. Remove pride and fear from my life that I may know Your love, which allows me to come boldly into Your presence. May my praise be a sweet sound in Your ears.

Lead me to be completely sold out to You when I praise and worship. I will not listen to the lies of the devil or be impacted by the concern of others. I will not hold back. I will sing with purpose and dare to become more undignified than this. Amen!

GRADING SERMONS – YOU GET A B+

As a child (about 12 years old) I participated in a ministry competition through a major Christian denomination. I competed in a preaching competition. The theme was 'To Boldly Go.' I went up on the platform and preached a sermon reminiscent of the fiery preachers of the Great Awakening. There was plenty of hell fire and brimstone to go around for everyone. When I finished, one of the women in the small

audience look astonished. She said that she had never heard such fervent preaching coming out of a child.

Quite proud of my effort to scare everyone into witnessing, I walked to my chair and sat down. I was shocked when the score was announced at the end of the competition. I received a B+. I came in third in the competition. I was both angry and devastated. The two speakers that scored higher than me were definitely more entertaining. One of them had a great story to tell. The other told two relevant jokes. I skipped the entertainment and went straight for the jugular.

My sponsor went up to the judges and asked about my score. She explained to me that my sermon lacked balance. It was too aggressive and lacked appeal for the seeker. My sermon had no punch line or anecdote to keep the judges' interest. I asked what that had to do with anything. The entire trip back I steamed over the outcome. I talked about the destruction in the Church caused by trying to appease people when the message should be urgent and wake them up. My sponsor agreed. But she said that my presentation lacked any measure of grace.

In retrospect, the entire idea of grading a sermon is ludicrous. Yet thousands of Christians do it every week. I frequently do it myself. The sermon has become the pinnacle of the weekly church experience. Are we supposed to grade the performance of the messenger or be transformed by the power of the message? Do we really think we have figured out God and his hidden mysteries? Or has God in his mercy revealed it to pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, prophets and apostles? When we depend on man's intellect or abilities, we set ourselves up for failure. The truths of God can only be spiritually discerned not intellectually discovered. This does not excuse us from studying the Bible or testing the teaching of others.

**Christians should follow the example
of the Bereans (Acts 17:11)
by searching the Scriptures daily.**

**We must know the Word for ourselves
and allow the Spirit to guide us in truth.
Simply relying on others to feed us
will not produce growth.**

Both our minds and our spirit must play an active role in discerning God's truth. We can only experience God in the spirit, but we know him in our minds.

Looking back, the preaching contest illustrates who I am and how I see things. It is clear to see the prophetic perspective implanted in me from a very young age. God designed me in the womb for a unique purpose. I desired to zealously preach the truth and call for repentance. That is the heart of the prophet. I will no longer make the mistake of looking to men to grade my performance. There is only one Jesus. He will judge me. I must stand true to His way and be what He created me to be.

Oh God, help me to fulfill Your purpose for my life. May I live and serve according to the gifting You implanted in me. Keep me from the pitfall of preaching truth without the blessing of grace. Guide me in what to say and with whom I should share it. Use my voice to bring glory to Your name and expand the Kingdom. May I no longer seek approval from men but only to do Your will in Your power!

IN THE CLUTCHES OF TEMPTATION

Having yielded to temptation and deliberately sinned, I feel far from God. Due to my own guilt and shame, I have wanted to stay away from God. I love God and know His

righteous standard. It pains me to know how far short I keep falling. I can relate to the prodigal son who went back to his father asking to be treated as a hired servant not a son.

**Sin really stinks. First the devil lies to you
saying its no big deal.
Then he turns right around
and convinces you that your sin
has become so great that God
wants to have nothing to do with you.**

All I can do is plead the blood of Jesus over my life, repent and ask for forgiveness. My feelings do not define my reality. God's truth defines my reality. God's love abounds despite my sin. God does not love me because of my actions. The Lord loves because His very nature is to love. God loves men to honor Himself.

My flesh is too strong for me to kill. Only God can empower me to change. Even the days that I feel righteous, I fall far short of God's righteous standard. There is only one place to turn. I will cling to the cross and be cured by the blood of Jesus.

BEAUTY IN BROKENNESS

Projecting shadows of reality,
we are all the same.
Afraid that others will discover our secrets,
we deny our condition.
Beyond repair, we cannot fix what ails us.
Can anyone make all things new?

Living in delusion,
we robe ourselves in grave clothes.

Surrounded by the stench of death,
 we long for it to be over.
 Plagued by our failings,
 we ask “Could anyone ever accept the real me?”

Confronted by the truth,
 we realize our need,
 yet we refuse the remedy.
 Denial poisons living water.
 We cry out,
 “Why am I still drowning?”

Out of options,
 I bow to God’s plan.
 Rejecting all else, I cling to the cross.
 Christ’s perfect love drives out all fear.
 Finally, I am at rest
 for there is joy in brokenness.

THE NAMES OF GOD

You can tell a lot about someone by his or her name. Names do more than just identify a particular person. By saying someone’s name, an image of him or her is formed in our mind. We begin to think about the characteristics of the person.

The change of a person’s name is used in the Bible to denote a major change in his or her life – just consider the lives of Abraham (Genesis 17: 5) and Jacob (Genesis 32:28). According to the Bible, the “overcomers” will undergo a name change when the Lord returns. “I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). Given the importance the Bible places on names, what can we learn about God by His many names?

Studying the names of God helps us understand His nature and how He relates to people. Stop and think about the following names of God and how they show His majesty, love and holiness.

Elohim: God - The One and Only True God

Yahweh/Jehovah: Lord - He That Is Who He Is, the Eternal I Am

Adonai: Lord - Master

El Shaddai: God Almighty - The All-sufficient One

El Elyon: Most High - Possessor of Heaven and Earth

El Olam: Everlasting God - God Over Eternal Things

El Gibbor: Mighty God - The Only All Powerful God

Jehovah Jireh: The Lord Will Provide

Jehovah Rapha: The Lord Who Healeth

Jehovah Nissi: The Lord Is My Banner, the Lord Is My Victory

Jehovah Shalom: The Lord Our Peace, the Lord Gives Peace

Jehovah Tsidkenu: The Lord Our Righteousness

Jehovah Shammah: The Lord Is Present

Jehovah Sabaoth: The Lord of Hosts, Lord Almighty, King of Glory

Father -Matt. 5:16; 28:19

Messiah - John 1:41

King of Kings - 1 Tim. 6:15

High Priest - Hebrews 6:20

“I AM” - John 8:12

Word - John 1:1

Wisdom - 1 Cor. 1:30

Shepherd - John 10:11

Bridegroom - Mark 2:19

Redeemer - Psalm 78:35

Vine - John 15:1

Light - John 1:9

Helper - Psalm 118:7

Spirit of Truth - John 16:13

Comforter - John 14:10

THE NAMES OF GOD REVEAL HIS NATURE & HIS HEART

The list above is just a sample of the names used to describe God in the Bible.

The Old Testament law assigns great reverence to the name of God. It forbids the misuse of God's name. From Genesis to Revelation, God's people realized that there is power and divine authority in the proper use of the Lord's name.

Examine this promise in Proverbs 18:10, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

What name of God touches your heart? Or do you even know God by name? By studying the names of God your faith will be built up. As the prophet Joel prophesied, "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Joel 2:32). We are commanded to act in the name of the Lord, which gives divine power to our lives. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17). If you have never delved into the identity of God, begin today by studying the Bible, memorizing Scripture and praying about the names and nature of God. As you seek to know God, He will reveal Himself to you.

REST FOR THE WEARY

The Pharisees and Sadducees seemed to constantly criticize Jesus for healing or doing other acts of kindness on the Sabbath. God instituted the Sabbath in the Old Testament as the

seventh day of the week. Like many of the ceremonies and rules in the law, the Sabbath points to Christ. It foreshadows the eternal rest awaiting all true believers in heaven.

The religious rulers missed this point. They focused on following the letter of the law when the fulfillment of it walked the very streets in front of them. Seeking to puff up their position and influence, the Pharisees and Sadducees added restrictions to the ordinances given by God. Then they defended their turf by chastising Jesus repeatedly on this subject. To make His point, Jesus continued to heal on the Sabbath. He said, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). This statement implies that God designed the Sabbath to be a blessing to man, not a burdensome web of regulations.

The Sabbath is modeled after the seven days of creation. According to Genesis, God rested on the seventh day. Why did God rest? Did the strenuous work of speaking the world into existence deplete His strength? Of course not. God rested to set a pattern for us. This pattern provides us a chance to recharge while serving as a weekly reminder of the sweet rest awaiting all believers.

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, “His place of rest will be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10). Jesus invited us to experience His rest. He said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28, 30). Are you tired and run down? Jesus wants you to experience His rest here and now. Although you will not experience the fullness of Christ’s rest until the end of the age, you can walk in the Lord’s strength, peace and joy today. It all starts with believing Christ’s promises and dropping your burdens at His feet.

The author of Hebrews warns about those who hear the Gospel but do not believe. God said, “They shall never enter my rest” (Hebrews 4:3).

I long for the day when I will enter God’s complete rest. The Lord will wipe every tear from my eye. Jesus will make

all things new. There will be no more sin, death or disease. I will have a perfect body. And I will see God face-to-face. Until then, I will lean on Jesus my Sabbath. You don't have to toss and turn due to spiritual insomnia. Enter God's rest today and enjoy the peace found only in Jesus.

MY PERSONAL SEARCH PARTY

Overcome by a sea of choices, I jumped on a plane to get away and seek the face of God. Of all places, I flew to Missouri (my old stomping grounds). The trip provided an oasis to my parched soul. I went to Kansas City to spend time soaking in God's love and to visit the International House of Prayer (IHOP-KC). I figured, 'Who knows — God may just do something.' Although I did not see a burning bush, get caught up to heaven, or talk with an angel, the Lord gave me exactly what I needed. God revealed to me the depth of His love. Then He sent me back with a clear mandate — intercede, write and disciple.

I thought the Lord might give me a vision of a distant land to visit. But He didn't. I thought God might guide me to a wife. Instead, He asked, 'Am I not enough for you?' I thought my visit to IHOP-KC would result in some kind of signature spiritual experience. Although I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the prayer room and the training session, my time alone with the Lord during the trip proved more powerful.

Having gone on a search, what did I find? Well, the Lord showed me how times alone with Him can be extremely powerful. He confirmed the burden on my heart for the three-fold mission of intercession, writing God's revelation and discipleship. While in Missouri, I visited some old friends from college and my previous job. Along the way, the Lord gave me opportunities to encourage them and visa versa.

My visit to IHOP-KC gave me some examples of what it means to be completely sold out to prayer. I met people called to serve as full time prayer warriors. The passionate intercessors at

IHOP-KC perfectly blend worship and prayer to create an atmosphere of heaven on earth. I left with a stronger belief in the power of prayer. While reading *The Secret of Faith* by Charles Finney, the Lord helped me to understand how integral faith is to every action because whatever is not of faith is sin.

TEARS OF GOD

Heartbroken over man's depravity,
God cries for his wayward children.
Longing to see them come home,
He waters the earth with His tears.

With His arms wide open,
God calls to any that will listen.
Mired in self, doubt and deception,
men do what seems right to them.
Waiting at the front door of heaven,
God waters the earth with His tears.

Each man stumbles down the road of life,
seeking pleasure and finding only pain.
Looking in the distance,
the Father sees no one coming home.
He waters the earth with His tears.
So far from the answer yet so close,
men completely give themselves to death.
They invent new ways of doing evil, and
they forget the call of the Father.
God mourns; He has spent His tears,
and the earth goes without rain.

Filled with remorse, one son humbles himself,
and heads for home.
The Father sees him on the road;

he runs to him and embraces him.
 As the son repents and ask for forgiveness,
 the Father forgets the past and restores him.
 Overcome by the reunion,
 God waters the earth with His tears.

A WEeping INTERCESSOR

The Lord works in each person differently. Accepting this fact can be difficult.

**I tend to look around
 at what others have and think,
 ‘God, I want that.’**

I faced this exact problem while serving at a youth discipleship camp. During one of the extended worship times, the Holy Spirit fell on the crowd. Teenagers and kids began to prophesy and receive visions. Some fell down and began to laugh in the Spirit. Later in the week, I prayed asking for the Lord to move in such a visible way in my life. I wanted to know why I had never been ‘slain in the Spirit.’ My flesh wanted a signature spiritual experience.

The Lord responded by impressing the following on my heart, “You don’t need to fall down. That’s not how I work in your life. You cry.” I continued to pout. I wanted what others had. I thought, ‘Oh, great! Other people get pushed down by the power of God or laugh in joy. I get to cry!’

Then while studying the Word, the Spirit led me to read the following, “Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me...Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people” (Jeremiah 8:21,9:1). The Spirit revealed to me God’s call to be an intercessor like

Jeremiah. Overcome by emotion, Jeremiah cried over the sin and blindness of Israel. He foresaw the doom destined for hardhearted Israel. He broke down in tears as he saw the world through God's eyes. Sometimes, he could not even cry; his pain was too intense for tears.

Like Jeremiah, God was calling me to travail in prayer for others. As I prayed with various teenagers and kids at camp, I become overrun with intense emotion and pain. I felt like I stepped out of myself and could deeply relate with the burdens of others. Many times I wept as I prayed in faith for others. The tears changed from tears of pain to tears of joy as the Lord worked in the lives of others.

Now that I look back on it, I am so glad that God did what He wanted to in my life. I would not trade God's call for anything. God has set me in a crucial place as a watchman on the wall – a prayer warrior. He reveals His heart to me and even trusts me to experience the pain of others. At first, I worried what others thought about me. After all, I am a man. Men are not supposed to cry. Right? But I believe that the Lord is calling many more men to cry over the Church. God wants to raise up an army of intercessors starting with men who understand how crucial the call to pray really is.

THE INTERCESSOR'S BURDEN

As I walk through life, the Spirit shows me many of the things that are wrong with the Church, including my own faults. I can easily become burdened with the things that I see. If I allow it to ferment within my soul, feelings of anger, resentment and disillusionment can overshadow the light of the Spirit and the love of Christ for others. Bitterness blocks the flow of grace. I can become prideful and judgmental toward other believers.

Sometimes, I feel like calling down fire to purge the Church. However, I am keenly aware of my own sins and

shortcomings. I would not be spared if the Lord answered my prayer. Apart from Christ's work, I am no better than anyone else. Why does the Lord allow me to see all of these problems that I am powerless to fix? Frequently, I feel that I know the answers. Why won't anybody listen?

Things tend to be out of order in the Church. We are divided by fine points of doctrine not united through the blood of Christ. Pastoral and church leaders lack accountability. Churches have plenty of programs and ministries but little true discipleship and spiritual growth. Worship only goes skin deep. Christian families spend more time watching TV than praying or reading the Bible together. Public schools and pop culture is setting the standard of truth for the next generation not the Word of God. Fathers are too busy working to attend to their primary calling. Many Christians are just as busy and burnt out as non-Christians. Politics more than the Spirit plays a key role in many church decisions. Elders and deacons are given a pass from complying with Biblical standards.

Many 'Christians' spend little time alone with the Lord. There are still millions of people that have never heard about Jesus. Meanwhile, false religions flourish and dominate through deception and oppression. False spirits have deceived many, even in the Church. Why do so few see things as they really are?

You can see how it would be so easy to become frustrated, burnt out and disillusioned.

**A good friend and brother in Christ
recently told me
that most people
gifted with a strong sense of spiritual
perception are also called to be intercessors.
He said the reason why we see
is so that we can pray.**

God has not offered us truth so we can keep it to ourselves. God wants us to petition for the blind. God wants us to cast the burden upon Him. As I pray for the things that are wrong, the Lord changes my heart — enabling me to love others despite their shortcomings and failures. Christ shows me how I am no different than those I would so quickly dismiss. I am humbled before a holy God.

I pray because I must. I pray because it releases the pent-up feelings inside of me. I pray because I love Jesus. I pray because God listens. I pray because it leads to life and the fulfillment of God's call. I pray because God designed me to have a relationship with Him. I pray because the Lord restores my wounded soul. I love the Lord!

