

teachings

Teachings

Vintage Ministries

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OPENING

Each of us is on a spiritual journey in life. It began the moment we came into this world and it will ultimately end at an eternal destination of our choosing. “I get to choose where I will spend eternity?” Yes, and not only that, but you have both the privilege and the responsibility of choosing the spiritual direction of your life while on this planet. That’s the risky business of having free will. And while that information right there is enough to peg anyone’s personal stress meter beyond its limits, there is good news. Actually, it’s incredible news! There is Someone who loves you so passionately and so relentlessly that He has gone to unimaginable lengths to make it possible for your spiritual journey to be the most incredible, challenging, fulfilling adventure you’ll ever know... if you choose to follow Him. That is what this booklet is all about.

The following pages contain teachings about this satisfying spiritual journey that can be yours. Each teaching is based on the ancient truth of the Bible and is intended to identify and give instruction concerning an element of significance which you’ll encounter on your journey. I present them to you with the prayer that you will not only find them interesting but genuinely life-changing. Truth will do that.

So no matter where you are on the path, come on and let’s walk together for a while. Read on and check it out for yourself. And thank you for giving me the privilege of sharing this with you. No kidding, it really is an honor.

Wes Aarum

Pastor of Vintage

Teachings

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teaching one

SALVATION

How To Know God

Thousands of years ago King Solomon, inspired by God, wrote down this simple but profound truth:

“He (God) has also put eternity in the hearts of men.”
(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Though he was one of the wealthiest and wisest people to ever live, he discovered – what you and I, if we’re honest, know to be true as well – that the stuff of this world doesn’t satisfy, doesn’t bring lasting purpose, doesn’t fill the void of meaning or answer the heart’s deepest questions in a person’s life. The truth is, it was never intended to. We are meant for something more... a connection with the Divine.

The Bible clearly maps this out in its very first book, Genesis – that we as human beings from the beginning were created with a specific divine design. And that design is to be in a personal relationship with God, to know Him and love Him and live life as He designed it to be lived. However, this is not how things are. Our deconstruction began when sin entered the picture – man’s rebellion against God, choosing to live life on his own terms. With sin our disconnect from God is total, and the result is not only an aimless life apart from our Creator but an eternity separated from Him as well. You and I are guilty of breaking God’s law (see I John 3:4; Exodus 20) and the consequences are dire (see John 3:36). But God does not end our story there, mired in hopelessness. His love for you and for me is so great that He launched a rescue mission, pursuing us with the possibility of a new life, the chance to be born again.

Our desperate situation called for the most extreme of measures. The only way to satisfy and uphold the justice of a holy God was to pay for our eternal sin crime with a substitute who could completely and totally fulfill the death sentence leveled against us—

“For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23).

God sent the only qualified, acceptable “payment” – His Son Jesus – to earth to die in our place so that by believing in Him and receiving by faith His sacrifice on our behalf, we become declared righteous (see Romans 1:16-17), we receive eternal life, a home in heaven (see I John 5:13), we are restored to our original design, that of a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ (see I Peter 3:18 & I John 4:9-10), and the eternal void of meaning in our life is filled (see John 10:10). The way this truth can become a reality in your life today is through faith – believing that what God says in His Word, the Bible, is for real, and then by coming to God on His terms: agreeing with God that you have broken His law and are guilty of sin (Romans 3:23 – “For all have sinned...”), accepting Jesus’ death sacrifice for you as the only way to get to God (John 14:6 – “Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.’”), willfully turning from sin and from living life on your own terms – the Bible calls this “repentance” (Luke 13:3 – “I tell you the truth, unless you repent you shall all likewise perish.”), and by turning to Jesus and placing your faith in Him (John 1:12 – “Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”)

Right now, right where you are at, you can voice your heart’s desire to Jesus through prayer and commit your life to Him – and that is exactly what it is – a life-commitment,

responding to God Who is desperately pursuing you as the Great Lover of your soul. For God to ask for a lesser commitment would not only cheapen it but would be completely unsatisfactory in dealing with our spiritual condition. We don't just need a spiritual band-aid, we need a total life-transfusion. It is this that God offers us (see John 17:3) wrapping it up in an ongoing, purpose-driven, outrageous love relationship with Himself. And it's one you can be confident in forever (see I John 5:11-13). This is where the journey begins, and God leaves the invitation open to you... it is the only answer to the call of eternity in your heart.

You can form your prayer something like this:

“Dear God, I believe that You are telling me the truth in Your Word and I agree with it. I confess that I am a sinner and I need to be rescued – I need a Savior. I believe that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die on a cross to pay the penalty for my sin. I believe that He rose from the grave, conquering sin and death, and now offers me eternal life – a love relationship with You forever. I want that. So right now Jesus, I turn from my sin in repentance and I turn to You. Come into my life, forgive my sin, and give me eternal life. I commit my life to You. Thank You for becoming my Savior, my Friend, my Lord. I love You. Thank You for loving me. Guide me now as I follow You. Amen.”

teaching two
DEVOTION

Feeding Your Soul And Enjoying Your King

Being a Christ-follower is all about relationship – living, growing, and enjoying a love relationship with Jesus Christ. That’s His desire and His plan for you. His love for you is unlike anything else you’ll ever experience – perfect, complete, consistent, eternal (check out these verses: John 14:23; 15:9-10; Romans 8:31-39)

So how do we daily connect with Jesus and grow in our love relationship with Him? God has given us two main sources to make this happen: the Bible and Prayer. These are divine sources of unspeakable spiritual riches. God Himself tells us that His Word is truth (John 17:17) and contains everything we need to live out life on this planet as God designed it to be lived (II Timothy 3:16). He goes on to let us know that through prayer we have direct – catch that – direct access to Him (Hebrews 4:16). Unbelievable, but true! “But how does it all work?” you ask. That’s the right question. Let’s pursue that answer. The following are some simple suggestions on how to implement God’s Word and Prayer in your daily life.

Because you recognize that God’s Word is powerful and that He’s given it to you as a way to get to know Him and to follow His plan for life, you definitely want to be in it every day. Setting aside a specific time to do this each day is not only crucial for you, but it means something to God as well. He loves you and enjoys the time spent together One-on-one with you. When you think about it, it’s absolutely amazing! The Creator of the universe, God Almighty desires to spend time alone with you. (This fact alone should definitely blow-away any self-esteem issues. You matter to God, and He loves your company. How

powerful and exciting is that?!) Let this truth encourage and motivate you to guard your alone time with God.

Find a place free of distractions, a place where your heart can throttle down and you can quiet yourself. Start out your time with a simple prayer asking God, by His Holy Spirit, to guide you and reveal to you what He wants you to learn. Breathe deep... be still... prepare to hear from God. Then, start reading at the beginning of a book of the Bible (a couple of good ones to begin with are the Gospel of John and First John). Read until something “jumps out” at you – like God wrote that just for you. Stop, re-read it, think about what it says and about what God is saying to you through it. If you decide to journal (which can be a great discipline and a big help to learning and growing) write down the verse and your thoughts on it. Try using the “So What – Now What” method. “So What” does the text say? Next, decide “Now What” does God want me to do about it? How does He want me to live this truth out, to live differently in this world for Him? God is all about life-change, conforming you to the example of Jesus (Romans 8:29) so that your life on this planet will count. Pretty exciting stuff! Tell God what you will do about what He’s shared with you in His Word. It’s an important element of accountability. Continue this way each day. When you get to the end of that book of the Bible, start another one. Remember, it’s not about how fast you can “burn” through a section of Scripture. It’s about relationship, about getting to know God. Slow down and feed your soul.

This leads into a time of conversation with God, talking and listening through prayer. Lay out your heart before God. He wants that (Psalm 62:8). To help keep your prayer life balanced and to prevent it from becoming a laundry list of “give me’s”, try using the “Teaspoon Method”. The abbreviation for “Teaspoon” is “tsp”: “t” stands for “Thank You” – a time of expressing thankfulness, praise, and

adoration to God; “s” stands for “Sorry” – a time to apologize, confess, repent, ask God’s forgiveness, and simply come clean with God about sin in your life; ”p” stands for “Please” – asking God for things, presenting before Him your needs and desires for yourself and others. All of this happens within the context of a growing love relationship with God. So don’t allow it to become mechanical. Just make it real.

Your times alone with God may sometimes be loud, sometimes quiet, sometimes filled with laughter, sometimes broken with tears – it’s just you and God – make it real. As you leave your alone time with God remember that the relationship is not on hold or on a shelf until the next day. Keep the conversation open. Think about Jesus throughout your day. He’s thinking about you. Live out your day with Him and for Him. You’re a Christ-follower... enjoy your King and enjoy your journey.

If, when you read a passage of Scripture, you find yourself having trouble making sense of it or simply struggling to find something that God is saying to you through it, try looking for one or more of the following:

A **SIN** to turn from

A **PROMISE** to claim

An **EXAMPLE** to follow

A **COMMAND** to obey

A **TEACHING ABOUT GOD** (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)

A **BLESSING** or **ENCOURAGING WORD** to enjoy

A **WARNING** to regard

THE TEN

The Ten is all about committing to take ten minutes every day and spending it with Christ. He is always speaking but we're not always listening. We want to listen. We need to hear from Him! Below is a simple and easy format for you to follow. There is also a reading plan for you to follow. Each day ends with a spot for you to write down a take away thought. Don't just blow through this time. Let it settle in on you and shape your day.

How to spend 10 minutes with God

Find a place where you won't be disturbed – this is your “sanctuary” – come with an expectant heart – You are meeting with the Creator of everything.

Take the first 2 minutes to prepare your heart & mind for this encounter with God. Relax. Think about who God really is. Clear your head of any distractions or stuff that's weighing on your conscience. Confess sin.

Then take 5 minutes for reading the Bible. Remember, this is God actually speaking. Take some time to pause, to listen – what does God want you to hear from Him? Think how you can apply the verses to your thoughts and actions today. Now you have 3 minutes left to speak to God in prayer. Let this be spontaneous. Unburden some things, pray for the people in your life, thank Him for what you learned, praise Him, share your innermost thoughts with Him.

IDENTITY

Who You Are Now And Forever

Nobody likes to have enemies. But the truth is, you've got one. He's vicious, he's relentless, and he absolutely hates you. The Bible identifies him as Satan, the devil, the evil one. His great desire for your life is to get you to buy into a belief system that is false – one that is riddled with phony reasoning and empty promises – one that is not based on the truth of God's Word. Why? Because Satan knows that if he can get you to believe wrong, then you'll choose to live wrong. How we live flows out of what we believe. And one of the battleground areas in which he wants you to adopt a wrong belief system is the area of your "identity". Who you are, how you view yourself, how you determine your value and worth as a person, where you find your security – all of these issues are wrapped up in your identity. Critical stuff and Satan knows it. He wants you to answer these questions based on the world's philosophy of the four "P's": Performance, Position, Personal Appearance, and Possessions. His plan is to get you to tie your identity to one or more of the four "P's". If he's successful, he'll set you up to be running for the rest of your life on a treadmill that goes nowhere, manipulated by the opinions of others and tortured by unattainable expectations. What a drain! This is not God's plan for you in the least. His heart is for you to clearly grasp an identity based on truth, your identity as declared by Almighty God Himself. This is where it gets exciting!

In II Corinthians 5:17 we are told that the moment we invite Christ into our lives and commit our lives to Him we become "new creations". This means that your identity becomes brand new. You are a new creation in

Jesus. You now hold a new position. No longer is your identity and your security as a person tied to the four “P’s”. No longer is it based on the whimsy of people or on the uncertainty of wealth or on the emptiness of chasing unworthy goals or on a deceptive and false external standard of beauty. Your identity is now sourced from God Himself. It is He who determines “who” you are and the value you hold. Your security as a person is locked into God. The opinions of others’ can’t touch that. And because God is absolute and unchanging, His declaration of your identity is also absolute and unchanging. Simply put, you are who God says you are. Did you catch that? **YOU ARE WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE.** This is a deep-seated, mind-shattering, heart-pounding truth. God desperately, passionately wants you to know it. He wants you to know it and to live your life out of it – to live your life out of your new identity in Christ. This is why He is constantly sprinkling personal statements about you and about your new position in Christ throughout His Word. He so wants you to get it. He wants you to absolutely understand that you are who He says you are. And just who does God say you are? Check out this sampling.

YOU ARE: accepted (Ephesians 2:6); bought with a price (I Corinthians 6:20); Christ’s friend (John 15:15); chosen by Christ to bear fruit (John 15:16); a child of God and can call Him Father (Romans 8:14,15; Galatians 3:26); dearly loved by God (Colossians 3:12); a co-heir with Jesus, inheriting His glory (Romans 8:17); a temple – a dwelling place – for God (I Corinthians 3:16); joined forever to the Lord (I Corinthians 6:17); chosen, holy, and belonging to God (I Peter 2:9); a citizen of heaven (Ephesians 2:6); God’s handiwork (Ephesians 2:10); a child of light and not of darkness (I Thessalonians 5:5); an enemy of the devil (I Peter 5:8); born again in Christ and the evil one – Satan – cannot touch you (I John 5:18); no longer ruled by

sin (Romans 6:1-6); free from the condemnation your sin deserves (Romans 8:1); bought with a price and belonging to God (I Corinthians 6:19, 20); able to approach God with boldness (Ephesians 3:12); alive with Christ and totally forgiven of all your sins (Colossians 2:13); the possessor of a spirit of power, love, and self-control (II Timothy 1:7); wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

And you want to know the real kicker about all of this? These declarations about you do not depend on you. In other words, they are not affected in any way by what you do or don't do – they are not dependent on your actions. Why? Because they are statements of truth by God. And as such, their veracity both originates from and depends on God, not you. The implications are enormous!

First, you are completely secure with God. His view of you and His love for you are not dependent on anything you do or don't do for Him. That's hard for us to get our heads around because we are so performance-oriented in all of our other relationships. But that's not how it works with God. He loves you and declares you to be these things because this is who you are in Christ.

Second, who you are is not dependent on what others think of you or even what you may think of yourself on any given day. As a Christian you are who God says you are. This frees you to be real and authentic in your relationships instead of being disabled or even manipulated by the opinions of others. You can love others honestly. And if they return your love or not, reach out to you or not, think you're cool or not – none of it matters because they DO NOT determine your value or worth. That is secure in God.

Third, receiving your identity from God inspires in you a genuine gratitude and a growing love for Him who is so

great as to do this for you – to love you like this. It is this realization that moves you to pursue Him even more and to live for Him with a deepening abandon. It correctly aligns your motivation. You choose to live for God not in order to get Him to love you. You are secure in that. You choose to live for God because you love Him.

Go over this list everyday if you have to. Keep going over it until you own it – until you grasp it and believe it – until you can honestly say, “Yes, I get it. This is who I really am. This is my position, my identity in Christ.” And this list is just a sampling! God has lots more to say about you throughout His Word, which is one more reason why it is so vital that you spend time with God in His Word every day.

Understanding your new identity in Christ is the first step. Living out of it is the next. This is where your new position becomes your daily experience. Each day you must choose to turn a deaf ear to Satan’s deceptive messages about who you are and focus on what God says about you. Satan’s not ever going to give up trying to get you to believe his lies. He hates you and is always on mission to bring destruction into your life in whatever way he can. But with God’s help you can choose to listen intently to His voice in His Word, to firmly believe what He says about you, and to live according to truth. **YOU ARE WHO GOD SAYS YOU ARE.** And that is something to get excited about every day!

Teaching four

FORGIVENESS

What To Do When You Blow It

In Teaching 3 we looked at the awesome truth about your new identity as a Christian. You are who God says you are, and nothing can change that. However, as you live your life as a Christ-follower it won't be too long until you notice that there are times (maybe a lot of times) when your actions don't seem to match who God says you are. In other words, your daily experience doesn't reflect your position in Christ. "What's up with that?" you think. "I'm trying to live for Jesus, but I keep blowing it." And then Satan's lies come flooding into your consciousness with thoughts such as, "How can God love you when you keep sinning against Him? You can't conquer this sin. Certainly God won't forgive you again. You might as well give up." Sound familiar? Is there an answer? You bet!

First, see these lies for what they truly are – lies! God's word makes this clear (we'll get to that in a moment). Choose not to listen to them. I mean really, why would you want to listen to someone or take advice from someone who viciously hates you and wants only to see the destruction of your life? This is Satan's plan. Don't buy into it by listening to his lies.

Second, you need to understand the difference between your "position" – who you are – and your "condition" – how you live. God addresses this situation head on in His Word. In Teaching 3 we clearly saw God's declaration of your new identity as a Christian – who you are in Christ. This is your "position". In I John 1:8 God talks about your

“condition”: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” God is not making an excuse for your behavior. He is simply stating the reality of your struggle as a Christ-follower. He knows that the pull of sin is still at work in you. Although your clear objective and desire as a Christian is not to sin (see I John 2:1), God knows that the possibility of sin is still very real for you. And if it happens, He has made a way – the only way – for you to deal with it. He wants you to immediately run to Him in a spirit of repentance so that He can wrap you up in His forgiveness and give you the deep soul cleansing you need and desire. To play the denial game with your sin is both stupid and dangerous. Sin, in all of its forms, is a deadly business. God knows this better than anyone. In fact, at its core is utter betrayal. By choosing to sin, not only have you invited destruction into your life (see Galatians 6:8), but you have turned on and betrayed your deepest friend, your biggest fan, and the God of the universe. Sin is indeed serious business.

Again, God knows this. This is why He follows I John 1:8 with verse 9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” To “confess” is to “say the same thing as”. This means that you agree with God about your sin. He says it’s wrong, you say it’s wrong. He says it goes, you say it goes. You don’t argue it or justify it or treat it lightly. You confess. As you do, the promise of God in this verse is crystal clear. You will experience both His forgiveness and His cleansing. How absolutely incredible is that?! And just in case you’re wondering, there is no quota or expiration date attached to this promise. God is not going to stop loving you, or walk away from you, or give you up because of your sin. Nor is He content

to let you stay there and wallow in it. God wants you to run to Him every time you sin. You've got His Word on it. And this is really important: don't call God a liar by believing what Satan says ("Certainly God won't forgive you again." Remember that one?) Believe God's Word. Believe what He tells you. Believe that He will and does forgive you. He is not a distant and detached God. He is your Heavenly Father, knee-deep in this life with you, passionately desiring your good. His plan for you is to stay away from sin, to stay away from all that would deceive and disable and destroy you. Why? He loves you. His plan for you if you sin is to run to Him, to confess and turn from your sin, and to receive His forgiveness and cleansing. Why? He loves you. And as you build into your life the daily habit of turning from sin and following God, you'll begin to align your condition with your position and to experience life and a relationship with God as He designed it to be. Pretty cool stuff.

TEMPTATION

How To Say "NO" And Make It Stick

Check out these verses: “but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” James 1:14-15. “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.” Galatians 6:8. It’s pretty clear where sin leads. And Satan wants desperately to take you there – to get you to choose his way of doing things – to get you to sin. He cannot choose for you. But he has a finely tuned promotional machine which he uses every chance he gets to leverage you in his direction. It’s called “temptation” – an enticement to sin. Temptation itself is not sin. It is the means by which Satan lures you to consider his countless evil, deceptive offers. And if listened to, these lies have the incredible persuasive power to make you believe that sin is the choice you should make. The result of sin is always, always disastrous. That is an eternal principle recorded in God’s Word (see Galatians 6:7-8). As a Christian you are in a battle, and the commander of the enemy forces is always on mission, strategizing with total and complete vicious intent as to how to tempt you to sin. He is relentless in his efforts and has proven throughout history to be more than capable of wreaking havoc on the world of mankind. Is there an answer, a way to thwart his evil plans for your life? Absolutely! God has not left you to fend for yourself in this war. He Himself is with you and has laid out specific instructions to help you fight against Satan’s temptations.

Be Proactive (Psalm 139:23-24; I Peter 5:8; Daniel 1:8): Ask God to help you identify weak areas in your life, areas in which you know Satan will come after you hard. Then make a decision in advance that listening to temptation is not an option for you.

Avoid Temptation (I Thessalonians 5:22; II Timothy 2:22): Stay absolutely away from situations, relationships, websites, places, etc. which you know are tempting to you.

Use Your Weapons (Hebrews 4:12, 15-16): The Bible and Prayer are two of your primary sources in your battle against temptation. Use them. They bring the power of God right into the middle of the conflict. Memorize Scripture verses that speak directly to what you are dealing with. Cram them into your head and into your heart and say them to yourself often.

Get Accountability (Proverbs 27:6; Hebrews 3:13): Grab a friend to help you. Being a Christian is not a lone ranger thing. Share your struggle with a godly friend who will encourage you and pray for you and to whom you give permission to confront you when he/she sees you making unwise choices. We always do better when we know someone is watching us, someone who's in our corner. **see "Accountability Guide" in this booklet*

Look For The Way Out (I Corinthians 10:13): This is great news! God has promised you that there is no temptation that Satan can throw at you that He cannot handle. God will always, in every temptation, provide a way out for you. But you have a role to play in this – you must look for it and choose it.

Get Back Up When You Fall (Proverbs 24:16): If you blow it and give into temptation, run to God to make things right (see Teaching 4 – “Forgiveness”) and then get back up right away and start living for Jesus. Staying down, wallowing in guilt only gives the enemy a reason to celebrate. And why would you want to give him anything like that?!

Not only will God help you in your battle against temptation, He has the ability to even use Satan’s efforts against your life as a positive thing (see I Peter 1:6-7). God can use temptations to test you for the purpose of revealing how strong He is and to help build into your life godly character. How awesome is that! So even before temptation comes, and it will come, kick God’s plan into action. And remember that nothing is impossible with God. He loves you and He’s in your corner. Ask God to help you identify weak areas in your life, areas in which you know Satan will come after you hard. Then make a decision in advance that listening to temptation is not an option for you.

CHOICES

How To Determine The Right Way

God's passionate heart for you is pretty explicit. He wants you to experience real life (see John 10:10). Not the phony, deceitful, destructive life that Satan has for you, but real life – a life that makes a difference, a life that means something, a life that matters. That is what God has in store for you. Pretty exciting stuff! The way in which this becomes a daily, living reality in your life is all wrapped up in one word – “obedience”. God wants you to obey Him with your every day choices. By choosing to follow His way in each area of your life, you escape all of the vile delusions Satan has waiting for you, and you get in on the real life and the real Love relationship God has designed for you. And honestly, who knows more about life and how it works best than the One who created it? This is the very One who loves you completely, continually, and desires only your good. When you clearly understand this, obedience becomes more than something you need to do. It becomes something you truly want to do. When faced with a decision, the questions that immediately come to your mind are, “Jesus, how can I please You in this? What choice do You want me to make? What can I do here that would make You smile? How can I best serve You in this?” These are the kinds of questions that reflect a heart in love with Christ, and one who knows how critically important it is to obey the Author of life.

“Okay,” you say. “I understand the priority of obedience. But how do I know what choice to make in every situation? I mean, how can I make sure that I’m choosing the right

way?” Great question. God has not left you in the dark on this one. After all, He knows how vital it is that you make right choices. This is where the Bible comes in. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” II Timothy 3:16; “Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth.” John 17:17. Clearly, God has given you in His Word everything you need to make right choices based on truth. And by the way, any choice you make which disagrees with what God says in His Word is a wrong choice. Period. No matter how good it may look or how much sense it may appear to make, if it disagrees with what the Bible says, you’ll be making a decision based on a lie. This is, of course, exactly what Satan wants because if he can get you to choose a lie he can get you to live a lie. Your life is the sum of your choices.

God has clearly laid out in the Bible that which is right and that which is wrong on a multitude of subjects. Most of everything you will encounter in life about which you’ll need to make a right/wrong decision is already communicated in Scripture. All you have to do is spend some time reading the Bible and you’ll easily see this. “But wait!” you say. “What about the things that aren’t specifically mentioned in the Bible – like bands, movies, dating – stuff like that?” Again, great question. Not a big surprise here, God has that one covered too. The Bible not only contains specific instructions or commandments, it also contains principles or guidelines that you can apply to any moral issue not specifically mentioned in its pages. God knew that things would come up in your life like that, things on which you would need His direction. He desperately doesn’t want you to miss out on experiencing real life by making a wrong choice. So He provides you

with some Biblical principles that you can use as a checklist when making a decision.

Here is a sample list of some of those principles. I'm presenting them in the form of a question. All you have to do is run your specific issue through each question.

- *Does it master me? (Does it exercise control in my life or influence me in a wrong way?)*

I Corinthians 6:12

- *Will it help someone else's walk with God? (Is it a right example of Jesus to others?)*

I Corinthians 8:12-13; Matthew 5:16

- *Is it beneficial in any way to me? (Will it build me up spiritually, physically, mentally?)*

I Corinthians 10:23; Mark 12:30

- *Does it bring glory to God? I Corinthians 10:31*

- *Does it slow me down spiritually? Hebrews 12:1*

- *Does it help me to be a good example of Jesus to non-believers? Colossians 4:5*

- *Does it encourage me to be pure?*

II Timothy 2:22

- *Is this the wise choice? Ephesians 5:15-17*

Again, the reason these principles are so exciting is because God doesn't want you to miss out on experiencing real life through wrong decisions. He gives you these truths as an expression of His passionate heart. Remember, being a Christ-follower is all about relationship. He loves you deeply and is well acquainted with Satan's plans of destruction for you. Obeying God's instructions is your only hope to escape living life based on Satanic lies and deceptions.

So when faced with a decision about something not specifically mentioned in the Bible, use these Biblical principles to help you determine what is the best choice to make. Run it through these questions. If you get even a single “No” answer to any of them, then your choice is clear. Don’t do it. Remember two things:

First: the commands of Scripture (your authority for right choices and living real life) are explicit in many areas. Whatever God says, do it. Pretty straight-forward. And where no specific direction is given, use these Biblical principles which are just as authoritative and binding as the commandments themselves.

Second: don’t ever forget what’s at stake. Often your emotions will want to lead you in a direction which God doesn’t want you to go. Using Biblical principles will show you this. Regardless of what you might be feeling or what other people may say, always obey God. Only then will you get in on the life plans God has for you and avoid the devastation Satan wants to wreak on your life. Choose to follow God in every area of your life and find out first-hand what He has in store for you.

There are a lot more great principles God has given you in His Word to help you make right choices. I’ve simply chosen the one’s listed in this Teaching to help get you started. As you come across others, make note of them and add them to your decision-making arsenal. Good stuff.

COMMUNITY

Getting Involved With God's Family

Being a Christ-follower was never designed to be a “lone ranger” type of a life. In fact, the exact opposite is true. The moment you invite Jesus into your life you become a member of the family of God, the body of Christ, the Church. The apostle Paul, writing to Christians, said this: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it.” I Corinthians 12:27 (see also Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12:12-13). You now have some pretty exciting intimate common ground with every other believer in the world. You have the same Heavenly Father, the same Savior, the same Holy Spirit living inside you, the same planetary assignment (see Teaching 8), and you belong to the same family – the family of God. In fact, the Church isn’t just something you go to, it’s something you are. This truth makes you a significant member of this spiritual family and you have an important role to play within the context of a local community of faith, a local body of Christ-followers who come together to do life with each other. This is the local church.

The bottom line is this: the church needs you and you need the church.

- *The local church needs you because God has designed you and equipped you to be involved in service to — and in serving with — your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, so that God's purposes in this world can be fulfilled.*

- *You need the local church because God wants to use your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to serve you, to encourage you, to help you grow in your faith, and to give accountability to your life.*

The local church is God's plan on earth for you to experience fellowship, corporate worship, community, service, and a true sense of belonging. It is within this context of community that He wants you to experience and celebrate the ordinances of Baptism (an outward expression of your inward commitment to Christ: see Matthew 28:18-19; Acts 8:12; Romans 6:3-4) and the Lord's Supper or Communion (see I Corinthians 11:23-26). Getting involved in a local church family is not an option for a believer (see Hebrews 10:24-25). It is part of God's expressed plan for your life.

The main requirement to keep in mind when choosing which local church to be a part of is that it must be true to the Word of God in both teaching and practice. The Bible must be the only standard of what they believe, what they communicate, and what they encourage you to live out. Make it a matter of serious prayer. Ask God to lead you to the church family He wants you to be connected with. And then when He directs you to it, dive in. Get involved in serving there and in building up and encouraging your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. You're part of the family of God. So play your part and enjoy your family.

teaching eight

WITNESSING

Following Through

On Your Planetary Assignment

Last words have always been important... the last words between a husband and a wife before he boards the train for a long business trip; the last words between a college student and his parents before he gets in his car and travels cross-country for another long semester; the last words between a boyfriend and girlfriend before she gets on a plane leaving for a summer tour of a foreign country. Last words have always been important. They are chosen carefully not only because they are significant but because they are meant to be remembered, often for a very long time. Jesus Christ was no different. He too spoke final words to His followers one day – words that were not only significant but carried with them a commission that was to be remembered and to be lived out until the day He would return. Let's listen into what He said: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." Mark 16:15. With these last words Jesus unleashed upon His followers that which was to be one of the dominating activities of their life on earth – their planetary assignment that would give them a clear sense of mission. They were to "preach the good news" everywhere to everyone.

It was simple and yet utterly profound. God was placing in their hands the unbelievable privilege of being His representatives on earth. And now, two thousand years later, Jesus' words still ring loud and clear to His followers today. He gives to you the same privilege, the

same planetary assignment. As a Christ-follower you are to “preach the good news” everywhere to everyone. It’s pretty awe-inspiring to realize that God wants to use you to carry out His plan to tell His story to this world! “Preach” means to proclaim, to announce publicly. “The good news” is the story of salvation through Jesus Christ, God’s offer of eternal life and a relationship with Him. God wants to get the word out and His plan is to use you to do it. “But how?” you ask. That’s the exciting part. God intends to use your whole life as a witness for Him – what you do and what you say.

God can and wants to use everything about you to make a difference for Him. “You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:14,16. As a Christian, this isn’t something you’ll become one day. This is something that you are right now! You are the light of the world right now. The things you do – your actions, attitudes, conversations, entertainment choices – all of it taken together are to display the reality of Jesus Christ in your life. That’s what being “the light” is all about. And Jesus says that simply by living your life for Him others will see it and will be drawn to God. How cool is that?!

But wait, there’s more. Not only can you make an impact for God through your lifestyle, you can make an impact for Him through your words. That’s where preaching the Good News comes in. “Wait a minute,” you say. “I’m not a preacher. I can’t do that.” Actually, you are and you can. Remember this is God’s commission to you. It’s not an option. And because of that, whatever He commands He also provides the help and ability to do. Don’t forget

that you're in a relationship with Him. God loves you, and He's with you every day through everything. That includes this exciting business of preaching the Good News.

So how can you “preach the Good News”? You can do it through your testimony. A “testimony” is simply you telling your story of how you came to know Jesus Christ. Typically a testimony includes three things: what your life was like before Jesus, how you came to invite Jesus into your life, and what your life is like now that you know Jesus. Or to put it another way: What was going on in your life before you met Jesus, how did you meet Him, and what is your life like now - how is Jesus making a difference in your life today? That's it. And you are the best one to tell it because it's your story. If you've never shared it before you might want to try putting it on paper first. Often writing it out will help you organize your thoughts and enable you to communicate it clearly. Practice on a friend. This will help you be better prepared to share it when God gives you the chance. And when He does (and He will) simply be real and watch God work. If the person you're sharing with is open and wants to hear all that you have to say — awesome, it's a win! If the person you're sharing with wants to commit his/her life to Jesus — awesome, it's a win! If the person you're sharing with totally rejects what you have to say — awesome, it's a win! Although that might sound strange to you, it doesn't to God. In fact Jesus said that if you are rejected for His sake you should be psyched because “great is your reward in heaven” (see Matthew 5:11-12). So you see the only way not to win is to not share the Good News.

“But what if the person I talk to actually wants to invite Jesus into his life right there?” Let me tell you from personal experience that when that happens it will be one of those amazing moments you’ll remember for a long time. Not only that, but you’ll get a taste of the miracle of introducing someone to Jesus Christ, and you’ll get hungry for more.

So what do you do when this happens? You simply walk the person through what is often referred to as “The Plan of Salvation”. It is a simple, straight-forward presentation of the “Good News” - what the Bible says about how to become a Christ-follower. And always remember to emphasize that it’s all about relationship, a relationship with God through the love-sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. Here are the basics: (see also Teaching 1 - “Salvation”)

- *Acts 17:26-27: God has put everyone on this planet right where they are so that they can be in the best place to come to know Him. That is His heart – for everyone to come into a relationship with Him.*
- *Romans 3:23; 8:7: They must understand they are separated from God by their sin. No one is exempt from this status.*
- *Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5: Salvation (a relationship with God now and forever) is a gift given only by God. No amount of good works can earn it. It’s by faith alone.*
- *John 3:16; 14:6: Eternal life (salvation, a home in heaven) comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.*
- *Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19: There must be not only an admittance of sin, but also a desire to turn from it – to give up living life on their terms and to live life on God’s terms. This is “repentance” – to have a change of mind that results in a change of heart – a turning from sin and a turning to God.*

• *John 1:12; Romans 10:9-10: By faith they turn to Jesus and invite Him into their life/commit their life to Him. They place their faith solely and completely in Him.*

Another way to share God's story of salvation is by emphasizing just one verse: John 3:16. All of the above key elements are contained in this verse. "For God so loved the world" – God has His heart intensely fixed on you; "that He gave" – He took the first step in building a relationship with you, He pursues you; "His one and only Son" – God's passion for you is revealed in what He gave for you – Jesus died on the cross because of the world's sin (your sin) which separates everyone (and you) from God – you can't fix this on your own, you need a Savior; "that whoever believes in Him" – the invitation for relationship is open to everyone – when you believe in someone you put your faith in them, you believe what they stand for, what they say, what they are all about, you commit – it's the same when you choose to believe in Jesus – by faith you wholesale commit to Him and what He's all about – you choose to turn and follow Him; "shall not perish but have eternal life" – you are going to spend eternity somewhere – committing your life to Jesus and having a relationship with Him guarantees you eternal life (heaven) and not eternal death (hell).

After you've helped them understand these truths, you can lead them through a prayer of salvation, a prayer which they can pray phrase by phrase after you and mean as their own. It's important to help them understand that they are not praying to you – you can't save them. Also, let them know that the words they are using are not "magic". Prayer is simply the way God has given us to express our hearts to Him.

Here is a sample prayer you can use:

“Dear God, I believe that You are telling me the truth in Your Word and I agree with it. I confess that I am a sinner and I need to be rescued – I need a Savior. I believe that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die on a cross to pay the penalty for my sin. I believe that He rose from the grave, conquering sin and death, and now offers me eternal life – a love relationship with You forever. I want that. So right now Jesus, I turn from my sin in repentance and I turn to You. Come into my life, forgive my sin, and give me eternal life. I commit my life to You. Thank You for becoming my Savior, my Friend, my Lord. I love You. Thank You for loving me. Guide me now as I follow You. Amen.”

Again, this is just a sample prayer. You can use it as a guideline or not at all. What’s important is that the person you are leading to Christ clearly understands what he or she needs to believe and then to express that to God through a prayer of commitment. And always help them to realize that being a Christ-follower is not just a series of beliefs. It is a relationship of commitment and love. Anything less is merely empty religion.

You then need to share with them I John 5:11-13. Verse 13 is especially important at this moment because it confirms God’s guarantee to them: “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.” Make sure that they see the word “know”. It doesn’t say “hope so” or “think so” or “maybe so”. They can have absolute assurance that God has given them eternal life through Jesus Christ, that God has established a relationship with them through His Son, Jesus. Done deal.

Now you encourage them to start building their relationship with God through spending time with Him

in the Bible (see Teaching 2 - "Devotion"). Give them a copy of this booklet if you can. It's critically important that they start growing in their new relationship with Jesus right away. Satan hates what has happened and will try everything in his power to hinder, discourage, and lead them to believe his lies for their life. Spending time in God's truth is what they need in order to effectively frustrate Satan's plans.

Two more things.

One: While it is your privilege and responsibility to "preach the good news", it is not your responsibility to save anyone. That is God's responsibility - that is His work not yours. You are to be a faithful witness. It is up to God to do the rest.

Two: Pray and ask God to give you opportunities to tell others about Him. If you're nervous, that's okay. Tell Him that too and ask for His help. In fact, ask Him to not only bring an opportunity your way but to give you the words to say as well. And you know what? He will...He really will. Don't wait. Do it today and watch God help you fulfill His planetary assignment for you!

Accountability Guide

Getting into an accountability relationship as a Christian is really important. God never intended for us to live the Christian life as a lone ranger. He wants us to have godly people in our lives who can encourage us, confront us, challenge us, and pray for us, and for whom we can do the same. That's what an accountability relationship is all about - helping each other live 100% for Jesus. Here are some guidelines you can use to help you have an effective accountability relationship.

- Pray and ask God to lead you to the right person who will be your Accountability Partner. This person needs to be a committed Christian with whom you can be honest and to whom you give permission to speak honestly into your life. This person also needs to be the same gender as yourself.
 - Once you have asked that person and he/she has agreed to be your Accountability Partner, set up a regular meeting time and place. Trying to meet once a week is a good goal. It keeps things current.
 - Here is a suggested format for your meeting with your Accountability Partner.
1. Ask each other these questions.
 - a. How is your daily quiet time?
(Bible reading and prayer)
 - b. How is your thought life?
 - c. Are you being a good influence in your relationships?
 - d. Are you living in complete obedience to Jesus in every area of your life?

- e. Have you been completely honest in answering the above questions?
2. Spend some time sharing praises and prayer requests.
3. Spend some time praying for each other.
4. Choose a verse of Scripture you will both work on memorizing by your next meeting.

These are only some suggested guidelines to use. You can add others. The important points are to be totally honest with each other, stay focused during your meeting time, and always remember the goal: to help each other love Jesus and live 100% for Him.

Scripture Helps

ANXIETY

I Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6-7

COMFORT

Psalms 46:1-3; Matthew 11:28

COURAGE

Isaiah 40:29; Philippians 4:13

DISCOURAGEMENT

Galatians 6:9; Isaiah 41:10; I Corinthians 15:58

ETERNAL LIFE

John 6:47; I John 5:13

FORGIVENESS

Matthew 11:25; Acts 3:19; I John 1:9

HELP IN TROUBLE

Psalms 18:2; Psalm 37:39; Nahum 1:7

LONELY

John 14:23; Hebrews 13:5-6

LOVE

*John 15:9-13; I Corinthians 13:4-7;
Ephesians 2:4-7; I John 4:10, 16, 19*

OBEDIENCE

Psalms 106:3; John 15:10; James 1:25; I John 3:22

PRAYER

*Psalm 50:15; 65:2; Jeremiah 33:3;
Matthew 7: 7-8, 11; Philippians 4:6-7*

PROTECTION

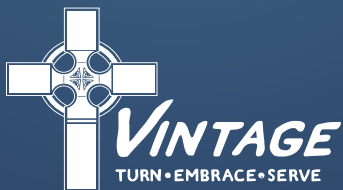
Proverbs 18:10; Isaiah 43:1-2

TRUST

Psalm 46:1-2; Proverbs 3:5-6; I Peter 5:7

WORD OF GOD

*Psalm 119:105, 130; Proverbs 6:23;
Romans 10:17; I Thessalonians 2:13;
II Timothy 3:15-16; James 1:21-25; I Peter 2:2*



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