

**Fly Beyond Every Life Struggle  
and Feel your Spirit Soar**

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***My Freedom Renewed website – [www.shannonericsson.com](http://www.shannonericsson.com) – begins like this:***

*“There is a Crisis in the Land..... Life comes at us really fast at times, and we all want to avoid a destructive crisis of some kind getting a grip on our life.....**We want FREEDOM** – but, it can be so elusive and difficult to attain..... even for seasoned Christians.”*

More to the point – *“There is a Crisis in the Church.”* – Even the most Bible Thinking, God Walking, Upright Christian Believer will experience seasons of life that make them vulnerable and susceptible to the trouble that Jesus spoke about in his Gospels—here’s what he said:

***“In this world, you will have trouble...”***

Turns out of course, that he was spot-on—some believers are just becoming aware of this trouble and recognize that it’s beginning to influence them and their lifestyle, and they are seeking, at the very least, a “tune-up” to strengthen their relationship with Jesus—they are wanting to prevent some kind of crisis developing that could hammer their life in the first place. Many have talked to me about a battle they are having with spiritual discipline—especially younger guys—it’s about their thought-life, and how they are struggling to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, like the bible says. They are realizing that their life has veered off course a little bit, and they are looking for an effective way to get it back on track, moving forward again. They long to reignite their faith and their love of God like they know they need to do—*like they used to do.*

However, many others know they need way more than a tune-up—they need a total spiritual life overhaul. A multitude of believers are looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places resulting in a crisis of substance abuse and even long-term addiction hammering their souls. In addition, our families are having to take on the emotional upheaval and debilitating stress caused by this Covid pandemic at loose on the world stage—mom’s and dad’s grappling with increased levels of anxiety and insecurity in their children that they’ve never experienced before.

They struggle mightily just trying to cope with the reality that life demands of them. For some it's economic, family, or work-related stress. Some Christians have lost their marriage, a loved one, or their career. Others lose their health, or their 401k or life savings. All too often, Christians recoil from stress and painful events by yielding to one or more scourges of life such as anger, eating or drinking too much, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual immorality like porn or adultery—even seemingly innocuous things, especially relevant in this culture we live in. *Check this out:*

Who would have thought that Christians would be getting hooked on romance novels, digital gaming, gambling, and social media of all kinds—where’d this come from?

One of the very best books of research on this subject that I have found, comes from one of America's leading Psychiatrists and Authors, Dr. Anna Lembke, MD. I paraphrase the following from her "**dopamine nation**" book <sup>1</sup>...

*"Americans especially becoming heavily influenced to **"overconsuming"** all kinds of things, because of the ease of accessing and acquiring, all kinds of things. We're all running from pain. We take pills—we drink booze—we gorge on chocolate cake—we binge on romance novels. We'll do almost anything to distract ourselves from ourselves—yet all this trying to insulate ourselves from pain seems only to have made it worse. The reason we're all so miserable may be because we're working so hard to avoid being miserable."*

Though these things can provide some escape and relief, it's only temporary—and then reality shows up again exacerbating the turmoil of life, especially if you're a Christian, because of guilt. It's a soul-crushing cycle that many Christians have a deep desire to stop, but they don't know how—and, not because of bible ignorance—turns out that their current plan is just not sufficiently effective. They need a new one; a better one—an effective one.

## **Are you, or someone you know and care about having to live like that?**

Truth is... no one desires to live like that. We want to determine and control our temperament, attitude, and behavior in a way that produces a deep-rooted contentment and fulfillment from our lifestyle. Isn't that it—doesn't that sound right to you? So, what would you think if I told you that kind of hope, renewed freedom and lifestyle is not only possible, but very attainable and very available, right now...?

There certainly is a crisis of spiritual freedom weaving its way through the church today—however, there is also, and forever has been, a profusion of really good news that comes in the form of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **He knows everything and he can do anything.**

Trouble is, there's also a multitude of Christians out there in the church today who are blissfully unaware of that—their need-to-know Jesus, way more effectively than they do now—has also become a crisis for them, and it is growing more prevalent in church life today.

An increasing number of Christians experience Jesus more as an acquaintance, or historical icon; they just don't know him well enough to consistently walk in the authentic, biblical freedom that he has provided us. Their spiritual foundation is very weak, making them vulnerable for some kind of train-wreck coming down the line, in their not-to-distant future. Many are becoming aware of this and are getting inspired to do something about it—that's some really good news. *Here's why*—the primary motivation for these believers to think about purchasing my book is clearly to either fix, or to avoid, the bad habits and destructive lifestyle issues that I write about—my research distinctly tells me that.

However, there's something else—something bigger. Every believer who chooses to begin studying my Freedom Renewed Program can anticipate something unexpected and wonderful happening in their life—they'll be drawn much closer to Jesus than they ever were before. Most won't see that coming—but, that's what happens when you hang out with Jesus—they just don't know it yet, but they will...This book will put them on the right path.

## **RENEWED LIKE AN EAGLE**

BOOK 1- FREEDOM THROUGH GRACE - INTRODUCTION

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<sup>1</sup> "*dopamine nation*" – Publisher: Penguin Random House; New York, 2021

That's one of the things that distinguish my book—in addition, the book is unique and set-apart, in a number of other ways. Christians have been using scripture for eons to help them avoid being trapped in a destructive behavior cycle. But simply reading and memorizing scripture isn't enough this day and age. You need a plan or process to help you focus and apply biblical principles of truth. This book offers that plan and process—and it's distinctive. While most life management books for Christians primarily repeat scriptures and different interpretations of them, this book combines biblical truth with keen insight from other invaluable sources of wisdom; in other words, **this book is bible-based, and it also incorporates freedom-oriented research** from other sources such as advanced learning techniques and life management skills, behavioral sciences, psychology, and high-performance athletic and business lifestyles.

And, here's another very key reason for writing this book the way that I have—a large number of believers shared that they were not interested in putting a “Band-Aid” on the issues of life they were struggling with—they knew that a couple of seminars or a weekend drive-by retreat just would not be sufficient to plug their life into. And further, it didn't matter whether their spiritual need was relatively minor, rekindling a little more discipline, or whether that need was massive, reordering their entire lifestyle. They wanted their spiritual condition fixed—NO MORE BAND AIDS! That's what the Freedom Renewed Program in my book is all about—providing a plan that actually works, and works really well, for ordinary Christians, and church leaders alike.

Truth is... that's exactly why I put an action-plan on my website and why I wrote this book—and that's exactly what my **Freedom Renewed Program** (FRP), in both of them has been meticulously designed to accomplish within any and every Christian who will seriously invest themselves in it. So, what do you think—how does that sound to you? Is it time to experience that fun, joy and fulfillment in your life again—*are you interested?*

Almighty God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, has a message for you. There is something that He wants you to know, about yourself or someone you care for, that you simply do not know right now. You really need to hear this—**It truly is a life-changer.**

### **That freedom message begins here in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah:**

*Jer. 33:3 – “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known....” (NRSV)*

There is a clear and compelling logic woven into this message of freedom that I encourage you to consider and think about in the following two points:

1. God knows that if your personal relationship with Jesus was sufficiently effective right now, you wouldn't have need to acquire that higher level of authentic, exhilarating, biblical freedom—**You'd actually be living it.**
2. God deeply desires to reveal those *great and hidden things* to you. However, he alone understands the motive behind every thought. So, God wants you to know that if you determine to seek him for yourself, or to help someone you love, with *authentic sincerity in your heart*, he will be found by you (*1Chr. 28:9*). He is waiting for you to take the first step and call out to him. He stands ready, right now, to begin renewing and reinvigorating your hope and your hunger for the deep things of God—question is, are you ready? *He always rewards those who diligently seek him* (Heb. 11:6).

I can tell you that this message is all about **Authentic Freedom**—not just some old clichés about freedom to live-out a few hopes and dreams.

Or, even answers to some prayers that you've likely pondered over and over—but the kind of change in life that can truly set you or someone you care about on a path to experience a more fulfilling, and even exhilarating life-style, characterized with much deeper joy and peace. That's what God's message and his reward looks like.

That hidden message that God wants you to know is also embedded here in the New Testament book of Galatians, with a little more perspective:

**Gal. 5:1** – *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (NIV)*

Jesus wants each and every Christian follower of his to experience the kind of freedom and abundant life-style that I have just described, however, the truth is that there are a multitude of us in the church today who are not free to live like that. So, if you or someone you love and care about are in need of that kind of freedom, this book is for you. That's exactly why I wrote it—acquiring, or re-acquiring an abundant lifestyle of authentic, exhilarating, biblical freedom. It's time to have fun and really enjoy life again—what do you think? Are you ready for that?

Jesus himself said, from John 16:33, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* Jesus is making a strategic point here by inference. He is counseling us to actually anticipate the arrival of trouble in this life and to prepare ourselves for it—and not to run from it, but, like him, to overcome it. *There is a way—he always makes a way for those who seek him with all their heart.*

Some of you may have already lost your marriage, your family, your career, your 401k, your lifetime savings, something you really value. Or you certainly know somebody who has. All because you or they have yielded to one or more scourges of life such as alcoholism, drug-addiction, pornography and sexual immorality, impulsive anger, eating disorders, etc. The list is long.

That's the kind of trouble that Jesus is talking about. However, he is also talking about his provision of freedom from that kind of trouble. This experience of freedom, documented in Galatians 5:1, is wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ, and the unsearchable riches of your knowledge of him—***of just how well you know him.***

And that unique kind of formidable and powerful knowledge my friend, is the great and hidden thing that Almighty God wants you to know, and know so well, so effectively, that your life will be wonderfully changed forever more. *Check this out:*

That freedom you are seeking—that you might even be desperate to acquire, is inextricably linked, both now and forever, to your working knowledge and relationship with Jesus. Following here, is a very easy and effective statement to focus your attention on that will lock this unassailable truth into your brain:

- ***Insufficient Knowledge of Jesus—Always Results in Insufficient Freedom, Insufficient Joy and Insufficient Peace in Your Life.***

Therefore, at the very least, I have authored this plan & book for that very reason—that your personal relationship with Jesus will have been made significantly stronger and more effective as a result of reading and studying what I've written. And further, that many of you will actually acquire that Freedom through Grace that I write about—and begin living it out with a new found joy and exhilaration. That's what Jesus wants for you – *But, there's that trouble he talks about...*

## **Okay – Let’s begin examining some of that trouble...**

Temptation, and our response to it, affects all people, from all walks of life—including Christians—including Christian church leaders. We are all vulnerable. We are all at risk. We all struggle with this, in some way, throughout almost every day of our life.

Even the most Bible Thinking, God Walking, Upright Christian Believer will experience seasons of life that make them vulnerable and susceptible to *the sin that so easily entangles*. That fact is documented here from the book of Hebrews:

Heb. 12:1 – *let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (NIV)*

## **Begs a question – Can you fulfill this scripture right now?**

Are you able to consistently and faithfully fulfill what God is instructing every Christian to do here? Can you do this all of the time—Some of the time—A little of the time—Every once in a while—or, like so very many Christians, would you have to say—Hardly ever, or even, not at all – it’s just too hard. Your answer will reveal a lot about how well you know Jesus right now.

God knows very well just how easy it is for any of us to become entangled in some kind of sinful behavior, and also, what it takes to throw it off and stay clear of it. However, it turns out this is easier said than done. In fact, many Christians possess sufficient *intellectual* knowledge of what they need to do. Knowledge of the biblical truth designed to set them free is not their main issue.

They have discovered, much to their dismay, that the discipline, willpower, habits, and overall life strategy they have adopted for themselves is not as effective as it needs to be. Try as they might, their numerous attempts to overcome destructive lifestyles fall short of success. And, it is certainly not because of any lack of desire. Every Christian I am aware of strongly desires to do what God is instructing them to do, not only here in Hebrews 12, but throughout the bible.

What an enigma. They may know what to do, but they are just not able to develop a method, or a plan for themselves that really works; Like Jesus said: *“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

For example, here’s the issue documented in Romans by the Apostle Paul:

Rom. 7:18-19 – *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (NIV)*

This passage of scripture accurately describes the conflict and bewilderment that results when Christians consistently yield themselves to sin. They may clearly recognize, understand, and desire to conform their lifestyle in a way that fulfills the teaching of Christ, but have not been able, or are not currently able, to consistently make that happen. So many have just given up. They’re *Out-of-Gas* or, their spiritual gas tank is almost empty – *Running on Fumes*. They have yet to find what it takes to get themselves free.

The problem looks just like this: **“No Jesus – No Gas!”**

The solution looks just like this: **“Know Jesus Well – Lots of Gas!”**

Jesus clearly doesn't want your life to run out of spiritual gas. He wants you to be free so you can determine and control your temperament, attitude, and behavior in a way that produces that deep-rooted contentment and fulfillment I just wrote about, throughout all the days of your life. This is true whether you believe in God or not. However, there is a certain type of person I am convicted to emphasize and reach out to with this program:

Let me describe that person – ***it just might be you:***

*“Outwardly, you may be a normal functioning man or woman trying your best to succeed with your life... Your family, close friends and associates may have no idea that you are having any significant problems. But Inwardly, where no one but you and God can see, you are really struggling to get free.”*

Does that describe you? *Definitely...? Maybe...? Sometimes...?*

You'd almost certainly be surprised at just how many wonderful men and women of God are dealing with this—maintaining a struggle to outwardly conform to what they know looks like a God honoring lifestyle, but inwardly, they have not yet been able to find an effective way to throw off stuff in their life that causes trouble and distress. This can be a very miserable way to live.

## THE PROBLEM

Here's the rub—I write a lot about it throughout my FRP—it's all about *“the cry of every human heart to be loved, to be accepted and to be respected.”*

Turns out that God deliberately created this longing within every one of us, and, it also turns out that God is the only one who can effectively fulfill it, through Jesus. However, we all like sheep have gone astray, and are prone to wander, just as the bible states—so, because that is true, our minds can easily be deceived into thinking that we can satisfy that very powerful yearning for love, acceptance & respect by indulging in all kinds of destructive behavior. As a result, many of us end up getting heavily influenced by it, or, even addicted to it. **That's the crisis**, and, it's getting worse in the church—not better.

Many Christians like those I've just described have become trapped in a destructive behavior cycle. This cycle starts by yielding to a temptation of some kind... Then comes remorse and sorrow and many times even some intense anger at one-self, followed by conviction and confession... then a short-lived state of repentance providing a temporary respite of freedom and peace... only then to repeat the cycle by yielding to temptation again and again resulting in more defeat and misery. The cycle goes on and on, sometimes for years and yes, even decades for some believers. This process describes the actions of a Yo-Yo, and can become a very merciless cycle of misery for those held fast by the grasp of it. A Yo-Yo travels up and down, ***but never forward—It doesn't go anywhere.*** Some people have been living like this for years, living in denial with some kind of binding affliction, and have had to become extremely stealthy to keep from exposing their lifestyle addiction or destructive behavior to others.

However, there is a way to either effectively inoculate one-self from being driven like this in the first place, or to get yourself free, and keep yourself free, from the tenacious grip of one of these afflictions. That's what the program in my plan and in this book is all about—Intended to benefit any Christian seeking consistent personal freedom from destructive habits and lifestyles. Over time, my FRP is designed to develop within you the knowledge, wisdom, fortitude, tenacity, grit and perseverance that will help you live your life in a more consistent state of freedom. That's why I developed this program and wrote this book—providing ordinary believers, a plan that actually works, and works really well.

This book is not just another Christian self-help encyclopedia to wander through and try to digest. I didn't want to write yet another self-help tome for the Christian DIY book market, of which there are many. Let me explain – A real perplexity that begs an answer to a number of questions, beginning with these – Why are so many Christians, in this generation, becoming so afflicted with destructive lifestyles? What is causing this and why are they so deeply rooted, entrenched and difficult to get rid of?

When I began developing this program and researching the effectiveness of existing books about the subject matter, I discovered something very compelling. A significant amount of the information needed to accurately and authentically define both questions of what was causing these debilitating lifestyles, and what can be done about it, was either not very clear at all, or, was missing entirely—but, please don't get me wrong here...

Many great and inspirational Christian books have been authored over the years, and many of them have brought me notable enjoyment and benefit. In my research, I could easily find support from bible study companion guides and other clinical resources from secular and even Christian behavior therapists, scientists and related professionals in the marketplace. There are numerous books and resources providing lots of good advice, lots of beneficial guidance. But I found nothing to substantially, or adequately, answer these questions of mine—after a lot of research, it became apparent to me that a new and unique development method could be employed that would be far more effective.

## THE SOLUTION

I began developing this program in 1986. It occurred to me that if simply reading and memorizing scripture could produce the desired freedom from a destructive lifestyle, then a book like this would not be needed. Christians have been using scripture for eons. That is not the issue. Statistical facts verify that this kind of program definitely is needed for so many of the reasons I have already documented within these last few pages.

### ***So, what makes this FRP unique? Actually, a number of factors...***

First, the program embedded within the pages of this book has been produced using a meticulous process of searching out and compiling, over many years, specific axioms of biblical truth, combined with other relevant, authoritative and beneficial sources.

These other sources include the development and implementation of very efficient life management skills, the clinical workings of the mind from experts within pertinent fields of behavior sciences, advanced training methods of high-performance athletes and business leaders, accelerated and advanced learning techniques, and other applicable resources. Then ***integrating all of this into an actual working plan*** that is always pragmatic, productive, exceedingly effective and very rewarding.

Learning, acquiring and activating these specific axioms, principles and precepts from the bible and other relevant resources one needs to develop a high-performance lifestyle could take a significant amount of time to achieve. So, I have also been determined to accomplish this, in the extremely fast paced world we live in, but, without having to expend an inordinate amount of time, energy and resources invested by readers who will launch themselves into this program. I really do appreciate and respect the very high value and sometimes scarcity of available time that a reader can apply to a reference work like this.

So, I have developed my process in this way, to seriously avoid wasting your time and spinning your wheels. I am tenaciously determined that the program in this book will work extraordinarily well for you, in a number of rewarding ways.

Here is one of them: I have purposely researched only those specific and highly relevant principles and precepts from scripture, and also from these other effective and beneficial sources, ***that really matter***. I have then categorized, arranged, organized, and finally compiled all this work to focus at one very specific purpose—and that purpose is to develop the spiritual foundation and virtues of freedom within every man and woman who chooses to invest themselves in this program.

However, I can't tell you that this program is super easy and requires little effort to get through it. (*If I did, you would have some difficulty trusting me and believing that this program is worth very much*). In fact, the study can be challenging, and even daunting at times.

Nonetheless, I have worked painstakingly hard to make both, the study process, and the retaining of knowledge, to be as easy for the reader as I can possibly make it. Even making it fun at times with a little humor. Here's another time-saver—at specific milestones of introducing essential precepts of biblical freedom, I document a **Key-Principle** to really help the reader “Lock-In” the crucial truth being presented.

For example, here's one of these essential key-principles:

**Key #3** – *Jesus Christ is more intent on helping you and teaching you how to obtain a vibrant, functional, and stronghold busting lifestyle than He is about exposing your weaknesses and failures to public humiliation.*

So, this program is definitely not designed to be a quick drive-by presentation of information like you might receive from reading a few self-help books, or attending a couple of weekend seminars or workshops. Many of you have tried that approach, and you know it falls short of developing what you need to overcome whatever is afflicting your life. Learning a few helpful principles and just saying no to destructive habits and behaviors that have taken root within you simply does not work and will never work. That approach is like a band-aid. It may cover up the problem for a while, but it cannot get down to the root cause of it. Take a look at it here from a slightly different perspective:

This program is unique and very effective precisely because it doesn't just propose making a few adjustments in your thinking and behavior – Rather, it is designed to thoroughly order, or re-order, the way you think about and approach a destructive habit, and the manner or method(s) you use to overcome them—whether you just need a spiritual life tune-up, or a complete overhaul.

But, it doesn't stop there. The program goes on to identify, develop and maintain within you what is needed to avoid them for the rest of your life. Why? Because that kind of comprehensive power and force must be acquired, and then applied, to overcome a destructive habit and lifestyle that has bound up your life—this FRP of mine will help provide that needed structure to plug your life into and develop some long-term stability—a functional and formidable spiritual foundation that you can depend upon.

This book meticulously and systematically reveals the What, Why and How all of this destructive behavior is happening to well-intentioned Christians navigating life right now, today—and, most importantly, this book delivers an exceedingly effective method of actually helping to acquire that life-changing freedom sought after by so many.

So, I reiterate; this program simply works – ***IT REALLY WORKS!***

## **SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING**

Okay, how does a destructive grip like this develop? How does it take root within us and end up influencing, and then, for many, actually determining, how we think, act and behave? Especially, as Christians, knowing Jesus at some level, and also having a working knowledge of biblical truth? How can this be?

*Indeed, how can this be... **What causes this to happen?***

For many Christians, even for those in professional or lay Church leadership, it often happens as described in one of the following example narratives:

Almost all of us start out life investing the majority of our time and energy on the health and well-being of our bodies, minds and careers. However, this typical life focus ends up being quite often at the expense of neglecting the health and well-being of our spirits. In point of fact, consider the following scripture verse from the bible that warns and admonishes us to develop and maintain a balanced lifestyle, including a very healthy spirit:

*Luke 9:25 – (Jesus Speaking) "For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and ruins or forfeits (loses) himself?" (AMP)*

Jesus is revealing an all-too-common contrast here that we are all faced with. The choice of optimizing the health and well-being of your body, mind and career in pursuit of gaining the whole world, at the expense of neglecting the health and well-being of your soul and spirit.

It's easy for even a well-intentioned Christian to get their life out-of-balance in this way. That's exactly why Jesus is informing and warning us here that anyone who does this makes themselves vulnerable and at risk of all kinds of spiritual weakness, suffering and harm. Even to having their life being ruined. He's telling us here to count the cost, prior to making the choice. He instructs every Christian here in this scripture to exercise wisdom by evaluating the return we will receive as we make daily choices navigating life.

He is also instructing us here, by way of inference, to acquire his attitude, to think about choices in life more like He does. To count the cost! To make daily choices that maintain your physical side of life in balance with your spiritual side of life. Refuse to compromise. Make this one of your essential Core-Values.

**Ok, now let's examine this particular spiritual problem with more detail:**

The following scripture verse from the book of Proverbs also warns and admonishes us to develop and maintain a balanced lifestyle, including a very healthy spirit, but from a slightly different and crucially important context:

**Prov. 6:10-11** – *A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and **poverty** will come on you like a bandit, and scarcity like an armed man. (NIV)*

### Poverty you say – **But, what kind of poverty?**

This scripture verse from the book of Proverbs is clearly a warning about the financial consequences of being lazy and failing to develop a good and effective work ethic, thereby leading to financial weakness, scarcity and poverty. All true by the way. But, consider this; what if God is also, at the same time, talking to us about the **Spiritual Poverty** that can, or will, come on you like a bandit. Especially if you neglect or fail to develop the health, well-being, strength and effectiveness of your spirit. What about that?

If you sleep when you should be working, if you fold your hands to rest a little more when you should be crushing-it as you maintain your spiritual life.

So, here's what can happen when you fail to sufficiently develop, and put into operation, a viable plan of establishing a strong spiritual foundation to base and build your life upon. Jesus has documented these results very clearly in his Gospel of Luke:

**Luke 6:47-49** – *(Jesus Speaking) "I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice.*

*He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.*

*But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete." (NIV)*

### **Clear, compelling and pragmatic isn't it?**

So, what do you think? Seems to me that Jesus has intentionally developed and documented here, a very strong and very logical correlation between these scriptures from the book of Proverbs and the Gospel of Luke. He wants you and me to see these consequences, both good and bad, very clearly, and to carefully think, exercise wisdom and apply this truth to your life. You can't "feel" this happening in your spirit—It is not physical or emotional—It is spiritual. But, you definitely can feel the consequences of it, both good and bad.

No question that God is deliberately concerned for you, about what kind of value you place upon the strength, health and well-being of your soul and spirit. So true, especially compared to that of your body and your mind, as you build, or rebuild, as the case may be, the spiritual foundation of your life.

*What do you think—Does this make sense to you—Do you agree...?*

### **BODY, MIND, SOUL AND SPIRIT – THE BALANCE OF LIFE**

Okay, let's take a closer look at this—remember, we are created with a body, mind, soul and spirit. Restating that a more accurate way: "**We are spirit, and, we have a body and a mind.**"

Our body, mind, soul and spirit are functionally interrelated and integrated with each other. Should any one of them break down or suffer dysfunction, the others are affected.

Most people work at strengthening their bodies and their minds, but inadvertently ignore the crucial importance of the health and well-being of their own soul and spirit. That's what this program is all about; learning how to enhance and optimize the human soul and spirit to develop and maintain a very high-performance lifestyle, in addition to learning to prosper in your vocation and your physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

The first of my Key Principles in this program reads like this:

***Key #1 – It is the health and well-being of the soul and spirit, not the body or mind, that is **directly** linked to achieving and maintaining spiritual freedom.***

One cannot achieve and maintain personal, spiritual freedom by being just physically, mentally and emotionally fit, strong and healthy. Authentic biblical freedom, and a strong, stable spirit begin with a viable, fruitful and productive relationship with Jesus Christ. No exception. To illustrate this, picture within your mind's eye and imagine a three-legged milking stool. Should look something like this:



The three legs represent body, mind & spirit. The health, wholeness & sense of well-being depend upon each of the three legs being strong, healthy & vibrant. You can easily see that, right? Now imagine one of the legs breaking off and becoming dysfunctional. Can you still sit on and use the stool anymore? Probably not, at least, not with any degree of stability or confidence. In the context of personal freedom, the broken leg of the stool represents spiritual health, vitality, strength & well-being. The bible paints a similar picture in scripture:

***Ecc. 4:12*** A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (NASB)

***Matt. 4:4*** Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (NIV)

***John 1:1*** In the beginning, (before all time), was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. (AMP)

***John 6:35*** Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (NIV)

We have been designed & created to be balanced in strength within the three strands of our being; that is: body, mind and spirit. If you "build-up" one strand without regard to the other two, your overall being will be less stable and strong.

So, God's will is for each of us to be like a three-stranded cord that is not quickly or easily broken. The priority in accomplishing that is to not neglect the nourishment, health and strength of your own soul and spirit, as you live life focusing time and resources on the health and well-being of your body and mind. Jesus, speaking in the bible, reveals and teaches us that it is the word of God that nourishes and provides health, vitality, & strength for the well-being of our spirit.

Jesus also teaches us that he is, in his very being, the embodiment and personification of God's word. Therefore, no one can fulfill the word of God without a viable and fruitful relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It just simply cannot be done without him. *He is the Bread of Life!*

Get it? You can only achieve a strong soul and spirit, that is also in balance with the vitality and strength of your body and your mind, by focusing yourself to learn God's word in the bible through a fruitful and productive relationship with Jesus.

## **ACQUIRING FREEDOM – A SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENT**

So, our pursuit of freedom reveals an enigma in our human condition; We rarely will plan our way into developing a rewarding and constructive lifestyle. Instead, we usually only plan and dedicate sufficient time, resources and energy into our vocational and recreational lives. But what about the performance of our personal lifestyles? The development of our Spiritual Foundation?

Turns out that even many Christians, almost always commit most of their time, energy and resources trying to develop a successful and high-performance vocation. They rarely dedicate sufficient time, resources, and energy regarding the spiritual health of their lifestyles, unless, and until, they find themselves in a personal crisis of some type. That can and should be avoided.

Check this out.....It has been said:

*By missing just a few, fundamental steps in developing a high-performance and rewarding lifestyle, a person may end up being very skilled in their vocation and professional attainment, but, be at significant risk of a spiritual blowout occurring at some point in their lifetime.*

### ***Again, what do you think—Does this make sense to you—Do you agree...?***

Consider another relevant example:

Early in the book of Genesis, God speaks with Cain:

*Gen. 4:6-7 – Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but... **you must master it.**” (NIV) (emphasis mine)*

God knows that Cain has made himself vulnerable and susceptible to the sin that so easily entangles. God loves Cain and wants his life to be successful so, God warns him. In this warning, God is also communicating something with very strategic inference.

Namely, that God will not "Master the Sin" for Cain. No—God expects Cain to exercise personal responsibility, take dominion, and master that sin himself by applying what God has provided him. By the way, this mandate that God spoke to Cain, thousands of years ago, is still very much in force upon you and me today. So, what was Cain's response? Does Cain heed God's warning?

No, sadly he does not. Instead, Cain demonstrates that he has little regard to place a high value on the health and well-being of his own spirit; even after God warns him. The result: Cain fails to control his anger and ends up killing his brother Abel.

Every living thing is completely accountable to God. However, the personal responsibility of Christians, in particular, to comply with that accountability is elective. We have to choose to do that. *Something to think about, isn't it? What do you think? Do you agree?*

## **SPIRITUAL STRONGHOLDS AND HABITS – GOOD AND BAD**

Destructive habits and lifestyles result when we build armored structures, strongholds, and fortresses internally within us, right where we live—right where we think and make decisions. These are Spiritual-Strongholds – Almost all destructive lifestyles can be traced back to being caused by, or being influenced by, the condition of a person's soul and spirit.

These strongholds are not made of steel and concrete and they cannot be seen, but their relative strength can accurately be compared to a formidable, structural barrier that is not easily moved. These internal strongholds can influence, or govern, or even completely control our temperaments, attitudes, and behaviors. We can learn the process of how these strongholds are formed within our minds. When we learn and understand how this process works, we can then begin to control it.

When that happens, we can harness that process to produce something wonderful within our self, rather than something destructive. Woven throughout the entirety of this book and program is the deliberate and intentional development of essential weapons of spiritual warfare, both offensive and defensive, needed to obliterate all of those internal strongholds. The ones so solidly lodged within your mind that you have not yet been able to get free from. A lifetime of good and godly habits can be the result for anyone who seeks to increase the unsearchable riches of their knowledge of Christ.

*Check out these following words:*

*"Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit." - Aristotle*

It has been written: "We are what we think" (Prov. 23:7). "We create our habits and then our habits create us." Our comfort-zones exist and function through the habits we learn and adopt, some good.... some bad.... some destructive.

The determined commitment you make to God and yourself, that you will tenaciously pursue increasing your knowledge of Jesus, will almost certainly end up being the most rewarding habit that you will ever form and put into operation.

## **WHY WRITE THIS BOOK – SOME OF MY PERSONAL MOTIVATION**

Considerable research has convinced me over the years that a significant percentage of Christians are experiencing cycles and seasons of misery in their lifestyles. It is not like being in a state of inward denial, for they know their affliction very well. It is because this insidious and hidden state is real, and afflicts a multitude of wonderful people in the church, that I have developed so much passion and dogged-determination to design this program and write this book. So, how have I become aware of these spiritual issues, you may ask?

***Good question; let me offer some background.***

My career, as a Professional Ministry Consultant, has put me in almost daily contact and relation with literally hundreds of pastors, church leaders, bible teachers, and individual believers within the Christian church community across our nation.

In this capacity, I have personally experienced many of the denominational structures that identify Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, and the other many expressions of faith within the Christian church, taken as a whole. So, I have learned to develop a very keen insight, knowledge and expertise of both evangelical and liturgical expressions of ministry, and, have also not been confined to construct this book from a single denominational viewpoint. This has been invaluable to me and I've been able to design this program for a very wide appeal within the Christian church, at large.

To perform my work well, I am required to “get to know” these ministers and their ministry performance goals and mandates with considerable accuracy, effectiveness, and depth. Most of these, over 400 church projects of mine, over the last 25+ years, have taken from several months to sometimes several years to complete.

This has provided me a more than sufficient time frame to establish very strong and trusting relationships with many. Through this network of endearing relationships, there have been extensive discussions and sometimes deep concerns being revealed, and even great sorrow expressed at times when well-intentioned men and women of God, with great skills and service to offer, seemingly lose so much when life “breaks down” for them.

Therefore, I have developed a sincere sense and conviction that I am writing this book not so much to a group of readers that I do not know, but rather, to very dear friends whom I have a very real connection with, and care a great deal about. I also have a lot of empathy with Christians who struggle with addictive behavior. I was saved myself while in my 20's from a lifestyle of being a functional alcoholic. I know the struggle very well, and have had to be vigilant and diligent in my pursuit to know and relate to Jesus effectively enough to maintain my own spiritual freedom.

### ***I get it... I really do get it...!***

And so, now you have explored this introduction, probably scanned the table of contents and have been evaluating what this program is all about. The syntax of the program within this book has purposely been developed to ensure a very high return on the investment of time, research and study that each of you will choose to employ. I know very well that you will need to develop a formidable **Strategy and Life Action Plan** to establish an effective lifestyle of freedom for yourself. I strongly believe that this book will help you do that very effectively.

I have also endeavored to design some flexibility in how you study and take-in this program. Some of you may only be looking for a very solid reference to just help you get back on the path of a more rewarding lifestyle. You may simply want to eliminate some errors in judgment before they lead to the formation of bad habits. If that lines up with your thinking, then I can encourage you to read and study the introductory and prep sections, and then read and study the Key Principles, located throughout the book. This will save time and give you a quick overview of the overall freedom program.

On the other hand, if you know that just a refresher course will not be sufficient for you, and that you realize your desire or your need for a very comprehensive plan – A plan designed to completely re-order your thinking about life stuff and your behavior(s), then I recommend a different approach. Here's what that could look like:

Read through the entire book without taking any extensive notes, but definitely documenting for yourself sections of the book that you realize will need further study. I strongly recommend that you do this without any regard for how much time this may take you to complete.

Take all the time that you need. Then go back through the book as often as needed, but each time focus a lot more attention and detailed study on those sections that require more concentration. This book has been deliberately designed to be very challenging at times, for many effective and beneficial reasons. However, I know you will also find it extremely compelling and rewarding.

And now... I thank you for your initial interest and consideration to read through this Action-Plan Introduction. I sincerely hope that you enjoyed it and that these words of mine have given you a number of life changing things to think about —wishing you the very best as you now begin to plan and develop your own Freedom Strategy studying your way through these sessions that I've listed... ***Godspeed...***