

# LIFE ACTION PLAN



SHANNON ERICSSON

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*Freedom Renewed – Web eBook*

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FIRST EDITION

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## **MEDICAL – HEALTH ADDENDUM**

Abundant, and notable documentation, from competent researchers over many years has revealed that there are a number of Christians who are suffering the toxic effects of abusing drugs and alcohol in their bodies and their minds over a long period of time. Should the reader be one who falls into that category, the author encourages the reader to first seek out medical professionals who can provide effective therapy to detoxify the body of the poisonous results of abusing booze and drugs, in particular. Having done that successfully, the reader will have put their body, mind and soul into a much better place to successfully take on the life challenge of acquiring authentic biblical freedom—a new found freedom from substance, and other abuse, that can result in a deep-rooted contentment and fulfillment from the Christian lifestyle.



WEB eBOOK – LIFE ACTION PLAN  
INTRODUCTION

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

***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—Jesus was absolutely right about trouble coming our way—in all shapes and sizes... So, you're thinking about this Action-Plan, and whether you should take it on. Truth is, you may, or may not, be in a crisis right now—but, there's one thing for sure—***your life is on a path, taking you somewhere, isn't that right?***

Therefore, I want to challenge your perspective and outlook on life a little bit, or, maybe, for some of you, by a lot—we'll take a close look at what I call the "***God's Eye View of Life,***" and how this influences your day-to-day Christian lifestyle. Here's why—in the God's eye view of your life, it is not very meaningful just how successful or unsuccessful your life is, right now—right at this particular moment in time.

Each of our lives have a trajectory that we're on, as we navigate life—and that trajectory matters substantially more than what our current results may reveal.... That trajectory begs this question: Where are your current habits likely to lead you through this next month, next year, next decade—what's trending in your life right now—you're going somewhere, right? The key is, where are you going next—what path are you on and where will it lead you? Something to think about isn't it... Therefore, ***I encourage you now to consider just how much spiritual freedom you've acquired up to this point in your life,*** and, whether you'd like to acquire more. That just makes good sense, doesn't it?

Here's the reason why—there is a widespread issue, that every believer—including you, me, church leaders, pastors, elders, and bible teachers alike, are having to deal with. It comes up almost every day, in our Christian walk with Jesus. Every one of us have at least one behavior, habit, or lifestyle issue that we want to prevail over—***we want to get rid of it!***

It can be as innocuous as eating too much, or not exercising enough—it can be a nagging, little sin habit, that most Christians would not give much credence to, but it can also be a lifestyle crisis of some kind...

It could even be a destructive addiction to something, or someone, that is wreaking a debilitating havoc on you—a significant loss of joy and fulfillment just navigating ordinary life. Many believers are starting to become 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, in the first place, that could end up crushing their life. 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 should do. 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, still 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 today. *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, are 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, just might be, because we're working so hard to avoid being miserable."*

**Does that ring a bell in your brain?** 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?**

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

**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...?

## THE GOOD NEWS

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 essential 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 lifestyle 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 also 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.

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-centric, and it also incorporates freedom-oriented research*** from other disciplines 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 this action-plan on my website and why I wrote my first 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.*

## ***Jesus conquered the world and all its trouble—and, SO CAN YOU...!***

That's exactly what he is inferring... 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 all about, from Jeremiah 33:3, 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 sound-bite 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 especially 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—today.

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 12:1, 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, take a good look at this—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 and 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 freedom-bandits. That's what the program in this plan, and in my 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 Christian, and even secular 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, so, I went to work—God put me to work...

## THE SOLUTION

I began developing this program, way back 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, living in this particular day and age.

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 some form of Church leadership, it often happens as described in one of the following example descriptions: 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 the good, and the 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. That's just a fact—it is the truth...

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 and sense of well-being depend upon each of the three legs being strong, healthy and 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:

*Eccl. 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 and created, by Jesus himself, 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, and 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. That’s just a fact, and it’s how he rolls...

## 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—**it is spiritual...**

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. And now, the good news—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. That makes God smile...

When that happens, we can harness that process to produce something wonderful within our self, rather than something destructive. Woven throughout the entirety of my book and this program is the deliberate and intentional development of essential weapons of spiritual warfare, both offensive and defensive, needed to obliterate all of those destructive, internal strongholds.

The ones so solidly lodged within your mind that you have not yet been able to get free from them. 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 my first 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 some great sorrow expressed at times, when well-intentioned men and women of God, with formidable 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 Web eBook, and my ***Freedom Through Grace*** printed 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 the first few chapters, and then read and study the Key Principles, located throughout this action-plan and 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 much more, 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:

Buy the book, and read through all the chapters, 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 directly pertain to your own spiritual freedom, and will require more concentration. My FTG book has been deliberately designed to be very challenging at times, for many effective and beneficial reasons. You won't find a 7 step, 12 step, or 20 step program in it—the work of changing your heart, and renewing your mind, can only be done by the Holy Spirit of God—just you, the book, and Jesus sitting down together, day-after-day, as he very personally, and very powerfully, teaches you how to walk in and by the Spirit, so you will no longer carry out the desires of your flesh—just like he says in the bible—(*Galatians 5:16-18*). I know you will 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 beginning 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 the chapters of this eBook Action-Plan, that I've listed... ***Godspeed...***



## CHALLENGE

You're reading this first chapter of my website Action-Plan, so, I assume that you've checked out the website, and have likely previewed the Table of Contents, and have now decided to invest yourself into this program. So, I thank you for that and I welcome you aboard—let's get right into this...

The first part of this session will likely be a challenge to you. A challenge to focus your thinking, and then to believe something different...

- about yourself
- about God
- about how life works, compared to what you have been believing

Here's the reason why—the bible boldly declares what a Christian's normal lifestyle should look like, **from God's unique perspective**, according to his biblical standard. I write of this standard, documented here in Hebrews 12:1, often throughout my book, and this Action-Plan series. Here it is for your reference:

*| 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)*

God is clearly speaking to Christians here in this passage of scripture. I restate the question, regarding this scripture, from my Intro again FYR... **can you do this all of the time...some of the time, when you feel like it, or, like so many believers, I can hardly ever do this at all—I just keep striking out...!** God is using this scripture passage here as an example to declare that every believer should be able to consistently live their lives, not in perfect compliance—but in earnest compliance, with this particular scripture, here in the book of Hebrews, and others like it, documented throughout the bible.

### ***This is God's perspective of a normal Christian lifestyle.***

Therefore, you are challenged to believe, adopt and understand this fact—that somewhere along the line, the relative strength of your spiritual foundation has failed you at some point, or, is not where you'd like it to be, isn't that it? God is informing you here in Hebrews 12, that you need to fix it—you need to find out what went wrong, or, what's going wrong, and call out to Jesus for help—it's time to get it corrected. What do you think? Sound right to you?

That's your first Challenge—opening your mind up, and making a sincere commitment to thoroughly assess your existing belief system, your core values and habits, and how they influence, determine or outright control your behavior. Your life has veered off course a little, or a lot, and you need to get it back on track.

The question now is, are you ready for that? The first step of this challenge is very simple, but also very profound—and, it is absolutely essential to your spiritual freedom.

Here it is in one word – **DETERMINATION**

You've become very aware that your spiritual foundation is just not strong enough to continue building your life upon it the way that you want, and the way that you know God wants. You fully realize that you need to change it—you need to fix it. Isn't that right?

Okay...we'll open this up. You've read through my introduction to this action-plan—you've developed, at the very least, a sufficient amount of curiosity to take the next step and invest yourself into this program. Let's build on that—you see, your success in acquiring that authentic, biblical freedom is absolutely contingent upon just how determined you become—how much intensity you are able to develop as you make your way through this program. So, what does that look like—take a look at this key principle from my Freedom Renewed Program:

### ***Find out what Spiritual Freedom will cost you, and pay that price.***

Truth is, freedom is not free—it's going to cost you something. Further, that price you need to pay is always determined by God himself, as he looks on your heart, measures your faith and evaluates just how much **GRIT** you have. He sets that price based upon his good and perfect will and plan for you, but also, upon those results—that particular price is unique to you, and each one of us, who have determined to follow Jesus. Here's a relevant example:

Consider what the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence committed themselves to pay, getting free from the tyranny they were under, way back in the 16th century. Take a look:

- Five signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died.
- Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.
- Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army, another had two sons captured.
- Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.
- They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to each other and to our new nation. They all signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

I reference this epic account of our Founding Fathers and what they paid getting free from their tyranny, for a really good and strategic reason—it is directly in context with getting oneself free from the tyranny of alcoholism, drug addiction, porn & sexual immorality, excessive anger, excessive stress and worry, gluttony, etc. *You get the picture...*

I encourage you here to **stop and think** about what I have just written—especially about your own determination. Your circumstances and status in life is certainly different than the founding fathers of our nation, however, there is one glaring exception that you definitely share with them. They fully realized that the freedom from tyranny they were seeking would cost them something—it was not free, and, it would not just be given to them; they would have to fight for it.

Just like you and me, they all had to struggle and wrestle with their own willingness to pay that cost, as the Lord began to reveal it to them. The cost of freedom that God reveals to you and me will be different than what they had to pay, but, the principle in force is exactly the same. Here it is...**When you determine to get yourself free from some form of spiritual tyranny in this life, you will be opposed.** Your adversary the devil wants to put his boot on your neck and keep it there throughout your entire life—that's just a fact. Therefore, ask yourself a couple of strategic questions and ponder what comes to your mind as an answer:

1. How determined are you to acquire that authentic, biblical freedom experience that I am writing about—just how important is it to you, and how bad do you want, or even crave, that kind of freedom?
2. It's going to cost you something—so, how willing are you to actually pay the price that God asks of you, once he reveals what that cost is? Think about that throughout your study on every page of this program.

## FREEDOM – TIME TO LAUNCH

**WEAPONS AND TACTICS** — The Bible has a lot to say about getting yourself free of worry, bad habits, addiction(s) and a destructive lifestyle—it also characterizes this conflict as being a definite, and deadly warfare—not at all like a contest, a skirmish or a scrimmage game of some sort—it is deadly serious. Your adversary, the devil, is not playing around—he's not seeking you out to just slap you on the wrist – he fully intends to steal every good thing that God has given you, and then to kill you, that is... IF YOU LET HIM.

That being the case, I encourage you to focus your attention on the following scripture passages that reveal some very strategic tools, weapons, and tactics that God has made available to every believer in waging this kind of warfare, both offensively and defensively:

*2 Cor. 10:3-5 – For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (NIV)*

*Eph. 6:11-12 – Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms. (NLT)*

I also encourage you to read and study these scriptures, with a focus on what jumps out at you—what kind of action the Lord is coaching you to take. This spiritual warfare is not about bullets and bombs. It is supernatural, and you will be engaging the enemy of your soul with your mind and your spirit—as Jesus, **The Lion of Judah**, leads you into combat.

Therefore, your mind will become one of your most formidable weapons of spiritual warfare—but, for that to happen effectively, it must be transformed from being corrupted by repetitive sin and destructive behavior, to being sufficiently renewed, by and through God's word—and that is a work of the Holy Spirit who has already begun his good work in you, which he promises to finish.

That last statement may surprise many of you, grappling with some expression of spiritual discipline. I've had quite a number of believers' questions that, wondering how God could be working in their life when they are experiencing so much chaos, trouble and discontent—it looks very much like an enigma, or paradox to them.

Truth is however, whenever we get ourselves into trouble, God goes to work making us aware of that trouble, and where it will lead if we fail to correct it. He warns us, either by his word, or by his Holy Spirit, or both. He knows that trouble will come our way from time to time, and he wants us to know exactly what to do about it, and how to handle it, when it does.

**THE SILVER BULLET** – Problem is, when some kind of trouble is first revealed in a typical Christians life, they almost always try to *fix it by putting a band-aid on it*. They want to resolve it and get rid of it quickly, and that band-aid represents the easiest, and the most immediate response to fix whatever the trouble might be. That method works well with minor frustrations that happen in your life once in a while, but not so much with trouble that just keeps on showing up—the kind of trouble that you cannot fix with a band-aid any more – What about that?

It can be really hard to wrap your brain around this. You realize that you need to step it up and elevate your game plan to a higher level, but change can be really hard—especially trying to fit this extra time, energy and hard work into your existing schedule, when you’re likely pinned down enough already. Isn’t that right?

Every one of us would love to have a Silver Bullet solution to resolve that kind of trouble. Isn’t that also right? Truth is however, we actually do have that proverbial Silver-Bullet available.

### ***The bullet has a name...JESUS.***

The Apostle Paul said it like this in the book of Romans:

*Rom. 7:24-25 – I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?*

*The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different. (MESSAGE)*

The key tactic here is simply getting to know Jesus better than you do now, and learning to trust him to do all the heavy lifting in your life—simple, but not easy. You want real change in your life to acquire authentic freedom? You will be opposed—there will be hindrances, obstacles and outright war coming against you, so, get yourself ready. You and Jesus working together are substantially more formidable than you think. ***He will make you more than a conqueror...***

**PREPARE YOUR MIND** – All expressions of sin, and many, if not most, afflictions of mental health and well-being, ***begin within the mind***, of every one of us—Christians and non-Christians alike. Specifically, the sub-conscious part of our mind. Established research from clinical behavior scientists and therapists have cited that 95% of what we think, and then, how we act and behave, all emanate from our sub-conscious mind. Does that surprise you? It did me...

Begs a question... why is that important to you right now? It is within the sub-conscious mind that you begin to increase the intensity of your determination—you begin to ramp-up your desire to find out what authentic, biblical freedom is going to cost you. You take on a new understanding of “hard-work” to mean, “hard & deeper thinking.” You earnestly begin that arduous mental work of deliberately thinking about how much you really do want this, and how much it’s going to cost—you prepare your mind to take this new work on—you get yourself ready—you anticipate the change in your lifestyle. You understand that from now on, *hard work = hard thinking*. For Noah, that meant taking on the building of his ARK—for you, it means finding out what authentic freedom will cost you, and then committing yourself to pay that price—very much a mental and spiritual issue, laid out here in the Bible:

**1 Pet. 1:13 Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.**  
(NRSV)

The Bible records these timeless words that actually form the foundation of authentic, biblical freedom: “**For as he thinks within himself, so he is**” (Prov. 23:7). The next question for you to resolve after ramping up the intensity of your determination, reads like this: How willing are you to take this on? The answer to that question will come in the form of you simply making a sincere **COMMITMENT** to yourself and to God, from deep within your mind, that you are going to get this done—it then becomes – just a matter of time...

**INFORM YOUR MIND** – You need to begin the process of letting your mind know that you want to, and that you fully intend to, make some changes. However, you’ll want to inform your mind of this in a way that works well to promote an authentic, *long-term change in your life*. You’ll be replacing some bad habits with some new habits. **Change is coming—let your mind know that.**

These transactions will actually take place within the sub-conscious part of your mind, and, you’ll need to use a language method that your sub-conscious mind will effectively respond to.

For example, it will not be very effective at all for you to just read off a list of do’s & don’ts that you’d like your sub-conscious mind to respond to and make happen in your life—your brain and your mind do not work that way. They are extremely complex and definitely not intuitive or easy to understand and predict. A multitude of books, scientific journals and very advanced research studies have proven that to be true—so, for our limited purposes right here and now, it’s only important to focus our attention on a proven method, to communicate effectively, with the sub-conscious part of your mind.

There are a few characteristics of how that part of your mind functions, that you do need to know something about—that is, if you are to experience some degree of success without having to spin-your-wheels and waste your time. Your sub-conscious mind is an active, integral part of your authentic identity—of who you really are. **Your sub-conscious mind knows all about you**—everything, down to the last detail, and, here’s why that fact is so essential to your success:

One of the most strategic characteristics of your sub-conscious mind is that it always knows exactly what is most precious and valuable to you—what you hold dear, and what your desires really are, at any and every moment of time throughout your entire life. That’s exactly how God created it to function, and, it doesn’t matter one whit to your sub-conscious mind whether those values and desires of yours are right or wrong—good or bad—beneficial or destructive.

It only matters and focuses on getting you whatever you actually value and desire—what it is that you want, irrespective of whether it is good, beneficial or healthy for you. Your sub-conscious mind will also know how much you really care about someone or something in your life—it will accurately measure the intensity and magnitude of exactly how determined you are to stay on your present course without change, or, whether you really are serious about making a change in your life that you actually believe in.

It doesn’t respond to what is true or false, unless, and until, you actually determine, and commit yourself, to sincerely increase your love of God with all of your heart, all of your mind, all of your soul, and all of your strength—and, to do that effectively, you’ll need to renew that mind of yours.

Therefore, wishing, hoping and a whole host of good intentions that you may develop to change the way you think, act and behave simply does not, and will not work.

Effective, real and beneficial change to your sub-conscious mind is not a trivial pursuit, and almost always requires a sincere, serious and very strong commitment to pay the price and do the work required—I say almost because God can rescue, deliver and change you in an instant, by his grace and miraculous power anytime he chooses.

He's done that for me and for a vast multitude of believers down through the ages, and, he'll continue to do that as he sees fit every moment of every day, till he returns—but, he is especially delighted when sees one of us making that determination to resist evil and fight for that freedom.

So, for now, I encourage you to inform your sub-conscious mind that you are directing a new change to come into your life.

You'll be expecting some new desires, values and habits to be developed to put your life on a new course. But, to be effective, you need to learn, practice and use the language of your sub-conscious mind—something like this – deliberately imagine, and then meditate, on how wonderful you will feel when you actually overcome and prevail against every hindrance and obstacle working against your spiritual freedom. Visualize yourself, in your mind's eye, actually experiencing that, and how it will make you feel, over and over again, as often as you can do it. This takes time and effort, mental and spiritual discipline, but, if you sincerely believe this, your sub-conscious mind will begin to change and you will truly begin to experience that authentic, biblical freedom you've been hoping for. ***Hope will give way to faith, followed by freedom...***

Your job is to convince your mind that this is extremely valuable to you and that you indeed, are going to make this commitment to get it done. The work of the Lord in this endeavor—on your behalf, is first to build and perfect your faith to believe this to be true—that you'll actually be able to do this, and then to equip and enable you, with everything needed to make it actually happen.

### ***What do you think—can you grip this and believe it for yourself?***

This first session involves a lot of mental work—that's where your spiritual freedom actually begins—developing a new mind-set—a formidable attitude—an attitude like Jesus has, so you can think and act more like him. Isn't that it?

***Josh. 1:8*** – *This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. (NRSV)*

*Are you ready for that—you'll be making some new choices.*

## **FREEDOM – CHOICES**

You also read in this action-plan intro that “*It was for freedom that Christ has set us free.*” Remember that? Let’s unpack that a little—load the following scripture into your brain:

***1 Cor. 6:12*** – *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. (NRSV)*

God is documenting here that he has given free-will to all mankind—we are all free to choose how we will live and navigate life—with, or without, his involvement. However, he also qualifies this free-will—he reveals that not all of our choices are to be considered as being beneficial to us—he infers that some choices are beneficial for us, but – some are not—and, that's the rub, isn't it?

God does not, and will not, make this choice for us—he will not make us think like Jesus—we must make that choice ourselves. He expects each one of us to exercise responsibility and choose wisely. So, the next time that you are tempted to take that drink, or that joint, or that porn image, or whatever thing that you know is definitely not beneficial to you, take on the following challenge.

**STOP AND THINK**—challenge yourself to reason and consider this choice from a different perspective than you usually do. Gods' perspective and encouragement to you is to take on, and have the same attitude as Jesus, so you can then think more like him, and act more like him. That's clearly what he wants for you—question is, do you believe that? Especially, if you've been yielding yourself to temptation(s) for a while, you know it's not that easy—it can be a challenge, a really tough slog. Consider the following case history I recently reviewed:

A very famous celebrity, who is a well-known actor, had an incredible experience with the presence and the still-small-voice of Almighty God. He had been going through a particularly rough patch of life and he found himself face down on the floor—he was exhausted and he was exasperated because of it. This experience was exceedingly rare for him in that he was not given to be so emotional. He was very distraught and he declared the following words, out loud:

***“this is difficult...why is this so damned difficult.”***

Immediately following this declaration, he heard the following remarkable words spoken to him from within his own mind:

***“it’s supposed to be difficult.”***

Almighty God showed up in the form of his Holy Spirit and spoke those words to him. That's the first time anything like that ever happened to him and it totally changed the rest of his life. Up until that time, he believed that God existed and that he created all the heavens and the Earth—but, he did not know him in a personal way at all—He was just a historical icon and more of an acquaintance that he was familiar with. After hearing God speak to him in such a personal way, he knew that he, and all the rest of us, were not alone, and would never be alone. God, indeed was with us, would never leave us, and loved us completely. His life would never be the same.

So, don't let yourself get discouraged here. It may feel like you are *drinking water from a fire hose*, and, that this is just too difficult and overwhelming. But, it's not—you can do this like a multitude of believers just like you have already done. Just let these words of mine begin to slowly sink into your brain. Just let your mind adjust and become aware that you will be making some wonderful changes. You are reading this right now, and that should encourage you to realize that God is already at work renewing your mind to help you navigate these new choices. It's not a coincidence...He put you here and now, deliberately on-purpose, for that very reason. This truth of his, is clearly at work in you, and will ultimately set you free. That's just a fact—that's how it works.

*Check it out:*

***Rom. 12:1-2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (NRSV)***

*Here's another one:*

***1 Pet. 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (NRSV)***

***Someone like YOU....!***

## FREEDOM – OBSTACLES

Okay, if you're really serious about this, you're realizing here that you need to get a grip on the issue—you'll be confronting one or more bad habits that have either led you into experiencing a destructive lifestyle, or have you heading that way. However, you're not alone—take a look at some more facts:

I speak with a lot of believers and study a lot of case-histories conducting research for my freedom renewed program and my writing. They all tell me that the following issues are prevalent and have been instrumental in causing them to suffer such a loss of spiritual discipline. Therefore, I encourage you to study this list well and see if you identify in some way.

1. **Immediate Gratification** – We are all sinners, by birth and by choice. In addition, we are all born into this world with selfishness being a dominant trait of our human nature—we all tend to want things right away, and, we do not want to wait very long to acquire those things that we desire. Believers who are experiencing a loss of spiritual discipline in their life almost always suffer with inadequate **impulse control**. They lack sufficient self-control over their thoughts and their behavior.

Many are no longer willing, or even capable of *taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*, like the bible instructs us all to do, in 2 Cor. 10:5. God speaks to this issue in the bible:

**1Th. 4:4 that each one of you know how to control your own body \* in holiness and honor, (NRSV)**

\* – Paraphrased to read: *"That each of you should learn, and know how, to control the members of your own body and mind, in a way that is holy and honorable to God."*

Behavior scientists and therapists cite a clinical lack of impulse control as being a very dominant cause of addictive behavior—for Christians suffering some kind of addiction, it shows up as a great difficulty to control or resist, strong urges and temptations leading them to various expressions of sin they are confronted with.

### **So, how are we to respond to that?**

Remember what I stated earlier, that an effective response begins with a new mind-set, an attitude just like God is instructing us to do in 1 Pet. 1:13—it begins in the mind with a fervent determination and commitment to do whatever it takes to get completely rid of this propensity and susceptibility, of yielding so easily to sinful behavior. **Get after this...**

Next comes adopting an effective freedom strategy, and action-plan, and putting them both into reliable and consistent operation.

That's where this program of mine comes into play—it's formidable and effective to help you prevail over those temptations that have been kicking your butt. This new mind set will involve you learning how to **weaponize the spiritual virtues of humility and patience** that will then lead you to increasing the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Jesus in your life.

However, don't go thinking that you will jump right into this—achieving an effective, spiritual change is not a trivial pursuit and it takes a lot of time and effort—but, it also can result in the greatest fulfillment that you'll ever experience—you will look back and absolutely cherish your decision to do this; to make this commitment.

- 2. Contentment** – This second challenge involves the current level of *contentment* you have in your life. One of the best and most pragmatic examples of this comes from the Apostle Paul, in the book of Philippians:

*Phil. 4:12 – I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being **content** in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (NIV)*

For many believers I have discussed this issue with, the predominant cause of becoming discontented and unhappy with their life comes from an abundance of failure being experienced.

Especially failing to prevail and overcome some kind of sinful behavior. They all agree—this really sucks and wars against their souls and contentment in life. Every one of them want to take their life back and experience that sheer enjoyment of life again. So, that begs a question:

What's the best and most effective way to look at this life sucking bandit of yours—plundering you of all that joy you should be experiencing? You need to figure this out—you want to be effective and you need a very formidable plan. So, how do you prepare your mind to evaluate this? First of all, you know the difference of whether this sucker is right or wrong for you—yes, isn't that correct?

That perspective is obvious to every Christian, but, what if you looked at it from a different perspective—a way to evaluate just how and why it is hammering you so easily, effectively and so often. What would that look like?

Turns out that the most effective approach is to evaluate each choice as to whether you think it will be either beneficial or harmful to you, rather than thinking whether it is right or wrong—here's why:

Our human nature will always have a predisposition to be at odds with God, throughout our entire lifetime—even as committed followers of Christ. Therefore, as a result, Christian psychologists inform us that whenever we are confronted with obeying God, because of a clear choice of right and wrong, our human nature will make it much easier to consider rebelling against God—because we are simply so prone to doing that.

However, if we consider the same choice as being either beneficial or hurtful to our life in some way, that same human nature will lead us to favor the more beneficial choice, and will resist the harmful one. I really think that is why God inspired the Apostle Paul to use the phrase, “all things are beneficial” rather than using what is “right or wrong” when he wrote that scripture in 1 Cor. 6:12—God loves us and does not want us to get hurt. He also knows exactly how our minds work and just how easily enticed we can be, so, use this following tactic whenever you are tempted to sin.

**Deliberately think about how harmful and hurtful that sin will be to you—and, how crappy you will feel if you yield yourself to it.**

- 3. Comfort Zone** – One aspect of our human nature is that we all acquire a comfort-zone for ourselves. Every human being has one. I’m sure you’ve all heard of that before. Ideally, the comfort-zone is actually a lifestyle, or a mind-set, where there exist very few surprises in your life. A place where you are in control of circumstances & events as much as possible. You know pretty much what is going on and what to expect on a day-to-day basis.

Your comfort-zone is similar to an "auto-pilot" in an airplane, and "cruise-control" in a car. However, in contrast, your comfort-zone is powered-up and turned-on all the time. It is literally a series of habits that you perform over and over almost every day. It defines and activates how you behave—how you typically respond to certain situations, circumstances and events in your life. It makes up and defines a huge part of your identity—***knowing who you are by experiencing and observing what you do.***

Jesus defined it like this: You will know them by their fruits, that is, how they act and by what they do. (*Matt. 7:16*). The book of Proverbs expresses it like this: "***For as he thinks within himself, so he is.***" (*Prov. 23:7*)

Your comfort-zone is primarily made up of your *core-values*. Those internal beliefs that you hold in extremely high regard and respect, whether you are able to live them out or not, and, whether they are beneficial or harmful for your lifestyle. Your core-values make up the guiding principles behind all of your habits—some good, some bad and some destructive. Those habits that dictate your behavior, and define your lifestyle. So, prepare your mind to almost certainly be challenged by this session intentionally shaping your core-values, and moving you out of your comfort-zone by a little bit, or by a lot. This program is very focused upon your core-value system that enables your comfort-zone—habit-by-habit, and how it influences your lifestyle.

## A THREE-PART CHALLENGE – GET READY

So, do as the scripture in 1 Pet. 1:13 directs you to do: "***Prepare your mind for action.***" Get really serious with yourself about this—ramp up your intensity. Be on the lookout for these three adversaries within your mind to "show up" and try to stop you from forming this essential habit that you desperately need to get all this started. ***Don't let them win—vehemently oppose them with all of your might!***

A huge part of achieving success in overcoming spiritual adversaries is first, becoming aware and vigilant, then learning to detect, recognize and identify those adversaries. You want more faith? You want more effective faith? You will be opposed. So, the question is...

### ***What will you do about it when it happens?***

When the devil detects that you have made this commitment to increase your faith in Jesus—to get to know him more, Satan and his demonic kingdom will actively oppose you, more than he does now. You can expect him to *step-it-up—this is spiritual warfare*. His mission, at first, is simply to make you less effective in your spiritual life. The devil comes only to steal, kill & destroy you, in every way that he can (*John 10:10*), and He knows that if he can start his mission by just distracting you a little bit, getting your life off course a little and making you less effective spiritually, then he might be able to keep his mission against you alive.

Satan also knows that if he does nothing, you will indeed become more effective in God's kingdom, and become a potent threat. So, he will actively come against you. He understands very well that if you succeed in forming this habit to just show up and increase your knowledge & relationship with Jesus, that his mission to keep his ***boot on your neck*** will fail miserably.

In context with this spiritual warfare, particularly applied to you, comes a famous quote by Edmund Burke, circa 1770 – He famously said these words:

***"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."***

Therefore, as you personally experience this spiritual warfare conflict, perhaps in a new way, remember this word from God to you—Jesus would say something like this to you: "*Refuse to do nothing,*" but instead, "*exercise your faith, display strength and take effective action.*"

Here's why—always remember these words:

## ***Complacency is a fierce Enemy!***

Renew your mind with this fact—this particular and very strategic truth—that if you choose to do nothing, or, you choose a plan of action that is woefully inadequate and ineffective, then that spiritual crisis you're becoming aware of can come on you like a bandit, and, you will absolutely hate it—you will rue that day like a plague, because ***you'll have known that you could have avoided it.***

That's why the Holy Spirit of God reveals this kind of strategic truth to you. He coaches you, and even warns you to pay heed. He wants to harness your attention on this issue in your life, right now—at this very moment—WHILE YOU STILL HAVE A CHOICE—a choice to actually do something about it.

Here's why – every time a destructive lifestyle of some kind advances and develops into an actual crisis, *that choice will no longer be available to you*—the result of that crisis will actually **FORCE** you into a result that you will almost certainly not control, not like and will not enjoy.

Therefore, gain some spiritual strength from these two, very formidable messages from the Lord—make them both personal.

*Luke 14:11 – For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (NRSV)*

*2 Chr. 7:14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (NRSV)*

Jesus would also say something like this to you: *“Don’t just stand there... DO SOMETHING—something effective.”* Choose to humble yourself willingly, and effectively, otherwise you’ll be humbled by a crisis coming your way at some point in your life. That’s why God advises and coaches all of us in Isaiah 66:2 to *Fear and tremble at his word*—because his word is always, and empirically, **TRUE**.

I really encourage you here, and soon, to exercise effective action to believe, adopt and activate this next step in choosing to avoid a crisis coming your way by weaponizing humility in your life—while you still have this choice. Here it is:

*Jam. 4:10 – Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (NRSV)*

Learn to overcome these three attributes of your human nature whenever you become aware of any of them showing up in your mind. *Take effective action.* Choose to humble yourself and tremble at Gods’ word on every occasion as you navigate life. Show up deliberately and make it a habit. You won’t regret it. Exercise godly wisdom and choose to humble yourselves voluntarily, so that God will exalt you—trust me here... God will do it way better than you.

Okay, let's take a break here before we move on. I'm sure that some of you may very well be feeling somewhat overwhelmed by all this. But, like God would say to you, ***let not your heart be troubled...*** He knows that you are not currently able, and perhaps not even willing, to make all this happen in your life right now. At times like these, let him comfort you with these words from the bible...

*Psa. 91:4 – He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (NIV)*

Jesus has your back—when your own love, loyalty and faithfulness to him fails—his faithfulness to you will fail not. His love for you is so intense, and his Gospel is so powerful, that he will literally **stand-in-the-gap** for you and shepherd you through every struggle of life.

Especially in those times when you are just too weak spiritually to carry-on. Jesus is really that good, and his Gospel is really that powerful. His love for you never fails, so, place your trust completely in him and believe what he says about you, and his plan for your life.

**Jer. 29:11 – For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.” (NIV)**

Got that down? All right, let's move on a little further on in this key scripture recorded in Hebrews 12. God inspired the writer to talk about a race. Let's take a closer look at that race.

## THE RACE

This session confronts you with putting some wings on this new challenge—you are about to enter a new competition in your life. The bible identifies this competition as “**a race**” that every Christian enters at the time of salvation, as I recorded in Heb. 12:1. The last line of that scripture reveals that we are entering a race—**let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us**. Remember that? A race means that there is competition so, who are you competing against?

You will not be competing with any of your contemporaries in this generation, or, Billy Graham in the last one. No, you will be competing strictly, and very specifically, with yourself, that is...

**YOUR OLD SELF**—Reads like this in the bible:

**Rom. 6:6 – For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—(NIV)**

Our old-self was crucified—or was it? For many Christians, that old self is very much alive and well—and, is still in control... **How about your old self?**

## THE COMPETITION

Is it way more active than you'd like it to be? The bible declares that our old self should no longer be calling the shots in our life. Further, it is actually, and literally, to be displaced with a new self and a new identity.

*Reads like this:*

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

**Eph. 4:24 – and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (NRSV)**

The bible mandates every Christian to “**put on Christ**” just like we would put on a new suit of clothes. Looks like this:

**Rom. 13:14 – But clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah), and make no provision for (indulging) the flesh (put a stop to thinking about the evil cravings of your physical nature) to (gratify its) desires (lusts). (AMP)**

Pragmatically speaking, God gives each of us a brand-new suit—but a number of us often leave that suit hanging in the closet, rather than putting it on. Here's what I mean by that:

When we are ***born-again*** and God adopts us as sons and daughters into his family, our spirit comes alive—we are given a new spiritual nature and a new identity in Christ.

However, our human nature—our old self, that we are all born with, is only displaced, and not replaced, and it remains in operation throughout all the days of our life. For many of us, we just run into the closet and take a look at that *new identity in Christ suit* hanging there, but fail to power-up and put it on.

And, that human nature of ours, which is completely selfish, will continue to seek its' own way, every minute of every day, right up to the day that we die. No exceptions—and that's another rub isn't it...

That sets up a definite tension and conflict that every Christian is faced with—that's the competition—that's the race defined in Hebrews 12, and we must learn how to compete effectively, if we are to win that race. Jesus defined this race as a conflict in a number of profound and compelling ways in the bible—he not only defines the conflict, but, reveals exactly what we should do about it, that is, if we are to prevail against it, like he intends for us to do.

### ***Here's a strategic example of that:***

An excerpt copied from my book, ***Freedom Through Grace***, reads like the following—Jesus himself said this, in 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 coaching us to actually anticipate the arrival of trouble in this life and to prepare ourselves for it; and like him, not to tolerate it, or run from it, but, ***to overcome it***. This presents a challenge to every Christian—to develop a different perspective on life.

## **PERSPECTIVE – LIFESTYLE**

I began this session by challenging the status-quo of your life—that challenge involves getting your mind prepared for action—something new—for a change in the way you've been accustomed to think about life stuff. I intend to build on that now by challenging your perspective and outlook on life a little bit, or, maybe, for some of you, a lot—to be much more like God's perspective on life.

We'll take a close look at what I call the "***God's Eye View of Life***" in this first session and how that influences your day-to-day Christian lifestyle. Here's why—in the God's eye view of your life, it is not very meaningful just how successful or unsuccessful your life is, right now—your status-quo, right at this particular moment in time.

Turns out that it's way more valuable to figure out where you are going in your life, rather than where you are at, or, where you have been. That's how Jesus thinks—that's how you want to think.

Here's what I mean by that—***your current trajectory*** in life matters substantially more than what your current results may reveal. Begs another question: Where are your current habits likely to lead you through this next month, next year, next decade? And, what's trending in your life right now—what are you thinking about—how far out are you looking—where are you going next—what path are you on and where will it lead you? ***Start thinking more like that.***

## PERSPECTIVE – DAILY

So, the *Gods' Eye View of Life* is also to be adopted and applied on a daily basis. That process is a working part of what is simply known as *Godly Wisdom*. Almost all of us develop some kind of a daily to-do list to plan our way into navigating, and managing how we respond to life stuff. I have a number of specific tactics to optimize that list for greater impact and effectiveness, but, the very first part of developing that list is all in your mind.

That process begins as you consider and plan-out your daily to-do list. However, instead of focusing all of your attention on that first activity, you deliberately focus your attention on how you will feel, **at the end of your work day**, after you have crushed it—nailing everything on your list after giving 110%+ on the effort. You intentionally think about and meditate on the exhilaration, and on the fulfillment, that you will experience, as you look back on all the good work that you completed. Before you put your hand on that first good work, you deliberately visualize, in your mind's eye, how you will feel after completing what you know God has prepared for you to do on that particular day. It's a specific mind-set... an attitude—Christ's attitude. God himself set a daily example of that mind-set that he wants each of us to imitate and follow, way back in the early chapters of Genesis. *Take a look...*

## PERSPECTIVE – GOD'S EXAMPLE

God has established exactly how you should feel and what you should be thinking about at the end of every work day. I call it, ***the well-done witness of good work***.

It's a deliberate mind-set that you seek after and adopt for yourself at the beginning of every day—to be purposely realized and experienced at the end of every day. God first set this example for each of us to imitate and experience early in the book of Genesis, as he was completing his 6 days of creating all the heavens, the earth, and everything in them. The bible records what he was thinking and experiencing at that moment when he looked back on his work—God said this:

*Gen. 1:31 – And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, **it was very good** (suitable, pleasant) and He approved it completely. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (AMP)*

So, what is it that the Lord wants us to take away from this and apply to our own lifestyle on a daily basis?

Every Christian comes to the understanding that God is purposely shaping each and every one of us to be more like Jesus—the bible says that we are actually made in his image, and challenges every one of us to seek out and adopt his attitude—to think, act and ultimately to navigate our lives by his example. God himself establishes what that is to look like right here:

*Eph. 5:1 – Therefore be imitators of God (copy Him and follow His example), as well-beloved children (imitate their father). (AMP)*

God looked back on his 6 days of creation and the bible records his response—what he thought about his work; he thought it was: **Very Good**—that's what he was thinking. Paraphrased, it reads something like this: *Wow, that work I just completed was very good—it was awesome!*

Therefore, that is exactly what each of us should be thinking and experiencing as we look back on what we accomplish each and every day. That's a big part of the **reward** that God himself provides every believer who seeks him with diligence—who lives their life intentionally to love, honor and follow Jesus—it's a functional and extremely powerful result of the faith we place in Jesus and his Gospel being put into consistent operation within our daily lives:

***Heb. 11:6 – But without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him [out]. (AMP)***

## ***The Gods Eye View of Life...It's a mind-set***

Hold that thought as I introduce a couple of issues that have a significant influence on acquiring, maintaining and sustaining authentic, biblical freedom for oneself over a long period of time—*over years and decades*. I've researched a multitude of case histories from ordinary Christians, and church leaders alike, who are struggling with the crisis I describe on my website and within the pages of my book. My research puts me in contact with hundreds of believers from all walks of life, many of them in some capacity of church leadership.

Turns out that almost every believer has experienced seasons of spiritual dysfunction of some kind and had to deal with the results—instead of experiencing that ***well-done-witness-of-good-work*** at the end of their day, and feeling very good and awesome about it, they experience a load of trouble, and feel really crappy about it. Fact is, navigating the Christian life includes confronting bad habits and sometimes entrenched, hard to get rid of, addictions, whenever they show up—even though the bible tells us in Galatians 5:1 that – *it was, and is for freedom that Christ has set us free*. Knowing that this scripture is absolutely true... It begs another question:

### ***Why is acquiring authentic biblical freedom so difficult?***

Actually, there are a number of issues that can adversely influence, or even prevent, this kind of spiritual freedom from being consistently experienced. I'm specifically talking about the kind of hindrances and encumbrances that we are to throw-off—to get rid of—to completely remove from our lifestyles, as documented in Hebrews 12:1.

I listed some examples of those issues earlier in this session, that I encourage you to continue thinking about. In addition to those, the following 3 always come up, and are often prevalent, when I discuss this stuff with other believers. Your experience is likely in this mix of freedom obstacles somewhere, so, check this out and see what you think:

1. **Spiritual Dysfunction** – Almost all bad habits and destructive lifestyles can be traced back to being caused by, or being influenced by, the condition of a person's soul and spirit—especially a weak or ineffective spiritual foundation that Jesus commented on in his Gospels (*Matt. 7:24-27*). *It's actually impossible to build a strong spiritual lifestyle on a weak spiritual foundation...*
2. **Love of God Lost or impaired** – Jesus laid down his greatest commandment in the Gospel of Mark 12:28-34 – *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself."*

In regards to a believer experiencing the loss or impairment of their spiritual freedom, Jesus has this to say in Rev. 2:4-5.... *"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first;"*

3. **Becoming Double Minded** – This is what happens to any and every Christian who experiences either issue above, to any significant degree. We become double-minded. James 1:8 informs us that a double-minded man (or woman) is unstable in all their ways. James 4:8 goes on to inform us what we should do about it; *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."* However, as many have realized, this is substantially easier said, than it is effectively done.

Okay, I've just documented several reasons that Christians of all kinds end up compromising, impairing or, outright losing their spiritual freedom that can only be acquired through Christ. He had a few things to say about that:

*John 14:6 – Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (NIV)*

*Matt. 7:13-14 – (Jesus speaking) “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (NIV)*

Truth is, authentic, biblical freedom can only be discovered, acquired, maintained and sustained over an extended period of time—*like the rest of your life*, through only one source—Jesus the Christ. And, Jesus reveals that there are only two pathways available to all of mankind:

1. **The narrow gate—follow Jesus—leads to life**
2. **The wide gate—follow the ways of the world—leads to destruction**

There is a path leading to each of these gates. A double-minded believer is often jumping from one path to the other, depending upon what life is throwing their way—depending more upon *how they feel about something*, rather than what God and his word has to say.

Jesus encourages and coaches all his followers to not do this—to not think and live this way—he says that it's not wise, safe, beneficial or fulfilling. He tells us that no man can serve two masters, and that each of us must choose which one of these masters we will serve—and further, that the master we choose to serve, will ultimately become our master. You want authentic biblical freedom? ***Let Jesus master your life...He'll do it way better than you.***

Therefore, settle this issue in your mind—there really is only one way—one path of life that is truly safe and secure—of incalculable benefit and fulfilling for a Christian to follow. It's Jesus, and Jesus all the time. However, it is also Jesus who said, "*the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" That amazing statement answers this question, and the previous one, a few pages back:

## ***Why do so many Christians easily choose a path to destruction?***

*The flesh is weak*—Turns out of course, that Jesus was exactly right about that, especially the weakness of our wills and just how easily our minds can be deceived. The fact is, our minds do not, and cannot, function like a compass, that always points to the North—our minds simply do not work that way. Our minds do not always point to the truth—as a result, many of us end up getting heavily influenced by, or even addicted to, the immediate, but only temporary relief, provided by drugs, booze, porn and a whole list of others, just to escape for a while, trying to cope with the demands that life requires of us at times. That's the crisis, and, it's getting worse in the church—not better. *So again... what are we to do—here's what we do:*

## **WE PLAN – BUT, NOT JUST ANY PLAN**

Most believers I talk with consider these issues as individual goals to set for themselves to achieve. However, specific, and very effective research into this subject, especially over the last 5 years in particular, reveal that navigating the Christian life through a goal-based system is simply not very productive. There's a better way to do life. How about this—something really valuable for you to think about, and to lock your brain into:

*New goals do not deliver optimum results—**NEW LIFESTYLES DO.***

We'll take a good look at this—how your short, mid and long-term goals and core values can be designed into a God-honoring, freedom loving lifestyle—a whole new way of living—**A SYSTEM.**

In addition, I want to weave into this session how the Gospel of Christ actually becomes that system—your new lifestyle. Turns out that it is way more wonderful and powerful, than most Christians realize, or, experience.

### ***God's in there—he lives in there, and, he wants all of us in there with him.***

The bible reveals that living the Christian lifestyle, from within the Gospel of Christ, is not an outcome—but more of a dynamic, living process. The Gospel functions in our life like a *Strong Tower*—a safe and secure place for Christians to run into whenever the worries and stresses of life come their way. That's where you will find the grace of God.

That's the place where you will practice and hone your understanding and application of God's grace—especially in those times when your faith falters and you end up yielding yourself to the sin that so easily entices you. You'll run in there and discover the incredible and wonderful truth that even though your sin may abound in your life at times, the inimitable, unfailing grace of God will abound all the more, to rescue you—to restore you—to bring you back to your senses and renew the fun & fulfillment of life again—he gives you a *Spiritual-Mulligan*—a do-over—a new lease on life. But, don't wait until the next issue develops to run in there—get in there now... do it daily—live in there with Jesus every day. Hang out with him... You'll love it and so will he.

For this reason, all of your energy should go into developing a system of godly habits, that can supercharge your comfort-zone—not making better goals or chasing better results. Here's why:

Remember that we all develop some kind of a routine in our life we call our comfort-zone that I talk about a lot in this program. It has been written: ***We are what we think*** (Prov. 23:7).

Remember that one? Here's another one: ***We create our habits, and then our habits create us.*** Our comfort-zones exist and function through the habits we learn and adopt, like I stated earlier, some good.... some bad.... some destructive.

One thing for certain to think about—the determined commitment you make to God and yourself, that you will tenaciously maintain the pursuit of increasing your knowledge of Jesus, both intellectually and relationally, will absolutely end up being the most rewarding habit that you will ever form and put into operation within your lifetime. I intend to convince you of that, throughout this session and throughout this program.

### ***However—this is lifetime stuff. We are just getting started here.***

Acquiring this new lifestyle and the attitude of Jesus that you require to master the sin in your life is not an event, but a process and a daily pursuit that you will develop into a very powerful habit. This wonderful and formidable habit will become an essential component of your new lifestyle. Won't happen overnight, so give yourself all the time you need, and set your thinking to coincide with God's schedule and timing, not yours. Learn to trust him.

## **PERSPECTIVE – GOD'S TIME FRAME**

I know of God rescuing and even delivering some believers from this kind of crisis in an instant of time using his miraculous power—I've also seen other times when he took many months, years and even a decade or two to complete a work like this when he begins one of his rescue operations. The timing key here is that God looks on the heart—he knows the condition of our hearts, every moment of every day throughout our entire life.

That's why he says this in the book of Proverbs:

***Prov. 4:23 – Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life. (AMP)***

Therefore, when you detect the springs of life drying up in your life... Take a close look at your own heart—don't let your love of God and people grow cold. Here's why—**you do not want Jesus saying this about you:**

*Matt. 15:8 – 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; (NRSV)*

That's why you need to guard your heart with all diligence—God's looking at it. He always has, and always will, give you his best, and, he wants your best in return. That's his heart put on display for you—his best. What does your best look like right now?

We all can tell when we are functioning at our best throughout the day. That's the time span when your brain is functioning really well at peak performance. Rarely does that time span exceed somewhere between 1 and 3 hours for most of us.

That begs an essential question for you to ask yourself: Who is currently getting that peak-performance time from you right now? The best time from your brain every day—who or what currently gets that? Who or what are you giving it to?

Is it Jesus...? Weed...? A six pack? A chocolate cake? **You get the picture...**

## SPIRITUAL SURGERY

In addition, Jesus makes a very essential change within you from the inside, equipping you, and enabling you, to perform an act of *Spiritual Surgery*.

**I said spiritual surgery**—*Okay, what do I mean by that?*

Look at this—a statement I just documented from Rom. 6:6 reads, *our old self was crucified with him*. Remember reading that a minute ago? So, this begs yet another question — **Who is it, that actually crucifies the old self?**

*Check it out:*

*Col. 3:5 – Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (NIV)*

God puts that deed on you, me and every Christian to get done. He makes each of us personally responsible to perform this spiritual surgery upon our old self—our old human nature. Jesus said it this way:

*Matt. 18:9 – (Jesus speaking) And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. (NIV)*

Most Christians know that Jesus is definitely not being literal here in this scripture. But, he definitely is providing an accurate perspective that he wants each of us to develop regarding the insidious, wicked and very dangerous influence that sin has upon every one of us.

Especially if it goes unchecked in our lives and leads to forming bad habits, a destructive lifestyle, or some entrenched addiction. All Christians are vulnerable, and easily susceptible to the appeal of sin, and this clearly represents a challenge to every one of us at times. That's why I wrote my first book, starting out with this particular chapter, also entitled, "*Challenge*."

This put to death mandate from our God is described in very brutal terms here in the book of Colossians. Jesus is exceptionally serious about this, so, pay special attention to these words for a minute, but, don't let the following brutal descriptions *freak you out*, or cause you any concerns, about what is being said.

Jesus will use these scriptures and descriptions to develop an accurate and formidable perspective within you, that you will highly value as powerful weapons of spiritual warfare. He means for that perspective from these scriptures to literally, ***scare-the-hell-out-of-you***. These are a part of the truth that you shall know. *The truth that will set you free.*

The original Greek word that the Apostle Paul used here in the book of Colossians for *crucify* or *put to death*, is the word, "***nekrosate***" (*Nek-ro-sate*). Perhaps the best description of this action comes from the Expositors Bible Commentary, which I copy here:

*"The verb "nekrosate," meaning literally "to make dead," is very strong. It suggests that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes. We are to wipe them out, completely exterminate the old way of life. "Slay utterly" may express its force. The form of the verb (aorist imperative) makes clear that the action is to be undertaken decisively, with a sense of urgency. Both the meaning of the verb and the force of the tense suggest a vigorous, painful act of personal determination."* (EBC)

A second, and equally brutal description of this action comes from Matthew Henry's Commentary, which I copy here:

*"It is our duty to mortify our members which incline to the things of the world. Mortify them, kill them, suppress them, as weeds or vermin which spread and destroy all about them. Continual opposition must be made to all corrupt workings, and no provision made for carnal indulgences."* (MHC)

As ruthless as these descriptions are, they really come down to a simple choice that each of us are confronted with, and sometimes challenged by, throughout our entire lifetime. Here it is—the Apostle Paul wrote it down in Romans with perfect context to our study:

**Rom. 8:13** *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.... (NIV)*

Moses, writing in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, first penned that choice like this:  
*"Today, I put before you, life and death – Choose Life"*

So, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit of God, will personally teach you, and train you, to become a masterful, spiritual surgeon. He begins that training at the very moment of your salvation, and, it will continue every day throughout your life. *However, that essential spiritual life training becomes way more effective, when you purposely, and very diligently, seek to increase the unsearchable riches of your knowledge of Christ.*

Most Christians, experiencing, or being influenced by, a destructive lifestyle, have never considered that they would have to become a "*spiritual surgeon*" to rid themselves of everything that literally wars against their souls.

I have deliberately described this life and death choice that we all face every day, in very stark and candid terms, for a specific reason. My intention is to present the reality of life much more from God's unique perspective, rather than what most Christians are used to experiencing. That's what this program is all about. You can absolutely trust Jesus to enable you and empower you into any and every change needed in life to acquire that lifestyle of freedom. You'll be presented with the challenge to acquire his attitude, and then, to begin thinking like he does, so that you can begin acting and behaving in life, like he did, and like he wants you to do. That means you deliberately and intentionally make Jesus to be the cornerstone of your new, or rebuilt, spiritual foundation. And that process my friend, will indeed challenge you. *Let's take a look at that...*

## SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

The actual strength of your spiritual foundation will prove to be the main determinant of just how much authentic, biblical freedom you will be able to acquire, sustain and enjoy, over your entire lifetime. Here's the primary reason why that is—out of your spiritual foundation will flow your behavior; how you act and what you actually do, moment-by-moment.

Your real priorities, that is, what you truly value, will always be determined by your actions—by how you act, and not according to your hopes, good intentions and feelings.... **Only what you actually do—reveals what your priorities and values actually are.**

Changing your belief system, in order to strengthen your spiritual foundation, is not a trivial pursuit—however, Jesus himself provides more evidence of why you would be strongly motivated to do this, and to do it really well. Here's a load of strategic truth from his words within the book of Matthew:

*Check This Out:*

***Matt. 7:24-27 – (Jesus Speaking)** “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.*

*The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.*

*But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*

*The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (NIV)*

This program is designed to teach you that a change in your behavior is not the sole-result of your willpower, but first on *what you believe*, and then on how you act – *putting what you believe into action*. Truth is, your willpower can only take you so far...

That renowned Hollywood theologian, Clint Eastwood, famously said these words in one of his movies: “**A man has got to know his limitations**” ... Remember that one? Turns out that there is a very profound insight to be found in this sentence from Clint Eastwood. Here it is:

*The resources required to develop and sustain a lifestyle of freedom are definitely not found within any of us. Believe and accept the fact that human willpower, combined with intellect, cleverness, education and desire is not sufficient for a person to free themselves from, or prevent the occurrence of, a destructive lifestyle.*

***Eastwood was right—You need to know your own limitations...!***

It further turns out that the essential resource required to develop and sustain a lifestyle of freedom for each of us is none other than the Son of the Living God, Jesus Christ. Many of you know this to be true. Intellectually, you've got that down. Believing this is not your main issue... Navigating your life up to this point has exposed the truth that you have not yet developed an effective strategy and life-action-plan to *put what you believe into consistent operation*. You run out of spiritual gas almost every time you try. So, the question lingers: My life has been hijacked – *How can I resolve this difficult dilemma and take it back?*

How about this—memorize these sound-bites for a quick reminder...

The facts look just like this: “**No Jesus – No Gas!**”

And, just like this: “**Know Jesus – Lots of Gas!**”

This session began by stating the life challenging problem faced by a very large number of Christians... I repeat it here from page 1, adding some more detail over the next few paragraphs:

**Problem:** *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)*

In fact, many Christians navigating life today 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 bad habits and 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. For example:

**Problem:** *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)*

So, we start out this first session defining and understanding that a multitude of Christians are currently experiencing a debilitating and even a destructive lifestyle, and that they simply lack an effective way to get themselves free of it. Let's focus our attention right there as we continue.

Heb. 12:1 clearly reveals and documents the instruction from God of what He considers to be a *normal and typical* response for any Christian navigating life. But, God also regards our response perfectly, because He knows our weaknesses. So, I restate the question again:

### ***What to do—how do we get our life back?***

God answers that question in the very next scripture that he inspired the writer of Hebrews (*most probably the Apostle Paul*), to write. Here it is:

**Solution:** *Heb. 12:2 – Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)*

Fix our eyes on Jesus Indeed... Could it really be that simple? Further, God also confirms and validates the answer to that question in many passages of scripture throughout the pages of the bible. Look at this one...

**Solution:** *Rom. 7:24-25 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (NIV)*

So then, *what to do?* Here's what we do – We look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. All life, and all freedom, begins with him.

**Jesus knows everything and he can do anything**, especially providing all things needed, not only for your freedom, but, for the totality of life itself. This action-plan session begins right there focusing on Jesus, and challenges you to examine your personal knowledge of Him. Whether that knowledge is sufficient or not. Whether you really need to increase your knowledge of Jesus. My first book, in every chapter, explores and details that knowledge of Christ, in many ways, and on many levels, because that knowledge, and how you apply it, is absolutely essential to acquiring, and then navigating your Christian life in a consistent state of freedom. He truly is the impregnable cornerstone of your spiritual foundation—apart from him, authentic biblical freedom simply cannot be acquired and sustained for very long.

Do you think it is a coincidence that God states the Christian dilemma in Heb. 12:1 and then immediately reveals what to do about it in Heb. 12:2...? I certainly don't.

So, this key phrase from verse 2 can be opened up a little more, let's take a look: "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.*" Okay, how does that happen? Fix our eyes on Jesus how exactly? By learning how to acquire his *attitude*. Let's go there.

*Check This Out:*

*Phil. 2:5 – Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: (NIV)*

*Eph. 4:23 – ...to be made new in the attitude of your minds; (NIV)*

Acquiring the attitude of Christ is inextricably linked to developing the freedom strategy and life-action-plan you will need to get yourself free, or, to keep yourself from falling prey to one of these destructive scourges. It works like this: As you begin to acquire his attitude, you begin to *think like him*.... Jesus said it himself in the book of John:

*John 15:5 – (Jesus Speaking) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (NIV)*

What Jesus says is always amazing, compelling, and many times even miraculous. What Jesus does not say, but infers, can also be equal in comparison. Here in this John 15:5 passage of scripture, Jesus infers that this pursuit of freedom by you is not to be attempted as a *Lone-Ranger*.

He says this: "**Apart from me you can do nothing.**" He means that Christians will not be successful navigating life by themselves only, with little reliance on him, especially if they are seeking to break-free from a destructive lifestyle.

In fact, acquiring that attitude of Christ, is actually a self-fulfilling prophecy. It reads like this: To the degree that you are successfully enjoying authentic biblical freedom, will also be evidenced that you have successfully been acquiring and maintaining the attitude of Christ within your mind. *That's exactly how it works...*

In addition, that attitude of Christ, so crucial and essential to acquiring and maintaining your spiritual freedom is one of the precious promises and provisions that God makes to you here in the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter:

*2 Pet. 1:3-4 – His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (NIV)*

God provides you *EVERYTHING NEEDED FOR LIFE*. Including sufficient knowledge of Jesus. Further, this passage of scripture provides you a guarantee. One of my favorite bible commentaries includes a paraphrase of this guarantee.

The wording reads like this:

That even **IF** you are not *perfectly* consistent, but you are **sufficiently consistent**, to fulfill this scripture, **THEN** you can expect to *never stumble* or, at the very least, *rarely stumble*, in your walk with God. *Does that appeal to you?*

But...GET STARTED! You will be very joyful when the Holy Spirit of God begins to increase your awareness and sensitivities of these attributes in your life, which are all woven into the person of Jesus Christ. You will discover that you are becoming more *God conscious* and less *sin conscious* in your day-to-day thinking.

Get started indeed. Calibrate your thinking. Connect the dots in this passage of scripture. I mean, didn't you invest yourself into this action-plan of mine to realize and acquire what one very strategic sentence from God is offering you in this passage: "*to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*"

Isn't that it? Isn't that true? Yes! Indeed, it is true and it only happens when we increase what?

### **"Our knowledge of Jesus"**

It is this specific, precise and highly detailed knowledge of Jesus that really matters to God and to you. Here's a very essential one of the many reasons why:

**Dan 11:32 – the people who know their God will display strength and take action. (NASB)**

Once again, connect the dots. It is the people who *know their God* who display strength and act effectively. Further, that is what so many Christians are lacking; that ability, or spiritual strength, to do just that; *to Display that Strength and Take that Action.*

That's what is missing, and, it is inseparably linked to how well you know Jesus. Meditate on that—you need to *KNOW JESUS REALLY WELL!* Almost certainly better than you know him now. So, you might ask... just how well do I really need to know him? Okay, good question—let's break that down some more...

## **SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE**

Before you can master the sin in your life, you must first begin learning how it works its way into your life. At that point, you'll be ready to acquire a sufficient base of spiritual knowledge thereby enabling you to effectively *resist* the sin that so easily entices you. This action-plan will get you started, and eventually my book, will help you do that, and do it more effectively.

Your success in resisting sin is *intrinsically-linked* to your relationship with God, through Jesus. What does that mean? In this context, you must know Jesus really well, to *master* the sin in your life. So, that process usually looks something like this:

Over time, your relationship with Jesus will grow and will be tested through experiences and you, at some point, will arrive at a place whereby you know him sufficiently well. When you arrive, **at that point**, you are able to begin mastering the consistent sin in your life. Pragmatically, that's how it works.

Your ability to successfully resist, and eventually master, the sin in your life will track and follow your relationship with Jesus that gets deeper with experience over time. The deeper you come to know God, the more faith you will have, and the more successful you will be, in resisting sin. The following two scriptures illuminate this:

**Dan. 11:32 – but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. (NASB)**

**Gen. 4:1 – and Adam knew Eve as his wife, and she became pregnant and bore Cain.... (AMP)**

The word used in the original language (*Hebrew*), for the English word “Know or Knew” found in the above two scriptures is the word: **“YADA.”** The context here is that the word used when Adam had sexual relations with his wife Eve, is the *same word* used in the book of Daniel when the people who “know” their God displayed strength and acted.

Now, for them to display that kind of strength and take that kind of action, they had to **know God** with the same depth, love and intimacy that Adam possessed, when he **knew** his wife Eve, but without any sexual connotation inferred here.

The significance of this distinctive form of knowledge actually expresses the dedication, selfless love and intimacy that we develop, form and attach to our spouses. That significant distinction is meant to be identical with how God desires us to know and relate to him through Jesus.

This is God’s message to you and he wants you to understand this really well, so, he compares knowing him with how a husband and wife know each other through a marriage relationship that grows stronger and more intimate over time. The process is analogous.

We are to fall in love with, and learn to know Jesus, in a related way that we fell in love with and know our husband or wife. So, pragmatically speaking, we find out what Jesus loves... and we do those things.

Conversely, we find out what Jesus hates or dislikes... and we refrain from doing those things. Very similar to falling in love with our husband or wife. Simply put, but very profound and not at all that easy to accomplish... We have to work at it and actively resist our own selfishness, on a daily basis.

If Jesus is just an acquaintance of yours, or, just an icon of history in your mind, your relationship with him is woefully inadequate—absolutely insufficient—and that, my friend, puts you at significant risk of a spiritual train-wreck coming your way.

God has designed our spiritual life experience like that on purpose. If it was really that easy, God knows we would not place such a high value on it. He also knows that we will really only struggle and fight for issues in life that we highly value and care about. How about you... Do you value and care enough for your marriage, and/or your relationship with God enough that you will fight to maintain it? Further, *is that value sufficient enough to confront your own selfishness?*

Take note of these following timeless sayings, from my *Pragmatic Theology Series* that will help you develop an effective and beneficial mindset about this new discipline:

- **FIND OUT WHAT GOD LIKES AND DO THOSE THINGS...**
- **FIND OUT WHAT GOD DOES NOT LIKE AND DON'T DO THOSE THINGS...**
- **FIND OUT WHAT GOD WANTS FROM YOU AND GIVE IT TO HIM...**

Think long and hard about this. Your relationship with God, and your relationship with your spouse, are gifts that god has given you. Your adversary, the devil, wants to take them both away from you. The question is, will you let him do that, or...Will you fight to hold onto those precious gifts? Where do you place that value? For many of you, the answer to that question is a personal and spiritual life challenge. That is why I place it here early in this action-plan. Now, consider this:

## SUFFICIENT SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

There is an excellent, pragmatic and compelling reason that God has determined our spiritual life to function in this way. He wants it to be exceedingly strong, not weak. He will test the strength of our spiritual life and faith as often as he deems necessary to ensure that strength. How does God do that, you might ask?

*Check this out:*

**Heb. 12:28-29** *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.” (NIV)*

God will often test things by *shaking* them. He shakes things to reveal weakness. He shakes all kinds of things; He shakes individuals, marriages, families, churches, businesses, organizations, nations, etc. *You get the picture....* However, like the scripture says, God's kingdom cannot be shaken. It is perfectly strong and we are receiving the gift of adoption into this family and kingdom of his through Jesus.

But, how about you... ***Is he shaking you to reveal some weakness?***

Or, does he need to shake you in some way? Is your faith in him sufficiently strong right now, or, does God need to shake it making you aware of any weakness? Think about it.

What do we take away from this? We are able to see and respond to our spouse through our human senses. However, we cannot see Jesus, but must relate and respond to him through faith, not sight; and, that is not so easy at times.

Not so easy indeed. Therefore, I encourage you to think and pray this through with sound reasoning and clear logic. Connect these dots; That **IF** your current knowledge of Jesus was sufficient, and your relationship with him sufficiently strong, **THEN** you would not be experiencing a destructive lifestyle, or being influenced by a series of bad habits. Isn't that true? What do you think? Do you agree?

I really encourage you to ***settle this in your mind.*** You want to be able to think and respond like Jesus whenever you are confronted with a temptation to sin – especially a besetting sin. Challenge your own thinking here. Take what time you may need and really think and reason about how well you know Jesus at this point in your life. Make a sincere assessment of not only your thoughts, but how those thoughts lead you to act and behave like you do. Connect those dots to link how your thought-life controls what you actually do on a daily basis. *Got it?*

Ask yourself, is your knowledge of Jesus sufficient? (*probably not*). Is it lacking, or insufficient? (*almost certainly*). Is your relationship with him sufficiently strong? You and God both know that answer...

The first few sessions of this action-plan are specifically focused on helping you to increase the unsearchable riches of your knowledge of Jesus, and precisely why you need to do that. Your working knowledge of the attitude of Christ is absolutely essential in this pursuit of freedom. So, you are challenged in this session to open your mind up to refining the *What you believe*, and the *Why you believe it*, knowledge of Jesus. In context with these last several paragraphs, let's introduce two, essential principles that must be wholeheartedly believed and adopted prior to learning and applying the many other essential principles of freedom in this program.

1. *The resources required to develop and sustain a lifestyle of freedom are definitely not found within any of us.*
2. *You must first acquire, and then apply, sufficient power and force that is demonstrably stronger than whatever it is you are trying to overcome or dominate. (This principle specifically applies to internal strongholds, habits or behaviors that bind us to a destructive lifestyle).*

So, once you accept the first challenge to open your mind up to some new knowledge and tactics, the next challenge, coming right after it, looks like this: **You activate and maintain** these two essential principles of truth to gain personal freedom for yourself, understanding that they both require the direct involvement of God, through the person of Jesus Christ. It is as simple and yet as profound as that!

That being the case.... Be wise – Be very wise, and incline your heart to seek God— to *Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith.* The yoke of Christ, and that yoke upon you, is at the heart of God's provision for your freedom. That is the challenge that you, me, and all of humanity must grapple with.... The plan of almighty God through the person of Jesus Christ. Either he is who he says he is, as recorded throughout the Old and New Testaments of the bible, or he is a complete fraud. What do you think...?

That means *the person of Jesus Christ*, not just his teaching. Jesus himself, acting through his Holy Spirit, is the only way for Christians to acquire a high-performance lifestyle of freedom. Many people have tried to build a “*structure*” for themselves of learning and adhering to the principles and precepts that Christ has taught, but, without having to form any, or very little, personal relationship and accountability with him.

The concept of adopting Christ’s teachings alone academically, without adopting a personal relationship with him has some benefit, but ultimately will not provide the freedom you are seeking, especially if you have been trapped in a destructive lifestyle.

You really do need a viable, healthy and personal relationship with Jesus Christ to effectively obliterate destructive habits and behaviors that war against your freedom and the joy of life. It is **HIS POWER**, not yours... He does the **HEAVY LIFTING**, not you. It is this relational partnership with Jesus, by his Spirit, that enables the overwhelming spiritual power required to develop, establish and maintain a viable and rewarding personal experience of authentic, biblical freedom for oneself. As I said earlier, *you just have to get to know him really well!*

As I close out this first session of my action-plan, let me leave you with some powerful encouragement, especially if you are experiencing a rough-patch in your life, and you think that you have little to no chance of putting these new tactics into operation.

**Matt. 11:29, 30 – (Jesus speaking) “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (NIV)**

Jesus, our Lord, absolutely knows each of our strengths & weaknesses and what each of us is able to bear. He never requires anything from us that we cannot accomplish in and through him.

HIS YOKE IS EASY AND HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT! So, don’t ever think the Lord would put something on you that you cannot handle. That is simply not true. I encourage you now to go back over this session to determine a “starting-point” to develop your freedom-strategy and action-plan. Clinical research has established that the hardest part of making a substantial change in your life is to simply take that first step—GET IT STARTED....

***Godspeed my friend.***



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

**THE PATH.....** To summarize up to this point: Christianity alone, through the person of Jesus Christ, by his Spirit, provides the opportunity to experience authentic spiritual freedom. There are a couple of pathways, or methods, documented in the bible that can lead you to it.

These pathways of establishing or restoring a lifestyle of freedom are described in the following sections utilizing a very simplistic narrative, by design. The intent is to document the distinctive differences of these two pathways causing you to intently focus your mind on one method in particular. That is all we need to accomplish at this point. What path to take. Therefore, read, and pray through this session to see which one the Lord will lead you to follow—and why...

### **CHURCH CENTRIC PATHWAY**

Should you realize that you, or someone you care about, are ensnared and trapped by a destructive lifestyle of some kind, you may decide to follow what I call the Church Centric method of restoring that freedom. Here's a brief description of how this method works:

First, (*assuming here that an effective church is being attended*), it is recognized and concluded that the freedom being sought after has not yet been acquired. Next, addressing the reader personally here, you recognize your accountability to God and you confess your sins to him and ask for, and receive, his forgiveness, based upon your faith. You then seek out other Christians to make yourself accountable to. This is quite often done through your local church or through a Christian counselor. There are many accountability, or sometimes called overcomer groups, formed at the local level in most evangelical churches. So, you confess your sins first to God, then one to another as the bible teaches:

*James 5:16 – Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (NIV)*

In most Church accountability groups, the process of confessing these besetting sins is not addressed to the entire group, but usually, to only one or two mature Christians who have shown themselves to be trustworthy confidants who then function as a mentor and a coach to help the besieged Christian disciple work toward getting themselves free, as the bible documents:

*Phil. 2:12 – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (NIV)*

This Church Centric process can, and usually does, work really well. However, this method does not always work well. There is a risk of unintended consequences that has been known to happen, and you need to be made aware of this potential issue, assess to see if it is relative to you, and what to do about it.

Here's the issue of concern: You will be entrusting people, in addition to Jesus, with the knowledge of your moral failure(s). Therefore, these other Christians, whom you will be confiding in, need to be exceedingly honest and trustworthy.

You need to be sufficiently convinced of their "Christian-credentials." They need to have established a rock-solid testimony, living out the life of a mature, competent follower of Christ who knows Jesus really well, and who can be trusted completely with your welfare. A person who looks something like this:

*Gal. 6:1-2 – Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. (NIV)*

The success and effectiveness of this process is directly dependent upon you and God, but also upon these other Christians. Jesus will clearly do his part, perfectly—every time. However, should even one of these brothers and/or sisters in Christ whom you have trusted fail you in this regard, your testimony can be seriously impugned with potentially very tragic results that you might have to live with for the rest of your life. Therefore, you need to understand very well what you risk when you decide to use this Church Centric method, and choose to rely upon others. Be very wise as you consider this—employ only a very well-reasoned, well thought-out and prayerful approach to this decision.

Many, many Christians know this pathway can be potentially perilous to their reputation and good name,<sup>2</sup> and have decided not to pursue this course of action because of that risk.

Regarding this risk, there is sometimes a very large price to pay for some believers who choose this process, especially when it fails to produce the intended results of restorative freedom. Because this price of unintended consequences represents such risk of testimony and livelihood, many Christians, especially professional and lay leadership in the church, refuse to put themselves at risk and pay that price. Instead, they maintain 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 answer. This can be, at times, a very miserable way to live.

Therefore, the Church Centric process of acquiring personal, spiritual freedom is not without personal, and sometimes professional risk, and this risk is fairly well known within the church community.

The Christian reader, who is currently struggling with besetting sin(s) or some kind of entrenched addiction, will have to weigh taking on this risk, against not making any change at all, thereby continuing in conviction, pain and misery. It has become very clear to me through research over the years, that for every believer who chooses to risk possible loss of testimony, and even livelihood, through this church centric process of restoration, there exists several others who choose not to, because they know all too well what has happened to many who have lost so much when that process fails for them.

This dilemma begs a question: How many of you have experienced what you thought was a Christian friend, or even a trusted confidant, turn against you at some point in time, and expose the very confidence you placed in them?

Unexpected and unforeseen consequences—that's the rub. Therefore, be aware, be very aware. Consider, think, reason, ponder and pray a lot about this before committing yourself.

This life will teach you that a true friend, who can honor your confidence and be found trustworthy, is sometimes very rare indeed.

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<sup>2</sup> God desires your reputation and your name to be of great value. Scripture records this: *Prov. 22:1 - A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. (NIV)*

Check this out—It is truly spoken:

*"Your best friends usually know the greatest things about you,  
but often think the worst of you,  
while Jesus..."*

*Knows all the absolute worst things  
about you but always thinks the  
Best of You."*

God does not want to see you fail! Jesus wants you to succeed wildly in your life, on every level that honors him and his will for your life. He wants each of us to live life abundantly (John 10:10) and to enjoy each and every moment of it. God knows very well how the JOY in your life will absolutely EXPLODE within you at the time you successfully develop your freedom strategy, put it into operation, and then begin to experience those exhilarating results.

He wants you to personally experience that explosion of joy for yourself, and he will oppose anything that diminishes that powerful episode and milestone in your life. Gods' matchless and priceless gift to you is his son Jesus Christ and the freedom that comes to you from, and through him.

So, even though you, or someone you deeply care about, may have been corrupted and developed a destructive lifestyle, Jesus will provide everything needed to overcome all of that. He'll put you on the right path—that's why I wrote this.

He will hold you accountable. He will also expect you to exercise personal responsibility. But, he will help you on every level that you decide to humble yourself and seek him on.

Consider these scriptural truths:

*Nah. 1:7 – The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. (NIV)*

*Psa. 46:1 – GOD is our Refuge and Strength (mighty and impenetrable to temptation), a very present and well-proved help in trouble. (AMP)*

*Is. 49:25 – For I will contend with the one who contends with you.. (NASB)*

Therefore, know for certain, that the value of your reputation, your good name, is very significant in God's eyes. He desires every good thing for you and your life. He works quite often "behind the scenes," without our direct awareness or knowledge, to establish love, respect and dignity with others for each of us whom he loves. Consider, once again, the following scriptural truth:

*Pro. 22:1 – A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. (NIV)*

In that context, I restate this attribute of God's nature that I have truly come to love, that makes the following key principle of freedom literally come alive.

*Check it out:*

**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.**

**Never, ever forget that about him.** It's a part of his nature. It's who he is and how he responds to us—much more according to his loving kindness, and not according to our iniquity—according to what we actually deserve for breaking Gods' laws so often.

He loves you that much, his Gospel is that powerful, his grace will always abound more than your sin abounds, and, God really is that good! He knows our deepest desire wanting to secure any needed restoration and personal freedom without the embarrassment and humiliation of public exposure. My research for this book and relevant observations of life inform me that public humiliation used for correction is certainly not God's preference, and is usually only experienced when other people are involved, and at fault in some way.

But—God also knows so very well how to deal with a stubborn heart and an unruly attitude within every one of us whenever he needs to. In context with that, the bible teaches us that God's desire and his plan for securing restoration and a good name necessitates voluntary repentance on our part—that's what we are to do.

He will always lead us to do exactly that—to immediately repent of any sin we may commit. His enduring patience with our selfishness and disobedience is truly legend and defies all human understanding, as he leads us back to that precious relationship and fellowship with him, that he values so highly.

His ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Exponentially higher! The bible further teaches us that it is actually his kindness that leads us to repentance in the first place.

*Rom. 2:4 – Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? (NIV)*

So, when weighing the attributes of this Church Centric strategy vs the following God Centric strategy for yourself or a loved one, carefully evaluate the Christians within your inner circle of friends. Those whom you may consider to call upon for help and counsel. You may not really know what you can expect from them. Refuse to be naïve about this.

On the other hand, Jesus, working through his Holy Spirit, may in fact lead you to trust and confide in one or two brothers or sisters in Christ, as the case may be and use them as vessels of honor to counsel and coach you onto that pathway to freedom that God wants you to be on. The key for you here is to take your time. Think, reason and pray this decision through.

Tenaciously resist any temptation from your human nature to act impulsively, making a snap decision, as you seek relief from a destructive lifestyle you so desperately desire and need to acquire.

## JESUS, OUR HIGH PRIEST – WHO NEVER CHANGES

In addition, tenaciously resist the temptation from your human nature to turn your personal responsibility to master this besetting sin over to others, in addition to Jesus. Consider the following scripture:

*1Tim. 2:5 – For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (NIV)*

Jesus is the only one who really knows your heart, and he is also the only one who has the power you require to obliterate every obstacle and stronghold within you that is keeping you captive. He can also lead, guide and/or direct you into a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ and/or into participating in a Church Centric “Overcomers” group of some kind to at least begin developing your freedom strategy. The key here is to not be impulsive and to not rush into this.

Instead, think, pray and plan your way into this decision. It will have short-term, mid-term, long-term and even eternal impact upon the effectiveness, the joy and the very quality of your life experience.

All that being said, the last several paragraphs document what you can expect from Jesus, whether you choose the Church Centric or God Centric pathway to personal freedom. He will always lead you to his good, acceptable and perfect will and plan for your life, including which of these paths to choose, however, he puts that choice into your hands to decide.

Therefore, after you effectively think, pray and plan about these two pathways to freedom, should you decide the Church Centric strategy might just be too risky, and therefore may not work out for you in your particular situation, at this particular time, do not worry or be anxious about it. Not at all—not even to stress about it.

God has provided a way through the wilderness for anyone who determines that they just cannot confidently resolve the potential risk associated with the Church Centric method of restoration.

God has not, and will never, leave you to fend for yourself, to pursue your personal, spiritual freedom; especially fitting if you find that you are just not sure about the Church Centric method. That you simply have not been able to develop the faith, confidence and peace that this method will work out and will effectively produce the results you so strongly desire and need in your life. Okay, so what's next? *Read on...*

## GOD CENTRIC PATHWAY

Considerable research and study of the scriptures, woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments, has led a multitude of God's people to find and follow this approach to establish and/or maintain a lifestyle of authentic, biblical freedom.

This God Centric pathway has been in place, and has been used by God down through the passage of time to draw his people closer to himself, and, in the process, to teach them how to acquire and maintain a very effective, constructive and abundant lifestyle.

The success and effectiveness of this process is not principally dependent upon other Christians, but almost exclusively upon God and you. God will clearly do his part perfectly, every time, just as he does with the Church Centric method.

So, the risk of any failure is primarily upon you. This fact of exercising self-control should really encourage you. However, in saying that, please don't think that this method leaves you alone to function like the Lone-Ranger, as mentioned previously.

Not at all. God's plan for your life clearly intends you to be a functional part of his church, to take your unique place within the body of Christ exercising the ministry of the gifts that he has equipped you with. Those gifts are unique to you because you are unique yourself. God intentionally made you that way.

Further, the example of Jesus himself, and others in the bible, will encourage you to seek out perhaps from one to three very close and trusted friends to navigate the Christian life with. There is great joy in this fellowship that God intends for you to thoroughly relish that simply cannot be experienced by trying to navigate the journey by yourself.

## GODS ABOUNDING PROVISION

In addition to Christian friends and the church, the bible documents a truly incredible array of provisions that God has available to equip you with, both for ministry and to acquire and sustain your freedom from bad habits, from besetting sin(s) and from a destructive lifestyle.

**Key #4 – *God has provided each of us with EVERYTHING needed for life. Including a specific PLAN to discover and put into operation, and, each good work that His plan equips you to accomplish.***

This starts with a couple of strategic scriptures I documented in the last session, but, providing a different perspective from the Amplified Bible shown here:

**2Pet. 1:3 – *For His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that [are requisite and suited] to life and godliness, through the (full, personal) knowledge of Him Who called us by and to His own glory and excellence (virtue). (AMP)***

**Phil. 4:19 – *And my God will liberally supply (fill to the full) your every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (AMP)***

The bible abounds with God's provision for those who have decided to get really serious about seeking him with steadfast diligence. There is even a wonderful assurance in scripture that this God Centric approach works through a process of acquiring, and then applying, the gift of faith that God has given you. *Your faith—this is where it starts.*

So, let's go over the following passages of scripture, restating a few points that build upon what you read in the last session. I often repeat this assurance from scripture, on many levels, and show you exactly how and why it is steadfast, and most importantly, how to achieve it for yourself, in direct relationship with Jesus, by his Spirit. There is a strategic sequence of core values documented here, beginning with faith. So, focus your attention on the sequence of these core values documented here in 2 Peter, and, **believe that they are all attainable by you:**

**2 Pet. 1:5-7 – *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (NIV)***

**2 Pet. 1:8 – *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)***

Therefore, as practicing disciples of Christ, we are all positioned somewhere within this framework of core values regarding our spiritual faith, growth and effectiveness.

Verse 8 states that if we possess these qualities, read: we possess all of these qualities in increasing measure, then we have the certainty that we will not be ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of Jesus.

We'll be increasing the unsearchable richness of knowing him more deeply and completely. Always remember and meditate often on that linkage; Your freedom is inextricably influenced by, and linked to, **how well you know Jesus**.

Another bible commentary I refer to very often states a valid conclusion to be formed after studying this passage of scripture. This is what it states—***you will never stumble***. These qualities show a progression from Christian infancy to the full and fruitful attainment of spiritual freedom throughout a person's life. Further, the phrase, “*in increasing measure*” literally means that spiritual growth is in process. It's dynamic, it's actually happening.

However, there are so many Christians who experience significant difficulty learning how to get themselves plugged-into this process, learning how to achieve this result for themselves. Many find themselves functioning in their spiritual lives like the Yo-Yo described in previous sections of this program. They travel up and down but rarely forward.

Very little growth and development of a viable and effective spiritual foundation for themselves to build their life upon. Their comfort-zone of debilitating habits keeps getting in the way, holding them in this vicious lifecycle. *Does that describe you in some way?*

Therefore, throughout this program of mine, I will unpack, parse and detail what this particular scripture (*2 Pet. 1:5-8*) means and exactly how we can achieve these results that are guaranteed to increase our knowledge of Jesus.

This God Centric approach really begins the formation of your life's spiritual foundation, and defines the starting point of anyone seeking to be free.

All of the core values that you acquire in your life, beginning with your faith, are first to be deeply-rooted in this foundation of biblical truth. Let's go there next and see what truth has to do with it.

## BIBLICAL TRUTH—THE FOUNDATION OF FREEDOM

In fact, the formation of every destructive habit in your life can be traced back to a weak foundation of biblical truth. A very profound statement, but absolutely true.

Conversely, this statement reveals another essential component of biblical truth—that would be the assurance, the guarantee, paraphrased here from 2 Peter 1:8 that we have been focused upon. Here it is:

*It is virtually impossible for a destructive habit to be formed within any person who effectively operates on a God-Centric foundation of biblical truth.*

This does not mean that you will never sin again. On the contrary, we are all sinners by birth and by choice, saved by grace, and will remain so in this lifetime. However, we can and must learn how to control ourselves in a way that is holy and honorable to God, as it is written from the Amplified Bible:

**1 Thess. 4:4** – That each one of you should know how to possess (control, manage) his own body in consecration (purity, separated from things profane) and honor, (AMP)

**Rom. 6:14** – For sin shall not (any longer) exert dominion over you, since now you are not under Law (as slaves), but under grace (as subjects of God's favor and mercy). (AMP)

As we learn to master the sin that can so easily entice and entangle us, we will be controlling ourselves in such a way that we no longer are ruled and mastered by the power of sin. **We will stop sinning consistently.** We will overcome bad habits and besetting sin. We will win more spiritual warfare battles over sin than we lose. When that process begins to start working in our lives, we will be well on our way to experiencing the development of our unique freedom strategy and life-action-plan.

You see, to acquire a new strategy based upon biblical truth, and then to practice living your life with consistent freedom, requires that you learn to view life much *more from God's perspective*—rather than from your own human nature. But, you and I are not born with the ability to do that. It must be deliberately learned. Remember studying that in the last session? Developing, refining or changing your spiritual life foundation, including your core values that make up your comfort-zone, to be in conformance with God's perspective, requires a very diligent pursuit of learning the truth. This pursuit cannot be a haphazard or an intermittent process; it will never work that way.

I really encourage you again, right now, to prepare and focus your mind like you did in the last session. There's some new stuff coming your way that just might challenge you some more—you up for that? Check out these next paragraphs revealing what I like to call **God's Classroom**—a new concept for many of you to think about and to dwell on. It bears some similarity to our K thru 12 plus college educational system, but is much more rigorous and thorough.

This next section is intentionally written to describe what a diligent and deliberate learning experience looks like **from God's perspective**. It is not so much about the what you're going to learn, but much more about the how you are going to learn it.

Therefore, the bible instructs us often to gird our minds for action—to be on the alert—to be vigilant and diligent (1 Pet. 1:13 – 5:8,9). Now would be a good time for you to do just that.

## GODS' CLASSROOM – THE CRUCIBLE OF LEARNING

Consider this: The Lord begins revealing the attributes of his divine nature in the pages of the Old Testament. He tells his people how to learn about him, his precepts and commandments. He describes, in a very pragmatic and practical way, exactly what the process of learning should look like—that is, the process of learning to navigate life more from God's perspective.

Moses, writing in the book of Deuteronomy, records these instructions from God regarding the process of learning his commandments, precepts and principles:

**Deut. 6:6-9** – “*These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*” (NIV)

Further on, in Deuteronomy 11, Moses adds a distinction of learning that is unique to how God is instructing his people, **including all of us in the Christian church**, down through the annals of time to this present day:

**Deut. 11:18** – “*Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds*” (NIV)

The meaning being that a Christian man or woman needs to develop and establish a lifestyle that promotes and sustains a **consistent and lifelong learning routine** of biblical precepts and commandments from God's Word, and fellowship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit of God.

Notice in particular how different the learning and teaching methodology is comparing Deut. 6:6-9 with our school system here in America, or any other nation for that matter.

The school system provides a structured format of learning for 6+ hours a day, 5 days a week, from the age of 5 for kindergarten through the early twenties completing college. Some go on to post graduate and doctoral studies.

However, **God's Classroom** learning program starts when you get up and continues throughout the day until you go to bed at the end of the day—**ALL DAY—EVERY DAY—UNTIL YOU DIE..!** Quite a comparison. However, please don't get lost on the context. We can learn to function in society and develop a vocation through the school system, without expending the full extent of our lives, on a daily basis. Practicing Christians have been doing that for millennia.

God also wants us to realize that we will never complete our knowledge, comprehension or understanding of him, even in this lifetime. He is simply that great, that awesome and complex. His ways and thoughts are *exponentially* higher than our ways and our thoughts. But, we can, and we should, evaluate how we think about him and how we perceive him to be within our own mind. In addition, we can and we should *make ourselves much more aware* that God is with us and dwells within each of us 24/7, regardless of whether we feel like he does or not. HE DOES—he really does, every day.

*Consider this scripture:*

**1 Th. 5:16-18** – *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (NRSV)*

God's classroom does not end every morning after you finish spending some time reading a few bible verses and investing a few moments in a daily devotional. Not at all. The bible instructs and encourages us to develop and to practice being knowingly aware of God dwelling within us by his Holy Spirit throughout the day, **EVERY DAY.**

God wants our mental and spiritual awareness of him to be sustained throughout the entire day, never letting up; but, not to “dog us” about his presence. Not at all. Only to teach, train, bless, protect and provide for us and keep us out of harm’s way, because of his great love for us, and also, because all we like sheep have gone astray—we are easily deceived and prone to wander.

*Check out this next key:*

**Key #5** – *Do not think that becoming **Easily Deceived** could not happen to you. Refuse to think that way. Instead, realize that we are easily susceptible to being deceived and deluded about God's will in our lives at any point in time. That is why we need a Shepherd in the first place, and that is why our need for Jesus, his grace and his truth is often DESPERATE.*

*Always Remember - Apart from him, we can do nothing... (John 15:5)*

The bible tells us that Jesus wants to provide *Abundant-Life* (John 10:10) to us, imparted by his Holy Spirit, through every day circumstances of living. So, when you experience one or more wonderful events during the day, like answered prayer, you should rejoice and thank God, in that moment; don't wait until tomorrow morning prayer time.

In contrast, when you experience a circumstance that adds some stress to your life, you should pray and ask God to help you, right then. That's what "*pray without ceasing*" means. It is very much an on-going process.

God's classroom in the bible is instructing us to maintain and sustain our awareness that God is with us at all times of the day and night, whether we can sense his presence or not. We are to live by faith, not by sight—it is a lifestyle, framed by the Gospel of Christ, and certainly not to be experienced only by our physical senses—how we see and feel.

God initiates our new relationship with him at the very moment we are born again, and, his desire is to experience a very close bond of personal fellowship with each of us without respect to any timeframe. It's Jesus—everyday—all the time—continuously.

We will in fact be spending eternity with him in a never-ending learning process focused upon those attributes of his divine nature, but never completely comprehending them. He is that far above our ability to understand him and his ways, which the bible says are unsearchable.

However, he clearly intends and instructs each of us to be growing and increasing in those unsearchable riches of our knowledge of Jesus Christ. So, he encourages us to develop the godly discipline of a proactive mind set and attitude throughout our entire lives, focused upon learning, understanding and comprehending all that we can about him and his kingdom. In addition to the passages in Deuteronomy documented here, Old and New Testament scripture is replete with numerous descriptions of God's learning process:

***Josh. 1:8 – Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (NIV)***

***Psa. 119:15 – I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. (NIV)***

***Psa. 119:97 – Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. (NIV)***

There is a very good reason that God's classroom is much different than what the world's system provides. God knows our human nature, and just how easy it is for us to stray from his commands. So, he teaches and even admonishes us to virtually saturate our minds with his word from the bible. Not just from an educational, intellectual standpoint, but, his word is also the bread-of-life that nourishes our spirit. Therefore, to the degree that we increase our knowledge of Jesus, we sustain the health and well-being of our spirits. And, what do we receive in return from him? He provides us abundant life – ***What a deal.***

Truly a Win-Win transaction. He is definitely a rewarder to all those who seek him with diligence. Check this out:

***John 10:10 – The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (NKJV)***

***God's Classroom***—very different from just learning how to read and write, or learning, and even mastering, a vocation or career.

The thought here is to dissuade any of you from thinking that just going through the school and college or seminary system will provide all you need to develop and secure a strong spiritual foundation to build your life upon that will lead you to a higher-performance lifestyle of personal freedom. It will not.

However, the bible is not teaching or admonishing us to take upon ourselves anything that is so arduous and difficult that we could not possibly accomplish it.

Or, that only a very select few, with extremely disciplined minds can accomplish what it takes to acquire a lifestyle of spiritual freedom. No, no, not at all. The bible is replete revealing God's amazing grace and lovingkindness, in many ways and on many levels.

*Check these scriptures out:*

**Matt. 11:29, 30** – (Jesus speaking) “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (NIV)

**Acts 15:10** – Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? (NIV)

**1 Cor. 10:13** – No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (NRSV)

**Joel 2:13** – “Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.” (NIV)

The bible is teaching and admonishing us to abide in Christ, with his word richly abiding in us, and then learn to walk in and by the spirit, in such a way that we will not carry out the evil desires that can well up from within our own hearts and minds. Further, that we will learn to control our bodies, including our minds, in a way that is holy and honorable to the Lord. Remember, it is our adversary the devil—and it is sin—not God, who is the evil taskmaster in our lives, seeking to put all of us, and keep all of us, in deep and terrible bondage.

Jesus, our Lord, absolutely knows each of our strengths and weaknesses and what each of us is able to bear. He never requires anything from us that we cannot accomplish in and through him.

HIS YOKE IS EASY AND HIS BURDEN IS LIGHT. So, don't ever think the Lord would put something on you that you cannot handle. That is simply not true. You read that in the last session, for a very good reason – It's absolutely, unequivocally, TRUE.

**Got that down?** Did you **Nail-It?** Good. Now you should continue planning on ordering, or re-ordering, your life to discover, learn, and conform your thoughts, choices, and actions to this God Centric way of doing life.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY—YES INDEED, DIRECTLY TO GOD**

Dealing with your sin, you make yourself *directly accountable to God*. You confess your sins first to God, then you repent and make any necessary restitutions, but with a new, **single-minded determination** to overcome whatever is causing the repetition of sinful thoughts and behavior in your life.

One clarification to this. The bible documents what we are to do if we sin directly against another person, or they sin against us:

**Matt. 18:15** – “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over... (NIV)

**Matt. 5:23-24** – “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (NIV)

Want more evidence to confirm and validate this part of your new freedom strategy? Consider the following; the very first use of the word “sin” in the bible is found in Gen. 4:7. I deliberately restate a couple of scriptures here with a slightly different perspective, beginning once again with God and Cain.

God himself is speaking to Cain in this passage. God knows that Cain is contemplating the murder of his brother Abel, and God directly challenges Cain to exercise his personal responsibility and resist the temptation. Here it is again, God himself, speaking directly to Cain:

**Gen. 4:7** – “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)

In this case, God is putting the responsibility for mastering sin personally upon Cain, and, upon each of us who follow. God does not leave us alone to accomplish this, but, he wants us to learn how to overcome evil and get free from this debilitating, habitual practice of sin.

So, understand that the type of sin God is talking about here is the consistent, or, besetting sin that we regularly yield ourselves to, thereby entrapping us to a destructive lifestyle—and not so much about sin in our lives that is more innocuous and of lesser consequence.

God was talking to Cain about the besetting sin of anger in this case. God knew that this tremendous anger from Cain, was hardening his heart and corrupting his mind, to the degree that Cain was contemplating the murder of his brother Abel, and, in fact, that is exactly what the consequence of this besetting sin of anger produced.

Cain murdered his brother Abel. As a result, Cain lost his freedom for the rest of his life. This result was not God’s desired will for Cain or for any of us. However, God holds each of us accountable and makes each of us personally responsible to seek, find and acquire the knowledge needed to develop our own unique freedom strategy. But, he won’t do this for us. It is ours to make happen. God created us to, and fully expects us to, take dominion and exercise control over our human faculties.

He clearly has established this responsibility for each of us to adhere to. He has also provided everything we need to perform that responsibility. His perfect nature can do nothing less.

However, he also expects each one of us to learn everything we need to know, and also expects us to learn how to acquire everything we need from him, in order to perform this responsibility. Cain failed to do that—God offered—Cain rejected—Abel was murdered. Connect the dots...God promises to hold nothing back from a person who will diligently seek him. In fact, it is that person who receives God’s reward and blessing:

**Heb. 11:6** – *But without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must (necessarily) believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him. (AMP)*

## GOD'S NORMAL LIFESTYLE – AUTHENTIC FREEDOM

Therefore, God has established that the control of a consistent pattern of debilitating sin can and must be mastered by any and every Christian seeking a lifestyle of freedom. We cannot eliminate sin from influencing our lives, but we can learn to absolutely prevent it from ruling over our lives in a consistent manner—that is clearly God's desire, plan and will for each of us.

This mastery over destructive, sinful habits is an exacting process that must be learned, working in partnership and very close context with God's Holy Spirit, because we are not born with that ability. However, a lifestyle of freedom is what awaits every Christian who will seek God with diligence. That truly is his *default-lifestyle*.

In summary of this God Centric method of acquiring personal, spiritual freedom, you accept full responsibility to assess, determine and correct the spiritual weakness, and to make any restitution your sin(s) may have caused, as you submit to God's leadership in your life.

You accept this responsibility with the understanding and acknowledgment that you cannot earn it, and that God himself will be providing everything needed to equip you as you fulfill this, according to his riches, glory and grace thru Christ Jesus (*Phil. 4:19*).

Therefore, as you acknowledge your accountability to God in this way, you also commit to exercising your personal responsibility as you diligently seek his will and plan for your life.

This will require you to make an honest and truthful assessment of your faith and spiritual growth, often, but especially when you are first seeking to make a change your life. Like I stated before, that assessment is not a trivial matter.

A truly honest assessment will challenge you with the fact that something must be definitely wrong with your core values and comfort-zone, or you would not be behaving in a consistently sinful manner. The bible admonishes each one of us about this:

*Rom. 12:3 – “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” (NIV)*

This is the distinctive difference between the Church Centric and God Centric approach to restorative freedom. Authentic biblical freedom **requires you** to be personally accountable and responsible for your actions. You can choose to be directly accountable to God alone through the God Centric approach, or to also make yourself answerable to other Christians through the Church Centric approach. The bible teaches and supports both.

Further, society has provided a number of organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Celebrate Recovery, and others that can be of benefit to a Christian struggling with addictive issues, however, God holds each of us directly and personally accountable and charges each of us with personal responsibility to him and his word.

In addition, other Christians can, and should be involved in this God Centric approach also, however, the difference is that you choose not to make yourself directly answerable to them for your behavior. To be sure, God has not designed your life to be conducted like the Lone-Ranger, but, will lead you to many godly people throughout your life to be nurtured, disciplined, admonished and blessed by. He always encourages us to love one another and to fellowship with one another.

So, this leads to a sixth key principle of God's truth thereby making yourself personally responsible for your actions and behavior. However, God has made that responsibility a choice that you must consider and determine.

**Key #6 – You must accept the fact that *You Alone* are absolutely, and personally responsible for the integrity of your character, your core values and unique comfort-zone system of habits you choose to believe, adopt and live by.**

That has always been the case, even before you were born again. Always remember that God himself spoke to Cain about sin and said, you must master it. However, now that **you** are born again, you are no longer alone in this struggle, and God has committed to providing you everything needed for that freedom you acquire, or renew, **Like an Eagle** (Is 40:31) (Ps. 103:5).

Well, there they are. Two viable, but different approaches from the bible that can lead you to freedom. What do you think—what stands out to you? Do you agree?

Okay, let's see what the bible, life & the next session tells us about **FAITH**.....



WEB eBOOK – LIFE ACTION PLAN  
Chapter 3 – FAITH

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

***Before you can OBEY God, you have to BELIEVE God...***

## **FAITH – GOD'S PERSPECTIVE**

The last session introduced you to what I call the **God Centric** method of acquiring and maintaining, authentic biblical freedom. A key strategy for me was, and is, to illuminate that particular path to freedom and help you get on it, and stay on it. I presented a number of attributes of spiritual freedom documented throughout the bible, but with a Gods' eye view of life, more from his perspective, rather than what is common to us. We'll begin this session exploring his perspective on faith, and how faith factors into acquiring and sustaining that spiritual freedom.

The bible establishes that **faith is to our spirit what blood is to our body. It is LIFE.** The bible also details that God's eyes literally search the world, to and fro, for individuals with faith, and, when he finds it, **he always responds.** Jesus said this in Luke 7:9: "*I tell you; I have not found such great faith even in Israel.*" God is actively looking for it, 24/7. Consider what he will find when he measures yours—you can be sure he's looking at it. Let's make it sufficient—let's make it greater.

**FAITH AND FREEDOM** – The bible establishes two, definitive and distinctive methods for anyone seeking to acquire true, authentic spiritual freedom for their lifestyles, *both of which require sufficient faith:*

1. The Freedom acquired through the **Grace** of God.
2. The Freedom acquired through **Obedience** to the Lord's commands.

The first experience of freedom that Jesus provides to every one of his followers is provided by his Gospel, through grace, and grace alone. This freedom experience begins at the initial time of salvation, and then every day afterward whenever a Christian effectively applies the Gospel and receives forgiveness of sin. Galatians 5:1 boldly declares this truth, "**It was for Freedom that Christ has set us Free.**" This method of acquiring freedom is contingent upon learning how to consistently believe, and then act upon, the Gospel of Jesus Christ—It is the core of Christianity.

There is also a second, and separate expression of freedom that God mandates to every believer; that is the **freedom that comes through obedience.** We will explore and detail that particular method of acquiring freedom in book two of this program. However, first you acquire and experience the spiritual power, that God has embedded in his Gospel, and put it into consistent operation within your life. That initial expression and experience of freedom acquired through grace prepares you to then acquire and experience the freedom that comes through obedience. That's how it works. So, in this session, we explore the freedom acquired by, and through, the grace of God. That's where spiritual freedom starts. Let's take a look...

**FAITH COMES FIRST** – Faith is dynamic and has an *ebb and flow* to it. In addition, your spiritual faith is not like your mind, which can be easily deceived. In fact, your faith in Christ will need to become unshakable as you acquire that freedom so essential to a thriving, abundant lifestyle.

Always remember this: FAITH COMES BEFORE FREEDOM. You will not acquire freedom without it—believe what God says in the bible first, then he will enable you to obey his commands. Study the following chart which displays how your faith is out in front leading you into acquiring that treasured freedom:

## FREEDOM STRATEGY PROGRAM

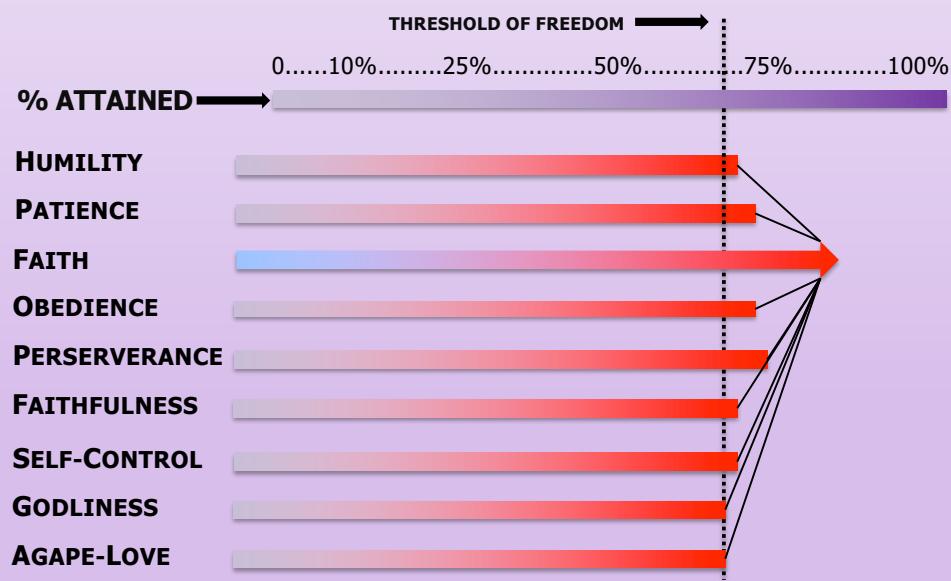
### Attributes of Faith & Freedom Chart

***2Pet. 1:4-7** Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your **faith** goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)*

The following profile plots a series of Spiritual Warfare Attributes, similar to the Divine Attributes listed in the above scripture reference from 2Peter. However, these spiritual warfare attributes have been selected from a context of a Christian seeking to focus on, and acquire, a lifestyle of Spiritual Freedom. Take particular notice here that it is the attribute of **FAITH** that effectively **LEADS** all of the other attributes needed to acquire authentic spiritual freedom. With faith in what you see in this chart, you will, in time, experience the results of your Freedom Strategy...Without faith, you can't even please God.... Study Mark 5:34 & Matt. 8:10 & 13 in context regarding how faith works from God's unique perspective.

*Faith is absolutely required and always leads these other attributes regardless of whether you acquire spiritual freedom exclusively thru the grace of God, or thru grace & obedience.*

#### PROFILE OF A CHRISTIAN WHO IS OVERCOMING A DESTRUCTIVE LIFESTYLE



Okay, what should you take away from this? How about developing your freedom strategy in such a way that you purposely strive to identify and avoid anything leading you to less faith, dull or ineffective faith, bad habits, even to the extreme point of addiction. Don't let your mind go there. Instead, consider and respond to the choice that the Gospel of Christ makes available to every Christian at the beginning of every day.

By choosing to activate your faith every day, you will then have a viable shot to choose life—just like God inspired Moses to declare, way back when:

*Deut. 30:15 – “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;”*

*Deut. 30:19 – “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,” (NRSV)*

Always remember, as Christians, we are to walk and live by faith, not by sight—as it is written:

*2 Cor. 5:7 – for we walk by faith, not by sight. (NRSV)*

**FAITH, ACTION AND VALUES** — A key thought for you to load into your mind here at the beginning of this session on faith stems from the transaction that God makes with you at the time of your salvation. He offers you the free gift of *Saving-Faith*. Spiritual life begins right there, when you activate that gift of faith and become born-again. That gift enables you to initially believe that Jesus is who the bible says he is, and that the Gospel of Christ is absolutely true. It is God who enables you to actually believe that in the first place (*John 6:44*)—It is his gift to you—because of his love for you. Your part of this transaction is simply to accept God's free gift and exercise your belief that it is indeed, true. At that point, God sees your faith and responds to it. He writes your name into his *Lamb's Book of Life*; he adopts you into his family and kingdom and grants eternal life to you. DONE DEAL.

God is transactional and we live in a *cause & effect* world. God makes covenants with mankind, and he also makes deals with us, throughout our lifetimes. For example, in the bible you will often read something to the effect of this following statement:

**If you, then I** – meaning: *“If you do this, then I will do that.”*

Here's a great example of that from the Old Testament book of Exodus:

*Ex. 23:22 – If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. (NIV)*

**Now that's a really good deal, wouldn't you agree?**

On another level, that salvation experience of yours is an *event*, and it happens in a micro-second of time. However, *from that point forward*, the growth, maintenance, strength, vitality and effectiveness of your faith is not an event, but a *process* conditioned by many factors, all of them influenced by your personal relationship with Jesus.

When you take effective action to exercise your faith, on what you believe to be true about it, then it will grow and you will exhibit increased levels of spiritual vitality, health, strength and well-being. Conversely, if and when you neglect the health and well-being of your faith, it will atrophy and become weaker. That's just how it works—*cause and effect*.

I write a lot about the *core-values* that make up your *comfort-zone* throughout this program of mine. Some of those core values, are more treasurable than others. I encourage you therefore, to put *your faith in Jesus and his Gospel* at the very top of your treasured values list. Those *highest treasured core values* of yours are the ones that *you will fight for* to protect from loss or damage.

In that context, I am purposely intending right here to *plant a thought, like a seed, in your mind*, from the words I write in this particular session on faith. I encourage you to methodically think through these words—especially those key words that you know pertain to you, and your particular lifestyle right now, and take all the time you need. Read and study through this program. Take notes and go back over those notes. Be sure about this. Prepare, study and inform your mind that you intend to do this.

That time may start out very small at first, but Jesus will cause it to grow, as he measures your sincerity—he knows just how serious this issue is to you. Then when you are ready, pull the trigger and take the action—begin showing up consistently to spend quality time just getting to know him better than you do now—that's where you start—that's your next step of spiritual growth. That's the action Jesus is wanting you, and leading you, to make happen in your life.

Think this through—of all the core-values that you treasure, highly value, and hold dear in your life, make this time of showing up for prayer and devotion to Christ one of the highest. Then follow through to ***guard and protect your heart, your faith and your mind especially above all others.*** Fight tenaciously to establish and maintain this new life-giving habit, so essential for your spiritual health and well-being.

I think the Amplified Bible version of the following scripture captures the context of this principle really well:

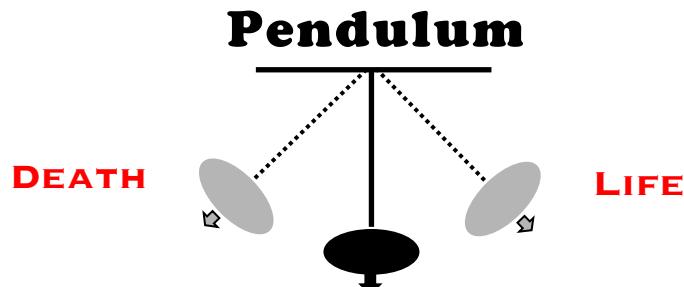
*Prov. 4:23 – Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life. (AMP)*

## LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

Sometimes life comes at you really fast. Other times, not so much. The take away here is that life is always moving, primarily because your mind is always moving. It's in motion all the time, even when you sleep, and, this issue of trusting God with your time schedule every day can really challenge you. You've likely heard of *the tyranny of the urgent?* Your adversary, the devil, wants to keep you in a state of chaos, while Jesus, is always working in your mind to bring order.

Your mind is very "*malleable*" and incredibly capable of either remaining in a fixed state in certain circumstances, or, actively changing perspective in others. God designed it that way on purpose—so he can shape it. The *God's-Eye-View* of your life is in motion, almost all of the time. It's like a pendulum you can visualize in your mind's eye, capable of extreme swings in both directions. One extreme can move you towards evil behavior, and the other towards godly, Christ-like behavior. However, your spiritual faith operates very differently. That faith of yours, is the substance that the entire spiritual foundation of your very life is made of. Jesus builds it, and then perfects it within you, truth upon truth, principle upon principle, throughout your entire life.

*What to do—first, choose life... Then exercise your faith to meet with Jesus every day that you can, praying to acquire his attitude and taking his yoke of life upon you. Next, put that Christ-Like attitude of yours into action to resolutely guard your heart, faith and mind. You'll need to effectively prevent that pendulum swinging in the wrong direction.*



Be aware of your mind always moving—*Your thoughts are always determining your actions and behavior—moment by moment – throughout all of your life.*

Therefore, shape and control those thoughts to move your life where you and Jesus want it to go. Actively and clearly think about this. Don't let your life go where you don't want it to go. Resist it like the plague. First, BELIEVE that you can do this—then put that faith into action:

**1 Pet. 1:13** – *Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (NIV)*

**James 4:7** – *Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (NIV)*

## FAITH, FREEDOM AND UNBELIEF

One way or another, *God always responds to faith* – or, the lack of it. That being stated, the bible is replete with many examples of how faith influences your life, especially any besetting sin in your life, one way or another. Let's examine a few of those to see Jesus at work, authoring and perfecting faith, just like he said he would do in Heb. 12:2.

Jesus used *parables* quite often to teach the principles and precepts of grace and truth that his Gospel operates on, and that our faith is established by. He did this intentionally and deliberately because he knew that these parables would illustrate a story-line, or word-picture within the mind. He also knew that forming a word-picture in the mind's-eye of someone was perhaps the most effective, and the most efficient way to initiate, build and perfect a person's spiritual faith, and to renew their mind. He simply, but profoundly, designed the human mind to work that way. Here's an example from scripture:

The law of sin and death can be either present and in operation within the mind, or completely absent, **depending upon the condition of a Christian's faith.**

**Rom. 8:2** – *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (NIV)*

Here is the predictable outcome from scripture clearly revealing the powerful result of what can happen to a Christian who exercises their faith to believe in the sheer, irrefutable, spiritual power of the Gospel of Christ:

**Rom. 6:14** – *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (NRSV)*

This word in Romans 6 that God inspired the Apostle Paul to write is absolutely true—but, do you believe that it is? How strong is your faith in this word? God is looking and he wants to know—and, for good reason. Here's why—there is a condition of faith that God has hated and judged, with epic results. That is the condition of **no faith**, known as the sin of unbelief, leading to unfaithfulness. There are numerous examples of this throughout both the Old and New Testaments of the bible. Perhaps the most relevant example begins with the following scriptures from the book of Numbers.

This egregious example of the sin of unbelief occurred just prior to the Israelites taking possession of the "promise-land" that God was giving them. The issue began to surface with the Israelites grumbling against how they thought Moses and Aaron was leading them:

**Num. 14:2** – *All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron... (NIV)*

God did not take this grumbling lightly. Check out what God said to Moses:

**Num. 14:11** – The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? (NIV)

"**They refuse to believe in me**"... The sin of unbelief is the antithesis of faith, and, without faith, it is virtually impossible to please God. Check out what God did to the Israelites because of their unbelief and unfaithfulness on this occasion:

**Num. 14:33** – Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. (NIV)

**Heb. 3:19** – So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. (NIV)

God would not allow that entire generation of Jews to enter the promise land, judging their complete lack of faith, exiling them in the desert for forty years.

I'm not hinting, or intimating with this example that it pertains to any of you seeking to acquire a lifestyle of freedom. My intent with this example is just to inform or confirm to you emphatically, just how much God hates the specific sin of unbelief. God hates all sin for sure, but, this one in particular. So, remember this about God's divine nature, and his hatred of sin. It vigorously reveals another attribute of **Who He Is**. Conversely, there are numerous examples of what God does when he is confronted with faith, and the condition of it, especially faith measured in different degrees of effectiveness. *Check out this well-known bible story:*

You all know the famous biblical story of David and Goliath. I encourage you to read through 1Sam. chapter 17 for this account of it. The key here, that I'd like you to think about, is that David killed Goliath—the almost 9ft tall Philistine giant, because he simply, but very profoundly, **BELIEVED THAT HE COULD**. David had sufficient faith that he could kill "this uncircumcised Philistine." However, before he actually went out and faced the giant in battle, he had to BELIEVE that he could do it, and, because he put that faith of his into action, he did in fact, kill Goliath. God responded to his faith and gave him victory. His faith was rewarded. David provided the faith that Jesus had authored and perfected in him, and God did the "*Heavy - Lifting*." Next, read through this amazing and miraculous example of how Jesus responds to Peter's faith on the sea of Galilee:

**Matt. 14:25-31** – During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then **Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” (NIV)

Okay, what do we understand about faith from this example? First, faith can be an exceedingly powerful catalyst. When Peter requested that Jesus command him to come to him on the water, his faith informed him that Jesus could miraculously make that happen. Peter began this example with sufficient faith because he had seen and experienced Jesus performing miraculous signs and wonders several times—Pete's faith was based upon EVIDENCE, not conjecture or presumption.

He knew that Jesus could do anything. He possessed strong evidence of his faith in Jesus. So, he obeyed the command of Christ to come. Peter realized, that his faith, at that particular moment, would enable him to obey the command of Christ to actually walk on the water, just as Jesus was walking on the water.

Peter had to believe that he could walk on that water, or, he would have never even gotten out of the boat. But he did get out of the boat because he *activated his faith* in what Jesus commanded him to do. **He took action.** He knew and understood the risk of failing miserably, in the sight of Jesus and the other disciples. He took that risk and exercised his faith. The result—God rewarded Peter's faith in an exceedingly powerful way. This example of faith in action provides us a veritable classic instruction and understanding of what can influence faith when it is put into motion, especially how dynamic it can be.

We do not know how far he walked and how long his faith prevailed. We do know, however, that it was the **condition of Peter's faith** that resulted in the suspension of the law of gravity, that enabled him to walk on the water. Clearly a miracle of Christ, arguably made possible through the faith of Peter. Faith is clearly at work as a catalyst in many miracles performed by Christ throughout the New Testament.

Faith can be variable and is always contingent upon, or can be influenced by, how we are relating to Jesus at any point in time. Here's what I mean by that: Peter's journey of walking on the water was indeed a miracle and was initiated by the condition of his faith. His faith was sufficient to begin walking on the water, but, at some point, "*when he saw the wind*," his faith weakened, he became fearful, and he began to sink. **Fear is the antithesis of faith.**

Accordingly, in a short period of time, Peter's faith went from being sufficient and strong, to becoming very insufficient and weak. Pragmatically speaking, this is what I think happened—Peter's faith was made sufficient for him to experience this walking on the water miracle because he was obedient to the commands of Christ in general, but specifically to the following scripture in Hebrews:

***Heb. 12:2 – Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (NIV)***

As long as his eyes (**read: his heart, mind and will**) were fixed on Jesus, his faith was strong enough to prevail over the law of gravity and he did not sink. However, he became distracted "*when he saw the wind*" (**read: storm**), causing him to take his eyes off Jesus, and when he did that, his faith immediately was weakened and he began to sink. That's it...

To summarize this particular section of session 3, I've documented a few "extreme" examples demonstrating how God responds to faith, both when it is sufficient and strong, and also when it is weak and even non-existent. I strongly believe that God wants you and me to understand what faith is capable of doing when applied properly, and a few things that can and do affect the condition of it. **Faith leads to faithfulness** when consistently put into action like that.

So, remember that God has given this incredible gift of faith to you, and he expects you and me to exercise personal responsibility to maintain it, and to maintain it at a high enough level of effectiveness, to sustain your freedom. Remember also that your behavior will never be changed by an act of your will exclusively, but only by what you actually believe—the working condition of your faith. Here's another Key Principle....

***Key #7 – Your behavior is not, and will not, be changed by the actions of your will exclusively, but only by what you actually believe... That is, by and because of, the condition of your faith at any point in time. The development of your spiritual foundation and your freedom strategy are always linked to the effectiveness of your faith”***

## INITIATE ACTION – POWER UP

This session on faith is designed to set what has been presented so far, into motion—so, where does your knowledge fit in with all of this? Sir Francis Bacon popularized the phrase, "**Knowledge is Power**" — However, according to the bible, he is only half-right.

*Check these scriptures out:*

*James 2:14 – "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?"*

*James 2:26 – As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (NIV)*

Therefore, spiritually speaking, that well used phrase can be restated like this: **Knowledge – put into action – is Power**. That's the essence of the Gospel.

Okay, load the following items from this session on faith to focus your mind on, to acquire, and to put into action, as these items come your way:

1. **Knowledge and Awareness** – Do you remember these famous words spoken by Jesus from the cross of Calvary? Do you know what they mean?

*"Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do"*

**Indeed, they know not what they do;** *If they did know, they likely would not do it*—like Eve when tempted in the Garden of Eden and like those Jesus spoke to from the cross. If they knew what their sin would cost them, they probably would not have yielded themselves to it. What do you think? Do you agree with that?

However, **they were not aware**. *They could have been, but, they were not.*

Awareness almost always comes in two stages; First comes *Intellectual Knowledge* to our mind, then, at some point later in time, comes *Heart Knowledge*. Turns out though, that only heart knowledge is "**Actionable**." Intellectual knowledge needs to be turned into faith.

When that happens, it can be owned and subsequently acted upon because faith reveals what is true, and truth reveals what will happen to you if and when you yield yourself to the sin you are being tempted with. A very significant conviction of mine, in writing the pages of this program, is exactly that purpose happening in your mind...

**To Make You Aware..... Exceedingly Aware!**

2. **Knowledge of Jesus** – Increase that knowledge; get to know him better than you do now. A 2-part challenge; Increase your *intellectual knowledge* of Jesus from bible study, and, increase your *relational knowledge* of Jesus by spending time with him in daily prayer and devotion. **Just Show-Up**
3. **Attitude of Jesus** – Learn from him. Specifically, learn how to *weaponize* your humility, patience, contentment, perseverance and your faithfulness, resulting in you becoming less selfish than you are now.
4. **Revise and Upgrade your Comfort-Zone** – Challenge yourself and evaluate the habits you have developed, both good and bad. Commit to refining the knowledge and the core-values that you have based each of these habits on.

5. **Renew your Mind** – Commit to increasing your knowledge and application of Spiritual-Warfare-Tactics. Specifically, to develop and increase your ability to **Capture every thought to the obedience of Christ** - (2 Cor. 10:5)

The human mind is easily deceived—consistently winning spiritual warfare battles requires the mind to be hardened as a target. Don't give the devil any opportunity. Eliminate the **Low-Hanging-Fruit** in your thought life that make you an easy target.

Our hearts – that is, *our soul and will* – need to be softened, not hardened; Especially when we hear his voice. Here's the key to that:

***Therefore, harden your mind, not your heart, and soften your heart, but never your mind.***

This session is intended to challenge you by introducing **action** into the program. Within the Introduction of this action-plan, I documented that this syllabus would not be confined to just an academic experience, but, in fact, be very pragmatic, integrating knowledge, understanding **and action**.

It simply would not be very beneficial for you to simply gain some academic knowledge about developing this strategy, without actually *experiencing the result*—navigating through this process of learning how to actually put it into operation. *To own it for yourself, and realize that exhilarating reward that God bestows upon you...!*

## **COMMITMENT – SHOW UP**

By now, I'm sure you all have realized that everything concerning the development and sustainment of this freedom strategy is centered on the person, authority and power of Jesus Christ, and getting to know him in a very personal way.

***Key #8 – Apart from a very close, effective, personal and intimate relationship with the person of Jesus Christ, none of us can possibly acquire and sustain a life of personal, spiritual freedom***

The next installment of that process begins right here. There simply is no substitute other than **spending time in his presence**, if you are to get to know him and learn to trust him more than you ever have before. That's why I tag this session with: **JUST SHOW UP**

That's where we go next. It is very simple, but very profound. It has a lot of similarities with developing a friendship with somebody. You just show up, begin experiencing their nature, personality and temperaments. You spend time with them so you can **get to know them**.

You find out what they like, and, what they don't like. If you are pursuing this person to be more than just a friend, perhaps like a future spouse, then, you will spend even more time with them. You will find out everything you can about them. You will treasure that relationship and set it apart from others. But what about God—about Jesus? He has a personality, a certain temperament and divine nature—He has likes and he has dislikes. So, **fix your eyes on Jesus–Heb. 12:2**.

Consider this—the beginning of this new level of spiritual discipline, to **Just Show Up**, can start with a simple but very sincere prayer request to God. Use the following prayer, or devise one of your own, to initiate the action that will validate your first action step of faith as a new commitment to God – Pray this often...

*Heavenly father, I really want and need to do this. I want to make this commitment of dedication, time and sincere effort to take the yoke of Christ upon myself and to learn of him and from him, more than I ever have before. Please apply the grace and power of your Holy Spirit, in Jesus name, to my life and circumstances, making a way for me to effectively initiate and sustain this new level and discipline of spiritual life. Thank you, Lord, for hearing me as I bring this prayer to you, with thanksgiving, in Jesus name.*

Now, keep declaring this prayer and others like it both out loud, and in your mind, to the Lord as often as you can. Be persistent, but trust the Lord and be sensitive to changes in your spiritual awareness, how you feel, and what you think about this, as he begins to work in your heart and your mind.

And, most of all, be authentic. God is very likely to test the sincerity of your heart and your mind for a while. He will measure your faith and your desire for change. How bad do you want this? Jesus will know the answer to that question.

In addition, he has provided us a spiritual weapon for this new discipline:

*| Phil. 2:5 – Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. (NASB)*

## FAITH – WEAPONIZED TACTICS

There are two attributes of **Christ's attitude**, in particular that you will need to acquire, or re-acquire. The first one is HUMILITY, and the second one is PATIENCE. You and I will never develop these two attributes on a level even close to Jesus, however, we can learn to "weaponize" each of them, making them significantly more effective in your life than they are now. There is a wonderful scripture written for those who are waiting, or learning to wait, on the Lord as they employ these two weapons of spiritual warfare:

*| Is. 40:31 – Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary. (NASB)*

Many of you may already be waiting, praying and devoting time with God at some level of diligence and consistency, but, **how effective are you?**

In my research, many Christians commented to me that they know the *quality of time spent with Jesus* is not very productive, authentic and sincere. Does that describe you? Are you mostly "spinning your wheels" out of habit or duty, but, not growing spiritually like you know you should be? An old axiom declares that 5 minutes devoted to God with diligence, focus and zeal is way more effective than 1 hour spent with him – *just going through the motions*. Therefore, from this point forward, tenaciously determine to achieve a closer relationship with Jesus, and refuse to spin your wheels and waste time any longer. Really anticipate God doing a new work in you. Every meaningful change in life has a starting point; **Make this one yours.**

Start right here as you study this program. Refuse "taking God for granted" any longer as we are all prone to do. Instead, challenge yourself to know and relate to Jesus with increased "reverence," according to the truth of scripture, for good reason: **Let the Holy Spirit of God speak to you through his word...**

*| Is. 66:2 – "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. (NIV)*

*| Psa. 15:1-2 – O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; (NRSV)*

## BE DETERMINED – BE AUTHENTIC

As you ponder what these words are meaning to you, and, especially what new action you are thinking might be effective for you, take a look at the following few paragraphs. Think and query yourself about this new commitment to ***just show up*** and invest quality time in his presence. Why would you want to do that? Your answer can have a very significant effect on your faith.

God wants you to respond to his love and his gifts by giving him the unconditional ***best*** of your capabilities. It has been clearly documented by many who research productivity, effectiveness and efficiency from our lives that most human beings are at their strongest, at their brightest, at their very best at the beginning of the day, early in the morning. That's what God wants from you—the very best of yourself given to him. That includes the best of your time, resources and energy first thing in the morning, then, throughout the rest of your day and throughout the rest of your life, every day that you possibly can. If the best of your day happens to be later in the day or evening, then start there, but determine here to give God that time when you are at your very best.

### ***Your Heavenly Father has already given you his best.... JESUS the Christ***

His most valuable treasure, in the form of his only begotten Son, so that you could be redeemed and reconciled to your Heavenly Father for eternity. Therefore, *determine to reciprocate and give God the very best of your life*, starting with the valuable time that you set aside for him. Instead of only praying *on-the-way-to-work*, or, *on-the-fly*, commit yourself to dedicating the most productive and valuable time of your day to meet with God in devotion to him, to get your day started right. The more you know Jesus, the more meaningful and fulfilled your life will be.

Give him your very best. He certainly deserves it. You may not make this schedule every day, and sometimes you will simply “rebel” and throw off “the yoke of Christ,” as detailed many times throughout this FRP. We all do that from time to time. That's a part of our human nature, which is, and always will be, at odds with God's will for our lives. But, ***BE DETERMINED*** in this new habit-forming commitment.

Be determined to show-up, but, let Jesus do the heavy-lifting in your life. He is not wanting to put you under any severe discipline, or some kind of labor-intensive process at all. His desire for you is not arduous to adopt and put into operation within your life. No, not at all. Consider the words of Jesus again in the following scripture passage which is absolutely faithful and true:

***Matt. 11:29-30 – Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (NIV)***

Jesus will never be the *Hard -Taskmaster* in your life—that's who sin is, and that's what sin does. Knowing and serving Christ is exponentially way easier and more rewarding than serving sin—

***So, just be authentic.***

Let him know how and what you are feeling. Pray and ask him to help you in your unbelief, in your weakness and fatigue, and even in your stubbornness and rebelliousness. In addition, pray and ask him to provide you the faith you need to authentically desire to be in his presence more consistently. And, recognize that you really do have a clinical NEED to experience and enjoy his presence, as much as you possibly can. The more the better, all throughout your day, every day. In his presence, there is liberty, peace and joy (*Ps. 11:16 – 2 Cor. 3:17*). I mean, you'd really like more of that wouldn't you? The presence of Jesus is always exhilarating, and sometimes even intoxicating (*Eph. 5:18*)—highly desirable and rewarding, and sometimes beyond measure.

**MID-SESSION SUMMARY** – By now, I trust that you have received at least an “entry-level” amount of incentive to begin making some changes in your life. You have likely been thinking about, or have been significantly reminded of, riding the “Yo-Yo” and how much that really sucks. You also realize and understand by now that a “quick-fix” band-aid is not what you need to acquire a powerful and constructive lifestyle. However, you are also likely thinking about **the challenge you may face** to activate your strong desire to get this new process started.

It may be likely that you have not yet initiated or developed an essential habit and discipline of daily prayer, devotion to Christ and immersing your heart and mind **effectively** in God’s Word. In addition, you also **know** that you need to discover, experience and relate a much deeper and closer relationship with Jesus than you ever have before.

So, I encourage you to scan through this session and “lock-in” the key parts that stand out to you, or that you know definitely pertain to you, then, move on.

## MAKE A "DEAL" WITH GOD

I encourage you to memorize and to hide this following key scripture in your heart and mind from the New International Version (NIV) of the bible:

*Matt. 6:33 – But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (NIV)*

I encourage you also to think through and add the pragmatic “detail” from this same scripture to your understanding, but, from the Amplified Bible Version (AMP) of the bible:

*Matt. 6:33 – But seek (**aim at and strive after**) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (**His way of doing and being right**), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides. (AMP)*

The very first part of **Just Showing Up**, is simply deciding to seek God, with a new attitude. Then, acting on that commitment to sincerely pursue and acquire that new attitude from Jesus himself, just like he encourages you to do.

So, I urge you to mark down this **Matt. 6:33** scripture reference on your calendar as the “catalyst” to remind yourself of the day you commenced your initial, or renewed, determination of acquiring a sustained lifestyle of personal spiritual freedom.

Regard this scripture as a principled “Axiom” of your particular Freedom Strategy, reasoning through the **cause and effect** of what God is speaking to you: That **IF YOU** decide and follow through with the consistent action of *seeking first* his kingdom and his righteousness—**THEN HE** will give you all “*these things*” taken together. *To paraphrase*: He will give you rescue, hope and increased faith leading to deliverance, and eventually, *Personal Spiritual Freedom*. That's a really good deal for you to consider making with God—don't you think?

I also encourage you to mark this reference down in a very prominent place, or even several places, that you can be reminded by, every time you see it. I can literally guarantee you of what a giant help and comfort this reference will be to you throughout this program. Why is that?

Here's why: You will lose some spiritual battles all along the way of seeking your freedom, and when you do, you can look back on your calendar and think about this reference. You can recall your motivation when you marked this scripture down. What your attitude was like—how tenacious you were at that moment—even the confidence you experienced from your feelings—from your emotions—making you very glad that you decided to do this.

You can remember how committed you were to succeed, even when you may have failed miserably so many times before. When you recall this milestone, you will be comforted and strengthened many times by the Holy Spirit of God.

## THE OBSTACLES WITHIN OUR HUMAN NATURE

Human beings are incredibly capable of *reasoning* their way out of all kinds of beneficial events, circumstances, habits and responsibilities. We can really become adept and expert at procrastination techniques to put off and delay very important, and even critical things, especially from God, that are designed to provide or add spiritual growth, faith and blessings in our life. It's all too easy for any of us to do that.

The tendency of our human nature is to avoid, and even to oppose, God in our lives. That tendency is also to seek out and acquire that which makes us *feel good*, and satisfies some level of selfish appetite, that may or may not be good for us. That is our normal and natural way of responding to life, most of the time.

Very often in this program, I write about the "***cry of every human heart is to be loved, to be respected and to be accepted.***" And, in our attempt to fulfill that longing, our minds can be easily deceived into thinking that we can satisfy that very powerful pursuit for love, respect and acceptance by indulging in all kinds of destructive behavior. As a result, many of us end up getting addicted to it.

God has purposely designed our minds to function that way—he has done this on purpose. Once we have developed a series of habits that in-turn produce a comfort-zone that we put into action, **our minds become very difficult to change.** So, if your comfort-zone causes you to effectively maintain an abundant lifestyle of freedom, you are indeed very blessed. If it does not, you have work to do.

*That is why I have often stated, you have to really want to do this.*

Further, think about the linkage between your human nature and your spiritual nature. When your spiritual nature is weak and not very effective in governing and directing your life, those selfish and destructive attributes of your human nature will occupy the dominant role of managing your life, thereby causing adverse influence upon the growth, health, strength and well-being of your spirit.

Conversely, when your spiritual nature is strong, healthy and thriving, those destructive attributes of your human nature diminish, lose strength and dominance over your life, while the good and beneficial attributes from your human nature do not suffer at all, in fact, they actually thrive along with your spiritual nature.

That's a much better way to live, isn't it? God means for you to thrive in your enjoyment of life—that abundant life, that thriving lifestyle Jesus offers and imparts to you, as you continue practicing and perfecting the new godly habit of ***JUST SHOWING UP.*** What do you think?

Therefore, as you cooperate more effectively with Jesus, he will help you and lead you, to effectively “transcend” the inclination of your human nature to oppose God. He will develop a totally new level of commitment within you that will eventually lead you to be stronger in your spiritual nature than you are in your human nature—if you persevere and refuse to give up.

When that condition begins to operate within you, your spirit will dominate the weak and destructive attributes of your human nature. And, you will experience the lifestyle of authentic spiritual freedom through Christ, more often.

## OLD THINGS PASS AWAY – ALL THINGS BECOME NEW

Next, some very helpful insight into overcoming and restructuring your comfort zone. There is a key function of your sub-conscious mind that is very instrumental in re-shaping and maintaining your comfort zone.

And that function is known as **Selective-Awareness**. Your brain, especially the sub-conscious part of your brain, is wired and programmed to get you comfortable and keep you comfortable with all kinds of things that you encounter in life. One of those things is known as, “*Old Patterns of Thought*.”

Your sub-conscious mind works in the background and is always on the alert to things that come your way that interest you, especially things that will fulfill and/or strengthen a habit that you have. It doesn't matter whether that habit is good for you, or whether it is totally destructive and terrible for you. It simply doesn't matter to your sub-conscious mind whether the habit is good or bad—that's because your sub-conscious mind is "Amoral."

It simply responds to whether you have a habit that needs to be fed, or reinforced, or strengthened. And, the more you “feed” that habit, again whether it is good or bad, the stronger and more entrenched within you it becomes, thereby appeasing that particular appetite.

***The core-values that make up your comfort-zone, determine where your sub-conscious mind will lead you.***

Over time, your sub-conscious mind will develop patterns of thought that are designed to make it somewhat easier for you to act upon the thought to fulfill a habit that you are very used to and comfortable with. Old patterns of thought more easily stimulate and activate your imagination, because you have experienced the habit so much in your life. Your imagination then takes over and reveals how you will feel when you act upon that thought pattern and then experience in reality what you just imagined happening in your mind.

Quite often, an old pattern of thought is actually what the bible calls a temptation, intended to compel you to commit a sin. This cognitive process happens exceptionally fast within your brain, and, you need to be very vigilant, sober minded and on the alert, just like the following scripture directs you to be, whenever it occurs, whenever you are tempted. You will first need to detect it. This is where you learn to deploy this new cognitive weapon called, **Selective-Awareness**.

Here's how it works: **You inform and direct your mind to alert you** anytime and every time one of these old patterns of thoughts occur, tempting you to sin. Once you detect it and become aware of it, then you process it and take the applicable action needed to stop it from deceiving you with another *ride on the Yo-Yo*—Described here in first Peter:

**1Pet. 5:8 – Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring (in fierce hunger), seeking someone to seize upon and devour. (AMP)**

***Someone Like YOU.....! (Remember this one?)***

Pragmatically, the specific action you put into immediate operation is to ***Take this thought captive to the obedience of Christ*** – (2 Cor. 10:5). Cast it out of your mind. Refuse to dwell upon it like you are used to doing. Instead, inform your mind that you intend to replace this old pattern of thought with a new one.

However, *when you first start initiating a change like this in your life*, especially a change intended to move you deeper into your relationship with Jesus, then your sub-conscious mind has few, if any, old patterns of thought to draw upon from an existing habit.

This makes it much more difficult for your mind to deal with—takes more mental and emotional energy and work for you to make this happen. At first, there is no habit. It doesn't exist yet. It is in the early stages of development. You are just beginning the process of informing and directing your sub-conscious mind that you indeed want to form this new habit. You are **Just beginning to show up** in order to experience a deeper and more effective relationship with Jesus.

At this early formative stage, a new habit can be very fragile and vulnerable to failure. Your sub-conscious mind is literally evaluating just how sincere and serious you are about forming this new habit. Therefore, be cautious and careful that you do not give up and quit too soon.

Here's one pragmatic reason why: In 2009, A well-known professional health psychology researcher, named Phillipa Lally, at University College in London, examined the habits of 96 people over a 12-week time frame. Her research study results revealed how long it can take to develop and maintain a new habit. The study showed that it can vary considerably depending upon the behavior, the individual, and the circumstances. The new habit time frame took as little as 18 days for some individuals, and others out to 254 days to form a new habit, depending upon how complicated it was.

The results of her research in this study calculated an average of 66 days for this group to form a new habit. Interestingly, that roughly coincides with how long it takes the sub-conscious mind to develop an initial "Memory Mapping" of a new pattern of thought, needed to form a new habit like this.

However, you'll also notice that God, and his super-natural influence, is not, and probably cannot, be factored into this kind of study. My intention in documenting this research is to provide you a valid perspective, based on actual, scientific study, regarding any new habits that you will be challenged to develop in this program. Further, take a look at this previous investigation:

Another well-known, but inaccurate, research study from Dr. Maxwell Maltz, stipulated that it only takes about 21 days to form a new habit. So, if you have been thinking that a new habit like this will likely only take you an average of 21 days to form, like most people think, you'd be making an error.

The key thing here that I'd like you to focus on is not so much the time frame that it takes to form a new habit. Whether it takes you 18 days, 180 days, or a number of years doesn't really matter because if you are to achieve success, *you simply have to put in the work*, either way, regardless of the time it takes you.

### ***So, let this inspire you.....***

Don't let yourself get bummed out because you initially thought this process would be easier, or would only take a couple of weeks. ***It's supposed to take longer.***

God designed your mind to function that way, on purpose. It's normal. Once you successfully reshape your comfort-zone to maintain your lifestyle of freedom, you'll be exceedingly glad that Jesus crafted your mind the way he did.

Like I stated before – *You Have to Really Want to Do This*. It takes time and it takes effort. That means **WORK** – but, you are not alone in this process—the Holy Spirit of God will provide you with what your human nature lacks:

You are a new creature competing in a race against your old self—remember that one?

*2Cor. 5:17 – Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (KJV)*

Those *old patterns of thought will pass away*. They won't be eliminated, but they will not be dominant in your mind either, and will not be in control of you, like they used to be. Then this will happen: *all things become new*, including you, even if you have been born again for 50 years. This is a new beginning, a new work God is beginning, or renewing in you. Because you have Christ in you, by his indwelling Holy Spirit, if you pray and ask Jesus to help you capture and crucify those old patterns of thought, he will, over time, give you what you lack without him...

### **The POWER to actually do this!**

*Acts 1:8 – But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; (NIV)*

*2 Cor. 10:3-5 – For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (NIV)*

So, now YOU COMMIT TO NEVER, NEVER, EVER GIVE UP—keep at it. This effort of putting godly habits into place is not easy. It can be a tough slog, so keep on *preparing your mind for ACTION*. Read, study and memorize these scriptures from the Lord intended to provide you an advanced level of faith and confidence. Keep on resisting, keep on fighting and struggling through until this happens: YOU WIN...!

### **He is training you to become More than a Conqueror.**

*Check it out:*

*Gal. 6:9 – Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (NIV)*

*Now Check this out:*

*Rom. 8:37 – No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (NIV)*

## **THE HARDEST PART**

There exists an abundance of books and references that have been produced about all aspects of achieving an increase in your ability to manage your life on a daily basis. There is also very clear and compelling evidence that the hardest part of putting this into practice and operation is simply **TAKING THE FIRST STEP**.

Remember, this first action step required in resisting and mastering sin is that you **make that decision to diligently seek God**, because, if you want to learn how to resist sin, you will require the personal involvement of Jesus Christ, on many levels. So, all that starts with a strong incentive to change oneself from yielding to sin, to being enabled and empowered by God's Holy Spirit to resist sin.

The second action step starts by **just showing up** to meet with God every day that you possibly can. Schedule and/or take the time and look very forward to improving your relationship and fellowship with him!! Show up—be there!

Put this new commitment in perspective and consider this—you really do not need to decide anything right now. No pressure—none. Receive this word from God documented in the bible:

**Is. 1:18** – “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (NIV)

Wow...Think through the implication of what this scripture is saying—the God who spoke the entire universe into existence—who is possessed with absolute power and absolute authority over everything in existence—THAT GOD... is revealing his unconditional love for you and me by humbling himself to the degree of actually, and tenderly, inviting us to reason with him about our struggles with life...AMAZING isn't it?

And, further, it doesn't matter one whit whether our struggle is just trying to gain a little more spiritual discipline, because we need a course correction in our life, or, whether we are held fast in the bondage to some form of sinful addiction. *He is an ever-present help in the time of trouble.* (Ps. 46:1), and, *he will never, ever quench a sincere expression of faith* (Matt. 12:20)—in fact, he will fan it into flames!

Jesus will never “force” his will upon your life at all, ever—he definitely is not the arduous taskmaster that even some believers think he is at times in their life—perish the thought. In fact, he says that if you will just try—to make a sincere effort in seeking him, that *he will be found by you, and he will indeed help you* (Eph. 5:10 – Jer. 29:13).

Jesus is tenaciously committed to you succeeding in the attainment of true spiritual freedom through the abundant life that he offers you. He wants you to be effective in the mission and ministry of your life that he gives to you. He will spend the rest of your life, if that's what it takes, enabling and empowering you to achieve this. That is why he encourages you to sincerely, and effectively, use your brain and think about this stuff—**reason with God.**

Talk to him in prayer. Tell him your concerns and why you think you can't do this, if that's the case—but, at the very least, commit to sincerely reading through all of this program. God knows, and you almost certainly agree, that you starting this program is not a coincidence. Let this stuff, all of it, the whole *Freedom Renewed Program* just wash over your brain—take it in—take your time. Think about the cost in time and energy that you'll spend, but, and measure this well, think about **the return you will receive** once you invest yourself.

Sometimes your feelings and desires coincide with God's will for your life, many times they do not, but, you will never know unless and until you begin meeting with God, through Jesus, **in earnest.** So, commit to changing and upgrading how you prioritize the things of God in your life from now on. Commit, or re-commit, to giving God something of yourself that he can work with. Give him the best of your time. Give him your focused and undivided attention during that time. Be focused, be deliberate, be intentional, be very sincere, be very honest.

Start slow if you need to—but hear this: **everybody can give God at least 5 minutes at the beginning of the day, with sincerity and a focused authenticity of being effective and diligent.** Gods' Holy Spirit will lead you to devote sufficient time in prayer and devotion that will accomplish his plan for your life, but, it has to start some place. Give him at least 5 minutes every day to start and then build upon that as he leads you. **Make it happen—you'll never regret it.**

The attribute that God first wants you to acquire is just simple **faithfulness**. You cannot acquire faithfulness if you do not put out the effort and sincerity to just show up. Produce the evidence of faithfulness to God over time, no matter how small the start, and God will provide you with a return on your investment of time, energy and zeal that will absolutely astound you. You will be really glad you did this.

Showing up is all about Jesus teaching us and training us to become **faithful to God**. Learning to be more like him. He is always faithful to himself, to his Word, and to his unfailing love for each of us, who have decided to commit or re-commit our lives to follow him. It is an unchanging attribute of his nature.

## JESUS – STANDING IN THE GAP

Think about and receive the following amazing and comforting truth about Jesus and his faithfulness. There will be many, many times when you will absolutely fail in your life to be faithful and obedient to Christ, even after you set apart a new commitment to just show up from this study, just like the Apostles failed him as recorded in the Gospel accounts. As Jesus himself told his disciples at that time, ***The Spirit is willing but the Flesh is weak.*** (Matt. 26:40)

It is in those particular times of failing when you find yourself absolutely unable or even unwilling to be faithful to Christ, that he just shows up and proves his unfailing love for you by revealing his faithfulness to you and to his word. When you will not, or cannot, deliver your faithfulness to him, in any situation, JESUS—becomes your faithfulness. He shows up for you—he **stands-in-the-gap**, and applies whatever is needed on your behalf to get you through the situation. Truly a part of his Amazing Grace. ***Where your sin abounds, his grace does much more abound – (Rom. 5:20)***

Remember, his love for you is unconditional. It is not conditioned on your response or behavior at all. The Greek word for this kind of love is called **Agape**, and in this context is defined as that attribute of God's divine nature, unique to him, that enables him to love us without any condition on our part to warrant or deserve that loving response from him. In its' simplest definitive form, the bible documents it like this:

***1 John 4:16 – And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. (NIV)***

His faithfulness, like his righteousness, becomes yours. It is imputed to you through **your faith in Christ**. Now, understand completely and absolutely that Jesus wants you working hard to learn how to reliably and consistently increase your faithfulness to him in every situation as you navigate life. But he also wants you to know, and to absolutely count on this fact—that **his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart** anytime and every time that it is needed by you and directed by him, especially in those times when your own faith and faithfulness are failing.

***Psa. 91:4 – He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (NIV)***

Check out this next Key Principle illuminating his love for you through his unfailing grace:

***Key #9 – When your own Faith and Faithfulness fail you, His will fail you not. He will always Show-Up, Stand-In-The-Gap for you, and deliver you from adversity because his grace is always sufficient and his love never fails.***

And now, just a word to close out this session on faith. Forget about how long it might take before you notice tangible, real results in your life from this study. Let that go. Leave the time frame exclusively to God. Just sincerely commit to do this, then definitely anticipate and expect God to change you accordingly, but, in his time, not yours.

WWII wasn't won in a day, a week or several months. It took over 4 years and was truly epic in scope. The spiritual warfare that you and I are facing and fighting is almost always related to that. It probably took a lot of time for you to become embroiled in a destructive habit or lifestyle. So, be patient with this process of getting yourself free. Trust God with how long it may take him to change your heart and renew your mind.

Leave that completely to him. The bible teaches us something about God's timing concerning many things. It is often said in scripture: ***In the fullness of time.... then God***. So, let God take his time with you. God, not you, happens to be the only one who knows what is required and how long it will take to "rebuild you" – to renew your mind and transform your heart.

Truth is, that you will win spiritual warfare battles and you will also lose spiritual warfare battles during this process of attaining spiritual freedom.

However, "In the fullness of time", at some point in the process, if you continue just showing up, and applying yourself with sincerity and diligence, God will begin to give you more wins than losses. You can count on the time coming where you will win more spiritual warfare battles than you lose.

Okay, that being said, here's what I'd like you to get out of this session on faith. Don't immediately plan on beginning a new, or renewed, time frame of meeting with God every morning for prayer and devotion. At this point, if you do that, you might just be setting yourself up for failure. It's too early for that level of commitment. Instead, I strongly recommend that **you begin by simply praying in earnest to God**, whether you set aside time for that or not. Just start praying. You can pray and chew gum at the same time, right?

Pray and ask God to begin revealing his plan for your life, that would include the freedom strategy and life-action-plan that he already has developed for you. His plan for your life (Jer. 29:11), including every good work he has prepared for you (Eph. 2:10), has been residing within the mind of Christ before you were even born.

However, because of his great love for you, and his amazing provision of grace to you, he will almost certainly not be revealing his plan and good works to you, until he has made you ready to sincerely and effectively, make that commitment. He will never "*set you up for failure.*" Instead, Jesus will set you up for success, victory over the power of sin in your life, and sufficient faith to believe all that.

Therefore, my strong recommendation to you right here is to read through and study every word of this program completely, taking it all in, before making any serious commitments to "*display strength and take action.*" (Dan. 11:32)

Then, when you have done that, do this:

*Eph. 6:13 – having done everything, to stand firm. (NRSV)*

*Eph. 6:13 – Therefore put-on God's complete armor, that you may be able to resist and stand your ground on the evil day (of danger), and, having done all (the crisis demands), to stand (firmly in your place). (AMP) (emphasis mine)*

***Godspeed.....!***



## CONSEQUENCES – A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

This 4th session adds additional layers and levels to help you respond to the universal mandate that God has declared, in Hebrews 12:1 & 2, for every Christian to believe in, and to abide by. I begin this session continuing to focus on our faith, on the choices that we make, and how they influence our lifestyles, both for good and not so good. These day-by-day choices end up determining the habits we will develop from the core-values and comfort-zones that make up the spiritual foundation of our life. That's the key reason I have started this session with all the expanded detail about the choices we make, how important they are and what influences them, for the most part.

We'll be focusing our attention on the **consequences of those choices**—especially those that can lead us to a destructive lifestyle, contrasted with those choices leading to an abundant, and constructive lifestyle. That's the path Jesus wants all of us to clearly recognize, to know really well, and then tenaciously follow. I encourage you to prepare your mind for exactly that.

I will begin with significant details of the **Destructive Cycle of Life** that is produced within a Christian when the love of yielding to, and following after, the evil desires of the heart exceed the desire to love and follow after the Lord Jesus Christ, and his commands. I will answer this question: *What can I expect to happen to me if I consistently choose this destructive kind of lifestyle?*

In contrast, we will then examine what it looks like to experience the **Constructive and Rewarding Cycle of Life** when a Christian decides to love God more than loving the fulfillment from yielding oneself to the temporary pleasures of sin.

Christ has set us free, therefore we are free to choose whatever we desire in life for the most part, however, not all of these choices are really healthy and good for us, so, we are to apply wisdom and assess each choice to determine whether we can expect it to be beneficial or not. Jesus wants us, and teaches us here that, to be *forewarned is to be forearmed*.

## FOREWARNED AND FOREARMED – THE GATES OF LIFE

Jesus was always forearmed with the truth that governed every choice that he made in life, to be that example for each of us to emulate and follow. He thought and reasoned his way into every choice that he made. Jesus left nothing to chance; He never “gambles” with our welfare. He knew the spiritual law of sowing and reaping, and that every choice he made would be subject to the consequences of that law.

On one hand, the results of that law can be very blunt and even brutal with some choices we determine to make—on the other hand, it can also be exceedingly wonderful and rewarding, depending of course, on what we choose to believe and to act upon, moment by moment throughout the day, every day.

Regarding being ***forewarned and forearmed***, Jesus had this to say:

***Matt. 7:13-15 – Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and spacious and broad is the way that leads away to destruction, and many are those who are entering through it. But the gate is narrow (contracted by pressure) and the way is straitened\*\* and compressed that leads away to life, and few are those who find it. (AMP)***

\*\* “Make straight the highway” – What’s that mean?

The bible makes a special emphasis regarding the Spiritual Life Highway that Jesus is referring to here in the Gospel of Matthew. There is a very detailed instruction set from the Old Testament & also the New Testament. Let’s take a look at that:

Make straight a highway for our God—A prophetic word from the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. A word from the Lord directly applied to the Jews returning from exile to Israel. However, as with so many passages of God’s word, this passage of scripture can also be applied to all generations of Christians who travel on the spiritual life highway of faith. Here it is:

***Is. 40:3-4 – A voice of one who cries: Prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord (clear away the obstacles); make straight and smooth in the desert a highway for our God!***

***Every valley shall be lifted and filled up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked and uneven shall be made straight and level, and the rough places a plain. (AMP)***

The key principle here is that God is directing us to make a way for Jesus to motor down the highway of faith in our life. **We are to prepare the way.** We are to clear away every obstacle that could get in his way (*Heb. 12:1*). Make our spiritual life highway to be very straight and level. Make it very easy for Jesus to travel on.

Jesus is providing us here in these particular scriptures, another level of his unique, prescient and pragmatic provisions of truth. He is revealing a very beneficial insight and perspective into the level of difficulty, or, said another way, the relative ease of making choices that lead to either a Constructive Cycle of Life, or, to a Destructive Cycle of Life.

He is simply contrasting how relatively easy it is to make choices that can lead to a destructive lifecycle, vs how difficult it can be to make choices that can lead to a beneficial, rewarding and constructive lifecycle.

### ***Why is that gate so narrow that Jesus reveals in Matt. 7:13?***

How about this:

***Luke 9:23 – Then he (Jesus) said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (NIV)***

Jesus reveals here, one of the most damaging attributes of our human nature—we are all selfish and we almost always choose the easiest path, irrespective of the consequences of that choice. Most people, even Christians, are prone to follow that easiest path, or choice, in life.

In fact, Jesus documents that there are many who open that ***wide-gate*** and enter that ***wide-path***, even though it leads to destruction—ironically, when we absolutely know it leads to some form of destruction. He then contrasts the wide gate with a ***narrow one that leads to life***, and reveals to us that few are those who find it, because it’s just so hard and difficult to oppose our deep-rooted selfishness at times. That indictment from Jesus, regarding the finite weakness of our human nature, is documented really well here in the book of Isaiah:

*Check it out:*

**Is. 55:8-9** – *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. (AMP)*

Jesus is teaching us here to, consider, and then to count the cost of the consequences of each action we choose to make in our life every day, especially the hard choices when they show up. Each of us will reap whatever we sow through the choices that we make. No exceptions. We are all accountable.

That inescapable contrast between those attributes of our human nature, compared to those attributes of God's divine nature clearly reveal just how desperate every Christian should be to acquire that attitude of Christ. To learn to think at least a little like Jesus, so we can escape the corruption that comes upon all those who enter that wide gate leading to destruction.

*Check this out:*

Consider the clear example, here again, of how Jesus thought about, and responded to, the mission that God the Father sent him to perform and complete:

**Heb. 12:2** – *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)*

**Counting the Cost** – Jesus thought long and hard about the cost he was about to pay. He agonized over it in the garden of Gethsemane, asking God the Father to take this cup from me if possible (Matt. 26). He even asked his disciples to pray with him about it—remember that?

The actions of Christ in the garden, and his forthcoming crucifixion, confirms that Jesus was indeed, **counting the cost** he would have to pay.

## COUNTING THE COST – WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY?

He compared that agonizing cost with the Return-On-Investment – (ROI) of joy that he would receive for completing the mission that God the Father had given him. He weighed out the return he could expect to receive from both alternatives.

On the one hand, Jesus had the option to reject the will and plan of God the Father. He really could have been spared his death on the cross; however, this is what he had to say about that choice:

**Matt. 26:53-54** – *(Jesus Speaking) Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (NIV)*

On the other hand, for Jesus, unlike each of us, there really was no competition between his two choices. Here's why:

Jesus bound and committed himself and his will to these prophetic declarations: "I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7) and, "I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29) and the following well known scriptures:

**John 12:27** – *(Jesus Speaking) – "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. (NIV)*

**John 10:15 and 18 – (Jesus Speaking)** – “Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

**No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” (NIV)**

Jesus determined that the intense and exhilarating joy he would receive by acting upon his love of God and his love of us, and his prophetic compulsion to do the will of the Father, completely negated any and all other choices. *Oh, that we could be that wise, insightful and determined...*

Because Jesus loved God and loved us to such a fervent degree, he compelled himself to be the prophetic instrument of God the Father's plan of salvation establishing the Gospel of Christ:

**John 3:16 – (Jesus Speaking)** – “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (NASB)

That's how and why Jesus counted the cost, and decided to endure the cross. He endured the unspeakable agony of the cross because, **God so loved**.

The love that Jesus has validated for God the Father and for each of us is perpetual, eternal, is always in effect, always in motion, and will never fail (1Cor. 13).

So, like Jesus, we are to think about, and count the cost. If we decide to wisely stay in our lane, **choosing life**, that choice will clearly be a beneficial one and we can expect to receive a fulfilling and rewarding ROI. Conversely, if we decide to change lanes, **choosing death**, that choice will clearly be a detrimental one and we can expect to receive a return that includes trouble and distress, apart from God's grace.

Sounds really simple doesn't it? **That's because it really is, just that simple.**

So, be forewarned and forearmed to exercise wisdom and think deliberately, long and hard about the certainty of that return you will receive from the daily, moment by moment choices that you make. Be sure that the consequences of those choices will be beneficial and rewarding to you and all that you value and hold dear.

The question continues to persist—why do Christians in conflict with the struggles of life so often choose a path leading them to trouble and distress, instead of choosing a path leading them to joy and fulfillment?

How about this passage from one of my favorite authors:

*In every Christian's heart there is a cross and a throne, and the Christian is on the throne till he puts himself on the cross; if he refuses the cross, he remains on the throne. Perhaps this is at the bottom of the backsliding and worldliness among gospel believers today. We want to be saved, but we insist that Christ do all the dying. No cross for us, no dethronement, no dying. We remain king within the little kingdom of Man's soul and wear our tinsel crown with all the pride of a Caesar; but we doom ourselves to shadows and weakness and spiritual sterility. A.W. Tozer*

In addition, here's some of the most prevalent reasons I have learned from the bible, from my own experience, and from researching a large number of Christian case histories over many years:

- 1. Temptations** – They are tempted to sin, either inwardly from their own sinful desires, or, outwardly from demonic forces of evil and wickedness.

- 2. Pain** – They experience different kinds of pain as they navigate life. For many, the struggles of life pile up and take their toll.

We all will face seasons of life that are difficult, by design. Dealing with those realities of life, for some of us, and at different times, tempts us to want to withdraw from the reality of life—just to get some relief; a respite from the tension and pressures of life.

At some point, the emotional and mental strain and stress can become so great that we become desperate for immediate relief, so, ***we medicate ourselves***.

To relieve that pain, we try to withdraw from reality through booze and alcohol, some form of drug, overeating and binging on food, expressing anger, yielding to sexual immorality like pornography, or other related expressions of sinful behavior. The pain can make us want to get away from it, so, we recoil and look for immediate relief. We medicate.

- 3. Pleasure** – They are drawn to the temporary pleasure experienced when yielding themselves to sin. At some point if they are unwilling, or unable (addiction) to control their behavior and repent, they become a lover of pleasure, more than a lover of God, as the bible documents:

*| 2 Tim. 3:4 – Traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*

- 4. Boredom** – Believe it or not, many Christians simply choose some expression of sin because they get easily bored with their tedium of life. They become indifferent to the realities and accountabilities of life and cease caring about spiritual life stuff and relationships with God and people; they escape reality thru sin.

Some of these causes of sinful behavior documented here adversely influence many Christians navigating life, however, one or more of them can also dominate their thoughts, actions and behavior.

How about you? Are you influenced by any of these, or others? Are you actually dominated by any of them at this point in your life? Let's take a closer, and very sobering look at this:

## SIN CAUSES DEATH TO SHOW-UP

Get a really good grip on this—the bible documents this truth:

*| Ezek. 18:4 – (God speaking) For all people are mine to judge—both parents and children alike. And this is my rule: The person who sins will be the one who dies. (NLT)*

*| Rom. 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)*

Here's the rub – ***Whenever we sin, we begin to die, on every level...***

The following Key Principle clearly documents this consequence of sin:

**Key #10** – ***Whenever we sin, we begin to die... We begin reverting back to behaving through the instincts of our human nature. This decline of life will continue on all levels until we humble ourselves and repent”***

**On every level?** Really—what does that mean, in practical terms?

The death you begin to experience in your life, on every level, when you yield yourself to sin, is not generally immediate, but, the effects of that death experience do begin immediately upon committing that sin, and worsen over time until you repent. The following outline documents some of what can be expected:

### **What happens to us when we sin? *The immediate consequences...***

1. The precious faith we have in God gets “dull” and begins to dissipate and die off.
2. Our active fellowship with Jesus by his Holy Spirit is “cut off.” (*Jesus will not hang out with you closely again until you sincerely confess and repent of that sin*)
3. Your desire and diligence in seeking God and his kingdom will diminish.
4. The ability of our minds to think clearly begins to decline. We become “Double-Minded” – Unstable in all of our ways.
5. The stress and struggles of life become more evident and consequential. Your vocational work becomes more difficult and less productive and enjoyable.
  - 5.1 Want some proof? Remember the curse that God put on Adam when he sinned in the Garden of Eden? God said this: **“Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.”** This curse will once again be activated and influential in your life.
6. The Yoke of Christ, and his provision of abundant life to you is no longer available until you sincerely repent. As a consequence of that, life will become more burdensome and your load will be heavier. Debilitating stress in, and on, your life will increase.
  - 6.1 So, instead of *throwing off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entices*, as God mandates you to do in Hebrews 12:1, **you will actually be throwing off the Yoke of Christ**, and his provision of abundant life—and that my friend, will really suck. You need to seriously consider and think about this loss that you will certainly bring upon yourself. This is a really bad deal for you—don’t do it.

Refuse to trade your precious fellowship with Christ for some temporary sinful pleasure – You can have one or the other, but, you cannot have both at the same time.

Consistently choosing sin over the fellowship of Christ is a terrible transaction that can wreck your life if you fail to stop it. Burn this principle of truth deep into your brain, and, never forget it. What you sow, you will reap, and—YOU DO NOT WANT TO REAP THIS—avoid it at all cost.
7. You will not be able to care about life like you want to and know you should. You will become more indifferent about life and relationships, even those that are dear to you. Your ability to THRIVE in the enjoyment and fulfillment of your life will really begin to fade—you’ll regret it.
8. You will begin to be more isolated from meaningful and strategic relationships.
9. You will begin to experience a loss of intimacy, respect, admiration and joy from all relationships, especially those meaningful and dear to you.
10. Your susceptibility of being easily-deceived into thinking that you can manage the consequences of your sin will increase—especially, how long sin may grip you. Truth is, once you yield yourself to that sin, you lose your God-given ability to control what happens next. You will become a **slave-to-sin**—just like the bible says you will—because you will lose the usual control and management of your lifestyle. These **unexpected-circumstances** and **unforeseen-results** can absolutely HAMMER your life.

- 10.1** My research over many, many years has sadly uncovered numerous case histories of godly men and women who have had to endure an ***unexpected and unforeseen*** season of mental and spiritual anguish—losing significant control over the usual thoughts and behavior of their lifestyle.

Some have not been brought back to their senses for many months and even years—all because they failed to heed God's warning. This issue is spiritually discerned—*you can't feel it happening like you can if you hit your thumb with a hammer*—it just doesn't work that way.

God lovingly warns us to exercise godly wisdom, discipline, resolve and control over our bodies and our minds throughout the bible. I encourage you to review and study what can happen if you fail to heed the many warnings that Jesus has provided us, as he lovingly shepherds us through life.

Therefore, once again, if you think that I'm intentionally trying to ***Scare the Hell out of You***—you'd be right!

*I Th. 4:4 – that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.” (NIV)*

*Gal. 6:7-8 – Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (NIV)*

There are sins of commission, even very pre-meditated and deliberate sins of commission we can be tempted to commit. There are also sins of omission and others that we can easily be attracted to, originating from evil desires that come from the wickedness of our own hearts, or from temptations outside of ourselves. These consequences are very real and are enforced through God's ***Law of Sowing and Reaping*** and his ***Law of Sin and Death***. We are all accountable to his laws—no different from gravity or electricity.

But we are not all responsible like we should be. ***How about you?***

Okay, let's pause here for a word of encouragement. The consequences of yielding yourself to sin can be a really heavy topic that can weigh you down significantly if you're not careful. So, *let not your heart be troubled* over these last few pages, and you can look forward in a few more pages to exploring a lot of detail about God's grace that always abounds more than any of your sin abounds. His love for you covers a multitude of sins so keep a God's eye view and perspective on this. Be *God-Conscious* way more than being *Sin-Conscious*.

## THE DESTRUCTIVE LIFECYCLE – A DILEMMA

Remember, the destructive lifecycle is compared to experiencing life as if you were riding a Yo-Yo, going up and down, but never, or rarely, moving forward. The bible also speaks to this *Lifecycle Yo-Yo* that we can become trapped in:

*Rom. 7:15 – I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (NIV)*

*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) – Remember this?*

The Apostle Paul is speaking here of the law of sin and death at work within him, and within each Christian as a part of human nature. We are all born with, and have to deal with, that law as a part of our nature throughout our entire life here on Earth.

We really are sinners by birth and by choice. That law sets up an ongoing tension and conflict within our hearts and minds often producing a very real competition between our own selfish will and desires, against God's good and perfect will for our life. So, *here we are again wondering, what to do—where to turn?*

*Rom. 7:24-25 – What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord. (NIV)*

This passage of scripture gives us great hope and insight into our destructive lifecycle of death dilemma, and, what can be done about it. The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, identified this dilemma and inscribed it here, into the book of Romans.

Putting words to his anguish of knowing what to do, but, realizing that there was nothing within himself that could possibly carry out his desire to perform or produce it—and that he needed rescue from outside of himself, namely, through the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. So, be very encouraged here because Paul wrote this as a practicing Christian disciple, just like you and me.

In addition, God took some 20 years of transforming Paul's heart, renewing his mind, and refining and perfecting his ministry **after his salvation experience**, before the Lord had him prepared to write these words in a letter to the Romans, later becoming the famous New Testament book of the same name.

So, Paul, almost certainly, wrote this timeless scriptural passage describing his own personal dilemma trying to overcome a spiritual issue, or issues, that he was, or had been, experiencing. In addition, for our example, this scriptural passage also applies to Christian disciples like you and me, struggling to overcome a besetting sin issue in our own lives, that we are challenged with. God clearly wants all generations of Christian disciples to be encouraged, and to never give up on this pursuit of freedom—that's exactly why he sent Jesus.

Further, Paul provides us some more insight, and very pertinent detail, describing his experience seeking the freedom that Christ has provided all of us.

*Check this out:*

*Phil. 3:12 – (Paul Speaking) Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. (NIV)*

Paul is further establishing here that – *he is pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him*. So, the question is often asked, *what is Paul after here; what exactly, is he pursuing?* The documented answer(s) to that question from many well-regarded bible commentaries are many. However, it must be certain here that Paul is describing a “journey” of some kind, and, at the very least, that *he is definitely in pursuit of the freedom that Christ has made available to him and every Christian*. That much is certain.

I reiterate again: ***It was for freedom that Christ has set us free. (Gal. 5:1)***

Therefore, take these encouraging words from the Apostle Paul into account and be very patient with yourself and with this learning process. It takes time, sometimes a lot of time, but, the result in your new life of freedom is immensely worth the investment you will make to acquire it.

God will never quit or give up on you, so, commit to never, ever, give up on him, or give up on yourself and your mission in this life to acquire and sustain a lifestyle of true, personal, spiritual freedom. I encourage you to add this perspective from Paul's writings here to your own pursuit of spiritual freedom as you seek to avoid, or prevent, a destructive lifestyle taking a hold of you. Now, let's develop another perspective.

## SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE – THE DEVIL AND THE NATURE OF SIN

God wants you to be wise and to understand the devil's tactics to steal, kill and destroy everything good and everything godly in your life. Especially your faith in God. This is personal. You need to understand and believe that. God wants to make you a blessing to his kingdom and a very real threat to hell. Sin will come at you and will attack you, in one of two general ways:

1. **Directly from your adversary, the devil and/or his demons.** The forces of evil are extremely skilled and adept at devising schemes, temptations and compulsions designed to deceive and entrap you into yielding yourself to commit sin, especially a besetting sin.
2. **Directly from the wickedness stored up within your own heart.** This comes from your own human nature to rebel against God, refusing to submit and comply to his will and to his wonderful plan for your life.

So, acquire what you really need to know about your adversary. Then, add this biblical knowledge to your spiritual arsenal. Then, learn how to weaponize it and put it into action. It will often come to you in the form of a *spiritual transaction*. If you are looking for it—if you are vigilant—you will detect it:

God delights in giving good gifts to you (*Jam. 1:17 and Ps. 103:5*). The devil works to take all those good things and gifts away from you. Reads like this:

*John 10:10 – “The thief (the devil) comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I (Jesus) came that they might have life and might have it abundantly. (NASB)*

*1 Pet 5:8 – “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (NASB)*

***Someone Like YOU.....! Remember this one?***

Once again, I reiterate here on purpose; Never forget, this is personal. These scriptures inform you that the devil, your adversary, your enemy, is always active, is very tenacious, and has a plan to harm you in any and every way that he can. However, God has something to say about that:

*2 Cor. 2:11 – in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. (NIV)*

*2 Cor. 2:11 – To keep Satan from getting the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his wiles and intentions. (AMP)*

*Eph. 4:27 – and do not give the devil an opportunity. (NIV)*

*2 Tim. 2:26 – and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (NIV)*

*Psa. 91:3 – That’s right—he rescues you from hidden traps, shields you from deadly hazards. (NRSV)*

The bible documents the fact that God does not want any of us to be unaware or ignorant of the devil's schemes, plans and traps that he intends to use against us as he opposes every good thing that God provides us.

Consider the following points to add to your knowledge that expand and detail these biblical precepts of truth. Like this one—do not give the devil an opportunity—an old Jewish proverb puts it this way: ***A bird can land in your hair, but, you do not have to let it make a nest...***

The most pragmatic explanation reads like this: A temptation can come upon you at any time, but, you do not have to allow that temptation to gain any advantage over you, and you therefore have no obligation to yield yourself in submission, compliance or obedience.

Absolutely none at all. You literally are FREE, but you have to learn how to acquire and “Walk” in your freedom. Remember key scriptures like this: 1Pet. 5:8.... “*be disciplined, be alert*”

**1 Pet. 5:8 – Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. (NRSV)**

**Rom. 12:3 – For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. (NIV)**

In context with that, remember also one of my previous Key Principles:

*“Do not think that becoming **Easily Deceived** could not happen to you. Refuse to think that way. Instead, realize that we are easily susceptible to being deceived and deluded about God’s will in our lives at any point in time. That is why we need a Shepherd in the first place, and that is why our need for Jesus, His Grace and His Truth is **DESPERATE**.*

**Always Remember** – Apart from him, you can do nothing – (John 15:5)

Your adversary, the devil knows this about you and your human nature and he will exploit this every time you give him an opportunity to do so. Therefore, be very sober minded about the true nature of sin—**particularly, besetting sin.**

Check this out:

- Yielding yourself to sin will take you where you do not want to go....
- Yielding yourself to sin will cost you more than you think you ought to pay....
- Yielding yourself to sin will cost you more freedom than you think you ought to lose....
- You will spend way more time immersed in the grip of sin than you ever thought you would....
- Yielding yourself to sin will result in an increase in the susceptibility of your becoming significantly deceived, and suffering an immediate loss of managing and controlling most circumstances in your life—you will, once again, become a slave to that sin...

Got all those bullet-points down? Count the cost—***it just ain’t worth it...!***

However, as you count that cost, always keep the following in perspective: *Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. (Rom. 5:20) – Sin Cannot Take You Where Grace Cannot Find and Restore You.* You simply cannot out-sin the grace of God. It is virtually impossible. The Gospel of Christ is that powerful, and God really is that good, because his love for you will never fail.

Okay, let’s unpack this destructive lifecycle predicament just a little more. Remembering the following phrase from session 3: **All it takes for evil to prosper is for good men to do nothing.** A biblical proverb states it this way:

**Prov. 6:9-11 – How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? 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)**

**Prov. 24:32-34 – I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: 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)**

What do we conclude from this? That if we fail to learn this lesson, if we observe correctly that we are trapped in a destructive behavior, but, we are not willing or able to take any action, that is, *any effective action*, then the evil we seek to avoid will, in fact, continue to overtake us, every time. The result: We are held fast to the destructive Yo-Yo lifecycle. This in turn leads us back to the beginning—***just how well do you know Jesus?***

*Here it is again:*

**Dan. 11:32 – the people who know their God will display strength and take action. (NASB)**

## CONSEQUENCES – RESULTS OF DISOBEDIENCE VS OBEDIENCE

The *consequences* of obeying and also disobeying God's word and his commands are spelled out very clearly throughout both the Old and the New Testaments of the bible. These *consequences* do not happen in a random manner, or, by coincidence. They are all governed intentionally and put into operation and force by God's precise laws over all creation, both, physical and spiritual.

The following scripture may very well be regarded as the most prominent and, perhaps the “vanguard” of spiritual laws (*Law of Sowing and Reaping*) that governs both good and evil consequences, especially in context with your freedom:

**Gal. 6:7-8 – Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (NIV)**

In addition, the following scripture may very well be regarded as the most prominent declaration of these consequences, both for good and evil:

**Rom. 2:9-11 – There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. (NIV)**

Remember this really well... These two scriptures function as spiritual LAWS; they are exact and pragmatic. They truly govern our spiritual, moral behavior in exactly the same way that physical laws govern the cosmos, like gravity and electricity. Should you violate them, you can expect to experience the consequences, both for good and for evil. However, God has provided a way that the consequences of violating these spiritual laws can actually be *mitigated or modified, and even nullified*.

That specific provision is through God's **GRACE**, and his **GRACE ALONE**.

As Christians, God does not judge us, or grade us on a curve, like so many teachers and college professors do. Through his grace, he always has the option to deal with us according to his lovingkindness, and not according to our sin and iniquity (refer: Ps. 103:10). He can, and very often does, override the sometimes-painful consequences of “trouble and distress” when we commit sin and do evil. Even when that sin is “pre-meditated” and/or deliberate. His loving-kindness and his goodness really are that great, through his grace, because **HIS LOVE FOR US NEVER FAILS!**

However, each of us make mistakes, commit sin and fail quite often. The bible coins this well-known phrase to describe this truth about our propensity to sin:

**All of us like sheep have gone astray** (refer: Is. 53:6 and 1Pet. 2:25). So, when we do, God will use all manner of things in your life to instruct you in obeying his word and learning his ways; even from the consequences of your own inclination to be easily enticed by sin and wickedness.

*Check this out:*

***Jer. 2:17, 19 – Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the LORD your God when he led you in the way? Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me, declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. (NIV)***

***Jer. 2:19 – Your own wickedness shall chasten and correct you, and your backslidings and desertion of faith shall reprove you. Know therefore and recognize that this is an evil and bitter thing: (first,) you have forsaken the Lord your God; (second,) you are indifferent to Me and the fear of Me is not in you, says the Lord of hosts. (AMP)***

Certainly, the first step required to overcome and master the sin in your life, is to be made aware of it. That is precisely what the Law-of-God does (*refer: Rom. 7:7*) Know this—our loving God wants you to become very aware of, and very adept at, learning from your mistakes. Develop this precept as a functional part of your new Action-Plan. It goes something like this:

Consider every mistake that you make from now on to be an opportunity that you can learn from. Think of the mistake as one of your new virtual teachers. Think and reason all the ways that caused you to make that mistake, especially if that mistake caused you to yield yourself to a besetting sin. Refuse to gloss over it, put it out of your mind and just move-on.

Instead, deliberately refuse to put it out of your mind and intentionally place considerable and significant value on the experience. You will learn best when you learn within the “Arena of Performance.” This is where life actually happens—this is where “***The Rubber Meets the Road***”

Think of what it was that triggered you to condition your mind to begin the process of yielding yourself to this sin.

**DO NOT LOSE OR WASTE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN**—it will only come around once. It is really valuable for you to begin recognizing what triggers your sinful behavior *as early in the process as possible*. Become very aware of this. Play it back over and over again in your imagination, in your mind’s eye. *The sooner you learn to recognize this initial trigger*, or triggers, the more effective your response to resist it or them, will be.

The key principle here, is that every time you purposely think and dwell upon these triggers, you will be instructing your sub-conscious mind that it needs to be renewed. That it must be re-programmed. Simple as that. That’s one of the ways your sub-conscious mind works. The more you deliberately think and dwell upon the what and why of these triggers, the more malleable and open to change your sub-conscious mind becomes. In the same way, **writing down these triggers** is a very effective method of programming your sub-conscious mind. Understanding these programming principles and acting upon them consistently is like hitting a *stand-up single* in a baseball game. It puts you in the game, or in the race. You’re now on first base—you can effectively make some notable and rewarding progress to renew your mind.

It would be so wonderful if only we could just learn by reading about the consequences of disobedience and obedience in the bible and then always choose and put into consistent behavior the wonderful consequences of obedience. However, life just doesn’t work that way. We are all born with a very selfish human nature. So, God has purposely included struggle against that selfish nature to be a very real and prevalent part of life. Primarily, so we can **LEARN** through that process.

One indispensable precept of learning to overcome and avoid the consequences of disobedience is first to understand each part of the process that cause it to happen in the first place, especially the very beginning of it. *Got that?*

## ADVANCED LEARNING – RENEW YOUR MIND

Learning, by having to experience the consequences of your disobedience, through your own wickedness, even when the grace of God is abundantly provided you in the process, is definitely not God's first choice of instructing you and me. The bible provides you a much better, much more desirable and much more effective way for you to learn. Read, ponder and study this:

*Rom. 12:2 – Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)*

God clearly wants you and me learning how to avoid the consequences of disobedience by learning how to renew our own minds.

Set yourself on that course. The program code that you will require to do that has already been given to you by God. It is found in the bible—it is in fact the very, but specific and particular, Word of God – His particular and personal message to you, revealed by the Holy Spirit of God with exactly the content and context needed to renew your unique mind. That renewing of your mind is a major key objective of this program of mine, in both books and within my website action-plan—to show you exactly how to do that.

**You are on the right track my friend.**

An incredible and effective aid to that mind-renewal process is readily available to you. So, take note of this very key and strategic precept of truth and spiritual warfare tactic. This principle and precept of truth is yet another offensive tactic of spiritual warfare that you should acquire and adopt for yourself. Here it is:

***Key #11 – God, in his wisdom and sovereignty has carefully hidden within the consequences of obedience and disobedience an “abundance” of clues and keys and tactics to help you develop your own freedom strategy.***

Those consequences are literally **pregnant** with truth and tactics that God wants to reveal and teach to you by his Holy Spirit. And, God means for you to discover them for yourself. He knows the joy that you will experience each time that you discover, learn and adopt one of them to the development of your own freedom strategy, and, he purposely wants you to experience that joy. He has intentionally designed your mind to respond to that joy.

It is the joy of that learning process that he wants you to recognize within the consequences you experience in life to propel you towards the freedom you are so desperate to acquire. Therefore, put this tactic into operation every time that you experience a consequence of your obedience and/or your disobedience.

Remember to **THINK and REASON**. Take your personal experience of that consequence to Jesus and ask him in prayer to reveal what he has hidden in that experience that he wants you to see—that he wants you to know—that he wants you to learn from and act upon.

*Jer. 33:3 ‘Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’ (NASB)*

Don't let this pass. Once again, tenaciously resist the impulse to just move on. Do not allow yourself to drift anymore.

Pay Attention—check out a very clear evidence from scripture that documents this message from God, by his Holy Spirit, that he wants you to know and that *he wants you to activate*:

**Prov. 25:2 – It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings\*\* is to search things out.**

\*\* The meaning of Kings in this context is  
**One who takes dominion over** - from Gen. 1:28  
This is directed squarely at you and me.

Remember a very significant fact documented earlier in this program: God has deliberately designed life to be a struggle at times. He has intentionally done this because he knows that this struggle will make us stronger. Therefore, life, *including the searching out of truth*, is not intended to be easy, but sometimes very hard, requiring extensive work and effort and sometimes taking years to find and experience that particular truth that God knows is needed to renew our mind and set us free from addiction, besetting sin and a destructive lifecycle.

Get serious therefore, and live your life intentionally—live your life **in-the-moment**, in reality, with great purpose. Sincerely resist how easy it has been for your mind to wander and to drift away from reality. **FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS** – (*Heb. 12:2*).

There is “GOLD” hidden within each consequence experienced from obedience and also from disobedience for you to discover and learn from, and be rewarded by—but, you have to get in there and mine it for yourself. You have to work and search it out. You must function like a king who takes dominion over the sphere of influence that God has given in all areas of life. One more time, here is that evidence from scripture that documents this message from God, by his Holy Spirit, that he wants you to know and that he wants you to apply in your life to **Take Dominion**. *Just do it.....*

#### **Spoken by God to Adam and Eve...**

**Gen. 1:28 – God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”** (NRSV)

This mandate from God to **take dominion** over all life, including our own life, especially our minds, is still valid and remains in force today for every human being.

#### **Spoken by God to Cain...**

**Gen. 4:7 – 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)

This mandate from God to **master the sin in your life**, is still valid and remains in force today for every human being.

These mandates from God are still in effect and remain absolutely valid today, and he expects each of us to put them into practice. So, Take Dominion. That dominion will come to you as an actual mind-set that you will experience every time that you successfully acquire the tenacious attitude, and yoke of Christ. That’s what it looks like—you’ll want to do this, and you’ll come to cherish it...That’s how you will recognize it.

Take on his yoke to completely avoid a destructive lifecycle producing trouble, distress, anxiety, frustration, little to no growth of character and integrity, no true peace in your soul, no vision or clear direction for your life, and so on. Refuse to be like a high-performance athlete being forced to just **Run-in-Place**, unable to **Run in the Race**. It almost always comes down to a simple choice—so, think about that—**CHOOSE LIFE...**!

The first part of this session has been focusing upon the consequences experienced from a destructive lifecycle. We will now compare that to living life yoked to Christ within a ***constructive lifecycle***.

*Let's move on to explore that with much more detail.*

## **CONSTRUCTIVE LIFECYCLE - ABUNDANT LIFE THRU CHRIST**

When the Holy Spirit of God comes to indwell you at salvation, and begins producing the image of God within you, your life is literally changed forever. You will never be the same again. As your new life, or, as the case may be, your renewed life in God unfolds, his Holy Spirit begins to reveal truth to you about life in general and life in his Kingdom.

But especially, he begins teaching you about the ***unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Jesus***. He wants to increase that knowledge within you, on a daily basis—every day that you will seek him, and allow him to do just that.

He will teach you about the destruction that sin causes in your life. God abhors and hates sin, and, he will teach you to hate it like he does—that is, if and when you sincerely determine to *know and follow Jesus*, not perfectly, but sincerely and earnestly. To know Christ like he wants you to know him, more deeply, and, because of that knowledge, to follow the commands of Christ with love, intensity, diligence and effectiveness. He wants you to learn to abide in Jesus and to acquire and effectively exercise your freedom. *One more time—his gift to you:*

***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)***

There is an abundant life that Jesus offers each of his believers, but, ***that kind of life is conditional***. Remember, we live in a conditional, cause & effect, world. *IF you do this – THEN, I will do that.* That's just how life is—that's how it works.

God delights in rewarding his children, and, the bible documents that ***he gives good gifts so that our youth is renewed like the eagle*** – (Psa. 103:5). Many of God's gifts are simply given to us, like salvation, that cannot be earned any other way. It is God's gift, through grace to us. It is also God's gift because of his great love for each of us, and, ***that great love of his never fails any of us*** (Lam. 3:22).

However, the *abundant life* that Jesus offers us, in this context, is an actual lifestyle, a new way of living, that does require something from us—in addition to his provision of grace. That is, *if we expect to maintain that lifestyle over time.*

If we truly desire and seek the spiritual freedom that God includes as a part of this abundant life in Christ, then God will challenge us, and oblige us to produce the *evidence* that this kind of lifestyle in Christ requires of us. Not always *out-of-duty*, but sincerely and authentically, out of our love of God—even when we don't feel like it. We first fall in love with him, and because of that love, we then choose and determine to serve him. This evidence is produced by us, not by chance, but by choice. We truly choose the lifestyle that we experience, however, Jesus still does the heavy lifting.

## **TAKE ON THE YOKE OF CHRIST AND THE ARMOR OF GOD**

Once we become born again, Jesus offers all his believers an abundant lifestyle that effectively “transcends” our human nature *when we are yoked to him*. We become yoked to Christ by living our life in cooperation with, and dependence upon him. Abundant life in Christ is what God considers to be the default and normal spiritual lifestyle for every Christian.

God looks upon that kind of everyday lifestyle as being completely normal. It cannot be accurately described as *just getting by* or, *just surviving in life*—not at all; God provides everything needed for life, in abundance (*2 Pet. 1:3*). Not perfect life, but normal life that can often include struggle. The yoke of Christ is also linked to the condition of your faith; there is an ebb and flow to it, just like there is with faith.

That yoke also includes the “*Armor of God*” providing abundant protection of your spiritual life, health and well-being (*Eph. 6:10-17*). Further, that yoke acquires the attitude of Christ in you that we are mandated by God to put into effective operation so we can think more like Jesus, and less like the world. That’s what is meant by God providing **everything**.

Further, it is conditioned by what your core-values are, and by the choices you make. For instance, whenever you choose to sin, especially choosing deliberate, be-setting sin, **you will be effectively throwing the yoke of Christ off of yourself**.

You will be folding your tent and throwing your spiritual sword in the dirt. It’s a mind-set that can come upon you—an attitude of opposing God. That’s what happens to you when you “Get it Backwards.” Here’s what I mean by that: Taking on the Yoke of Christ will always lead you to a constructive lifestyle, in turn enabling you to **submit yourself to God and resist the devil** (*Jam. 4:7*).

However, a destructive lifestyle will conversely lead you to *get that backwards*—to do just the opposite—**you end up submitting to the devil and resisting God**. You will go for another ride on the Yo-Yo (*Rom. 7:18-19*). See the difference?

Therefore, you can clearly comprehend the contrast in lifestyles—right? And, you are learning that God has given you some very powerful and offensive weapons of spiritual warfare. You know about humility and patience and are learning how to use them effectively as powerful weapons of spiritual warfare.

You are understanding the wonderful benefit of refusing to exalt yourself by deliberately choosing to sin; instead, you choose to humble yourself and wait upon God to exalt you and to rescue and protect you from all evil (*Ps. 91:14*).

You are learning to actively and effectively use godly vision through the imagination formed in your mind’s eye. Using this vision as a weapon of spiritual warfare, you can see yourself *motoring down your spiritual life highway, choosing to STAY IN YOUR LANE*. You are maintaining the good health and well-being of your soul and spirit as you consistently refuse to **CHANGE LANES**.

Okay, now take a look at this—the Greek word for **abundant** from the original language in the bible is: “*perisseia*,” meaning: *to be more than enough, be left over, be present in abundance, be abundant, abound, excel; exceeding the usual number or size, extraordinary, abundant, profuse, superfluous, fullness...*

### **You get the meaning...**

Let’s unpack this a little more. The abundance of life that Jesus provides arrives to us on many levels. This abundant life from Jesus is also the subject of a myriad of books on theology, philosophy, self-help, etc. published down through the ages. However, in this program, we focus on how this abundant life in Christ influences and affects our spiritual freedom.

So, what about this contrast: What can we expect to experience once we actually begin acquiring and sustaining the personal spiritual freedom that comes from a constructive lifecycle? *What does that look like?* To begin a consistent abundant life experience, that eventually will lead us to the freedom we desperately desire and need, we must learn to trust Jesus with the direction and welfare of our lives, **exclusively**.

There is a myriad of really beneficial and rewarding reasons that we should learn to trust Jesus, on every level of our lives and with every aspect of our lives. These spiritual life saving benefits can be experienced as a consequence of acquiring, adopting and abiding in the abundant life that Jesus provides you through a constructive lifecycle. Not all at once, but over time, and throughout a lifetime. So, I encourage you to consider, rejoice over, and study the following list of attributes Jesus makes available whenever needed as you learn to navigate life as a new, or renewed disciple of Christ. You really need this power filled lifestyle—remember, Jesus said, ***in this life, you will have trouble*** (John 16:33).

1. **HOPE, beyond all measure** – Let's expand this with more detail from where we left off in the last session, regarding hope. Some of you desperately need this level of hope that is beyond all measure. You can't even fathom "thriving" in your life right now. Some of you feel like you want to, or, are about to, literally give up on Christianity – on this God thing.

Still others, perhaps in some form of ministry work, have just about had it—and some of you, who have walked with and served God in various capacities for years, perhaps most of your life, are almost ready to fold your tent, lay down your sword and quit trying to live for God altogether. You are at the end of your rope—you are out of Gas.

First, I want you to know, very personally from me, from my heart, because I've been there, several times in my life, that God knows you, better than you can ever possibly know yourself; and, he knows all of those fearful thoughts that often come upon you—that you may think your very life might be moving toward an imminent collapse, including all you value and hold dear. Especially the thought of losing the hope you have of overcoming this besetting sin, or, whatever you consider as an abject failure in your life.

He knows the condition of your life and exactly what you are thinking as you read this. He knows the level and measure of your desperation to get free and get right with him, especially after so many well-meaning, well intentioned and serious attempts, but, so far, to no avail—all resulting in failure, sometimes producing an overwhelming sense of discouragement and bewilderment in your life.

He knows that it may very well be this last hope you are literally "clinging" to, that maybe, just maybe, you have finally found something within this program that will provide you a *way through the wilderness* from the perplexing sense of life you are experiencing.

So, if this describes your life experience in some way, for you my friend, the beginning of the abundant life Jesus offers you right now starts with **HOPE**. Authentic, tangible and genuine hope that you can begin to believe and wrap your head and your heart around.

The truth is, that before some of you can even develop, or re-acquire, even the smallest desire to begin moving your life back into a positive direction with God, all you have to hold onto is some level of hope that this is even feasible for you—even possible for you.

So, I believe that God wants you to know, to think about and consider, just two things at this juncture and probable "crossroad" of your life:

- ONE:** Things and circumstances in your life can get profoundly **worse** for you. You may not realize it or feel it, but, God is trying to "get your attention" so he can put you on a path leading to freedom. So, unless and until you decide to exercise this hope for change, more crap can certainly come your way.
- TWO:** Things and circumstances in your life can get profoundly **better** for you. You may be thinking that your life sucks so bad right now, that, for you, it can't get any worse; you have bottomed out; the only way for you now is UP...

And, you will prove that to be correct when you begin to put your hope into action reviving the faith and belief you once had in Jesus and God's word at some level. Therefore, right now for many of you, it is simply about **ACTION**... not good intentions... not lip service.... but deliberate and effective **ACTION**.

**Here's why:** Should you decide to take no action, then, as we have previously documented, the freedom you are hoping for will not be coming your way—or, you do decide to risk failure again, **by taking effective action** and you begin to acquire that faith to believe in God and his word one more time. As you ponder and think about these two options that have been put before you, consider this:

*Matt. 12:20 – A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out... (NIV)* – **Okay, just what does that mean?**

*Check this out:*

You might think that you are out of gas in your life, however, God always keeps a reserve ready and he knows there is still a few gallons of spiritual gas in there for you. God always measures your heart, and, no matter how small and weak the current condition of your faith is, he will not quench it—ever. Now please, I really implore you to not let yourself gloss-over or rush through the following passages of scripture.

Remember, (*Jesus speaking here*), “**Man does not live by bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**” (*Matt. 4:4*) – The literal health and well-being of your soul and spirit reside on these words from Christ. So, let these scriptures resonate well within you to revive and invigorate your spirit. **It's time to be renewed like an Eagle.**

In fact, when you decide to exercise what little hope remains in you, and you begin to put your faith in him again, he will fan that smoldering wick of your faith into flames. God has done this for me, numerous times throughout my life, and he will do it for you.

Remember and recall now, Key Principle #3, documented previously:

*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.*

Remember and consider also a few significant truths of God's intentions for you from Psalm 18:

*Psa. 18:28, 32-36 – You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light...It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights; He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.*

*You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn... (NIV)*

Remarkable and wonderful words from Psalm 18, and also very true, revealing God's amazing grace and loving nature toward King David, but also to all those whom he has saved and adopted into his kingdom, down through the ages, including you and me. Further, study more from what the bible documents about *the hope that God has given you* and continues to kindle:

**Rom. 5:5** – *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (NIV)*

**Rom. 15:4** – *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (NIV)*

**Rom. 15:13** – *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace, as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (NIV)*

**Eph. 1:18** – *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.... (NIV)*

**2 Tim. 2:25, 26** – *In the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (NIV)*

2. **Spiritual Power – Another blessed benefit** – At the instant you are saved, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit of God from our Heavenly Father to dwell within you for the rest of your earthly life. The power to get free and to change your life, that you are looking for, and that you desperately need, comes directly from HIM. He will never leave you nor forsake you. Abundant life indeed!

**John 15:26** – *“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me... (NASB)*

**John 15:26** – *But when the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengthener, Standby) comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth Who comes (proceeds) from the Father... (AMP)*

**Acts 1:8** – *but you shall receive POWER when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.... (NASB) (emphasis mine....)*

**John 14:12** – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. (NASB)*

3. **Your heart is transformed and your mind is set on a path of renewal** – Jesus provides an amazing and miraculous transformation in your life that cannot be achieved any other way. God is not like you and me. He is not natural; He is “Supernatural” and God is Spirit. Jesus knows everything and he can do virtually anything...!

Therefore, it simply does not matter one whit of how impossible your situation may look to you right now. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible for God (*Luke 1:37*). Should God determine, or, better yet, *when* God determines, unlike you, he is able to speak **FREEDOM** into your life at any time of his choosing.

Logically speaking, if God can create light, when and where there was no light, he can also create freedom in your life, where there was no freedom. Where it did not exist before. What do you think? Can that be true? Does God actually do that today? Would he do that for you?

4. **The precious faith we have in God grows more firm and stronger** – That’s because Jesus himself is the author, finisher and perfecter of your faith. Your blood is life to your body, but, **your faith is life to your spirit**. I reiterate here what I have documented a few times previously: To successfully resist the devil, faith must be sufficiently firm. Flabby, weak, ineffective faith will not suffice...

**Remember this always** – *Behavior is not always changed by what the commitments and actions of your will are, but predominantly by what you actually believe—the working condition of your faith at any point in time.*

Every Christian experiences seasons in life when faith is firm and strong, and, other seasons when faith sometimes fails from weakness. God will also purposely test our faith at various times throughout our lives to add even more strength. It is exceedingly wise to study what affects our faith; what we do, or not do, that can make it grow, or, make it diminish.

5. **Your spiritual fruitfulness becomes more effective** – Jesus provides you consistent growth and spiritual strength as you continue to hone in and develop godly habits and increased levels of spiritual discipline. God will always reward your discipline and diligence seeking him. Consider this:

*John 15:1, 2 (Jesus Speaking) – “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (NIV)*

There are many other attributes of the abundant life provided by Jesus that we will explore and focus time and study upon throughout the remainder of this program. However, the key principle at this point is for you to easily contrast what you can expect to happen when you ride the Yo-Yo and experience a destructive cycle of life, compared to what you can expect to happen when you choose to take the Yoke of Christ upon yourself and experience a constructive cycle of life.

Now do yourself a favor. Go back over both lists and lock each point into your memory, especially those that specifically pertain to you. I encourage you to take the extra step of writing these specific points down on paper—to further imprint them into your sub-conscious mind. As you do so, be sure to remind yourself that each of these life cycle attributes come from the bible and are therefore, absolutely true. Refuse to gloss over this. You need the highest return on your time and energy that you can get—*refuse to spin-your-wheels anymore. Make your life count...!*

Consider well, the impact of your choices upon your life and the life of your loved ones, family and friends who love you and care about you, and, the influence of your life upon them. Deeply think about all the ways that your choices impact your life, both your past and present life, and your future life, considering these two contrasting lifecycles. Once again, “*You have to really want to do this*” if in fact, you are going to be successful.

**Godspeed** to you now as you push back against every obstacle along that authentic, spiritual freedom journey you have begun. **Go & Make War...**



WEB eBook – LIFE ACTION PLAN  
Chapter 5 – TACTICS

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

## **Spiritual Warfare – Advanced Tactics**

*Let's get right into it – Your initial tactics of fighting this spiritual war begins by bringing your own mind under control—taking dominion over it, and then subduing it, to put you into conformance with God's word. That's the safe place for you to be. You first prepare and renew your mind, just getting it ready to effectively submit to God. Then, when you believe that you're ready, you begin doing that with all of your heart. You humble yourself, submit your mind, your will, and all that you are, to God and his will, his word, and his plan for your life. Take on that Yoke!*

You do all of that, preparing yourself, “**way before**” you develop your plan to resist the devil. Here's another one of my strategic keys to help you remember that and to put it into perspective as a functional part of your **new comfort-zone**.

*Key #13 – To master consistent, besetting sin in your life, it is better and much more effective to turn on the light rather than, or certainly before, you fight the darkness. Actively pursue knowing and obeying Jesus and the unsearchable richness of his fellowship. Do that, way sooner, and way more, than actively resisting the devil, by trying to manage and control your own sin. Do that effectively, and the darkness of that habitual sin will begin to diminish and fall away.*

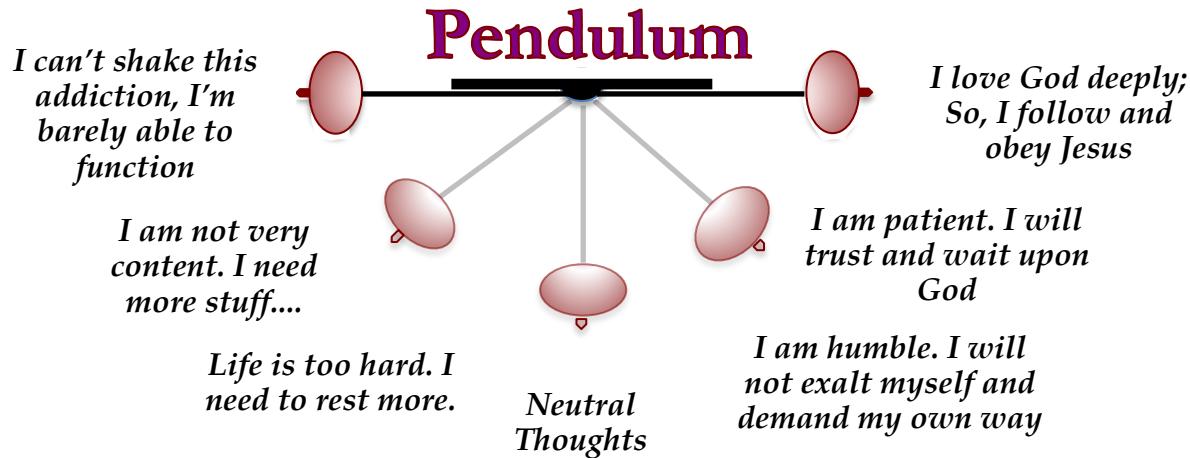
Okay, earlier in this program, and throughout both of my books, I document a teaching technique that Jesus used a lot when he spoke. **Stories and parables**—he would often relate stories and parables to his disciples making it much more effective for them to remember, and then to easily recall, what he was teaching them. Jesus did this very deliberately because he knew that telling a story about something would more effectively engage the disciple's imagination.

I wrote about this, in an earlier session, documenting that age-old idiom that says, “*A picture is worth a thousand words.*” Remember that? I began using pictures to describe and relate a story, or some key principle of truth that I wanted to communicate to you, and also, to make it much easier for you to recall.

**Let's take another run at that – More detail from a different perspective...**

Remember the pendulum image from session 3? What do you think of when you recall seeing the image of that pendulum in your mind's eye? Something about the ability of your sub-conscious mind to think really good and beneficial thoughts in one direction of the pendulum, leading to life, then swing all the way opposite and think of selfish and evil thoughts that can lead to death.

Sound about right to you? I encourage you to go back and refresh your memory of that principle of truth I identified with the mental image of a swinging pendulum, if you need to. Further, let's add some more detail to that swinging pendulum here to make the image in your mind's eye even more effective for your life. Looks like this:



Notice once again the contrasting choices that lead to life on one side of the swinging pendulum, and death on the other. Contrasting choices—remember that? Let's take another look at that verse from the book of Matthew I documented earlier:

**Matt. 7:13-14 – (Jesus Speaking)** “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (NIV)

**Life and Death**—Moses started all this by simply declaring this contrasting choice, back in Deut. 30:19, to the young nation of Israel, encouraging each of them to **Choose Life**. Jesus adds more detail to this same contrasting choice here in Matthew 7—he adds a road, or a series of roads, to be thought of as pathways leading to life:

**Acts 2:28** – You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence. (NIV)

So, whenever you are tempted a little bit, or even vigorously compelled to commit a sin, especially a premeditated, besetting sin that you are clearly struggling to overcome—whenever those first thoughts hit you, do this:

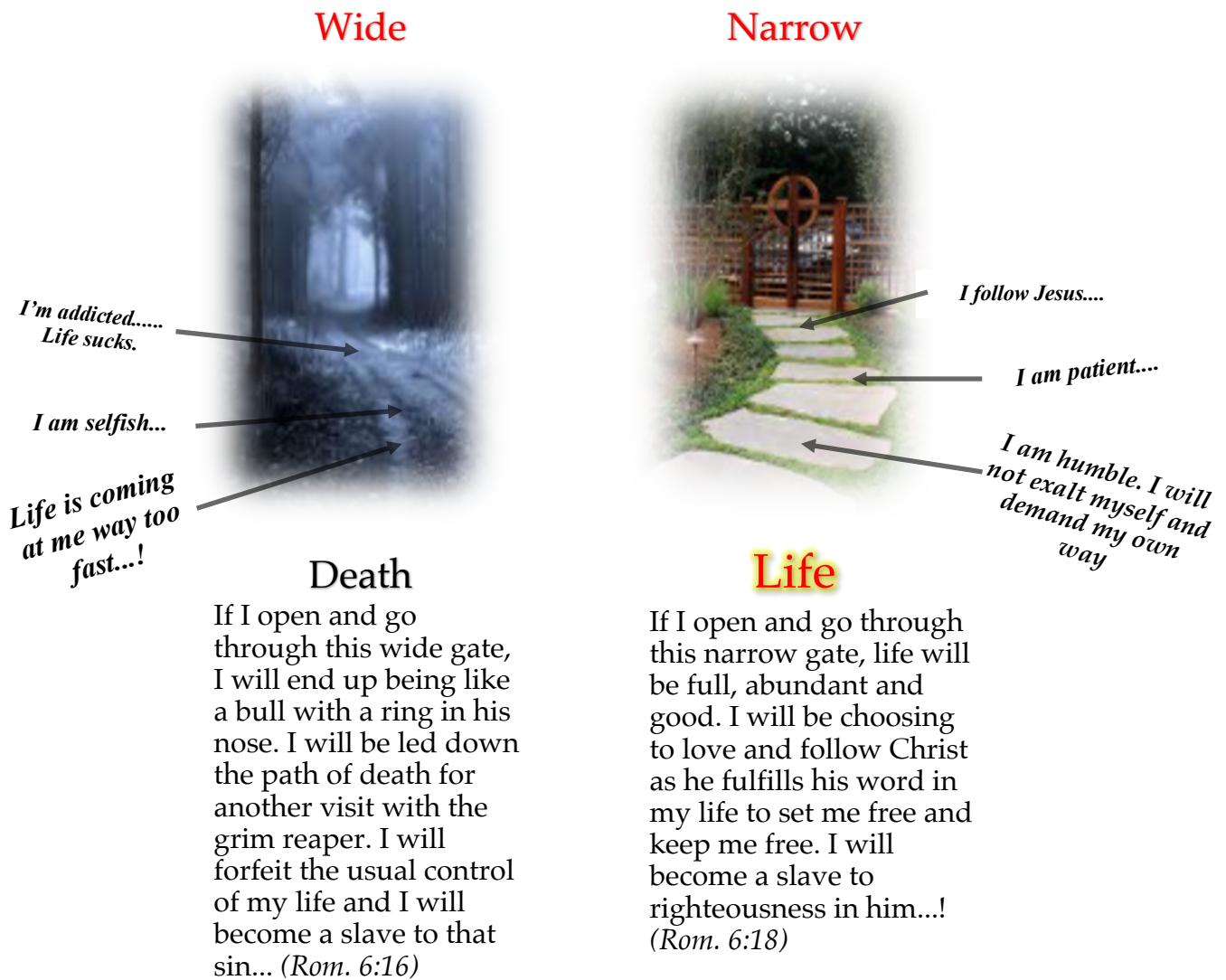
Immediately, **STOP and THINK** – but, **DON'T ACT – NOT YET...**

Instead, start by counting the cost of your action, knowing that the *wages of sin will be paid* to you in some form or another if and when you yield yourself and commit that sin. Therefore, **STOP**—then **THINK** the following thought:

*If I yield myself to this sin, that I really, and strongly, desire to commit right now, I will be doing the exact and the extreme opposite of what I really should be doing. (Rom. 7:15-23) Instead of **Humbling Myself**, I will actually be **Exalting Myself**, and thereby opening myself up to experience significant risk, trouble and distress. Perhaps another image, with more detail, will illuminate what God is clearly wanting you to know from Matthew 7:13-14, as you consider taking another ride on the Yo-Yo.*

*Check out the following image with a different perspective:*

# Two Gates



I also encourage you right here to load the previous image of the swinging pendulum into your mind and ponder the message it reveals to you. Your brain is certainly capable of leading you in either direction, for good, or for evil. It is truly your choice—the ball is in your court. This represents that “**Fork-in-the-Road**” challenge I write about often throughout this program.

Every time that foreboding temptation comes your way, you would do well to remind yourself that you are running in a very competitive race, and, that you are actually competing with, and against, “**Your Old-Self.**” Hebrews 12:1. Remember that?

*That nemesis that you often face is the wickedness within your own heart.*

Well, what do you think? Is the Holy Spirit getting through to you? Made up your mind yet? When you get to that fork-in-the-road, Jesus is standing tall, right there in the middle of that fork—right between those gates.

He stands between those two gates, clearly pointing out to you, which path to take. Which gate to open and go through. He is not willing to see you fail. He makes intercession for you. And, God has provided the following strategic scripture as a spiritual prescription to all of that. Load this deep into your brain...

A virtual synopsis of “**what to do**” and “**how to handle**” every temptation.

This prescription of his, for your spiritual path of life, looks like this:

*2 Chr. 7:14 – if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (NIV)*

Therefore, Jesus bids you now to go ahead and weaponize your humility, and make it operational. Put it on display. Refuse to believe and resign yourself that you cannot prevail over this sin that has kicked you’re butt so many times. Stop believing that lie. God said this about that: “*For lack of vision my people perish.*”

So, like the old adage said: **don’t just stand there, do something...!**

Do this – Activate and use your imagination, your mind’s eye, to visualize those two gates from Matthew 7. The wide one and the narrow one. Next, look at those two pathways leading up to each of those two gates. Further, ponder the phrases from both sides as you walk the path toward each gate. Take it all in... *Got it?*

Okay, now contemplate and think the issue through, while you are still on the path, **prior** to arriving at those two gates. Count the cost **BEFORE** you get there and end up making a foolish and stupid choice to yield yourself to that besetting sin, and suffer the consequences.

Instead, apply the grace and wisdom that Christ gives you to consider what will, or certainly could, happen to you **after** you make that choice and yield yourself to that sin. **Count the Cost!** Once you open the wide gate especially, yielding yourself to that sin, you’ll be taking a ride on the Yo-Yo again. Life for you will suck...

This is a really good time for you to do something that you’d never do intentionally—this is where you **procrastinate – on purpose**. You need to war against seeking after that immediate–gratification that is a result of allowing yourself to get out of control and become double-minded. Remember that the bible declares *a double minded man to be unstable in all his ways (Jam. 1:8).* Therefore, don’t go there. *Stay in your lane.* Capture those bad thoughts—replace them with good thoughts. You can do this!

So, I say again, procrastinate and delay that attitude from coming upon you. That is not the attitude you want to acquire. Instead, do this—*acquire His Attitude*:

When you acquire the attitude of Christ effectively, this is what happens:

*2 Cor. 10:5 – We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.....and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (NIV)*

Jesus is revealing here, in a very wonderful and even merciful way, that he has already exposed what could or would happen to you, if you choose to go through the wrong gate and jump on the Yo-Yo. He has clearly exposed what you will reap, **BEFORE** you make that choice. Remember, **being forewarned is being forearmed?** So, as you consider which path to take, and why you would take it, and which gate to open, *you can actually preview* what is likely to happen, or, what could happen, for good or not-so-good, depending upon which gate you choose to go through.

**Weaponized Tactics** – Always beginning with humility and thinking just like Jesus, you take on his attitude. Copied here from session 3, take another look at it:

*Attitude of Jesus – Learn from him. Specifically, learn how to “**weaponize**” your humility, patience, contentment, perseverance and your faithfulness, resulting in you becoming less selfish than you are now.*

## SPIRITUAL AND MENTAL STRATEGY

Okay, let's pull some of this spiritual stuff from these last few pages together before we move on. *Jesus made a big deal out of thinking this through—so should you.* We all require food, water, exercise, rest and sleep to maintain the health and well-being of our bodies and our minds. We all consider these things as **essential**—isn't that right? They are not **optional**, are they?

However, it is almost always the case that Christians who are struggling with spiritual discipline of some kind—especially those who lose a lot of spiritual warfare battles, make the following 3 tactics to be optional in their lifestyles, instead of making them essential.

Therefore, I definitely encourage you to make it **essential**, rather than **optional**, that you believe in, and adopt for yourself, each of the following “*why I did, what I did*” advanced tactics, for **your spiritual good health and well-being**.

1. **Prepare Your Mind.** Remember and activate 1 Pet. 1:13 – *Prepare your minds for action, then submit yourselves to God* from James 4:7? These two phrases are effectively used by your mind to do just that. This tactic is your *get-ready*.

*You deliberately inform your mind that action is coming—something big.*

You are about to enter the throne room of God Almighty in your mind’s eye. You visualize what that might look like and how you would feel going in there—to stand before his awesome presence... Are you getting a sense of this in your mind? Here’s why... Almighty God declares that we are to **Fear and Tremble at his Word**. I encourage you therefore to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to mightily impress this upon your mind.

I further encourage you to reflect upon this often—*let this loom-large in your mind.* Follow God here as he reaches deep into Hebrews 12-28, 29 and provides you another *what-to-do* example of preparing your mind to come into his presence—here it is:

**Heb. 12:28-29** – *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”* (NIV)

Your mind prep first includes acknowledging almighty God for who he is, in all his awesome splendor, majesty, and glory—you fix your eyes on Jesus knowing that he alone has absolute power and authority over all matters of life and death. He reigns supreme with unassailable sovereignty—he reigns supreme over you—Therefore, rejoice and be very glad—his reigning over you is way better than you reigning over yourself.

When you think this through effectively, within your imagination, preparing your mind in this way, you will be putting yourself in a mindful state of humility, and you will have made yourself ready for this action. Next, when you have done that, you boldly submit yourself to God and resist the devil and all of his schemes. Once you have thought this tactic through and practiced it several times, it only takes a few seconds to develop this humble, but extremely formidable mind-set, prepping you for action—for spiritual warfare.

2. **Renew Your Mind.** So, you want to experience God’s good, pleasing and perfect will for your life? Alright, if that’s the case, the bible says your mind needs to be renewed—right there in Romans 12:2—*Look it up...*

That literally means that your sub-conscious mind needs to be re-programmed using God’s word as the code. One of my primary objectives in authoring this program is to save you from having to invest hundreds of hours researching the best methods of doing just that. Remember and recall this phrase I just wrote about in session 3...

I purposely emphasize it here again as a reminder – *Check it out:*

**The human mind is easily deceived.** Winning spiritual warfare battles consistently requires the mind to be hardened as a target. Don't give the devil any opportunity... Eliminate the "Low-Hanging-Fruit" in your thought life that make you an easy target.

Our hearts, that is to say: *our wills and our soul*, need to be softened, not hardened; Especially when we hear his voice. "**Therefore, harden your mind, not your heart, and soften your heart, but never your mind.**"

Remember as well that it is Jesus alone, who sets, maintains and totally governs the spiritual warfare **Rules of Engagement**, for you, me and Satan himself to abide by. Jesus establishes everything that the devil is allowed to do against any of us—he sets the limits and the boundaries over all conflicts in life. That's what Jesus does—in response, here once again as a reminder, is what we do:

**2 Cor. 10:4-5 – The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (NIV)**

Renewing your mind is not an event, like salvation...it is a process—a rigorous, daily habit you develop and activate at the beginning of every day. You intentionally weaponize humility and patience, preparing your mind-set to launch yourself into the day. Refuse to start your day until you've done this, and done this as effectively as you possibly can. Otherwise, you enter the conflict with just your feelings and your intellect, and, if that's all you bring to the fight, Satan will eat you for lunch.

3. **Replace Bad Habits and Spiritual Strongholds with Good ones.** Every habit you have, both good and bad, started out as a thought, or a series of thoughts. The images of the swinging pendulum and the two gates a few pages back are designed to produce good and godly spiritual thought patterns and powerful strongholds within your mind.

Those formidable strongholds will eventually result in you forming good habits that contribute to your new, abundant and constructive lifestyle. You can't eliminate bad habits from within your mind completely, but, you can absolutely replace every one of them with good ones.

In addition, the whole process with these 3 tactics only takes a few seconds to complete, after you commit them to memory and practice recalling them. Further, remember these profound and pragmatic words from coach Vince Lombardi, he famously said: "*Practice doesn't make perfect...Perfect practice makes perfect.*"

## GOOD AND EVIL AT WORK

Okay, in the context of contrasting choices and values, think of it this way... Beginning at a very fundamental level, there exists both God and Satan, both good and evil, at work within our lives. Further, in this context of good vs evil, life is experienced as a series of giving and taking – **God gives, and the Devil takes away.** It is extremely helpful and beneficial now to understand how this pragmatic life process of give and take is worked out in each of our lives, especially in the context of acquiring spiritual freedom for oneself. Study this next stuff very carefully... Remember again from earlier chapters, that God gives us abounding provision:

**2 Pet. 1:3 – His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (NIV)**

That abounding provision includes the knowledge of truth, as a part of God providing everything we need for life. In this particular case, truth is provided to us in the form of a **contrast** once again, and here it is:

**John 10:10** – (Jesus speaking) *The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows). (AMP)*

The contrast of this principle of truth is very clear...

1. God provides us everything we may need for life, in abundance.
2. The devil comes to steal every good thing that God has given us.

That is, if he can – however, **that can only happen, if we let him**. This series of giving and taking goes on daily, moment by moment, throughout our entire lifetime. The process sets up a conflict of spiritual warfare within our minds and it begins in this scripture from Genesis that I repeat here from earlier sessions, but, with some added perspective from the Amplified Bible:

**Gen. 1:28** – *And God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue It \*\* (using all its vast resources in the service of God and man); and have dominion \*\* over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves upon the earth. (AMP)*

\*\* – *This would involve the members of your body, including your own mind....*

And so, the devil goes to work to take this God given mandate away from mankind. First, he comes to simply **distract** us....

To get our attention off of God. He continues using his evil ways to beguile, deceive and corrupt every one of us, if he can, that is... **if we let him**. He does not want us to exercise our dominion.

Next, if he is successful in distracting us, he steals our **effectiveness** so that we are unable, or unwilling, to fulfill our mandate to subdue and exercise that dominion that God has mandated for us. The devil knows that if he can successfully distract us and simply just make us **ineffective** spiritually, he has accomplished upwards of 80% or more of fulfilling this following scripture: “*The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy,*” as documented just previously in John 10:10.

God gives us a gift or a mission – Satan comes to steal it and take it away from us... Whatever it is. This process is repeated over and over again and documented throughout the entire bible. More examples of God’s giving to us:

**James 1:17** – *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (NIV)*

**Eph. 2:8** – *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (NIV)*

Here it is again; God gives us salvation; a new life—he gives us the ability to understand and then believe his word thereby imparting initial and saving faith in our hearts at the time of our salvation and also throughout our sanctification.

And for all mankind who hear God’s word in their hearts, the devil comes to take it away that they may be prevented from believing:

**Luke 8:12** – *Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. (NIV)*

Why is Satan so adamant against God's word? Because the devil knows that a single Christian who chooses to believe God, and to fear and tremble at his word, and to exercise faith, will become a serious threat to hell and a blessing to heaven.

Sounds so simple doesn't it...? **Yet, it really is just that simple.** Profound isn't it?

And so, on and on it goes—producing sometimes horrendous levels of stress, conflict and spiritual warfare within our minds, very often resulting in bad habits, heinous addictions and besetting sins. Good and evil at work in your thoughts, in your choices—in your lifestyle.

However, the bible also establishes a way to successfully navigate this enigma of life through an absolute axiom of truth, documented in this and other related scriptures—hold on to this one—load it deep into your brain, for it truly is the bedrock of your soul and your spiritual foundation. If you have read the bible in its entirety, you can say this: *I've read the back of the book, and it says, We-Win..!*

*1 John 4:4 – You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater<sup>3</sup> than the one who is in the world. (NIV)*

Okay, we explored the consequences of lifestyles and behavior in the last session. We've continued exploring choices we are all confronted with in this session; especially contrasting choices we all have to deal with as we navigate life.

Let's expand that some more in this next section:

### **You Will Fight Most... FOR WHAT YOU VALUE MOST**

The details and specifics of the “**how to do this**” gift from God is wrapped up in acquiring two very strategic and powerful tactics that we have gone over multiple times in this book, which I repeat here deliberately on purpose for emphasis:

1. Increasing the “**Unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Jesus**”
2. Consistently seeking and acquiring his “**Attitude**”

*Col. 2:2 – and, attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself... (NASB)*

*Phil. 2:5 – Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus... (NASB)*

What's attitude got to do with it? I've been going over attitude quite a bit. Here's another good reason why I've been doing that. There is an old American adage that was taught to me years ago that serves as an apt example of putting this truth into action; putting your attitude on display; goes like this:

***T**here is only one reason that organized crime networks do not easily operate within the FBI main headquarters in America... That reason.....*

***T**he FBI leadership **WILL NOT LET THEM...!!!***

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<sup>3</sup> Recall the first FRP Key Principle previously documented in chapter one of my book, and session one of my action-plan, entitled Challenge: “*You must first acquire, and then apply, sufficient power and force that is demonstrably stronger than whatever it is you are trying to overcome.*”

The very same thing holds true regarding you letting the devil and/or wicked thoughts operate within your own mind. Jesus absolutely never allowed this in his mind—nor should you.

Develop therefore, that same mind set and attitude. Determine to no longer allow evil that access.... *Take Dominion.... Subdue Your Brain.... Put your attitude on display!*

## PARABLE OF THE STOLEN CAR

How about this—another related example from normal, everyday life that I have named, ***The Parable of the Stolen Car***. Imagine yourself at rest in your home and you notice a car thief trying to get into and steal your car parked outside... *What would you do?*

The difference in your response to the devil sending a thief to steal your car, compared to *the devil personally stealing some of your spiritual faith and effectiveness*, has everything to do with how and where you place your values in life. ***What do you value and why? Ever think about that?*** I'll come back to this parable of the stolen car in a few pages, but first, let's look at your values a little more.

The bible is replete with examples of how and where to place your values—of what should be highly valuable and precious to you—of those things in your life that you would definitely CHOOSE TO FIGHT FOR...

The most precious and valuable gift that you can receive from God, or anybody else for that matter, by far, by leaps and bounds, is the unsearchable riches of the knowledge of Jesus, and, how you put that knowledge into effective action within your life. It's documented throughout the bible and this FRP. That knowledge of Jesus becomes the ***compass*** of your very life.

So, I encourage each of you to do some more ***critical-thinking*** about this, and apply sufficient logic and reason to ***place a value upon your desire*** to acquire a constructive, and higher performance lifestyle. What really matters is to establish how personally ***valuable*** you believe it will be, if and when you actually do acquire, and begin to experience, living out this abundant, constructive and high-performance lifestyle. ***Put a value on it.*** What would this really mean to you? How valuable is it, especially compared to other life goals you may have? Think this through—how bad do you really want this?

This process of taking the time to accurately assess and evaluate your thoughts and feelings about acquiring this kind of very desirable lifestyle for yourself, if done correctly, will assist you mightily to develop and establish that effective ***attitude***—which you must consider essential, and not optional.

You know by now that this attitude is not acquired as a one-time event... No, no... you will find yourself seeking to acquire, and then maintain, this attitude of Christ, often times on a ***daily basis***—sometimes over & over. You'll need to invest a lot of time getting to know Jesus and relating to him—and, you'll need to know the reason why, because it is going to cost you something.

This endeavor is not always easy, and, in fact, sometimes very elusive and difficult to attain. Some days you will roar...! Other days you will strike out and fail miserably. However, as you learn to effectively acquire and put this attitude of Christ in operation within your life, you will increasingly come to value it very highly.

At some point, if you do this effectively, it can exceed the value of every other experience you hold dear in your life. This acquired attitude is one of the ***unsearchable riches*** you will come to value and cherish as your knowledge of Jesus increases.

When done correctly, you will indeed **FIGHT** to maintain this attitude and you will resist the devil every time he comes to try and take it away from you. In addition, the riches that come to you through the increased knowledge of Jesus are acquired not by sight, touch or feel, but only by faith. So, you will not “see” the devil when he comes to steal your faith or other spiritual gift that God has given you, like you see a thief stealing your car, but you can learn to become incredibly sensitive and aware within your spirit, whenever the devil comes **prowling around, seeking to devour you.** (*1 Pet. 5:8*).

Therefore, as you learn to grow into and experience your physical life, you learn to acquire and place a value upon, all of the things you want and need to support your lifestyle, right? You navigate your life by your human senses. If you see someone trying to get into and steal your car, you will be highly motivated to respond, probably in immediate fashion, to stop that thief from stealing your car. **Your response will be directly contingent upon the value** you have placed on that car.

If it doesn’t mean much to you... if you place little value on it... then, most likely, you may not try to stop the thief from stealing it; especially, if you think the thief might just punch you out! On the other hand, if you place a significant and high value on it, you may even risk your life resisting, opposing and trying to stop the thief from stealing what belongs to you. You will take **dominion** over, and you will **subdue** that sucker...! Isn’t that right?

In contrast, but also somewhat similar, as you learn to grow into and experience your **spiritual life**, you will also learn to acquire and place a value upon, all of the things you want and need to support your spiritual lifestyle. You navigate your spiritual life at times, by your human senses, but mostly by your faith in Jesus, by your prayer life, which in turn is also contingent upon your knowledge of him. If you sense an impending spiritual warfare threat or attack, you will be highly motivated to respond also, but in direct proportion to the sensitivity and relative strength **of your faith.**

You may not feel or see, or even be physically aware that some spiritual event may be coming your way, but when your faith is sufficiently strong, you will connect with God and know what to do—you’ll know how to respond. Jesus will make sure of that—He always has your back.

He is always faithful to you, even when you are not to him. In fact, the bible documents that—***His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart*** so that ***You will not fear*** (*Ps. 91:4*).

With that spiritual sensitivity in mind, you might wake up some morning and sense that you just do not “feel” like spending time with God in prayer and devotion, or you find yourself becoming “easily bothered or even angered” by something that would normally not affect you very much, or you experience other similar outlooks—*don’t blow this off—pay attention.*

When something along those lines happen, you need to consider that those feelings and bad attitudes **may not be coincidental at all, but may very well be the devil intentionally at work trying to steal some good gifts that God intends for you to have and use.** Good gifts from God, like peace and joy, that he intends for you to put into operation that day or week to make your life more effective and rewarding.

Good gifts, like progressing in your efforts to acquire that attitude that is in Christ Jesus, thereby providing you power to overcome these spiritual warfare attacks that you cannot obtain anywhere else. Check the following scripture out:

***1 Pet. 5:8 – Be serious! Be alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. (HCSB)***

***HE’S LOOKING FOR YOU....!!!***

Remember that one? Further, as you grow and mature *spiritually*, what you learn to value becomes more distant from your human senses and much closer to your spiritual faith in God through Christ. The bible states that even your good name, your reputation, the integrity of your moral character is **to be valued much higher** than things you acquire in your physical life, even precious possessions like silver and gold:

**Prov. 22:1 – A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. (NASB)**

Okay, I trust that by now a fairly clear mandate is being developed within each of you studying this program, to focus your attention on what has been documented in these last few and forthcoming pages—even if you have lost a myriad of spiritual battles in the past resulting in significant hammering of your faith, esteem, or even dignity, in addition to losing financial assets like income, savings, your house, your car, etc.

**Be encouraged...** The bible tells us that God is able to “*Make-Up what the Locust has eaten.*”

*Check this scripture out:*

**Joel 2:25-26 – And I will restore or replace for you the years that the locust has eaten... And you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord, your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. (AMP)**

So, don’t let yourself think that your case is just too bleak—that God can never make up what you had before; that life can never be the same—REFUSE TO THINK LIKE THAT. It just isn’t true—Here’s the truth: God really is able, and God can fulfill this scripture in you! He does it all the time. **Just give him something to work with—get this thing started.** Take that next step to change. Just decide, and then commit, and then, DO IT...! Seek Jesus with a newly applied diligence and ask him to restore or replace the tenacious zeal and motivation that you may have had before, and that you certainly need right now. He’s likely speaking to you right now—are you listening?

## SPIRITUAL WEAPONS - BE SINCERE - BE AUTHENTIC

Further, with some of you reading this book who know Jesus to a certain extent and have walked with him for a longer period of time, my research involving many case histories reveal a very profound confirmation of some words that Jesus spoke from the book of Revelation. Jesus is not talking about, or looking for *lip-service* here—no, **he is wanting to see some evidence from you.**

And, like the prodigal son, Jesus and your heavenly Father are tenderly calling out to you, saying, "**Come Home my son, my daughter... I really miss you..."**

**Rev. 2:4-5 “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.” (NIV)**

**Simple, true and very profound...** For some of you, these few paragraphs, and this scripture spoken by Jesus himself, is really **ALL YOU NEED TO HEAR.** You know very well, deep down in your soul, the Holy Spirit of God is speaking to you—beckoning you to just **come home.**

Therefore, today if you indeed **hear his voice**, refuse to harden your heart and do pay heed and follow after what he is saying to you. Jesus is calling you back to renew that first time you fell in love with him. He wants that love from you kindled again but, **in the form of sincere, authentic evidence**, beginning with a changed heart that you seek from him with significant diligence and sincere desire. For many of you who are experiencing a besetting sin of some kind, you have hardened your heart and caused your first love of Jesus to grow cold and ineffective.

You've just stopped caring so much about life, like you used to. You know so very well if that is true in your life... and, so does Jesus—he knows. The remedy is just as simple, true and profound as it always has been: **Humble yourself and repent** and begin doing the things with Jesus that you did at first... demonstrating your love of God through your relationship with Jesus.

Do those things again faithfully, with diligence, and God will also show up again faithfully to reward you—pressed down, shaken together, running over, with more than you can think, ask or imagine...

A blessing that you can hardly contain. That's what this law of giving in the bible records: **Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap.**" (Luke 6:38-NIV). In this case meaning that you give the best of your life and your love to Jesus.

I have been made aware of many, many people, over the years that I have been researching for this FRP, both inside and outside of the Church, who have experienced what they consider to be an absolutely devastating and even un-recoverable sense of ever being able to attain an authentic lifestyle of freedom. Some think it now to be impossible for them.

They have literally tried and failed miserably so many times. That specific inspiration they need to gather themselves up and prepare their minds for action again, even **just one more time**, seems so far out of reach for them. So, refuse to let that happen to you. Refuse to despair...

*Let these words encourage you:*

*Prov. 24:16 – for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again... (NIV)*

*Luke 18:1 – Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (NIV)*

*Gal. 6:9 – Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (NIV)*

Rather, let God, by his Holy Spirit encourage you through these scriptures. They are the Word of God; therefore, they are absolutely and empirically true for every Christian, but especially now for you, at your point of need. Further, consider, study, believe and adopt for yourself the following axiom of truth also from God's word to be applied directly to you and all of your current circumstances:

*Phil. 1:6 – And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ (right up to the time of His return), developing (that good work) and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you. (AMP)*

No matter what your circumstance, no matter how many years, or even decades you have been afflicted and held fast in bondage to this sin; NO MATTER WHAT... God has not given up on you and definitely does not want you to give up on yourself, on him or his word. He has made a way for you. He really has. Therefore, settle this in your mind and commit or re-commit to acquiring the faith you need to give this freedom thing another shot.... But this time, a different shot, a more viable and even a certain shot. **YOU CAN DO THIS...**

Okay, remember the **Parable of the Stolen Car?** Think and respond in like manner as if someone is trying to steal your **highly valuable** car. Your Mercedes, your Corvette, your whatever. You know if that was happening, you would go out and try to stop that thief with everything you have. You would DISPLAY STRENGTH... you would TAKE ACTION... because that is what the people who know their God are taught and trained to do by the Holy Spirit, as he shows you how to "Overcome the World" (John 4:4) by making you "*More Than A Conqueror*" (Rom. 8:37) through him who loves you.

Truth is, for many of you at this point, it's relatively easy for the devil to steal away your zeal for God, and to dull your faith. He has his boot on your neck! So, a strategic and formidable key to winning this spiritual warfare battle is to be objective and more pragmatic in your thinking and assessment.

When you first become aware that your desire for God, and those things in your life that you highly value become weak, don't go there. Refuse to accept your identity as being a victim. That's what the devil wants you to believe—an absolute lie for any Christian. You are definitely not a victim! Your identity is in Christ, and, you remember what you just read in the last paragraph:

Jesus is making you to be – ***More than a Conqueror in Him.***

May not feel like it right now, but, nonetheless, it is absolutely true. So then, simply do what I encouraged you to do just a couple of pages ago—pray and ask God to restore and replace that desire and zeal that has been ripped off, and take that very same action each and every time you become aware that your faith is not sufficient. CHALLENGE IT—doesn't really matter what caused you to experience a loss like that. Just ***display strength and take action and get it back.*** This give and take struggle is a part of spiritual warfare, and it can occur at any time, several times a week or even several times a day.

The devil is very motivated to keep his boot on your neck, to keep you from being effective in God's kingdom and he will keep trying to steal every good gift that God has given you, especially your desire to know, follow and obey Jesus. But, at some point in this struggle, the following situation will begin to happen:

***James 4:7-8 – Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. (NIV)***

Your desire to draw closer to God, like the strength of your faith, is closely linked to the condition of your heart. When God sees that you are sincerely inclining and opening your heart to draw closer to him, He will act on your behalf and will begin frustrating the devils' strategy to plunder you of every good thing God has given you.

However, before you take any action resisting the devil, remember first to submit yourself to God effectively. That's when ***God can enable you to effectively resist the devil***—Satan and his minions will have to flee from you.

This scripture is absolutely true, and it has been experienced not only by myself, many times, but by a vast multitude of God's people down through the ages; especially those who have been under siege to some addiction and besetting sin. It is pragmatic and Jesus wants you to know and experience how he makes this scripture come alive within you.

*It often happens like this:*

At some point in time, and, in some cases, perhaps a lot of time, you will realize and experience that you have crossed that ***amazing threshold*** whereby your desire for that comfortable, besetting sin you've grown so used to, clearly begins to fall away, and your desire for Jesus begins to definitely increase.

**What a day that will be for you...!** The truth of this scripture will be validated in your life because you believed this word to be true and you have consistently displayed strength and have acted to prove it. And, here's how that begins: ***You decide*** whether or not you will surrender your will to God by choosing to humble yourself and wait upon the Lord whenever temptation comes your way.

When you consistently choose that action, you will begin to experience winning more spiritual battles than you lose. When that process begins to grip you, and it really will happen if you just simply **refuse to give up**—you refuse to fold your tent and lay down your sword like you used to do when tempted. At that point, you will cross the threshold—that line in the sand—that new border you have set up, and you will successfully resist the devil, and guess what?

**The devil will have to flee from you.** He simply has no choice.

The choice and the action of this process is initiated and controlled by you... The timing and the power of this process is determined and controlled by Jesus, remembering here, once again, that “*apart from Jesus, you can do nothing.*”

So, once more, this scripture from James 4:7 reveals a two-part spiritual warfare tactic that God has provided, and I remind you of, to consider, to think and reason about, to believe and understand, to adopt for yourself, and finally, to put it into operation by displaying strength and taking action. Sometimes focusing your attention and action on one, sometimes the other, and sometimes on both at the same time. Jesus will always lead you and point the way.

## SEEK CHRIST – BEFORE A CRISIS DEVELOPS

Throughout the many years of researching this FRP, I sought out an answer to this common question of almost everyone who was being hammered by, or heavily influenced by, some kind of debilitating sin or addiction:

*What is it that caused you to finally challenge yourself to humble out and repent of your besetting sin, addiction, or almost addiction?*

Great question isn’t it? The vast majority said – ***it was a crisis*** – of some kind. They believed God’s word, that a crisis would result if they failed to repent, either sooner, or later—they knew they were pushing their luck, and that it was coming, that it would really happen—that it was inevitable. They knew that made them extremely vulnerable.

Therefore, this session and my books have been written with a primary mission of documenting to any Christian, exactly how that crisis can be effectively, and successfully, averted. That primary mission will require a Christian to effectively **CONFRONT** and **OVERCOME**, whatever is causing the lead-up to that crisis.

***So, why do so many Christians put-off and delay this confrontation?***

Why? Sadly, here’s the answer: A large number of Christians simply become *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. You’ve heard this before in previous sections. The struggles of life cause them to *harden their hearts*, and, as a result of that, many end up *forsaking their first love of God (Rev. 2:4)*. Turns out that loving sinful pleasure is easy—and, loving God can be really hard. The bible says it like it is—sometimes, very bluntly. I paraphrase what Jesus said here from John 14:15:

***If you love me, you will obey what I command – If you don’t, you won’t***

Stings again, doesn’t it? God’s word, and his truth, cuts through every excuse we may declare, and lays bare the true condition of our hearts. Your obedience is always conditioned by your faith in, and your love of, Jesus. I’ve endeavored to document the many answers to this question of confronting evil and wickedness in your life throughout every chapter of my book and every session of this action-plan.

Truth is, the dominant cause comes from our own **selfishness**, and it is this attribute that causes so much grief, trouble and distress to come into our lives, that can and will, eventually, lead-up to a crisis, unless it is effectively confronted, subdued and corrected.

The bible informs us that, ***we all like sheep have gone astray*** – (*Is. 53:6*). We want our own way, our hearts can be exceedingly wicked, and this causes us to clash with God, and to outright rebel against him, his laws and his way of life more often than any of us would like to admit. Isn't that right? He knows the wickedness of the human heart, and that we all can be easily enticed to rebel against him and sin, at any time, throughout all the days of our life. He has also faithfully and truthfully revealed the consequences of our sin and rebellion throughout the pages of the bible. So, we are totally without excuse – (*Rom. 1:20*). *Isn't that Right? Do you agree?*

Therefore, apart from God's grace, the wages of our sin are always paid. However, in context with the veracity of his laws, God certainly does not want any of us to perish, but he wants all of us to come to repentance (*2 Pet. 3:9*). That's why he has warned us to ***guard our hearts*** and ***avoid the consequences of sin, in the first place***. He sent us a ***shepherd named Jesus***, to show each of us exactly how to get that done.

Jesus, as you all know, has come to give us life, and life more abundant that includes the spiritual freedom we all crave. He is determined to shepherd each of us into a lifestyle that is abundant, rewarding and enjoyable. In addition, he is equally determined to show us exactly how to ***avoid a crisis*** that will surely happen, at some point in our life, if we fail to develop a lifestyle that includes effective repentance, whenever warranted.

Therefore, God is appealing to you here, in this program, and throughout the bible, to exercise wisdom, logic and sound reasoning to believe and adopt the fact that a crisis of some kind will surely be coming your way if you fail to heed his many compassionate warnings. *Remember this:*

***Rev. 3:20 – Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (NIV)***

Even though the Lord is speaking here to the 7 churches in Revelation, he also makes this offer personally to you, every day of your life. He certainly wants you to open that door, but further, *he wants you to keep it open throughout the entire day*. Anytime, and every time that you commit, a consistent, besetting sin, you are effectively slamming that door shut in his face. Jesus does not want you to do that anymore. He wants you to learn how to effectively avert a crisis that will always show up, at some point, with any expression of consistent sin in your life.

So, I encourage you to remember, and consider the parable of the Prodigal Son, as recorded in Luke 15: 11 thru 32, but take particular note from this scripture in the middle of the story:

***Luke 15:17 – When he came to his senses....***

Now, prior to coming to his senses, the prodigal had squandered all the riches from his inheritance on wild living. Who knows how long that took?

However, after having done that, ***a significant crisis came upon him*** when he could no longer finance that kind of rebellious lifestyle, and, he found himself out of bucks and out of spiritual gas. Fortunately for him, and also for each of us who fall into the same category, this is the message of repentance that the Holy Spirit of God put into his mind...

*Check it out:*

***Luke 15:18 – I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you... (NIV)***

So, when you come to your senses after riding the Yo-Yo for a while, you confess your sin and repent of it, then, by the grace of God, Jesus will open that door again to you, over and over, throughout the rest of your entire life, if that is what it takes for him to get through to you. He really is that good and loving, and his Gospel really is that powerful and strong—his love never fails.

Some of you have been riding that Yo-Yo for over a decade. You've been running from God, or, you have simply given up on trying to run the race anymore that God has marked out for you (*Heb. 12:1*).

That begs another question for you to consider. Are you getting tired of this destructive lifestyle yet? Are you ready to come back home to Abba Father now, or, will you wait for that crisis, or another crisis, to come upon you?

Always remember, you have this choice to confront your besetting sin issue(s) right now, or, like so many other Christians, you can choose to procrastinate and delay the inevitable until that crisis shows up.

However, the difference is, **at that time**, you will then be **FORCED** to deal with it.

At that time, the choice you have now will be gone. God clearly is saying to you, don't wait for that to happen. Jesus has given you freedom to make that choice, so, save yourself a lot of grief, and determine to make that choice soon. That's why the bible declares – ***Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*** God does not want that crisis coming upon you.

Remember as well, from many previous sections of this FRP, that *God has intentionally designed life to be hard*. He wants it that way because he knows when we struggle with it, *that very struggle will make us stronger*.

God makes it clear that even though the normal life experience for every Christian will be hard at times, God also makes it clear for any Christian, who gets trapped into yielding themselves to some kind of consistent sin, their lives will be exponentially way more difficult and even **harder**. So, it is consistent sin in your life that becomes the difficult taskmaster, not God.

In addition, God will not violate your free will. So, remember again, the longer you wait to display strength and take effective action to get yourself free, the more entrenched besetting sins and addictions become. It will be way easier to confront the issue(s) now, rather than next week, or next month, or year, or decade! Remember this well-known axiom as well, from a previous section:

*"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for **good men to do nothing.**"*

*I remind you – **Complacency is a deadly enemy...!***

Okay, enough said. Next, I want to close out this session with a challenge to those of you not currently experiencing a debilitating crisis in your spiritual life.

A major intent of this session has been to make all of you very aware of the struggle that God has deliberately designed into navigating life. Especially through the myriad of contrasting choices we, as Christians, must contend with on a daily basis. This struggle of life can often lead to a crisis, and, sometimes that crisis even comes by way of God himself. Remember, when God finds a weakness in something, or someone, he shakes it.

He wants to ensure that we are made aware of any weakness within our spiritual health and well-being, especially our faith.

***He does that on purpose – so, we can get it fixed...***

Therefore, the challenge is to begin thinking and planning the rest of your life to develop more of a *long-term view of life—the Gods' eye view of life*—rather than a very limited, short-term view.

## WALKING IN AND BY THE SPIRIT

To actually adopt this longer-term attitude and point-of-view, and put it into operation within your life, will require that you earnestly advance your spiritual life skills learning to walk-in-and-by-the-spirit, way more effectively than you do now. Consider this:

One of the first things we learn in life just after we are born, is to walk with our bodies on a weak little pair of legs that do not know what to do, where to go, or how to get there. We soon discover that those weak little legs have to go through an arduous training process, and be put into consistent operation, requiring a lot of patience and practice. We fall down, we hit the floor, we bounce our heads off tables & walls, causing bumps & bruises, and, as a consequence, we experience significant pain at times.

This process of learning to walk with our bodies goes on for at least several months, and for some of us, can take a couple of years. But, at some point, we work through all the difficulties, and pass a threshold where walking actually becomes effortless—we no longer have to even think about how to walk—we just do it. And, so it is, with sometimes amazing similarity – learning to walk in and by the Spirit. This is where your initial experience of spiritual freedom advances to the pinnacle of living life to the highest and most rewarding fulfillment possible.

**Gal. 5:16-17 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (NIV)**

Irrespective of how old you are, or how complicated your current life might be, you need to develop and establish for yourself, through Jesus, **a powerful juggernaut of a spiritual foundation** that truly will fulfill what Jesus said, concerning hearing and obeying his word in Matt. 7:24-27—however, you will first need to fulfill Gods' word to you here in Galatians 5:16-17, in order to do that. Just like in your physical life, **you must learn to walk, before you can run.**

The bible is teaching and admonishing us to abide in Christ, with his word richly abiding in us, and then learn to walk in and by the spirit, in such a way that we will not carry out the evil desires that can well up from within our own hearts and minds. This process can take years and even decades for some of us—I'm not exaggerating here—there are many case histories of wonderful men and women believers who have literally walked with God for decades, but, who have not yet mastered walking-in-the-spirit with confidence and stability—they're still learning – That's a fact, so, be very patient with yourself and with your God...

Take the long-view thinking about how absolutely wonderful you will feel knowing that you just fulfilled Matthew 7:24-27, and that door Christ has opened up to you at the beginning of your day is still wide open. Think and ponder a while on that, knowing that you have just averted another ride on the Yo-Yo, and have also made the face of Jesus smile and shine upon you.

## ATTITUDE – IT'S A FORMIDABLE MIND-SET

Let me close with this... Remember back in Genesis 3:1 when the devil challenged and tested Eve with the statement, *Hath God said?*

He tried that with Jesus in the desert and failed miserably every time. You can just picture Jesus getting in the devils face with an attitude stating, “*Yes Satan, God hath said.... and,*

***It Is Written...!***

The evidence from numerous passages of scripture inform us that Jesus developed, displayed and maintained a resolute attitude and used it again and again whenever his Father's will and his mission was being challenged. Take a good look at this one:

*Matt. 16:18 – (Jesus speaking) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. (NRSV)*

Jesus has a message here, once again, that he also wants you to hear—this same scripture reference from Matthew can be paraphrased to read:

***I will build you, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against you...***

So, what do you think? Can you believe that Jesus is focusing this paraphrase right at you? Do you think that Jesus is vested with determination for your attitude to be like his..? **Have this same attitude in you that was also in Christ Jesus.**

Perhaps the best, or one of the most applicable books of all that I researched on this subject of attitude was written by pioneering psychologist Angela Duckworth. That book she authored is entitled, "**Grit**."<sup>4</sup>

Her extensive research in the clinical fields of behavior psychology and her subsequent hypothesis that what really drives achievement is not genius, talent or advanced education, but a special blend of passion and long-term perseverance. She coined the term, **GRIT**. She also researched numerous men and women leaders within the business world, education, sports and related vocations and discovered the identical and dominant trait that identified their success was also **GRIT**—way more than anything else that they could attribute to their success. That kind of grit is what the apostle Paul is documenting here in Heb. 12:1, that I refer to over and over again throughout this program. Here it is again:

*Heb. 12:1 – Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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)*

\*\* Dogged Determination

Stubborn Endurance

**GRIT** – “There’s no quit in him” – “He refuses to buckle”

That’s the measure of Christ’s attitude, but on steroids, at an exponentially higher level than any of us can ever attain—so, in that context, and more to the point, Jesus is determined to develop and build a similar attitude in you—ready for that? Are you jazzed about it? Will you cooperate—will you follow him? Will you develop an attitude and sufficient faith to obey him more consistently than you do now?

Work the concept of why GRIT is needed into this session—the best example is found in Heb. 12:1 – Run with PERSEVERENCE the race marked out for us. In addition, this attitude of Christ that we call GRIT, is almost always developed through trial and error in navigating normal, ordinary life stuff—mostly error. A Christians’ repeated failure to develop and produce sufficient spiritual discipline, godly wisdom and resolve when life delivers hardship represents the essential fertilizer that GRIT is made of.

Christ had it in spades, still does, and always will—further, it turns out that GRIT is as essential for you and me to acquire and sustain an abundant lifestyle of freedom, as it was for Christ when he was walking the Earth, setting all this up for us—essential, not optional... **Got it?**

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<sup>4</sup> “*Grit*” – Publisher: Simon & Schuster; New York, 2016

Life is hard—really hard and difficult at times, because God designed it that way—it's supposed to be hard. It's that very struggle in life that every one of us are challenged by from time to time—God uses these cycles and seasons of struggle in life to develop, hone and perfect that spiritual GRIT in us. He does it to make us stronger. That's what he did in Christ by his Spirit and that's what he does in each of us. You want authentic biblical freedom to be developed and sustained in your life—okay then, you need to acquire GRIT—you were not born with it, but Jesus has a full load of it ready to build into you. It is absolutely essential in your pursuit of spiritual freedom. When you get enough of it and use it effectively, you'll be fulfilling this command of Christ:

| *Phil. 2:5 – Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

## Further—In Case of Emergencies..... Use your “Spiritual Fire Extinguisher”

1. **Do This:** After applying all that you can from your new Life-Action-Plan, should you find that your spiritual strength is just not sufficient to resist that nemesis of sin—to put out the fire of temptation, burning within you... Do what Joseph did when the devil attacked him through Potiphar's wife... **“BOLT – Get the hell out of there”**
2. **Or This:** Immediately fix your attention on Jesus, and the presence of his Holy Spirit... You'll need some help—one of the most effective methods of doing that consistently, is to set apart several sections of this book, to be used **“In case of spiritual warfare emergencies.”** Here's what I mean—As you read through, and study the pages of this book, you'll encounter sections of 3 or more pages at a time, where you sense the presence of God, to be very close at hand. When that happens to you, mark the beginning page for each of those particular sections. There will be many. Know where each of these sections start, so you can quickly turn, and begin prayerfully to read through that section. Do this at any time you find yourself really struggling to resist the **“sin that so easily entangles you.”** Here's why:

*2 Cor. 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (NIV)*

This is the irrefutable word of God—said another way, **“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there can be NO SIN present.”** That's the place you want to be whenever you find yourself under horrific temptation to sin in some way. Do what Jesus did in the desert when the devil tempted him to sin...He cited the word of God, saying: **“IT IS WRITTEN.”** The Spirit of the Lord showed up—the devil had to flee... He had no choice.

Want more proof? Christian counselors, therapists, and psychologists who specialize in treating addiction, cite and use the following fact about the inner workings of the human brain. Almost all temptations to sin, **have a finite time frame of intensity.** That's some very strategic, and some very good news—especially for a believer struggling to fend off a barrage of temptation coming their way.

Here's why—It has been scientifically, and clinically proven, that the intensity, and the ferocity, of most temptations begin to dissipate significantly after a time frame of 2 to 5 minutes.

So, knowing this, the wise believer being besieged by an intensive bout of temptation, can apply this ***spiritual fire extinguisher—by reading a key section of my book***, to quench that fire. That's how it works...

*So, hang in there—wait it out—it will blow away....*

However, be forewarned—these 2 tactics should not be used in an impulsive way. So, ***be sure to plan your way into this***, in advance. Forebear with yourself by making this decision, to take this action, well in advance of the spiritual attack—know that this is the action you have predetermined to take in the event of a spiritual warfare emergency. Write it down as a part of your freedom strategy and life action plan— ***make these 2 tactics to be your “spiritual fire insurance policy.”***

And, always remember this about Gods' grace... If and when you experience a “*clash of wills*” between you and God, and, for whatever reason, you determine that you either cannot, or will not, submit yourself to God that day, well then... You will likely end up jumping on the Yo-Yo again for another ride – And, you know that drill by now.

Then again, for every day that you are enabled and empowered by the grace of God to faithfully ***bear much fruit***, you can expect God to reward you with that ***well done witness of good work—you'll be rejoicing***... So, every time that happens, you should receive his supernatural favor and blessing, give him abundant praise, and then, do it again tomorrow and the next day, and the day after that, and every day thereafter... ***Hallelujah...!***

## SUMMARY

My clear intent, hope and prayers for all of you engaging in this freedom renewed program of mine, is to put each of you on the right path that will indeed lead you to begin experiencing that freedom through grace, that only Jesus and the inimitable power of his Gospel can provide you.

I encourage you therefore, to take and apply what I've written in these five chapters, to begin building, or, re-building that spiritual foundation of yours, employing a tenacious and formidable attitude, just like Jesus—to get that done.

Always remember that—for a Christian, the following scripture is the benchmark milestone describing believers who are effectively learning how to walk in and by the Spirit:

| ***Dan. 11:32 – the people who know their God will display strength and take action. (NASB)***

My further hope and prayers for all of you is to continue on this path, learning to hone and perfect your ability to walk in and by the Spirit, through both of my books, ***Freedom Through Grace***, available now on Amazon, and ***Freedom Through Obedience***, when it becomes available in print.

In closing, you have my abundant gratitude for investing some of your very valuable time, faith and grit pouring over these words of mine, on this rewarding journey with Jesus, the lover of your soul. Now I thank you, and bid you...

***Godspeed My Friend...***