

Week 2 : Having a Strong Foundation

WEEK 2: DAY 1

A Strong Foundation

God wants His instructions to be clear, so scripture often includes examples and comparisons that people can easily understand. In Matthew 7:24 – 27, Jesus tells the parable of the two builders: one man who built his house upon rock and another who built on sand. Eventually *“the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house...”* and, as expected, the house on rock remained while the house on sand fell. Jesus had been teaching many things to His followers over time, and Matthew 7:24 reveals His point: *“Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”*

We always have a choice to follow the path of *wisdom*, or the path of *folly*. There is no third alternative. One path leads to success, the other to failure. For example, many years ago, I was a land developer who built industrial parks, shopping centers and storage facilities. A piece of property was purchased for the construction of an office building, based on a cost analysis that looked profitable. But when the architect finished the plans, the foundation was much larger than expected, adding additional expenses. The foundation footings required were seven foot in diameter and used four times the usual amount of steel!

When questioned, the architect explained that about 30 feet under the crust of this land was a fault line resulting in a level of mud. In his expert opinion, the only way to build safely required a massive foundation to support the building. By this time in my career, I had completed various projects representing more than 3,000,000 square feet of construction, and I could have chosen to follow my own experience rather than the architect’s advice. Imagine what would have happened, however, if I had taken those plans and decided to build according to my past experience.

If I chose to shrink the foundation to what I thought would be adequate, the problems would have been devastating. As storms and earthquakes hit, the foundation would have cracked. The deterioration would go like this: the slab would eventually break, and cracks begin to appear in the windows, then the door jambs would get to the point where the doors did not close, and the staircase would begin cracking, and the elevator shaft would not line up. Eventually, the building would be condemned as unsafe because of the inadequate foundation and resulting damage.

Obviously, I would have been foolish to ignore the architect for any reason, be it greed, pride or even

putting faith in my past experience. To follow anything but the architect's plan for a strong foundation would have resulted in disaster and greater loss. And so it is for us as believers when we are ignorant of, or ignore the instruction of God and do not follow them. It is not enough for us to be "**hearers**", but we must be "**doers**" if we are to build a strong foundation for our life (James 1:22). It is always *foolish* for us to question or ignore the architect of our faith, Jesus Christ.

Scripture reveals information on God's design for a strong foundation that we need to study and follow, because a building is only as good as the foundation it stands on. Your life can look good for a while, but how strong are you really? The storms of trouble will eventually reveal the true nature of your foundation.

Priorities in Place

Jesus told us, "*But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matt. 6:33).

FACT FILE

Seek first – is a command to do and never stop. The promise is that if we do, "*all these things shall be added to you.*" When interpreting "all these things" you need to take into account that this sermon starts at 5:1, known as the Sermon on the Mount. The immediate context (v 31) speaks of food, drink and clothing, if Christ will take care of those needs if we seek Him first, how much more will He give us all things to parent His children.

Seeking God and His kingdom is to be our priority as believers, and as such it is the foundation for life. Remember, as parents we also are ministers of God to our children, and face the added challenge of fulfilling His will in all things pertaining to family. We accomplish this by putting the issues of life in perspective, and by prioritizing our choices according to what God says is important. To truly fulfill God's purposes in and through us, we must look to Him *daily* for strength to accomplish this task.

We would all agree that it is important for a pastor to have a strong, intimate relationship with the Lord. We would expect him to get up every day and spend time studying and praying, seeking wisdom and guidance from God to lead his congregation and family. If he did not, we would question his dedication as we recognize the need for God's empowerment and direction in order to fulfill his responsibilities.

You can easily put those expectations on your pastor, but now consider yourself. If God looks upon ministering to your children with the same importance that he places on a pastor's relationship to his congregation, is it not just as urgent for you to seek God's face every day? Is it not necessary for you to build that strong foundation, that relationship with Christ where you get the strength and wisdom needed to lead

a family? Experience, and scripture, tells us all that if we do not read the Word and pray daily, the old sin nature begins to show up, bringing chaos and destruction into our lives.

When we look at families throughout the world, we can see that they are in trouble. Our kids are killing one another, abusing drugs, experimenting with sex, and many are walking away from the faith. “Somewhere between eighty and ninety percent of kids in America are abandoning their parents’ faith once they reach adulthood. At that tragic rate, the fifty million children who are growing up in church today would die out to fewer than *seven thousand* in only ten generations time. That’s sadly where current Christian families in America are headed without a radical change.”³

Christian counselors that see families experiencing major trials often find that the foundations for strong and enduring faith have been neglected. In many cases this is due to ignorance, parents acting from experience and worldly advice rather than Biblical truth. Because the parents have not been taught how to build this strong foundation in their own lives, the influence they should have on their children for good is weak at best, and at times actually turning their children away from God.

Intimacy with God

In Deuteronomy 6, Moses fulfilled God’s will by teaching the Israelites what was expected of them when they entered the Promised Land. Within these instructions, God reveals *His* heart regarding the close relationship He wants to have with us. This *intimate* relationship with God is the foundation, the strength of our faith, upon which we build.

Deuteronomy 6:1-6 *“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you—‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.”*

Verses three and four begin with, “*Hear, O Israel,*” to emphasize the importance of listening to God’s voice. Whenever that phrase appears, the message is, “Listen up!” God is really on our side; He wants us to

³ Stephen & Alex Kendrick with Randy Alcorn, *The Resolution for Men*, ed by Lawrence Kimbrough (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011), 115.

succeed. In these verses, the information was actually essential for Israel to survive as a nation. And what God said in Deuteronomy 6 is relevant to us today. These verses reveal truths that also are fundamental to our success as believers and ministers to our children.

In Deuteronomy 6:5, it says, “*Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*” **This means that you show your love for Him by *choosing* to have an intimate relationship with Him.** Spending time with Christ is a daily choice. Being closely acquainted, familiar and personal, and abiding in Him “*with all your heart, soul and strength*” means the involvement of your total being – body, soul, and spirit. We recognize that our spouse, our children need love from us and we have some idea of how to do that. God asks for individual attention, time, as you build a loving relationship with Him. In fact, God promises that if you put Him first, other relationships will also improve.

Verse six tells us God’s words must be first in our hearts. This means not only reading it regularly, but also obeying. To exemplify Christ and teach others, you must have intimate knowledge of God’s will. That, combined with dependence upon Christ’s wisdom and strength, is the foundation needed to fulfill the difficult responsibilities of guiding your children to Godly maturity. And your *daily* practice of devotion and communication with God is directly related to success.

FACT FILE

Heart: Hebrew *lebab*, meaning heart, mind, inner person. The primary usage of this word describes the entire disposition of the inner person.⁴ Greek *kardia*, is the seat of the desires, feelings, affections, passions, impulses, i.e., the heart or mind.⁵

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Describe in your own words what the following Scripture says about God’s Word and what we are to do with it?

Psalm 119:10-11 “*With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*”

4 Warren Baker, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 537.
5 Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament, electronic ed.* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

Read the following Scriptures and write out the main principles. What principles can you draw from this Scripture to be a better parent? List two ways you can do this.

Deuteronomy 32:46 *“and he said to them: ‘Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.’”:*

Deuteronomy 11:18-19 *“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”*

Deuteronomy 30:14 *“But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.”*

Psalms 37:31 *“The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide”.*

Psalms 40:8 *“I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.”*

Sadly, many people in the body of Christ have never been disciplined in the truth that intimacy with God (the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit) is proportionate to the amount of effort put into seeking Him. That requires time in His Word, praying and fellowshiping with other believers. The word “disciplined” indicates that one Christian (or several), perhaps more mature in the faith, has come alongside to help another develop intimacy with the Lord. Without a guide, the pathway can be difficult to follow. We may think, *How is it possible to develop a relationship with an invisible God?*

And many may also think, *I go to church on Sunday. I’m a Christian because I prayed the prayer of salvation. I remember the emotion of that decision. Haven’t I quit smoking and drinking and changed some of my bad habits? Is there something more?* Yes, there is.

 **SELF-EXAMINATION**

How have you been maintaining a daily relationship with God, in prayer and the reading of His Word?

 **ACTION PLAN**

After learning these principles, is confession and asking forgiveness needed? If so use the space below to write out your prayer and commitment to start each day with Him.

WEEK 2: DAY 2

Three Essential Ingredients

Luke 6:46-49 *But why do you call Me “Lord, Lord,” and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.*

Again we see the importance that Jesus put on having a strong foundation. In this passage, He breaks it down into three essential ingredients. *First*, He says “*whoever comes to Me,*” which indicates **where** we are to build. The Bible is clear that Jesus is our foundation, I Corinthians 3:11 reads: “*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*” There must be a time in life when you sought forgiveness for your sins and asked Jesus Christ to come into your life as Lord and Savior. Merely being born in America and/or attending a church does not make you a Christian. That requires a decision to repent from sin and turn the control of your life over to God, through Jesus Christ.

John 1:12 speaks of Jesus, “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*”

The *first* ingredient is receiving Jesus Christ.

Second, the passage in Luke says, “(whoever)... **hears** My sayings” which refers to the **tools** we use for building, God’s Word and prayer. You must decide to regularly spend time reading and meditating on God’s Word, really listening to what God is saying. Through God’s Word and prayer, we get to know Him and understand His love; and how to live correctly. Galatians 2:20 says, “*I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*”

The *second* ingredient is your daily relationship with Christ through reading and mediating on His Word and prayer.

The *third* ingredient essential to building a strong foundation involves follow-through. Jesus says, “(whoever)...*hears my sayings and **does** them,*” describing the person who is doing God’s will. This process of hearing and doing means to obey, or apply His Word to life. 1 Peter 1 22-23 says, “Since you have purified your souls in **obeying** the truth through the Spirit...through the Word of God which lives and abides forever.”

The *third* ingredient is living out obeying God’s Word

Scripture tells us that it is important to continually examine our intentions and actions: “*Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD*” (Lamentations 3:40).

SELF-EXAMINATION

So how would you describe the **quality** of your spiritual foundation?

Let's look at the following areas and inspect the three ingredients that Jesus emphasized in Luke 6:46-49.

The first ingredient is either “yes” or “no”. Have you agreed with God that you are a sinner, received Christ’s death on the cross as payment for those sins, and asked Jesus into your heart as Lord and Savior? This is the first essential step for building a strong foundation. You cannot skip this one, because Christ is the foundation for our faith. If this is still confusing, hopefully Romans 10:9-10 will help. **(Look at Appendix B for receiving Christ.)**

Romans 10:9-10 *“...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

You also can pray:

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sin. Thank You for dying on the cross for me and paying the price for my sin. Please come into my heart. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to be Your disciple. Thank You for forgiving me and coming into my life. Thank You that I am now a child of God and that I am going to heaven. Amen.

After choosing to build your life on faith in Jesus Christ, the next two ingredients refer to “following” Christ by establishing priorities. *First*, let’s consider the practice of prayer. Prayer is often considered an attempt to enlist God’s power to alter circumstances, but God is more interested in having constant mental communion with us. Prayer is a function of thought, but more than that, it is an open channel of communication with God that involves both speaking and listening. God wants you to know that He is available for all things at all times.

Philippians 4:6 *says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*

God desires constant awareness of His presence and continuous communication. He also wants you to spend some quiet, private time with Him each day. In Psalm 5:3, David said, *“My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up.”*

Prayer and study of the Bible are essential elements for growth in the Christian life. This time of study and communication is often referred to as a “devotional” time. To become truly engaged beyond the written word requires an aspect of imagination called faith - to believe though we cannot see. In John 20:29, Jesus said, *“...because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* In Matthew 6:9-13, often called “the Lord’s prayer,” Jesus Himself gives us an example of how He prayed and some basic aspects to be considered in prayer.

The following prayer is an example of simple, heartfelt communication inspired by elements of the Lord's Prayer to be said prior to beginning your devotional time:

Lord Jesus, I praise You for desiring to be close to me, for wanting to spend time with me. I praise You for Your love and Faithfulness, and praise You, for You are God, the creator and sustainer of all things. I am asking for the grace to walk in obedience today, to love my spouse and children, and to tend to them according to Your Word. Help me to forgive anyone who hurts me today, and give me the grace to ask for forgiveness when I fail to represent You, Jesus. And Jesus, please open my heart to receive Your Word this morning. I'm asking for understanding to know You more and for Your grace to obey. AMEN

It is important to begin your devotional time with prayer, perhaps one similar to this. You may be tempted to use prepared prayers, but God's greatest desire is to just talk with you. After all, He already knows what is in your heart, and loves you in spite of what you have done. Romans 5:8 says, "...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." As you spend time each day with God, you will begin to feel comfortable in His love, and praying will become "talking to God" about everything.

ACTION PLAN

Take a moment and write out a prayer to God, asking for help in developing an intimate, open prayer life with Him. (And remember that it is only by faith in Christ that we are given access to the Father. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.")

Now, please pray through this prayer that Paul offered for the Ephesians, and make it personal by putting yourself in each spot where the space ____ appears.

Ephesians 3:14-21 *"For this reason I ____ (your name) bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you ____, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your ____ hearts through faith; that you ____, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you ____ may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ____ ask or think, according to the power that*

works in us___, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Make a list of some specific requests, or praises, Paul included in his prayer.

Along with personalizing this prayer, you can also use it regularly to pray these things into the lives of your spouse and children, and other loved ones, just put their names in there instead.

You have learned that God desires relationship, which requires that you first receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, and then choose to set aside time for prayer and Bible study. Living the Christian life, sometimes referred to as "abiding in Christ," involves listening to God through reading and meditating on His Word. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says, *"...Man shall not live bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* Perhaps your pastor is an extraordinary teacher, but living for a week on a Sunday morning message alone will lead to being spiritually feeble.

Many Christians put "daily devotional" booklets, such as *Daily Bread*, in the bathroom, or beside the bed, to grab a quick dose of spiritual energy. They pull it out, read a little, and think, *OK, I did my thing. I got into the Word today, praise the Lord.* But a quick meal like this wears off soon, as does the memory of what we read. In our culture, we have so many gadgets to help us "multi-task," with our cell phones, radios, TV, Kindles, etc, that often our time with God becomes just part of the daily mix. If we do not *actively* pursue daily time alone with God, including focused study, meditation and prayer, then we may fall into the "grab a quick bite" category, which surely will lead to poor spiritual health.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Study the following verses and write down what they say about the attitude we should have when reading the Word and seeking wisdom from God.

Proverbs 18:15 *"The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."*

Proverbs 23:23 *“Buy the truth, and do not sell it, Also wisdom and instruction and understanding.”*

Colossians 1:10 *“That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;”*

To avoid the quick study, cultivate the habit of “meditating” on the Word of God. When people hear the word meditation, many think of Hindu prayers, but meditation is a term used in the Word of God. We are to meditate upon the things that we read, which indicates that we are listening responsively in thought to what God is saying.

FACT FILE

Meditate: in the Biblical world meditation was not a silent practice; it meant to moan, utter or growl. It had the idea of muttering sounds like reading half aloud or conversing with oneself so that you would so interact with the text that it would soak into your mind. As a tea bag soaking in water permeates the liquid, so meditating on Scriptures permeates our minds.

Psalm 119:15 *“I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.”*

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

What did God tell Joshua to do in this verse, and why was this so important to God, and to Joshua’s success?

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

Do you want to have good success? Yes No

Read the following passage and then write out the meaning of these verses, in your own words, and how they would affect your parenting if you did this.

Psalm 1:1-3 *“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper”*

WEEK 2: DAY 3

When children are young, their dependence on mom and dad can make them uncomfortable or fearful when left in another’s care, and when mom or dad returns, there is great affection and rejoicing. As they mature, the excitement cools and parents may be given a greeting like “Hi Mom,” “Hey Dad,” or maybe not much at all. By this time, the presence of parents is somewhat taken for granted, and or is not acknowledged at all.

Beware, because we can do the same thing to the Lord. When we first come to Christ, we cannot wait to pray and get into the Word. When we read it, we feel God speaking right to our hearts. Oftentimes we experience wonderful emotions, and even share our good news with friends and loved ones.

Over time, if we are not watchful, our attitude can become, “Yeah, yeah, studying Matthew again. Been there, done that.” Sadly, we lose the attitude “Daddy’s here!” We cannot stay in this state of mind! Just think: you have the blessed privilege of going into the Holy of Holies, with a God who wants you to call Him “Daddy” (Romans 8:15 *“...Abba, Father”*), to hear Him whisper awesome truths and tell you how wonderful and important you are to Him!

SELF-EXAMINATION

When was the last time you sat quietly with the living God, excited for Him to speak to you?

The first event recorded in the Bible after Jesus Christ gave up His spirit on the cross was the ripping of the veil, from top to bottom, which covered the entrance to a temple chamber called the Holy of Holies (Matt 27:51). It meant that Christ's death on the cross had ended our separation from God. Before that, only the high priest could enter once a year bearing sacrificial animal blood. A great price was paid when Christ offered His own blood for our deliverance. Hebrews 10:19 says, *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,"* So Jesus' death was not only to defeat the power of sin, but to buy a way for the Father to have intimate fellowship with us. We must not *"neglect so great a salvation,"* (Hebrews 2:3).

For those who have grown children, how blessed are we when they want to spend time with us? Do you think God is any different? He loves it when you and I call "time out" and say, "Daddy, this is Your time, mine and Yours, right now, and I'm not going to let anything get in the way. I'm going to protect this, God."

And it is interesting, and revealing, that when we make this commitment to set time aside for God, that distractions seem to come "out of the woodwork". If not interruptions from family and phones, then your mind floods with thoughts – a problem at work, the bills, your spouse, your kids, etc., etc. Many times Satan sends those distractions because he knows that our firm foundation, the strength of our faith, does not come from good works, or just desiring to be the best dad, mom, or spouse, but from our relationship to Christ. Everything good grows out of this relationship.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, and write in your own words what this Scripture says about the battle we are in, and what we are supposed to do about it.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."*

When Jesus explained the parable of the sower to His disciples (Mark 4:13-20), He wanted them to know what Satan and his demons are up to. How would this Scripture relate to your time in the Word: What is the battle?

Mark 4:15 *“And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”*

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 11:3, he referred to Genesis 3:1-7 which describes how sin entered the world when Eve listened to Satan’s lies. Paul’s fear was that Satan, in the same way, would *corrupt* (spoil, subvert or destroy) the new believers’ minds from the *simplicity* (purity, sincerity, “singleness of heart”),⁶ that they had in their relationship with Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3 *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”*

Eve was *deceived* (led into error) by Satan’s *craftiness* (cunning shrewdness), so that she believed a lie to be the truth. Satan’s plan is always the same.

 **SELF-EXAMINATION**

Are there any lies you have believed regarding God’s desire to be in a close relationship with you?

What are some common thoughts that come when starting or doing your devotions? Write them out.

6 Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

But Satan cannot be blamed for everything; sometimes we are at fault ourselves. When Jesus prayed in the garden as He faced going to the cross, His disciples slept when they should have been praying also. Jesus warned them about the weakness of the flesh:

Matthew 26:41 *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Jesus’ command is to “watch and pray”, and the result is for our good – that we are not overwhelmed by temptation and our laziness. Praying is an essential discipline so we must fight the battle against such thoughts as, *I just don’t feel like it, I’m tired, or I just don’t care or have time.* Complacency must be replaced by non-negotiable priorities in seeking the Lord.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Write out in your own words what these verses are instructing you to do.

1 Peter 5:8 *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”*

Ephesians 6:11 *“Put on the **whole armor** of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” [emphasis added].*

All your success, including the power to minister as a parent, comes from a continuous relationship with Christ. Mark 4:34 says, “. . . And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” We will receive great insights and understanding from Scripture, as well as power and wisdom that we need as a parent as long as we are spending time with Jesus in daily devotions and Bible study. God loves each of us the same, and He longs to commune with us. There is no parenting book written that will cover every situation you face. That is why God wants you to depend on Him each day, looking to His Word for understanding and guidance.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Read the following Scripture and notice the disciples’ attitude when they did not understand Jesus’ teaching. What did they do?

Matthew 13.36 *“Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.’”*

Remember, God is always waiting for us to come to Him, wanting us to seek the wisdom we need to deal with life. Knowing this, how can we be too busy to spend time with the living God? We need to keep this continuously in mind, guarding against our tendencies to become independent, or take God’s goodness to us for granted.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV), Paul writes: *“**Study** to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”*

FACT FILE

Study: this word is an imperative verb, meaning it is a command to do and to continue to do. The word denotes a zealous persistence in accomplishing a goal.

Rightly dividing: has the idea of cutting something straight as you would in carpentry, masonry or with cutting a piece of cloth to be sewn together.

What grade would you give yourself in your *Bible study*? What do you think God means here by the word “ashamed”?

 **ACTION PLAN**

Take a moment and meditate on what you just read and learned and write out a prayer to the Lord asking Him for specific help in following His instructions.

What is the exhortation in this verse?

2 Peter 1:10 *“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.”*

Obedience Is Action

The *third* ingredient of building a strong foundation is the decision to act upon what we hear, or learn from God.

Luke 6:47-48, *Jesus says, “whoever...hears My sayings and **does** them...He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.”*

We need to treat the Bible, the Word of God, as the words of **GOD**. In the Old Testament, the Jews considered the very name of God so sacred that they dared not to speak it. It is by God’s grace alone in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that you are considered righteous, and given the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as a teacher and guide. Your part is to desire to do His will, and respond in thankfulness and obedience. If you treat the Word of God as suggestions, then you may find yourself picking and choosing what best suits your will. This is not wise and will not result in the success that comes from building on a strong foundation.

Luke 14:33 *“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”*

FACT FILE

The word “forsake,” means to deny. This verse is telling us to daily align our priorities to God’s Word, which places His will over ours.

There were many who considered Jesus’ teaching too difficult to follow, so they turned and walked away from God. There will be instructions in these lessons that may be different from the way you do things currently. Some may seem hard, but remember that by God’s grace you are able to do His will, not by your own strength.

John 6:66-67 *“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’”*

ACTION PLAN

Write out a commitment to God, to depend on Him for the grace, or power, to both desire and follow His instructions on parenting.

Take a moment and consider your priorities with God, spouse, children, work, church, leisure time, and fellowship? Do you believe they are in proper order? If not write out a prayer of commitment to change.

God shares His heart regarding our priorities,

1 Timothy 3:1-13 *“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus.*

This passage makes it clear that your home must have first priority in order for you to be a good minister. Many homes are out of order; where people are more concerned about leisure, work, or even service in the church.

One author says concerning this passage:

“Paul indicated that the experience the leader gained in the home would develop sensitive

compassion (“take care of”)—(tending to [our emphasis]) for his role in the church. The verb “manage” appeared in v. 4. The development of proper leadership skills in the home was a prerequisite for using them in the church.⁷

SELF-EXAMINATION

Since a pastor must have his family in order before qualifying in God’s eyes, then he is able to set an example for the congregation. If you were in a church, and you saw that the pastor had many problems with his family, and that he did not tend to His family correctly, would you respect him and his leadership? Why?

Genesis 18:19, says: *“For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”*

We mentioned this Scripture earlier, but it is excellent example of God’s attitude on parenting. God is telling Abraham, the father, that He has *known him* for a purpose, *in order to instruct* his family in the ways of the Lord. These are priorities. Notice that God does not say, “you need to work all the time to bring in the cash” (although we know if we do not provide for our family we have denied the faith, 1 Tim. 5:8), nor does He say “do more ministry”, or “why don’t you mount that camel and head on down to Egypt to relax, take it easy”. Even though work, ministry and leisure time are important, and even Biblical, none are first priority. A balance must be reached, but your priority relationship is with God first, and then family next.

SELF-EXAMINATION

Take a moment and write down what has been the priority in your life. Has God been first, then family, then work or...? If you are married, ask your spouse if they agree with your assessment. If you have kids you can ask them, they will usually give you a straight answer if you ask in a gentle way.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Read the following Scripture and write down what it says about the Biblical concepts of *choosing*, *serving* and the *family*?

⁷ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *vol. 34, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 112.

Joshua 24:15 *“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

1 Kings 18:21 *“And Elijah came to all the people, and said, ‘How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.’ But the people answered him not a word.”*

Matthew 6:24 *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”*

Finally, are you practicing Godly principles in your home? The fruit of the Holy Spirit is “. . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal. 5:22-23 NIV). Are these the qualities that your children see growing in you and increasing in your home environment? How would you evaluate yourself? Doing Great? Sometimes Lots of room to grow?

What is most important to you, other than your relationship with Christ? If anything else becomes more important, you will suffer and so will your family. God blesses obedience. Disobedience, on the other hand, puts us outside God’s provisional grace that we need day by day, and causes us to begin to operate in our flesh.

Do you see any room for improvement? These are not trick questions. God gives us these instructions, and He makes them clear enough to understand. He also says that we are to encourage one another continuously. We all need God’s power and grace every single day. *But we must never forget that God will not do by miracle what He has called us to do by obedience.*

What are the three ingredients for a Strong Foundation?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WEEK 2: DAY 4

The Chief Cornerstone

The most significant aspect of building on a strong foundation is selection of the proper chief cornerstone. Let's look at what Scriptures say about that in relation to Christ, and also our relationship to Him:

Ephesians 2:19-20 says: *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."*

1 Peter 2:6-8 *"Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.' Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed."*

It is important to notice that there is an order of spiritual progress presented in these verses: 1) accept Jesus Christ, 2) abide in Him, and 3) obey. Most Christians become preoccupied with the third step. Perhaps you have found your thoughts dwelling on, *Oh, I've got to quit doing this; or I have to do something better; or Why can't I stop doing these wrong things?* Fortunately, accomplishing the first two steps brings success for the third – we find ourselves with the power, grace and desire to be obedient believers.

When people come in for counseling, struggling with sinful behaviors or even addictions, the first question should be, "How's your abiding relationship with Christ?" The most common response often is, "What does that mean?" The answer is that our relationship with Christ is the connection that gives us the power to obey. Our intimacy with God is what gives us the power, the grace for that day, to have victory over sin. And He only gives us grace for the day. He does not give us grace for a week. We need to see this connection and understand this spiritual principle.

Read **John 15:4-5**:

*“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it **abides** in the vine, neither can you, unless you **abide** in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who **abides** in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” [emphasis added].*

Jesus is concentrating on the idea of abiding, as He uses the word four times.

FACT FILE

Abide means, *“To stay, remain, to continue in a place, to endure without yielding.”*

When Jesus gave this instruction to His disciples, it was only a short time before He would go to the cross and then on to be with the Father in Heaven. He wanted to make sure that His disciples knew that their relationship with Him would continue, even after He was not physically there.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

According to the following Scriptures, where are we to abide? What is the result?

John 8:31-32 *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

John 15:7 *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”*

Notice how the following Scriptures relate to us abiding in Christ, our dependence upon Him, and the outcome.

2 Corinthians 3:5 *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”*

2 Corinthians 4:16 *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.”*

Our devotional life is so like the foundation under a house. You cannot see it, but the strength of it will be revealed as natural disasters occur. We may spend most of our time and money making the house look good, but a weak foundation can quickly bring all that time and money to nothing. If we spend our time on mere image of success instead of growing in righteousness, our home will be built on “sand” and will “fall” just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 7. It is the foundation that holds up the house, not the frills and attractive paint job.

In the following chapters, you will find Biblical tools for raising children. However, if you skip this spiritual principle, ignore your foundation, you will go right back to your old habits. The strength of your relationship to God, in Christ, is the only foundation on which you will build successfully

Rebellion and Choices

When you hear the word *rebellion*, what comes to mind? Teenagers? The word *rebellion* often is associated with adolescents, however, *rebellion* means *any* resistance to authority.⁸ When you choose to do things your own way, including setting priorities according to your desires instead of God’s instruction, that is rebellion. So, choosing to not set aside time for an intimate relationship with the Lord is rebellion.

Developing intimacy and abiding in Christ are *choices*, and God clearly tells us in Scripture, “Do it.” He said it to the Israelites before they went into the Promised Land: *“Love God with all your heart, mind, body and soul”* (Deut. 6:1-6). We spend time with the people we love, and we must choose every day to love God by spending time to know Him better by searching the Bible for spiritual truth, then work it into our lives through prayer and obedience.

The erosion of our spiritual foundation, our connection to God, begins with neglecting our devotional life and usually leads to the following:

1. We stop giving of ourselves and start asking, *“What about me, my feelings and my needs?”*
2. We begin to wallow in selfishness and exhibit *conditional*, rather than unconditional, love.
3. We stop hungering (seeking) for holiness.

⁸ *Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language; Second Edition Unabridged; G & C Merriam Company, Publishers, Springfield, MA 1944*

4. We begin to justify our sinful attitudes, behavior and selfishness toward others and our children.
5. We start blaming others for our misery, and sinful attitudes and behaviors.

SELF-EXAMINATION

Are you exhibiting any of these types of thoughts, or behaviors? If so, write down which ones. Then take a moment and confess it to the Lord and ask His forgiveness. Remember 1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

How can we combat our natural tendency towards neglect, which leads to apathy and sin? The answer is that we must train ourselves. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul the Apostle wrote, *“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection.”* He understood that he needed to work, that he needed to train his own body to make it do what it normally did not want to do.

FACT FILE

The word “discipline” is *hupopiazō* (Greek), which was used to describe boxers giving knock out blows—punches to the part of the face right under the eyes, until they were black and blue. (Related passages: 1 Timothy 4:7-8; Jude 3; 2 Peter 1:5-6.)

What are your first thoughts in the morning? When you are lying in bed, when you become conscious, what is your first thought? Train *yourself* this way: first thing in the morning—focus your mind on Christ and remember or acknowledge to yourself and God how much you need His strength to battle your natural sinful desires. The great thing is that God already knows your struggles. And remember, when you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. Now, in Christ, God can get through to you with, “Here I am; I want to bless you, I love you.”

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

What do the following Scriptures teach us about the Psalmist’s thoughts in the morning? What was he doing? How can you remind yourself to think of God first thing, before you get out of bed?

Psalm 5:3 *“My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up.”*

Psalm 119:147 *"I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word."*

God knows everything; He knows how weak and foolish we can be, already knew all the "junk" that we had inside when He adopted us as His children. He knew, *and chose us anyway!* He is not here to condemn us, but He desires to bless us. *We must train our minds.* When you wake up, let your first thoughts be, "God here I am. Thank you that I am one of Yours! I know there are so many areas in my life that need improvement; God, I need Your strength!" The Lord is longing to hear you say that every day.

Train yourself to put your mind upon Jesus in the first moments of the morning; not on your bills, your spouse, your kids, or your job, no matter how pressing those things may seem. Pray and ask Him for His grace to love your family and to walk in His will today. Now, this is before you begin or do your personal devotional time with Him. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap"* (Gal. 6:7). If we put God first, before all things, we will reap all the promises waiting for us in Him.

So, you set your mind on God first, have your devotional time, but you must also return to Him in thought during the day. God is the One we depend on, and obey, when we face difficulties, including problems with our children.

Notice how God encourages us to think in the follow verse:

Colossians 3:1-2 *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" [emphasis added].*

FACT FILE

"Seek" and "set your mind," are imperative verbs, indicating the action is a continual process. "Seek" means to look for and strive to find. "Set your mind" refers to the will, affections and conscience.

What are you to set our mind on?

ACTION PLAN

Write out a prayer asking God to quicken your mind to think upon Him.

Our Sovereign God

As God's children and His ministers, we must always remember that God is in control, and that He has a purpose in the trials we face. Psalm 139:1-18, tells us our days are predestined, every one of them. They were written in His book before time was created, before the earth even existed.

The Bible says, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"* (Eph. 2:10). We can take comfort in the knowledge that in every situation, God has already been there. He knows all things; He is never surprised. So when you get up Saturday morning to find your three-year-old has spilled orange juice and cereal all over the floor and is making a little goulash, you can walk in and calmly think, *OK, God, You were already here. What is this about?* And on Friday night when your teenager comes home later than allowed, you can remind yourself, *OK, God, You have been here already. You knew this was going to happen to me. You said in all situations You have prepared me for good works.* We can learn to glorify Christ in all our circumstances!

Here is a catchy motto that you can write down, and use as a guide to developing a good attitude: "If I put my eyes on others, I get stressed. If I put my eyes on myself, I get depressed. If I put my eyes on Jesus, I get blessed." Post that on your refrigerator, or on your mirror, so you see it each morning to remind you to do your devotion. Or better yet, memorize it!

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

According to this verse, what is God doing behind the scenes? Who do we have to trust?

Ephesians 1:11 *"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."*

Read the following Scriptures and write out what they reveal about God's nature.

Deuteronomy 29:29 *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

Isaiah 14:24 *“The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, “Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand:”*

Isaiah 25:1 *“O LORD, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, For You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.”*

Proverbs 19:21 *“There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand.”*

2 Timothy 1:9 *“who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,”*

WEEK 2: DAY 5

Your Amazing Transformation

Again, our primary goal as believers, and as parents, is to be *transformed* into the image of Christ and doing His will. Simply put, to become more and more like Him in thought and action. God has a plan and purpose

in the trials that you face. As God works, He will use these challenges to reveal the areas we need to be transformed in.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Read the following Scriptures and write out the positive consequences.

James 1:2-4 *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

1 John 2:5 *“But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”*

An illustration of this transforming process can be found in **Matthew 14:22-31**. Jesus had been ministering to people. He fed thousands, healed and preached, and at the end of the day, He was exhausted. He walked down to the Sea of Galilee and told the apostles, *“Get in the boat, go to the other side; I’ll meet you over there.”* So the apostles jumped in the boat and began to sail across, while Jesus remained behind to pray.

*“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. **23** And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. **24** But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. **25** Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. **26** And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. **27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” **28** And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” **29** So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. **30** But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” **31** And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”*

When they were halfway across the sea, a storm came up. But Jesus had sent His disciples out into that

storm, knowing full well it was coming. He purposefully put them out there, just like He often does to us. Seeing Jesus walking on water, Peter cried heroically, *“Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”* At Jesus invitation to *“come,”* Peter began to walk on the water! But then took his eyes off Jesus and put them on the storm, he began to sink. When Peter cried *“Lord, save me,”* the Word says that Jesus *“immediately”* extended his hand and caught him.

When Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat, it is important to recognize that He was testing Peter’s faith. Was Peter going to keep his eyes on Christ and have faith that He had it all under control, giving him the ability to do something he could not do on his own? Peter had the faith to begin, but then wavered in fear and began to sink. Peter *learned* the importance of keeping his eyes upon the Lord. Some 30 years later, when Peter wrote the following words, you can see the transformation in his perspective.

1 Peter 1:6-7 *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

FACT FILE

The word **“genuineness,”** *dokimion* (Greek), means something that has been tested and approved. It was used of metals that had been through a purifying process to remove all impurities.

Peter is encouraging the church, assuring them that trials are necessary to develop sincere, pure faith. If you see trials this way, and cooperate with God, you will be able to rejoice.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Look up the following scriptures and write down what they say about trials, testing, and how God works in the midst of them.

Psalm 17:3 *“You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.”*

Psalm 66:10 *“For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined.”*

Proverbs 17:3 “ *The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts.*”

James 1:3–4 “ *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*”

As parents in crisis, we often take our eyes off of Christ and His promises, put them on circumstances, and become overwhelmed. So often, turning to Jesus is our last move. We need to remember that God is waiting to prove Himself faithful and more powerful than our circumstances! We must keep our hope fixed upon Him (Heb. 12:2), and remember He sends us into storms because He has a plan (Eph. 1:11).

Just as Christ showed power over nature when He walked on water, and His power over death, man’s greatest fear, so God wants to perform miracles for us as we raise our children. We need to live each day seeking to please God alone, keeping our eyes on Him, not on the storms and the difficulties. Sadly, because we do not develop intimacy with Christ, peace disappears. We become agitated, angered, and lose our joy and strength when the going gets tough. Peter wrote, “*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*” (1 Pet. 4:16). No one enjoys suffering, but for parents it is part of the job. Rather than think, *God, why is this happening to me?* turn your thoughts to: *God, what are You revealing in me through this circumstance?*

 **SELF-EXAMINATION**

Over the next 7 days, write down as many things as you can that qualify as your trials. It can even be a disagreement you have with your spouse. This will become a beginning list of areas that God can transform *in* you. Many parenting and marriage problems stem from not viewing trials God’s way. Also write out what was revealed to be *in* you – anger, impatience, etc. - attitudes that you believe fall short of God’s nature. I encourage you to start taking responsibility for those failures by asking for forgiveness from God, spouse and kids.

Suffering is part of God’s plan and can lead to *inner transformation* and His glorification. Our struggles come from three sources: the world, the flesh and the Devil. Yes, even Satan has the freedom to trouble us, as He did with Job, (chapters 1-2). If you are not totally dependent upon God’s daily strength (Ps 88:9), and His wisdom in every situation (James 1:5), the temptation is to trust in yourself. Moving away from God gives strength to our sin nature (Gal. 5:16). Fleshly reactions and attitudes are not a reflection of God’s nature (Gal. 5:19-26), and these most often trouble us when we are out of fellowship (Heb 10:24-25), or when reject the fact that God uses our children to transform *us* spiritually.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

Read the following verse and write out how this verse changes your attitude toward non-glorifying and or sinful behavior.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *“For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently.” — (Amplified Bible)*

It is true that, in Christ, no trial is beyond our ability to be victorious, but God is not saying that you and I must be perfect. All of us will fail at times. But you must accept responsibility for your actions and ask God for help. In this way you cooperate with God to change, grow, and mature in Christ. The moment that you and I accept Jesus Christ as Savior, the journey of *transformation* begins. We will travel this road until we die. There will never be time when we can think, *OK, I’m done*, until we are with Him in heaven (Rom. 8:22-23; 1 John 3:2-3).

Read this as a prayer, from you to God, asking Him to do this work in you.

Hebrews 13:20-21 *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

After meditating on these Scriptures and praying, what principles do you see that relate to your transformation? How can these also relate to your parenting?

Laborers Together

In the first verse of Psalm 127, the author wrote, *“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”* God so wants to protect our families. Can you see from this passage that you and God are to be working together, with Him in the lead position? He wants to intercede in your child’s life, showing Himself both faithful and powerful, but you must first allow Him to be the Lord over your family.

God’s Word tells us that He blesses obedience (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 18:20-21). When we are disobedient in the areas of intimacy and relationship with Christ, will God be able to intercede on our behalf (John 9:31; Heb. 11:6)? He is faithful, but we need to do our part (Phil. 2:12-13). In order for you to glorify God, you must stay *connected* to Him each day. It is then that you will experience transformation, and stand on a solid foundation. *Remember*, God will not do by miracle what He has called you to do by obedience.

As a parent and minister of Christ, the mainspring for service is not love for your children, but love for Jesus Christ. If you are devoted to the cause and or outcome of raising children, you will become discouraged and brokenhearted looking to them for your reward. Parents often receive less gratitude from their children than they do from the family house pet. But if *love* and *service* toward God is your motive, no ingratitude or outcome will hinder you from serving your children and fulfilling His will and wishes. Christ Himself came to earth with one desire - to serve and please His Father in Heaven. Matthew 20:28 says, *“ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Clever methods are not the key to accomplishing *God’s purposes*; the key is your relationship with Him. God will foil the best of man’s plans if He is left out of them. The tools we will cover in the remainder of

this book will be extremely useful in helping you raise your kids. Remember: tools are the means, but the meaning comes from commitment to God and fulfilling His will and plan. And God has a plan for each child and we are to study, pray, train, discipline and enjoy them, but the day will come when they also will be fully accountable to God for themselves.

The integrity of the foundation on which we build our homes, and raise our children, is directly related to the strength of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Through daily prayer, Bible study, and a desire to obey we are working with God as He purifies and changes us, enabling us to become Godly parents to our children. We must be disciplined, devoted, and as always, God has a glorious promise waiting for us.

2 Peter 1:1-4 *“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

If you could get up every morning and take a pill for peace, knowledge, divine power, and wisdom for every situation of the day, would you do it? Clearly, that is what God promises to us if we will simply seek Him first.

DIG DEEPER: FURTHER STUDY

What are the promises in the following verses? Write them below.

Luke 11:9-13 *“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”*

To help you better understand this all-important truth—when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He made a deposit of grace, power, knowledge and wisdom in each one of our names (Eph. 1:3). But you can only make a withdrawal from your account if you use His name, and He only gives His name to those who receive and trust Him. How often have you gone to the bank lately? Have your efforts to have a devotional life, to be alone with the Lord for even a few minutes, ended in distraction? Never let failure turn you away from your Lord. Ask for His help and keep at it. Don't be robbed by discouragement, or let your account go dormant due to lack of use.

Keep Building!

If God reveals that your relationship with Him has become weak, or stale, the first thing to do is ask forgiveness (1 John 1:9), saying "I'm sorry. I forgot. I've lost my first love. I've allowed life's duties, desires and troubles to turn me from the very reason that I exist - to have fellowship with You."

Then commit to begin anew. Start with fifteen minutes; tell yourself you are going to read one chapter, or read until He speaks to you. Start first with prayer, putting yourself in His presence, praising Him, with the *expectation* that God is going to reveal Himself to you. When you are finished, meditate on what you have read.

Finally, get a journal. Keeping a record of your devotional time is telling yourself and the Lord, *I'm expecting You to say something to me today*. This is very important. Wait upon the Lord, and whatever He gives you, write it down and date it. He may give you some direction or a prayer, or simply remind you of His promises.

Keeping a journal enables us to go back and see what God has already done, what He has shown us, and maybe renew our strength for a present trial. Sometimes I go back and read through my journal, and usually, by the third or fourth page, I am brought to tears because of the things written there that God spoke to me about my life, my kids, my wife, and for the ministry.

Intimacy is a *process*. Begin with fifteen minutes daily, and it will grow. You will learn how to abide in Christ, pray without ceasing, and be in fellowship with Him throughout the day. On this strong foundation you will be able to build a solid family.

See back of book for more devotional instructions. See Appendix D and E.