

**GOD'S
INCREDIBLE PLAN
FOR YOUR LIFE**

“I’M A NEW BELIEVER! WHAT’S NEXT?”

By Frank Eiklor

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"I'M A NEW BELIEVER! WHAT'S NEXT?"

A TEN PART SERIES THAT COVERS:

- 1. ASSURANCE OF YOUR SALVATION**
- 2. YOU'RE A NEW CREATION**
- 3. LEARNING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**
- 4. LETTING YOUR LIGHT SHINE**
- 5. FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**
- 6. BEING CHRIST'S WITNESS TO OTHERS**
- 7. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP**
- 8. DEVELOPING A PRAYER LIFE**
- 9. FACING TESTS, TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS**
- 10. GOD'S LADDER TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

By Frank Eiklor
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GOD’S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 1 LET’S SETTLE THE QUESTION ONCE AND FOR ALL!

We are about to embark on a journey that will lead us to the very God of eternity. He is not hiding from us. On the contrary, like Adam and Eve, our sins have caused us to hide from Him. But here He is—in Jesus Christ Himself—ready and eager to be found by those who seek Him with all our hearts (Jeremiah 29:11-13) “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

Only the One who overcame death and the grave has the answer to:

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IN LIFE

If you were to die tonight, where would you spend eternity? That really is the most important question in life.

Each of us will die. Some of us spend serious time thinking about death, while others try to avoid that thought altogether. Yet, time and events always have a way of making us face the fact of our mortality.

Why is this? Why do only human beings concern ourselves with thoughts about life after death? The answer is really simple. The Bible teaches us that God has put the desire to live forever in our hearts because that is what He intends for each person.

The Bible is a book of facts—truths tested and proven through the centuries. Jesus Christ walked this very earth, performed miracles, died on a real cross and was literally raised from the dead. God is ready and willing to show you the truth and to give you assurance that you can know where you will spend eternity. Here are seven steps and scriptures that can lead you to His path of eternal life.

FACT #1 GOD’S INCREDIBLE LOVE

God loves you so much that He gave His beloved Son to die for your sins. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

FACT #2 HEAVEN’S ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT

Having the invisible God become real to us requires a miracle. That miracle is called the “new birth.” Good works, church membership or a hundred other positive attributes can’t cancel out God’s one unchanging requirement to enter His kingdom: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless

one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” John 3:3 What does this mean? Let’s look at:

FACT #3 GOD’S VERDICT

There is a wall that separates every man and woman from God. That wall is sin. When our lives are seen in the light of Christ’s perfection, we see how far we have fallen in word, thought and deed. We can also call sin a spiritual cancer, and a pure and holy God says we all have the disease. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

FACT #4 GOD’S OFFER OF PARDON

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 What an amazing word from God. On the one hand—the terrible fact that the penalty for sin is death. This is not merely physical death but a spiritual separation from a loving God forever. Then comes the glorious fact—God’s offer of his free gift of eternal life to all that come to Him. How do we do this?

FACT #5 GOD’S INCREDIBLE PROMISE

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name.” John 1:12 Here is what it really means to be born again. To receive Christ is more than mere head belief. It is to turn from our sins in a true attitude of repentance and choose instead the will of God as seen in the pure and unselfish life of Jesus. And it is as simple as answering a knock at the door.

FACT #6 CHRIST’S INCREDIBLE INVITATION

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock, If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20 Jesus stands at the door of every human heart. That heart is the real you, not merely the physical organ that pumps blood. Christ forces Himself on no one. He is waiting for you to answer His invitation to enter your life, forgive your sins and make you a new creation. You will then begin to discover His own wonderful plan for your life. And you will know for certain that Christ’s free gift of eternal life with Him is yours now and forever. Will you ask God right now to forgive your sins and receive Jesus into your life? Here is a prayer that can help you do it.

“Dear God, thank You for loving me and sending Your precious Son, Jesus, to die for my sins. I want to be born again spiritually and have your gift of eternal life. I know I’ve broken Your laws and Your heart many times. I’m so sorry. I turn from my sins and my own ways and come to You. Cleanse my life and change me. I open my heart to Jesus Christ and receive Him as my Savior and Lord. Help me to love and trust You one day at a time. Thank you for hearing my prayer and for coming into my life. You are my heavenly Father and Jesus is now my personal Savior. Amen.”

FACT #7 GOD'S INCREDIBLE GUARANTEE

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. 1 John 5:13 Now that you have asked Christ to forgive and save you, here is God’s answer to you as to where you will go after death. Look at that word again—“that you may K-N-O-W that you have eternal life.” That’s “now”—present tense. According to God’s own word, you can now confidently say, “If I were to die tonight, I would go to be with my Lord!”

We can help you begin your new life in Christ. Look at the word “trust” and let’s give it practical meaning.

- ✓ **T**-ake time daily to talk to God in prayer.
- ✓ **R**-ead His Word each day for spiritual food. (A great place to begin is the gospel of John).
- ✓ **U**-nderstand that you need the strength and friendship of other true Christians who love the Lord. You will find that at a church where the Bible is preached and lived.
- ✓ **S**-tand on God’s promises in the Bible no matter how many times Satan tries to pull you back into your old ways of thinking and doing.
- ✓ **T**-ake every opportunity to tell others that you have opened your life to Christ. When you share your simple story (your “testimony”) with another, your faith grows stronger and others learn how they, too, can be forgiven and have eternal life.

Now that you have asked Jesus to be Savior and Lord of your life, you’re ready to grow from a new babe into spiritual maturity. With Christ in your heart, you are a brand new creation. Our next study will help you discover what that means.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 2 YOU'VE BECOME A NEW CREATION!

You have opened your heart to Jesus and He has forgiven and cleansed you from all sin. His promise of eternal life with Him is now yours. This is what it means to be “born again” into the new life of the Spirit. So now, just like a new baby, it’s time to grow into a mature child of God. That means learning to develop our spiritual eyes to focus on the wonderful fact that:

IT’S NO LONGER YOU—BUT JESUS IN YOU!

Try to live a life pleasing to God using your own will and power. Just try! You will fail miserably and grow more discouraged and hopeless than ever. Human strength is not equal to satanic influence and temptation. Paul describes our dilemma perfectly: “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot perform it—I have the intention and urge to do what is right, but no power to carry it out.” (Romans 7:18 Amplified Bible)

HERE COMES JESUS!

But here comes Jesus! The conqueror of sin and of Satan. Our champion. Hallelujah! What happens when we sincerely tell God we are sorry for our sins and invite Christ to rule our lives instead of us? A miracle occurs – it’s called the new birth and it simply means from now on it’s “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

That incredible mystery brings new life. From now on, it will not be God on the outside trying to influence your life, but God on the inside directing your steps. What I mean is found in Philippians 2:13, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Wow! What a wonderful fact. God will now give you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him!

The word “w-o-r-k” has four letters that I wish to use to describe the wonderful work the Holy Spirit does in a life surrendered to Jesus. Make this your prayer everyday.

W – “Will in me Your thoughts and plans for my life, Lord. I want nothing less—nothing else.”

“For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord...” (Jeremiah 29:11 Amplified Bible)

O – “Order my steps to do your will, dear Lord.”

“The steps of a good man (woman) are ordered by the Lord...” (Psalm 37:23)

R – “Release in me Your supernatural energy for each thing you ask me to do.”

“To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”
(Colossians 1:29)

K – “Keep me in constant contact and fellowship with my power source – the Holy Spirit”

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”
(Romans 8:14)

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...”
(Revelation 2:29)

SO REMEMBER

Take time DAILY to read God’s Word and pray. Ask the Lord DAILY to empty you of self and to fill you with His Spirit. Then go into your day believing that God will work His will in your life through word and deed. You will experience His personal and intimate presence more and more. There can be no greater joy!

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 3 SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES THAT BRING SPIRITUAL GROWTH

You are now a disciple—a follower of Jesus Christ as He walks with you through this life and one day into heaven itself. So let's keep growing in our faith as God becomes more real in our every-day affairs of life.

The scriptures are filled with calls to discipleship. Jesus called the twelve who accompanied Him “disciples”. The word itself is derived from another word—“discipline”. A disciple is one disciplined in the ways and walk of the Master. We are called to a God-controlled life—but most Christians, sadly, live self-controlled lives. Following are six simple but practical ways to develop a more real and intimate walk with the Lord and become, as Paul was, an example for others to follow.

1. A TIME ALONE EACH DAY WITH GOD

“Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:40,41

It takes time to slow our inner motors and learn to hear the Holy Spirit's voice. Take that time—daily—to study the Scriptures, meditate on them, and pray.

2. MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11)

The Word of God is the mind of God. Fill your mind with His mind and see the difference. Memorizing just one verse each week means 52 verses in one year – forever a part of you.

3. DETERMINE TO DIE TO SELF SO THAT JESUS CAN BE FORMED IN YOU

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” (John 12:24)

Each day will offer many opportunities to say “Yes” to Jesus and “No” to self. Determine to pass the test.

4. REALIZE THAT OUR GREATEST PAINS REVEAL HIS CLEAREST FACE

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18, see also John 16:33, II Corinthians 4:7-12)

Live long enough and you learn the truth that few like to preach – that pain is gain – whether we are repenting from the Lord’s rebuke or suffering affliction with a heart dedicated to loving Him alone.

5. LEARN AND PRACTICE THE HOLY SPIRIT’S PRESENCE – HIS PROMPTINGS, REPROOFS AND LEADINGS

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says...” (Revelation 2:7)

We recognize the important voices of people in our lives by being exposed to them. There is no more important a voice than the Lord’s and His voice will always witness to His Word. Ask the Father to fill you with the Holy Spirit each day in a new and fresh way.

6. MODEL JESUS BY RELEASING HIS LOVE TO OTHERS

“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Christ’s call to be His witness through deed and word is unmistakable. Like any genuine relationship, the more you fall in love with Jesus the more you will live to introduce Him to others.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 4 PREPARING FOR THE LORD'S RETURN

Just as Christ's first coming was prophesied and fulfilled, so He has promised to return a second time to rule and reign forever. No more sin. No more curse. No more death. That is the great hope of those who love Him and are called His "body" or "church". As you study your Bible, you will see why many of us believe His second coming is near, as more and more signs come to pass.

Now that you love Jesus, others will be looking at your life to see if you are real or just "another phony". That's why this lesson is so important.

When Jesus Christ gave the signs that would precede His coming, He mentioned a great increase in earthquakes. That has obviously come to pass. But far more dangerous is the "spiritual shaking" that is also taking place all around the world wherever followers of Jesus live and serve.

The Scriptures indicate a great shaking—a "spiritual earthquake"—will test God's people in order to shake loose from our lives anything that is not of God. I love the words in Hebrews 12:25-29 where God says He will shake heaven and earth (and your faith and mine) so that "those things which cannot be shaken may remain." (v27)

Each of us Christians is being seen by others. Once we say that we have been born again spiritually and love Jesus, we become walking advertisements. Some people will love us, others may laugh and pity us. Some will listen, others will turn away. Some will accept Christ because of our witness, others will reject Him. But no matter what happens in this world, or what the future holds for you and me, there are five pillars of character and life style that our Lord wants as part of each of our lives.

- 1) **INTEGRITY**—Where no one can say "He is a phony who does not keep his word and lives a lie." On the contrary, our walk with God will offer concrete evidence that our words and actions are based on honesty and truth. 2 Corinthians 8:21 "Providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."
- 2) **TRANSPARENCY**—It takes effort to maintain a pure conscience in a filthy world. If I sin against God, I must make a sincere confession. If I hurt another person, I must make restitution. That way, we will never allow our conscience to grow careless and become hard. Acts 24:16 "This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men."
- 3) **FIDELITY**—One word that should mark God's servant is "faithful". Living in the Scriptures daily and asking the Holy Spirit to control our lives will make "faithfulness" a moment by moment occurrence: faithful to God, mate, family, close friends, neighbors, employer, teacher, students, etc. 1 Corinthians 4:2 "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

- 4) **HUMILITY**—This does not come as pride disguised as “I’m just a humble nobody”. It is the humility of Jesus that assumes its spiritual authority as one of the Lord’s “kings and priests” and lives out this high calling by serving others and esteeming them “better than ourselves”. Philippians 2:3-8 “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

- 5) **LOVE**—The New Covenant of Jesus does not allow any word, action or reaction to be excused because of what someone else has done to me. Since “God is love”; since Jesus calls love the highest proof of discipleship; since the very first “fruit of the Spirit” is love, it is obvious that the pillar of agape love is to be seen by others as proof of Christ’s ownership of our lives. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Mark these five pillars in your Bible for easy reference to encourage other Christians. Great days of testing lie ahead. Those whose pillars go deep into the Word of God will be sought out by many in a world filled with fear and uncertainty. May the Lord make you and me part of those whose house is built on the solid Rock!

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LESSON 5 THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD'S GREATEST GIFT TO YOU

Our Heavenly Father wants each of his children to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That is His beautiful promise in Luke 11:13: "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!"

But if you have a glass half filled with dirt and you fill the rest with pure water, you would not have a glass of pure water but one only filled with mud. That is why it is imperative to first ask the Lord to empty us of junk—self, sin and satanic impulses—before we ask Him to fill us with His precious Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God? It will be like Jesus walking the earth in you and doing His will in and through your life.

TWO INCREDIBLE SCRIPTURES

Look at John 14:12: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also: and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."

This scripture has incredible meaning. What "greater works" could anyone do that Jesus did not do? He healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons, calmed the elements—He did it all! But until He returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit could not be given to millions of believers ("Christ in you"—Colossians 1:27) who would be used to do the greatest work of all—lead others to Jesus so they, too, could become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). Also, when Jesus was on earth, He was limited to one place at one time. Now He is working through His followers in many places at the same time.

The other incredible verse is found in Acts 10:38: "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

To be full of the Holy Spirit is to be full of Jesus and, like Jesus, we will then walk through our world "doing good" as the Holy Spirit touches other lives through us.

SIX INDICATIONS OF A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

When winter snows melt and fill rivers to overflowing, we marvel at their power and effect. Jesus promised full rivers of living water that would flow from you and me: "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" John 7:37, 38.

Notice five key words in connection with this promise to fill us with His Spirit: 1) Thirst, 2) Come, 3) Drink, 4) Believe, 5) Flow.

And when the Holy Spirit comes to take control of our lives, He brings all of the fruits that make Him who He is: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22,23

That is when others see the changes made in our lives. For there will doubtless be at least six manifestations that will be evidence that we are truly filled with the Holy Spirit and not with ourselves.

1. Unconditional love for Jesus Christ. “And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.” But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” (Matthew 26:6-10, 13)

2. A purified heart and a holy life. “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” (1 Peter 1:22) “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)

3. Humility that draws the spiritually hungry (a spirit of servanthood that esteems others better than oneself). “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3-5

4. A love for the brethren, regardless of differences or denominations. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34, 35

5. A longing to reach a lost and dying world. “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” John 4:35 “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.” Isaiah 6:8

6. The power of the Holy Spirit to be a moment by moment witness to the reality of Jesus. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

A TIME FOR ACTION

Ask God to search your heart, and confess anything and everything that grieves Him. Simply ask Him to empty you of all sin, self and satanic holds on your life.

Now ask your Father to fill you with His Spirit and remember the five words of Jesus: “Thirst”, “Come”, “Drink”, “Believe”—and then “Flow”. Ask Him now to fill you, and believe that He is doing it, just as He promised. You will then begin to see why the Lord never said, “By their boastings”—or “By their claim to have certain gifts”—but only “By their fruits you shall know them.” (Matthew 7:20) The proof will not come merely from what you say with your lips, but from what others see in your life.

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LESSON 6 WHAT MAKES YOU AN EFFECTIVE WITNESS

Now that you know Christ as your Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit wants to use you to lead others to the Lord. That should start with those in your home and then all of your loved ones.

First, you are to shine as a light to those around you. Like Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Then you are given the awesome privilege of being Christ's witness through your testimony—what Jesus means to you. You may get extreme reactions from "I'm impressed" to "I'm not interested." But the lesson I will now share with you will help you stay true to the Lord Jesus and stay determined to see those you love experience the reality of Jesus Christ in their own lives—whether that comes to pass sooner or later.

Stay in God's Word daily and He will add to your life the following eight ingredients that will cause your loved ones to know that you are a real follower of Jesus and not just another religious pretender.

1. CONSISTENCY

What do you and I want them to see? We want them to see *CONSISTENCY*. That's number one. Difficult loved ones will not be impressed if your life is up one day and down the next. For example, an unsaved wife or husband sees the believing mate act sweet one day and angry the next.

Paul said that those who studied him could see "...in what manner I always lived among you." (Acts 20:18) Is your life consistent or are you a yo-yo Christian—up and down? Is your physical presence clean and an example. How about your home, yard and car? Are you one of the best workers on your job? How do you behave toward loved ones? Do you consistently speak, act and react graciously? One of the biggest complaints from unsaved family members when asked to give an answer why they don't listen to their Christian loved one is that they don't see real consistency in that person's life.

2. BEING REAL

We Christians can be so desperate to see our loved ones saved that we are nervous in their presence. They feel these "religious vibes" and it turns them off. *BE REAL*

For example, let's say you have a brother with whom you try to share Christ. He goes with you to a point and then shuts down. He lets you know that he would appreciate you not pushing him any further. What next?

Notice Jesus with His loved ones. Sometimes we forget that He did have loved ones—and according to Scripture "For even His brothers did not believe in Him." (John 7:5) Did Jesus push the panic button? There is no record of it—not at all! He knew who He was, what He had, and

that if He just loved them unconditionally they would one day wake up to the fact that He was for real.

That's just what happened and it can happen in your life. Begin to enjoy the company of your loved ones and learn to discuss some of their subjects. That doesn't mean compromising your principles and committing sin. It could mean talking baseball with your brother or perhaps politics with another loved one who enjoys a debate—(keep it friendly). Become a little more human and you may find loved ones enjoying talking with you more and more. At times they themselves will bring up the things of God and give you a great opportunity to share your testimony.

3. HUMILITY

Another way to witness to loved ones is through *HUMILITY*. Sometimes as Christians we think we have to be so spiritual or we will lose our loved ones if they even think that we do wrong. Stop worrying—they won't *think* you can do wrong—they *know* you and I do wrong because loved ones know loved ones better than anyone.

I love Paul's humility when the high priest had him slapped in the face. Paul lost his temper and delivered a verbal karate chop saying, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall." (Acts 23:3) When he was informed he was addressing the high priest, he could have put on a spiritual air or excused his own rage. Instead, he admitted he did not know it was the high priest and that he should not have talked like that. What he was saying was, "I'm sorry."

You may be a Christian, but you and I know we are no where near perfect. Be quick to admit your mistakes and sins that hurt anyone in your family. True humility always speaks louder than false pretense.

4. HONESTY

Next is a powerful ingredient called *HONESTY*. But honesty must be practiced without flying it like a flag. For example, a young man I think highly of asked me to lie if his wife called to ask if I had seen him. I simply told him that I would not do that, but that if she did not ask me, I would not volunteer the information. I didn't look at him and give him a long sermonette like, "From the moment I accepted Christ as my Savior I stopped my lying (and of course, I did). And the day you accept Christ will be the day you no longer lie, either. Besides, all liars go to hell!" That's like throwing cold holier-than-thou water in his face and he probably will begin to avoid you.

And talking about honesty, make sure your bills are paid on time and, if in doubt on your income tax, give it to the IRS. Don't make many promises, but if you do make some, keep them at any cost. And be honest with your loved one's time. If you have told him that you will meet him at a certain time, don't arrive fifteen minutes late just because it's your loved one. Be on time, even if the other person isn't, because that's a sign that you value that person's importance.

5. STABILITY

Something else your loved ones must see in your life is *STABILITY*. For the first few years of my Christian life I'm sure that many of my loved ones may have looked at me as a little weird. You know, out there in a "beautiful isle-of-somewhere" with no real interest in the real world. Some probably thought, "My poor brother is going to be a minister. He must have failed at everything else."

Now, more than fifty years later, my loved ones can see that God has been good to me. My face isn't lined with marks of alcohol and my marriage is one that many people envy. God has provided all of our needs. We are exhibiting stability in the midst of some of our precious loved ones whose lives lack peace and deep joy. We don't make them feel uncomfortable—we're just available to love, love, love! Stability means that you and I run the Christian life like a race—with patience. (Hebrews 12:1) And long term stability is a great witness to loved ones who are watching others falling apart all around them.

6. COMPASSION

Another ingredient is *COMPASSION*. That comes with having a passion for God. By having a morning and evening devotional, you can open up to the passion of God that He feels toward human beings and then allow His passion to flow through you toward your loved ones.

The Bible says, "My little children, let us not love in word, or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18) Loving through actions means remembering anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions. It means helping that loved one when he or she is sick or hurting—without bragging about it. It means a card, a flower, even a letter or gift for no occasion at all—just because you genuinely love that person. That kind of love is hard to find—and hard to resist.

7. CONFIDENCE

The seventh important ingredient to add to your life and witness is the powerful force of *CONFIDENCE*. You and I must learn to be confident in God—even when our eyes tell us nothing is taking place with our loved ones. Ask your heavenly Father to save each of your family members just as he did for the Philippian jailer. (Acts 16:31) If He did it then, He can do it again.

Praise God often—believing that He is working in the lives of your loved ones and using you as His physical representation of His loving concern for them. As you thank Him for your loved ones, you'll begin to see qualities in their lives that you can really appreciate—even though they don't yet know the Lord. And you'll grow more confident in the Holy Spirit's ability to convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (notice, that's the Holy Spirit's job, not yours or mine—John 16:8-11).

8. PATIENCE

The final ingredient is *PATIENCE*. Remember the prodigal son leaving his father, wasting his life and feeding the pigs? There's an interesting scripture in Luke 15:16 that says: "And when he came to himself." It took a long time for that point in his life to come.

What was the father doing meanwhile? No doubt praying for his son, loving him and believing that the good foundation he had given his son through his own example would finally bear fruit. The story says that "...when he was still a great way off, his father saw him ..." (Luke 15:20). That means he was watching because he expected his prayers to be answered.

Your prayers will be answered too, my friend. Adopt a patient attitude of love. Ponder all the beautiful and positive points in those unsaved loved ones and let them know how much you appreciate being around them. Tell them with words that ring with sincerity and truth how much you love them. God will tell you when and how.

As you pray for that person, seek God's wisdom in how to demonstrate compassion through new and unique ways. If that loved one brings up the Lord or a religious subject, make your point honestly, humbly and graciously. If he shows openness, go as far as you are allowed. That may mean all the way to commitment to Christ which will thrill God and you to no end. However, if that loved one lets you know through word or reaction that he has heard enough, back off and change the subject. Loved ones will appreciate your giving them space and it will give them further courage to bring up the subject again. Remember, you can't pick green fruit.

CONCLUSION

What I have shared with you are not profound secrets. On the contrary, they are merely the honest lessons of life I've learned the hard way in how to witness through actions to my loved ones, neighbors and friends. Go to work loving your family members and others like they have never been loved before. And remember to pray this simple prayer, "Lord, let's be partners in reaching my family and friends. I'll love them and You change them."

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 7 THE IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship with other believers is not just a good idea—it is an absolute necessity if you are to grow to spiritual maturity and not fall into the many traps of the devil. That's why God tells us in Hebrews 10:25 "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." A single burning log will die out if it is not placed with other logs in the fireplace.

How important is the Church? Jesus Himself called it into being and we know the real definition of "the Church" is "the body of Christ". That body extends around the world and will one day take in every nation, kindred, tongue and people. In each city and village we find "the local church" – made up of believers from that general area.

Many people complain about the condition of the Church today. We would be wiser to pray more and complain less. One great man of God was asked if he was discouraged over the condition of the Church today – especially in the western world. He answered that he is sometimes disappointed but never discouraged. That is a wise answer.

Many pastors and congregants are seeking the Holy Spirit to become the head of their assemblies as He was in the book of Acts. The following simple outline is what is beginning to take place in many local churches around the world. I call it God's eight-fold goal for the local Church and I hope it will help you to ask the Lord to lead you to such a family of believers.

Number One

A GROUNDED CHURCH – (Grounded on the foundation of repentance and restitution.)

"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." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Number Two

A GATHERED CHURCH – (Where believers enjoy coming together for mutual exhortation and edification.)

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42)

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25)

Number Three

A GIFTED CHURCH – (Where each believer seeks, finds and uses his/ her God-given gifts, abilities and talents for the mutual blessing of the body of Christ. You will become one of those believers.)

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy, in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12:5-8)

Number Four

A GROWING CHURCH (Where no believer – including pastors – ever thinks he/she knows it all—but all continue to grow in knowledge of, and obedience to, the Word of God.)

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18)

“Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:13-16)

Number Five

A GOING CHURCH (Where each believer is challenged to be a witness for Christ and the Holy Spirit chooses some of them for full-time service including going to the mission fields of the world.)

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

Number Six

A GIVING CHURCH (Where believers give joyfully from the bottom of their hearts – not reluctantly from the top of their purses.)

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Number Seven

A GOVERNED CHURCH (Directed by the Holy Spirit and Spirit-led leaders to develop “disciples in shoes”; not to leave them “infants in pews.”)

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Number Eight

A GLORIOUS CHURCH (Where God’s glorious presence is manifested in a body of believers whose lives are filled with obedience to God and unconditional love for each other.)

“That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:27)

IMPORTANT

If you are part of a church like the above, thank God for it. If not, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to one. But always remember not to stay away from other believers until you find the “perfect church”. There is no such thing—and if there were, it would cease being perfect after you and I walked in. Let God’s unconditional love be your guide in fellowshiping with others.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 8 DEVELOPING A PRAYER LIFE

Many believers struggle in their prayer lives. Obviously, Satan fears one who prays in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the evil one will do all in his devilish power to keep us from prayer. A prayerless life is a defeated life. That's why Jesus said, "...that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

However, even when we do pray, it is easy to concentrate only on our own problems or on the little circles of family and friends around us. God wants us to break out of our own small world and begin to carry His big world in our hearts and prayers. So let me offer my own simple plan of praying that keeps me focused on others more than on myself. Perhaps it will help you to enlarge and strengthen your prayer life and fill you with a greater joy as we do battle against the enemy in these last days. "But the end and culmination of all things has now come near; keep sound minded and self-restrained and alert therefore for the practice of prayer." (1 Peter 4:7 Amplified)

MY TOP 10 PRAYER LIST

1. Pray for the **"martyr church"**—Christians around the world who are persecuted for the sake of Jesus. "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also." (Hebrews 13:3)
2. Pray for your **family members** to be saved and committed to Christ. "So they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)
3. Pray for **world evangelism**. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14)
4. Pray for **Israel** and the **Jewish people** to receive God's unconditional love from the Church and experience the transforming love of Messiah Jesus in their lives. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." (Romans 10:1)
5. Pray for **your church** and the **body of Christ** worldwide to be filled with the fire and love of the Holy Spirit. "that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27)
6. Pray for the **"Laodicean lukewarm church"** to experience the new birth and meet the living Christ. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot...As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." (Revelation 3:15,19)

7. Pray for your **neighbors and friends** and watch for the Lord's signals to share your testimony with them. "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4)
8. Pray for the **sick and dying**—(for the dying—God's great grace; for the sick—His healing touch). "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1)
9. Pray for the **poor, homeless, widows, orphans, abused and those in prison** (and keep your eyes open for the Lord's opportunity to get involved). "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." (1 John 5:14)
10. Ask the Holy Spirit to lay any **specific burdens** on your heart throughout the day or night as you learn to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit..." (Ephesians 6:18)

Remember that prayer is like a child talking things over with a father. You have a wonderful heavenly Father who wants to hear your voice—whether a whisper from your heart or words from your mouth—and answer your prayers. Set a time aside every day for special prayer, meditation and searching the Scriptures. Then little by little you'll learn to talk things over with the Lord—any time, all the time—as things arise in your heart and mind.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 9 FACING TESTS, TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS

I have walked with Jesus too long to ever believe those who say, “Come to the Lord and your times of trouble and suffering will be over.” On the contrary, trouble and suffering will in some manner visit every believer—from infant Christian to the most mature saint.

The writer of Ecclesiastes hit the target when he said: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose...” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). But just as nature’s seasons and extremes work for the ultimate good of mankind, even so the changing of times and circumstances work for the ultimate good of the soul. After all, God’s true goal for those He has saved and called is not just our arrival in heaven, but in our being conformed to the image of Jesus Himself (Romans 8:29). To do this, the Lord allows at least seven different times, or seasons, to be part of the life of one who would serve Him.

1. TIMES OF DELIGHT

It is wonderful to feel the powerful presence of the Lord. And who would not want a continual sense of being used mightily by the Holy Spirit. Elijah knew that exhilaration when God told him to confront King Ahab and destroy Satan’s army of 450 Baal worshipers and 400 other false prophets of Jezebel. When God’s fire fell and the devil’s disciples were destroyed, what a feeling of anointing and closeness to God Elijah must have felt! A true time of delight! But those times don’t last, as Elijah learned when he ran for his life from Jezebel and sat down under a juniper tree to offer God his death wish (1 Kings 18-19:4).

Don’t confuse the times of delight (that lift our emotions to Mount Everest heights) with the scriptural admonition to “Delight thyself also in the Lord” (Proverbs 37:4). Emotions change when circumstances or feelings change, but God’s Word and presence never change. Marriage offers a good illustration. Honeymoons can be sensational “times of delight”, but then the difficult reality follows. So enjoy the times when God’s presence is so real you can almost touch Him, and His Word explodes like a million joy bells in your heart. But realize that His training will take in much time when you will “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7); when you will learn the principal of endurance in spite of a loss of your positive emotions. That’s why I call “times of delight” tests—and not just triumphs—because how you view those positive moments will determine how you will handle the negative times.

2. TIMES OF DRYNESS

You will experience times when it feels like God is nowhere around. We all have—or will have—periods of dryness where our feelings tell us that God has left us on our own. It is now only faith that keeps us going by insisting that God’s promises are true—and that God is closer than our breath.

David describes his times of dryness: “Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1). And David’s emotional state grows worse when he complains in Psalm 13:1 “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” Yet he always ended up experiencing God’s deliverance.

Dry times are good for us. They offer us the best chance to grow—by believing we are being cared for by the God of abundant rain even when we must endure times of desert heat and lots of pain.

3. TIMES OF DANGER

Every believer will experience times of danger to a greater or lesser degree. For some, it may be the literal danger of imminent death. Thousands of believers in Jesus are being martyred throughout the world. All of these precious saints are sacrificing their lives to preserve their testimonies to love Jesus to the end. And many of their persecutors are coming to Christ after seeing only love from those they hated.

I love the attitudes of the three young Hebrews in Daniel 3:17-18. When they were ordered to worship the king’s idolatrous golden image, they refused by declaring God’s power and ability to deliver them from the burning furnace. But since they were not sure that it would be God’s will to spare them from death, they boldly added those great words of faith, “But if not” and confessed their love for God alone, whether they lived or died.

Paul declared the same in Philippians 1:20-21, “According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death”, counting his life expendable for the cause of Jesus and affirming his desire to glorify the Lord by life or by death.

Most Christians may never face the martyr’s challenge, but all will be called upon to stand up for Christ when circumstances would make it easy to deny Him. There will be danger and some form of persecution to all who will live godly lives. “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

4. TIMES OF DECEPTION

It is not when we are at our weakest that we are most vulnerable to deception, but rather in our high moments of victory and achievement. King Saul was God’s man in his early days of humility. But then came success, praise and power that caused Saul’s great fall and Samuel’s sorrow: “When you were little in your own eyes...” (1 Samuel 15:17). Always remain “small” in your own sight while confessing Christ as your strength and power.

Paul warned against the trap of comparing ourselves with others, either negatively or positively...“comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Our standard of measurement and our champion must be Jesus and Him alone so that we can resist those times of deception.

5. TIMES OF “DEFEAT”

Note the word “defeat” in quotes. I’m well aware that it is God “who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57). Nevertheless, those who have walked intimately with the Lord know that He allows those times when it appears that His plans and purposes for our lives are defeated. It is only then that the Lord Himself becomes our most and only prized possession—not just His plans and purposes that can leave us arrogant in “our call” and proud of our humility. When defeat was all Job knew, he was left with “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” (Job 13:15). And that was enough to make Job the victor even in seeming “defeat”.

6. TIMES OF DESPAIR

There are times when we sink even deeper than feeling merely defeated. Our spirits can become so crushed that we sense our physical life ebbing and death a certainty—unless God intervenes. Paul experienced that in Asia when he “despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8). But he caught God’s lesson even in this extremity when he said, “Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). And it was going through this dark tunnel that allowed Paul to rejoice in the light he saw at the end: “who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1:10). Past experience gave hope for the present and a guarantee that God would invade with His presence any future “times of despair.”

It was the same with the psalmist who both talked to, and answered, himself in his despairing moments: “Why are you cast down, O my soul...hope in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance” (Psalm 42:5). It is only in our times of despair when we focus on our only hope for help...and find more of God Himself.

7. TIMES OF DEATH

Here I am not speaking of mere physical death. It is easier to die physically than to die spiritually—to self—daily. Paul said, “I die daily.” (1 Corinthians 15:31) Jesus spoke of a corn of wheat “dying” in order to bring forth much fruit. (John 12:24) Again Paul spoke of the reality of “For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:11).

Of all the seven seasons of testing in the life of an overcomer, this seventh will be the most present. For the more one matures in the Lord, the more—not less—he or she realizes that the monster called “self” must be submitted to the cross of Jesus in a moment by moment recognition of death. But it is then that we find a greater measure of the Lord Jesus Himself, as we are progressively conformed to His very image (Romans 8:29) and He Himself—not our old self—is formed within us.

REMEMBER

Once we recognize there is no avoiding passing through—again and again—these seven times of testing, we won't be defeated by anything that comes our way. The greatest apostle that ever lived was troubled, distressed, perplexed, persecuted and cast down (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). Some called him dishonorable, evil and a deceiver (2 Corinthians 6:8). He faced prisons, whippings, beatings, stoning and shipwreck (2 Corinthians 11:23-25). Jews, Gentiles and robbers all conspired against him and false Christians hurt him most of all—while he endured pain, hunger, thirst, shivering with cold and yet having to nourish the churches (2 Corinthians 11:27, 28).

And we still can't stop. For in his first letter to the church of Corinth, Paul told how he and the apostles were called fools and weak—and were despised, reviled, persecuted, defamed and made the "filth of the world." (1 Corinthians 4:10-13) Yet it was this same "weak Paul" who was made powerful by the indwelling Savior and who called himself "more than a conqueror" through Christ. (Romans 8:37). God can do the same with you and me.

Enough said! How dare any of us complain about our lot in life?! Let the seven times of testing come. The key is to know that "My times are in Your hand" (Psalm 31:15) and learn moment by moment to "Trust in Him at all times." (Psalm 62:8) If our only desire is more of Him, our Lord will use every season to make us more *like* Him.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

LESSON 10 GOD'S LADDER TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

This is the last study in our new believer series. You are on your way to spiritual maturity.

Study 2 Peter chapter one closely (his last two chapters also). When a great man of God is about to die, his final instructions can be priceless. And so it is with Peter. In his first epistle, he introduced himself as “an apostle” to babes in Christ (1 Peter 2:2).

Time flies, and now a more mature Peter introduces himself first as “a servant” and then an apostle as he sends another letter—this one urging babes in Christ to mature into faithful saints and soldiers.

That's when he offers us God's ladder to spiritual growth and deeper, more real experiences with the Son of God. We have, Peter writes, been given “great and precious promises” and a Savior who now lives within us and sets us free from every lust that eats like cancer in those without Christ (verses 3 and 4).

But we are to play our part. God gives us faith to believe—and that faith becomes our solid base or foundation. Now we are to climb the ladder—one step at a time (it's all contained in only three verses, 7-9). But it's loaded with meaning and possibility.

First, “add to your faith virtue”—purity, character that becomes more and more like Jesus. Then add to virtue “knowledge”—daily searching the scripture in order to know God's will and plan for your life. Next we add another step in the ladder called “temperance” or self-control. We learn to say “Yes” to what God loves and “No” to what He hates.

One more step up the ladder takes us to “patience”—where we learn to walk with Jesus moment by moment and endure tests, trials, tears and temptations without getting discouraged and giving up. Then we add to patience “godliness”—a deep cry for “God-like-ness”—where we see such a holy and perfect God more clearly and submit our thoughts, words and actions to Him for a deeper purifying and separation from the filth of the world.

Now, way up the ladder comes “brotherly kindness”. It is often easier to love the “lost” than the “saved”. But when we open our hearts to the Holy Spirit's gift of kindness and gentleness, we will love our brothers and sisters, not provoke them or gossip about them. We will live to serve them, rather than wait for them to serve us.

Finally comes the step in our spiritual ladder that leads to a greater awareness of God's incredible presence. From brotherly kindness, we now climb to the top step, agape love. This love is so powerful, so unconditional, that it is the very essence of the Father's description of Himself—“God is love”(1 John 4:8). With this love released in all our relationships with God and others, we are more than conquerors. Without it we remain babes at best and defeated at worst.

Peter, who is soon to die (see verses 13-15), assures us that if we climb this ladder of God's priorities we will live fruitful lives and receive an abundant entrance into heaven. Maybe that "abundant entrance" will be necessary because of the many others who will also come to Jesus because of our telling them the good news with our lips and living it through our lives!

Congratulations! You have now completed this ten lesson series on assurance of salvation and first steps in Christian growth. Let us know how these lessons have helped you. And remember, we have much more help to offer you, always at no cost, in the St. Paul School of Leadership. Just go to our website: www.shalomworldwide.org Then go to work!

God bless you!

Frank Eiklor