

**THE GRASS
REALLY
ISN'T
GREENER**

THE GRASS REALLY ISN'T GREENER

**A Perspective
of the Other Side
of God's Fence**

Bud Price

**Great Commission Illustrated
Highlands Ranch, CO**

**WWW: <http://greatcommission.com>
Email: books@greatcommission.com**

**THE GRASS
REALLY
ISN'T GREENER**

*A Perspective
of the Other Side
of God's Fence*

Copyright © 1998 by Bud Price &
Great Commission Illustrated

Appendix A Copyright © 1998 by John Engler

All rights are reserved. No part of this book may be duplicated,
copied, translated, reproduced or stored mechanically or
electronically without specific, written permission of the authors and
publisher.

Published by Great Commission Illustrated

Printed in the United States of America

Fourth Printing, February 1999

ISBN 0-9653469-5-1

Cover photo used with permission by dennis coello
Back photo used with permission by Bill & Donna Ashley
Cover graphics and layout by William To

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. Scripture references marked NAS are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright The Lockman Foundation 1977. Used by permission.

To Gramps

*I hope I have done you proud.
You always made sure I felt that way.*

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to all of those who believed that I would return to God's way, especially my wife Sylvia who watched me wrestle with Satan and whose encouragement helps me stay focused on my purpose.

To my son Nathan, who led our family back through his own baptism into Christ.

To Doug Meyerkord, who baptized me and then never stopped being a friend closer than a brother.

To Warren Pottinger, Kelly Cochrane, Scott Boain, Leroy Walters, Mike & Jeanette Hardcastle, Jeff & Andrea Lamotte and Joe & Alpha White.

To Jesus, who forgave me once again and gave me yet another chance.

And to Barry Baker without whose inspiration this little book would not even exist.

I love you all!

Contents

Dedication	7
Acknowledgments.....	11
Foreword	13
Introduction.....	15
1. The Deceitful Heart	19
2. Needing, Asking For and Wanting	
Advice	25
3. The Callused Heart	31
4. Appreciating the Cross.....	37
5. By Whose Effort	43
6. What Would People Think of Me?	47
7. From Riches to Rags.....	53
Appendix A -	
Unfaithfulness and Restoration.....	59
Appendix B -	
Testimonies of Restorations	83

*And let the one who is taught the
word share all good things with
him who teaches.*

Galatians 6:6

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my wife (Sylvia), my son (Nathan) and my mom (Evelyn) for being there for me. I also want to thank Monica Hicks, whose typing skills and serving heart made publishing this book possible.

I'd like to thank Rex Geissler for believing in my work and that I could make a difference. I should also mention Tad Wakefield for his editing of the manuscript.

I appreciate Warren Pottinger for getting in my face when I needed it most and wanted it least.

I would like to thank Nick Young for honoring me by writing the foreword. Nick has always reminded me that the Lord will hold me accountable for what I say and do. Nick also believed in me and encouraged me to write this book, move to Dallas, lead the Chemical Recovery Ministry and be a man of vision.

A special thanks goes to Mike & Margaret Isenberg, and Dave & Beth Sipos for their humility and unending love. A heartfelt appreciation also goes to the disciples of Christ in the St. Louis church for their unconditional love.

*I tell you that in the same way
there will be more rejoicing in
heaven over one sinner who
repents than over ninety-nine
righteous persons who do not
need to repent.*

Luke 15:7

Foreword

Jesus said, “I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Think about this concept. This is truly an incredible thought. There is joy throughout heaven every time a sinner changes his mind and decides to obey God. The book you now hold in your hands is a statement about how one such sinner was led astray, repented, and how he was brought back.

Bud Price became a disciple in 1990 as a result of the church in St. Louis. Four years later he fell away from God and from a relationship with God’s people in the church. After seventeen months of living in a downward spiral, he was restored to Christ. Bud’s deceitful and prideful heart, which Satan had used to bring about Bud’s spiritual departure had once again been conquered and converted.

Bud tells his story in such an informal way that you will be tempted to think you are actually conversing with him about his story rather than reading a book. For Bud, the months after his restoration have been a time for discovering and understanding himself. This is an important process. Self-discovery is a prerequisite for self-mastery. “Know yourself” was the axiom of Socrates. The command of Jesus to “deny yourself” (Luke 9:23) implies the former while communicating even more. What is the point of knowing one’s self

without the goal of mastering one's self? Perhaps the reading of this book will prove to be a time of enlightenment for you also.

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

James 5:19-20

It means so much to have Bud back in the fellowship of the saints. It is a great victory when any sinner turns away from his life's error and returns to God. Luke 15 is the chapter that tells about four lost things: a sheep, a coin, a son and an older brother. The chapter has been called "the gospel within the gospel" because it reveals the heart of God toward sinners. It is a heart of compassion, forgiveness and love. Whenever a sinner comes home to God, it is the church's finest moment and Christ's highest glory. Bud's story reminds us that the message of the gospel is not "be good" or "do good," but "come home." May the reader of this book note this lesson and apply it.

Nick Young - Lead Evangelist
Dallas / Fort Worth Church of Christ Jesus
January 1996

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Matthew 13:44

Introduction

When I think of the incredible joy of the kingdom of God which Jesus described in Matthew 13:44, the first thing that comes to mind is, “How could anyone ever possibly walk away from something like this?” But walk away is exactly what I did. After experiencing the same joy that Jesus described in Matthew 13:44, living and even leading in the kingdom of God for four years, I simply stopped coming to church, stopped answering the phone, and stopped caring about anybody but myself.

In less than one month, I selfishly destroyed my life as well as those around me. My stepdaughter of eleven years moved back to her maternal father. Then two weeks later, my wife left both God and me. I experienced physical heart problems but the doctors found only stress as the cause.

Even through all these trials, I didn’t humble myself to God and see what he was showing me. I just couldn’t understand why I wasn’t able to *fix* my problems and make my life come back together. If only I had turned to God’s word for guidance, I would have found my answers in the book of Job 32:8, “But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.” The spirit of God had left me. Just like a cold front in the weather, my sin blew out my spirit, which became obvious very soon. Everything that I tried to do was an endless effort. Similar to pushing a stalled car, first with

assistance and then by my own effort, the full load of life had suddenly dropped squarely upon my back.

There were things in my life that I could not see. I was not oblivious to the obvious calamities that were plaguing my life, but rather was blind to the subtle attitudes of my heart. The real reasons for my walking away from God were attitudes in the heart. These attitudes began to take root long before I ever walked away. In retrospect, the attitudes seemed to create the actions.

I have been asked by countless people, "What were you feeling when you left God and left the church?" This is a question that cannot and should not be answered quickly. This question merited serious reflection and self-examination. It is a question, though, that I need to continually ask myself. Even after living my life seventeen months without God, seeing my fourteen year old son and my new bride baptized into Christ two weeks before I was restored, and having my heart converted again, I know the same answers and lackadaisical attitude to that question will cause me to be unfaithful again.

It is these very thoughts and attitudes of the heart that I have chosen to write about. I do not take complete credit for the whole concept of this writing, though. Recently a brother from the Dallas/Fort Worth church was visiting St. Louis. While talking with him about my life he made the comment that, "someone should write a book that expresses the feelings and attitudes, which cause a person's heart to harden enough to leave God." In response to that charge I will attempt to share not only my own personal feelings and experiences but also the opinions and thoughts of others that have had the same experience of walking away from a life with God.

Realizing the possibility for redundancy in recording the feelings associated with such a topic, I only ask that the reader put all the chapters into the context of one man's life and heart. This is not a "how to" or "how not to" book. Rather it is a collection of attitudes, thoughts, feelings and personal experiences one may encounter when Satan is allowed to take hold of a person's heart. If this book spurs someone to turn back from the potentially deadly decision to leave God and the body of believers, then I can consider it an undeserved blessing and take no credit of my own from it.

Many of us have had a close friend wander away from the truth. The pain and shock of a friend leaving the faith never hurts less than it did the first time. Perhaps the words of evangelist Marty Fuqua, who preached at a Great South Evangelism Seminar, explain my

feelings about being unfaithful better than anything I can write from my own capacities:

The true purpose of God's movement is not to just have more people coming in the front door than are spiritually leaving through the back door.



Bud Price
Dallas, Texas 1997

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Jeremiah 17:9

1

The Deceitful Heart

Once I walked along a lake with a brother from a bible study group. We reflected on the ways God showed his patience with us. The analogy that came to me was that life in the kingdom was like walking on that nicely paved walkway around the lake. As long I stayed on the path and follow the planned course, I easily found my way around the lake. In a similar manner, as long as a disciple of Christ stays on the narrow path of righteousness, they can much more easily find their way through life's many trials.

As we walked along, we talked about how God must feel when we stray away from the path and how, when we come back, he is always there waiting for us. But the one thing that changes is that people who are walking on the path had moved on and advanced to another point on the path while we plotted our own course away from it. So much can happen while one strays from the path of righteousness. A person's path might be changed forever by one's decision to leave.

Often the foolish idea gets rooted in a disciple of Christ that their local church would not be able to go on without them. Not true—God does want every soul and the unique talents and gifts each person can offer, but all too often a person begins to think in a humanistic way that they are the reason the movement of God is able to exist. No one is expendable but neither is anyone invaluable to the church or to God.

Well, maybe a person would not be that prideful. Perhaps they wholeheartedly know that the church was active and growing before they came along and could certainly continue and thrive if they chose to leave. But surely the people around them, their bible study group or those closest to them, would not be able to make it without them or would they?

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 17, verse 10, describing people like this, saying:

I the Lord search the heart and examine the
mind, to reward a man according to his conduct,
according to what his deeds deserve.

A person is rewarded according to what his or her deeds deserve, but only *after* the Lord examines what is on their minds and, more importantly, in their hearts.

What is the true heart of a person? No one really knows for sure except God. Most times not even the person knows his own true heart. It is at this point that one begins to deceive himself. A person begins to justify the bitterness in his heart and deceives himself into thinking he has it all on track. It all revolves around sin and one should not discredit Satan. Credit is given where credit is due.

But in reality *each person* is responsible for his own decisions. Decision—now there's an interesting word not usually associated with traditional Christianity. Webster defines it in part as "the act or process of deciding...by giving judgment." And that is exactly what takes place when one first begins thinking about walking away from God. Amid the temptation, the critical attitudes of the heart, the hardening due to sin, and before even the first thoughts of leaving, a person begins to decide (there is that word again) that *they* will determine which path they are going to take.

I really think the one thing that I found almost surprising was how easy it was to just walk away. It was almost as if I was expecting some sort of Star Trek-like force field to prevent me from leaving. I

felt like some sort of powerful spiritual current would whisk me back safely into Jesus' and the church's arms. I really don't know where that notion came from, because God never said that the Christian life was going to be anything like that. In fact all through the words of the prophets, gospels and the writings of the apostles, the word "if" is used quite frequently. For others, it is difficult to leave the Lord and the church. Even though their desire may be to sin, they still "count the costs" of walking away from God.

Consider the following scriptures with emphasis added.

If you repent...*if* you utter worthy, not worthless words...

Jeremiah 15:19

For *if* you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive your sins...

Matthew 6:14-15

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because *if* you do you will save both yourself and your hearers...

1 Timothy 4:16

God clearly leaves the choice entirely up to each person. And this was one thing that totally caught me off guard. Even though I was taking action to leave and was in the decision process, I still thought subconsciously I was expecting to be swooped up by some sort of giant dip net into the spiritual catch. It was like a weary catfish after a long fight, which could no longer resist the strength of the fisherman's line. But my own heart was actually deceiving me; instead I was released like a bass that didn't meet the minimum requirements of a keeper.

It was not easy to think of myself as a throwback or a non-keeper, but that is what I had become spiritually. My heart had deceived me to the point that I had wandered away from God without even knowing that I was wandering. So often a person, as human nature controls them, becomes forgetful and complacent. Then a person's religious lifestyle becomes so repetitious that they do many

things without even knowing they are doing them. People often drive somewhere and after about three miles, realize they were headed in the opposite direction they intended to go. This same line of thinking, or maybe lack of thinking, is the beginning or creation of a deceitful heart, which causes calluses to form over it. A person starts doing things without any thought of what consequences their thoughtless deeds will give birth to.

1 Timothy 4:1 speaks of life today, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits.” A person can become his own deceiving spirit and cause this abandonment himself first by not identifying the deceiving spirit as such and then by following it. Many people even pray about their decisions and justify themselves by saying that God told their spirit to do it. Yet they ignore the predefined biblical directives and the wisdom of getting advice from mature disciples of Christ. God didn’t just say that the heart was deceitful, he added “deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” This is the first step many take off the path.



For Today

- How can you see deceit in others' hearts?
- How can you see deceit in your own heart?
- Have you thought about what your life would be like if you were not a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- Do you find yourself thinking, saying and doing things you gave up when you became a Christian?
- Are you already "counting the costs" of leaving God and leaving the church?
- Does anyone know where you are *really* at spiritually?

Recommendation

- Memorize Jeremiah 17:9
- Read Douglas Jacoby's *The Spirit*¹
- For further study read Proverbs 14:5, 1 Samuel 16, Isaiah 53:9, Psalm 50:16-23, James 1:19-27.

*May I never boast except in the
cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
through which the world has been
crucified to me, and I to the
world.*

Galatians 6:14

2

Needing, Asking For and Wanting Advice

As I reflect on being unfaithful to God, I came across many instances of pride. Whether conscious of my pride or not, it doesn't matter. Pride was obviously in my character: "I have helped this person" or "They sure need me to lead this song." To the contrary, the apostle Paul said that he hoped to *never* boast except to boast in the cross of Jesus.

One day I thumbed through an old quiet time notebook from years ago (it's interesting that I hung on to that old stuff). In the notebook, I came upon one particular boastful statement that at the time probably seemed humble and sincere. The boastful statement sounded like this, "This lesson was the spiritual food I needed in order to supply my faith with the biblical protein it needed." Throughout my notebook, I never found anything that remotely mentioned how I sought or needed advice. The only thing I saw was many prideful boasts about my own capabilities and what "I" did to help *me*.

Looking back I could not find any consistent time when I ever wanted the many advisors that make victory sure (Proverbs 11:14). When I did get advice, I vividly recall being selective about the specific wording I used with my advisor. I was also great at

identifying problems in other people and *giving* advice but not living out that humble attitude myself. I was so boastful about anything I had accomplished or overcome that it was as if I didn't want to share the glory with anyone else.

That independent spirit was not something that started to take place just before I left the church. No, it was clearly a lifelong way of functioning, a deeply rooted character problem that still desires to rear its ugly head.

My wife and I recently had a couple of local church leaders over for dinner. This couple had wandered away from the faith at one time and had been restored. Since their return, they grew tremendously and have done some great things for God. One of the things they said was that prior to their thoughts of leaving, they made some major decisions without seeking advice. Proverbs 15:22 and 20:18 plainly tell us to make plans by seeking advice. Not long after they carried out their plans without seeking advice, they became prideful and wandered off on their own path.

A person may ask what in the world this has to do with boasting? To spell it out, one should refer to Proverbs 20:11, "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right." As adults, many are sure they don't need advice to check if their conduct to determine if it is pure and right. They are relying heavily on their own decision-making abilities.

Often people want to get the credit in life. They want to hear their names mentioned in sermons and even go as far as to get little attitudes when they are not mentioned. It may not be a pleasant thing to admit it, but everyone has attitudes like this situation at one time or another. What matters is how a person deals with those feelings. People like it when they are "lifted up" while someone is sharing good news. It may make a person feel good and there is nothing wrong with that. Often, a person wants it a little too badly and will even try to create the results by taking boastful actions or saying boastful things like, "I reached out to 100 people today" or, "I brought 10 friends to a special church service." Many people have done something sacrificial for a person and then lost their blessing in heaven by making sure they told everyone about it (Matthew 6:1-8)?

Throughout the book of Proverbs, there are many great sayings and rules for living. But there is not any issue that God warns about more than the need to consistently get advice. God went out of his way to emphasize the importance of staying humble to him and getting help from the people he placed in our lives. It is almost as if

people were destined from birth to be independent in their thinking and God knew that they would turn away from him. If one does not get input and humbly seek the more objective views of others to make sure they stay on the narrow path, God knew they would come to their own conclusions and decisions, which inevitably pleases only their own selfish desires.

Self reliance is boastful even in itself. Self reliance says to God and others, "I don't need anyone to tell me what I need, not even God!" Uh oh, what was that statement? A person does not even God? Surely someone would never make such a defiant statement as that. Nonetheless, a person doesn't need to say the words. Their actions speak loud enough for God to hear. The audible sounds were never uttered through the lips but they thundered from their heart.

A lot of the excuses that I used to prevent me from getting advice were actually insecurities caused by being burned by poor advice in the past. Notice the word used was "excuses" not "reasons." They are excuses because people focus on the few mistakes made by past advisors instead of all the good that another person's point of view and experience have to offer and will produce. It is easy to forget the positive results from getting advice because people always want to take the credit. For instance, would a person have passed the fourth grade in school without their teacher? No, they would not. But when it comes to more important life issues, one makes spur of the moment decisions entirely on their own. There were a few times that I did seek advice but it was in a very guarded way. Typically, my advice seeking was selective and strategically planned out so that I would not get disciplined on my heart or my motives. Also, it is easy to leave out certain facts when getting advice so that the desired outcome seems like the correct one.

A lot of what kept me from getting input on decisions was just being afraid that I would not agree with the advice. Then, to be a good disciple of Christ, I would go against what *I* thought was best and had planned out. This was tough for me because, who knew what was best for me more than I did? Then if I took the advice given, the credit for the success would go to someone else, and I could not let that happen! So I learned the art of going through the motions. I would pretend to be seeking advice (playing the discipleship game) but I would have the conversation mapped out in detail and in advance. In this manner, I could manipulate the person into telling me what I wanted to hear. The scariest part of this is that the issues I am bringing up were not conscious thoughts. Rather, they were things I

discovered in reflection, which revealed that not only was I doing this but also I was doing it in the name of God.

This presents the question most asked of me since coming back and the question that the apostle Paul asked in his letter to the disciples in Rome in Romans 6:21, "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?" The answer would be that I had begun to learn the truth about getting advice. It doesn't make a person a sniveling spineless worm to ask for advice on matters in their life but rather it makes a person just the opposite. It shows God and others that a person is mature enough, man or woman enough, to admit their imperfections. It also shows that a person can admit they are not always right and that they are serious about living up to the declaration they made at baptism; that Jesus, not himself or herself, is Lord of their life. This being the case, one should not do *anything* "out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than ourselves" (Philippians 2:3-8). Later in this passage the example is given of how Jesus literally poured out his life for others to the point of death.

Perhaps the wise words of my Grandfather (who has left me with more than I was able to understand in my youth) would best describe the need to get input of others. In simple layman's terms he would say, "A dog can't smell his own stink and it's a lot easier for him to go 'round smellin' the other hounds' rear ends than it is for him to be a'smellin' his own." I can look back now and see that Ol' Gramps was not giving me a lesson in animal husbandry but rather was simply trying to teach me that a person can see the faults of others but seem to be blinded by his own faults. People give their views on issues a lot more attention than they are willing to give to others' views and insights on themselves (Luke 6:41-42).

If a person chooses to not seek advice in their daily living, they place themselves on an even level with God since he is the only one who can claim perfection. Boasts, pride and lack of advice are a solid plan for complete failure. I make this statement boldly after witnessing my own destruction because I kept others locked out of my life.

Wanting, asking, and seeking advice goes against everything people are traditionally raised to believe (especially in independent America), that denotes a "strong" person. But God never seems concerned about man's traditions. He only wants people to keep realizing everyday that he is God and that man is not.



For Today

- What are the benefits of isolation and independence?
- What are the problems with isolation and independence?
- What do the Proverbs say about a wise man seeking advice?
- What things do you seek advice about in this life (purchasing house, car or computer; college; job; career; marriage; children)?
- Why would you not seek advice about issues that involve discipleship and the imitation of Jesus?
- Do you dread getting advice?
- Are you open with the *heart of the matter* in regard to the advice you are seeking?
- Are you vague when you are asked specific questions about your proposed plan?
- Why do you sacrifice and get advice? Is it for God's glory?
- Do you seek advice to do the *good, better or best* thing for Christ in each situation?

Recommendation

- For further study read Deuteronomy 8:10-18, 2 Corinthians 12:18-19, 1 Peter 5:6-7.
- Read Gordon Ferguson's *Discipling*¹.
- Read Steve Kinnard's *Call of the Wise*².

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Ephesians 4:18

3

The Callused Heart

I have often made the unappetizing mistake of leaving the lid off the cake, donut or cookie container. When I come back the next time my sweet tooth calls, I find my snack as hard as a rock. In that rock-like state, it is useless, even to our beagle Elmer. In a similar way, a heart that is hardened to God, his Word or to God's people is no better than hard, stale snacks.

Though people often overlook the fact that God chooses people who will carry out his purpose, they must remember that God uses others as one of the ways to talk to people today. Unlike the prophets and mighty leaders of the Old Testament, we don't actually get to hear "first hand" from God himself.

There might be a smaller number of unfaithful people if people actually did hear the voice of God booming from heaven or blasting from a burning bush. But God wants a person to rely on the unseen

(referred to in 2 Corinthians 4:18) and put their faith in him. Putting one's faith in him also means a person should have faith that he has placed the right people at the right time in one's life. A person should appreciate the people that God has placed in their life, and *not* always think whom God *ought* to place in their life.

No matter what a person thinks is the cause or reason for not listening to God through the advisors he places in their life, the passage in Ephesians 4:18 explains it in detail. I recall being able to have an enormous amount of insight and understanding when I was doing great spiritually. Later, I was blind to my character as I began to drift away from God. The change almost seemed to happen instantaneously once my heart hardened.

While I was being restored to the faith, I was frustrated because I did not see things in myself the same way others saw them. These blind spots in my life were due to my lack of understanding and my separation from God. It didn't matter how hard I tried to see it; my heart would not let me see it. My heart had become hard and the end result was ignorance of everything others saw in me (Ephesians 4:18).

I almost felt stupid as my heart started to soften. No, I did feel stupid at not "getting it" and that just frustrated me all the more. But it was pointed out to me that I needed to trust in God's word as it counsels and guides, just as I had been shown many times before. The Bible plainly describes what a hard heart will cause to happen once trust has left. If there was a heavier burden in my life I cannot recall it—to feel the weight of the darkness slowly creeping over me like a shadow eclipsing my understanding and reasoning.

As children of the light, it is often forgotten that a person can so quickly "lose all sensitivity" (Ephesians 4:18-19). The callousness that forms over a hardening heart must be viewed as just that, *callousness*. Just like the many layers of calluses on my hands from years of carpentry work, the living flesh beneath them can feel something touching the surface but the sensitivity to detect the slightest splinter is simply gone. No longer can my hands detect slight touches because they have become callused and hard from years of abuse. This is exactly what happens to the heart that becomes callused and hard toward the word of God.

What then, most folks have asked, is the beginning of the hardening? The actual reason really doesn't matter, except only to guard against it happening again. Once Satan finds the right button to push to make one squirm he usually doesn't have to look any further into one's heart to trip you a person again. It's strange that people

allow Satan the privilege of consistently tripping them up with the same struggles. Darkened understanding is what should be focused on because in the darkness is where the real attitudes lie. Those attitudes are just lurking and waiting to devour the poor unsuspecting soul who allows struggles to continue (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Consider it this way. Suppose a spouse or roommate comes home. Slowly and methodically they explain an automobile accident while you are in the middle of preparing dinner, helping the kids with homework, catching up on phone messages or finding a bill in the mail that says the electricity will be turned off tomorrow if it's not paid. Most people would tend to miss a few details of their story. But take the same story being told in a totally different scenario. There are no kids, no TV and no phone interruptions. You become Mr. Understanding and avoid future bumps when the topic is discussed later. The former situation is exactly how my life became. Everything seemed to be confusing. I just couldn't seem to get a handle on any situation, as I was darkened in my understanding due to the hardening of my heart. Details always seemed to be missing or just out of reach.

Does this mean that life in the kingdom of God is all a bowl of cherries and that no one ever has any problems? Hardly! There might even seem to be twice the number of problem situations now because a Christian is dealing not only with their own heart but also helping the hearts of others they normally wouldn't have cared about. But what is so straightforward about this lifestyle is the hope one receives from softening one's heart to God. For the most part, the problems have a new "light" on them and it seems to be easier to see the solution behind them.

When one's heart becomes hard, everything done is a struggle. In Isaiah 29:14, and again in 1 Corinthians 1:19, the Bible explains that not only does hardening your heart to God darken your understanding, but that God actually causes the confusion. The apostle Paul even goes as far as to say that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 1:20).

Perhaps it could be best described as division between man and God. The worldly viewpoint of someone with a callused heart (though wanting to be on God's side) really separates himself from any understanding of why there are trials and troubles in the first place. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul spelled out how they simply weren't ready to gain understanding because their thinking was worldly (1 Corinthians 3:2). That type of thinking, that hardening of the heart, is the beginning of the separation between God and oneself.

The world doesn't understand true discipleship of Jesus. It never has and never will. When one's heart is hardened to the point of wandering away (and one doesn't have to stop coming to church to have wandered away in one's heart), they become part of the world. Jesus said many times over that the world did not understand him. He also warned people that one's heart will leave if they are not careful.

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down
with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of
life, and that day will close on you like a trap.

Luke 21:34

Note that Jesus did not say that a person would see this coming. He said that piece by piece one's heart slowly becomes hard and then the door of understanding *slams* shut.

To me, subtle changes in how I viewed life's anxieties were undetectable but *they* were the actual calluses, "It seemed like the thing to do at the time." How many times has a person heard someone use that excuse? But a lot of the decisions I made while I was hardening my heart were made with no more forethought than that they *seemed* right.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to
those who are perishing, but to those who are being
saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

The cross of Christ is foolishness because the heart is too hard to absorb the truth. Similar to the analogy of trying to listen to the story while the hearer is distracted, the cross becomes twisted. The cross becomes useless, as a hardened snack because a hard callused heart will not be used to the fullest extent for God's purposes.



For Today

- What attitudes affect your heart for God?
- What sins harden your heart?
- In what ways can you see heart changes in others?
- In what ways can you visualize a heart change in yourself?
- Does the Bible have the same impact on your heart today as it did at first?
- Does the Bible have *any* impact on your life?
- Is it becoming more difficult to pray?
- Do you decide to keep sin for your own pleasure?
- Do you view disciples who are doing great with a “We’ll see how long that lasts” attitude?
- Does the Lord’s supper become just a part of the service?
- Do you let yourself sleep in, not have great times with God and then justify it instead of repenting?
- Do you actually repent (change) or do you just feel bad or sorry about what you did (2 Corinthians 7:8-11)?
- Do you not share your faith because you think you do not have anything to offer?

Recommendation

- Find a journal or notes that you wrote in your first few days as a disciple. Read it and talk to God about the differences between the way you were then and the way your heart is now.
- Read the front page of the newspaper and write down how you see God moving in the world.
- For further study read Hebrews 3:8-15, Nehemiah 9:1ff, Luke 8:5-15.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:28-29

4

Appreciating the Cross

Throughout the previous chapters I have referred to a number of questions that people asked me when I was initially beginning to return to God. But none of these questions was more frequently asked than the one that inspired this book. That question was, “Why do you think you left the church?” Hebrews 12:28-29 was one scripture that I searched for long and hard to pinpoint the feelings I had or better yet, what feelings I had lost.

A couple weeks after I began coming back, some of the folks from church got together for a barbecue. As I talked with one of the members, I learned that she and her husband had become disciples of Christ during the time that I had wandered away from the truth. When she asked why I left, the answer came to me for the first time. I turned toward her and simply said, “I just lost my appreciation for the cross

and what God had done for me.” It was the first time that the thought had ever crossed my heart. I had received a kingdom that could not be shaken but had become thankless and unappreciative, therefore losing sight of God. I had to pause and gather my thoughts because I finally felt like I was on the right track.

I had never really looked at my decision to leave in this way, but for the first time I began to feel, not just see, how ungrateful I really was towards Jesus Christ. My life had become too complex for God. I thought I was different than everyone else. *My sin was explainable.* It was just that I couldn't get anyone to listen to me. But what it all added up to was simply a lack of appreciation for the grace of God. I didn't deserve grace in the first place. Years after my conversion, I still wasn't grateful for God's grace. To say the least, this was hard for me to admit. The Son of God died a brutal death for me, *for me*, and I felt that I did not want to follow Jesus where he had gone.

After a recent evangelistic meeting in St. Louis, I was enjoying a great time of fellowship and sharing that usually follows such a great event. A sister in the church looked at me during our conversation and said “You are different, but I mean that in a good way.” This really didn't sink in as deep as it did later. After more thought on not just what she said, but how she said it, it really hit me. Besides a few more lines and wrinkles on my face and a lot less hair on my head, she had seen a difference in how I spoke about Jesus. The only difference could have been true love and appreciation to simply be faithful to God and to realize his mercy.

A person should simply appreciate being in the kingdom of God and getting input about their character, life, and sharing with others. There is a tendency in all people to become complacent. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year of hearing the similar lessons and scriptures can cause one to plain and simply take them for granted. Sometimes this can even drain the power from the initial impact of one's conversion to the point where a person doesn't ever stop and *really* give thanks for his or her salvation.

Given a real opportunity to show appreciation every day, many people still wouldn't do that because the opportunity was always there before they left God and they didn't seize it at that time either. People really should not have to be reminded about these things but unless they go against their human nature and deny themselves (Luke 9:23), they will continually attempt to heal the cut the cross put in their hearts through humanistic ways.

The human body can heal itself quite well if there is no intervention of dirt or germs to infect a cut or wound. The body tries hard to go ahead and heal itself, even though dirt has gotten into the wound. The body's healing process of closing tight the outer layer of the skin gives an appearance of "Good as New!" But as the cut closes around the infectious tissue there is a reddish swollen tender area starting to form that shows something is wrong beneath the surface.

Human nature doesn't want us to allow pain, but that's just what people need to allow. The feelings that occurred when a person is first shown the cross of Jesus stagnate into obscure dullness. Many people believe that without even knowing it, the cut will naturally stay open. But just like the cut skin and tissue, the "dirt" of this world gets in and infects people's hearts.

Although a surface check may appear to look normal, the trained eye can see through the surface layer to the dirt that must come out. The wound must be re-opened and that is much, much more painful than a cleansing irrigation before the wound starts to close around it. The thankfulness of God's grace is the "irrigation" and the realization of appreciation is the "cleansing process."

A person can only fake gratefulness for a little while and with a few people. Then God gets tired of messing around and says enough is enough. The right people were put in my life to expose my ungratefulness but I ran away from them. With their trained eye they could see the redness of infection that I tried to hide by my outward appearance. But the thing they saw most was how I lost my compassion for Jesus. Lost was the gratefulness that my sins had been forgiven.

In the apostle Peter's letter 2 Peter 1:5 he writes that we should "make every effort" to add goodness, knowledge, self-control and several other similar qualities to our faith. Peter continues to state "if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive." In verse nine he throws in the clincher (emphasis added), "BUT IF ANYONE DOES NOT HAVE THEM, HE IS NEARSIGHTED AND BLIND, AND HAS FORGOTTEN THAT HE HAS BEEN CLEANSED FROM HIS PAST SINS."

For the rest of my life I need to always recall this passage and give thanks to the one man who saw more in me than I ever saw in myself. He saw so much that he was willing to die for *me*. I have been more compassionate at the news of the death of a soldier on the

foreign battlefield or some fictitious person in a movie more than I have had for this one man's death and sacrifice for my sin.

The appreciation of the cross will leave me again if I allow it to and if I don't bring to life the seldom-verbalized three-word statement, "Thank you Jesus."



For Today

- What does the cross of Jesus mean to you?
- Are you in a religious routine or do you re-evaluate your walk with God regularly?
- What have you done in the last year, month, and week because of the sufferings of Christ?
- Are you willing to walk the same road as Jesus?
- When was the last time you thanked God and his people for your life?
- Have you forgotten the pit God has pulled you out of and the sins that he has forgiven?

Recommendation

- For further study read Psalm 36:1-ff, Isaiah 52:13-15, 53:1-ff, 1 Peter 1:3-12, Philippians 2:1-11.
- Read DPI's *Thirty Days at the Foot of the Cross*¹.
- Watch the third two-hour videotape of *Jesus of Nazareth*².

*Are you so foolish? After
beginning with the Spirit, are you
now trying to attain your goal by
human effort?*

Galatians 3:3

5

By Whose Effort

In searching my life for warning signs that could have prevented me from becoming unfaithful to God I found Galatians 3:3. Yet even in making this statement, I exalt my own effort and knowledge above that of God. I deliberately forgot the fact that it was God who led me to this scripture. This deception of not placing God into my thoughts was, and still seems to be, the one issue that plagues me the most. It is my very nature to not rely on the Spirit.

God helping a person is different compared with a person trying to attain happiness on his or her own merit. But the question quoted above (Galatians 3:3) that the apostle Paul asked the people of Galatia almost two thousand years ago is what God shows people, further deepening this area of one's life. Not only are efforts without him futile but he describes a person as foolish when he or she doesn't do the things they did at first. People rely on themselves more and more because of their lack of faith.

Even during a person's restoration back to Christ, one can recall having to deny tempting critical thoughts. A person must rely on the Spirit, relying on the power of his will in one's efforts. Just like the feeling of joy right after baptism, restoration is fresh and new, giving life to what was dying inside (Acts 3:19). But after a few victories

and a couple of successes, a person may quickly see not what *God* is doing, but what *he or she* is supposedly accomplishing.

In Revelation 2:4-5, God describes it as a person's "first love." The verse in its entirety reads:

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken
your first love. Remember the height from which you
have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

Many people think the first love referred to in this passage was simply the humility to love enough to rely on the Spirit instead of one's own efforts, knowledge and capabilities.

I had the bittersweet occasion to experience this "first love" two times, once upon entering the kingdom of God, then again after being restored back to the fellowship. I do not make this statement as a proud one, but rather to express how honored I am to be given another chance by God. The point is both times I made my efforts appear like the prime reason for my success without ever knowing this thought process was even taking place. My pride wanted to take the credit away from God.

Every person I have spoken with who has either been unfaithful to God and been restored, or who has given serious thoughts to either leaving the life of a disciple or stepping down from some form of leadership, has described the same scenario. First the person thought he or she was really doing God's will and had his Spirit living and ruling in their lives. Then this person started seeing other people getting raised up ahead of, or instead of, them. That's when Satan and his demon of frustration stepped in. The person begins to question leadership's ability to recognize the "real true workers." Soon they are trying so hard to have their efforts noticed that the attitudes take over their thinking. This occurs because the person tries to attain his goals by his own effort and forgets how and by whose power he had begun. Others may be the opposite and not want to lead or only want to do the minimum daily requirements (like the list on a vitamin bottle).

The apostle Paul wrote, "After beginning with the Spirit." Who else would know better what that statement truly means? Paul was a man whose conversion surpasses any before or since him. Acts 22:6-16 describes nothing short of incredible events in history. The man was physically blinded by a light from heaven and the person reaching out to him was none other than the Son of God himself (try

topping that story at one's good news sharing). Yet can a person dare say that their walk with God would be different if their conversion was this spectacular and dramatic an occasion? But people don't need blinding light to come down from heaven and the voice of God to call them out in order to see the Spirit working in their lives. The evidence of the Spirit is sometimes dulled by one's own desire to place himself or herself in the driver's seat. People expect to see a flashing warning light ahead alerting them that they aren't doing the things they did at first.

The truth, though hard to swallow, is that God has willed his Spirit to Christians as a deposit (2 Corinthians 5:5). Ungrateful as some may seem after receiving this deposit, they thank him by acting as if they have more power over situations than he does. By relying on their own efforts they unknowingly begin to separate themselves from the Spirit by not allowing him to do the work through them and for them.

Many people say that they stayed faithful solely because of their fear of God. Now this is one motivation, but if one's only motivation is fear, are they really staying faithful to the gift of the Holy Spirit? Do people treat other relationships in this way? Is a person faithful to their wife for fear of what a life would be like without her? Does fear express gratitude to God for his gift or to Jesus for his sacrifice? If there is only fear, then one misses out on all the joy of letting the Spirit challenge one's faith or one's growth. People should be aware that if something or someone isn't growing, the dying process has already begun. As long as a person is foolish enough to rely only on himself, the Spirit is hindered and keeps his power from working completely in their life.

In coaching my son's baseball team, I try to teach the boys to rely on the basics, the fundamentals. In this way they will continue to do the things they did at first. As a disciple of Jesus Christ the fundamentals are no less important. It is foolish to attempt to throw out the runner going to first base before one catches the ball or to think that my son, as only one player, is the entire team. If only I could have watched a few game films to pick up the glitch in my mechanics. Perhaps I would have been able to see that I was trying to outplay my position and was about to be benched by the Holy Spirit of God.



For Today

- By whose spirit do you start your day?
- By whose spirit do you continue throughout the different parts of your day? Work? Home? Outside home?
- Do you pray specific prayers to test your faith?
- Is your relationship with God one-dimensional? What does it mean to be one-dimensional?
- Are you living “life to the full”?
- Is it hard to do just the basics of discipleship?
- Do you “deny yourself” (Luke 9:23) in everything you do for God, but without any joy?
- Do you only subscribe to the *minimum daily requirements*?
- Do you protect your heart because you lack faith in God’s plan and the intentions of his people?
- Who do you consistently give credit to for your successes, yourself or the God of glory?

Recommendation

- Pray and sing through the Psalms.
- For further study read 2 Samuel 22:22-37, Psalm 50:16-23, Romans 4:1ff, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

*So Gideon took ten of his servants
and did as the Lord told him. But
because he was afraid of his family
and the men of the town, he did it
at night rather than in the
daytime.*

Judges 6:27

6

What Would People Think of Me?

The way God chooses his leaders has always amazed me. It seems that the choices that he makes are completely opposite of what I would think was the best selection for the situation. No different, though, are God's choices of those who become disciples of Christ. How often has one heard of people that lived a completely pagan lifestyle before becoming Christians and being used in great ways by God? But it seems that God chooses the weakest people, or should I say the meekest people, to do the most important jobs for him. Stories about men like Gideon who struggled with God's decisions abound in the Bible. Gideon's struggle was primarily due to what others might think of him.

Then to ease a person's insecurities, there always seems to be the need to sort of "help" God just a little and alter his plan to fit their

comfort zone; such is the case with Gideon. Carrying out God's command at night, Gideon subdued his own fears of the townsmen and fears of his family while at the same time technically obeying God. There seems to be no greater fear or hindrance to God's plan than one's own apprehension about how people view them, even when they don't know them.

Gideon feared his family and his friends to the point that he changed God's plan to fit more comfortably with his own. Luckily for Gideon, God wanted a leader for his people and had more tolerance with Gideon's fear, arrogance and people pleasing than usual. There were and have been others such as Moses who was not as fortunate (Deuteronomy 28:15-52).

Ironically for people today, it seems that it really doesn't work any differently. In a person's daily walk as a disciple of Jesus, he or she seems to be constantly placed in awkward positions with family, friends, and coworkers. It's almost like God wants to see a person's reaction to rejection and ridicule in order to determine one's faithfulness. But then the passage in Acts 17:26 explains not only God created people but also how he determines the *exact* places where they should live. This and Acts 14:22 explains that people will find themselves in challenging situations, which will end up testing their faith, as James wrote.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:4-7

When I relate this to my unfaithfulness to Jesus, it is obvious that feeling insecure played a major role. It doesn't take a lot to push a person out of the kingdom of God, especially baby Christians. A little fear of what friends and family will think of one's commitment will cause them to shave the wood of that cross they have been attempting to take up every day. In order to make the cross of Christ a little less obvious and easier to pack around, a person changes the many pounds

of wood from it into a little toothpick-sized commitment. I can recall feeling guilty about not visiting my out-of-town mother more often. During a visit with her I left early before church on a Sunday morning to come back in time for church, a three hour drive one way, only to feel guilty about it later. I was, in my heart, making it back to church for fear of what others might think of me if I didn't go, then feeling guilty for what my mom might have thought of me for leaving before the weekend was over. Also, I remember how angry I got when someone suggested that Satan might be using my mom to weaken my convictions by making me feel guilty about going to church instead of spending more time with her. I can see now that not only was that person not saying my mom was doing this, for she never would encourage me to miss church, but that I was playing right into Satan's hands by my actions, thoughts and feelings.

I played into Satan's hand because over a period of time God got tired of my complacency. As I let my fear of what friends would think of me or my guilt about my family got stronger, I also started to make adjustments in my commitment to Jesus and even my love and desire for God. All along I was creating in myself a person that I couldn't stand to be around.

All the things discussed thus far eventually took over my life. These things can take over a person's life as well: my callused heart, my deceitful heart, not asking for advice when I would take trips (James 4:13-17). I did not appreciate Jesus but saw my own effort as the main source of people's salvation. My lack of steadfast love for God eventually drove others and myself away since no one saw anything different in me.

My fear of not being accepted by everyone kept me from being accepted by anyone. Not only did I lose all of the friends I had made in the kingdom (because my sin separated us), soon after "wandering away from the truth," I lost all of my hunting buddies as well. The hunting group parted when I got in the middle of a property line dispute.

Then there I was, out in the world with no one wanting to have anything to do with me, not even uncles or cousins. I can recall saying over and over again, "How could this be happening to me?" Here I was, so careful to not rock anyone's boat and to not do anything that might make someone dislike me, and now I was alone.

But did this loneliness soften my hard heart or open my eyes, causing me to accept even some of the blame? Hardly! No, I was sure that it was everyone else's fault. I mean after all, how could I be the

one that had done anything wrong? I was the one that *used* to be a disciple of Christ.

Thankfully, God has now revealed the obvious beginning of this whole mess. It all began by worrying more about what these people thought of me than what God wanted me in their lives for. He had trusted one of his disciples (me) and put me in others' lives at the precise time he predetermined. God did this so that I would reach out to them and God could save their souls for eternal life. The problem was that I was more concerned with meeting their approval and not looking weird. More often than not, trying to merely fit into a crowd only makes a person seem less appealing because they then show no conviction about anything.

God still gives us commands. Even though he may not send an angel to us as he did to Gideon, all of his commands in the Bible are just as serious. 1 John 5:3-4 states how we are to show God we love him—by obeying his commands.

By compromising my faith and my love for God to look more favorably in the eyes of others, I hurt God. That hurt caused a distance between God and myself that eventually became the chasm I would fall into when I left him.

Many times during the months that I was unfaithful to God, I reflected on my lack of commitment and my desire to please the world instead of him. It only came to be a full understanding in me after I was restored that God wasn't trying to embarrass me. He is now using me to touch people's hearts even if I see a different response from them. What I never saw before was that these people are fighting their own spiritual battle with Satan and aren't too likely to show others how they are really feeling inside. This is the same way I reacted when people tried to get me to be real. I can't make other people's reaction my main concern. God will make it obvious when he wants me to step out in faith and I should not worry about looking *normal* or what the world calls *normal*.

Jesus didn't waiver in his convictions with the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). Was he impressed by this obviously high profile citizen? No way! Jesus had nothing to prove. Risking that he might look weird to his friends, Jesus told this guy what he needed to do.

We know that this young man who approached Jesus went away sad. I often wonder if this fellow ever did get right with God later in life due to the impact of Jesus, who was not afraid of what others thought. Jesus is amazing! Even while the Pharisees were trying to trap him, they acknowledged that Jesus was not moved by what

others thought of him, “You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are” (Matthew 22:16). Christians need to become more like Jesus.

My fear and obsession of having the acceptance of friends and family became a wall between God and myself that kept my heart in the dark. My heart was shadowed by my own insecurities and blinded to the fact that I was in sin because of it.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him
out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

1 John 1:10

God’s word loses its place in a person’s life when one’s fear of acceptance grows greater than one’s fear of God who saved them.



For Today

- How do you *think* people view you and your life toward God?
- What did people think of Jesus Christ?
- What did people think of the apostle Paul?
- How does God view you?
- Do you hide your Christianity when you are with your family, friends or on the job?
- Do people see the changes in your life?
- Are you more influenced by people in the world or by your spiritual brothers and sisters?

Recommendation

- Read Josh McDowell's *His Image, My Image*.
- Read Tom Jones' *Mind Change!*.
- For further study read Psalm 37, 1 Samuel 15, Mark 14:66-73, 1 Peter 2:9-17.

*So Saul took his own sword and
fell on it.*

2 Chronicles 10:4

7

From Riches to Rags

God chose Saul as king of his people. God searched throughout the entire population of his people and chose him from the smallest tribe and the least clan of that tribe (1 Samuel 9:21). Saul boldly led the powerful nation of Israel (God's chosen people). Cities were rescued and respect and confidence were regained for all the nations to see.

Truly God set Saul up for major success and victory. But then many have heard the rest of the story probably in Sunday school class as a kid. This is a Bible story possibly second in popularity only to that of the birth and crucifixion of Jesus. Saul ticked off God by becoming prideful and arrogant toward him. Saul then turns around and gets fired and replaced by a giant slaying, shepherd boy. Then that kid, David, goes on to leave his own mark in history with success of his own that outshines the success of King Saul.

But what about King Saul; couldn't he have recovered at some point and turned bad into good? The answer is *yes* he could have, but *no* he did not. No, after all the glorious years of reigning over Israel and after God slaying his enemies, it all came to the abrupt bitter end that we began this chapter with, death by his *own* sword.

So does everyone who is unfaithful to God end up committing suicide? No, not physically, but in a spiritual way yes, one does commit a form of suicide if they don't repent and come back to God.

After brushing up on biblical history about the sad story of one poor guy three thousand years ago who had it all (the world by the tail) and threw it all away, how does one relate that to unfaithfulness and restoration? The attitudes that began Saul's downfall were no different than the attitudes I felt when I left God.

If there were ever a man that I could compare myself to, it would be Saul. In him I can see a lot of my own character traits. The pride, arrogance, jealousy and critical nature are eerily coincidental. Similar to Saul, I was leading people away from God. I didn't care that my faithlessness was breeding epidemic proportions of fear, insecurity and lack of confidence to captivate all those I had been charged to lead.

Even though I physically lived on, my soul was dying a slow, brutal death. In 1 Chronicles 10:13-14, it simply says Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance instead of inquiring of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David, son of Jesse.

Since coming back to the Lord I am constantly trying to identify the mistakes that I made in the past to prevent them from ever occurring again. I look at what God charged me with initially and how prideful I became about my leadership. And now I look back and realize that at some unknown point in time I began to view these things, these people, these responsibilities as my own little part of the kingdom that I thought I deserved. The scripture doesn't read, "So the Lord put him to death and turned his kingdom over to David." Instead it reads "...turned *the* kingdom over to David"—God's kingdom.

I had placed myself on equal footing with God without even realizing it. The attitude I had was so subtle it was like a virus. My attitude had few noticeable symptoms until it gripped my entire being and choked off my oxygen, the oxygen that breathed life into my understanding. Just like Saul not following God's specific direction (1 Samuel 15:3), I took it upon myself to rewrite the Bible to fit more comfortably into my lifestyle.

Now many of those reading this are probably thinking, "Man, what an idiot! You should have seen that stuff coming a mile away." And I suppose they're right. But don't for one second imagine that I haven't been haunted by that same afterthought thousands of times.

The old saying that hindsight is twenty-twenty was never more applicable. But it's also a lot easier to see after the fact.

The sad truth is that as great as Saul was and as much as I relied on God in the past like he did, the business end of the sword was waiting and it was only a matter of time before I fell on it as he did. I was a spiritual accident waiting to happen. The course I had set my life on was leading downhill and going out of control.

I was at an evangelism seminar recently trying to soak in the lessons and sermons and great fellowship there was to offer. One of my main goals attending such a function is to talk to every church leader and evangelist present. In the conversation, I asked one particular question of each of them and compare and compile their answers into one decision, coming away from the seminar resolved to apply it to my life. The answer to everything that I asked seemed to be the same and it seemed Oh, so simple, "Be as good a disciple of Jesus as you can be and just be happy to be in the kingdom."

So very often a person forgets that one little statement, to just be happy to be in the kingdom. Saul surely forgot it and ended up losing it all. I forgot it and after losing it all was given another chance. The attitudes that caused me to leave then are actually living cells in my being even as I attempt to put together these thoughts. But if I am consistently aware of them they won't be fed and enabled to grow.

On a bus ride from Thousand Oaks Youth Camp in Texas to St. Louis, I was talking with a sister who has been a faithful disciple for more than a decade. She told me that not a day goes by that she doesn't ask God to please keep her thankful and to guard her against wandering away from the truth. Thus she felt this always kept a light shining on the possibility that Satan would try to draw her away from God.

I have attempted to break down the unfaithful heart that I once had and the restored heart that I now have. I have tried to show the reader how one may feel when they sign their own death warrant and leave God's kingdom. But in all actuality I suppose that nothing explains it or describes it better than Jesus did in the following scripture.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Many people look at their evil deeds as the sins that they confessed when they first studied the Bible to become disciples of Christ. But I look at them in a different light now. I look at them as the deeds of evil that Saul and I, each in our pride, committed to the point of death. These deeds are actually part of one's emotional and personal makeup. This pride is a line in one's character resume, a part of a person that they may be afraid to face but shouldn't ever, ever ignore.

God gives people specific instructions all the time. It's just a matter of really listening to him to meet one's spiritual needs instead of hearing, then filtering his Word to fit our wants and desires. Groping around in the darkness was no fun at all. The process of realizing how the darkness crept over me, though, has been both enjoyable and enlightening. I've been back across the fence that divides God's kingdom from the world and the grass really isn't greener. I believe the grass is even a little browner and sparser than it was before. Those in the world still haven't noticed it changing but when a person comes from the green pastures of the Lord, it is obvious.

Although helpful, these issues are not anything profound: a whole bunch of no-brainers. When a person is doing well spiritually, they will know many of these issues without a doubt. So I suppose there is no more appropriate way to sum this up than with the words of a brother I have had my heart compared to:

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus. To him be the glory both now and forever! Amen!

2 Peter 3:17-18



For Today

- Are you making every effort to add (2 Peter 1:5-9) to your spiritual life?
- Is your faith and love eroding because of your heart?
- Are you playing Russian Roulette with the decisions in your spiritual life?
- Are you happy just being a disciple of Jesus and doing the work of the Lord?
- Have you forgotten what God has done to bring you to this point?
- Do you pray for daily strength so that you will not wander from the faith and into Satan's schemes?

Recommendation

- For further study read II Samuel 12:1-23, John 21:15-19, Ephesians 4:20-24 and Hebrews 2:1.

Appendix A

Unfaithfulness and Restoration

Introduction

This appendix discusses the topics of unfaithfulness and restoration from the New Testament. This study will examine the New Testament to understand the processes that are involved and areas of life that are affected in unfaithfulness. It will then consider specific ministry actions in accordance with the biblical teachings on these topics.

Terminology

One of the difficulties involved in understanding this topic from a biblical perspective is the “terminology gap.” There is no single, unambiguous technical term for those who are unfaithful to God and leave the church in the New Testament.¹ Instead, the New Testament

¹ This is in contrast to other topics (like baptism, for instance) that have a special technical term and can be well understood simply by considering all the instances where that technical term is used. Further, not all of the terms involved can be translated into English in ways that maintain their distinction in the Koine Greek.

uses many different terms² in figurative ways to describe this action.³ For instance, the NIV translation of fall away can have different meanings based on the context of the statement. Compare the differences in the apostles' falling away or stumbling temporarily in Matthew 26:31-33 with the other persons' permanent fall referred to in Hebrews 6:6. This may seem to complicate matters, but in reality it defines and illuminates each of the various aspects of a complex topic. As a result, one can gain great insight into what goes on in the hearts and minds of those that become unfaithful to God and leave the church.⁴

Many of these terms are used with a wide range of meanings. What is in view in an instance of any particular term could range from a minor sin (that would not necessarily pose any immediate threat to salvation) to a major departure from the faith. In addition, the various terms are often used interchangeably or nearly synonymously.

Fortunately, these terms tend to fall into one of four broad, general groupings; each of these broad categories will be discussed below.

1. Those where **destruction** of faith or righteousness is in view
2. Those where **departure** from that which is right is in view
3. Those where **denial** is in view
4. Those where **deception** is in view

The terms in the above groups are given below, listed in the general order of decreasing severity. The number in parenthesis is the frequency for each term in the Greek New Testament. Passages relevant to the topic of unfaithfulness are also included.

Destruction

² In all, there are over twenty Greek terms that are used to discuss the idea of leaving the faith.

³ This is similar to other topics in the New Testament. For example, members of the first century church were known by several terms, including "disciple," "believer," "Christian," "brother," "saint," and by other terms as well. Each of these placed an emphasis on a particular aspect of the identity of the follower of Jesus.

⁴ This is to be distinguished from those who may be removed from the active fellowship in accordance with Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 or 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

The main idea of the terms in this group is that the faith or salvation of a disciple is destroyed by some action. Here are the terms in this word group:

- *nauageo* (2): suffer shipwreck.⁵ 1 Timothy 1:18-19.
- *analoo* (2): consume.⁶ Galatians 5:15.
- *apollumi* (84): active: ruin, destroy; lose. Middle: be destroyed, ruined, lost.⁷ Romans 14:15, 1 Corinthians 8:11.
- *apoleia* (17): transitive: the destruction one causes, waste; intransitive: destruction one experiences, annihilation, ruin.⁸ 2 Peter 2:21
- *anatrepo* (2): cause to fall, overturn, destroy.⁹ 2 Timothy 2:16-18, Titus 1:11.
- *phtheiro* (8): ruin or corrupt, destroy.¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Corinthians 11:3-5.
- *skandalidzo* (27): cause to be caught, to fall, absolute passive let oneself be led into sin, fall away; be led into sin, be repelled by someone, take offense [at someone]; give offense to, anger, shock.¹¹ Matthew 18:6-9, Mark 4:17, 14:27, John 16:1, 1 Corinthians 8:13, 2 Corinthians 11:29.
- *adokimos* (8): disqualified, unfit.¹² 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Corinthians 13:5-7.
- *katargeo* (26): make ineffective, powerless, idle.¹³ Galatians 5:4.

Departure

The main idea of the terms in this group is a departure from right action or faith. Here are the terms in this word group:

⁵ *ibid.* p. 534

⁶ *ibid.* p. 57

⁷ *ibid.* p. 95

⁸ *ibid.* p. 103

⁹ *ibid.* p. 57

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 857

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 752

¹² Bauer, Walter. Translated by Gingrich, F. W. and Danker, Frederick. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd Edition, University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 18

¹³ *ibid.* p. 417

- *parapipto* (1): fall away, commit apostasy.¹⁴ Hebrews 6:6.
- *ekpipto* (10): fall off or from; [nautical technical term] drift off course or run aground; figurative: lose something; fall, weaken.¹⁵ Galatians 5:4, 2 Peter 3:17.
- *pipto* (85): fall.¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:12, Revelation 2:5.
- *ektrepo* (5): active: turn, turn away; passive: let oneself be turned aside.¹⁷ 1 Timothy 1:6, 5:15, 2 Timothy 4:4.
- *apostrepho* (9): transitive: turn away, mislead; intransitive: turn away from something; middle: turn away, repudiate.¹⁸ 2 Timothy 4:4, Titus 1:14, Hebrews 12:25.
- *hupostrepho* (35): turn back, return.¹⁹ 2 Peter 2:21.
- *aphistemi* (12): transitive: cause to revolt, mislead; intransitive: Go away, keep away, depart, withdraw.²⁰ Luke 8:13, 1 Timothy 4:1, Hebrews 3:12.
- *aphiemi* (133): let go, send away; cancel, remit, pardon; leave; let, let go, tolerate.²¹ Revelation 2:4.
- *astocheo* (3): miss the mark, go astray.²² 1 Timothy 1:6, 6:21, 2 Timothy 2:18.
- *ptaio* (4): stumble, trip, make a mistake, go astray, sin; be ruined, be lost.²³ James 3:2, 2 Peter 1:10.
- *aptaistos* (1): without stumbling.²⁴ Jude 1:24.
- *hupostello* (4): draw back in fear.²⁵ Hebrews 10:38.
- *hupostole* (1): shrinking, timidity.²⁶ Hebrews 10:39
- *pararreo* (1): flow by, slip away; figuratively: be washed away, drift away.²⁷ Hebrews 2:1.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 621

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 243-4

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 659-60

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 246

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 100

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 847

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 126

²¹ *ibid.* p. 125-6

²² *ibid.* p. 118

²³ *ibid.* p. 727

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 102

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 847

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 847

Denial

The main idea of the words in this group is the denial of faith or of Jesus himself. Here are the terms in this word group:

- *arneomai* (30): refuse, disdain; deny; repudiate, disown (with accusative).²⁸ Also *aparneomai* (10): deny.²⁹ Mt 10:33, 2 Timothy 2:12-13, John 13:38, 18:25,27 1 Timothy 5:8 Titus 1:16, 1 John 2:22-23, Jude 1:4, Revelation 2:13, 3:8.
- *apotheomai* (6): reject, repudiate.³⁰ 1 Timothy 1:18-19 (ref Acts 13:46).

Deception

The main idea of the terms in this group is that some course of action is taken that one thinks is right, but it is not. These words may seem like they belong in the “departure” group, but the critical element of these words is deception. Here are the terms in this word group:

- *apoplanao* (2): mislead; wander away from someone or something; be led into error.³¹ 1 Timothy 6:10.
- *planao* (37): active: lead astray, cause to wander, mislead, deceive someone; passive: go astray, be misled, wander about.³² Matthew 18:12-13, 24:4,5,11,24, Hebrews 3:10, James 5:19, 2 Peter 2:15, Revelation 12:9. “Me planasthe” (“do not be deceived”) rhetorical phrase in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 15:33, Galatians 6:7, James 1:16.
- *plane* (10): wandering [from the path of truth], error, delusion, deceit, deception [to which one is subject].³³ James 5:20, 2 Peter 3:17.
- *exapateo* (6): deceive, cheat.³⁴ Romans 16:18, 2 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Timothy 2:14

Area of Life

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 621-2

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 108

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 81

³⁰ *ibid.* p. 103

³¹ *ibid.* p. 97

³² *ibid.* p. 665

³³ *ibid.* p. 665-6

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 273

Considering the process (destruction, departure, denial or deception) is only part of the picture of unfaithfulness as discussed in the New Testament; the area of life that is affected is also discussed. Any of the following areas of life can be in view when someone becomes unfaithful.

1. Personal Righteousness
2. Relationship with God
3. False Religion

Let us consider New Testament references for unfaithfulness in each of these areas of life, with attention to which process (destruction, departure, denial or deception) was operative.

Personal Righteousness

Destruction

- Jesus taught that disciples like the “shallow-rooted soil” would become unfaithful when trouble or persecution comes:

But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly **falls away** (skandalidzo) (Matthew 13:21).

- Paul recognized that his own personal righteousness was necessary for his own salvation, regardless of how much he preached to others.

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be **disqualified** (adokimos) for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:27).

- Paul saw how some had shipwrecked their faith due to a violated conscience:

...holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have **shipwrecked** (naugeo) their faith (1 Timothy 1:19).

- Other instances: Matthew 24:10, Mark 14:27, 2 Corinthians 13:5-7.

Departure

- Jesus spoke of those who would depart from the faith in times of testing:

Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they **fall away** (aphistemi) (Luke 8:13).

- James recognized that all disciples fail in many ways. While this shows that not all “falling” is to be equated with unfaithfulness, it also shows that all disciples have areas where they are liable to sin.

We all **stumble** (ptaio) in many ways. If anyone is never **at fault** (ptaio) in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check (James 3:2).

- The Hebrew writer viewed the unfaithfulness in times of hardship as “shrinking back.”

“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he **shrinks back** (hupostello), I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who **shrink back** (hupostole) and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Hebrews 10:38-9).

- Peter had a stern warning for those that would turn their backs on the word of the gospel:

It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to **turn their backs** (hupostrepho) on the sacred command that was passed on to them (2 Peter 2:21).

- Other instances: 1 Timothy 1:5-6, 5:11-15, Hebrews 4:11.

Denial

- Paul warned that those who fail to take care of their families deny the faith, as do hypocrites whose life does not match their claim of discipleship:

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has **denied** (arneomai) the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

They claim to know God, but by their actions they **deny** (arneomai) him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (Titus 1:16).

- Paul also spoke of those who would deny Jesus:

...if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we **disown** (arneomai) him, he will also **disown** (arneomai) us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot **disown** (arneomai) himself (2 Timothy 2:12-13).

Deception

- James identified deception as a key area where someone could leave the truth:

My brothers, if one of you should **wander** (planao) from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the **error** (plane) of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

- Materialism also has the capability to deceive disciples:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have **wandered** (apoplanao) from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10).

- Other instances: Hebrews 3:10, Revelation 13:14, 18:23.

Relationship with God

Destruction

- Paul recognized that the reckless use of Christian freedom by one disciple could destroy the faith of another disciple:

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating **destroy** (apollumi) your brother for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15).

- Paul told the Galatians that their mutual contentiousness would lead to their eventual destruction:

If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be **destroyed** (analoō) by each other (Galatians 5:15).

- Other instances: Matthew 18:5-9, 1 Corinthians 8:11.

Departure

- The Hebrew writer saw unfaithfulness as turning from God himself:

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that **turns away from** (aphistemi) the living God. (Hebrews 3:12).

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we **turn away from** (apostrephō) him who warns us from heaven (Hebrews 12:25)?

- James identified distance from the truth as a key area where someone could be unfaithful:

My brothers, if one of you should **wander** (planaō) from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner

from the **error** (plane) of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20).

- Other instances: Romans 11:11.

Denial

- Jesus warned that disowning him would cost one his salvation:

But whoever **disowns** (arneomai) me before men, I will **disown** (arneomai) him before my Father in heaven (Matthew 10:33).

- Other instances: Matthew 26:34-35, Luke 12:9, Revelation 2:13, 3:8.

Deception

- Paul illustrated the role of deception in a disciple leaving his sincere and pure devotion to Christ:

But I am afraid that just as Eve was **deceived** (exapateo) by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be **led astray** (phthiero) from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).

False Religion

Destruction

- Paul saw that false teachers could destroy the faith of disciples:

They must be silenced, because they are **ruining** (anatrepo) whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain (Titus 1:11).

- Other passages: 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Galatians 5:4, 2 Timothy 2:18.

Departure

- Paul warned that the draw of false religion would cause many to turn from the truth:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will **abandon** (aphistemi) the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

- Peter warned that the error of false teachers could cause his readers to fall away:

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and **fall** (ekpipto) from your secure position (2 Peter 3:17).

- Other passages: Galatians 5:4, 1 Timothy 6:21, Titus 1:14, 2 Timothy 2:18, 4:4.

Denial

- Several false teachers were guilty of denying Jesus in their teaching. For this reason alone, they forfeited their salvation.

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even **denying** (arneomai) the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves (2 Peter 2:1).

- Paul discussed those who rejected faith and a good conscience on the way to shipwrecking their faith:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have **rejected** (apotheomai) these and so have shipwrecked their faith (1 Timothy 1:18-19).

- Other passages: 1 John 2:22-23, Jude 1:4.

Deception

- Jesus warned that false prophets and Messiah figures could cause one to be deceived:

For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will **deceive** (planao) many (Matthew 24:5).

- Satan and other spiritual beings have a major role in the deception of disciples and the lost as well:

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who **leads** (planao) the whole world **astray** (planao). He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him (Revelation 12:9).

- Other passages: Matthew 24:11, 24:24, Mark 13:6, 13:22, 2 Peter 2:15, Revelation 2:20, 19:20, 20:3, 20:8, 20:10.

Preventing Unfaithfulness

Having seen New Testament evidence for the various processes and areas of life involved in unfaithfulness to God, we now direct our attention to Scriptural evidences concerning the prevention of unfaithfulness.

Destruction

The chief idea in the prevention of the destruction of one's faith is keeping the expectations of individual disciples in line with the reality of future faithfulness in the kingdom.

- Jesus' teaching and ministry to the apostles the night before the crucifixion was designed to keep them from becoming unfaithful.

All this I have told you so that you will not **go astray** (skandalidzo) (John 16:1).

Departure

The chief ideas in the prevention of the departure of disciples are care, involvement with other disciples and continuing growth.

- Paul warned that the Corinthians could fall if they were not careful:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't **fall** (pipto) (1 Corinthians 10:12)!

- The Hebrew writer saw “drifting away” as what happens when disciples don't pay attention to what the gospel commands them:

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not **drift away** (parareo) (Hebrews 2:1).

- The Hebrew writer saw daily involvement with other disciples as an effective means of keeping disciples from turning from God.

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that **turns away from** (aphistemi) the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:12-13).

- Peter gave a great prescription for assuring that disciples would never depart from the faith:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never **fall** (ptaio), and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-11).

Denial

The chief idea in the prevention of disciples denying their faith is the sober warning of the consequences of such a denial.

- Paul warned that those who would deny the Lord would themselves be denied by him:

...if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we **disown** (arneomai) him, he will also **disown** (arneomai) us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot **disown** (arneomai) himself (2 Timothy 2:12-13).

Deception

The chief idea in the prevention of disciples being deceived away from their faith is holding to the gospel as it was taught in the first century and being wary of those who would suggest otherwise.

- A primary focus of the ministry of John was keeping his readers from being led astray. His teaching emphasized the fundamental teachings of Christianity and the need for disciples to have these truths remain in them and be reflected in their lives:

See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—even eternal life. I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to **lead you astray** (planao) (1 John 2:24-26).

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone **lead you astray** (planao). He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous (1 John 3:6-7).

- Peter warned his readers to be on their guard against “lawless men” to avoid being deceived by their errors:

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the **error** (plane) of lawless men and fall from your secure position (2 Peter 3:17).

- Paul warned that smooth talkers could deceive naïve disciples:

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people (Romans 16:17-18).

- Jude said that Jesus could keep all disciples faithful:

To him who is able to keep you from **falling** (aptaistos) and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 1:24-25).

Summary

For reference, the following chart summarizes the preceding paragraphs:

	Righteousness	Relationship with God	False Religion	Prevention
Destruction	Mt 13:21 1 Cor 9:27 1 Tim 1:19 Mt 24:10 Mk 14:27 2 Cor 13:5-7	Rom 14:15 Gal 5:15 Mt 18:5-9 1 Cor 8:11	Tit 1:11 Gal 5:4 2 Tim 2:18	keep expectations and implications of righteousness in view (Jn 16:1, 1 Cor 9:27)
Departure	Lk 8:13 Jas 3:2 Heb 10:38-39 2 Pet 2:21	Heb 3:12 Heb 12:25 Rom 11:11	1 Tim 4:1 2 Pet 3:17 Gal 5:4 1 Tim 6:21 Tit 1:14 2 Tim 2:18 2 Ti 4:4	careful spiritual maintenance (1 Cor 10:12, Heb 2:1) involvement with others (Heb 3:12-13) growth (2 Pt 1:5-11) reliance upon Jesus (Jude 1:24-25)
Denial	1 Tim 5:8 Tit 1:16 2 Tim 2:12-13	Mt 10:33 Mt 26:34-35 Lk 12:9 Rev 2:13 Rev 3:8	1 Tim 1:18-19 2 Pet 2:1 1 Jn 2:22-23 Jude 1:4	warning (2 Tim 2:12-13)
Deception	Jas 5:19-20 1 Tim 6:10 Heb 3:10 Rev 13:14 Rev 18:23	2 Cor 11:3-4 Jas 5:19-20	Mt 24:5 Rev 12:9 Mt 24:11 Mt 24:24 Mk 13:6 Mk 13:22 Rom 16:17-18 2 Pet 2:15 Rev 2:20 Rev 19:20 Rev 20:3 Rev 20:8 Rev 20:10	holding to original message (1 Jn 2:24-26) wary of other teachings (2 Pt 3:17, Rom 16:17-18)

Ministry Considerations

Putting all of these ideas in these scriptures together, we may identify some of the ways to address the issue of unfaithfulness from a ministry perspective.

1. *Teaching Focus*

The scriptures show the need to talk about unfaithfulness to God and leaving the church. Jesus talked about it, Paul talked about it, Peter talked about it, and John talked about it. Jesus and the apostles intended their hearers to understand the threats to their salvation and to be equipped to prevail in the struggle through knowledge and warning. Neither the first words nor the loudest words a disciple of Christ should hear about leaving the church should come from Satan! Since Jesus, Paul, Peter and John talked about unfaithfulness regularly, these supporting scriptures show that it more than deserves a continuing place in the teaching ministry and general dialog of the church.

Each disciple of Christ should clearly understand the processes (destruction, departure, denial and deception) and areas of life (personal righteousness, relationship with God and false religion) where he could become unfaithful as defined by the Scriptures.³⁵ This will enable the disciple and those who lead him to develop a plan for faithfulness against these threats when they arise.

2. *A Plan to Stay Faithful*

The types of unfaithfulness and areas of life affected, together with the characteristics of the individual disciple (his strengths and weaknesses), should be carefully evaluated. The objective of this evaluation should be some plan for continued faithfulness for each disciple.

While the standards of discipleship are the same for all disciples, how people are discipled to attain maturity is unique for each individual. This plan could be individually customized to include things such as personal study topics, special studies, and situations or issues that should be discussed on a regular basis.

Jesus, Paul, Peter and John all had a clear plan to keep disciples strong in the faith so they would not become unfaithful. This biblical pattern should be followed today.

³⁵ The study presented at the end of this appendix could be used to discuss these areas with all disciples, especially new disciples.

3. *Pay Attention to the Early Signs*

Very few people become unfaithful instantly, as though doing “awesome” one minute and being unfaithful the next. Instead, the final departure from the church is usually the last step in a process that goes on for days, weeks, months or even years.

One needs the vision and insight to see how people are doing spiritually before they become unfaithful to God. Many signs can be evident and helpful in this: Is the disciple growing and changing, or are there troubles or sins that constantly drag him down? Is he content or discontent? Is he involved in helping others or self-focused? These are the warning signs of fundamental spiritual problems. These types of issues must be identified and addressed before failures, discouragements and temptations grow into more advanced problems.

Restoration

It is difficult to find any undeniable examples in the New Testament where someone has been unfaithful and where they were restored to the church.

In order to help the unfaithful person get restored, a good example of specific direction that Jesus gave for repentance in general is the churches in Revelation of Ephesus and Laodicea. Jesus gave both of these churches very specific direction in order to maintain their relationship with God. Let us consider the text of these passages:

Remember the height from which you have fallen! **Repent and do the things you did at first.** If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (Revelation 2:5).

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. **I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see** (Revelation 3:17-18).

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone **hears my voice and opens the door,** I will

come in and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).

Based upon the examples in Revelation cited above, plans for restoration should include a re-focus on discipleship, and (even more importantly) a discussion and resolution of all of the specific factors that caused someone to become unfaithful in the first place. From these examples we can see the critical aspects of restoration:

1. The identification of the specific sins (Revelation 2:5, 3:17-18) that were operative in the unfaithfulness.
2. A specific plan of repentance from these specific sins (Revelation 2:5, 3:17-18).
3. A desire to be restored to a personal relationship with Jesus (Revelation 3:20).³⁶
4. Renewed discipleship (Revelation 2:5).

Deliberate Sin

Another set of passages that touch on the topic of restoration is Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26-29:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away (parapipto), to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three

³⁶ Interestingly, Ignatius of Syria wrote to several churches in Asia Minor a little after 100 AD, not long after the book of Revelation was written. He wrote to Ephesus, but not to Laodicea nor Sardis. This could mean that Ephesus heeded the repentance commanded in Revelation, but that Laodicea and Sardis did not and faded into oblivion as a result.

witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

The subjects of the Hebrew writer were unfaithful to the point that repentance was not possible. Instead of the possibility of restoration, those referred to have an expectation of judgment. Consider the terms that describe these people:

- Crucifying Christ
- Subjecting Christ to public disgrace
- Deliberately keep on sinning
- Trample the Son of God underfoot
- Treat as an “unholy thing” the blood shed on the cross

Though the specific behaviors that led to this condition are not clear, the existence of the condition and the impossibility of repentance from it are extremely clear. This could be “sin leading to death” of 1 John 5:16.³⁷ Only God knows those unfaithful people who are beyond repentance. As this article has used “unfaithful” to signify those who can be restored, a new term could be introduced for those unfaithful who are beyond repentance, such as “apostate.”

Conclusion

The topic of unfaithfulness requires a clear understanding of the terms and processes involved. While this article has used the term “unfaithfulness”, it has also illustrated a variety of other biblical terms as well. As a result, one can be equipped to use these terms in accordance with their usage in the New Testament.

Having seen the attention that biblical writers paid to this topic, leaders can imitate them and equip disciples of Christ to deal with the threats that could make them become unfaithful. This could include teaching this topic from a biblical perspective, and making sure Christians are growing and staying clear of the obstacles that could cause them to become unfaithful. It should also include a plan to

³⁷ Also see Numbers 15:30 for a perspective on defiant sin.

perceive the early warning signs of these various problems and a plan to deal with these issues before the problems escalate.

Some people who become unfaithful cannot be restored, but some can and will be restored. The process of restoration should include a focus on the basics of discipleship as well as an investigation and resolution of the issues that led to becoming unfaithful originally.

Getting Practical: A Bible Study on Unfaithfulness

Introduction: This study discusses the topic of unfaithfulness: what it is, how it can happen, and what can be done to prevent it. It is suitable for presentation to a group or for use as a “follow-up” study after someone has been baptized.

A. Introduction

1. What is unfaithfulness?
2. It means to abandon your relationship with Jesus and forfeit your salvation - John 15:5-6.

B. A disciple can become unfaithful

1. As a “good” church member - Galatians 5:2-4, Revelation 2:1-6, 3:1-5
2. There are three specific areas of life to be concerned about
 - a) Personal Righteousness
 - (1) Personal conduct - 1 Corinthians 9:27
 - (a) Sincere heart, clear conscience - 1 Timothy 1:5-6
 - (b) Materialism - 1 Timothy 6:10
 - (2) Hard times - Luke 8:13
 - (a) Changes in leadership or persecution - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10
 - (b) People in the church may hurt you - Romans 14:15, Matthew 18:15-17, 34-35
 - (c) Singles: dating disciples only! – 2 Corinthians 6:14, 1 Corinthians 7:39, 1 Kings 11:1-4
 - b) Relationship with God
 - (1) Denying God - Matthew 10:33, Titus 1:6
 - (2) Turning from God - Hebrews 3:12
 - c) False Religion
 - (1) The draw of false religion - 2 Timothy 4:3-4, 2 Corinthians 11:3-4
 - (2) The role of Satan - Revelation 12:9, 1 Peter 5:8-9

C. Self-assessment:

1. It is important to be aware of the risks - 1 Corinthians 10:12
2. What are the risks that I will face that could pull me down?

D. The warning not to fall away

1. Ridicule by those who see you quit - Luke 14:28-30
2. Worse off at the end than at the beginning - 2 Peter 2:20-22
3. Expectation of judgment - Hebrews 10:26-31

E. Conclusion: Prevention

1. Becoming unfaithful starts with discouragement, weariness or spiritual failure of some kind, but results in being lost, possibly beyond repair. It could happen to you! - 2 Peter 3:17
2. Be a growing, faithful disciple - 2 Peter 1:5-10
3. Hold on to what you have already learned - 1 John 2:24-26
4. Be close and open with others - Hebrews 3:12-13
5. Persevere through hardships, discouragements and trials- Galatians 6:7-9, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4
6. Jesus can keep you from falling as you rely upon him- Jude 1:24-25

Appendix B

Testimonies of Restorations

Editors Note: The following authors' names have been changed to protect their privacy.

David Hernandez

I became a disciple of Christ in March 1991. My wife was also baptized that same night. Many things in our lives changed at that time. I had great zeal and passion for being in the church through which God was having such an impact. God used me to convert my cousin to Christianity. I was persecuted intensely by family and friends. During the summer and fall of 1991, my church went through a difficult time where the commitment of each disciple was tested. As the scripture says, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). I lost my cousin and many close friends to Satan's influence. This hurt my faith in God. During this time, there was a change in the friend who was discipling me. He was not doing great spiritually and I took the opportunity to not be completely open about my sin and bad attitudes (James 5:16).

I made a decision to not allow people (including my wife) to get close to the person I really was deep down inside. From that one decision, it took me four years to officially leave God. I protected my heart by being a “people pleaser.” I stopped being real with God, with myself and with people around me. Unfortunately, I was also a great deceiver. I easily adapted to my surroundings in order to *fit in* like a chameleon. My marriage deteriorated to the point of being a mere coexistence. My wife had her life and I had my life. I stopped caring about anyone except myself. My old sin crept back into my life just like the seven spirits returning to the empty house.

In May of 1995 I decided to continue sinning without restraint. I decided at an opportune time to become brutally real with myself and with everyone else. I woke up one Sunday morning and decided I did not want to be a disciple anymore. I knew why I was leaving God so I refused to point fingers. I called everyone I knew and told them what I was doing. I told everyone not to waste his or her time trying to convince me otherwise. I had made up my mind and heart and asked everyone to respect my wishes.

Even though I had plenty of opportunities to sin while leaving God, I could not completely give my heart to sin. I sensed that in my soul there were certain lines that had been drawn. If I crossed these lines I knew there would be no turning back. I was spending a lot of time with some old friends and neglecting my family. I continued to encourage my wife to keep going to church with our three children. Whenever someone would bring up the Bible, God or the church I would say I left because of my own issues. I never blamed God or his people for my life. I knew it was one hundred percent my own heart.

During the summer of 1995 I noticed my wife’s heart begin to leave me. I have never felt so alone. I seemed to be a ghost that lived here on earth but was trapped between the light and the dark. Eventually my heart broke because of our separation, a near death of a friend, and many other things. I did not want to go through a second divorce. I felt so terrible I just wanted to go somewhere and die. In November 1995, I moved to my parents’ home in East LA. I began to think that God was destroying my life. My wife continued to “attend church” but I knew her heart had rotted to the core. I would see my kids three or four times a week. I spent many nights crying myself to sleep. I felt my heart being crushed and all the garbage being squeezed out.

One Friday night I decided I wanted to go back to church. The night before, an old friend I was hanging out with, had an accident

that nearly killed him. I was there when it happened. I kept him conscious but I thought he was dying in my arms. He went to the hospital and his wife was there for him. It easily could have been me in the accident. If I died I knew that I was not right with God and would go to hell. In my heart and my mind I was already there. On that Friday night I was driving all three of my boys home when I told them I was coming back. There was much crying from all of us. After I dropped them off I went to a church leader's home. I talked and prayed with him and some other brothers.

It took me about forty-five days to be restored completely. During that time, my wife left God and ran off with another unfaithful person. We went through a divorce that devastated not only my heart but also my three boys' hearts as well. God put another brother and his family in my life to help me rebuild my heart.

The eighteen months since that time have been the most rewarding, challenging and spiritually testing time in my life. I have struggled and battled Satan in many different ways. He has tried everything to get me to fall again. God has been faithful in my greatest time of need (Psalm 107). Satan continues his onslaught on my heart but now I am fighting back and I know the victory is God's.

The most important aspect of your relationship with God is your openness and total vulnerability. Without these aspects you cannot pray and your heart hardens toward God, his word and his people. Then you become bitter (Hebrews 12:1-15) and you eventually leave.

Even if you think you are *doing the right thing* in leaving for a little while, you will pay a heavy price for your decision in many different areas. I am so thankful that God did not let me go beyond the point of no return. I thank his people for showing me God's love, patience, forgiveness, acceptance and faith. I am determined that no matter how hard it is or how much it hurts to live like Jesus, I will never leave God again. I would rather suffer and struggle like Jesus did than have life easy and lose my relationship with God (Luke 9:23-26).

Angela Jackson

I went to quite a few churches but I knew all was not right. So I prayed one afternoon that God would help me find a church that lived by his standards set forth in the Bible. Five minutes later my new spiritual helper and her boyfriend knocked on my door to invite me to church—it was quite scary (Psalm 14:2). I didn't come to church right away, but she continued to befriend me and share her life with me. I was so impressed at her convictions about Christianity, I finally made it to church (Matthew 5:15-16). I began studying the Bible. My new friend's life was very similar to mine and I clung to her. She showed me that God's way is the best way and that God can solve any problem. She helped me to start resolving my molestation. She taught me, through the Scriptures, that although it was terribly unfortunate that I was molested as a girl, I was now an adult and responsible for my own sin before God. My abuse was not an excuse to be disobedient to God. I still visited the psychologist until my minor panic attacks culminated into a major panic attack. I decided to trust God with the situation. I found "Mr. Right" in God!

I learned that although John 3:16 is a wonderful scripture, it is just one verse in thousands of verses that God calls us to be. My husband became a Christian a short time after. However, I wasn't the best example of a godly wife and he continued in some sin that he was not willing to give up for God. He decided he didn't want to be a Christian anymore and that devastated me because I knew there was no hope for our marriage. My husband started a relationship with another woman and eventually left me.

I continued to go to church but my heart was not there. I lost sight of God. I blamed anyone and everyone when things didn't go the way I thought they should go or when my feelings were hurt—like I had never hurt anyone's feelings. I kept telling people I didn't fit into the scheme of things and no one wanted to talk to me. My attitude was so miserable—who would subject themselves to my wrath? I was so blinded by Satan's schemes that I couldn't see the light.

I was unfaithful to God and started looking for another church. I knew the truth and I wasn't going to settle for less. I made a list of things I was looking for according to the Bible. I started my quest in the phone book. Much to my dismay, I couldn't find one church that I felt met the Bible's criteria. There was so much contradiction in the

churches that I talked with compared to the Bible. There was no biblical unity in other churches at all. There were black churches, white churches, Hispanic churches and Asian churches. I knew I wanted to come back to church but my wall of pride was so high. It was such a terrible feeling. God's thumb was on me but I was too prideful to call anyone.

One day I was convinced I was going to die. I cried all day long because I just knew that was going to be the day. I went out to the beach and cried and prayed. When I came back, two of my best friends from church were there waiting for me. I was still prideful. I told them I would call a bible study leader when they left. I picked up the phone but I just couldn't do it because of course that would mean they won. I put the phone down and about three seconds later that bible study leader called me. I knew this was my last chance from God. I truly believe I was going to die that day, not physically, but spiritually. Celine Dion's song "Because You Loved Me" sums it up:

I lost my faith, you gave it back to me. You said
no star was out of reach. You stood by me and I stood
tall, I had your love, I had it all, I'm everything I am
because you loved me.

I had breakfast with the bible study leader the next day and decided to come back to church (James 5:19-20). I didn't want to meet with the leader anymore because she has the kind of Bible that automatically flips open to what you need to hear and I knew I could no longer fight God's word.

It was very hard and I had to fight very hard to grow spiritually. I had made people my idol. I had put all my trust in people instead of God. I now had to change my mindset to make my relationship with God more important than anything in the world. If I were the last person on earth that wanted to be a Christian, I would have to stand firm and no one can help me stand firm except God. I now love the New Living Translation of Psalm 119:67, "I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word" and Psalm 119:71, "The suffering you sent was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your principles." It was good for me to be disciplined and to suffer because when it was all over, God drew me even closer to him.

Soon after, God put my best friend Tammy in my life. Tammy helped me gain back my love for God and His Word. We would sit

down for hours reveling in the Scriptures. She is my David and I her Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1). I continually reaffirm my love for her and she will forever have her own special place in my heart and my love for her will never diminish.

God relieved me little by little of the thoughts of my molestation and my faith grew. I now look at it as the one thing that brought me to a relationship with God. I was so arrogant I probably would have never turned to God if it weren't for that. God truly turns what was meant to harm us into good. I once read that the reality of suffering is that it is an opportunity for God, and God's people, to express compassion. I carry this saying in my purse. This past Thanksgiving, I went to my aunt and uncle's house for the first time in four years. The week before, I was tortured with nightmares and awful thoughts. I really didn't know if I had forgiven the person. I went anyway because I had been encouraged that week with Isaiah 41:13 (NLT) which says, "I am holding you by your right hand—I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Do not be afraid, for I will help you. I am the Lord your Redeemer.'" When I got there, God showed me that I had truly forgiven and it was time to move on.

Through the Scriptures, make sure your relationship with God is where God wants it, not where you think it should be. Don't be swayed by your emotions—listen to the truth and be honest with yourself. If you're not a disciple of Christ right now, find a disciple and let them study the Bible with you. We must resolve not to pick the Bible apart analytically, but let it cut your heart. If you are a faithful disciple of Christ, make sure you are standing firm. If you're not standing firm in the faith, open up and get some help as Matthew 24:13 reads, "But he who stands firm to the end will be saved." I thank God that he has helped me to overcome many obstacles including molestation, divorce, discouragement, depression and unfaithfulness. And God can help you to be an overcomer as well! Just make the decision to not give in to your feelings and start talking with a strong disciple of Christ.

Randy & Kim Reagan

When we were first married eight years ago, we never would have imagined the struggles that lay ahead. We had been disciples of Christ for years, loved the Lord and dreamed great dreams of what we could accomplish together, but we were not prepared for Satan's schemes. We entered marriage very naïvely. We thought that two were supposed to be better than one, but quickly we allowed each other to continue sins without resolving them. Satan's plan was to use each other's weaknesses to destroy the other. Within weeks of being married, that plan was obvious to everyone but us. Randy experienced some conflicts with other brothers that he had unresolved issues about. I quickly took "his side" and failed to see the sin was in his heart and that he needed me to help him be open. This was the beginning of a bad pattern in our marriage and one of the "bitter roots that would grow up to defile many" (Hebrews 12:15).

Over the years, life dealt us many disappointments and struggles. We moved to another state at a very unstable time in our lives spiritually. That was the first of many bad decisions that led us away from God and his kingdom. Randy had difficulty finding work and when he found work, the position was beneath his potential and not enough for a family to survive on. Two of our three children were born in periods of unemployment and our first pregnancy ended with an early miscarriage. Financial hardship continued for years culminating in near bankruptcy. We seldom had enough to live on and at crucial times credit cards became a way of buying groceries and paying rent. Although we would lead spiritually in various capacities and were even fruitful at different times, our faith was incredibly weak, Randy's self-esteem was low and we were both dying spiritually.

Rather than turning to God and other disciples in that time of need, we became more withdrawn and independent, distrusting the advice and motives of others. Kim had convinced herself that God was using the financial hardship to lead us out of the church to help us find the "true kingdom of God"—this had been a struggle with her for years. Kim even used scriptures to try and prove her case. She had been miserable for so many years that she thought, "this couldn't be God's plan." Her happiness became the standard for the truth instead of the word of God. Randy let financial pressures, bitterness toward life's challenges and unresolved conflicts pull him away from God.

Career and financial concerns became the controlling focus of his life. This hardened his heart and allowed him to walk away from God.

In the two years we were gone, Kim actually read her Bible and prayed on a regular basis. Both of us knew a moral life was the “right choice” and Kim became just another “religious person.” At first it was great to be gone—unlimited time, no accountability, we did what we wanted and when we wanted to. We tried to maintain a few friendships with other disciples but that became too painful to continue. Although we were unfaithful to God, life blessed Randy with various promotions. Financially, things were beginning to improve. Our marriage actually did OK but we were talking less and less about deeper issues. Randy was traveling quite a bit and we seldom had time together. The girls were getting more and more out of control and no one seemed to have any answers for us. We were living in the Northwest on a temporary job assignment, when Kim began to pray about our lives and the next city we would be transferred to. She longed for God to be back in our lives and knew he was the answer we needed. She prayed that we would move to a city with a great church that would help us. She had no idea what she had just asked for. Randy was interviewing for a position in the Los Angeles when a friend who happened to be a church leader called. We had known him and his wife for years and had recently sent them a Christmas card. Kim was telling them how great our lives were going and that she still believed we had made the right choice in leaving. Then she found that the Christian leaders were living in the same area of the same state and county that the company was encouraging us to move to. This was too coincidental. She believed God was telling her something, but had difficulty accepting that this was God’s plan for her life.

Within days we were living in the same area as the church leader and within weeks we were attending a Bring Your Neighbor Day. There were many “issues” to work through and resolve. We both had to take responsibility for our sins of unfaithfulness, ingratitude, worry, selfishness, bitterness, independence and pride. It was humbling to realize we had left the kingdom of God and that he was working to bring us back. We had to see how terrible our sins were to truly appreciate his grace. Without Jesus’ sacrifice there would be no coming back. There would be no hope for our children or for us. We’ve been restored for over a year now and are amazed at how much God has changed our lives. We’re grateful for every struggle we went through because it has produced character and hope in us.

We're so thankful for the evangelist and his wife and for their love and friendship over the years. Our convictions about sin and discipleship are deep, as they have been developed through many struggles. We know how unworthy we are to be in God's kingdom and consider it a tremendous honor and privilege to serve in any way. We understand God's love in a special way and want to share this with others. We want God to know how grateful we are by the way that we live our lives. Although life still holds its challenges, we are happier than we've ever been. We have found peace with God and with each other. We no longer want his grace to be without effect in our lives or your life. We definitely want to encourage you to be like us and come home to God and to his plan for your life!

END NOTES

Chapter 1 The Deceitful Heart

¹ Douglas Jacoby, *The Spirit* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1998).

Chapter 2 Needing, Asking For, and Wanting Advice

¹ Gordon Ferguson, *Discipling* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1997).

² Steve Kinnard, *Call of the Wise* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1996).

Chapter 4 Appreciating the Cross

¹ Edited by Tom & Sheila Jones, *Thirty Days at the Foot of the Cross* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1997).

² Sir Lew Grade presentation of a Franco Zeffirelli production, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Van Nuys, CA: LIVE Entertainment Inc. 1992)

Chapter 6 What Would People Think of Me?

¹ Tom Jones, *Mind Change: The Second Edition* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1997).

Other Books from Great Commission Illustrated

BORN OF WATER

What the Bible Really Says About Baptism

Those who study seriously the subject of baptism know that, according to the scriptures and earliest Christian practice, baptism was considered the door into the kingdom of God. While many acknowledge this, few have taken the time to delve deeply—into the New Testament and the early sources. I appreciate Rex Geissler for taking the time to do just this. I commit this work to you, the reader, and commend Rex Geissler for his labor of love. Enjoy this book!

Teacher Douglas Jacoby, from the Foreword

KEEPING THE FAITH

The Early Church and the Apostolic Pattern

Eleven years in the making, a new book from John Engler considers the historical evidence of the early church writings. Engler quotes from all twenty-seven New Testament books and twenty-six post-apostolic documents to show the early church and the apostolic doctrine. *Keeping the Faith* discusses how the church of the apostolic era evolved into the early institutional church. In the foreword, teacher Steve Staten says: “What I appreciate most about *Keeping the Faith* is that John Engler writes with an Indiana Jones sense of intrigue and adventure, striving to turn over every piece of evidence. This work is often captivating, always relevant and filled with the right questions.”

Other GCI Books

www.greatcommission.com

Reasons For Belief

A Handbook of Christian Evidence

John Oakes, Ph.D., 284 pages

John Oakes' book *Reasons For Belief* gives the most detailed evidences and support for the Bible that one can find. This is a classic work and highly recommended for anyone who wants to support their faith or share their faith with others. The book includes many pictures.

Is There A God?

Questions About Science and the Bible

John Oakes, Ph.D., 164 pages

The first John Oakes book *Is There A God?* answers many questions that come up when a person talks about science and religion. Some of the topics that Dr. Oakes discusses include evolution, creation, the age of the earth, Genesis and atheism. This is a must read for anyone interested in science and religion.

Daniel

Prophet to the Nations

John Oakes, Ph.D., 236 pages

No book in the Old Testament provides a stronger link to the New Testament than Daniel. The John Oakes book *Daniel* is an objective attempt to unlock the prophetic message of Daniel, putting it in its proper historical context and includes appendices on the Apocrypha, angels, and the premillennial doctrine.

Born Of Water

What the Bible Really Says About Baptism

By Rex Geissler, 172 pages

In the New Testament there are dozens of explicit “baptism passages,” in addition to a host of baptismal allusions. *Born Of Water* discusses presents scriptures and then discusses the various interpretations of the verses and why they are correct or errant. The appendices are especially helpful including a study of conversion in the book of Acts, studies of the Greek in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2:38, common misinterpretations of conversion doctrines, and what the early Christians stated about baptism. Dr. Douglas Jacoby states about the book, “In the first century, baptism had not yet been reduced to a mere symbol or confessional ritual. It was vital, universal, and part of the new birth. While many acknowledge this, few have taken the time to delve deeply into the New Testament and the early sources.”

Keeping The Faith

The Early Church and the Apostolic Pattern

By John Engler, 292 pages

With a detailed look at ancient primary sources, *Keeping The Faith* examines the history of the Christian church through the first three centuries. It identifies how and why the simple discipleship of the first century church evolved into the highly structured institutional church. *Keeping the Faith* also considers how those same processes operate in the lives of Christians today.

The Grass Really Isn't Greener

Unfaithfulness & Restoration

By Bud Price, 98 pages

The Grass Really Isn't Greener discusses the aspects of unfaithfulness to God and restoration to God and the body of believers. Bud Prices tells his vivid story of how he left God, returned and how *The Grass Really Isn't Greener* on the other side of the spiritual fence. It includes a bible-based section by John Engler on restoration.

The Explorers Of Ararat

And the Historic Search for Noah's Ark

Edited by B.J. Corbin and Rex Geissler with 21 Co-authors

482 pages, 265 photographs

The Explorers Of Ararat is a comprehensive book about the unsuccessful search for any archaeological remains of Noah's Ark. First, the book is a collaborative effort with leading research expedition leaders author each chapter. Second, the objective book offers a compilation of ark resources including historical and contemporary accounts and 265 photographs.