

Turn Your Worry into Worship

“Steps to Building a Passionate Godly Relationship”

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Preface

This course has been a labor of love—a love for God. I was blessed to be led to Jesus about twenty years ago by a good friend. Another blessing was that she told me from the beginning that this new path I was about to begin was about a relationship not a religion. I had never experienced that so I was very excited. That introduction has led me on amazing and wonderful journey that has continued for decades, as my relationship with the Lord has grown immensely.

Since I had no church background whatsoever, I had to start from the beginning. Overnight I was introduced to a new language, a new relationship with God, and family and friends around me who were not Christians (with whom I did not share my transformation news). The “Good News” was that the Holy Spirit in me was active and blessed me with a passion to hit the ground running.

As I reflect back, I recall taking a few side trips on my faith journey that perhaps could have been avoided. I decided I wanted to share some of my experiences so that perhaps others may find their journey a bit easier.

Over time, I have grown in my faith and remain excited about my relationship with God. I can say from firsthand experience and the experience of others who have made the same commitment to do our part in this amazing relationship, it has changed our lives for the better. I and many others have become accustomed to hearing His voice daily (through thoughts) and being led by His promptings. I am very grateful for the blessings He has bestowed upon me.

One major factor that has been missing for me for many years has been an intense feeling of true passion for Him. As I explain in the course, I have gone to great lengths for years to search for that passion, a passion I have seen in others, but could never attain.

Not long after I had finished writing this course I felt led to pray that I would know God more in my heart and less in my mind. Since God was kind enough to answer that prayer over the past year I had to rewrite parts of the course (The first version had two paragraphs about the heart. Now there are seventeen pages under the subheading

Passion for God!!) I realize I am a different person. I am filled with a heartfelt passion and love for Him after all these years. I believe that adds a whole new dimension and excitement to this labor of love.

This course is about God and what I have been led to learn about Him such as His character, what He expects from His followers, how He reacts to various behaviors related to human nature, and more. I have included relationship steps that are guidelines for those who want more of a relationship with Him.

In order to allow you to see how God has made Himself known to me I share some of my personal feelings and experiences. I share some of the steps I took so that maybe it will help someone else not have to search for years the way I did. My hope is that this course will provide some encouragement, or perhaps be a guide or a starting point.

Everyone's relationship with God is different and very personal. Clearly, what has been helpful for me may not be for others. That is to be left to God and each individual. The personal parts I share can also be easily edited to reflect your own experiences if you decide to use it to organize a small group course or one-to-one mentoring.

Before We Begin: “Is This the Right Course for Me?”

Would you like to experience more joy and peace?

Would you like to reduce fears, anxiety, and worry?

Would you like to be able to cope with difficult people in your life?

Would you like to get up each day feeling God’s presence in amazing ways?

If you said yes to any or all of these questions you may want to keep reading.

I have come to realize over the years that if we want more love, peace, and joy in our lives, we can attain that if we are willing to put in the time and effort to grow in our relationship with God. He tells us in His Word He is waiting for us. He tells us in the book of Revelation 3:20 that if anyone hears His voice and opens the door He will come in. If we believe God is sovereign (in control of every area of our lives), and we believe He has a will for each of our lives (a plan for us for which He knows the beginning, the middle, and the end), it is beneficial for us to hear that voice, that manifests through our thoughts, and act upon it.

If you really think about it, that is the voice of the God of the Universe, the God who parted the Red Sea, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, telling us He is ready, willing, and able to have a true relationship with us. By hearing and obeying His quiet, yet powerful voice within us, we can receive an ongoing sense of calm, guidance, reassurance, comfort, love, support and more, as we live out our lives in this chaotic world.

When we take a leap of faith and give this relationship a try we often tend to attract like-minded people into our inner circle, many of whom could be ahead of us on their faith journey. When we hear some of their testimonies of the amazing ways God has helped them in their lives and they know it had to be God because of how it played out, I for one would say, “Show me how. I want that!” That is what happened to me. The friend who led me to Jesus had a peace about her that I wanted badly. I was willing to put in the time and effort to build that special relationship over the past twenty years and I have never regretted it for a minute. God has done immeasurably more in my life than I could ever have asked or imagined.

I also came to the realization years ago that any control I believed I had over my life was and continues to be only a perception. Since that is the reality, my good and common sense tells me I would much rather have God guiding me and supporting me every step of the way than my even attempting to do it all on my own. I cannot say it often enough, that that decision has benefitted me in ways I could never ever have dreamed of, including God coming to my rescue as He helped me through some challenging situations along the way. I cannot even imagine doing life without God leading me every step of the way.

After a while, like being in step with a new friend who becomes a best friend, our daily Godly interactions begin to flow more and more naturally. It is powerful and exciting. For anyone reading this who has a very busy life and struggles with making a time commitment to building a relationship with God, I believe the ways He has guided me over the years and helped me avoid mistakes I would have made without Him, has more than made up for the time I spend making sure I honor and learn from the One to whom I owe everyone and everything in my life.

I wrote this course to honor God, but I also did it because I enjoy sharing with those who are seeking a shift in their lives for more love, joy and peace. In His Word God tells us what He wants from us in order to attain that. As I share some of my personal experiences as well, the information I have provided reflects what I have come to learn are the keys to opening God's amazing doors of opportunities to soak in His wisdom as He welcomes us with open arms.

I have seen over the years with myself and others that when God sees us taking steps to grow in our relationship with Him, He will step in in noticeable ways. He will respond in ways we could never have imagined. Only God could orchestrate the amazing testimonies I have heard over the years, as people made a commitment to do what it takes to build a passionate, Godly relationship.

The Importance of the Bible in Our Lives

We are very fortunate to have the Bible, which is the undeniable, authoritative, Word of God to humanity. In this amazing book He shares His sacrifice, wisdom, love, character, expectations, miracles, signs and wonders, visions, emotions, promises, consequences that follow certain behaviors, and more.

If we want to have a strong relationship with God, it is critical that we become more familiar with the Bible. Without knowledge of His Word, how can we know what He expects from us, how He expects us to behave, what He wants us to have, how He wants us to live, etc. If our knowledge only comes from other people and reference materials, we are not seeing firsthand what God is trying to tell us. We are only gaining that knowledge as an interpretation of how someone else who reads it firsthand tells us what to believe. The key here is to pray before we open our Bibles and ask for guidance from the Holy Spirit to tell us what He wants us to discern from our time in His Word.

There are a number of ways to gain this understanding. A Life Application Study Bible is a good start. It is God's Word together with study notes and descriptive pages that delve deeper into the lives of the men and women of the Bible, maps that clarify where events occurred, timelines, and more, that tell us how we can apply His Word to our everyday lives. It is a nice combination of being able to read the Word, ingest the Word, hear what the Holy Spirit tells us we should discern from the Word, and then check out the study notes to support us or correct us as appropriate.

Some new believers like to begin with a children's or a teenage version of the Bible since they find that easier to understand. An Internet search will also provide you with some suggested reading plans such a one year or a two year, commentaries that offer information for a better understanding, and other study materials.

Sermons delivered by a pastor that we admire and trust are an excellent way of learning the Word. Using the sermons as a springboard to delve even deeper will take our study to an even higher level. **Note:** Please see a list of popular pastors that can be heard online in the Resource section.

Another option is to subscribe to a devotional online or by mail. There are also devotional books such as Jesus Calling that are excellent. These all offer daily writings on topics that affect our lives, accompanied by suggested Bible verses to study. If we truly want to learn and grow our relationship it is helpful to not only read the suggested verses, but to learn more by reading the chapters so we can see that verse in context. It is also helpful to read the introduction to the particular book of the Bible that contains the suggested verses in order to gain a better understanding of the context of what is written.

It is important to remember that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Heb. 13:8) It is also quite apparent that human nature has not changed since biblical times. It is so special that we have this amazing gift from God that is as pertinent today as it was in biblical times, that we can turn to for guidance as we proceed on our faith journey. Here are a few examples:

How about the phrase "history repeats itself?" How many times have we heard that? Lo and behold, in Ecclesiastes it is stated in verse 1:9, "History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new."

How often have we been told that when we are angry about something and want to resolve it immediately, that it would be wiser to "sleep on it?" Psalm 4:4 states, "Don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Think about it overnight and remain silent."

It is common when we are feeling overburdened and stressed for someone to advise us to delegate and not take everything on ourselves. In the Book of Numbers it tells us that as the Israelites were wandering through the desert towards the Promised Land, they were complaining about their hardships. In Num. 11:10-15 we read about Moses' breakdown when he told God, "I can't carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy! I'd rather you killed me than treat me like this. Please spare me this misery!"

God proceeded to advise Moses to bring forth seventy of the leaders of Israel to help him. In Numbers 11:17 God told Moses, "They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone." God was telling Moses to delegate!

There are a myriad of such examples throughout the Old Testament. It is heartening and empowering for us to realize that even though the Bible is thousands of years old, so many of the issues we face today were addressed years ago and we are able to see how God reacted and to guide ourselves accordingly.

Another example of how relevant the Bible is today has to do with the various biblical figures such as King David. David had to wait almost fifteen years between the time that he was anointed king and actually became king. Jacob waited fourteen years before he could be with Rachel. These are all examples of learning the importance of patience and how God works things out for our good on His timetable. We can then work on applying such patience to our own lives as we continue to read the Word, meditate on it, and use the principles in our own lives in order to feel more peace and joy.

“Grasping” the Concepts of Building a Godly Relationship

Please keep in mind that there is a lot of material here. Every word may not be for everyone. We often have time restraints for various reasons. We must carefully and honestly examine our priorities as far as how we choose to spend the time we can call our own. Pray and ask God where He wants to lead you. Slow down and be still and listen for His voice.

There is no rush. We will never know it all. The Bible teaches us that it is pleasing to God when we give Him our time and attention. James 4:8 tells us, “Come close to God and God will come close to you.” He will be thrilled should you decide to begin this journey.

Remember, to God, each and every one of our hearts is an open book. Be honest with yourself and with Him. It may not be long before you notice Him guiding you and sending you signs that you are on the right track. Keep taking small steps as your love for Him and your knowledge of Him increases. His rewards are limitless.

Note: Pray, pray, and pray!! It is always important as we begin taking steps to improve our relationship with God to pray first. Talk with Him and let Him know your intentions. Ask for what you need as far as support. Express gratitude for all you have. Utter praises to God for who He is and all He has done for you. Even though God knows everything about us and our intentions, He likes it when we pray and it glorifies His holy name. (See the section in the Appendix on Prayer for more on its importance.)

It is important as we begin to see positive changes to praise Him and give Him the glory for all of it. The Bible tells us that repeatedly in so many scenarios. Last, but certainly not least, it is crucial to praise Him in the valleys. For whatever reason He may have us going through a valley, He knows what is best for us at the time and what He wants to teach us. Remember, He has it all planned out and we are to listen for His voice and see where He is

leading us. It is important to continue to show our gratitude to Him for being such a personal, comforting, loving God. Remember that we are communicating with the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe who raised Jesus and Lazarus from the dead. The God who knows every hair on our head. There are not enough words to express what a blessing that is! Let's make an effort to do it often.

When we begin the relationship building tasks it is important to begin with baby steps. As we take those steps and notice some positive changes such as feeling better about ourselves or others, our lives in general, our work environment, etc. we can build on those steps and our relationship with God will intensify. That is very exciting!!

G – Gratitude: “An ounce of gratitude goes a long way.”

R – Repentance: “How to tell God you are sorry.”

A – Avoidance: “Avoiding the perils of sin.”

S – Surrender: “How to Let Go and God.”

P – Passion for God: “Softening Our Hearts”

Gratitude - "An ounce of gratitude goes a long way."

"Let Us Come to Him with Thanksgiving." Psalm 95:2

“A thankful attitude opens windows of heaven. Spiritual blessings fall freely onto you through those openings into eternity. Moreover, as you look up with a grateful heart, you get glimpses of Glory through those windows.” (Jesus Calling Morning and Evening Devotional – 11/23)

Most of us, when asked, will say we are grateful for our lives. No matter how little we have in life, we could always have less. No matter how badly we may be feeling, we could always feel worse.

It is important to have a continuous "extreme attitude of gratitude." It is not simply feeling it in our hearts and saying, "Oh, God knows how I feel. He knows I am grateful." Our lives are filled with reasons to show our gratitude. There may be serious situations that have turned out better than we had expected. Perhaps things are going quite well in our daily lives. It is easy to forget to express gratitude to God when we are doing well. We are often too busy enjoying ourselves. However, this is one of the key times during which He wants to hear from us.

In the Bible we see examples over and over again of people who were blessed by God and took it for granted. Many paid a steep price for that behavior.

The Bible is replete with verses extolling the importance of showing gratitude to God.

“Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim His greatness.
Let the whole world know what He has done. 1 Chr. 16:8

"Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!" 1 Chr. 16:34

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving; go into His courts with
praise. Give thanks to Him and praise His name.”
Ps. 100:4

It is very helpful to remember that He is the same God today as in biblical times. He wants us to be righteous, obedient, and grateful. We experience the same types of issues that our forefathers endured and we respond with similar emotions. The only difference is that our experiences are geared towards more modern times. Society is filled with those who, on a daily basis, put gratitude aside and outwardly display emotions ranging from impatience, frustration, and annoyance to anger and rage.

God wants to know that when He blesses us we will not leave Him in the dust, as we race off to immerse ourselves in pleasure. He does not want to look at us with regret and say, "Hey, wait a minute. What about the One who blessed you? Do you have a moment for me? Do I need to remove these blessings in order to get your attention? (He will do just that in a heartbeat!!) Do I need to bring you to your knees to stop you from racing off into your own world of momentary bliss? I am in this for the long haul. I am looking for a relationship. Wait a minute. Come back!!”

Relationship building tasks for gratitude:

Begin with baby steps and build on them. Any time we take on a new challenge, if we start slowly it is much easier to keep going than if we attempt too big a task and find it overwhelming.

1. Take the first step in learning how to think about what you are thinking about. Instead of your mind being on auto pilot most of the time, begin to notice your surroundings. We may be called “human beings,” but the life most of us lead reflects that of “human doings.” Take a walk where there are some forms of nature and challenge yourself to be in the moment. Look around and observe some of God’s amazing creations right in front of you. Examine a flower, a leaf, or a tree closely and see the magnificence of His creation and how these creations sustain themselves. Notice a bird and how self-sufficient God created him.

As your mind begins to quiet down, think about your life and that for which you are grateful. Talk to God and tell him. There are many basic things that we tend to take for granted. He loves to hear that we appreciate the beautiful day that He has created, that we have a place to live, a good friend, a pet we love, modern conveniences, a job, a comfortable retirement, food and water that are safe to ingest, etc. The list is endless.

There are some life altering moments for gratitude that involve our health and the health of our loved ones, answered prayers, miracles, signs, and wonders that God sends as a way of communicating with us, special people in our lives to whom we can reach out and help make their lives better, those who reach out to us to do the same and, once again, the list can go on and on.

The key here is that God sees we are interested enough to remember Him. That part is very special. We will see some amazing consequences that accompany slowing down long enough to express extreme gratitude on an ongoing basis.

2. Keep a gratitude journal. Many enjoy writing down that for which they are grateful. It feels so good when we begin to list many of the things we take for granted and realize how grateful we are for them. Once again, the key is that we are remembering to honor the One who is making it all possible. We will begin to notice how much He appreciates it.

3. I find it interesting when we are out with friends and conversing about various things to weave gratitude into the conversation. I find that it is common for many people I know (who are extremely blessed) to complain and speak very negatively. I simply cannot help but interject gratitude and no one can refute what I am saying. It is a great way to turn a conversation around. I also believe it is an outward way for me to honor God and that feels good. I have also found, having done this for years, that those people tend to no longer talk that way when I am around.

4. Take the first step in reaching out to help someone else. There are so many people in need. The possibilities are endless. I know so many people and have read about so many who may have some tough situations occurring in their lives who say that they feel extremely uplifted when they are able to reach out and help others. Paul quoted Jesus in Acts 20:35 when he said, "You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

5. Studies have proven that even though we believe we are having many thoughts at once, we can actually only have one thought at a time. That means that if we are having a day when we are feeling frustrated, angry, annoyed, etc. we can physically notice the thought and switch it out for a thought that reflects gratitude. Technically, it is not possible to feel gratitude and anger or some other negative emotion in our minds at exactly the same time. When we get used to switching our thoughts our subconscious kicks in and we can begin to switch our thoughts automatically.

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” Rom. 12:2

Repentance - How to Tell God You Are Sorry

Repentance is the act of being sorry. However, *the key factor* is that it not only means being sorry, but also changing one's heart and one's behavior.

We all have times when, for whatever reasons, we behave in ways that do not honor or please God. The important things to consider are our intentions when we exhibited the behavior and how we handled the situation afterwards. Did we behave poorly knowing it was wrong from the start or was it truly accidental? Did we try to cover it up? Did we try to rationalize it away? Did we immediately acknowledge what we did, apologize to God, and begin to repent by asking for forgiveness and making changes in our behavior as we moved forward?

How we respond to these types of situations is a key factor in how genuine, wonderful, and amazing our relationship with God will be. It is important to remember, just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we cannot run and we cannot hide from God. In addition, we cannot lie because God knows exactly what is in our hearts. After all, HE MADE THEM!!!!

True repentance is truly being sorry and then changing our behavior to show Him we sincerely mean it. It is crucial to be honest with Him and ourselves. We can say we are sorry and acknowledge why what we did was wrong. However, the real test is how we act from that day forth. Did someone ever apologize to you for saying something behind your back and yet you heard she was still doing it? Has anyone ever promised to do something important for you and failed to do it, only to apologize profusely and then let you down again?

These people clearly do not fall under the biblical definition of repentant. God will keep His eye on those who are insincere, with the intent of eventually teaching them repentance. He will keep giving them plenty of practice opportunities until they get it!

What makes people repent and really meant it? There are a couple of factors involved in truly changing hearts and, in turn, doing our best to please God. One factor is the size of one's ego and another is how fearful one is of God. Please see the section in the Appendix on Egocentricity and on Reverent Fear of God).

Notice in the following Bible verses how people in biblical times repented. Take note of the consequences that occurred when they repented versus when they continued their sinful behavior.

"Then Hezekiah humbled himself and repented of his pride, as did the people of Jerusalem. So the Lord's anger did not fall on them during Hezekiah's lifetime." 2 Chr. 32:26

"But in spite of this, the people kept on sinning. They refused to believe in His miracles. So He ended their lives in failure and gave them years of terror. When God killed some of them, the rest finally sought Him. They repented and turned to God. Then they remembered that God was their rock, that their redeemer was the Most High." Ps. 78: 32-35

"God is an honest judge. He is angry with the wicked every day. If a person does not repent, God will sharpen his sword; He will bend and string his bow. He will prepare his deadly weapons and shoot his flaming arrows." Ps. 7:11-13

The following passage is an interesting one. It shows what can happen if we repent without it being truly heartfelt. Remember, God made our hearts and knows what is in them.

"I told them that every Hebrew slave must be freed after serving six years. But your ancestors paid no attention to me. Recently you repented and did what was right, following my command. You freed your slaves and made a solemn covenant with me in the Temple that bears my name. But now you have shrugged off your oath and defiled my name by taking back the men and women you had freed, forcing them to be slaves once again." Jer. 34: 14-16

Therefore, this is what the Lord says, "Since you have not obeyed me by setting your countrymen free, I will set you free to be destroyed by war, disease, and famine. You will be an object of horror to all the nations of the earth. Because you have broken the terms of our covenant, I will cut you apart just as you cut apart the calf when you walked between its halves to solemnize your vows. Yes, I will cut you apart, whether you are officials of Judah or Jerusalem, court officials, priests, or common people- for you have broken your oath. I will give you to your enemies, and they will kill you. Your bodies will be food for the vultures and wild animals." Jer. 34:14-20

Relationship building tasks for repentance:

Remember to begin in prayer!

1. Think of one behavior for which you need to repent. In your heart, you know it is time. Tell God (talk with Him just as you would with a close friend) what you are going to work on and how you plan to do it. As you go about your day, notice your thoughts and your behavior. Stay aware of any signs from Him. Eventually, as you follow some of the aforementioned steps, you will become attuned to these signs that may at first appear to be coincidences (remember with God there are NO coincidences!!). Be patient. Since this type of awareness may not be something you are accustomed to doing, it may take some time to begin to notice signs.

The key is to keep putting one foot in front of the other and taking the steps you believe are necessary to accomplish your goals. Keep in mind, especially in the very beginning, it is not so much about what you are hearing or seeing from God, as it is the fact that He sees you caring enough to devote time and effort to Him! He will respond!

2. Begin to journal your experiences related to repenting. You may want to write down how you are feeling as you start this leg of your journey. Write about what you notice as you proceed. When feelings arise, add them to your journal. Your documentation can be helpful to you in the future, especially if you decide you have another behavior on which you want to work. Once you become accustomed to repenting, it may begin to flow naturally. Knowing when you need to repent and the actual act of repenting will become second nature. Once in a while, if I know I have dishonored God I get a sense of biblical conviction. There is an intense feeling that will come over me if I did something that dishonors God and I must immediately begin to repent.

3. If you enjoy taking walks that can be a wonderful time to talk with God about anything including repentance. It does not have to be complicated. Pour your heart out to Him. Be totally honest. Let Him know how you should have behaved or what you should have said and then do your best to avoid repeating the offensive behavior.

4. If repentance is something that you question or struggle with and you enjoy studying the Bible, it may be helpful to do an Internet search on those in the Bible who repented and those who did not and the various outcomes. Becoming familiar with biblical accounts, especially if you use your imagination and plug your current situation into a scenario can be very revealing and helpful.

Avoiding the Perils of Sin

If you ask ten people to give a definition of sin it is quite possible to get ten different answers. I am using the word sin as anything that would be an affront to God. If we were to take a moment in a particular situation and ask ourselves "What would God tell me to do if He were sitting right here next to me?" and then proceed to do what our minds or our egos guide us to do, rather than what God would want us to do, there is a good possibility that our action may be sinful.

The sin we are discussing deals more with sin committed as we go about our business living our everyday lives, as opposed to murder, theft, etc. that everyone would clearly recognize as sin. For example, someone makes a purchase at the grocery store and the cashier, thinking he gave him a twenty-dollar bill, hands him change for a twenty instead of the ten he gave him. He keeps the money and leaves. Some would say "It is a big company. They build those kinds of losses into the cost of doing business!" Others may say, "I need the money more than the store does." They may even go so far as to say, "Oh, I know I'll be back soon and spend that money here anyhow, so they will get their money back!!"

The interesting thing is to see what takes place in our lives after sin occurs. People who understand this concept will say that the timing of a negative event was too perfect for it not to be related. In the beginning, it is human nature to not even think of equating the consequences with a particular sinful behavior. However, once people begin to "get it" and realize God's hand in all of this, they began to see that it does indeed all add up. They realize that the timing of their consequences and the timing of their particular "sin" are clearly exemplifying a cause and effect situation.

Another example of what could be called common sins are those involving the breaking of traffic laws. Many drivers drive as though they are above the law. If they can avoid getting caught, then so be it. That's what radar detectors are for, right? Tell me this. If Jesus were sitting next to you in the passenger seat (although I think I would prefer to have Him at the wheel ;) and you believed in His sovereignty (that He is in control of the events in your life), do you think you would really have that radar detector sitting on the dash?

Well guess what? He is with you and He knows what is going on. He does not miss a beat. Begin taking time to notice a consequence and the behavior that may have preceded a particular consequence or series of consequences. Often people say to themselves that they just cannot figure out why so many things seem to be going wrong in their lives. By taking a closer look, a correlation may become apparent.

Keep in mind, however, that things going wrong in our lives are not always the result of something we have done wrong in God's eyes (For more about that, read the book of Job in the Old Testament. For a better understanding of life's trials and tribulations see the section in the Appendix called "Trials and Tribulations.")

"If we confess our sins He is faithful to forgive." 1John 1:9

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin." James 4:17

As you commit yourself to change and begin your action steps it will change your life in a positive way forever. People around you will begin to notice. There may be some who are not supportive and some who may reflect toxic behavior from whom you may want to distance yourself.

“Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”
1 Cor. 15:33

“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, turn away from them.” Rom. 16:17

There will be some who are going to be inspired by the new you. They will question how you did this. When you tell them how God was involved and continues to be involved in your life God gets the glory and He loves that. He will welcome your new relationship with open arms. This can be a whole new beginning to a relationship with Him that will bring immeasurable peace and joy and strength into your life. Give it a try. Have some patience. God works on His timeframe, not ours.

Relationship building tasks for avoidance of sin:

1. Pick one of your behaviors that you believe would not meet God's approval. Ask God to help you stop that behavior for a while and see what you notice. Some will attest to the fact that when they do this they notice things going more smoothly in their lives. Keep in mind also that the sin that occurs could be something very subtle, so it is crucial to pay close attention.
2. If you are not quite sure what is going on, but you have a feeling God is not pleased with you about something, start talking with Him and asking Him to make it clearer. If He senses your sincerity about all of this and that your desire to please Him is truly heartfelt He will respond. Just say it in plain and simple words. Then it is very important to sit still and listen.

Sometimes His voice can be very low and subtle. If you are amidst noise and chaos you may miss it! Be patient. (That can be a tough one.) There may also be times when you are getting the message, but you are not quite ready to respond. That may take some soul searching.

3. Seek the wisdom of a *trusted* pastor, counselor, or close friend. Be truthful about your concerns and your desire to repent. This can also be helpful to gain wisdom about forgiveness towards yourself and others. If you feel comfortable sharing, ask those close to you to pray for you and your concerns. It can be helpful to use one of the aforementioned resources as someone to whom you can be accountable. Once avoidance of sin becomes second nature, it will be apparent that the best accountability partner is God!

Surrender - From Fear to Faith: "Let Go and Let God"

Before we can surrender, we must determine who is really in control. Do we believe that God is sovereign (in complete control)? Without knowing that, what is the point of surrendering? So how do we gain that knowledge?

The Sovereignty of God

Those who have a heart for God will most often say that God is in control of their lives. When events or situations happen in their lives that would seem to some to be called coincidences, those with faith and a sincere heart for God know that those occurrences exemplify God in action accomplishing His will. For many who experience these occurrences, it would actually take a lot more faith to think that people could have that many coincidences in their lives, than to believe they occurred as a result of what God wanted to happen at that moment.

It is important to keep in mind that God knows all of us very well because He made us. He knows what will come out of our mouths, for He made our mouths. He knows how and what we see, for He made our eyes. He knows how we really feel because He made our hearts. He also has a plan for each and every one of us that only He knows. He often points out to me in various ways that if, for a moment, I believe I am in control, it is clearly only a perception.

There is a belief (amongst those who believe God is sovereign) that states that God will show us what He wants us to know and then, if we don't seem to get it, He will show us again, but not so gently. For many of us, we need to be hit with a "2 by 4" to really get it. I believe if we are honest, many would admit they have gotten the old 2 x 4 more than once in their lives!! Keep in mind,

even with the 2 x 4, since we are only human and God has given us free will, we may still want to do things our own way. It sometimes takes a lot of work (forethought, focus, discipline, patience, etc.) to think and act differently.

Once we step out in faith to change our thoughts and behaviors, begin to see how positively He responds when we surrender to His control, and realize it is an easier way to live, we become more amenable to the whole concept. We also become more attuned to His will for us.

Think about all of the things we do in the course of a day and the risks we take doing them. For example, think for a moment about driving on a busy highway. We enter the highway and accelerate to stay in the flow of traffic. We have no idea who these drivers are, what they have been eating or drinking, how much sleep they got the night before, how big a fight they had with their boss, kids or spouse right before they got in their car, who angered them at the last stop they made, who is talking on the phone or worse yet, who is texting, etc. We just hit the pedal and go full speed ahead.

We are clearly NOT in control. Whether an accident occurs or not is out of our hands. Yes, we can be careful. We can be wonderful, cautious, defensive drivers. However, the bottom line is that many find solace in their belief that God is in control on that highway. It is His will as to what is going to occur or not occur.

Once we have a good understanding of who is truly in control, we can delve deeper into the idea of surrendering to Him. When we surrender our lives to God we are essentially saying, "God, we know you are really in control and have always been. We are now coming to that realization and are willing to stop

pretending we are in control. We are willing to let You do what You do best, run the universe, including our lives. The Bible specifically states that You want what is best for those who believe in You. Now it is time for us to trust in You. As we follow the old adage "Let Go and Let God," it can take so much pressure off of ourselves."

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

Rom. 8:28

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight."

Prov. 3:5-6

Of course, surrendering does not mean kicking back and waiting for things to occur in our lives. We must be proactive and use the free will the Bible says God has given all of us. As we get to know Him better, we will become more and more familiar with what He expects of us and the myriad of ways He shows up in our lives. The key here is to focus more time and energy on getting to know God (His nature, character, ways, desires, etc.), so that we will be in step with what He wants for us. That will enable us to be in touch with His will for our lives and His power within us.

As our relationship with God grows, our ability to surrender grows. In the beginning, it is very similar to making a new friend who, later on, becomes a best friend. We do not trust that person as soon as we meet. It takes time to gain trust. It takes time to see that someone will be there for us and that that person is truly looking out for us. There is no doubt God will show Himself to be an awesome best friend.

Until we honestly believe in the act of surrender and are willing to make it something that we constantly strive for, our relationship with God will waiver. Now please don't get me wrong. The idea of surrendering to God is an ongoing lifelong pursuit. It is not something that we complete and we are done.

Our egos and the outside world are always testing us and tempting us to take a different path. They are tempting us to take the "me" path rather than the "He" path! This is why it is so important to consistently stay in touch with the Lord and to do what it takes to stay aware of that special connection. That, in turn, will allow us to remember who is really in control.

At times when we are facing serious problems and issues that we have tried to resolve and we know we cannot, many will surrender by default. Each person does it in his or her own way. Surrendering could be the time you may have broken down in tears because of something a child or a parent may have done that frustrated you to no end. It may have been when you or a family member were facing a physical illness over which you realized you had absolutely no control. You may have surrendered when you were depressed and could not rise above it in your own strength.

The exciting part about surrendering is that once we try it and experience a positive consequence, it often feels so uplifting that we cannot help but want to try it again. This builds on itself and as time goes on, we feel more and more comfortable surrendering. It is so much harder to try to run our lives completely on our own. After all, what is in God's will for us is what is going to happen anyhow. We may as well be on board and accept our lives as a partnership with Him taking the leading role.

Relationship building tasks for surrender:

1. Pray and begin to tell God you want to surrender to Him Say it and think it continuously. As you do this, be on the lookout for situations in which he may test your sincerity.
2. Write a prayer on surrendering or take some verses from the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament. You can use them as they are written or use them as a model to write your own. Pray them often and aloud.
3. Put some notes around the house or in your car saying "Let Go and Let God" or some other words that are meaningful to you. Keep thinking it over and over and saying it to yourself or out loud during the day. Say it before bed and when you wake up. See what happens.
4. Journal events that have occurred in which you have surrendered. Then take time to notice how the action of letting go has saved you lots of wasted energy (and sometimes even time, money, heartache, and more). Detail what occurred so that when another event warrants you to surrender, you have something to which you can refer. Building on these types of occurrences will help strengthen your faith.
5. This may be a good time to consider joining a Christian, biblically based small group. They are made up of Christian men and women who gather together to talk about the Bible or Christian books that the group members decide to study. There are many existing groups that welcome outsiders. They often meet in person, but now there are many that meet on Zoom.

These groups generally provide a safe environment for people to learn and share. For a topic such as surrender or actually any of the topics discussed in this course, it can be very helpful to learn from others who have experienced surrendering or

whatever challenge on which you are working. These groups can be found by asking friends or doing an Internet search. If you find a church that is appealing to you, you can then see if it offers small groups and what those groups encompass.

What is Godly Passion and How is it Expressed?

“But now, O Lord, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand.”

Isaiah 64:8

Those of us who have committed to developing or intensifying our passion for God understand the importance of the criteria below. We are truly committed to the lifelong process of surrendering to God and allowing Him to mold, transform, and sanctify us as we walk with Him.

Unquestionable love for God.

Spending daily time in praise and worship.

Remembering and being grateful for God's miracles.

Repentant and committed to changing sinful behaviors.

Loving others and ourselves.

Surrounding ourselves with others who live with Godly passion.

A life filled with intentional prayer.

A trust/faith in the sovereignty of God to Whom we surrender.

Immersing ourselves in the Word of God.

Committed to obedience to God.

Submission to the filling of the Holy Spirit (giving the Holy Spirit complete control over our lives as He gives us daily direction and guidance).

Giving to God and to those in need.

Forgiving others (we have a God who has forgiven us).

An attitude of ongoing extreme gratitude.

Passion for God – Softening Our Hearts

The heart is of great importance in the Bible. Prov. 4:23 tells us to “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”

Keep in mind also that God knows our hearts. After all, He made them. The writer of Ps. 44:21 was questioning why Israel had been defeated despite their faith and obedience. He goes on to say, “God would surely have known it for He knows the secrets of every heart.”

God also knows that the human heart in its natural condition is deceitful and wicked. “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due reward, according to what their actions deserve. Jer. 17:9-10

In Mark 7:17 Jesus is responding to His disciples about a parable He had just used talking about food that does not defile us because the food does not go into our hearts, but only passes through the stomach and goes into the sewer. “And then He added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All the vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”

So here we have it. Our natural hearts (that determine the course of our lives) are tainted by sin and according to Jer. 17:9 we are blind to see just how pervasive the problem is.

When the Lord rejected King Saul as king of Israel and spoke to Samuel about his replacement the Lord speaks about the heart. “When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, “Surely this is the Lord’s anointed!” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

1 Sam. 16: 6-7

“This is what the Lord says to the people of Judah and Jerusalem: Plow up the hard ground of your hearts! Do not waste your good seed among thorns. O people of Judah and Jerusalem, surrender your pride and power. Change your hearts before the Lord, or my anger will burn like an unquenchable fire because of all your sins.”

Jer. 4:3-4

“My wayward children,” says the Lord, “come back to me, and I will heal your wayward hearts.” Jer. 3:22

We see all throughout the Bible how much God loves those whose hearts are filled with love and a passion to do what is right in His eyes. He is clearly bothered by those with hardened hearts. Not only that, but God is so loving and forgiving that if we humbly come to Him and let Him know we are ready, willing, and able to begin a new path, allowing Him to soften our hearts, He is ready with open arms. Keep in mind, this is something we cannot do in our own flesh. It is very spiritual which is what makes it so special and exciting.

God, in addressing Israel whose people have been in captivity as punishment for its sins, gives the following promise if they return back to their land: “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will guide you with knowledge and understanding.”

Jer. 3:15

“I will give them hearts that recognize me as Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me wholeheartedly.” Jer. 24:7

“But whenever they were in trouble and turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought Him out, they found Him.” 2 Chr. 15:4

The heart is the inner core of a person, the seat of our emotions. From the heart comes emotions such as courage, love, affection, passion, anger, sadness, frustrations, desires and more. These affect our thought process that leads to our behavior. The mind, on the other hand, engages in conscious thinking and decision making. Our minds (including our subconscious) can clearly have a profound effect on our emotions (the heart) and hence our behavior.

When we have God more in our hearts than in our minds we are better able to feel His presence and hear His voice. When we are blessed with that capability, we can get a better understanding of His will for our lives. Once we get a sense of His will, if something is not going the way we had hoped or planned or if we are having some difficulty making decisions about something, it becomes easier to discern what may be going on. That can be comforting, give us hope, reduce worry and anxiety, etc.

Since God knows what is best for us, how His plan for us will transpire, and the ending, He is going to have His way whether we are on board or not. Our life becomes easier when we come on board and stop trying to swim upstream.

As we see the craziness in the world and we examine our own lives it may be helpful to ask ourselves if what we are experiencing on a day to day basis is okay. Do we feel joyful? Do we reach out to others in need? Do we realize that the control we think we have over areas of our lives is simply not true? In reality, remember

control is only a perception. Do we spend most of our free time on social media or hanging out with people who may not be the best influence on us?

Is it possible our lives could be more worthwhile, peaceful, joyful, and rewarding, and more if we made a commitment to make a few changes in how we spend our time, conduct ourselves, treat others, and take inventory of our thoughts that often lead to how we feel and how we behave?

This Passion section is very personal and special to me. I know that the passion I have for God now is truly one of His miracles. Passion for God is so personal that it is not necessarily something people talk about openly. For years I have read books on Godly passion, watched YouTube videos on how people conduct their devotional time, received ideas from friends about inspiring apps and devotionals, etc. Nothing seemed to change.

God has blessed me in amazing ways over that period of time. That said, what I have come to learn more recently is that we can know Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and keep on “learning,” but unless our heart is right with God, we are missing out on a lot that God wants to offer us.

When I began my path years ago I recall learning from some who seemed to have passion how important it was to pray. That made sense to me, but quite honestly, I did not know how. I did not have access to all of the information that we have today to give me ideas. My mentor at the time gave me the idea of praying the Psalms. That got me off to a wonderful start.

I made up some of my own prayers from my Bible verses. I modeled some prayers after the Psalms. (Please see more details in the Appendix under Prayer on how I used the Psalms to create prayers.) They were a nice tribute to God, but the passion was still missing and I really wanted it.

(Caution: If you like the idea of a little prayer book consisting of the prayers you create, it can be a nice introduction. However, be careful not to get caught up in saying rote prayers for an extended period of time. I learned that it is important to be able to pray spontaneously and saying rote prayers that actually get committed to memory because they are repeated so often are the direct opposite of spontaneity).

My level of passion for the Lord (which for definition purposes would be words such as excitement, affection, devotion, intensity, and joy and having a hunger to spend time with God praising and worshipping and being in His Word) began increasing after, in the last quarter of 2021, God put it on my heart to pray for that to happen. I prayed every day to have God more in my heart than in my mind. I played music over and over and over again that spoke of softening the heart. My goal was to feel more emotion. God sent me two significant responses, successful lung surgery and a mentor. Those responses were steeped in God's glory from which He has a unique ability to soften hearts and make them more passionate.

I have heard many testimonies of those who have gone through situations that were not good at the time, but afterwards they say how much those situations changed their lives for the better. Some say they are stronger, wiser, closer to God, more passionate about Jesus, more grateful, more patient or kinder to others. I believe that is true in my case as far as my surgery.

God allowed me to feel His presence in a very powerful way working up to, during, and after my surgery. I believe that experience raised my confidence level as far as being more open about Him and His sovereignty, His love for me, and the importance of doing everything in my power to please Him and bring Him glory. That was the beginning of my level of passion for Him intensifying.

In the past, when I used to speak about God, I remember feeling very self-conscious about what other people would think. I am not that way anymore. God has allowed my authentic self to blossom in ways I have never experienced and it feels very special and freeing.

Please keep in mind, there is nothing out of the ordinary about me and my path for more Godly passion. If you are looking for more of that in your life, realize you can attain it as well. I have seen over the years, with myself and others, that when God sees us taking the steps to grow in our relationship with Him, He will step in in a big and noticeable way. He will respond in ways we could never have imagined. Only God could orchestrate the amazing testimonies I have heard over the years as people made a commitment to do what it takes.

The other answer to my prayer that God decided He wanted me to have involves a man whom I had known for a couple of years. When we first met we had an amazing conversation about God. Little did I know that a year and a half or so later he would become my mentor for Godly passion. As God has worked through Him, he has exemplified for me how to feel *in my heart* that the God we serve is a big God with ways higher than our ways. God accomplishes things of which we could only dream.

My God-sent mentor grew up in another country with very little materially and has lived through extreme hardship. However, even as a young child he had a passionate heart for God.

He has shared himself with me through his powerful mini sermons, hearing how he prays, inviting me into his church life and Bible study, a daily prayer line, mutual sharing of worship songs and Bible verses, and frequent powerful conversations about the goodness of God. He has also set a wonderful example of making a serious time commitment to be with God in spite of the fact that he is a very busy man.

With all that said, I have seen the benefits of his aforementioned commitment. I have seen God work in his life in the most wonderful and amazing ways that I never would have imagined could take place. That is so inspiring. His journey has helped me to believe that if God can do this in his life, He can do it in my life and in the lives of those who are willing to show God they are serious about their desires and their commitment to God.

His journey has given me the confidence to step out of my comfort zone to help others who want that kind of relationship with God. You may want to pray and then be patient (remember everything happens in God's timing not ours) about finding a mentor who may be ahead of you in their walk with the Lord. Their experiences and how God has brought them through challenges can be very inspiring. There are those who would be honored to teach and encourage you. God is good and He wants more passionate followers. Passionate followers glorify Him and He loves to see that in us.

I have compiled this course with lots of ideas and suggestions. That said, it is easy for you to personalize what I have written. You can use this material for your own benefit and/or it can be used as a foundation for a small group class or for one-to-one mentoring. You can edit the course and add your own experiences and ideas that have worked for you and may be beneficial for others.

*Last, but clearly not least, I believe an exploration of passion **must include** the concepts of Godly love and intimacy. They all work together when we have a true love relationship with the Lord. (Please see sections on Godly Love and Intimacy with God in the Appendix.)*

The part we need to play in all of this takes us back to the "GRASP" concepts. I also believe they need to be addressed in somewhat of a "boot camp" mentality if we are going to take them seriously. We are asking God to take us to a higher, more passionate relationship with Him. That is very special. In order to attain that heartfelt level of passion, however, what I have

experienced and have seen in others is that it does, of course, involve the steps discussed below, but with a high level of discipline and commitment. We have to desire it so passionately that we are willing to take some time and effort to attain it.

The path to higher heartfelt passion involves three major disciplines that will please God and show Him we are serious about our intentions. We must give God our time, be obedient as much as humanly possible, and offer our praises continuously. In order to make this as clear as possible I will break these down into steps.

1. Obedience: *(Please see the section under GRASP called **Avoiding the Perils of Sin for specific steps that lead to obedience.**)* In biblical terms obedience is the supreme test of faith in God and reverence for Him. Deut. 11:26-28 sums up what God thinks of disobedience: “Look, today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse! You will be blessed if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. But you will be cursed if you reject the commands of the Lord your God and turn away from Him and worship gods you have not known before.”

Obedience comes down to personal choice. God has blessed us with free will. As humans we tend to behave in ways that benefit us in some way. Some behaviors may not be good for us, but that does not mean we are not finding comfort or some type of benefit through that behavior.

What kind of music are you listening to? What are you reading? Would you be comfortable with the language you use if Jesus was standing there with you (Well, guess what? He is!!!) It often takes major discipline to agree to make a change towards becoming obedient, take the first step towards that change, and then maintain a level of obedience that meets God’s standards.

The question is, “Are we willing to change course and reap the amazing benefits we will receive from the Lord?” In order to take this step, it can be helpful to do it with or even talk about it with a spouse, good friend, pastor, mentor, counselor, or whomever you believe can be a support and perhaps a motivated God loving accountability partner. As the saying goes, once you make up your mind to act, “Just Do It!”

Another key factor is to surround yourself with those who value the importance of obedience. Surround yourself with people who will be good influences and “fire” (in a kind way we can lessen the phone calls, the texts, etc. and they will get the message) some of the ones whom you know are toxic and with whom you should not be hanging around. (This is actually biblical advice. Please see the verses in the section “Avoiding the Perils of Sin.”)

Keep talking to God every step of the way. Ask Him for His support. Tell Him your feelings, frustrations, concerns, and struggles, etc. Romans 8:31 tells us “If God is for us, who can be against us?” When He sees your intentions are heartfelt He will be there for you all the way.

***Please see section on Prayer in Appendix and Repentance in the GRASP section for further suggestions.**

2. Praise and Worship

“Happy are those who hear the joyful call to worship, for they will walk in the light of your presence, Lord.” Ps. 89:15

If you truly give thought to all of the wonderful things God has done for you throughout your life (a good one to start with is that you are still alive) we can never praise God enough. I have heard heartfelt, passionate believers who were experiencing bad situations say they still praise God because no matter how bad things are they knew it could be worse. God’s grace and mercy abound. The Bible tells us there are new mercies every morning.

There is so much chaos and craziness in the world. As people are rushing around distracted by other people and technology, it is easy to see why some are hard pressed to be still long enough not only to praise God or listen for His voice, but to even think to do so.

Scripture Meditation/Memorization

Meditating on a particular Bible verse is one way of praising and worshiping God. When we sit and repeat a particular meaningful verse over and over and really get it into our hearts we are honoring God. It is also helpful to us to have some verses memorized in order to have them when needed.

Note: Please see: Meditate on Bible Verses under Godly Love in the Appendix.

Here are a couple of well-known examples:

As God was preparing Joshua to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land He says, “I command you—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and He will keep your paths straight. Proverb 3:5-6

Music

Music throughout the Bible was used for glorifying and worshiping God, praising Him for His great deeds, thanking Him for all of the ways He had blessed various groups of people and individuals, offering an outlet for their emotions ranging from sadness and disappointment to contentment, pure joy, and more. Worship music is very popular today for the same purposes as in biblical times. Music has the ability to take us to a transcendent spiritual level that leads us to feeling closer to God. It takes God from our minds into our hearts, thus allowing our emotions to take over our praise and worship time. That can be so engaging and powerful.

“I will sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.” Ex. 15:1

Don't be drunk with wind, because that will ruin your life. Instead be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. Eph. 5:18-19

“He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.’” Heb. 2:12

“My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you, I whom You have delivered. Ps. 71:23

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. Both horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.’” Ex. 15:1

I feel blessed that I now look forward to playing my music and worshiping God. I spend more time because I want to, not because I have to. I find myself crying tears of joy when I express my gratitude. That is when I know God's Spirit is in my heart.

“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Rom. 5:5

Taking walks is a great time to praise and worship the Lord. It is easy to thank Him over and over again for the many ways He has blessed us. We do not have to make up fancy language and new catchy phrases. We need to be our authentic selves and give thanks and praise over and over to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. How special is it that we can talk with Him!! It is beautiful music to His heart. Remember, He knows **everything** about us anyway, but He likes to hear it all from us. He will reward us immeasurably.

I keep worship music on almost all of the time unless I am studying or writing. I have found that sometimes there are stressful situations that may pop up and I find it helpful to play to certain songs. When I am getting ready to fall asleep, I often hear the last song I listened to playing in my head as I drift off. I truly believe it helps me sleep more soundly.

Remember to pray! Talk with God and ask Him what He would like you to do. Ask Him to give you the support, discipline, and patience you need to develop the habit of spending time with Him. Gradually, the habit that takes discipline in the beginning becomes a joy to which you will look forward. Your passion and your relationship will begin to grow and you will start hearing His voice clearly. You may actually feel a sense of emptiness if there are days you don't meet with Him.

Once again, when you decide to plan a worship time or a quiet time with God I would suggest baby steps if you are not used to it. It is also important not to compare yourself with others. Comparisons can be detrimental to our spiritual health. There is a popular saying about that. "Don't compare your seed to someone else's harvest." Everybody's schedule is different as is their relationship with God. If you are not used to sitting quietly and listening for God's voice five minutes can be an eternity.

It can be helpful to do a search on You Tube for some suggestions on how to plan a quiet time. There are wonderful Bible reading plans, devotionals, sermons online, podcasts, etc.

The only thing I would caution you about is, of course, to plan to have some study time, but also leave enough time for when you are simply "being." This entails sitting on a couch, the floor or perhaps you are still in bed and you take the time to praise His mighty name and worship Him. Perhaps you have a favorite song that stirs your heart for God. If you choose to, you can also enjoy the time simply being still and quiet and listening for God's voice. This is often when the real heart to heart connection grows.

When I was first led by God to experience Him more in my heart I was sitting for fifteen minutes listening to “Seek First the Kingdom” by Elevation Worship featuring Pat Barrett. I would meditate on a few special prayers of gratitude that I had written. I remember that it is was quite an effort to sit for those fifteen minutes. It is better to begin with five minutes and gradually increase it than to try to sit for too long and give up. As time went on I learned the words and began singing along and getting more involved. I began thanking God out loud for all of the ways He has blessed my loved ones and me. I did that daily for many months.

Once you find songs that touch your heart try playing them over and over. Praise God and thank Him over and over. Learn the words and sing along. The lyrics to these songs will sound so sweet to Him. Not only that, but the fact that you are giving your time and attention to God will be greatly appreciated by Him. As time goes on, God will show His appreciation by allowing you to discern His voice (amidst the chaos of the world) and see signs of His presence. How special is it to be able to hear from the Creator of the Universe, the God who raised Jesus and Lazarus from the dead, our amazing God who parted the Red Sea. When He shows Himself to us, it feels so special that we want to spend more time.

Music that speaks to our hearts is a very personal vehicle. I am going to list some artists and groups that have had a profound effect on me and millions of others that you may want to explore. If you find that the old hymns touch your heart it is easy to do a search and form a playlist of your favorites.

So many wonderful praise and worship songs are available on many different music platforms. Once you start forming playlists, your music platform will bring up suggestions. That is a wonderful way of being introduced to different genres and artists.

Maverick City Music - Elevation Worship - Phil Wickham
Mercy Me - Zach Williams - For King and Country - Newsboys
Josh Baldwin - John Wilds (Bethel Music) - Austin Johnson
William McDowell - Jon Reddick - Tauren Wells - Todd Galberth
Tasha Cobbs Leonard - Todd Delaney – Ryan Ellis

The following are some songs I listened to when I was praying for God to be more in my heart than in my mind. I literally played some of them over and over for a few months. The words were so on target for what I wanted God to do in me and He came through in a big way. I am so grateful to Him for that.

“Have My Heart” Chris Brown with Maverick City Music

“Give Me Faith” Chris Brown

“Fill the Room” Chandler Moore with Maverick City

3. Time: Giving of our time to God is an interesting requirement because time is finite. Time that is not managed well has the potential to be one of the greatest impediments to spending time with God. That makes it critical to have the discipline to know how to prioritize our time and stick to it.

A lot has changed over the decades. We all know that with social media at our fingertips wasting time can be a rough habit to break (initially one has to realize it is time wasting and then comes the needed discipline to cut back). TV news has also become more intense. With almost every news report on all of the stations being the latest “breaking” news, for some it is difficult to resist watching. I have heard people say they are “glued to the set!”

I have experienced that if we stop doing things that waste our time in order to spend more time with God, such having healthier family togetherness minus the electronics, reaching out and helping those less fortunate, and other healthy activities, God will see our intentions and be quite pleased.

I have also noticed that as I spend more time with God my daily tasks will go smoother and have less glitches. That saves me time. I spend it with God and He gives some back to me! How awesome is that. And all the while, because of the rich, quality time I am spending with Him, we are growing closer and closer. It can take a lot of discipline at first and perhaps some feelings of withdrawal from our habitual distractions, but it is worth the effort if you are looking to strengthen your relationship with Him.

Time management coaches have suggested for decades to keep an hour by hour log for a weekday or two and the weekend to get real with ourselves about how we are spending this important resource. Often people are surprised about the outcome. This gives us a starting point for change. Once you complete that, here are a few suggestions:

Pray about this behavioral change in your life. Ask God what He thinks and get quiet and listen for His voice. See where He leads you. Then pick one activity that you know you need to let go of or cut back on if you want to have a passionate relationship with Him. Take baby steps. If it is scrolling social media, you could begin with cutting back for an hour or more depending on your personal situation and increase it each day or every other day. It is better for most people to do it gradually and as you do it, fill that time with Godly activities. Some do quit cold turkey. That decision is between you and God.

Find a trusted accountability partner who also has some changes to make so you can be accountable to each other. Check in as often as necessary to stay on track. Be careful not to be too hard on yourself. Give yourself some grace. Habits take time to break, especially those that have been a part of your life for years.

Once a month or sooner if you wish, do a log again to check in and see your progress in writing. Celebrate your success and keep it up!!! God will bless you many times over for your heartfelt desire to have a passionate relationship with Him.

Remember, it is important if you are truly serious and committed to having this relationship, to have your inner circle of friends be those who support you and will not be there to tempt you to do things that will obstruct your new path. It is all about choices, your choices. God sees what you are choosing and He will guide His responses accordingly. I have seen it time and time again.

Six Principles for Staying Focused on Your Journey

- 1. The God we worship today is the same God our forefathers worshipped thousands of years ago. Our sinful human nature has remained constant.**
- 2. We can learn from those who lived in biblical times what pleases God and what angers Him.**
- 3. It behooves us to do our best to behave in the manner that pleases Him and quickly repent if we step out of line.**
- 4. It is critical to spend time with Him and show an ongoing extreme attitude of gratitude.**
- 5. Slow down long enough to appreciate what God has to offer. This will allow us to hear His voice and experience more of the signs He is sending our way.**
- 6. Focus on the goal: A Passionate Godly Relationship.**

Put one foot in front of the other and begin your journey. Walk, don't run. Take it all in. There is no hurry. As you experience the various steps you will gradually find yourself immersed in a wonderful, amazing, positive, life-changing experience.

As your relationship grows, so will your sense of inner strength. This strength, the Holy Spirit (the power of God within you) will enable you to cope with and grow from life's challenges in a way you may have never before experienced. You will also feel a sense of contentment and pure joy you may have never felt before. Take that first step. Give it a try. You have nothing to lose and so much to gain.

APPENDIX

**Hearing God's Voice
Godly Love
Intimacy with God
Egocentricity
Reverent Fear of God
Prayer
Righteousness
Trials and Tribulations**

Hearing God's Voice

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”
John 10: 27

“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or you turn to the left.”
Isaiah 30:21

There are a myriad of ways God “speaks” to us such as through His Word, His still small voice that manifests through our thoughts, nature (a timely bird, rainbow, etc.) circumstances (perhaps He wants us to learn a lesson through a particular situation), music, a person who appears at just the right moment with just the right words, our hearts (intuition), miracles, and coincidences that we begin to realize are really God’s timing and not coincidences at all, and more.

The timing of His communicating with us is often so perfect that it is easy to think of it as we may have before we were believers. That, of course, would be a coincidence. Remember, there are no coincidences in God’s kingdom, especially when we are striving to intensify our relationship with Him.

When He sees our intentions He will make His presence known. It is up to us to filter out the noise and chaos of the world, and pay attention to our thoughts and not what is going on around us. It is up to us to recognize it is our loving, patient God trying to communicate with us so that we can stay in alignment with His will for us. From my experiences and those of others, I can say that living life that way becomes so much easier.

As our relationship with God grows, and the more we can slow down and be quiet enough to notice He is speaking to us, the more natural and amazing the relationship becomes. It is also important that we show our excitement and give God the glory that the King

of the Universe who parted the Red Sea and raised Jesus and Lazarus from the dead is actually communicating with us out of love.

I have included a section on Hearing God's Voice because God, in His still small voice that I hear daily, has impressed upon me the importance that we should not only acknowledge Him for allowing us to hear His voice, but to praise Him continuously for loving us enough to speak with us.

As far as acknowledging that He is speaking with us, the aforementioned small group setting is an ideal place to share those experiences with others. If you have a like-minded friend who can appreciate what you have to share and perhaps there can be mutual sharing, that is also a great way to celebrate God.

It is all about giving God the glory and truly letting Him feel your heartfelt love and appreciation. Not only is it amazing that He speaks with us, but He speaks with us in our own particular language. We each have our own special mode of communication with Him. That is such a blessing.

You may want to keep a written record of some of your very special interactions with God. I call them WOWs!! He conveyed to me a long time ago that if He is going to bless me in such a special way, the least I can do is write them down as I continue to show Him my heartfelt appreciation.

Having such interactions in written form also gives us the opportunity to go back and feel the joy and appreciation we felt when we experienced them and rejoice that we have such an awesome, loving, faithful God. We can even share our WOWs with friends and family who are looking for the joy we exude. We can show them firsthand how our amazing, powerful, loving God communicates His love for us.

Note: Please see the Resources page at the end of the course for excellent resources for hearing the voice of God.

Godly Love

The Bible tells us God loves us: “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” Jn. 3:16

“For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken,” says the Lord, who has mercy on you.”
Isaiah 54:10

“But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” Rom. 5:8

“For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With His love, He will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.” Zeph. 3:17

The Bible also tells us God is love: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 Jn. 4:7-8

God is also the source of love: “We love Him because He first loved us. 1 Jn. 4:19.

Here is a beautiful definition of love that reveals many aspects of God’s love toward us: We are told, “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong doing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” 1 Cor. 13:4-8

It is clear in the Bible that we have done nothing to deserve God's perfect love: "But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." Ro. 5:8

Our challenge is to: Accept God's great love. "God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." Eph. 2:8-9

Experience His love in our lives for eternity as He tells us in Jn. 3:16. "God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life."

It has taken me quite a while to feel that true heartfelt love for God. Wherever you currently find yourself as far as your desire to feel Godly love, perhaps you may find some of the following suggestions helpful.

---Reflect back and begin to recall all of the wonderful ways God has blessed you over time. Even what you may consider a small blessing counts. Your recollection could also include prayers He has answered and some He may not have answered in order to protect you or lead you to something better than you thought you wanted for yourself. How could we not feel great love for a God who has blessed us in so many ways?

---Meditate on Bible verses that touch your heart. Some verses lend themselves to waking up our imagination and immersing ourselves in the various scenarios that are taking place within the Bible. We can imagine how we would feel if we were there with those men and women at the time. It can also be helpful to mull the verse over and over like a cow chews his cud. It is about quality, not quantity. There are also Apps. and YouTube videos that can be helpful for learning how to memorize verses as well.

Keep in mind, it is always nice to memorize verses, but sometimes depending on the situation one verse that is truly meaningful and heartfelt can surpass a few verses that we can simply recite.

---Music can also be a wonderful way to connect with our hearts. Please check out the section in Passion for God that I have written pertaining to music leading us to more Godly love.

Reference: www.compellingtruth.org

Intimacy With God

Intimacy: close familiarity or friendship, affection, personal, innermost, devoted.

Characteristics of an intimate relationship include, but are not limited to unconditional acceptance and closeness, to be cared for, understood, loved for who we are, free of judgment from others, etc. In an intimate relationship with God we have the added feature of never being alone and attaining inner peace.

As I have explained in the earlier section called Passion for God: “Softening Our Hearts,” Godly passion had been something I was in the process of developing after searching for it for many years. Looking back, I can see that my search for passion has included intimacy with and love for God. After all, don’t we think of those terms as connected?

When we think of intimacy with another human being, depending on the level of intimacy, we can include reciprocal love and passion. I believe it is very similar with God except for many it may go even deeper.

True intimacy with God begins with drawing near to Him. We draw near to God through righteousness and obedience. “Come close to God and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.” James 4:8

Jesus is the perfect example of intimacy with God because He and the Father are one. He knew He was never alone. No matter the circumstance, no matter who was around Him or how people felt about Him, Jesus was at peace, confident, and able to overcome.

“The Father and I are one.” Jn. 10:30

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.” John 6:38

There is an image the Lord has sent me that helps me gain a better understanding of the depths of intimacy with God. It is the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42. When I think of intimacy with God I picture Martha rushing around with a mental to do list. Then there is Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus taking in His every word. That image, combined with meditating on the Word and appropriate music in the background can clearly lend itself to intimacy with God.

An example of meditating on the God’s Word would be the story of Joseph in Genesis 37– 50. How Joseph’s story of extreme trials and tribulations over a long period of time were eventually turned into good can provide us with intense inspiration as we compare something we may be experiencing at the moment to his journey.

Another aspect of Godly intimacy is what is called emotional intimacy. A personal example of this intimacy includes being able to pour out my heart to Him as I cry out with tears running down my cheeks. It is so special to be able to share my feelings and thoughts with the Lord who not only knows what I need, but can provide what I need to intensify my relationship with Him.

It is also special because what I share with Him is only between the two of us and He will comfort me when I need it. To me this is the epitome of unconditional love and intimacy. It is extremely powerful especially when it becomes a regular way of relating to God. As I release many emotions a sense of peace and joy come over me.

Remember that we can speak with Him as we would a close friend, or simply whisper to Him, and sometimes even laugh with Him (I find He has a wonderful sense of humor) as we share our innermost feelings and thoughts. As we go about our day and we continuously interact with Him He will protect us, direct us, encourage us, shower

His love on us, rebuke us, and more. I sometimes find it difficult to put into words how special and intimate this relationship can be when we make ourselves available and put Him first in our lives whenever humanly possible.

Intimacy with God is possible for anyone who is willing to put in the time and the commitment to developing it. I have come to realize that this concept of Godly intimacy is not as complicated or difficult as I have made it out to be for many years. It is a matter of praying to God to bring it out in us and then quieting ourselves long enough to feel it in our hearts. For many including myself, the challenging part can be having the spiritual discipline on a daily basis to put some boundaries into place to take us out of this chaotic world and allow ourselves to be immersed in the supernatural world where God is welcoming us with open arms.

It clearly takes self-discipline to be still in a setting where you can be alone with Him. Pray for that as well. You will be pleasantly surprised. As your feelings of joy and peace increase, I believe you will desire these feelings more and more and be willing to do what it takes. Once again, as God sees your intent He will supply what you need to make it happen. He is a good and loving Father who wants what is best for his children.

Egocentricity

The ego is the part of the psyche that is concerned with the outside world. It is constantly pulling us away from God and toward prideful behavior and the need to show superiority. Some will even say that it stands for Edging God Out.

In order to be connected to God, we must let go of our ego. In order to live righteously (do what is right in God's eyes) we must let go of our ego. In order to experience true joy and contentment (not superficial happiness that can come and go minute-by-minute depending on outside circumstances and often on material possessions) we must let go of our ego.

From as far back as biblical times and the era of ancient philosophers, the ego has been written about and analyzed. In biblical times, when people displayed egocentric behavior, they invariably ended up facing some dire consequences (floods, famines, plagues, etc.) The Bible is replete with wisdom about the pitfalls of pride, reflecting what happens when we allow our egos to control our thinking and our behavior.

"Though the Lord is great, He cares for the humble, but He keeps His distance from the proud." Ps. 138:6

"For the Lord delights in His people; He crowns the humble with victory." Ps. 149:4

"The path of the virtuous leads away from evil; whoever follows that path is safe. Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall. Better to live humbly with the poor than to share plunder with the proud." Prov. 16: 17-19

The tower of Babel, described in Genesis 11, is a prime example of how the ego takes control and how God reacts to such behavior. The Bible tells us that there was a time when everyone spoke one language and could therefore understand one another. In Gen. 11:4 we are told that the people said, "let's build a great city with a tower that reaches to the skies-a monument to our greatness!" Verse 11:7 tells us that God showed his disdain for this egotistical project by proceeding to give them different languages so they could not understand one another.

Do we not create monuments to ourselves today? Think about it for a moment. To create a monument often takes time, energy, money, and lots of attention. Do we not give much of that to the "goods" we pursue in our lives today? How much time do we spend with our electronic "stuff" verses the time we spend with the One who enabled us to have that "stuff?" How about a car or a home in which we take so much pride? How important is it to us? How much time does that then leave us for God?

Wisdom, that comes with experience, tells us that real joy, patience, peace, good health, and feelings of safety and security come from being God-centered rather than ego-centered. God is powerful and He is patient. However, His patience will wear out eventually if we continue to ignore the wonderful blessings He bestows upon us, in spite of our egocentric behavior.

Take heed. Observe what is happening in your life. See if there may be a connection between some behavior and some consequences. Take a look to see if you are displaying any egocentric behavior. Such behavior can sometimes be quite subtle. You may have to really get honest with yourself and push that ego out of the way, while you take a deep look inside!

If you discover you need to work on some egocentric behavior begin with prayer. Be honest with God (He knows the truth already) and open up to Him with a broken and contrite heart. If

you sincerely mean it, let Him know you are ready to repent (remember this includes changing some behaviors). Ask Him to forgive your past and help you to move on as the new you, the you who is a child of God and who reflects the light of Jesus.

(For action steps please return to the section on Avoiding the Perils of Sin in the GRASP section of the course.)

Reverent Fear of God

The Bible is filled with messages guiding us to have a reverent fear of God. As our relationship with Him grows and we see how blessed we have been, and we know how powerful He is, we are clearly being steered in the "reverent fear" direction. God can do wonderful things, but there is also a side of Him that will definitely come down hard on us if He senses we are taking advantage of Him or showing an unappreciative heart. That can clearly make one fearful.

Reverent fear is fear that emanates from a profound feeling of respect for someone. We should respect God's power and authority because we know he is holy and all powerful and we have a desire to please Him. It can stem from love and/or a sense of awe.

If you sense that this is something you need to develop or want to develop, it is a good idea to get back to the GRASP principals. Take inventory of your heart and your mind and see if something does not feel right as far as your relationship with God. You may want to refer to the sections on Repentance and Avoidance.

Here are some examples of how the Bible talks about this type of fear:

1 Sam. 12:14 says, "Now if you will fear and worship the Lord and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the Lord's commands, and if you and your king follow the Lord your God, then all will be well. But if you rebel against the Lord's commands and refuse to listen to him, then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors."

"Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God to restrain them." Ps. 36:1

"Happy are those who fear the Lord. Yes, happy are those who delight in doing what he commands." Ps. 112:1

"My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. The you will understand what is means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God." Prov. 2:1-5

"I gave the responsibility of governing Jerusalem to my brother Hanani along with Hananiah, the commander of the fortress, for he was a faithful man who feared God more than most."
Neh. 7:2

Nehemiah was a man who was devoted to God. He was in charge of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem when those who had been held in captivity in Babylon returned. Nehemiah was very familiar with what it meant to have a reverent fear of God. He also prayed continuously. It is extremely inspiring to read the book of Nehemiah in the Bible. It clearly illustrates how beautifully and naturally a reverent fear of God was in Nehemiah's life. It also allows us to see that praying first was of utmost importance in his life and that God responded to him in amazing ways.

Note: Please go back to the section on Repentance and the section on Avoidance under GRASP and the section called Righteous – Being "Right" with God in the Appendix for more on developing a reverent fear of God.

Prayer

Prayer is the primary way for the believer to fellowship with God. It is a time to express our praise, gratitude, emotions, and desires. Prayer can be audible, silent, private or public. The term corporate prayer is used to describe praying together with other people. These can be small groups or larger gatherings.

In trying to describe what prayer is, it is important to note that not only is prayer extremely personal, but there are so many options and no right or wrong. One key question could be, how do you believe your prayer life is working for you?

There are a myriad of Bible verses about prayer. In 1Thess. 5:17 we are told to “pray without ceasing.” Phil. 4:6-7 tells us “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.”

“O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants....” Neh.1:5-6

Nehemiah was a true prayer warrior who prayed unceasingly. Remember, we have the same God then and now and Nehemiah was just an ordinary person as are we. If God answered his prayers He will certainly hear ours, and if it is in His will, He will answer them in His time frame if He believes it is in our best interest.

When Jesus was asked by his disciples how to pray He presented them with The Lord’s Prayer. Doing a search of Christian sites offers a plethora of information for our own lives on how to apply what Jesus offered to His disciples.

It is important to keep in mind that prayer is not just a time for asking God for what we need. Even more importantly, it is a time to show Him praise and gratitude not only for answered prayers,

but for blessings He has bestowed upon us out of His goodness and His love for us. God has given us many blessings over the years (some may not even be ones we were aware of, such as protecting us from something). I cannot say often enough how we need to give thanks and praise to Him for His goodness and love. In addition, many who have been praying for years and have gotten responses to their prayers will attest to the fact that it is crucial to praise God even when times are tough. God is a personal, faithful, merciful God who is always working for our good.

***(Important:** Please make sure to read the section on Andrew Wommack in the Resources part of the course. He has what I believe is a wonderful, biblically based take on what prayer is and what prayer is not. It has been life changing for me in a very positive way. Since following what he suggests more closely, I am hearing from God and feeling His presence even more intensely).

It is also important to take the time to sit quietly and listen for what He may be trying to tell us. God wants to have a relationship with us and prayer is the language we use to commune with Him. There seems to be a consensus among many who enjoy their prayer time that praying is a dialogue. We speak with God and then we get quiet (or as the Bible says, “Be still and know that He is God”) and listen for Him to respond.

It is said that God speaks to us in His still small voice or a low whisper. Many identify it as a thought that we get and we know it is from God. This may be a challenge at first. If you find that is so, simply begin with five minutes and work your way up. God will be thrilled to see you are making that effort and taking prayer seriously.

The wonderful thing about God's Spirit within us is that we do not have to go somewhere to pray. We can pray wherever and whenever we want and He hears us. We can talk to Him as we do our daily tasks and thank Him for watching over us and protecting us. Prayer can be as informal as having a

conversation with God anytime we feel like it and then listening for His response. As our relationship matures we will hear His voice and see His signs more and more. It is very powerful and exciting and definitely a motivation to continue the interaction.

When difficult situations arise in our lives God wants us to come to Him in prayer **first** before we go to a friend, relative, neighbor, co-worker, etc. He wants us to learn to trust in Him during those times. When we develop that habit God will respond and we will learn to recognize His answers.

A critical concept to mention here is the possibility of unanswered prayers. What about them? How do we deal with them? How do they affect our relationship with God? How they affect our relationship with God is dependent upon how we view unanswered prayers. It is not easy or pleasant to realize that there are things we pray for that are either not going to happen or they are not going to happen within our time frame. It is important to understand that there are usually good reasons for this. Some of the reasons may include the following.

1. God, in His unwavering love for us, knows better than we do that what we are praying for is not the best thing for us at that moment. Remember, He has it all planned out and He knows the beginning, the middle, and the ending. We do not. Have you ever applied for a job and prayed that you would get it, only to get upset because someone else got it? After all that, you ended up getting one at a later date that was much better than the one you did not get? Have you ever prayed that a boyfriend or girlfriend would see the light and not break up with you, only to find an even better match for you waiting in the wings?

Surely, it may have taken a while. Remember, it is not up to us to determine the time frame. However, in order not to get too upset, we must realize that God is in control, He is looking out for our best interest, and He knows things about our future that we do not know.

That said, having patience and waiting for God for whatever you are praying for can be very difficult. It is a constant challenge. Don't give up hope though. Keep being obedient, showing your constant heartfelt gratitude for the blessings with which He has showered you, and doing your best to reach out and help others. Blessings can be as basic as the fact that He woke us up this morning and we have breath in our lungs and a roof over our heads and shoes on our feet. When we think about the basics the list can go on and on.

It can be very helpful to be a part of a small group that has members of various ages and experiences in the faith. Those who are new to the faith can learn a lot from those who have been faithful in their Christian walk for years. They can offer firsthand knowledge of their experiences with unanswered prayers and prayers in general and can be a wonderful support to show how things worked out for them. That can be so powerful and encouraging. Small groups can also be a great way to hear how people who are strong in their faith pray.

2. Please read 1-4 under Trials and Tribulations. The reasons listed there are the same reasons for unanswered prayers. God wants us to be more humble, turn to Him more, experience more personal growth, and learn some lessons. Going through this type of "learning" can be painful, frustrating, annoying, and anxiety producing, etc. However, more often than not, the experience makes us stronger. Going through these experiences often enough will also make us more patient, in addition to our feeling even more grateful when our prayers are answered in a timely manner.

Where to begin.

There are so many examples of the various ways people pray that it can be overwhelming if you are just beginning or want to take your prayer life to the next level. I am going to simplify

this with a few examples. Remember not to get too bogged down in the study and simply step out and start that conversation with God. I believe you will be thrilled that you did!

Some pray at their designated devotional times. When we study God's Word and talk with Him as we read, perhaps with questions about that which we are reading, that is a form of prayer. Others will tell you they pray throughout the day. Prayers throughout the day may be anything you would like to

share with Him or ask Him. I often pray for a hedge of protection when I get in the car. I thank Him for His protection when I arrive home.

Prayers could include asking for patience when there is a long line, locating something we have misplaced, assistance in decision making, praying for a friend or family member, and most importantly thanking Him throughout the day for His blessings and His answers to our prayers. These prayers throughout the day can be very short, just as if we are talking to a friend. It gives glory to God when we remember to do this. The more we do it, the more it becomes second nature.

We can have prayers for so many areas of our lives such as praise and gratitude, healing, wisdom, fear, anxiety, friends and family, and more. Remember, a big part of prayer is praising God and expressing our love for Him as well. When we acknowledge God throughout the day that lets him know we are thinking of Him and are grateful that He is in control.

As I have mentioned in the section under Passion for God, I gradually accumulated prayers from the Psalms and other Bible verses. I combined Bible verses with words of adoration, gratitude, and reflection on God's glory from my heart to His heart. The Book of Psalms is a wonderful resource for prayers. You can simply recite the prayers or you can personalize them. Here is an example from Psalm 100: The Bible says, "Shout

with joy to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before Him, singing with joy.” The personalized version: “I shout with joy to You, Lord. I worship You with gladness. I come before You, singing with joy.”

Keep in mind that if you use a particular Psalm, the words you find inspiring may not include the whole Psalm. These are your prayers. You can choose words and verses and put them into your own language or piece them together using the biblical language. There is no right or wrong here. The important thing is that you are spending time honoring God!

Should you desire to write your own prayers, a simple Internet search such as, “adjectives of praise to describe God” will give you a plethora of words to use in your prayers. You can also look through the Bible at various prayers and see words that were used in biblical times. Another search for “God’s promises in the Bible” and “Names for God in the Bible” will get you off to a good start on your prayer writing path. The more you write prayers the more naturally they will flow from your heart. I have used this as a way to increase my confidence and widen my comfort zone to do more impromptu public praying.

Remember, give yourself grace and have patience. Begin with baby steps. We are all a work in progress and God sees our intentions (really to be able to verbalize how to give Him more glory and to show Him more gratitude) and He will guide us on our path and give us what we need as we proceed. He has done that before in many of our lives and He has no reason, if what we are doing is in His will, to stop now.

There are those who find corporate prayer very powerful as part of their time with the Lord. It could be an in-person gathering at a designated location. It could also be on a phone prayer line or on Zoom at designated times, with a leader (members could take turns) who plans the hour or

however much time the group decides to meet. What's App is handy for connecting with others to ask for urgent prayers throughout the day.

Some prayer groups do a short Bible verse study and then go into prayer. A song could be a part of the program as well.

Take time during prayer time to simply sit and listen. As you do this more and more, God will reveal Himself in amazing ways. Many find that playing music is conducive to praising God and lifts their spirits and their hearts into a spiritual realm.

Note: Please go back to the Passion for God section for suggestions for prayer in the form of praise and worship.

Righteous -- Being "Right" with God

To be righteous in God's eyes means thinking and acting in ways that are pleasing to Him. It is behaving with integrity, even when no one is looking. A good way to think about it is to imagine Jesus is right next to you. Would you behave the way you are behaving? Would you have the thoughts you are now having.

Being "right" with God also means having a reverent (respectful) fear of God and His amazing power. Are there things you would not do because you fear the consequences?

If Jesus were driving, would He be going 50 in a 35-mile zone? Would He be using a radar detector? Would Jesus keep the change for a \$20 bill when he only gave the cashier \$10? Would Jesus be saying those things about His neighbor? True integrity is what we do when NO ONE else is around. Remember that when no one is around, God is there!!!!!!

It says in the Bible that we are made in God's image. Once we become familiar with the Bible, we see that God is the perfect example of righteousness. Therefore, he wants us to be righteous. Not only does He want us to be righteous; He sometimes has some extremely negative consequences for us when we are not. There are a myriad of stories concerning those on the receiving end of major consequences as a result of unrighteous behavior. The Bible is also replete with examples of how God acknowledges, loves, and respects those He considers righteous. For example:

"This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God."

Gen. 6:9

When everything was ready, the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the boat with all your family, for among all the people of the earth, I can see that you alone are righteous." Gen. 7:1

"And Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith." Gen. 15:6

Many have learned from experience that when it comes to righteousness, it behooves us to take the time to think about our behavior and what might need changing. If there are a number of behaviors, it may be helpful to begin with one of the easier ones that we are pretty sure we can accomplish. As you proceed, take note of your day-to-day life to see if you notice any positive feedback coming your way. It may be something obvious, but it could be a very subtle sign. It is important to remain aware of how you are feeling and what is going on around you.

Once you get deeper into this process, it can be helpful when something negative occurs to think about what you may have done to which God may be calling your attention. This is an ongoing process. As we spend more time with Him, we get better at noticing and understanding His signs.

Please keep in mind that not every negative thing that happens in one's life is a result of bad behavior or bad thinking. Don't be too hard on yourself. There can be other reasons for things appearing to go wrong (please see section on Trials and Tribulations). The book of Job in the Old Testament makes this very clear. It is enlightening and heartening to read how Job worked through some terrible life experiences and how he ended up.

Trials and Tribulations

Hardships and problems are a part of life. Some people experience more than others. Some experience them at a younger age than others. There are also those who seem to go through life experiencing hardly any.

Volumes are written about trials and tribulations. For this course I am going to list a few of the more common explanations for going through what the Bible often calls a storm or a valley. I would suggest an Internet search for those who are looking for more background.

1. God wants us to humble us. We live in a society in which humility is not exactly running rampant. We could actually go so far as to say we live in an age of entitlement and egocentricity. God sees this. Just as He did in biblical times, he can bring on major trials that can "bring us to our knees" very quickly. We have all experienced such events or know people who have experienced them. They can humble us in a matter of seconds. Suddenly the mundane, silly stuff that we may have been complaining about or dealing with is gone from our minds and the seriousness of what is at hand takes over. (See section on Egocentricity for Bible verses expressing God's attitude towards humility.)

2. God wants us to turn to him more. Those who are familiar with the Bible, and who believe God is sovereign, know that God wants to provide for us as we become more dependent on Him. The Bible makes it clear that our dependence on Him gives Him great pleasure. Therefore, when we are forced to deal with certain trials and tribulations, over which we realize we have absolutely no control, God wants us to turn to Him as our source of provision, guidance, and comfort. An example of this is how right after 9/11 churches had greater attendance than they had had in years. (Of course, God wants us to be dependent on Him on a daily basis, not just in extreme situations.)

In Genesis 12, Abraham had shown his faith in God's ability to provide when he was told by God to, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land I will show you."

Abraham followed God's command while having no idea where he was headed. God provided well for him thereafter.

It is also important to know that God "provided" Abraham's son Isaac to him at a time in his life when his wife Sarah was way past childbearing years. God told Abraham and Sarah He would do this and He kept His word (as He always does).

The book of Job in the Bible is a wonderful example of how God wants us to experience trials and tribulations. Job was living an extremely blessed life when the enemy destroyed it all. His faith was being tested and Job showed how much he trusted in God.

In these instances and so many more, the Bible reminds us that God did provide. He wants us to know He will continue to provide if we have faith, turn to Him more, and build and maintain a heartfelt relationship with Him.

3. God wants us to grow personally. We often hear those who have endured trials and tribulations claim they are much stronger as a result of their experiences. Many also say they have developed a relationship with God as a result of their experiences or have gotten closer to the God with whom they already had a relationship.

A Biblical example of this is the life of David, later known as King David (the greatest king of Israel). He was secretly anointed king while King Saul was the acting king. King Saul, because of his disobedience, became rejected by God and would later take his own life.

David went through numerous trials and tribulations as God worked to strengthen him and prepare him to take King Saul's place. From facing the giant Goliath "on his own" (with God's help, of course), doing his best to escape the wrath of King Saul who had become jealous of him and was trying to kill him, to fighting numerous battles, David was being primed as the future king. God was forcing him, through trials and tribulations, to grow as a person physically, mentally, and emotionally.

There are a so many examples throughout the Bible of people being strengthened from trials and tribulations. As you study your Bible, it can be interesting to keep track of these examples and learn from them. If you take the time to write them down, you will have a rich supply of wisdom and insight to turn to when troubling situations come your way.

4. God wants us to learn some lessons. Sometimes God will present us with a particular issue that manifests itself as a consequence of some behavior on our part. That behavior often involves something for which He wants us to repent. As we grow in our relationship with Him and are honest with ourselves, we can often tell what behavior God is trying to point out, especially if the consequence comes in a timely manner.

The book of Judges is a prime example of learning lessons from behaviors and their consequences. The Israelites had finally entered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. After Joshua died, things began to go downhill. Sin was rampant. They worshiped idols and were not thinking about God. The Israelites were supposed to continue fighting and driving out the Canaanites, but they failed at this. There were cycles in which God would bring leaders known as judges to rescue them and protect them from their oppressors. Judges would die off and the Israelites would go back to their old ways.

It becomes quite apparent, throughout the Book of Judges, God was trying to teach the Israelites lessons on how He wanted them to behave. After all, He is the one who enabled them to get to the Promised Land in the first place. For a while, those who understood what God was trying to do lived more peacefully. Inevitably, human nature would set in and the sinning cycle would begin again.

In Chapter 30 of the Book of Isaiah we are told in verse 20: "Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and affliction for drink, he will still be with you to teach you."

As we become more attuned to what God expects from us, it becomes easier to know if He is in the process of rebuking us for something we have done that He considers out of integrity, prideful, etc. We can then repent for what we have done, change our behavior, and move forward (as long as all of this is heartfelt).

5. God likes to receive the glory for what He does in our lives. When something amazing takes place, whether it be an answered prayer or what some call unbelievable coincidences (as those who love the Lord, we know better!!), etc. many people tend to call their friends and say, "You're not going to believe what just happened!!!" The Bible makes it clear that that behavior is something that pleases God (especially if the credit for the "event" is being given to Him).

In Biblical times God repeatedly made it known that He wanted the glory (praise, respect, reverence, admiration). In Ex. 9 God was instructing Moses on what to say to Pharaoh. God wanted to make it clear that He could have already destroyed Pharaoh, his officials, and all of the Egyptians. He went on to tell Moses to say to Pharaoh that He, the Lord of the Hebrews says, "But I have let you live for this reason--that you might see my power and that my fame might spread throughout the earth." Whether it was

supplying food (manna) in the desert, protecting them against foreign invaders, forcing Pharaoh to let them out of Egypt, etc., God continually let it be known that He had come to their rescue and that they needed to acknowledge Him and be appreciative and obedient.

10 Steps to Building a Spiritual Bank Account

What is a spiritual bank account?

This is a very special account that holds our spiritual strength. When our spiritual bank account is plentiful we are in sync with God. We constantly feel His presence and have a strong desire to live righteously and not let Him down. There is a desire to spend time with Him and get to know Him better. We have a deep appreciation for who He is and all that He has done for us in our lives.

In turn, we are constantly aware of His guiding light. Decisions can be made based on what we believe He wants us to do. Once we get used to having a closer relationship with Him, we will notice His "signs." We are more attuned to His will for us. We also notice blessings, both large and small, that He keeps sending our way as rewards.

Having a strong spiritual bank account will help us lower our levels of stress, fear, worry, and anxiety in our lives. We have more inner strength to better manage life's challenges. It helps us get through trials and tribulations with an amazingly powerful partner guiding us all the way. In addition, it helps us feel better physically and mentally.

How to Begin Building a Spiritual Bank Account

Building a spiritual bank account can be an overwhelming task, which is why many people begin and do not follow through. It is important to take it one step at a time. This is a journey. God knows what is in our hearts!! If He sees we are trying our best, He will respond and we will see positive changes in our lives.

That, in turn, makes us want to spend more time with Him. It creates a very positive domino effect. It also creates feelings in us that we like and we want them to continue.

I have broken down the process into 10 steps. Even though they are numbered, there is no particular order to these steps. As time goes on, you will see that these steps all begin to meld together to form what will be your relationship with God. They will become a part of you. Many get to the point of wondering how they even tried to live their lives without this amazing relationship. Let's get started.

1. Believe God is sovereign (in control) and live according to that understanding. This step involves letting go of ego. The ego will try to pull us away from God and push us to believe we have control over our lives. It has been said that ego stands for "Edging God Out."
2. Surrender. When we surrender, we are saying, "God, You are in control. We are willing to stop pretending we are in control. We are willing to say that thinking we are in control over our lives is only a perception of control. We are willing to let You do what You do best, run the universe, including our lives!"
3. Have an ongoing attitude of extreme gratitude towards God. It helps to think about all of the wonderful things He has done and continues to do for us in our lives.
4. Learn more about what God considers sin and do our best to avoid it.
5. Repent often. As humans, we will sin (even if unintentional.) God wants us to repent. Repentance is not just being sorry. It also means changing one's heart and one's ways.

6. Spend time with God reading His Word, meditating on His Word, memorizing meaningful verses, praying, and praising Him for the glorious God He is. Learn how to "talk" with Him by developing and maintaining constant communication with Him. By doing this, the more we will learn about His character, His love, His expectations, His likes and dislikes, His ways, His promises to us, and more. We will also begin to feel even more comfortable turning to Him for guidance and comfort in all areas of our lives.

7. Slow down and take the time to make God a priority in our lives. We are called "human beings," but we are really "human doings." To please God, we need to "be" more and "do" less. It means prioritizing and giving up some of the time we spend on trivial things. If we want to experience the wonderful things God has in store for us, we need to give Him the time and attention He deserves.

8. Attend a church where the sermons are biblically based. These are great because they are inspirational and informative all in one. These places of worship are wonderful for finding those who are on similar paths. Interacting with like-minded people can be extremely inspiring.

9. Give of our time to help others. God wants us to have a servant's heart. By doing this we are glorifying Him. Remember, we are made in His image and He is always doing for others.

10. Live for the glory of God. This sums up all of the above. When we do our best to follow these steps, we are living for God's glory. That means instead of living our lives in a worldly manner filled with materialism, immediate gratification, and self-indulgence, we are living in a way that gives God the adoration, respect, honor, praise, distinction, eminence, and reverence He clearly deserves. Need I say more.

10 Keys to Living a Life of Surrender, Peace, and Joy

Turn to prayer **FIRST** before you go to a friend, relative, neighbor, co-worker, etc. When you develop this habit God will respond and you will learn to recognize His answers.

Remain humble. When in doubt ask yourself, "Would Jesus say, think, or be doing this?"

Do not let anyone steal your peace and joy!

Let go of logic (thinking in human terms in which there is often fear and worry). Think in the spiritual realm where the Holy Spirit within you is guiding, protecting, and strengthening you.

Trust God Always. "Almighty God, You are my rock and I trust You for victory!!!"

When you feel worried or fearful say something meaningful to you such as "I surrender my thoughts to You, God, my Burden Bearer."

The greatest gifts you can give God are your obedience, your time, and your praises.

When facing difficulty, meditate on Bible verses expressing God's love for you. Think of how He has blessed you in your lifetime. If he sees you striving to be righteous and obedient He has no reason to abandon you now.

Worry enough about the small stuff and God will give you stuff to worry about!!

Resources

These are individuals and books that have played an important role in my faith walk over the years. Many of them have an extensive YouTube presence as well.

A life application study Bible helps the reader gain a better understanding of what the verses mean and how they can be applied to everyday life. It is also filled with resources such as maps, timelines, profiles of the men and women of the Bible, historical context, reading plans, and more.

Tyndale Life Application Study Bible

The Tony Evans Study Bible

Experiencing God:

An excellent Bible study that has been popular for decades about knowing and doing the will of God. It teaches us how to be led by God and join Him where He is working in our lives.

Experiencing God Bible:

This Bible is amazing if you want study notes that reflect how to live your life being led by God as you learn to hear His small, still voice. This helps to stay in alignment with God's will and that makes life easier. It takes every chapter, verse by verse, and illuminates how those in biblical times did this and how God responded.

Everyday Worship – “Living to capture the heart of God.”

This is a powerful book for those looking to take their passion for God to the next level. It is the story of how one man strives to model his life as an everyday act of worship.

A Better Way to Pray – Andrew Wommack – Andrew teaches that when we pray we do not need to bring God an entire “grocery list” of our needs because God knows exactly what we need. “Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!” Matt. 6:8 He emphasizes the importance of spending time with God in prayer which he defines as communing or fellowshiping with Him. He says we should spend the majority of our time blessing God with our praises, our thanks, our worship, our desire to listen for God’s voice so we can gain some of His wisdom and any other way we can express our love for a God who has blessed us over the years. He has written a plethora of books and has a comprehensive YouTube presence with teachings on many of his books.

Katy Souza – Katy was a career criminal who was led to Jesus in prison. She later began a prison ministry. After serving almost twelve years, her sentence was miraculously shortened. She has extensive insight into soul healing and the supernatural. I learned a lot from her about how to talk with God as I would talk with a friend, every moment that I can throughout the day, and how to see and hear His responses. She has a number of series related to the supernatural on YouTube.

Battlefield of the Mind – Joyce Meyer – This book is excellent for those looking to think more about what we are thinking about and begin to renew our minds. The goal would be to mitigate anxious and worrisome thoughts.

On Our Knees – Phil Wickham – An informative, inspiring book about intensifying our prayer life. I was fascinated and inspired by the fact that as famous as Phil Wickham is, he too wanted to go deeper with his prayer life. The audio version is read by Wickham.

4 Keys to Hearing God’s Voice – Mark Virkler – This book was very valuable to me in learning about communicating with God. He has a number of other books and a whole ministry devoted to this important part of our faith called Communion with God Ministries. He helped me understand that God is my friend who is always with me and loves to speak with me! He also has a lot of YouTube videos on this topic.

Discerning the Voice of God: How to Recognize When God is Speaking – Priscilla Shirer – She has a different way of presenting the topic than the others I have listed that I found very enlightening. She also has a strong YouTube presence.

Experiencing the Spirit: The Power of Pentecost Every Day
Henry Blackaby

Sermons: Charles Stanley, Joyce Meyer, Steven Furtick, Michael Todd, Beth Moore, TD Jakes, Billy Graham, Andy Stanley, Tony Evans, Joel Osteen, Priscilla Schirer, Rick Warren

All of these popular pastors have a strong YouTube presence.